

***BELARUS, RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
MOLDOVA, UKRAINE:
Winter Emergency 1998-1999***

1 April 1999

appeal no. 30/98

situation report no. 02

period covered: February 1999

Despite the weak donor response to the Winter Emergency Appeal, implementation of the operation continued in February. The production and distribution mechanisms planned in the Appeal are working successfully and the most vulnerable have received urgently-needed assistance during February, the key month of the prolonged winter. Despite serious funding and logistics constraints, hot meals, second-hand clothes, and food parcels reached the intended beneficiaries.

The context

Responding to a potential humanitarian disaster affecting millions of people in the countries of Moldova, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine facing critical risks provoked by harsh climatic, social, and economic conditions, the Federation and respective National Societies launched an Appeal in September, 1998 for a 6-month operation intended to:

- { alleviate the impact of cold, malnutrition, disease, stress, and to protect the dignity of 1.6 million beneficiaries;
- { maximise the use of local resources (human, goods and services);
- { strengthen local capacities by providing sustainable infra-structural support and training to the national headquarters and branches of the local Red Cross societies and collaborating social welfare institutions; and
- { promote partnerships between the Operating National Societies and the Participating National Societies.

More specifically, the Winter Relief operation is designed to tackle the most basic needs of the target population by supplying warm winter clothing and footwear for children and adults, and supplementary parcels of basic food and hygiene items. It was planned to establish soup kitchens to provide beneficiaries mainly in urban areas with more than one million hot meals over a six-month period. Institutions catering for children, the handicapped and the elderly also receive basic medicaments (nursing kits).

The priority beneficiaries include families with many children; single parents, orphans; single and other pensioners; severely handicapped adults and children (located both at home and in institutions which the authorities are struggling to support); unemployed and homeless; remote health stations;

and street children (unofficial estimates suggest there are at least one million roaming across Russia - with proportionally similar figures in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova).

Also severely affected are those living in remote northern regions previously subsidised under the Soviet system. A Red Cross assessment team found a potentially catastrophic situation in the Far East (Chukotka, Kamchatka and Magadan) in December 1998 and an Appeal for the basic needs of 80,000 people was launched in early February. In recent days substantial pledges have been received for this appeal and procurement of relief items has started.

In response to the dramatic spread of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases and on behalf of the National Red Cross Societies in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russian Federation the Federation launched an Appeal for a long-term (10-15 year) programme in March this year. This appeal seeks CHF 9,432,000 and is intended to provide social support for TB-patients and their families. This support is similar in nature to the WEA programme which has already proven successful and effective in reaching the socially vulnerable. The Red Cross now begins a campaign to raise public awareness and knowledge of TB issues.

Latest events

Belarus

Consumer prices rose by 16.6 % in Belarus in January, while in 1998 the country had the highest rise in consumer prices (180%) among the CIS member states. Due to the amount of snow this winter, the possibility of floods in Gomel and Brest regions on the banks of the biggest Belarusian rivers (Pripyat, Sozh and Dnepr) is very high.

Moldova

The economic indicators are grim: in 1998 consumer prices rose by 8%, total agricultural output dropped by 45% (since 1990), industrial output for the same period fell by 56%. Some 15,000 teachers will lose their jobs after the school programme was reduced to five working days a week. Meanwhile up to 11,000 children of school age do not attend school. In Chishinau, only 152 out of 691 school graduates registered by the municipal employment centre managed to find jobs. The minimum pension in Moldova is MOL 60 (USD 6.9). The child mortality rate in Moldova is on the rise. Twenty per one thousand babies die before they reach one year of age. Thirty per cent of babies are born with some disease. The rachitis rate among children in Moldova went up 35-fold since 1985.

Ukraine

According to recent statistics, out of a working age population of 27 million, there are between six million and seven million unemployed people in the Ukraine. An additional 300,000 state employees may be made redundant this year, while 280,000 state officials have already lost their jobs over the last six months. In 1998 consumer prices rose by 20%, and the average salary in Ukraine amounted to Hr 176.09 (or about USD 52.1) per month in December. Compared with 1997, Ukraine's foreign trade dropped by 13.1%, totaling USD 32.61 billion. In 1998 exports dropped by 1.4%. The decline was largest in agricultural goods which decreased by 23.2%. Fuel prevailed among Ukraine's imports, with 40.7% of the total imports. Total imports reached USD 14.72 billion, including goods produced in the Ukraine such as sugar, vegetable oils, margarine and sunflower oil. Western Ukraine may again face disaster because of heavy rains and snowfall. Winter storms have partially flooded or destroyed some 150 houses and left a dozen settlements without electricity in the Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Transcarpathian and Mykolayiv regions. More settlements will be in danger of flooding when the snow, up to two meters high in some areas, begins to melt.

Russia

Despite an unstable political situation, elections are set for December 1999. In 1998 consumer prices rose by 20%, and the average real salary dropped by a factor of three. Many highly qualified specialists do not have jobs. The state of peoples health is worsening daily. Public health services received only

30% of the planned amount from the Federal budget. A sharp increase in infectious diseases is being observed. There were 80 TB cases per 100,000 population in 1998 compared to 34 in 1991. AIDS remains a significant and growing problem all across the country. There are shortages of medicine, and the means to buy even simple medication is limited.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Belarus

In Belarus the WEA coverage (as of 26 February, 1999) was 50.6%. 26 soup kitchens were operational throughout the country. Overall, approximately 800 meal coupons were distributed daily. Social rehabilitation and reintegration of the beneficiaries continued. Regional Red Cross Committees organised the delivery of hot meals to bedridden beneficiaries. Efforts were made to provide hot food for TB-infected beneficiaries. Work with the suppliers of hygiene items continued, tender proposals were received and analysed, and distribution plans prepared. 82 tons of second hand clothes were distributed in February to the homeless, unemployed, orphans, large families and families with low income. The Belarus Red Cross Committees maintained local fundraising activities which produced USD 6,818 in cash, kind and services over the 1 January to 10 February period. The local fundraising efforts continue. A Dutch donation made the procurement of a vehicle for the Railway Red Cross Committee possible. However, permanent technical problems with available but worn-out vehicles caused delays in the delivery of relief supplies.

Moldova

Tenders for food and hygiene supplies have been organised. A new list of beneficiaries have been drawn up, using the applicable criteria. 17 tons of second hand clothes have been distributed, as well as hot meals and hygiene parcels.

Ukraine

28,621 persons received food parcels, and 11,342 persons received hygiene kits. In addition to the food parcels, 74 MT of second-hand clothes was distributed.

Russia

Producers have supplied the food parcels according to plan apart from a delay in Bashkodostan, where the agreement with the original supplier was cancelled due to financial difficulties. A new supplier has since been found. All partial payments for the food parcels have gone smoothly due to close co-operation between WEA-team and the Financial department.

A European bulk food donation with a value of close to USD 500,000,000 was announced. The aid will be given to four major companies who will resell it at market prices, and the profit will be placed in a special account administered by the Ministry of Labour. The food may arrive by the end of March.

Monthly payments for soup kitchens are being transferred regularly to all the regions. Contracts and agreements with local soup kitchens have already been made and over 370,000 hot meals have been served to about 54,000 beneficiaries. Thirty shipments of second hand clothes have already been received and released from customs. Over 630 MT's have been received in the regions, and more than 300,000 beneficiaries have been served.

Up to the end of February 146,000 family food parcels had been produced by 11 producers. Almost all producers have accepted to continue the production even for the second round based on the former contract signed in the middle of December.

The consequences of the low funding will be reflected in the production of FFP's for the second round, which will only reach about 65% of the original number (98,500 units). For the second round most of the suppliers have indicated that they will take full advantage of the exchange rate clause.

Bulk food and bilateral programmes:

The programme for distribution of US *bulk food* in Siberian regions (Kemerovo, Khakassia, Irkutsk) will also cover a portion of Evenkya kray and Burathia, targeting 434,000 beneficiaries with a monthly ration of 1.6 kg's of rice, 1.6 kg's of peas, and 5 kg's of flour. Distribution was planned to start in May 1999. The beneficiaries will now receive a three month ration twice in a six month period. The total quantity is 25,000 tons, which will be transported to the regions by the trans-Siberian railroad from Vladivostok. The programme will be managed by the US co-ordinator (who arrived in January) based in Moscow and four other US Delegates based in the Siberian regions who will co-operate with the local RRC in the above mentioned regions.

Norwegian Red Cross, in coordination with the Swedish Red Cross, is assisting beneficiaries in Murmansk and Arhangelsk. Every month vulnerable people receive 10 kg food parcels, consisting of flour, butter, powder milk, pasta and sugar, with meat and chicken. The Norwegian Red Cross has its own distribution system, including vehicles in the regions. The total value of this programme is USD 10,000,000.

The Netherlands Red Cross Society is supporting the Russian Red Cross and conducting its own bilateral programmes in 15 regions (Primorsky krai, Magadan, Amoursky oblast, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Ulianovsk, Volgograd, Ryazan, Vologda, Tver, Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan, Bryansk, Arhangelsk and Moscow), providing cash support to manufacture FFP's and with medicine to support 140,000 beneficiaries. In Altai, the Netherlands Red Cross is assisting three children's hospitals, support which amounts to USD 75,000 worth of assistance and will feed 1,000 children during the year.

The Finnish Red Cross is donating USD 1,000,000 for programmes in Karelia (six regions), assisting children with food and clothes, conducting institutional development, and disaster preparedness. They are also working on implementing medicine programmes in this area.

The main difficulties for the operation have been:

- { the 20 days waiting for procurement contract approval for producing food parcels;
- { the increasing costs of food commodities on the local market;
- { the uncertainty of funds for the continuation of the programme;
- { the delay in receiving reports from the regions as well as the lack of reports from ongoing bilateral programmes.

Delays have also made it difficult to keep the very tight time-frame for producing and distributing the FFP's. Due to the obstacles encountered above, the WEA operation (especially the production and distribution of FFP's) is a month behind schedule.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

All the Red Cross Committees have been providing the mass media with detailed information about the WEA implementation, and the WEA operation has received regular coverage in national media in the four countries.

Several international journalists have made field visits resulting in very positive coverage in major newspapers and on TV. The leading English-language newspaper in Moscow, which is read by most foreign diplomats and business-people, carried an editorial entitled: "Red Cross Does Food Aid Right". Contacts have been maintained with several embassies, including the Swedish, US, British and Irish. Monthly meetings take place with the EU commission in Moscow, and the Federation attends regular UN coordination meetings.

The chief reporter of the "Sudwestrundfunk" broadcasting station, visited Belarus and Ukraine in January 1999. The February follow-up to this visit included a series of radio reports and information

placed on their Internet site as well articles in the German press. This information was also made available to the ONS's involved.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The assistance rendered to date in the form of food parcels, soup kitchens, winter shoes, and clothes to multi-child families, orphans, pensioners, handicapped, and homeless in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation has proved invaluable. Funding is a major concern, and in the event that adequate funding does not materialise, plans have been formulated to ensure that the core activities of the programme remain viable.

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