

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

7 April 1999

situation report no. 5

OVERVIEW

The International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement has launched today an integrated appeal to step up their operations in the Balkans. This integrated appeal for CHF 149,830,000 is a strategic work plan based on assumptions for potential developments in what is a very volatile situation. In its first phase, a six-month period, the appeal foresees support for refugees and displaced people as well as other people directly affected by the crisis. Particular emphasis will be placed on: the provision of emergency assistance for displaced persons, refugees and civilians, the provision of medical supplies and the protection of the civilian population.

LATEST EVENTS AND RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT ACTION

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

As the military action continues the numbers of internally displaced are increasing. According to the Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC), 8,700 displaced people have contacted Red Cross branches requesting assistance. The YRC continues to provide food and non-food assistance to these people. In response to the continuing military operations, the YRC has delivered medical supplies to three key medical facilities in Belgrade. The ICRC provided the YRC with a further 30 dressing sets. A Red Cross team has travelled to Aleksinac (in eastern Serbia) to assess humanitarian needs following recent air attacks in the area.

A shipment of 250 Dressing Material Kits donated by the Norwegian Red Cross will be arriving soon, and will be distributed to the YRC regional warehouses to assist the local first aid-trained volunteers in treating minor emergencies related to the current crisis.

The destruction of 2 of the main 3 bridges spanning the Danube in Novi Sad has prompted the Red Cross branch in Vojvodina to expedite the distribution of relief assistance to municipalities south of the river.

Montenegro

The number of IDP's is currently estimated at some 30,000 people. To meet the needs in Montenegro, a Red Cross convoy of six trucks with food and non-food (jerry cans and plastic sheeting) will depart tomorrow from Belgrade to Montenegro.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

According to the latest figures, some 130,000 ethnic Albanian refugees have entered the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since the start of the crisis. The "no-man's land" at Blace is reported as now being empty with most of the refugees having been transferred to various camps. The thousands of people estimated to be waiting to enter the "no-man's land" from Kosovo have also crossed the border

or moved elsewhere. At Jaznice, there are still some 20,000 people in the "no man's land" where Red Cross teams continue to distribute food, medicines, liquids, blankets and shelter material.

With families separated during the transfers, the ICRC, SCF, Care and Unicef are identifying unaccompanied children and trying to trace their parents. For this purpose, an additional tracing delegate will join the team today. Currently, 70,000 refugees are living with host families in Macedonia; 46,000 have registered to date with the Macedonian Red Cross and are now regular beneficiaries.

In the Blace vicinity, the risk of epidemics is diminishing, according to medical reports. Around 100 people have been treated in Red Cross or MSF medical facilities near the border. In recent days, 40 people, mainly elderly, have died, four of them children; 10 new-borns have been registered.

Food distribution arrangements remain fragmented but plans are in place to achieve a dramatic improvement in the next few days. A new Red Cross warehouse with a 2,500 square metre capacity - increasing to 4,000 sqm. - has been rented.

A German Red Cross construction team is erecting 450 tents in the camps with another 400 available - and the Society is also installing a water purification station. A German Red Cross hospital is expected shortly. Two German Red Cross planes have arrived in Skopje with tents, biscuits, three trucks, hygiene parcels, wheat flour and sunflower oil. Fourteen additional German Red Cross delegates are scheduled to reach Skopje today (Wednesday) to run the Red Cross hospital. The American Red Cross has donated a vehicle to assist the relief operations.

Albania

Over 270,000 people have reportedly arrived in Albania. This number may increase if some refugees currently located in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia move into Albania. In addition to the ongoing distributions to refugees in Kukes, the Red Cross has organised distributions of food to other locations such as Tirana, Berat, Elbasan, Lezhe and Korce where many people have already settled. Some 27,000 people remain in Kukes and 15,000 in Kruma. Yesterday, a Red Cross flight brought 40 MT of BP5 which was immediately trucked to Kukes and over 3 MT of medical supplies have arrived in Tirana.

Close to the border, the ICRC has started an ad-hoc family news service with refugees having the possibility to make a short telephone call to a relative. This is in addition to the ongoing broadcast of family details on radio networks. For the coming month, the Red Cross plan to assist a total of 43,222 persons per week (based on current planning figures).

The scarcity of food supplies provoked the first food riot in Kukes during the night of April 5. While night time distributions have generally been considered more secure, the lack of food prompted approximately 600 people to attack distribution teams. Police intervened to restore calm, but with food even more scarce the importance of providing ready-to-eat meals cannot be over emphasised. These provisions will fill a crucial gap, and provide WFP and UNHCR with the time needed to build up stocks so that longer-term distributions are arranged.

Six locations are being assessed for water and sanitation purposes (the main border crossing point of Morini, the smaller Q'e Prushit crossing point, the crossing point of Chafin Marina, the way-station at Goli school 12 kms from the Morini border, Croma mosque, and Kukes itself). Neither Pushet or Chafin Marina currently have water and sanitation assistance, and the German Red Cross is undertaking an assessment. The Goli school also requires assistance, and the Red Cross are considering action there as well as in Croma.

With four confirmed cases of measles (three in Kukes and one at the border crossing point of Marini) plans for a full vaccination campaign of refugees and 90,000 local population are in motion. However,

there is no epidemic at this point. Diarrhoeal diseases continue to grow and are causing considerable concern. Clothes, towels and soap are urgently needed to assist with scabies cases, and ORS and cups to treat dehydration.

OUTSTANDING NEEDS

Significant logistics problems are being encountered due to congestion at receiving airports. The ongoing crisis demands coordinated action. Before despatching items National Societies are urged to contact the Geneva logistics unit (please see contact information below) in order to avoid unnecessary delays at the border. (contact Charles Bernimolin, Federation, and John Wert, ICRC, at: 041 22 730 2143 or 041 22 730 2204; *Fax*: 041 22 733 9460; *email*: fedicrcbalkanlog.gva@icrc.org).

For further information from the International Federation, please contact Mark Wilson (tel: +41 22 730 4439; mobile +41 79 406 1963, email: wilson@ifrc.org) for Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Penny Elghady (tel: +41 22 730 4319; mobile +41 79 205 1959, email: elghady@ifrc.org) for Albania and Macedonia.

For further information from the ICRC, contact External Resources Department (tel: ++ 41 22 734 6001) or Pierre Kraehenbuehl (tel: ++ 41 22 730 2256, email: pkraehenbuehl.gva@icrc.org)

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