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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 18

This report is published daily as a general update on Red Cross Red Crescent activities during the Balkans crisis, targeting primarily the Movement's components and supporters. Today's text can also be found on the internet: www.ifrc.org and www.icrc.org.

LATEST EVENTS

The ICRC has issued a statement urgently calling on all those involved in the hostilities to respect international humanitarian law, to investigate incidents in which that law might have been violated and to take every step to put an end to such violations and prevent them from recurring (the full text of the statement can be found on the internet: www.icrc.org.)

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, president of the ICRC, visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over the weekend and this morning. Today (Monday 26 April), he saw the three members of the American Army held by the Yugoslav authorities. He was able to talk to them briefly and handover Red Cross messages written by their families. As it was not a visit according to ICRC modalities, an ICRC team will undertake a complete visit to the three prisoners of war tomorrow.

Dr Sommaruga met today with President Milosevic to discuss Red Cross action and humanitarian issues arising from the conflict. During the three-day visit, he met with members of the Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC), the International Federation, and the FRY Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Minister for Social Affairs and Health. On Sunday, the President went to Novi Sad, the capital of the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina, where he visited the areas damaged by air strikes and held meetings with government officials.

Red Cross delegates continue to deliver water by truck to Novi Sad for the areas without a regular water supply. An ICRC medical coordinator carried out a field survey in Novi Sad on 24 April. The Red Cross branch in Vojvodina has received three water testing kits, two water cisterns, and other material. A medical coordinator and a medical delegate visited Nis and Vranje on 22-23 April. A truckload of 348 mattresses was delivered to the Red Cross branch in Nis.

To date, around 1,200 displaced persons have approached the YRC in Belgrade seeking assistance. In the town's Crisis Reception Centre, 92 people are accommodated, mostly those without shelter or in need of medical care. More precise data is expected next week from the YRC concerning the number of people who have become socially vulnerable due to damaged homes or who have lost their main source of employment and income.

The YRC continues to implement the following activities:

w Soup kitchens in Belgrade are still providing food for 3,000 beneficiaries. Of 10 urban suburbs, only Rakovica is without an outlet and the YRC branch in Belgrade is looking at options since it is one of the city's most affected municipalities.

w Red Cross teams continue to visit the shelters and organise first aid courses for the local population. There is an ongoing need for first aid equipment and dressing materials.

w A Red Cross pharmacy has been reopened in Zmaj Jovina where refugees, displaced, and social cases can obtain free medicine (with a valid 'Red Cross card' and a doctor's prescription). At the moment, stocks are low and there is a significant demand for the cardio-vascular drugs (in particular, nitro-glycerine).

w The March consignment of American Red Cross food aid for elderly refugees and CRS food aid for socially vulnerable is currently being distributed. In addition, YRC is also distributing hygiene parcels, for which there is a big demand, especially among the category displaced of beneficiaries.

In Montenegro, according to UNHCR and the Montenegro Commissioner for Displaced People, it appears that 23,000 newly arrived displaced persons have now relocated to Albania. The total number of displaced people in Montenegro, including those who came during 1998, is currently estimated at around 80-85,000 people. The total number of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia is still approximately 28,300, while the number of social cases is about 35,000.

While the number of displaced in the two municipalities with the biggest caseload - Rozaje (the entry point from Kosovo) and Ulcinj (the main exiting point to Albania) - remains constant, in the rest of Montenegro local branches are reporting major increases in the number of displaced. While the distributions running smoothly, the availability of food and non-food items is becoming an increasing problem. In addition to food, especially hygiene items, baby parcels, sleeping bags and mattresses are needed.

The problem of finding and providing adequate accommodation and sanitary facilities is growing. People are primarily accommodated in factory halls, mosques and churches, sanitary conditions are inadequate, and the risk of epidemics is high. In one location, more than 1,000 people are spending nights in a bus station and in and around the municipality building. At the same time, the needs of the refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia are competing with those of the displaced.

The Red Cross in Vojvodina reports that a further 9,500 persons have been categorised by the authorities as in need of special welfare assistance ('social cases') . The pressure on the Red Cross to assist this category is growing daily, and the need for the expansion of the soup kitchen programme is growing. A recent assessment of the 13 Red Cross facilities currently providing hot meals indicate that the service needs to provide for an additional 14,000 beneficiaries. A further seven Red Cross branches in Vojvodina are seeking assistance to open soup kitchens in their municipalities. Currently, the Red Cross branches are distributing blankets, sugar, rice, oil and flour to the most vulnerable displaced, and field reports indicate that food, medicines, baby food, and hygiene materials and diapers are needed.

In the Kragujevac region, the Red Cross branch in Jagodina has, to date, recorded 680 displaced from Kosovo who have contacted the branch for assistance. The Red Cross branch lacks relief supplies to cover the huge number of people requesting assistance. The Red Cross estimates that approximately 20,000 people are socially vulnerable in the municipality.

Trainers from the Red Cross branch of Kragujevac's Youth Field Unit carried out 17 first aid training courses for 426 participants. A traditional Red Cross drive "A visit to a village" was carried out despite the emergency situation. Red Cross volunteers and medical teams visited more than 150 households, performing medical check-ups distributing food and hygiene items as well as urgently needed medicines from the Red Cross pharmacy. The reopening of a regional warehouse in Kragujevac to cope with the increased distribution of aid is underway.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Over the weekend of 24-25 April, a total of 6,100 new refugees from Kosovo entered the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, according to UNHCR. On Friday, 23 April, 1,000 people crossed through the Blace border point. On Saturday, 24 April, there were 2,200 new arrivals, and 2,900 on Sunday, 25 April.

Departures to third countries on Thursday, 22 April, totaled 603 refugees (to Austria, France and Turkey). On Friday (23 April), 280 refugees departed for Norway and Sweden, while on Saturday (24 April), 717 refugees departed to Austria, France, the Netherlands and Turkey. According to UNHCR, the total number of humanitarian evacuations to third countries was 18,209 through 23 April. An additional 15,500 refugees were evacuated to Albania without the involvement of UNHCR.

Relief Distribution: On Friday, a truck with relief goods was sent by the Federation and the Macedonian Red Cross to the village of Lipkovo in response to a request received from UNHCR about new refugees in that area. The truck carried 1,000 blankets, 500 Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), 200 kg of soap, 500 litres of milk, 50 mattresses, 2,000 tins of fish, 1,800 tins of meat and 960 kg of milk powder. The items were intended for a group of refugees reported by UNHCR to be seeking shelter in the town's mosque, among them many small children in ill health. Upon arrival in Lipkovo, the Federation/Macedonian Red Cross staff accompanying the truck were told that the refugees had since been transferred to a camp. The goods were then distributed to 940 refugees listed as living with host families in Lipkovo and its surrounding villages.

Distribution of food and non-food relief began over the weekend by the Skopje and Kumanovo branches. More detailed distribution reports are expected from the Macedonian Red Cross on Monday.

Health: Preparations for the expansion of the field hospital's capacity have begun in the Stenkovec-Brazda camp. Technical delegates have begun fencing off the area and putting up additional tents. The UNHCR has approached the Red Cross regarding the need for in-patient health care at the new camp, Cegrane, currently being set up. The Red Cross field hospital staff will also be involved in a measles vaccination campaign along with medical-oriented NGOs working in the camp.

Since the opening of the Red Cross ERU field hospital on 12 April and through Friday, 23 April, a total of 771 patients have been treated. The most common ailments have included respiratory tract infections, diarrhoea, and fever among children, while among adults cases have included diabetes, urinary tract infections, gun shot wounds, leg fractures, three inflamed appendixes requiring surgery, and three deliveries of babies (one by Caesarean).

An average of 80,000 litres of water is produced per day by the Red Cross ERU water team and is supplied to the field hospital, MSF, and Taiwanese health posts; 5-10,000 litres of water

is transported by truck each day to the health post in Stenkovec-French as well. Any left over water is put in the pipeline for use in the Brazda camp.

Logistics: A shipment of 1,000 hygiene parcels, 55 rolls of plastic sheeting, seven mobile VHF radios and 13 hand-sets was received from the German Red Cross on Friday.

NATO has informed the Federation that it will continue to provide mechanical (i.e. fork lifts) assistance only until the UNHCR positions equipment and personnel. The Red Cross is exploring various possibilities in addition to the proposal of UNHCR.

Six cars from the Finnish fleet have been registered and made available since Friday and were immediately allocated to the four Relief Field delegates.

Tracing: Through Saturday, 24 April, the ICRC Tracing service had opened files for 330 children in search of their parents, and 1,027 files for parents looking for their children. A total of 57 cases have been closed and an additional 49 cases are pending, i.e., are in process of being reunited.

External Relations and Publicity: Over the weekend numerous contacts and interviews were conducted with or organised for international media. These included: APTN, Dutch print media, German TV crew (covering Gostivar branch's relief distribution), AFP, BBC, Danish TV, Radio France International, CBC Radio, and APTV in Lojane. A French TV crew filmed a comprehensive report starting at the Red Cross warehouse, following a refugee receiving relief from the branch in Lojane, and following refugees to their host family accommodation.

On Friday (23 April) the President of the German Red Cross visited, observing the work of the German Red Cross delegates in the field hospital at the Brazda camp and meeting with the Macedonian Red Cross leadership.

Albania

Official government figures on the number of refugees in Albania stand at 350,342. In the Kukës prefecture alone (Kukës, Has and Tropoja), 210,000 people are registered. Latest figures also suggest that the actual number of refugees living with host families in Albania exceeds 200,000. In keeping with the agreement signed with the Albanian Red Cross (ARC), UNHCR, and WFP, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has revised its relief plans to reflect this new information. Full rations will be distributed to the refugees and to the host families on a weekly basis, requiring 1,237 mt of relief goods (food parcels and non-food items). The increased distribution demands will require additional warehousing space; at each of the six prefectures from which distribution is taking place, approximately 600 m² will now be necessary. The situation remains difficult at the Shkoder Tobacco Factory, which serves as the transit centre for new arrivals from Hani Hotit.

Relief Distributions: A relief/medical team has returned from Bajram Curri, where the security situation continues to deteriorate. The Red Cross team handed over 400 food parcels to OSCE delegates in the region. The team also visited the local ARC. In the Tirana prefecture, the total number of distributions (of food parcels and blankets) has reached 14,598. In the city itself, distribution has not proved difficult, but in the villages and the surrounding areas, conditions are more challenging. At a meeting with the Prime Minister's Emergency Management Group, the Red Cross raised the issue of customs clearance delays - which are hampering the humanitarian effort - and is hopeful that a positive response will be received in the near future.

Tracing: In both Kukes and Shkoder, the satellite telephone service is in huge demand and is one ray of light for the people arriving. There is a constant line of people wanting to use the two fixed telephones, the main destinations for calls being Switzerland and Germany. Two more satellite phones are taken daily to camps and villages around Kukes where they are also in demand. A tracing team also returned from Korca, where there are many tracing needs, in particular requests for tracing children lost in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In Mannheim, Germany, the ICRC has carried out a second visit to a member of the Yugoslav armed forces held by the United States army at a military base close to Mannheim, Germany (the prisoner of war had been transferred from Tirana). A private talk was held with him and the ICRC will forward to his family a Red Cross message which he had written.

Other Issues

Logistics coordination remains essential, and the International Federation and the ICRC advise National Societies that no unsolicited donations can be accepted by the operation. All donations must be co-ordinated with the Geneva logistics unit:

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