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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 19

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. For Geneva missions (and others), today's text can also be found on the internet: www.ifrc.org and www.icrc.org

LATEST EVENTS

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, completed a two-day visit to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia yesterday (April 26), meeting with President Slobodan Milosevic, who gave him his personal assurances that the ICRC would be able to move freely and safely in Kosovo in order to be able to perform its humanitarian tasks in aid of the victims of the conflict. During the meeting, President Sommaruga expressed the ICRC's serious concern over the plight of those still remaining in Kosovo and stressed the imperative need for the presence of an independent and impartial organization that could provide material relief and come to the assistance of the wounded, detainees, and people searching for their families.

Today (Tuesday 27 April), a team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), including a doctor, visited the three US servicemen held by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. The visit was carried out in full accordance with the standard procedures set forth in the Third Geneva Convention; that is, the ICRC delegates held private talks with each Prisoner of War (POW) and registered his personal details. The POW's were also given the opportunity to write Red Cross messages, which will be forwarded to their families.

The YRC, Federation and ICRC are in the process of revising a plan to assist people affected by the current crisis, with a focus on: assistance to vulnerable people (including refugees from Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina); a soup-kitchen programme for beneficiaries; assistance for repair of damaged households; medical supplies for the wounded; providing water supplies; psychological support for victims of air-raids, violence, and displacements; and technical and development support to the YRC.

With the loss of the last bridge in Novi Sad, the Red Cross branch in Vojvodina as well as a few other neighbouring branches (Sremski Karlovci, Beocin) are experiencing difficulties in responding to the needs of vulnerable groups. The Vojvodina branch intends to submit a proposal to the ICRC to fund a boat which will be used exclusively within the Red Cross mandate.

Red Cross branch reports indicate an urgent need to supply a growing number of social cases with food, either through the soup-kitchens programme or through the distribution of dry food rations. In addition to all basic food items, there is an urgent need for milk powder, baby food, infant formula.

In the Nis/Zajecar region, the number of displaced from Kosovo increases on a daily basis. In eleven Red Cross branches (out of the 36 in the region), 3,069 displaced have approached the local Red Cross for assistance. The Red Cross branch in Nis has established a reception centre with a capacity of 300 beds.

In Krusevac, 510 displaced persons from Kosovo have registered with the Red Cross and have received 2,000 kg of potato, 900 kg of onion, 100 kg of sugar, 150 kg of rice and 2,500 kg of flour. Since the beginning of the crisis, 94 first aid courses have been attended by 2,556 people. Around 2,000 students have also attended lectures on psycho-social support organised by the Krusevac Red Cross Center for Psycho-social Support.

The Red Cross has distributed the following supplies to displaced persons in these locations:

- Varvarin: 25l of oil, 25 kg of sugar, and 12 hygiene parcels to 25 persons.
- Cicevac: 35 kg of sugar, 5 kg of salt, and 7 hygiene parcels to 35 persons.
- Brus: 43 displaced have received 250 kg of potato, 100 kg of onion, 50 kg of beans, 43l litres of oil, 30 kg of washing powder, and 43 pieces of soaps to 43 persons.
- Aleksandrovac: 1,500 kg of wheat flour, 70 kg of beans, and 26 hygiene parcels to 55 persons.
- Trstenik: 592 kg of wheat flour, 60l litres of oil, 70 kg of sugar, 6 kg of salt, 16 kg of pasta, 25 kg of milk powder, 31 hygiene parcels, 117 kg of beans, 43 pieces of soaps, 7 kg of cheese, 28 hygiene napkins, and 48 cans of meat to 106 persons .

In Montenegro, the total estimated beneficiary figures communicated on April 23 remain unchanged. Many of the Montenegro Red Cross branches confirmed that the displaced persons still tend to fan out from the entry point at Rozaje to other areas, resulting in increased pressure on local Red Cross branches.

In Ulcinj (Montenegro), the majority of displaced are still lodged in private houses. Semi-permanent collective shelters are being used and the authorities are planning to open collective centres in private houses and government facilities. The Montenegro Red Cross report that since 29 March, aid has been distributed to some 1,800 people. The Red Cross is supporting a local humanitarian organisation to distribute milk to children arriving in the area.

The Red Cross logistics efforts continue, with the first two truckloads of ECHO white beans for 125,000 beneficiaries safely delivered to the YRC warehouse in Belgrade.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

UNHCR has reported that 3,000 new refugees crossed into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia yesterday (Monday, 26 April) through the Blace border point. The majority were transferred to Stenkovec-French, Stenkovec-Brazda, Neprosteni (1,000) and some 200 remained in the tents at Blace. The new refugees come mainly from the Urosevac and Kosovo Polje areas.

On Sunday, 25 April, 798 refugees were evacuated to third countries, including France, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Relief Distribution: The number of refugees living with host families and registered with the Macedonian Red Cross has increased dramatically in the past week. The current number of registered beneficiaries is 88,587, nearly double the initial planning figure of 46,000 Red Cross

beneficiaries. Although some 42,000 have already received relief rations for April, the refugees are arriving faster than relief can be distributed.

The Skopje branch of the Macedonian Red Cross has been faced with logistical challenges particularly in the distribution of bulky items, such as mattresses. The branch will be provided with support from the National Society's headquarters and the International Federation's Relief Co-ordinator in better organising and staffing distribution points. The need for increased capacity is especially urgent as there are plans to greatly expand beneficiary lists next month to include host families and social cases.

Health: Four additional tents - each 50 square metres in size - were set up for the expansion of the Red Cross field hospital in the Stenkovec-Brazda camp. The tents will be equipped and provide space for some 60 more beds.

UNICEF began a child immunisation campaign for Kosovar children accommodated in all refugee camps on Monday. More than 8,900 children under five years of age in the camps will be vaccinated against polio, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus, while newborns will be vaccinated against tuberculosis. The medical personnel from the Red Cross field hospital is also assisting in administering the vaccinations at the Brazda camp.

Logistics: A consignment of 17,700 blankets was received from the Logistics Service in Geneva in response to requests from the delegation. New customs requirements have been announced for goods arriving by truck and these are being further investigated together with the Macedonian Red Cross.

Some 1,000 blankets and 1,000 mattresses were dispatched to the Kumanovo branch over the weekend (24-25 April).

Tracing: ICRC staff are attempting to respond to all queries, and to deal with the most vulnerable cases. These include children under 18 years old, the elderly and serious medical cases. In the large Stenkovec camps, in particular, inter-camp messages are vital. So far some 1,000 Red Cross messages have been relayed to and from the camps in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The ICRC Tracing service has registered a total of 333 children looking for their parents and 1,032 parents looking for their children through Monday, 26 April. The number of cases where family reunification was successful has increased to 70, while an additional 33 cases have been matched and are in process of being reunited.

External Relations and Publicity: On Monday, briefings and interviews were conducted by the Information delegates with the following media: CBC Radio (Montreal), Korean TV, Danish TV, TFI (private French TV), AFP, ITN, BBC Radio 5-London, Canadian Radio, ARD (German TV), Czech TV, Sky News, ITN (separate crew) and TFI (separate crew).

Albania

According to the latest figures from the Republic of Albania's Emergency Management Group, there now are 356,653 refugees in the country. Action to move the refugees away from Kukes is underway and the total for this prefecture has fallen to 100,000 (from 120,000

last week). However, sporadic shelling near the Kukes border point has caused heightened tensions amongst the refugees.

Relief Distributions: Among the goods distributed by the Red Cross Red Crescent since the start of the current operation in Albania are: blankets (50,285); tents (549); mattresses (4,178); bedlinen (800 sets); hygiene parcels (4,509); clothing (685 kg); tarpaulins (10,500); water purification tablets (49,000); cooking sets (740); meals ready to eat (87,108); wheat flour (2,996); baby food (20,347 kg); high protein biscuits (154,332 kg); and tinned food (23,664 kg).

Shelter: Shelter capacity identification continues; UNHCR and the EU have identified and assessed seven high priority locations as buffer shelter capacities. Additional site identification campaigns by the Albanian consulting team, UNHCR and the OSCE are ongoing. Sanitation remains very poor in the camps and collective centres.

The following Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies are working in refugee camps within Albania, with activities ranging from the provision of emergency services to overall camp management: Turkish Red Crescent (Elbasan, capacity 5,000), Italian Red Cross (Kukes, 3,300 Durrës, 1,500 Kavajë, 5,000), Hellenic Red Cross (Pogradec, 5,000).

National Societies involved in camps currently being established are: Danish Red Cross (Lezhi, 7,000) Austrian Red Cross (Shkodra, 5,000) United Arab Emirates Red Crescent (Kukes, 10,000), Joint Netherlands and Belgium Red Cross (Vlorë, 6-10,000), Spanish Red Cross (Berat, up to 2,000).

Social Welfare: There is a "huge need" for psycho-social services for Kosovo refugees in Albania, a Red Cross Red Crescent team reported today. The three person team, which spent 10 days surveying conditions in Kukes and Tirana, urged action on all fronts -- in camps, in collective centres and for refugees with host families.

Severe psychological disorders were the fourth most frequent cases in camp hospitals, they pointed out, but besides care for such illnesses, other, simpler initiatives could help to reduce stress and trauma among the refugee population.

The team recommended a better flow of information on services available to the refugees -- tracing services, phone availability, relief distributions, and transport, for example. But its chief proposal was the immediate establishment of a Red Cross psycho-social welfare service, initially staffed by a co-ordinator, two social welfare workers in Albania (and one in Macedonia) who would introduce a training programme for locally recruited welfare workers and promote the development of other measures. Another responsibility would be awareness training to alleviate stress among all those working in the relief operation.

To facilitate the training courses the Danish Red Cross, which hosts the International Federation's Reference Centre for Psychological Support and provided two of the team members, has already translated relevant manuals into Albanian.

The need for psycho-social assistance is widely recognised by aid agencies, the team reported, although none as yet has begun a formal programme. A start has been made, however, on improving information, recreation areas are being set up in some camps and an inter-agency mental health group is now meeting weekly in Kukes.

Logistics: The government has appealed to all NGOs to adhere strictly to its customs requirements regarding all incoming humanitarian goods.

Tracing: Radio broadcasts of lists of names has proved invaluable in providing information about missing family members. The Tracing reception desk in Tirana receives regular calls from people confirming that they have news via the broadcast of missing relatives. From this week onwards, the ICRC has been making special announcements on unaccompanied children and elderly people.

In the towns of Shkodra, Tirana, Durres, Vlore, Bairam Suri, Berat, Pogradec and Korce, the names of some 480 family heads have been registered. With the use of the fixed-station tracing office in Kukes, and the mobile satellite phones, 1,119 phone calls have been made by refugees to relatives residing in other countries. In Shkodra, 704 phone calls were made, 38 in Berat, 16 in Fier and 72 in Korce.

Participating National Societies: Strong support for the Red Cross/Red Crescent operation in Albania is continuing from Middle East National Societies. Over the weekend, a plane chartered by the Saudi Arabia Red Crescent landed in Tirana with a consignment of relief goods, and more flights are planned. Goods and personnel from the "Palestine Red Crescent Society" are due to arrive in the Albanian capital shortly. Meanwhile, plans are in hand to transport 110 mt of food assistance provided by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, and the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent (which is establishing a refugee camp in Albania) is exploring the possibility of chartering an aircraft to fly food to Tirana next week.

External Relations and Publicity: Interviews have been given recently to news organisations in Canada, Switzerland, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Delegation: The joint delegation currently comprises 74 expatriate delegates across the country, the majority of whom are working side-by-side with volunteers and staff of the ARC in assisting the refugees.

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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