

3 May, 1999

RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 23

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

Relief/Distribution: Five ICRC trucks loaded with 5,040 metres of plastic sheeting, 2,016 hygiene parcels, and 2,010 blankets departed Belgrade on Saturday, 2 May for Surdulica in the Nis region.

Montenegro: The communal kitchen in the Rozaje camp provides one hot meal per day to 3,000 beneficiaries. Direct distributions to displaced in collective centres also continue. As of 29 April, all of the collective centres had received hygienic kits. Work has begun on the conversion of a coal shelter in the Kristal factory into separate family spaces. This shelter will accommodate some 270 displaced previously housed in the Ljekobilje factory.

In Ulcinj (southern Montenegro), staff have begun collecting names of people expressing the desire to inform relatives of their whereabouts. Some 150 people have so far registered their names to be broadcast. As of today (Monday, 3 May) displaced can telephone their families from three newly-installed telephone lines. At the Neptune camp, the ICRC has provided tables and kitchen utensils for a communal kitchen currently under construction for some 200 people.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The continued, large number of daily arrivals of new refugees from Kosovo over the weekend has severely overburdened the refugee camps in the FYROM. Thousands were forced to spend the past several nights in the open as the pace of putting up new tents (in the new Cegrane camp) was overrun by the pace of new arrivals. In just days, the Cegrane camp population rose to 17,600 on Sunday, and UNHCR reports that 2,000 more people are waiting at the Blace border crossing to be transferred to the camp. Upon agreement from government authorities who toured Cegrane on Sunday, the camp will be expanded to accommodate an unspecified number of additional refugees. Although precise information is still unavailable, the Red Cross estimates the number of refugees in FYROM to be already near 200,000, with thousands more expected in the coming days.

On Friday, (30 April), 8,300 new refugees crossed into FYROM while on Saturday, (1 May), an additional 8,000 arrived, according to UNHCR. New arrivals on Sunday (2 May) were estimated at over 3,800.

Departures of refugees to third countries have been outpaced by the number of new arrivals. UNHCR reports 889 refugees departed to Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Norway and Sweden on Friday (April 30). On Saturday (1 May), only 647 people departed to Austria, Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Relief Distribution: A Red Cross Relief team went to the border village of Straza on Saturday with milk and medicines for 1,000 people expected to cross into FYROM. The ICRC requested 1,500 blankets, 1,500 bottles of water and 1,500 rations of high-protein biscuits be dispatched on Saturday. As access to this group was not possible at the time, the relief items were transferred to the Blace border transit camp.

Relief distributions are ongoing. Through Friday, (30 April), 65,000 refugees living with host families had received assistance. Over 102,000 people have been registered as beneficiaries of the Macedonian Red Cross to date.

Health: Sanitation is becoming an issue in the vicinity of the Red Cross field hospital in the Stenkovec-Brazda camp due to the close proximity of latrines, the capacity of which are overburdened. Two additional deliveries of babies overnight brings the total number of babies born in the hospital to 16, three of which were by Caesarean section.

An assessment of the health needs in the newly set-up Cegrane camp was carried out during the weekend by a representative of the Norwegian Red Cross together with the Health Co-ordinator from the German Red Cross. The equipment for the field hospital requested by UNHCR will be forwarded to FYROM on Friday, while additional staffing needs will be met by ten Palestinian Red Crescent health delegates being transferred from the Albania delegation.

Tracing: The ICRC has to date registered 396 cases of unaccompanied vulnerable persons which include children, elderly, physically and mentally disabled. There are now 944 tracing requests registered and 149 cases have been closed.

Logistics: Dispatches from the warehouse on Friday (30 April) included: 630 mattresses, 780 blankets and 150 hygiene parcels to the Skopje branch; and 220 pairs of socks and 26 bags of used clothing to refugees living with host families in Malino.

Macedonian Red Cross: In addition to providing food and non-food relief assistance to refugees in host family accommodation, the Macedonian Red Cross is also increasing its activities through its Information Centre for Refugees, supported financially by the Federation. Open since June 1993, the Centre is working seven days a week providing referral and psychological support to walk-ins and, in greater number, to those calling over the phone.

Participating National Societies: The American Red Cross continues to work with the Macedonian Red Cross for expanding capacity of the distribution system. ARC also approved the purchase of fork lifts for the Federation's warehouse, as well as paying three months rent for it. The Acting President of the ARC visited the region and met with MRC, Federation and ICRC leadership, toured the warehouse, stopped at the MRC branch in Tetovo and the Stenkovec-Brazda refugee camp.

External Relations, Information, and Publicity: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Information delegates conducted interviews or briefings with the following media over the weekend (30 April - 2 May): CBS network, AFP, Macedonian Radio, two French-Canadian TV stations, CBC, BBC, a French radio station, Sky News, Voice of America, Canadian TV, and NTR (Canadian news agency), the LA Times, NY Times, USA Today, Southam News of Canada, and Voice of America (in a separate contact)

A telephone press conference was organised for the visiting Secretary General of the Canadian Red Cross through the Canadian Department of National Defence, which holds a daily press briefing in Ottawa.

Albania

With a reported influx of several thousand people from Djakovica into Kukes over the weekend, latest estimates put the refugee population in Albania at over 370,000. Despite an on-going programme of transfers out, the main entry point of Kukes remains the country's most over-burdened region with the refugee figure once again breaching 100,000.

In the country as a whole, by far, the greatest number of refugees are staying with host families (almost 270,000 in more than 40,000 host families), approximately 70,000 are accommodated in collective centres and some 30,000 are in camps.

Relief Distributions: An agreement has been reached between the Albanian Red Cross (ARC), the Federation, and the ICRC with the World Food Programme and UNHCR. The ARC will deal with the needs of refugees in host families throughout Albania, and to facilitate this approach, the country has been divided into six areas - Kukes, Shkoder, Tropoje, Tirana, Durres, Fier and Elsaban. In each area, relief delegates have been assigned to assist the local branches of the ARC. The ARC will provide warehouses to store goods transferred from main warehouses in Durres and Tirana. In the various districts, the ARC branches will distribute goods according to the number of refugees in host families.

Until the new programme comes into effect, relief distribution of food and non-food items continues in Kukes for refugees in collective centres and in host families. In the Kukes and Krume districts 3,500 and 4,000 people leave the area daily, but the number of refugees in host families is on the increase. In the town of Kukes alone, 53,000 beneficiaries have been registered including those in host families. In the communes around Kukes, estimates indicate some 30,150 beneficiaries, more than 90% of whom are accommodated in host families. In the Has district, comprising the town of Kruma and its communes, 23,900 beneficiaries have been registered. At Bajram Curri in the Tropoje district, the OSCE has registered 2,200 refugees, most of whom live with relatives. Some 4,000 displaced from border villages are also in Bajram Curri.

In Tirana, an influx of refugees from Kukes has caused numbers to swell to 43,639 living with host families. The Tirana Red Cross branch operates four distribution centres in the city. So far, 18,441 refugees from Kosovo living in host families have received monthly full rations (20 kg) of food and blankets. To receive rations, the head of the host family and the head of the refugee family both come to the distribution points. The ARC relies on the help of some 100 volunteers who have so far coped extremely well.

Some 2,000 refugees were transferred last week by helicopter from Kukes to Elbasan where they were accommodated in a camp run by the Turkish Red Cross. Another 1,000 people left by bus from Kukes to Gramsh, also in the Elbasan region. Current figures put the number of refugees living with host families in the Elbasan district at 6,000.

A relief coordinator and a representative of the ARC made a visit to Peskhopi in the Diber district. The two helicopter rotations delivered 421 food parcels. The Diber region has received 3,650 refugees from Kukes and 2,500 of these have found shelter with host families. The local Red Cross branch has bought 200 tins of condensed milk for children.

Food parcels (12 MT) and field rations (14 MT) were delivered to Shkodra last week. Some 20,000 refugees are estimated to be in Shkodra, according to the ARC. When the refugees arrive at the border they are first registered, then they receive food, diapers for infants and medical care if needed. Refugees continue to be housed at the disused tobacco factory, since the capacity of host families to take them in appears to have been stretched to the limit.

Some 5,146 food parcels (5 kg) provided by the French Red Cross reached Kukes on Saturday, with a further 4,745 delivered to Shkodra; a consignment of almost 22 MT of wheat flour and 4,250 blankets arrived at Elbasan.

Health : A Red Cross team visited both the university hospital and the military hospital in Tirana to assess present and future needs. The team also went to Shkodra, where the director of the regional hospital was given two dispensary sets, two pediatric sets, one dressing material set and a WHO emergency kit. A camp with a field hospital has been set up by the Austrian Red Cross in cooperation with the Austrian ambulance service.

Logistics: As of today, 3 May, four helicopter rotations will take place from Tirana to Kukes. Each helicopter has the capacity for transporting seven tonnes of relief supplies and passengers. Since the ICRC/Federation ferry began twice-weekly operations on 11 April, a significant quantity of relief items have been transported from Ancona, Italy to the Albanian port of Durres. So far, 116,703 individual food parcels have been shipped to Durres. On Saturday, 1 May the ferry departed from Ancona with 17 French Red Cross trucks loaded with individual food parcels. To speed delivery, all the vehicles are driving directly to the respective regional field offices, escorted by the Albanian Red Cross. The ferry consignment also carried other essential equipment, including a fuel tanker to facilitate better fleet usage.

A total of 15 trucks has arrived in Durres with 180 MT of wheat flour from the German Red Cross.

Additional trucks for distribution have been put on order, and are due to arrive in mid-June. Until that time, the Red Cross is negotiating the services of a local trucking company. A programme for servicing the vehicles starts today (Monday), which will affect delivery schedules.

The Red Cross is seeking additional warehouse space and parking to facilitate the movement of goods.

Current stocks in the Tirana warehouse include: 523 boxes of medicine; 94 stretchers; 1,008 blankets for children; 10 rolls of plastic sheeting; 123 tents (30 m²); 225 family tents; 20 tents (27.5 m²); 25 pallets of chlorine & hypo-chlorite; 2,960 kg clothing; 3,044 kg used clothing; 2,784 food parcels (2 kg); 14,370 food parcels (5 kg); 2,481 food parcel (9 kg); 20,000 boxes of macaroni; 90,960 meals ready-to-eat; 11,840 kg of rice; and 40,000 kg of sugar.

Variations in the size, content and packaging of food parcels are continuing to delay relief distributions when volunteers and workers in the warehouses find it necessary to inspect packages that are not uniform, or sift through the parcels to bring them into closer conformity with the accepted standards.

Participating National Societies: At the second PNS coordination meeting (covered briefly in Report No 22, 30 April 1999), attending National Society representatives called for increased collaboration, cooperation and information flow between PNSs and the joint delegation. Discussion on the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding between

the delegation and the PNSs was postponed pending a review of the document by the delegation. The Albanian Red Cross detailed once again the procedures to be followed by all PNSs when bringing goods into the country. (At the first meeting, it was made very clear that the Red Cross Red Crescent delegation, which has diplomatic status in Albania, should be used as the consignee on all shipments.)

External Relations, Information, and Publicity: Weekend media included coverage in the United Kingdom, United States, Norway, Germany and France.

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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