

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

5 April 1999

situation report no. 3

OVERVIEW

The response of the International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement to the crisis in the Balkans has been quick and immediate. With personnel and stocks now in place, the Movement is now active throughout the crisis area and is playing a major role in providing refugees and internally displaced with emergency relief. Nevertheless, concern is still high for the civilians that remain in areas where military operations are continuing.

LATEST EVENTS AND RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT ACTION

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

With military operations continuing in FRY over the last two weeks, many civilians are suffering extreme anxiety about the safety of their relatives and neighbours. Civilians are also feeling the effects of the attacks against bridges and power plants. The ICRC and Federation continues to work with the Yugoslav Red Cross in ensuring that a capacity is maintained to respond to any humanitarian needs.

Concerning civilians inside Kosovo, the ICRC has begun to gather information from refugees in Albania about the fate of relatives remaining behind.

There are currently six ICRC delegates in Belgrade, and three delegates from the International Federation.

Montenegro

More than 30,000 people have arrived from Kosovo, with many more expected in the coming days. The ICRC is currently undertaking an assessment in the northern region of the water and hygiene situation of the displaced. The Montenegro Red Cross continues to be very active in distributing assistance (food and non-food) and organising shelter for the displaced.

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

Albania

Accurate figures regarding the total number of Kosovo refugees who have entered Albania remain difficult to confirm, but Red Cross assessments indicate that they number more than 172,000 (however, recent UNHCR and OSCE figures report as many as 220,000). Refugees continue to enter through three main entry points: Morina (on the border near Kukes), Qafa e Prushit (north of Kruma) and

Shkodra. Over 2,000 refugees have arrived in Bajaram Curri (Tropja district) with thousands more reportedly expected which is of concern as the security situation of the district is precarious.

Reports from Kukes emphasise the critical shortage of relief items and lack of fresh food available at the local market to feed all the new arrivals. Food and relief items are being transported to Kukes, but the road conditions remain difficult. The lack of shelter in Kukes remains a problem, and more transit centres are being organised. No clear figures have been reported on the number of shelters available in the country, but tent camps are being put in place throughout the country by Red Cross teams responding to the urgent need to shelter the thousands of homeless. Hygiene and sanitation in all the camps is a major concern.

Between Sunday, 4 April and Monday, 5 April, Red Cross relief convoys (a total of 8 trucks) transporting ready-to-eat-meals (10 MT of HEB and 40 MT of compact food) and blankets are enroute to Kukes and Krumë (some 50 km. north of Kukes). Another truck with blankets and hygienic parcels has been despatched to Berat, some 150 km's south of Tirana.

With a total lack of water at the border, the Red Cross has organised the distribution of water to the refugees as they arrive. In addition, a new stock of medical supplies was also dispatched by the ICRC to the medical facilities.

The ICRC has registered the details of over 600 families who would like to establish contact with their relatives through the family news service, conducted in collaboration with Radio Tirana, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle. The majority of families are in refugee centres in Tirana and the network will be re-enforced throughout Albania in cooperation with the Albanian Red Cross.

From 26 March to 4 April, the Albanian Red Cross and the International Federation had distributed the following to the refugees: 6,816 food parcels, 29,827 blankets, 277 hygiene parcels, 300 cooking sets, 190 mattresses and 692 bedlinen sets.

The daily crisis management meeting of the authorities, with Red Cross participation, continues to assess the evolving needs.

There are currently 14 delegates from the International Federation and 11 ICRC delegates in Albania.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

For several days, 50 - 60,000 people have been held up at the border. Red Cross workers report that conditions are intolerable in the no-man's land, and people have begun to leave for a transit camp close to Skopje. However, the flow is not continuing and tens of thousand of people remain there with Red Cross teams continuing to distribute food, medicines, liquids, blankets and shelter material. According to UNHCR, more than 130,000 people have crossed the border.

The German Red Cross is currently erecting 410 tents, and will be providing water and sanitation equipment for the transit camp.

The Red Cross warehousing and distribution network is established. One warehouse has been rented in Skopje, and another will be rented in Tetovo. The immediate objective is to increase warehouse space to approximately 6,000 sq. meters to accommodate the supplies which are either in the pipeline or are now arriving.

11 ICRC delegates and 7 Federation Delegates are currently assisting the relief operation.

OUTSTANDING NEEDS

Ready to eat meals, tents, food, hygiene items, mattresses, blankets and first aid kits remain the priority items. Water and sanitation problems in Kukes are increasing, leading to fears of epidemic outbreaks. The biggest need however at this point remains shelter. The Federation urgently requires 30 relief, logistics, finance/administration delegates for the operations in Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

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 ongoing crisis demands coordinated action. The Federation and ICRC advises all Participating National Societies that a joint logistics unit has been formed 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. (contact Charles Bernimolin, Federation, and John Wert, ICRC, at: 041 22 730 2143 or 041 22 730 2204; Fax: 041 22 733 9460; email: fedircbalkanlog.gva@icrc.org).

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