

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS

8 April 1999

situation report no. 6

LATEST EVENTS AND RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT ACTION

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Following the Red Cross assessment of the humanitarian situation in Aleksinac, the ICRC has despatched 5,000 blankets for people who had to find accommodation with families following the destruction of their homes. Support will also be given to the medical centre in Aleksinac to enable this facility to be operational again. A Red Cross team will visit Novi Sad, and Nis, Vranje and other affected places in southern Serbia to establish the needs of the civilian population affected by the air strikes.

Montenegro

A Red Cross convoy of six trucks with food and non-food items (jerry cans and plastic sheetings) departed today for Montenegro from Belgrade for distribution to the thousands of displaced people there.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

On 6 April, refugees located in Blace were transported to Bojane and Radusa and three of the four refugee camps in Stenkovic. By early yesterday morning (Wednesday) Blace camp was completely empty. In addition, some 120 buses transported thousands of people from Blace directly to two locations in Albania, Korce and Pogradec. A major concern for the Red Cross is that refugees do not suffer further by the separation of family members. For this reason, the identification of unaccompanied children and tracing of their parents continues to be a priority. Red Cross teams have returned to Blace to clean the area and install basic water and sanitation facilities.

In the camps, the situation is as follows: (figures are broad estimates):

- *Stenkovic*: 30,000 people are accommodated in tents. Oxfam has a water purification station running. The German Red Cross team is installing a second water station to be operational shortly. A small Red Cross in-patient hospital will be erected in the coming days. Food distribution remains difficult and in some areas the refugees have organised their own distribution teams.
- *Jesnice*: This camp was hosting several thousands refugees but is now reported to be empty.
- *Neprosteni*: Currently housing 3,300 refugees, this camp is reported to be good condition though there is a lack of food and sanitation items.
- *Radusa*: 1,560 refugees, again lacking food and sanitation.
- *Bojane*: 1,200 refugees - sanitation is poor with shortages of food and medicines.
- *Ceglane*: Initially intended to host 8,000 refugees but work on the camp is currently halted.

Meanwhile, the Macedonian Red Cross (MRC) continues the distribution of non-food items to 46,000 beneficiaries living with host families.

Together with the ICRC, the Society will soon start tracing activities, primarily to reunite families spread around the country. The total number of people requiring such assistance is unknown but over

the last days the MRC has been approached by approximately 100 persons a day, mainly refugees who have not been stopped in Blace; an MRC information centre with a green telephone line to facilitate contacts between family members has been opened.

Albania

The overall total of refugees in Albania now stands at over 280,000, after the arrival of over 23,000 refugees at the Marini border crossing yesterday, 7 April. The border crossing point at Prushit was closed from the Kosovo side on 6 April and no refugees were able to cross over. This morning (8 April) the border crossing point at Marini was closed at 03.00 hours with no crossing since. The OSCE and UNHCR confirm that there are only 2,000 refugees at the crossing point further north at Chafin Marina.

Thousands of refugees who had initially fled to Macedonia are reported to have crossed the border into Albania. In Korce the refugees spent the night in a football stadium without any assistance. In Pogradec the contingent are living in three disused military barracks.

The Albanian Red Cross (ARC) branch in Korce, where most of these refugees are settling temporarily, is rapidly organising assistance for the newcomers. Five MT of BP-5, 12 MT of baked beans, and 5 MT of baby food are being sent to Korce to meet the initial needs of the new arrivals. ARC headquarters have sent in a team to assess the needs, and the Federation is also sending two delegates.

Clearance problems at Tirana airport, logistics problems on the road to Kukes, and the slow entry of goods into the pipeline continue to delay food distributions. The lack of food caused distributions yesterday, 7 April, to be limited to two of the six collective centres in Kukes, and some organisations were unable to distribute any food rations at all. The normal distribution at the six collective centres should be resumed shortly depending on the quantity of food which is delivered during the day.

Food distributions by the National Society, with Federation and ICRC support, will continue at the Marini crossing point if it reopens.

The following Red Cross-donated relief items have been distributed in Kukes, Elbasan, Peqin, Librazhd, Tirana, Berat and Lezhe: 14,450 food parcels; 51,515 blankets; 60 MT ready-to-eat meals (MRE's); 24,955 jars of baby food; 49,000 chlorine tablets; 277 hygienic parcels; 300 cooking sets; 642 mattresses.

In Kukes, the Federation has proposed its services to the authorities to manage camps, and various essential activities. The quantity and quality of the water supply in Kukes remains good, but access points will be improved by Red Cross teams. The municipal authorities are in the process of cleaning up the trailer park and the main square as well as beginning a regular refuse collection from the streets.

An International Federation assessment of the health situation in Kukes notes that diarrhoeal diseases have been increasing slowly, although there is no epidemic. After further investigations, an outbreak of measles no longer seems likely. The main causes of morbidity are exhaustion, diarrhoea with dehydration, and upper respiratory tract infections. Psychological and acute psychiatric disorders (psychoses, acute reactions to physical and mental trauma) are prevalent. Small injuries after trauma (during the flight or by violence) are also frequent.

The two local health facilities in Kukes are providing the following services:

{ Kukes hospital (236 beds, 100 nurses, 37 doctors, radiology, small surgery, gynaecology/obstetrics, internal medicine, ophthalmology and ORL and a small laboratory for basic haematology, liver counts, urine-sputum and faeces analyses; a second level hospital). Its most urgent needs are blankets and bedsheets; drug and equipment requirements are currently being assessed by the clinic director.

{ Krume hospital: a primary level facility, which seems to have no drug or equipment needs because it is being supplied by a local NGO.

Information

The Movement's information teams throughout the operational area are continuing to respond to a constant stream of interview and briefing requests from media organisations and their correspondents. National Societies allowing journalists onto relief flights are reminded that delegations' capacity to provide transport and communications facilities is very limited. In addition because of the high demand for briefings and interview in the field and via the phone, information delegates are focusing primarily on this area of activity.

OUTSTANDING NEEDS

Significant logistics problems are still 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 (Contact names and numbers: 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)

Renny Nancholas
Director
Europe Department
International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies

Angelo Gnaedinger
Delegate General for Europe, Middle East,
and North America
ICRC