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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

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This report is published thrice-weekly 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

According to the latest update from Vojvodina, there are 1,336 displaced from Kosovo registered by the Red Cross branch and 593 registered by the Serbian Commissioner for refugees. In addition, there are 500 displaced from other regions in Serbia registered by the Red Cross, and 2,599 by the Serbian Commissioner for refugees. Also 18,487 socially vulnerable persons have approached Red Cross branches for assistance.

During the week of 1-7 May, the Red Cross supplied 50 MT of bulk food and 5,300 individual food parcels and 19,200 m² of plastic sheeting; 5,350 blankets; 4,300 hygienic parcels, and 966 mattresses, as well as jerry cans and candles to some 5,300 people directly affected by air-strikes in Surdulica, Novi Sad and Valjevo. Over the same period, surgical material, infusion and medicines have been delivered to medical institutions in Surdulica, Novi Sad, Aleksinac, Prokuplje, Vranje and Valjevo. The assistance is sufficient for the treatment of 500 wounded for 10 days. The ICRC water/sanitation engineer has started a series of contacts with the relevant authorities in Novi Sad, aimed at searching for a durable solution to the problem of water affecting some 90,000 residents of the town.

In Ulcinj (Montenegro), according to local authority information from the crisis board, there are 38,519 displaced from Kosovo in addition to some 10,000 who fled Kosovo last spring. Outstanding needs include sugar and oil, mattresses and baby items. Some 815 refugees are accommodated in the 'Safari' collective centre where the living conditions are reported to be very bad. The Red Cross health enquiries office, which opened last week in Ulcinj, has been responding to a wide range of questions from the displaced on medical problems; there is also a clear need for a psycho-social service.

In Rozaje, a Red Cross team has continued to welcome newly displaced persons with 'fast' distributions (tinned food and milk for children). People who fled their homes in the village of Murino last week have been assisted by the Montenegro Red Cross in Andrijevisa and Plav with 8 MT of bulk food, clothes, hygiene and individual food parcels.

The Red Cross branch in Niksic has registered a recent increase of about 300 displaced which brings the current total to 1,689. There are 2,500 refugees and 2,800 socially vulnerable in the municipality. Relief distributions for the current month have yet to start since the branch awaits the necessary supplies, including flour, oil, sugar and blankets.

In Kolasin, there are 420 refugees and 400 social cases, as well as 90 displaced from Kosovo. Immediate needs comprise canned fish or meat, clothes and shoes.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

International media reports that between 200 and 2,000 refugees entered FYROM yesterday at Blace are unconfirmed by UNHCR, whose arrival figures for the day are 30. Meanwhile, the number of departures to third countries continues, with 2,408 refugees leaving Monday for: Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and USA. Some 170 left for Albania, according to the UNHCR, which has noted a reluctance among the refugees for this option.

Relief Distribution: According to latest figures from the Macedonian Red Cross (MRC), 119,900 refugees living with 21,000 host families are now registered. Some 1,500 tents (donated by the German Red Cross) were sent to Cegrane camp, where the recent tent shortage is being resolved; however many tents are still pitched on slopes and, consequently, are subject to water flow during rains.

Health: The field hospital and equipment donated by the Norwegian Red Cross has been released from customs and set-up in the Cegrane camp will be completed this afternoon (Wednesday). Treatment of patients will start from tomorrow. The International Federation Head of Delegation (HoD) visited the camp Tuesday and noted that sanitation conditions have improved.

Social Welfare: Representatives from the FYROM labour and social planning ministry, USAID, ECHO, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps International, CARE, InterSOS, German Red Cross and the International Federation met yesterday to plan for increasing food distribution to social cases, including the disabled and poor. Currently, the MRC is assisting 5,693 social cases by distributing food and hygiene parcels. The goal for June and July is to increase this figure to 65,000 families identified as needy by the ministry.

Logistics: Dispatches from the International Federation's central warehouse through Monday (10 May) included: 900 mattresses, 6,044 hygiene parcels (donated by ECHO), 1,462 hygiene parcels (donated by the Swiss Red Cross), 1,365 cooking sets, 450 tents and 400 packs of diapers. Deliveries included a consignment of hygiene parcels from the ICRC (4,160) and ECHO (5,544). In addition, the Swedish Red Cross has dispatched 300,000 candles to Skopje, hygiene packs are expected from the Spanish Red Cross shortly while individual parcels donated by the French Red Cross are en route from Rennes to the Vasto warehouse.

Tracing: The Red Cross tracing agency has registered 569 vulnerable people (the majority of whom are unaccompanied children, but also include elderly, physically and mentally disabled persons). A total of 1,218 people had made tracing requests through Monday, with 252 families reunited.

Participating National Societies: Two staff from American Red Cross have been in Macedonia recently for briefings on tracing operations and how the Society can assist; discussions on this initiative continue.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: ICRC operations director, Jean-Daniel Tauxe arrived in Macedonia 11 May for meetings with the International Federation HoD, the President and Secretary General of the Macedonian Red Cross and visits to the new ICRC office at Tetevo and tracing tents at Stankovec and Cegrane camps.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent delegates conducted interviews or briefings with the following media on 10/11 May: Daily Mail (UK), TV8-Canada, New York Times, European Broadcast Union, Channel M6/TV France, FR3/Regional TV France, People magazine, Macedonian newspaper Dnevnik, San Antonio Express/Texas newspaper and TV Suisse/French.

Outstanding Needs: The new planning figure of 143,000 beneficiaries in host families has highlighted a shortage of blankets and mattresses. The current pipeline is based on a caseload of 80,000 beneficiaries.

Albania

Latest figures from Albania's emergency management group (EMG) indicate that more than 436,000 refugees are in the country, with more than a fifth still in the Kukes area. The EMG puts at 120,000 the number of refugees in camps and collective centres around the country, a significant increase over last week's figures. UNHCR has announced that pre-registration of refugees would begin early next week.

Relief distributions: Food parcel production in Greece and the Netherlands is expected to reach 30,000 per day by 21 May, which will help maintain the pipeline for Red Cross Red Crescent distributions to refugees living in host families. Meanwhile, distributions are stalled in the Durres area, due to some mismatch between the refugees' expectations and the planned deliveries. Across the country, food rations were 600 MT short of requirements.

Logistics: Six aircraft loaded with 11 kg food parcels will be arriving over the next few days. Arrangements have also been made with the Bulgarian Red Cross which will forward six trucks loaded with relief goods to Albania in the near future. Wheat flour (600 MT) has been put on order from Bulgaria. Quicker turnarounds for the Kukes convoys will become the norm with off-loading occurring during the night, and the convoys heading back the next night; four more trucks have been sent to Kukes to facilitate distributions.

Telecommunications: Some of the satellite telephones installed at the delegation are being deployed to the field for tracing services. The mobile telephone system in Albania is becoming overloaded - hand-phones ceased to function last night.

Tracing: To date, the tracing department has received 1,709 visits by refugees seeking assistance, 7,087 telephone calls have been placed, 4,376 messages have been typed for radio broadcast, 65 cases of unaccompanied vulnerable have been recorded together with 85 cases of parents who have lost children; 83 family reunion cases have been opened and 16 closed. A total of 47 Red Cross messages have been dispatched.

Participating National Societies: The Danish Red Cross announced that it has begun accepting people into its camp in Lezhe. A four member implementation team from the Spanish Red Cross has been briefed by the delegation. Representatives from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent have visited Tirana distribution points in recent days, ahead of a decision on the dispatch of a further shipment of food parcels.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: Media contacts involving Red Cross Red Crescent delegates over the last two days have included interviews with BBC TV, CNN, APTV, People magazine, ABC (American), Danish radio, Norwegian newspaper (Dagbladet), Finnish Radio, Deutsche Welle, an Albanian newspaper (Shekulli) and radio (Shimet). France's TV2 filmed the distribution of French Red Cross food parcels in Fier. Arrangements were made for a South Korean journalist to visit Durres upon return from Kukes. A local film crew will be assisting in the preparation of a short documentary on the Albanian Red Cross and its cooperation with the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

This evening, the Head of Delegation is scheduled to meet with the British Government's DFID and, separately, with the American Government's DART team, to discuss the situation in Albania and the need for assistance to the refugees through the Red Cross Red Crescent.

Kukes Report

Despite insecurity on the main refugee exit route from Prizren to Morini, the refugee influx continues when the border is open. New arrivals into the area on 10/11 May were almost 4,000 with over 9,000 departures to other parts of the country. During the last two days, there have been problems in mobilizing the necessary transport capacity to move refugees south. This, coupled with the large influx of refugees over the weekend and Monday, has led to an increased strain on existing facilities in Kukes.

Relief distributions: Distribution of food items continues in Krume District. Every refugee in a host family and the host family has received a full monthly ration of wheat flour (8 Kg) and a two-week ration of food parcels provided by the French Red Cross.

On 10/11 May, distributions included wheat flour and food parcels to over 1,500 beneficiaries in Krume 'old town' and Pla-i-Pates village. The distributions were fully monitored by Red Cross Red Crescent relief delegates and food items handed directly to the beneficiaries. The respective Red Cross branches were also fully involved in every aspect of the distribution exercises.

Logistics: Yesterday the Red Cross Red Crescent warehouse received 54 MT of food parcels and 5.2 MT of chlorine chemicals. The warehouse delivered 42 MT of food parcels in Kukes town, which will be distributed shortly.

Health: All the camp hospitals and clinics have been busy during the past few days assisting new arrivals, with very good cooperation between the three Red Cross Red Crescent hospitals/clinics. During this period the Finnish Red Cross emergency clinic treated 800 patients alone, all of whom were mentally and physically exhausted. With the arrival of the Norwegian Red Cross operational theatre unit, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Red Crescent hospital will shortly be able to perform sophisticated surgical interventions. It will be one of the most advanced medical centres in Albania and should result in excellent medical treatment for beneficiaries, reducing the reliance on medical evacuations. The UAE Red Crescent camp has also established a school.

Four injured people were successfully transported out of Bajram Curri by the Red Cross on 10 May. A recent assessment by a Red Cross water and sanitation delegate concludes that a medium-term plan is needed to rehabilitate water supplies in Kukes and surrounding villages.

Tracing: The distribution of tracing and message materials in Kukes town and the surrounding area, has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of refugees seeking help from the Red Cross Red Crescent sub-delegation.

The protection team visited the UAE Red Crescent camp/hospital to register abandoned elderly and disabled people. During 10/11 May, the team also facilitated 943 telephone calls and 498 radio messages at the Red Cross tracing office and in the UAE Red Crescent camp, Italian Red Cross camp and the MSF camp.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: Coverage of the UAE Red Crescent camp was achieved on BBC World News yesterday. The piece featured the camp in general, the coordinator and an eight year old boy at the camp school expressing his feelings about the crisis in Kosovo. Yesterday SK Film Productions visited the Finnish Red Cross basic health clinic to conduct an interview for inclusion in a film on the plight of the refugees. The Helsinki Saanomat newspaper also conducted a general interview with the coordinator at the clinic.

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