

Geneva 3 April 1999

## **CRISIS IN THE BALKANS**

### ***OVERVIEW***

The scale of the humanitarian disaster unfolding in the Balkans continues to take on immense proportions.

Attempts are being made by the respective authorities and humanitarian organisations to coordinate and develop an appropriate response, yet the dimensions of the crisis are pushing capacity levels to the limits. The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement continues to mobilise personnel and stocks according to the needs identified by the field-based teams. Priorities remain food, water, shelter and medical care. The movement must continue to increase its capacity to match the quickly accelerating humanitarian needs while making all efforts to ensure that this response is coordinated. The International Federation and ICRC, through the combined 'Steering Committee', is especially concerned about the logistical capacity in the operational areas and therefore encourages all Participating National Societies to inform the Federation and ICRC about the type and quantity of supplies which have been sent and/or which are in the pipeline.

At the same time it is an absolute priority for the ICRC to continue to gather in a comprehensive and systematic way information from the displaced about the fate of those remaining behind. Tracing mechanisms are being put into place to try and put relatives who have lost contact back in touch with each other.

### ***LATEST EVENTS, AND RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT ACTION***

#### ***Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:***

There are fears of growing hardship as military operations continue in FRY with civilians spending night after night in air-raid shelters. The Yugoslav Red Cross continues to stand ready to respond to emerging needs among the population. The ICRC has delivered to the YRC a quantity of food, 19,000 blankets, 44,000 candles and 10,000 jerry cans for emergency distributions. The goods have been transported to regional warehouses in order to ensure a capacity to respond to any needs.

Medical supplies were also delivered to the YRC to respond to any additional requests from hospitals and medical structures. YRC first aid teams have been active in visiting newly-arrived displaced people from Kosovo and have distributed some emergency supplies. In Kragujevac, Red Cross first aid

volunteers and counsellors have been visiting the main air raid shelters to provide practical and psychological support.

In Belgrade, a helpline has been set up by the Red Cross branch to allow members of the public to speak to trained psychiatrists for professional support to cope with trauma.

There are currently nine ICRC delegates in Belgrade, and two delegates from the International Federation.

### ***Montenegro:***

The Montenegro Red Cross (MRC) estimate that by Thursday around 30,000 people from Kosovo had arrived in Montenegro. They have been settled by the authorities in Rozaje (around 12,000), Plav (around 3,300), Ulcinj (around 3,500), Podgorica (around 1,800) and other municipalities. There are reports that many more thousands are heading for Montenegro. The Albanian Red Cross also report that they have confirmation that are some now refugees arriving from Montenegro in the northern Albanian town of Shkodra.

Montenegro Red Cross and the ICRC have been distributing assistance together from existing stocks. So far, some 900 tonnes of food and non-food have been distributed. A truck with over 170 tents has arrived from Zagreb, while over 1,600 mattresses have also been transported from Belgrade.

The MRC is in the process of organising assistance and shelter for the internally displaced.

Yesterday, joint MRC/ICRC teams who went to Berane and Rozaje discovered thousands of displaced in a difficult condition - housed in makeshift collective centres such as factory buildings without heating and adequate water infrastructure. The most urgent need was for mattresses and blankets.

There are reports that there are around 6-7,000 internally displaced still waiting in the mountains.

There are currently seven ICRC delegates in Montenegro and two delegates from the International Federation.

### ***Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:***

An extremely worrying situation is now developing with tens of thousands of people amassing at the border to enter the country waiting to join those who have already arrived. Many have been forced to wait for days and Red Cross teams working in the "no man's land" between the two borders - the only organisation to able to do so - have identified serious health problems due to food and medicine shortages and poor hygiene conditions.

In Blace, the first deaths among the stricken people have been reported. This is sadly not uncommon for people enduring these difficult conditions and the vulnerable - elderly, sick and young children are the groups now particularly at risk from health problems. The Red Cross teams are working through the night to address the most urgent needs, delivering food, liquids, blankets and medicines, but it is critical that a solution is found to ease this serious problem.

Red Cross relief flights (German Red Cross) were due to arrive today and a further ICRC flight is planned for Monday in Skopje carrying mainly tents, blankets and sleeping bags, water and sanitation material, food and medical supplies.

There are currently four delegates from the International Federation and ten delegates from the ICRC in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

### ***Albania:***

Estimates indicate that there are now more than 175,000 refugees in Albania with the figure rising by the hour. The majority are immediately being transferred or travelling independently to nine other districts. However, the situation remains extremely difficult to handle with authorities and relief organisations trying to cope with the scale of the influx. It is estimated that 40,000 people have been transferred to other destinations such as Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Diber, Fier, Vlore, Korçe, Elbasan, Lezhë, Gjirokastër, and Shkodër.

Improvised collective centres have been set up in Tirana, Kukës, Kruma and Shkodër, and conditions are extremely difficult. Problems relating to poor hygiene and overcrowding are a real threat to health.

The Albanian Red Cross, assisted by hundreds of volunteers and supported by the International Federation have distributed goods such as blankets, food, medical supplies, chlorine and other essential items. The ARC remains on the border with 40 volunteers to greet new arrivals with basic first-aid and other emergency goods.

More than 400 tonnes of relief goods including tents, tarpaulin, blankets, jerry cans, and individual food parcels are due to arrive in the coming days in Ancona, Italy to be dispatched to Albania. A plane with 17,000 blankets from Netherlands Red Cross arrived today, and another 17,000 blankets are expected to arrive tomorrow. Trucks carrying food, blankets, hygiene parcels, tents, and medical supplies are also en-route. Two further flights of ready to eat food from Swiss Red Cross are scheduled for April 6 and 7.

The Italian Red Cross will set up and take on the management of three camps, one in Kukës, and two in Durrës, each one for up to 5,000 people. Assistance and personnel has also arrived from various national Red Cross societies.

There are currently 10 delegates from the International Federation and 11 ICRC delegates in Albania.

### **Outstanding Needs**

Urgently needed supplies include ready-to-eat meals (REMs), sleeping bags, tents, water and sanitation material, food, hygiene parcels, kitchen sets, and mattresses. An updated Appeal reflecting assistance provided and revised needs will be issued shortly. Attached is a summary of emergency relief items purchased to date and/or in the pipeline.

## **Conclusion**

The scale of the crisis demands a high degree of coordinated action, and the Federation and ICRC have therefore formed a joint logistics unit. It is therefore critical that all donors and National Societies inform this coordinated logistics unit of intended operations and provide details of needs to be fulfilled. *Contact numbers are John Wert, ICRC, and Charles Bernimolin; Phone: 041 22 730 2143 or 041 22 730 2204, Fax: 041 22 733 9460; email: fedicrcbalkanlog.gva@icrc.org.*

*For all further information, contact ICRC, External Resources Department (tel: ++ 41 22 730 2591, email: mhansson@gva.icrc.org) or Pierre Kraehenbuehl (tel: ++ 41 22 730 2265, email: pkraehenbuehl.gva@icrc.org)*

*For all further information, please contact Mark Wilson (tel: +41 22 730 4439; mobile +41 79 406 1963, email: wilson@ifrc.org) for Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Penny Elghady (tel: +41 22 730 4319; mobile +41 79 205 1959, email: elghady@ifrc.org) for Albania and Macedonia.*

Renny Nancholas	Angelo Gnaedinger
Director	Delegate-General
Europe Department	Europe, Middle East and
International Federation	North America
of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies	ICRC