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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 20

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

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

In Belgrade, the current priority is to establish practical working procedures with the relevant authorities in the Yugoslav capital so as to develop and consolidate the commitments concerning Red Cross action obtained by the ICRC President during his visit this week.

Relief/Distribution: A Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC) convoy of 12 trucks left today (Wednesday) for Podujevo and Pristina with some 44 MT of wheat flour, 2,650 hygiene parcels and a combined total of 20.00 MT of sugar and salt. The YRC has submitted a proposal for further Movement cooperation, involving the setting up of three joint teams: in Nis (to cover south and east Serbia), Novi Sad (Vojvodina) and Belgrade (within the Serbian Red Cross). Cooperation with the Montenegrin Red Cross would also intensify.

In Montenegro, tensions stemming from security incidents in Rozaje in mid-April have resulted in some 7,000 people leaving for Ulcinj, Tuzi and Sarajevo. In Rozaje, numbers decreased by 5,414 during the period from 18-25 April. The total number accommodated in collective shelters on 25 April was 3,891.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

On Monday, (26 April), 1,252 refugees were evacuated to third countries which included Croatia, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Turkey. This brings the total number of evacuations by air to 20,976.

Relief Distribution: Through 27 April, over 48,700 Red Cross-registered refugees living with host families have received the non-food relief distribution for April. The delivery of bulky mattresses to the warehouse of the Skopje branch of the Macedonian Red Cross will be stopped temporarily in order to allow more efficient distribution of food, hygiene parcels and blankets to the target beneficiaries for April. The capacity of the Skopje branch will be improved starting Wednesday when five additional staff begin work and another computer is purchased for expediting refugee registration (funded by the American Red Cross project delegation).

Health: Two patients from the Red Cross field hospital at the Brazda camp were transferred to the University hospital in Skopje for dialysis treatment. Present capacity at the field hospital is between 36-38 patients; beds are only available in the obstetrics ward. The process of expanding the hospital by some 60 beds was nearing completion Tuesday.

UNHCR formally requested assistance from the Federation for a field hospital in the new camp, Cegrane, presently being set up between Gostivar and Tetovo.

Logistics: The following relief goods arrived in the Red Cross warehouse between 21-26 April: 9,000 mattresses; 18,825 blankets; 5 metric tonnes of rice; and 125 tents. Warehouse dispatches on Monday and Tuesday (26-27 April) included: 1,833 mattresses and 1,500 blankets to the Tetovo branch; 2,000 mattresses; 500 blankets to the Skopje branch; 4,500 blankets and 2,000 hygiene parcels to the Gostivar branch..

The continuing process of structuring the Red Cross warehouse is made difficult because many relief shipments arrived during the emergency phase without proper documentation. Thus, it is difficult to match goods with requisitions as tracking numbers do not appear.

Tracing: Contact with missing family members is a major source of anxiety for many people and delegates continue to allow use of their nine mobile phones by the refugees. Red Cross messages (RCMs) are collected in collaboration with the Macedonian Red Cross, and roughly a quarter of all messages received are then distributed inter-camp while the remainder are sent to other countries, with Germany being the principal destination. The number of files opened for children has increased slightly to 337, as was the case for the number of files opened for parents searching for their children (1,035). A total of 63 cases have been closed and 93 additional ones are pending reunification.

External Relations, Marketing and Publicity: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement delegates have recently conducted interviews or briefings with the Seattle Times newspaper, AFP, a Canadian radio station, French radio, Sky News, a North Carolina TV station, Boston Globe, Reuters, APTN, the European Broadcasting Union, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, British Channel 4, France 3, M6 (French private TV), Boston Globe, Radio Malta, Independent, Daily Mail and Voice of America (Albania and English sections).

Albania

Latest statistics from Albania's Emergency Management Group indicate there are currently more than 356,000 refugees in country. Approximately 102,000 are in the Kukes area, close by the border - including some 15,000 (and rising) with host families. The overall figure is expected to drop in the coming days as UNHCR steps up its efforts to transport the refugees to prefectures south of Kukes. Since the crisis began last month, 250,000 people have transited through Kukes en route for other parts of the country. Meanwhile, weather patterns continue to make life miserable for those in northern areas of Albania, as well as hampering relief and transport efforts.

In Tirana, the joint delegation is besieged each day by people seeking details on how to travel abroad; guidance and advice are offered according to available resources. Indeed, across the country as a whole, Red Cross Red Crescent delegates are regularly pressed for answers on a range of basic questions, including resettlement and travel documents, accommodation and food distributions.

Relief Distributions: Red Cross Red Crescent distributions to host family refugees in the Kukes area has been set for Wednesday 5 May to allow various NGOs time to re-route their deliveries. Adra and the CRS will also take on food distribution in three camps to 3,000 people on that date. However, logistical problems in Kukes seem likely to plague implementation of the distribution efforts for some time to come.

Elsewhere Red Cross Red Crescent field delegates report that relief distributions in other parts of the country will begin shortly. Recent deliveries include: 40 MT of wheat flour to Tirana,

Kukes, Shkodra; 20 MT of wheat flour to Elbasan and Fier; a combined total of 3,600 French Red Cross food parcels to Shkodra (2,000) Elbasan, as well as supplies which are arriving in Durres for 30,000 host families.

The German Red Cross has recently provided ten trucks with wheat flour. In all, 23 trucks carrying cargoes of flour will make deliveries in Kukes, Elbasan and Shkoder, securing food for some 25,000 beneficiaries for one month.

Health: The second Finnish Red Cross ERU team is en route for Shkodra to set up a basic health clinic (BHC). The site has been selected and is being prepared; agreements with the local authorities in progress. Equipment will be moved to Shkodra tomorrow (Thursday) to be operational as soon as possible. A Red Cross Red Crescent assessment team has visited Peshkopi's hospital and also reviewed the sanitation situation in Shkodra. German Red Cross sanitation equipment has arrived in Kukes.

ERU staff at the BHC in Kukes have vaccinated some 10,000 people against polio and measles in recent days. In addition to the vaccinations, the clinic is treating up to 250 people per day, mainly children and elderly. A block latrine is under construction by just across from the clinic, thus improving access to sanitation facilities for refugees and the resident population. The Red Cross is assisting the authorities in monitoring environmental health conditions.

Logistics: Following an intervention by the joint delegation, Albania's Ministry of Labour has dispatched officials to border points where trucks with humanitarian aid had been seriously delayed. As a result, some 20 trucks, each carrying 15 MT of aid on average, are now able to proceed to their delivery points.

Cases of misuse of the Red Cross Red Crescent emblem are on the increase, with a number of trucks not associated in any way with the Movement, transporting goods around the country and displaying the emblem. These concerns are being raised with the Albanian authorities.

Tracing: So far, the names of 1,488 heads of families in Kukes have been collected. In all, 1,494 phone calls, covering some 15,000 people have been made from mobile satellite phones. More than half of the calls are made to Germany. The tracing service has registered 29 unaccompanied minors and ten vulnerable cases (pregnant women on their own, handicapped or elderly people).

Telecommunications: Though the arrival of mobile communications equipment is still awaited, the Austrian Red Cross telecoms ERU has carried out repairs and upgrades to the delegation's computer stock. Additional radio operators are needed before an adequate radio network can be established. Meanwhile, system capacities remain limited, hindering the usefulness of both the pactor facility and the satellite phones.

Participating National Societies: Three delegates from the Netherlands Red Cross have arrived to assist members of the joint Netherlands/Belgium Red Cross team in establishing the Vlore camp.

External Relations, Marketing and Publicity: The Head of Delegation has briefed a visiting British Parliamentary delegation (Committee for International Development) on Red Cross action.

The London-based Press Association wire service has carried the diary of a Red Cross expatriate nurse, who was also profiled in a UK tabloid; over the weekend a British broadsheet featured another Red Cross delegate. Interviews with local media have focused on the ICRC

President's recent visit to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In Kukes, a Red Cross Red Crescent delegate was interviewed by various Norwegian newspapers and radio stations and US, UK and Swedish TV networks. Correspondents from a range of American news services - including ABC Radio, UPI, USA Today, CNN, Associated Press, CBS and NBC - have recently covered Red Cross Red Crescent activities in Albania.

Outstanding Needs: In Kukes, warehouse stock levels are becoming low and in need of urgent replenishment. Adding to the difficulties are restrictions on the transportation of goods, slowing the distribution of aid from the warehouse to the various field offices. The provision of extra trucks would help alleviate the problem.

Outstanding needs

According to latest information from the Geneva logistics unit, among urgently needed items under the joint appeal mechanism are: food parcels, hygiene parcels, buckets, kitchen sets, blankets, flour, candles and folding jerry cans. An initial list of contributions to the joint appeal (cash and kind) is being prepared for dispatch to donors in the coming days.

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

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