

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

4 April 1999

situation report no. 2

OVERVIEW

With the crisis continuing in the Balkans, the International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement is increasingly concerned for the physical and psychological well-being of the displaced and the refugees. The situation for these people is still dramatic despite the relief and medical supplies that are starting to be distributed. Efforts by respective authorities and humanitarian organisations to co-ordinate and develop an appropriate response are now achieving results, yet the dimensions of the crisis requires a coordinated approach from the Movement. Personnel and stocks are being mobilised according to the needs as identified by the field-based teams. Priorities remain food, water, shelter and medical care. Participating National Societies are highly encouraged to coordinate their response through the logistics unit established by the Steering Committee (contact Charles Bernimolin, Federation, and John Wert, ICRC, at: 041 22 730 2143 or 041 22 730 2204; *Fax*: 041 22 733 9460; *email*: fedicrcbalkanlog.gva@icrc.org).

LATEST EVENTS AND RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT ACTION

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

With military operations continuing last night in FRY, the civilian population are facing increasing hardship with people sheltering in air-raid shelters and the general atmosphere reportedly very tense. The ICRC, YRC and International Federation continue to work in FRY with the main focus on maintaining a capacity to respond to humanitarian needs. Therefore, regular contacts are continuing with the authorities and medical structures.

The ICRC delegation has also been active in transferring relief stocks from Belgrade to Montenegro to assist the increasing needs of the internally displaced. There are currently six delegates in Belgrade, and three delegates from the International Federation.

Montenegro

The Montenegro Red Cross and the ICRC have been concentrating on organising assistance and shelter for more than 30,000 people that have arrived from Kosovo, with many more expected. The ICRC has undertaken an assessment in the central and southern regions of the water and hygiene situation of the displaced and is currently undertaking an assessment of the medical needs. The MRC continues to be very active in distributing assistance (food and non-food). There is increasing concern for the security of the displaced as they continue to be housed in makeshift collective centres, mostly factory buildings and mosques.

There are new reports of 20,000 people waiting in the mountains to cross into Albania.

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

Albania

More than 160,000 refugees have now entered Albania in the past seven days. Thousands more are reported to have arrived in the north-western Albania. Reports from Kukes emphasize the shortage of relief items and the fact that there is not enough fresh food available on the local market to feed all the new arrivals. Most of the refugees have now been moved from Kukes to other locations in Albania such as Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Diber, Fier, Vlorë, Korce, Elbasan, Lezhë, Gjirokastër and Shkoder.

The mobilisation and delivery of Red Cross/Red Crescent relief items gathered pace in the last 24 hours. Yesterday a second plane from the Netherlands Red Cross loaded with 17,000 blankets landed in Tirana, and a flight containing three vehicles donated by the German Red Cross also arrived. Between today and tomorrow relief convoys (a total of 8 trucks) transporting ready to eat food, food parcels and blankets will depart to Kukes and Krumë (some 50 km's north of Kukes). Another truck with blankets and hygienic parcels have been sent to Berat, some 150 km's south of Tirana.

The Albanian Red Cross is present in the Kukes area with staff and some 40 volunteers, supported by three Federation delegates. Between them, today every refugee crossing the border was given a blanket and water. A Federation Sub-Office is now being set up in Kukes. Throughout the country, all of the local Red Cross branches affected by the refugees crisis have volunteers taking part in distribution of food and non-food items.

In Tirana, ARC volunteers are distributing food parcels in the refugee camps and the collective centre. Breakfast consisting of bread and cheese were distributed to the 900 refugees located at the Mullet collective centre located some 15 km's away from Tirana. 100 food parcels intended to last one week were also distributed as well as 100 cooking sets, hygienic parcels and clothes.

A 12-person volunteer team from the Italian Red Cross arrived today and departed to Kukes to immediately establish a health post. Basic health care will be provided to new arrivals. The Italian team has committed to managing three tent camps being established by the Italian army: one in Kukes with 3,000 people, two in Durrës for a total of 6,500 people.

The French Red Cross is present in Kukes to carry out a medical assessment. The Belgian Red Cross (Flanders) is also represented, as well as the Netherlands Red Cross. The German Red Cross is presently doing an assessment of the water and sanitation situation in the area.

23,000 food parcels from the British Red Cross are expected to arrive Tuesday 6 April by trucks from Greece. 20 MT of food are expected to arrive on Tuesday 6 and Wednesday 7 April from the Swiss Red Cross. The Spanish Red Cross has sent two trucks loaded with varied relief items that are expected to arrive next Wednesday.

The Federation delegation has been extended with three Logistic Delegates, a Liaison Delegate, a Finance Delegate and four Relief Delegates. In the coming days, Water/Sanitation, Health and other delegates will also join the delegation.

The ICRC transported 11 war wounded from the border to the hospital in Kukes. In terms of the general health situation, signs of dehydration have been seen amongst the arrivals and medical teams continue to support local facilities assisting the refugees.

For the thousands of people who have lost contact with their relatives, the ICRC has launched a family news service in collaboration with Radio Tirana, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle. For the newly arrived refugees (those housed in stable lodgings) from Kosovo, the family details and current location are given so contact can be made by family living abroad or in Kosovo. Every day, family details of 100 people are broadcast by the radio networks.

There are currently 17 delegates from the International Federation and 11 ICRC delegates in Albania.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Tens of thousands of people are still waiting in the "no man's land" at the border to enter the country. Red Cross teams are undertaking a crucial task of facilitating the access of humanitarian organisations to the area and distributing food, medicines, liquids, blankets and shelter material. The humanitarian situation has slightly improved but Red Cross delegates have identified serious health problems due to food and medicine shortages and poor hygiene conditions, with people crowded into a small, damp and muddy area with little or no shelter. Red Cross delegates on the spot comment that the most disturbing feature is the highly traumatised state of the people; they have undertaken a very difficult journey to reach the border and see no immediate solution for their future.

The Macedonian Red Cross and the International Federation are assessing the site chosen by the Government as a reception camp for the refugees who are stranded at the border. Red Cross tents and water and sanitation facilities are expected to be erected there for some of the refugees. Supplies which arrived yesterday in two German Red Cross flights will be used: 1,600 sleeping bags, 10,000 blankets and 357 tents, along with water and sanitation equipment. Federation-provided blankets and mattresses (purchased through the Regional Logistics Centre) have been unloaded into the warehouse and are ready for distribution. Further warehouse space is being secured. The ICRC has also delivered 37 MT of compact food (BP-5) and 3 MT of medical supplies.

The Macedonian Red Cross are mobilising more volunteers, and the International Federation currently has seven Delegates (with another five on the way), and the ICRC 10 Delegates in place.

OUTSTANDING NEEDS

The most urgently needed supplies in Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro remain ready-to-eat meals (MREs), blankets, sleeping bags, tents, water and sanitation material, food, hygiene parcels, kitchen sets, and mattresses.

In Albania, the biggest concern at this point is shelter. It is clear that tent camps have to be settled right away as a short term solution, although medium and longer term shelter solutions have to be looked at. Identification of proper sites and allocation is still a problem and commitments for camp management are being sought. The International Federation is contacting PNS about assisting with these commitments. At the same time worries regarding transportation of relief to Kukes are increasing, with road limitations making the transportation of supplies from Tirana extremely slow. There is also an urgent need for food, hygiene items, mattresses and blankets as well as first aid kits. In the Kukes area, there is a shortage of food and shelter.

CONCLUSION

The International Federation and ICRC will launch the 'International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Integrated Appeal in Response to the Crisis in the Balkans' on Tuesday 6 April.

The scale of the crisis demands coordinated action. The Federation and ICRC would like to remind Participating National Societies have formed a joint logistics unit to facilitate the operation, and it is critical that all donors and National Societies inform this coordinated logistics unit of intended operations and receive details of needs to be fulfilled.

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