

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

14 May 1999

appeal no. 30/98

situation report no. 3

period covered: March - April 1999

Implementation of the Winter Emergency Appeal (WEA) has been curtailed due to funding constraints as well as difficult working conditions in the Red Cross regional branches caused by communication and logistics problems, and staff shortages. Despite the obstacles encountered, assistance has been delivered. The spring season however has not brought significant relief to the intended beneficiaries who continue to experience difficulty and rely on the Red Cross for basic food and domestic assistance.

The context

Responding to the humanitarian needs of millions of people facing critical risks provoked by harsh winter conditions, as well as social and economic dislocation in the countries of Moldova, Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine, the Federation and respective National Societies launched an Appeal in September 1998 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 Emergency Appeal (WEA) operation was 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. Soup kitchens have been established to provide beneficiaries in urban areas with more than one million hot meals in 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 (both at home and located 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).

In conjunction with the WEA, the Federation is also carrying out two other relief operations:

- The Far North-eastern Appeal (Critically Isolated Communities) is over 70% covered and the approval for the procurement of family food parcels (FFPs) in Magadan and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky was finally received. The distribution will start in May and will last until late July. One delegate has arrived to work on the programme and two more were selected and will arrive in the coming days. Following assessments which indicate a similar level of need in other regions, the Far Northeast programme may be extended to cover Taimyr. Additionally, some of the USDA Bulk Food channeled through American Red Cross/Federation will be used in Evenkia; Red Cross assistance is now covering northern Russia entirely.
- The TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs programme, launched on 12 March in response to the disease afflicting populations in Russia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, has not yet attracted significant funding. Some preparatory work is ongoing however, and information and organisation meetings are held as well as TB workshops and training in Kiev for all four countries.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Despite the funding constraints, over 150,000 FFPs were distributed to about 125,000 families in Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Authorisation was provided for the production of 98,900 additional FFPs, but production delays due to the change of supplier remain.

Belarus

FFPs: In March, food parcels were distributed depending on food availability in Oblasts. Having negotiated price reductions with the suppliers, the Belarus Red Cross procured 1,100 food parcels. The extra food parcels will be distributed to the population affected by the floods in the Brest and Gomel regions. The Red Cross Oblast Committees in Brest, Grodno and Vitebsk began the second round of food parcel distribution. As planned, food parcels will be distributed to the same beneficiaries.

Soup kitchens: There are 26 soup kitchens operating in Belarus. The number of homeless receiving meals in soup kitchens increased due to the recent prison amnesty.

Hygiene and Nursing Kits: Procurement of hygiene kits was funded by the Dutch contribution and items were distributed to 3,000 bedridden people, in soup kitchens and medico-social centres. A tender for the procurement of 400 nursing kits was organised by the Belarus Red Cross. The kits will be delivered and distributed to Red Cross nurses in April.

Second-hand clothes: Second hand clothing was received in March as follows: 17,496 kgs in Gomel, 17,712 kgs in Moghilev, 16,200 kgs in Brest. Taking into account the urgency for relief items due to spring floods in the Brest region, customs formalities were settled within 2 days, though normally this process takes from 2 to 3 weeks.

The implementation of the WEA was addressed at the Belarus Red Cross Presidium held on 10 March. One of the decisions of the Presidium was to intensify local fund-raising efforts and report regularly on the number of volunteers involved in the operation and the funds raised.

Reporting from the Oblasts has improved considerably compared to last year's operation. Further strengthening of the ONS' reporting lines through the provision of computers and fax machines to the branches is still needed. Recurring problems with the repairing of the old vehicles continue to affect the delivery schedule.

Moldova

During March the following activities were carried out: establishment of the list of beneficiaries for the canteens, food parcels and hygiene parcels; organising new procurement tenders for food and hygiene parcels; distribution of second hand clothes received at the beginning of February; meetings with the Government and the Parliament to discuss tax exemption for the items procured in the frames of the programme

Ukraine

The Ukrainian Red Cross is working on the procurement of 375 medical kits and obtaining commercial proposals for their production. The National Committee of the Ukrainian Red Cross transferred funds to six regional committees (Lugansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhzhia, Rivne) and to 21 regional organisations (Vinnitsa, Volyn, Ivanovo-Frankivsk, Kirovograd, Crimea, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Odessa, Poltava Sumy, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Kherson, Khmelnytsky, Chercassy, Chernigiv, Chernivtsi, Sevastopil, Kiev regional and Kiev city) for the procurement of food parcels in the field.

Together with the procurement, delivery, and distribution of food parcels and hygiene kits, Red Cross committees are carrying out specific operations to attract additional funds, to collect more food and clothes, as well as other goods from private enterprises, organisations, commercial companies, and citizens.

Russia

FFPs: The first round of the procurement of 158,000 FFPs, worth USD 1,337,468, was completed. Over 105,236 food parcels were already distributed to 383,231 beneficiaries throughout the country; and 52,764 FFPs were stored for the upcoming second round.

The second production and distribution round started in March and is coming to an end, but no reports from the regions have yet been received. A tendering process was initiated in order to select suppliers for the third round. A full distribution will be finalised by the middle of June - one and a half months later than originally planned. The main causes of the delay are the time needed for procurement approval and delays in the tendering process for the third round of food parcels.

Soup Kitchens: Monthly payments are being transferred regularly to all regions. Funds for soup kitchens were distributed to the Russian Red Cross (RRC) in the middle of April. Contracts and agreements with local soup kitchens have been settled and several schools have been included in most of the regions. Some 425 soup kitchens are now fully operational across the country. Over 848,000 hot meals have been served to 121,622 beneficiaries.

Second hand clothes: About 932 tons of second hand clothes were purchased and delivered to 403,489 beneficiaries in Moscow, Kaluga, Pskov, and Tatarstan. Two containers of second hand clothes were distributed to the regions outside the traditional WEA area (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Pskov, Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Tambov, Tver, Smolensk and Bryansk).

Seeds: Offers for seeds were received in all regions, and preparations were made for their distribution. Suppliers for 90,000 seed sets were found for all 14 regions in Europe, Ural and Siberia.

Donations in-kind: at the beginning of March 40,5 tons (4,695 packages) of baking mixture worth USD 18,018 were received and distributed among 42,874 beneficiaries in the Tartar Republic. Two Volvo trucks were also donated.

Also 518 tons of capelins and 175,000 tins of herrings from the Iceland Red Cross were distributed in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Pskov, Novgorod, Yaroslavl, Tambov, Tver, Smolensk, Bryansk, and the Archangelsk region.

The main difficulties during the period were: new procurement approval procedures for food parcels; inflation and increasing costs of food commodities on the local market; irregular reports from the financial department; delays in receiving reports from the regions

Bulk food and bilateral programmes

The programme for distribution of 25,000 MT of USDA bulk food in the Siberian regions (Kemerovo, Khakassia, Irkutsk, a part of Evenkya kray, Buratia and a part of Chita) targeting 434,000 beneficiaries with a monthly ration of 1.6 kg of rice, 1.6 kg of peas, 5 kg of flour and 1.3 kg of oil was unfortunately further delayed. Current estimated time of arrival of the first delivery is June. The second delegate has arrived and was based in Irkutsk, also covering Buryatia.

A visit was made to Khakassia and Irkutsk in February to meet regional Red Cross branch representatives, local authorities, including government and customs, and to continue with logistics preparations. Assessments were carried out on several warehouse facilities in both areas.

A three day visit was made to Kemerovo at the end of March to meet the local Red Cross and to present a plan of action for a bulk food programme to a local orphanage. The RRC has decided to assist City Orphanage # 2, housing approximately 320 children with support of USD 2,000 - 3,000 per month for six months for supplemental food support. In Kemerovo, contracts were established for warehousing and assessments made of available transport in the region.

Bilateral Red Cross Assistance

The Norwegian Red Cross is providing food and second hand clothes assistance in the Murmansk region, *The Finnish Red Cross* is providing assistance in Karelia, consisting of second hand clothes, shoes, and food. *The Netherlands Red Cross* is supporting Russian Red Cross and providing assistance in 15 regions (Primorsky krai, Magadan, Amoursky oblast, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Ulianovsk, Volgograd, Ryazan, Vologda, Tver, Nizhni Novgorod, Kazan, Bryansk, Arhangelsk and Moscow), consisting of food and medicine to support 140,000 beneficiaries.

Outstanding needs

With the lack of funding for the WEA programme, the outstanding needs remain food to counter malnutrition, improving sanitation, and medicine to treat diseases.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The programme gets regular media coverage in local newspapers, radio, and TV, and continues to attract international media interest, comment and debate.

Several meetings with USDA, the Humanitarian Aid Commission and other US agencies contracted to distribute food were held. There is a concern among many that the agreements made on the government-government food aid package will not be respected in the humanitarian operation. Through continued meetings with the US Embassy and the Humanitarian Aid Commission, final details on agreement with plans to ensure duty free importation of the bulk food are being discussed.

A second meeting with PNS delegates was organised by the Russian Red Cross and held in Moscow in March with the American, Norwegian, Finnish, and Netherlands Red Cross. The objective of the meeting was to keep each other informed about all ongoing Red Cross programmes in Russia.

A general meeting with most of the chairpersons, involved in the WEA programme was held on 2 March in Moscow. Meetings were also held with the UN, EU and World Bank. Positive reports and articles were published in major and local media.

The visits of George Weber, Secretary General of the Federation, to Moscow on 12-13 March and Kiev on 23-25 March was used to brief media and authorities on all Federation/ONS programmes - the WEA, TB, Chernobyl, floods and the Far Northeast.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Despite the difficult working conditions, remoteness of areas targeted, and financial constraints, the Winter Emergency operation continues to fulfill its objectives. The assistance rendered to date in the form of food parcels, soup kitchens, second-hand clothes to multi-child families, orphans, pensioners, handicapped and homeless in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Russian Federation has proved invaluable. However funding is a serious concern, and in the event that adequate funding does not materialise a plan for radical cuts has been formulated in order to ensure the viability of the programme.

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