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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

Kosovo assessment mission - first feedback

The five-day assessment mission to Kosovo was completed with a trip on Monday to Prizren (south east of Pristina) and had included visits to Pristina and to the Macedonia border. In both towns the ICRC was greeted positively, especially in Prizren as it was the first international organization to visit since the conflict began. There were meetings with some local authority representatives and with the local Red Cross.

The objective of the mission was to make a first evaluation of the security environment, to re-establish contacts and assess the feasibility of re-establishing a fully operational set-up again in Kosovo. It was the first step of a phased return of the ICRC to Kosovo.

A team of around ten delegates ex-Geneva are subsequently due to arrive in Kosovo within the coming days - the first aim to be to physically set up again a fully-functioning office in Pristina and to re-establish a dialogue with the authorities there, which is an important security factor.

It is important to point out that this first assessment has confirmed to the ICRC that, whilst not experiencing any direct security problems during the limited movements undertaken during this trip, the prevailing security environment has to be considered as complex and potentially volatile, especially whilst a conflict is still being waged in the region. It will be absolutely necessary to continue an open dialogue with all the actors involved - NATO and those on-the-ground in Kosovo to minimize the risks as much as possible.

Whilst the ability to respond to the clearly urgent humanitarian needs of the population still remaining in Kosovo is the ultimate aim and was the reason which prompted the ICRC to begin this process with President Sommaruga's mission to Belgrade, it is nevertheless imperative that any operation is structured within the security and operational constraints the ICRC could face, including damage to roads for relief transportation, presence of mines, ongoing military operations and so on.

It was not the ambition during this trip to establish a comprehensive, global assessment of the scale of needs in Kosovo. However, initial impressions from the trip did indicate urgent needs for medical and basic relief supplies.

For example, during a visit to the hospital in Prizren it had emerged that whilst it was functioning, there were urgent requests for replenishment of supplies which were reported to be running low. Similarly, it could be observed that there were limited food supplies available in the town.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia)

Relief : The German Red Cross has donated 8,100 parcels containing items for babies. In Sabac, 20 MT of wheat flour and 1,388 hygiene parcels were distributed from the new regional Red Cross warehouse, and the village of Bogutovac has received emergency food aid and hygiene parcels from the Red Cross branch in Kraljevo. On 20 May, ICRC convoys left Belgrade for Nis, Novi Sad, Jarjika and Kragujevac.

National Society: The Yugoslav Red Cross has received two land cruisers funded by the British Red Cross. The Nis and Kragujevac Red Cross branches have opened reception centres for displaced persons from Kosovo.

Psycho-Social Welfare : A team of psychologists and psychiatrists from the Belgrade Red Cross branch help line participated in 15 programmes broadcast by Studio B TV. The 15-minute programmes encompassed topics such as how children and elderly people coped in wartime situations, and aim to preserve mental health in stressful situations.

In Kragujevac the local Red Cross has hired a team of professionals for its anti-stress programme and has opened a psycho-social help line. Psycho-social teams make weekly visits to shelters in the region.

Detention: Two Yugoslav prisoners of war (POWs) held by the United States military were released on 18 May and repatriated under the auspices of the ICRC.

The prisoners were handed over to the ICRC at a border crossing point between Hungary and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia this afternoon after being transported by the US military authorities from Germany, where they had been held. They were then escorted by ICRC delegates across the border and received by the Yugoslav authorities. Earlier, an ICRC team in Germany had held private interviews with each of the prisoners to ensure that they were returning home of their own free will. Delegates also accompanied them on the trip to the Yugoslav border.

The two POWs had previously been visited by the ICRC in accordance with the standard procedures set forth in the Third Geneva Convention.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Montenegro)

Health : The Montenegro Red Cross has indicated that a heightened risk of epidemics due to lack of running water and electricity now exists in collective accommodation in Jaz (Budva), while a scarcity of disinfectants in the collective centres in Ulcinj means that hygiene conditions remain substandard.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

After several days of being turned back at the Blace border, significant numbers of refugees have been crossing once again. The UNHCR report 4,279 refugees entering Macedonia 18-19

May. Meanwhile, the number of departures to third countries continues with 3,118 people leaving for Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom - and the UNHCR is anticipating an increase in the rate of departures. Overall, these latest statistics brings the current refugee population to 75,300 living in camps, and a further 150,000 with host families. Macedonian Red Cross figures show 138,344 refugees as registered host family beneficiaries.

As part of its campaign to encourage refugees to transfer to camps in Albania, the UNHCR has arranged for a small group of community leaders from Stenkovec and Cegrane camps to travel to Albania and view the camps there. They will return in a day to inform the refugees here of the conditions in the Albanian camps. The UNHCR is also producing a photo display and a video to inform the refugee population of the available facilities.

Social Welfare: Starting in July, 60,000 families, identified as poor by the labour and social welfare ministry, will receive a basic food ration. A consortium of international organizations and NGOs are coordinating the donations, including ECHO, USAID, Mercy Corps, CRS, American Red Cross and German Red Cross. In addition, InterSOS will support 6,000 of the most vulnerable families. The Red Cross Red Crescent initiated this effort and has been a catalyst in bringing all parties together on the solution.

Logistics: Dispatches from the Red Cross Red Crescent central warehouse on 19-20 May included: 1,520 mattresses, 3,600 blankets, 8,000 hygiene parcels (donated by ECHO), 2,140 standard hygiene parcels, 1,195 large hygiene parcels (donated by the Spanish Red Cross), 600 diapers. Deliveries included: 6,030 blankets, 2,995 sheets (donated by Swiss Red Cross), 6,233 hygiene parcels, and 2,507 sleeping bags (donated by Swedish Red Cross).

A new forklift (donated by American Red Cross), capable of lifting up to three tonnes, is now operating at the main warehouse in Skopje. This will help speed up the unloading of shipments, which had been handled by five manual forklifts; for example, on one day recently, there were nine trucks waiting to unload various shipments of goods.

Tracing: The ICRC tracing agency has registered 741 vulnerable people (the majority of whom are unaccompanied children, but also include elderly, physically and mentally disabled persons). Through yesterday, 20 May, 466 Red Cross messages had been collected and distributed over the past week. In one case, a father living in a refugee camp needed to contact his eight year old son who was in a Belgrade hospital. He came to the Red Cross tracing centre at the camp, wrote the message, which was faxed to the Belgrade delegation, for delivery.

Participating National Societies: The Finnish Red Cross has installed security lighting in the main warehouse in Skopje. The Society's electricians have been setting up lamp posts, maintaining and operating the generators for the lighting at the two Stenkovec camps. Next week, they will be loaned to WFP to help make ready office containers ear-marked for any future operations in Kosovo. The American Red Cross has prepared for the arrival of eight tracing assistants who will be working in the refugee camps.

External Relations, Marketing and Publicity: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Information delegates conducted interviews or briefings with the following media on 19-20 May: Interviews and briefings were given at the Norwegian Red Cross hospital to CBC, Newsweek, CNN, Deutsche Welle, VG/Norwegian newspaper, Aften Poften/Norwegian newspaper, and the UK Sun. In addition, LBC (Lebanese Broadcast Satellite) carried a five-minute special report on the hospital, broadcast throughout the Arab world and leading to

many inquiries. There were in-depth interviews on tracing with ITN and Europe magazine. SABA photo agency (working for Time magazine) visited Stenkovec and Cegrane camps, photographing the reunification of four families.

Albania

There are now 455,147 refugees in Albania. The UNHCR and the Albanian authorities continue to encourage refugees to move out of Kukes. On 19 and 20 May, 2,861 refugees were transported to Berat, Elbasan, Diber, Vlore, Durres, Lezhe and Fier. The country's Emergency Management Group (EMG) is concerned about the current lack of adequate shelter capacity, making it difficult to relocate refugees from Kukes to other parts of the country.

Estimates of the number of refugees living with local host families differ. According to the Red Cross lists, there are 305,592 refugees staying with Albanian families, while the government estimates there are 291,729. The discrepancy is probably because the Red Cross lists also include figures of refugees known by the municipalities in each region, even if they are not yet registered. The Red Cross estimate of hosting families has risen to 39,341.

Relief distributions: After the distributions in week 19 (10-16 May), there are still significant shortfalls in food supplies for the current month, as follows:

Durres: The total number of beneficiaries including host families is 61,199. Of the required 497.59 MT of wheat flour for May, 102 MT has been delivered, together with 216 MT of the necessary 621.99 MT of food parcels - a shortfall of 406 MT of food parcels and 396 MT of wheat flour.

Elbasan: The total number of beneficiaries including host families is 21,211. By last week, 62 MT of the required 169.29 MT of wheat flour was delivered together with 199 MT of the necessary 212.11 MT of food parcels - a shortfall of 42 MT of wheat flour and a manageable tonnage of food parcels.

Fier: The total number of beneficiaries including host families is 27,794. Of the required 222.36 MT of wheat flour, 125 MT has been delivered, together with 229 MT of the necessary 278 MT of food parcels - a shortfall of 49 MT of food parcels and 98 MT of wheat flour.

Kukes: The total beneficiary number is 104,543, including host families. By week 19, some 237 MT of the required 836.34 MT of wheat flour needed had been delivered together with 397 MT of the necessary 1,045.43 MT of food parcels - a shortfall of 600 MT wheat flour and 648 MT of food parcels.

Shkoder: The total beneficiary figure, including host families is 29,232. Of the required 233.86 MT of wheat flour, 69 MT has been delivered, together with 234 MT of the necessary 292.34 MT of food parcels - a shortfall of 134 MT of food parcels and 165.04 MT of wheat flour.

Tirana: To date, 54,380 beneficiaries out of a targeted 87,459 have been assisted. This week there have been distributions of Swedish Red Cross food parcels or two French Red Cross food parcels and food parcels donated by Handicap International. Some of the distribution points have run out of blankets, and therefore have only been distributing food. Two distribution points have been replaced to allow larger stocks to be stored at the actual distribution point. Newly arrived refugees will now receive French Red Cross food parcels

until their inclusion on the monthly distribution list. The total shortfall for food parcels for last week was 697 MT, and 1,955.91 MT of wheat flour.

A convoy of six trucks to Bajram Curri, provided by the UNHCR on 11 May, transported food, blankets clothes, plastic sheeting and hygiene kits from various NGOs together with 163 kitchen sets, 25 cooking sets and 1,000 tin openers provided by the Red Cross Red Crescent for a population of some 2,400 refugees and displaced.

Health: Local hospitals in Kruma, Bajram Curri, Peshkopi, Korce, Tirana, Lezhe and Shkoder are being supported with surgical and medical supplies. The two Finnish ERU teams in Shkoder and Kukes, including a mother and child clinic, provide services to 80,000 people.

The main problems being treated are still upper respiratory tract infection, diarrhoea and cardio-vascular diseases. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Red Crescent and the Italian Red Cross hospitals in Kukes are both referral units, and the UAE Red Crescent is also providing basic health care for 100 unaccompanied elderly in their camp. Chlorine is being distributed in Shkoder and the villages surrounding Kukes after a watsan assessment team visited the area last week.

A programme focusing on the mental health of the refugee population is underway. Severe psychological disorders have been observed among the refugees, and for the time being the basic health clinics are providing psychological support to those suffering from mental trauma. A Japanese Red Cross mobile health clinic will provide basic health care for vulnerable target groups among refugees and the local population. Health education for the prevention of communicable diseases has begun in Kukes.

According to the EMG, close to 30 per cent of the beds in the hospitals are now occupied by refugees. There is a need for extra food supplies to the hospitals, as many of the refugees do not have relatives to bring them food. The Red Cross and the WFP have been asked to look into solutions for supplying extra food for the refugee patients.

Logistics: Another ship docked in Durres port yesterday, containing 26 trucks with Red Cross food parcels and wheat flour. The trucks are being dispatched directly as follows: Tirana (4), Durres (6), Shkoder (5) and Fier (4), while the seven trucks for Kukes are being crossloaded in Tirana. In total the two ships which have arrived this week have brought 340 MT of wheat flour and 60,000 food parcels on 49 trucks.

Stock movements over last week included 71,948 food parcels and 381 MT of wheat flour, as well as 7,916 units of non-food items, such as blankets, tents and hygiene items.

Telecommunications: Radios are still being installed in the vehicles lacking radio facilities, while further installations of computer facilities are on-going.

Tracing: Some 2,807 refugees have visited the tracing service so far this month, while 12,768 telephone calls have been facilitated by the tracing delegates for the heads of the refugee families; 8,777 radio messages have been collected and submitted to radio stations for broadcasting, while 112 cases of elderly or sick people looking for their families are registered. There are currently 104 cases of parents who have lost their children, and 121 cases of children separated from their parents; 189 cases of family reunion have been opened, while 24 families have been reunited. Five ICRC tracing teams are working throughout the country and extensive tracing activities are being carried out by the 36 Albanian Red Cross branches.

Shelter: In total, around 150,000 people are sheltered in camps and collective centres. 31,050 refugees live in camps where a number of PNSs provide a variety of services (*table below*). A need for an improvement in fire fighting equipment in the camps has been identified and the EMG is encouraging donor contributions.

Nat Soc	District	Capacity	Present	Activity
Austria	Shkoder	5,000	2,800	Management
Denmark	Lezhe	5,500	1,500	Management, water sanitation, food, health and education
Germany	Korce	4,500	2,600	Water sanitation
Hellenic	Pogradec	2,500	1,200	Water sanitation, food, health and education
Italy	Kavaje	5,000	5,300	Management, health and field kitchens
Italy	Kukes	5,000	5,100	Management, health and field kitchens
Neth/Belg (joint)	Vlore	2,000	500	Management, water sanitation, health and education
Spain	Durres	5,000	0	Management and health
Turkey	Elbasan	5,000	4,050	Management, water sanitation, health and field kitchens
UAE	Kukes	8,000	8,000	Health

Participating National Societies: The Saudi Red Crescent is working with the Saudi Joint Relief Committee - providing medical assistance through health posts in Kukes, Kruma, the Sports Centre transit camp in Tirana, Bulqiza, Skrapar, Berat and Kavaje - in connection with camps and collective centres supported by this umbrella organization. A 40 bed field hospital is due to be opened in Tirana on 24 May. The Saudi Joint Relief Committee, chaired by the President of the Saudi Red Crescent, has also been distributing food parcels, meals-ready-to-eat and meat in Dieber, Tirana, Elbasan, Berat, Fier, Kavaje, Kukes, and Shkoder.

The Kuwaiti Red Crescent has been undertaking food distributions in Tirana, including deliveries of bulk food that have been packed and distributed at the regular distribution points.

The Austrian Red Cross is expected to accommodate 3,000 refugees in a camp in Shkoder by the end of the week. Improvements to the electricity in the tobacco factory collective centre in the prefecture has led to refugees preferring to stay in this facility rather than moving to camps, where conditions would be better, particularly in winter time. The Austrian Red Cross is planning to provide food parcels for 16,000 refugees and host families from early June. The transportation of food parcels and wheat flour will be undertaken by the Albanian Red Cross.

A camp in Durres for 5,000 refugees will be handed over to the Spanish Red Cross within a few days. The National Society will be responsible for camp management and health activities and presently has eight expatriate delegates assigned to these activities.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: Red Cross Red Crescent delegates have been assisting journalists from the Sunday Times and BBC World with tracing stories; two reporters introduced by the Swedish Red Cross have been covering a story on distributions to refugees in host families and are also profiling a Swedish health delegate. The Swedish newspaper Norbotten Kuriren is preparing an article on Red Cross Red Crescent food assistance, while CNN has been assisted with interviews with the Saudi Red Crescent.

Kukes Report

During the last two days, there have been some encouraging developments with the food pipeline, which is now showing signs of springing to life. Even so, the Red Cross Red Crescent sub delegation is reluctant to communicate this information formally to the local authorities, until there are no doubts that commitments made can be achieved.

The movement of refugees into and out of Kukes remained very low on 19 and 20 May, with only four people crossing the border and 2,896 leaving for the south; since 12 May only 63 refugees have entered the region.

Over the course of this week, the information campaign aimed at encouraging refugees to move south has concluded somewhat unsuccessfully, with only 4,000 of some 132,000 refugees (32,000 in collective centres and 100,000 in host families) in the Kukes and Has districts registering their willingness to move away from the border areas. On 20 May, the United Nations Secretary General focused his visit to Kukes solely on the refugee camps.

Relief distributions: On 20 May, the new round of distribution commenced for Kukes town, in which 474 beneficiaries (refugees in host families and host families), received 683 French Red Cross food parcels and 4.75 MT of wheat flour.

Logistics: On 19 and 20 May, five trucks and trailers carrying 94 MT of Swedish Red Cross food parcels, 45.3 MT of French Red Cross food parcels, 20 MT of wheat flour and 3,123 ECHO hygiene parcels were received by the Kukes sub delegation. In order to deliver the relief items directly to the seven different distribution points in Kukes town, a secondary delivery involving 46 truck journeys was made, carrying a total of 61.6 MT of Swedish Red Cross food parcels, 120 MT of French Red Cross food parcels and 644 MT of wheat flour.

Health: During the past week the number of new arrival patients visiting the hospitals and clinics has dropped significantly, reflecting the fall in the overall refugee numbers entering Albania. Despite this, on 19 and 20 May, the Finnish Red Cross clinic treated 390 patients, including 126 children. The vaccination campaign continues, with a slight drop in demand over the past two days. However, the team is finding that increasing numbers of disabled and chronically sick patients are requiring special assistance. On 20 May, the clinic coordinator also delivered additional medical supplies and used clothes to the UAE Red Crescent hospital and the Italian Red Cross hospital.

There are currently heavy demands on the medical staff at the UAE Red Crescent hospital, due to a temporarily shortage of doctors. Despite this, on 18 and 19 May, 773 patients, including 114 accident/emergency cases, were treated. It is very much hoped that the operating theatre will open next week, when additional equipment arrives from Norway. On 19 May, the Italian Red Cross hospital treated a total of 185 patients, of which 89 were under 10 years old, 83 were between 10 and 60 and 13 were over 60. On 20 May, due to low cloud over the Kukes mountains, the evacuation to Tirana of two boys, from the Italian Red Cross hospital, was postponed. It is hoped that this evacuation will occur on 21 May.

Tracing: The new protection and tracing information office has been extremely busy dealing with general enquiries, especially concerning visa and family reunification procedures. On 19 and 20 May, the protection team also opened the following new cases: 13 family reunifications, 11 tracing requests for unaccompanied minors and five for abandoned elderly people, one special tracing request and four debriefings. Team members transmitted 55 special radio messages, received four Red Cross messages and solved 1 special tracing request. Over the same period, 1,124 satellite telephone calls and 166 radio messages were transmitted. In addition, the team successfully closed a family reunification case on 20 May, in which a 94

year old abandoned woman was transported by helicopter to Tirana, where she was reunited with her daughter-in-law.

Albanian Red Cross: On 19 May, the Secretary General of the Albanian Red Cross visited Kukes and Krume towns, holding meetings with the various Red Cross Red Crescent bodies. In this visit, the Secretary General focused particularly on the local branch members in Krume, recently involved in a new distribution exercise for refugees and their host families. This was the branch's first relief operation on this scale though not for the first time, problems were encountered regarding the beneficiary list issued by the municipal authorities. Even so the distribution was completed to deadline and according to schedule.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: The Peninsula (Quaker English-speaking newspaper) conducted an interview with a delegate, focusing on the tracing and message service and food distributions to refugees living with host families. Contact was also made with the Times, the Guardian and Reuters TV.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face a heavy influx of refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The UNHCR reports the total number of refugees has recently expanded from 58,000 to approximately 72,000. Over 20,000 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, 21,000 Moslems from Sandzak and 650 Serbs have fled to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBH). More than 30,000 FRY refugees have arrived in the Bosnian Serb entity - Republika Srpska (RS). This rapid increase in the number of refugees, reinforces the urgent need for hygiene parcels, blankets and food in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Relief: At the non-food sector meeting, the International Federation presented its plan to distribute 10,000 hygiene parcels to 50,000 refugees within the next six months. The United Methodist Church Organization (UMCOR) plans to distribute 35,000 food parcels within the next four months. These food parcels will be distributed to Kosovo refugees in Sarajevo Canton only. The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) will be taking over World Food Programme (WFP) activities concerning food distribution in collective centres in June when WFP closes its operations. Last Tuesday, 18 May, the food sector of the NGO Council met to discuss plans of further activities in regard to the distribution of food in collective centres.

Shelter: Representatives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Red Crescent have declared an interest in building a refugee camp for 2,000 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnian government has offered three sites and the UAE Red Crescent delegation will be meeting with officials shortly. The UNHCR reports that last week six more refugee camps were set up to accommodate the increasing number of refugees. The total number of camps in FBH and RS is now 28 compared with last weeks total of 22. There are 17 refugee camps in FBH and 11 in RS, including 13 collective centres, 11 transit centres and 4 tented sites offering shelter for more than 7,200 refugees.

Logistics: NGOs have agreed to create a database which will include current activities, planned activities and planned activities for contingency stock in case of a sudden influx of refugees.

Social Welfare: The first meeting of the NGO community support sector addressed concerns over the continuation of refugee children's education. The meeting also addressed the needs of elderly refugees. The International Federation's social welfare department is currently in the process of assessing the number and the specific needs of the elderly.

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