

# ***BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, UKRAINE: WINTER EMERGENCY 1998 - 1999***

*2 February 1999*

*appeal no. 30/98*

*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: September 1998 - February 1999*

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*The Winter Emergency Appeal (WEA) began in full during the reporting period, with tenders issued for the procurement of supplies, procurement initiated, and distribution mechanisms in place. The most vulnerable are now receiving urgently-needed assistance to manage through the winter. Clothes, food parcels, and hot meals are being distributed across the region, with the proven Red Cross network ensuring that aid is reaching those most in need.*

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## ***The context***

Millions of people in Belarus, Moldova, the Russian Federation, and the Ukraine are on the brink of a humanitarian disaster. The situation is worsening as the harshest winter months set in. The Russian State Statistics Committee estimates that 44 million people, or 30% of the population, are now living below the poverty level (calculated as those earning \$32 or less per month). The catastrophic situation is caused not only by the economic fall-out from the ruble's collapse in August, but also because Russia's harvest is the worst in 40 years. As a result, commodity prices have doubled, food shortages are common, and unemployment is rampant. Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are undergoing similar economic and social crises. Given the unpaid salaries and pensions, deteriorating health services, and under-funded social welfare, the situation in some areas has become desperate.

Those afflicted include not only people from traditional vulnerable groups (the elderly, disabled, and single parents) who lack the means to participate in the prevailing barter system, but also teachers, miners, doctors, technicians and scientists all who periodically go on strike over non-payment of wages. Those living in remote northern regions previously subsidised under the Soviet system are also severely affected. A Red Cross assessment team carried out a mission in December, 1998, and found a potentially catastrophic situation in the far east (Chukotka, Kamchatka and Magadan) in December, for which a separate Appeal covering the basic needs of some 80,000 people is being prepared.

## ***Latest events***

### **Belarus**

Inflation in Belarus has spiralled out of control, prices of imported goods have sky-rocketed by 300 per cent in recent months, and 40 per cent of the population are reportedly living in absolute poverty. Over 600,000 people are existing on less than USD 10 per month, and the situation for pensioners is particularly untenable. According to the Belarussian Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, consumer

prices rose by 21.7 per cent in December alone. The sharpest monthly rise in prices of 25 per cent occurred in November. Consumer prices on the whole rose by 180 per cent in the country during 1998.

### **Moldova**

Moldova is one of the poorest Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. Four out of five Moldovans are estimated to be living below the poverty line, and with any economic recovery dependent on trans-regional economic developments, the situation for hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable will only worsen.

### **Russia**

According to most analysts, the decline of the ruble is expected to continue, though slower than before. Economic growth is expected to be negative until the end of 1999, and even with an anticipated stabilisation in 2000, growth will only reach half of its 1989 level by the end of next year. Inflation has slowed from the dizzying 52.2 per cent of September levels. Scenes broadcast from a Human Rights Watch survey into Russian orphanages shocked the world in December, showing pictures of abandoned or orphaned children tied to benches, lying on floors, and malnourished. The Russian Red Cross (RRC) and the Federation as well as other concerned organisations are actively considering appropriate interventions.

### **Ukraine**

The Ukraine was hit by serious floods both in the spring and autumn, further increasing the devastating impact of the socio-economic problems. The floods seriously damaged agricultural land and made thousands of families homeless. The coldest weather for a decade is adding to the suffering, and while prices continue to spiral upward, state allowances are frozen. The monthly cost of living as of 19 January, 1999 rose to the equivalent of USD 86, up from USD 85 one week previously. Compared with a year ago, prices increased 26.5 percent in local currency and decreased 33 percent in dollars.

Unemployment in Kharkiv oblast (one of the most industrialised provinces in the Ukraine) rose by 50 percent last year, and for each available job nineteen urban and 100 rural inhabitants compete. With the general 10 percent reduction in external trade in 1998, analysts conclude that there is a process of de-industrialization currently occurring in the country which will have long-term impacts.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

An allocation of CHF 500,000 was made from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), allowing the operations described below to be initiated. This allocation has been re-imbursed in full.

### **Belarus w**

The Belarus Red Cross opened the first of its soup kitchen in December, and is now operational in all oblasts (provinces). Both hygiene and food parcels are being delivered nation-wide.

	<b>Procured</b>	<b>Delivered</b>	<b>In Pipeline</b>
Food Parcels	17,200 pcs	5,700 pcs	11,500 pcs
Detergent	12,600 pcs	0.00	12,600 pcs
Bathing Soap	6,120 pcs	0.00	6,120 pcs
House Soap	8,000 pcs	0.00	8,000 pcs

### **Moldova w**

Almost 24,000 hot meals have been served at Moldova Red Cross soup kitchens in the reporting period. In January, 500 hygiene parcels were distributed (300 in Kishinau and 200 in Rezina), distributed to 26 soup kitchens, seven sanitation centres, and 127 medical and social rehabilitation rooms. Soup kitchens have provided meals to 1,163 people (350 of them with no income, the remainder are children from especially-deprived families).

### **Russia w**

A co-ordinator for the American Red Cross Bulk Food programme has taken up his duties at the Delegation. During September, the Logistics Delegate (Relief Co-ordinator) assessed new regions to be covered in the Appeal. Visits were made to Murmansk and Kaliningrad; Perm, Chelyabinsk, Orenburg, Bashkortostan in the Urals, and to Kemerovo and Irkutsk in Siberia. A small community of Evenk peoples living in northern Krasnoyarsk krai will receive assistance and second-hand clothes through Irkutsk. The RRC is providing limited assistance and second hand clothes from Buryatia to neighbouring Chita. Assistance is also being provided by the Netherlands Red Cross to Primorsky kray, Magadan, Amursky oblast, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Ulyanovsk, Volgograd, Ryazan, Vologda, Tver, Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan, Bryansk, Arkangelsk and Moscow.

*Seminars:* A two-day seminar on the 1998-1999 WEA was held at the RRC sanatorium Druzhba, outside Moscow at the end of October, attended by chair persons from the 12 selected regions in addition to representatives from neighbouring regions (including Yakutia, Penza and Evenkiya). This seminar was followed by a resource development workshop for 40 chairpeople. Immediately after the WEA seminar, a resource development workshop was held for 25 RRC chair persons involved in the WEA and First Aid programme. A fund-raising consultant has been working in the delegation since early September, and took part in the workshop, together with the RRC counterpart.

*Capital investment:* two new vehicles were purchased in Moscow.

*Personnel:* the team working on the winter emergency situation has been increased to two logistics officers, two field officers, and a secretary. The RRC will provide any further increases in personnel.

*Bulk food:* With the arrival of the Project Co-ordinator for the joint American Red Cross and US Government-funded food aid project, preparations are underway to receive and distribute 25,000 MT of food to 4 main areas in Siberia. The programme aims to assist 434,000 vulnerable individuals, families, and institutions throughout the regions of Irutsk, Buriatia, Kemerova and Khakassia with a 9.6 kg monthly ration of flour, rice, green peas and edible oil. Due to the vast distances to be covered in the regions and the difficult conditions in winter, a three month ration will be given to beneficiaries during each distribution cycle.

Initial planning has included meetings with the RRC, high level meetings with the visiting US Secretary of Agriculture, and with other organisations involved in the US food assistance package. General administrative frameworks are being developed for documentation and dissemination materials to be used during the distribution period. In the coming month, field visits will be made to all four regions targeted for assistance. In addition, plans are under way to recruit four American Red Cross-funded delegates to be based in the regions, and to work in support of the RRC and the Federation during the implementation period. The first of two food shipments are scheduled to arrive in April.

Funds for family food parcels were allocated to the RRC only in mid-December, but over 90,000 food parcels have now been manufactured and delivered to regional committees. As of 25 January, 43,300 parcels had been forwarded for delivery to beneficiaries. The soup kitchen programme also progresses, with over 100,000 hot meals served to 20,000 beneficiaries by 25 January, 1998. A total of 18 shipments of second-hand clothes were received and released from customs during the reporting period. Over 144,000 people have benefited from the 383 MT of clothes sent to Russia.

Because the incidence of tuberculosis incidence among children in Astrakhan city is 22.5 per 100,000 compared with 13.2 in the Russian Federation, the Astrakhan Red Cross committee made an urgent request for assistance to assist these children. Support will take the form of providing regular hot meals.

### **Ukraine w**

Implementation of the winter emergency activities in the Ukraine has been somewhat delayed due to the floods which hit the country twice this year. Soup kitchens will be opened shortly, and items for food and hygiene parcels are now being purchased. It is anticipated that the WEA will be fully functional in the Ukraine in February.

## ***Outstanding needs***

Additional funding is crucial to the success of the operation, particularly in Russia. While a total of some CHF 23 million out of a total Appeal budget of CHF 25 million has been received to date, some CHF 15.6 million was in-kind donations and only CHF 7.5 million was provided in cash, meaning that 30 per cent of the intended food parcels have been cut. Potential donors are requested to contact Michael Schulz, desk officer on ++41 22 730 4320.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The launch of the WEA was attended by 30 journalists (newspaper, radio and television), with good coverage provided both nationally and abroad (foreign journalists outnumbered their regional counterparts by three to one). The WEA generates considerable media interest, and journalists are keen to travel to Siberia to publicise Red Cross activities. Regular interviews have been conducted with the Head of Delegation, Logistics and Information Delegates.

A Resource Development Delegate arrived in mid-September, concentrating efforts on fund-raising for the 1998 - 1999 WEA. International companies based in Russia have been approached to provide four per cent of the Appeal budget. Contact was made with 20 main donor embassies/trade commissions in Moscow to seek their assistance in identifying multinational corporations in the Russian market. During a monthly meeting at the Swedish Embassy of 30 Swedish subsidiaries, the fund-raising project was presented, resulting in several contacts. Appointments were then made with 12 major Swedish corporations in Saint Petersburg in order to test the general approach towards collaboration with business. (Several informal commitments have been received, mainly concerning goods in kind). An RRC counterpart was identified and began work at the end of January.

An Information Delegate arrived in January, and is improving reporting procedures and building on well-established media relations, together with the RRC.

Collaboration continues with local government structures in the regions, ensuring efficient use of funds and personnel. At a higher level, the Head of Delegation and the Director General of the RRC met with the Labour and Social Welfare minister, the chairman of the Humanitarian Aid Commission and Emercom (the disaster response centre of the Russian Government). In the other countries, fruitful co-operation with governments, media and other agencies are being explored and developed. In Moscow the embassies of Canada, Ireland, Sweden, Great Britain and the EU have all been briefed on the WEA. The Head of Delegation met individually with the UN Under-Secretary General, Sergio Vierra de Mello, to discuss the WEA and humanitarian affairs in general.

## *Contributions*

Annex 1 provides details of contributions.

## *Conclusion*

The Winter Emergency Appeal programme is in full implementation, with parcels and other essential supplies now reaching beneficiaries in the far-flung areas encompassed by Belarus, Moldova, the Russian Federation and the Ukraine. The timely arrival of funding is essential to an operation of this size and importance, but assistance has already been scaled back because funds have not been as forthcoming as hoped. As a result, hundreds of thousands currently living in appalling winter conditions may not receive adequate assistance.

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