

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: WINTER SUPPORT FOR SIBERIAN AND NORTHERN TERRITORIES

28 February, 2000

*appeal no. 29/99; launched on 2 November, 1999 for 10 months
situation report no. 2
period covered: 22 December, 1999 - 23 February, 2000*

This is the third successive year that the Federation has launched a winter appeal for Russia, and the current programme is intended to assist 770,000 beneficiaries in 22 Polar and Siberian regions. ECHO support has enabled production of family food parcels to begin for beneficiaries in the Altai and Tyva Republics, and several cash and in-kind contributions have been received allowing the Russian Red Cross to open soup kitchens in some regions. Funds, however, needed to produce hygiene parcels, to procure seeds, and to purchase bulk food remain very limited. Despite the external assistance delivered, the beneficiary population as well as the authorities acknowledge that sound economic development remains the only viable long-term approach to solving the regional problems.

The context

Russia's descent into poverty has been well chronicled. From a humanitarian point of view, the single most important contributory factor in recent history has been the financial crisis of 17 August 1998, which ruined the cash economy in many areas, caused salary payments to be frozen, put hundreds of thousands out of work, and highlighted the government's inability to cater for the new needs, unknown in Soviet times. In 1998, there was a near-failure of the traditional summer shipment of millions of tonnes of life-sustaining supplies into the remote areas of Siberia. Even if governmental support improves in 2000, it is expected to be insufficient to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

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In 1998, the Far North Route failed, with only about 25 per cent of vital supplies (fuel, medication, and food) getting through. Living conditions plummeted, and an emergency was avoided in Kamchatka only when an icebreaker entered the port of Petropavlovsk in November, ferrying in urgent supplies of coal for power stations. The Federation responded by sending assessment teams to four regions in the Far Northeast, and launching an Appeal (No. 05/99) on 8 February to help over 80,000 people in early 1999.

Many government resources which may have been available to support the region are presently supporting developments in the North Caucasus.

It is anticipated that this year only 15 percent of vital supplies will be channelled through the Far Northeast Route, leaving already vulnerable groups in isolated regions in a precarious humanitarian situation. Working in such isolated regions presents particular challenges to the Red Cross. Any aid must be efficiently targeted, and provision must be made for higher logistics costs than other operations.

In Russia, males can expect to live to an average of just 58 years, while 16 children per thousand die in infancy, compared to 11 in western Europe. Seven times the number of children between one and nineteen die every year, with the major causes of death being accidents, injuries, poisonings, violence, malnutrition and poor living conditions. The World Health Organisation has blamed the country's shrinking life expectancy on poverty, unemployment, homelessness, excessive drinking and smoking.

More disturbingly, communicable diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis are spreading at alarming rates, with one Russian dying every 25 minutes of TB. International health officials agree that drug resistant TB is ominously close to spreading across Russia's borders into Europe.

Increased vulnerability to natural hazards such as floods and agricultural pests compound the problem. When living so close to destitution, few households or health facilities can muster enough resources to protect themselves from such additional shocks.

To respond to the humanitarian situation, the Federation launched an appeal to address the following objectives:

- to provide humanitarian assistance to 770,000 of Russia's most isolated and vulnerable, primarily focusing on children and elderly living alone;
- to procure, transport, deliver and monitor emergency aid (food parcels, bulk food, hygienic items, seeds and soup kitchens) to lone elderly, multi-child families, single-headed families, bedridden invalids, residents in elderly homes, abandoned or orphaned children and specialised hospitals;
- to protect and nurture indigenous coping mechanisms through initiating ten pilot small-scale community development/income-generation programmes in order to achieve self-sufficiency;
- to prioritise healthy lifestyles focusing on nutritional support, sanitation, personal hygiene and health education; and,
- to promote the development of the Russian Red Cross.

Latest events

The State Statistics Committee reported that in January this year an average salary entitled for one worker increased 57.7% to Russian Rouble (RR) 1,826 (USD 63.6), but due to inflation, salary arrears, pensions and allowances delays, people's real income decreased 3.1% in comparison with January 1999. Russia's population decreased by 785,000 people in 1999, according to the Committee. According to the director of the Russian research centre on living standards, pensioners have been worst hit by the fall in levels of real income. Compared to last year, pensioners can only afford to buy 55 per cent of the minimum food basket.

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In the beginning of January severe frosts hit Siberia with temperatures dropping as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius in Krasnoyarsk region. Heating systems - designed for temperatures no lower than minus 39 degrees Celsius - simply broke down.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The 1999-2000 winter has been exceptionally severe in parts of Siberia, with governmental services and individual coping mechanisms straining to meet many basic needs. Heating systems failed in one southern Siberian town, leaving 14,000 people without heat in temperatures as low as minus 47. The Russian Red Cross has been called upon to provide support for those most vulnerable, and this appeal recognises that in many cases what was intended as food support has become a primary source of nourishment for many hard-pressed families and individuals.

Under the Russian Red Cross (RRC) and International Federation Plan of Action, the beneficiary lists have been streamlined to target the extremely vulnerable in the poorest, most isolated regions. Limited emergency aid will again be given, but 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 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 is 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 forming the beneficiary caseload, consisting of the elderly living alone, multi-child families, single-headed families, bedridden invalids, those living in elderly homes and specialised institutions, and orphans and abandoned children living in homes.

The Russian Red Cross and the Federation are finalising a relief operation in Kamchatka, Koryak, Chukotka and Magadan to assist 82,000 beneficiaries in these remote regions. Felt boots, bed linen sets, medical supplies and blankets have been sent to the regions and final distributions have started.

The regional TB programme, which started on 12 March 1999 is ongoing in seven regions of Russia - Astrakhan, Buryatia, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Kemerovo, Tomsk and Pskov as well as in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Visiting Nurses training seminars are being held, food and hygienic parcels distributions are ongoing in all four countries, soup kitchens are operating.

A EUR 900,000 (CHF 1,443,700) contract with ECHO to produce 37,000 family food parcels (FFPs) for Altai and Tyva Republics (18,500 and 18,500 respectively) was signed, in collaboration with the German Red Cross Society. A tender among several producers is ongoing, and the RRC/Federation team is now in the field to choose a supplier. Each food parcel will contain: 2 kgs of wheat flour, 2 kgs of buckwheat, 2 kgs of haricot beans, 2 kgs of macaroni, 2 kgs of sugar, a litre of vegetable oil, four cans of beef (1.3 kg), two tins of sweet condensed milk (800 g) and 0.5 kg of tea.

The serving of hot meals in communal soup kitchens is planned in March. Depending on different prices for food products in the regions, the price per meal will vary between ten and 20 roubles.

Nine 20 mt containers of second hand clothes from an in-kind Swedish Red Cross donation were sent to the Evenk AO, Kirov, Kemerovo, Irkutsk and Chita regions, Khakassia and Buryatia Republics.

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An earmarked contribution was received from the Finnish Red Cross for the production of 30,000 Family Food Parcels (FFPs) for the Komi Republic, Komi-Perm AO and Kirov region. Procurement and distribution will be made in three rounds of 10,000 FFPs.

Completion of Phase I distributions of the USDA 1999 bulk food programme in Irkutsk and parts of Evenkia is pending. Phase II distributions continue in all the targeted regions, to the more readily accessible areas. The programme was held up by the protracted shipment of 17 containers of oil for Kemerovo, Abakan and Ulan-Ude (the last of 1,392) which arrived in late December. Warehousing contracts have been extended as needed in all regions.

Approximate receipt and distribution of food through the end of December.

Commodity	Total Received (mt)	Total Distributed (mt)	Balance
Flour	11,148	8,111	3,037
Rice	4,628	3,179	1,449
Peas	4,642	3,162	1,480
Oil	2,889	2,239	650
Total	23,307	16,691	6,616

Some 1,758 individual beneficiaries and 1,335 institutions received the assistance up to the end of December.

An orphanage project is being implemented along side of but outside of the appeal objectives. According to the programme co-ordinator, funding (USD 250,000) is available through the end of March.

The American Red Cross is negotiating with the US government on the continuation of the bulk food programme.

Logistics

Some goods for the Far North East operation will be transported and distributed by this operation where target areas and beneficiaries of the two operations are in close proximity.

Outstanding needs

Cash support is urgently required. Procurement of hygiene parcels, bulk food and seeds has not started yet due to a lack of funds. Several regions have not received funding for food parcels, and donor support for community development programmes is encouraged.

There is also an urgent need for a relief co-ordinator and a programme co-ordinator to fill posts which have been vacant since 17 December.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Local governors, city administrations, Red Cross branches, welfare departments, health institutions and customs representatives as well as representatives of the local offices of the Ministries of Health, Education, Internal Affairs and Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) were met in all the targeted regions during assessment missions, conducted by the Federation/RRC teams.

In January and February several meetings with the US, Canadian, Finnish, and British Embassies, as well as representatives for the OSCE, EU/ECHO, USDA and USAID were contacted to discuss future collaboration.

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See Annex 1 for details.

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