

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: WINTER SUPPORT FOR SIBERIAN AND NORTHERN TERRITORIES

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1999*

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The 2000 winter emergency appeal targeted to assist 770,000 beneficiaries in Russia's Siberian Northern territories was launched on 2 November. Several donors have provided strong indications of forthcoming support, and an ECHO contract is being considered for the procurement, production, and distribution of family food parcels in Altai and Tyva Republics.

The context

From a humanitarian point of view, Russia's financial crisis of August 1998 exacerbated an already critical situation, worsening the cash economy in many areas, causing salary payments to be further frozen, putting hundreds of thousands of persons out of work, and highlighting the government's inability to provide adequately for vulnerable groups.

The situation is particularly worrying in the Siberian regions of the country where the government is no longer able to transport vital supplies over the far north route.

Presently, 31 indigenous ethnic groups live in the territories of Siberia. Although most populations differ in their origin, language, and culture, they are characterised by common types of economic activities: hunting, fishing, reindeer-breeding and herding. Their traditional occupations are linked to their nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life and low population densities. Tuberculosis has become a serious health problem, and assuring a sustainable future for indigenous peoples is a significant challenge.

As the winter has already begun in this part of Russia and governmental services and individual coping mechanisms are insufficient to meet many basic needs, the Russian Red Cross (RRC) has been called upon to provide support for the most vulnerable. The RRC, working with the Federation's Delegation in Moscow, will streamline beneficiary numbers to target the extremely vulnerable in the poorest, most isolated regions. Limited emergency aid will again be given, but this year there will be an increased focus on community development, with ten pilot income-generation programmes planned, and a strong bias towards community health and sanitation, concentrating on keeping people healthy and out of hospitals. Included in the budget of this year's appeal is a bulk food component for the Northern territories. By protecting the culture of the many indigenous groups in Northern Russia and Central Siberia, emphasis will be placed on recovering traditional coping mechanisms.

The Russian Red Cross has used data from assessment missions, monitoring reports and state statistics to target 21 regions (Nenetsk AO, Altay kray, Altay Republic, Taymyr AO, Evenk AO, Tyva Republic, Chukotka AO, Koryak AO, Magadan, Kamchatka, Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Khakassia Republic, Buryatia Republic, Chita, Komi Republic, Komi-Perm AO, Kirov, Kurgan, Tyumen, Yamalo-Nenetsk AO, Khanty-Mancy AO, Irkutsk and Kemerovo) in West, Central, and Eastern Siberia. A major refinement of distribution lists has taken place, with only the most vulnerable five per cent considered as beneficiaries and with a priority for lone elderly, multi-child families, single-headed families, bedridden invalids, those living in elderly homes and specialised institutions, and homes for orphans and abandoned children.

Latest events

This programme is being implemented against the backdrop of the 20 December Duma elections and the conflict in Chechnya, both of which will influence the programme support and implementation. Furthermore, the recent Russian harvest indicates an improvement over last year's results, but still not enough to survive this winter.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

On 2 November, the new winter emergency appeal was launched with the participation of the Federation/RRC representatives, including the head of Delegation and the RRC Director General, the head of the ICRC, the president of the Business Development Institute, head of the Duma department for indigenous peoples of the North Russia, the Russian Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Representative, and various print and media services.

An application for ECHO support has been submitted, seeking some ECU 0.9 million (or CHF 1.5) million for procuring, producing and distributing family food parcels in Altai and Tyva Republics.

Outstanding needs

In addition to the basic cash and in-kind support specified in the appeal, more detailed assessments in some of the targeted regions need to be undertaken, an activity which can only be carried out with the availability of funding.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Following-up on last year's programme, contacts have been reinforced with various embassies represented in Moscow, the Russian Ministries of Social Welfare, Health, Emergency Situations and Foreign Affairs as well as the State Committee on North Development and Humanitarian Aid Centre.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

This is the third RRC and Federation winter emergency programme, and relies on the extensive experience gained over the last three years. The programme is considered vital in providing basic and essential supplies during the winter period. This programme, however, is differentiated from others by its intention to implement community development projects, recover traditional crafting skills, and diminishing the dependency on humanitarian assistance.

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