

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR ENDURING EMERGENCIES

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The assistance programmes jointly developed by the International Federation and the Russian Red Cross (RRC) are well designed to deliver crucial support to the segments of the population hardest hit by socio-economic upheaval, including children in institutions, pensioners living alone, single-headed, multi-child and low-income families. Despite the well-targeted nature of the programme, the level of donor response and support has been very low, and the Federation strongly encourages increased commitment from the international community. A Programme Co-ordinator will shortly join the Delegation to further refine programmes and ensure an effective implementation.

The context

The decline in Russia's socio-economic situation continued throughout the 1990s, accompanied by political turmoil, natural disasters, occurrences of new bio-industrial hazards and economic hardship. Diseases which had once been under control (such as tuberculosis) are now thriving, and the growth of HIV/AIDS causes grave concern. A surge in diseases such as tick borne encephalitis, anaemia in nursing mothers and babies, anthrax and others have strained a health service which is severely under-resourced and responding slowly to much needed reforms.

Regular shipments of essential supplies (food, medicine, fuel) which once allowed inhabitants of the permafrost regions of Siberia and the Far Northeast to survive the bitter winters have failed, leaving millions exposed to power cuts, food shortages, unpaid bills, soaring disease rates and ineffective or non-existent health services. Most of the non-indigenous inhabitants have opted to leave for the bigger cities of European Russia while indigenous races are finding their traditional way of life the only viable coping mechanism. Even these methods are under threat due to increased livestock diseases, reduced or contaminated fish stocks, and other elements.

The conflict in Chechnya remains unresolved, resulting in more than 200,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in neighbouring North Caucasian republics and other parts of Russia. Recent floods in Eastern Siberia have led to fears of outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid. In addition to conflict and floods, Russia is prone to earthquakes, droughts, volcanic eruptions, fires and severe storms. And as a result of technological disasters, vast regions of the country have been polluted. Radioactive fallout from nuclear accidents led to contamination in several parts of the country, with areas bordering Belarus and Ukraine severely affected by the Chernobyl accident.

To respond to the situation, the Federation and Russian Red Cross (RRC) formulated a Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) intended to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable Russians. With up to one third of Russia's population living on less than one dollar a day, the need for increasingly well-targeted, effectively monitored emergency humanitarian aid is critical.

The CAS intends to support the RRC's readiness to respond to difficult socio-economic conditions, and to cope with disasters caused by climatic change or other environmental situations. The Federation and RRC recognise the need to ensure that assistance is targeted to the most vulnerable groups, and the emergency relief programme launched in the winter of 1999/2000, and into 2001 targets elderly living alone, children (particularly those in orphanages and other institutions) imperilled indigenous communities, and disabled persons.

Considerable emphasis is being placed on health education, particularly in the RRC's fight to reverse the alarming increase in communicable diseases. The Federation and RRC have also already started to work on improved quality of assistance, by undertaking new monitoring and evaluation missions to impoverished areas.

The Russian Red Cross participated in the «Almaty Conference» (Almaty, December 1996) and is a signatory to the «Almaty Declaration» establishing the Federation's focus on support to four key areas of activity: Institutional and Resource Development (IDRD) reform, Disaster Preparedness and Prevention (DPP), Population Movement (PM), and the Visiting Nurse Services while continuing emergency response action. Part of the support towards the reform process concentrates on legal advice.

The Delegation also serves as a regional financial management base for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and supplies logistical and information support to other Federation Delegations and National Societies in the CIS.

Latest Events

Presidential elections took place on 26 March and Acting Head of State Vladimir Putin was confirmed as President-elect). Various indicators show that the economy is gaining momentum, based largely on improved industrial production, budget revenues, and foreign exchange reserves. While some analysts consider that the windfall from rising oil revenues has merely masked a lack of needed structural reforms, it serves as the basis for cautious optimism since the financial crash of 1998.

Despite governmental claims in the beginning of the year that the Chechen war is nearing its end, sporadic fighting continued in the region. The Government continues to espouse a hard-line approach to the conflict situation. The failure to deliver USD 12 million allocated in aid to Chechnya intended for small farmers for the planting season has been widely criticized.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Health •

Visiting Nurses Service (VNS)

Monthly salaries are being paid to six visiting nurses in Ekaterinburg under the German Red Cross funded project.

The Swedish Red Cross support to VNS working under the TB programme is ongoing, with the majority of activities having been completed. Further salaries will be covered from ECHO funds for the TB programme.

The Belgorod training centre for VNS was equipped. A training centre in Ryazan was established and equipped in March. From 28 March to 11 April a seminar for visiting nurses on homecare issues was conducted. Thirteen visiting nurses and eight instructors were trained.

The VNS/TB project is experiencing a delay caused by logistic difficulties in procuring 55 VNS kits. The nursing kits are now expected to arrive in Moscow in the middle of April, and distributions will follow soon after.

HIV/AIDS - Youth/VNS •

The "*Youth peer education on prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs*" programme, postponed due to a delay in financing, has begun in six regions (Moscow, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Krasnodar and Sochi). An assistant to the Delegation's Health co-ordinator was employed to help in the programme's implementation.

At the end of March the RRC AIDS co-ordinator met with the UNAIDS representatives to discuss the development of AIDS prevention materials.

First Aid •

On 1-2 February a 16-hour training course was held for four instructor-trainers from the Penza and Stavropol regional committees. Manuals on child care and first aid were sold, and the funds raised will be used for further first aid programme development. Two sets of programme equipment (dummies and accessories) were received and sent to the regions.

During the reporting period ten regional committees (Moscow, Moscow region, Penza, Rostov, Samara, Stavropol, Orenburg, Voronezh, Astrakhan and Volgograd) received first aid kits for refugees and forced migrants. Each committee received five First Aid kits, containing bandaging material, medication and prophylaxis means. Distributions are ongoing among IDPs temporary settlements, schools and children's hospitals.

From 17 January to 24 February eight resource development/first aid seminars were conducted in Krasnoyarsk, Khakassia, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Buryatia, Vladivostock, Krasnodar and Nizhni Novgorod to assist in establishing a concrete plan of developing financial resources and furthering the programme's self-sustainability. Following the seminars, a second round of consultations was held in Krasnodar and Nizhni Novgorod. Local Red Cross chairladies had arranged meetings with commercial companies to discuss first aid training for the employees.

In a welcome cross-organisational move Charities Aid Foundation gave the RRC a free consultation on commercial activities related to first aid, including programme licensing, sales of services, taxation and transferring resources between the RRC Central Committee and regional branches.

In March, two Canadian Red Cross representatives visited the RRC and Federation in Moscow to review the progress of the First Aid programme. A field trip was conducted to Krasnodar and Tatarstan, as well as a monitoring mission to St.Petersburg. Local chairpersons and programme co-ordinators were met; the substantial success in modernising first aid training and getting courses

up and running across the country was noted. While the transition to cost-recovery programming has been difficult, encouraging signs of initiatives at the regional level were noted. More time will be allowed for implementing this ambitious programme. Future marketing of the programme will be done through the RRC Training Centre. A proposal for the transition to cost-recovery is being prepared, with the Canadian Red Cross and CIDA indicating interest.

On 24 March, a meeting was held at the Canadian Embassy with the participation of the RRC and Federation, Canadian Red Cross, and Canadian Technical Co-operation programme representatives to discuss the progress of the First Aid programme to date and share opinions on its future development.

To promote the FA programme in Russia, the RRC has submitted an application for participation in an upcoming conference on Emergency Medicine

Blood Donor Recruitment Programme •

In January-February information materials on non-remunerated blood donorship were developed by the RRC, in collaboration with the Moscow Blood Transfusion services. Leaflets, posters, stickers and pins were produced. The printed materials include information on safe blood donations, legal aspects of blood donorship, gratitude to blood donors for given blood, and blood donation and AIDS prevention.

In the beginning of March a workshop on blood donorship recruitment was arranged in Belgorod region, one of the pilot territories within the programme. Representatives of the other four pilot regions as well as their counterparts (heads of regional Blood Transfusion Services) were invited. The Belgorod RRC Committee demonstrated the methods of their work with donors. Information materials were distributed for field testing.

Disaster Preparedness and Response •

A new project co-ordinator was assigned to the programme at the end of March. Assistance to Chechen IDPs is ongoing with soup kitchens and rooms of medical and social assistance functioning.

As a response to an explosion in Khabarovsk on 8 February which destroyed 20 apartments in a five-floor building, humanitarian assistance in the form of 100 family food and hygiene parcels was procured and sent to the city for 30 homeless families (some 100 people).

Population Movement Programme •

During the reporting period 11,035 people, including 8,621 migrants were assisted in RRC Reception points for forced migrants in eight regional committees: some 3,090 individuals received food coupons, 2,346 beneficiaries received family food parcels, 1,748 medical prescriptions were paid, 80 medical kits were distributed, 3,523 people received hygiene parcels, 401 legal and 723 psychological consultations were held, and some 559 second hand clothes sets and 147 pairs of shoes were distributed.

The Moscow Social Rehabilitation Centre for Refugees and Asylum Seekers assisted 118 people during the reporting period. Some 1,368 consultations were held in the Centre for medical and social assistance in Pskov region.

The RRC Central Committee reception point for forced migrants assisted 1,434 people, including 1,221 migrants during March. Some 741 food coupons, 536 vitamin kits, 15 food parcels, 894 hygiene kits, and 436 sets of second hand clothes and 64 pairs of foot ware were distributed; 114 legal consultations were conducted.

Two RRC centres of medical and social assistance for forced migrants assisted 579 vulnerable people, including 252 migrants during the reporting period.

A training workshop for chairpersons of the Northern Caucasus RRC committees was held, and a legal seminar for lawyers working on the project was conducted in six regions in the Northern Caucasus outside the immediate conflict zone.

Some 238 individuals were provided with consultations through the Telephone Hot Line project.

Institutional / Resource Development and Capacity Building •

From 21 to 25 January an institutional development seminar was held for the chairpeople of the 15 RRC Far East branches to discuss problems in the view of the present socio-economic situation and further Russian Red Cross development. A similar seminar was held on 1-3 February for the chairpersons of the 13 RRC North-west committees. Plans for a zonal division were also discussed during the seminars.

A new chairperson was elected to the RRC Moscow region committee on 9 February. On 11 February a conference was held in the Ingush Red Cross to elect a chairperson, presidium and presidium bureau.

A seminar for youth activists from the RRC North-west committees was held on 12 February. A new design for RRC membership cards was created and approved.

On 21-22 March, the RRC's Fourth Plenum was held with the participation of all regional chairpersons to discuss the implementation of the RRC Strategic Work Plan in 1998-2001. Heads of Delegation of the Federation and the ICRC both addressed the Plenum.

Development of RRC Youth •

Three water rescue youth projects were developed by the RRC Central Committee Youth Department. The objectives are to teach children and teenagers to swim, to teach young people water rescue skills, and to establish RRC water rescue stations.

On 8-12 February an institutional/resource development seminar was held for youth departments of the RRC Central Committee and North-west branch. A decision was made to set an RRC regional youth movement co-ordinator in the North-west district to co-ordinate the work of republican and regional RRC youth departments with the RRC Central Committee Youth department.

In comparison with 1998 the number of RRC youth departments increased to 22 across Russia. Four Red Cross youth centres are situated in Moscow to include youth centre on HIV/AIDS and drug addiction prevention, socio-psychological support to teenagers and youth, Moscow city youth centre and a South district youth centre. There are currently 948 RRC youth volunteers across the country.

RRC Membership Card Project •

A total of 100,000 membership cards were sent to the regions during the reporting period. Some 20,000 cards were assigned to the Finnish and Norwegian assistance programme to Russia's north-west regions.

Field-trips to the Vladimir and Murmansk regions and the Republics of Ingushetia and Karelia were conducted to monitor the process of the membership cards project implementation.

Information/Media •

The main focus during the reporting period was on the TB information programme in preparation for World TB day on 24 March. Promotional leaflets, brochures and radio spots were prepared and sent, working in close conjunction with the Delegation's Health Department and appropriate departments within the RRC.

Positive media coverage was received following a visit by the Delegate to Ulan Ude and a village on the Mongolian border where the local Red Cross has assisted people whose heating was cut. The

Moscow Times (an English-language newspaper), Radio France Inter and Zddeutsches Zeitung published articles on this story, with the Moscow Times highlighting the problem of donor fatigue.

On 1-7 March the Information officer conducted a field-trip to Kamchatka together with a Canadian TV crew; visits and interviews were conducted with local authorities, the RRC leadership and local committee representatives. The journalists covered RRC activities under the Far Northeast programme and its assistance to the indigenous people of Kamchatka. The Delegation's Information Department also provided video materials on RRC activities in the Far East.

A video clip on Federation and RRC activities in Chukotka and Kamchatka was created and made available to National Societies.

Outstanding needs

The intended assistance programmes are functioning only due to the carryover funding which remained available from 1999. The programmes covered in this situation report have been carefully designed and structured, and are now beginning to show signs of real progress. Without a substantial and immediate injection of funds, many of these programmes will be reduced, a development which would imperil the Russian Red Cross's reform process.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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