

PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

CHERNOBYL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMME (CHARP) BELARUS, RUSSIA, UKRAINE

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In Brief

Appeal No. 05AA072

Programme Update no. 1

Period covered: January to June 2005

Appeal target: CHF 850,112 (USD 682,437 or EUR 550,590)

Appeal coverage: 98.6% *Please click here to go directly to the Contributions List*

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals:

Chernobyl Annual Appeal 2005. for details, please go to the website at http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA072.pdf

Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine 2005 Appeal. For details, please go to the website at http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA071.pdf

Russian Federation 2005 Appeal. For details, please go to the website at http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA073.pdf

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Operational Development

On the 19th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear accident, people in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine remembered the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Hundreds of mourners laid flowers and lit candles before a monument in Ukraine's capital to mark the 19th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General Kofi Annan made an anniversary plea for greater international help for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine to recover and rebuild after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Mr. Annan said that almost two decades after "the worst technological catastrophe in history", the three countries "continue to grapple with daunting social, economic, humanitarian and environmental consequences".

According to the United Nations, about seven million people in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia continue to live in highly contaminated areas. The number of cancer cases - especially of the thyroid gland - keeps growing. Experts expect the rate of thyroid cancer will peak between 2006 and 2020.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one third of all children from the area around Gomel (Belarus) aged between 0 and 4 at the time of the accident will develop thyroid cancer during their lifetime – a total of 50,000 children in this group alone. Although thyroid cancer is extremely aggressive, it can be treated successfully if caught early enough. Red Cross works in areas where health authorities have little if any capacity to bridge the gap and detect and diagnose thyroid pathologies in time

Established in 1990, CHARP, the Federation's longest-running humanitarian operation at present stage, provides medical screening for thyroid cancer and psychosocial assistance to people affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The programme focuses on high-risk groups - those who were under 18 years at the time of the accident as well as those older persons who still live in highly contaminated areas. Given that the programme has identified an increase in thyroid cancer in age groups older than the current target group, the latest evaluation recommended expanding of its target focus to 0-40 age at time of the disaster. The Red Cross continues to improve its early detection capabilities. For example, the Brest mobile diagnostic laboratory (MDL) in Western Belarus can now conduct on-the-spot "fine needle" biopsies in the field on suspected cases of thyroid cancer, giving a reliable and rapid diagnosis – essential if lives are to be saved.

In recent years, funds have come from the Netherlands, Japanese, Austrian Red Cross Societies and British Government/Department for International Development. However, despite the clear indicators showing the increase in thyroid cancer incidence, the interest from donor communities for this unique Red Cross programme have steadily declined.

Recent large scale crises and disasters prominently featured in the media have pushed the Chernobyl disaster further in the shadow. Therefore, in 2005 -2006, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) will be featuring Chernobyl tragedy as one of the world's forgotten disasters.

To revitalize the interest of international donor community and governments in this largely forgotten disaster, the IFRC will hold a donor meeting in early October 2005. The meeting will bring together international aid organizations, governments, scientists, and the media, to develop an overall assistance strategy for implementation by the international community.

Disaster Management

Overall goal: The health of the population affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster is improved.

Objective: Effective medical, social and psychological assistance is provided to targeted individuals in the six regions affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

Expected results :

- Six mobile diagnostic laboratories will have screened 90,000 people for thyroid gland pathologies in the target group of individuals who were under 18 years old at the time of the accident and living in contaminated areas.
- Prevention of death from thyroid cancer because of timely detection and referral to medical institutions for treatment.
- Stress and anxiety linked to radiation is reduced for 15,000 people annually through psychosocial support.
- Immunity is improved for 24,000 children living in highly contaminated areas through winter supplies of multivitamins containing C, D and B group with iron, folic acid and stable iodine.
- Red Cross National Societies have well trained and equipped mobile diagnostic laboratory teams carrying out diagnosis and treatment of ailments in remote rural areas of the six most affected regions of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.
- The sustainability of CHARP is increased because of a new management strategy that hands over more programme responsibilities to Red Cross national societies and gradually integrates activities into the health care system.

Progress/Achievements: To achieve the original objectives established during the reporting period, the following activities were implemented:

- In the period from January to May 2005, the specialists of six mobile diagnostic laboratories (MDL), working within CHARP, have checked **37,924** people. The MDL doctors focused their efforts on checking the priority target group, i.e. individuals who were between 0-18 at the time of the accident and other adult population living in highly contaminated areas. In **17,118** people, abnormal scans were detected (i.e. pathologies).
- Along with the thyroid screening, the laboratory doctors carried out the diagnosis and treatment of other ailments upon complaints of patients or results of clinic tests. However, the MDLs do not provide mass blood and urine testing any more, as the primary health care is rather limited in the remote rural areas and the programme has to fill a gap in it to some extent. At present, this activity is comparatively limited ranging from about 20% to 50% of all work performed by the MDLs.
- CHARP continued to provide psychosocial support to the population affected by the Chernobyl disaster. This work was carried out by the MDL specialists, Red Cross workers and volunteers. The psychosocial support diminished stress in the population through delivering accurate information about the long-term health effects of the accident. The Belarus Red Cross arranged production and distribution of an educational brochure on providing psychosocial support, which were 30,000 copies in total. All three Operating National Societies scheduled to hold refresher workshops in June-July, on methods and tools for providing psychosocial assistance to the victims of Chernobyl.
- In February- May 2005, the Regional Red Cross Committees distributed multivitamins which had been supplied by the Netherlands Red Cross logistics services. The multivitamins were delivered for children living in highly contaminated areas of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. In particular, there were supplied **2,400,000** tabs of multivitamins which have been distributed to **25,000** children.

Impact



Dr. Artur Grigorovich (Brest MDL) is taking a sample of thyroid tissue in a young woman with suspicion for thyroid cancer in order to detect the cancer as early as possible

During the reporting period, the specialists of the Red Cross MDLs referred **3,033** people to specialized medical institutions for further examinations. Some **918** patients with a suspicion for the thyroid gland cancer underwent fine needle biopsy. In **89** patients, the supposed thyroid cancer cases were confirmed by cytological examinations and the information on this was provided by these clinics to the Red Cross. The number of thyroid cancer cases detected during the reporting period is higher than for the same period of 2004 when the MDLs had detected **81** confirmed cancer cases.

Besides thyroid cancer, the MDLs via screening have detected other pathologies which might be pre-cancer conditions. In particular, nodular pathology was detected in **4,885** cases (28.5%) of the total number of all abnormal scans. Thyroidites were suspected in **2,140** cases (12.5%). The above mentioned patients receive the necessary treatment and they are under monitoring of Red Cross MDLs and healthcare institutions.

Significantly impressive results have been achieved by Brest MDL (Belarus). The doctors of this MDL conduct biopsy just in the field in case of suspicion for cancer. Owing to fine needle biopsy, during January-May 2005, the Brest MDL team has detected **52** thyroid cancer cases.

Constraints

There were no major problems in the implementation of the project during the reporting period. The work was fulfilled in accordance with the objectives set.

A certain issue was to follow strictly the target plan that focuses on the thyroid screening only of the target group (age 0-18 at time of the disaster). The experience obtained by MDLs shows that it is not quite reasonable to go to remote areas and screen only the target group. In many villages, very few representatives of this group are residing, many others have resettled to other areas for schooling and work trying to be away from the areas directly affected by the Chernobyl disaster. Besides, in many of these regions, people beyond the risk group have been checked as it has been difficult to refuse older persons who wanted to be checked. In total, about 30-40% of all examined people were older than the target group. Two thirds of all cases of thyroid cancer have been detected in this older age group.

Therefore, this issue was considered during evaluation of CHARP carried out in March 2005. The evaluation mission recommended that Red Cross MDLs would enlarge the range of screening to age 0-40 at time of the disaster (*More detailed information on the evaluation is described in the section Coordination*).

Analysis and outlook

CHARP is an ongoing programme. The data collected by Red Cross MDLs during the reporting period shows that the incidence of thyroid gland diseases related to radiation exposure, in particular pre-cancer pathologies and cancer, is growing. Thousands people were referred by MDL specialists to specialised medical institutions and provided with possibility to take necessary treatment and save lives.

Gradually, CHARP improves the efficiency of the screening by using modern diagnosis techniques. Over the last two years, CHARP technical infrastructure was significantly improved owing to the support of the Netherlands Red Cross. The old and obsolete equipment was replaced with the new one, which was more sophisticated. The replacement of old MDL vehicles is in progress. Along with this, the MDL personnel were provided with advanced trainings. This ensures a good technical basis for future work of MDLs which can be operational at least during the next 5-6 years.

However, the funding situation for CHARP in 2006 and onwards is not secure, which could have an effect on the mid and long term sustainability of the operation of this programme.

Therefore, it is vitally necessary to draw attention of the international community to the problem of the Chernobyl disaster as a “forgotten disaster” in order to find overseas support to CHARP. On the other hand, it is important to develop further cooperation with local authorities and medical institutions in order to increase local input to CHARP. The relevance of the programme at present is high, when the incidence of thyroid cancer is supposed to peak in 2006-2020.

Coordination

In March 2005, a mid-term evaluation of the programme was carried out in accordance with the programme Agreement between Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian and Netherlands Red Cross National Societies and the Federation regarding the support and implementation of CHARP.

The evaluation team consisted of a medical expert from Ukraine and an expert on institutional development, organization and management from the Netherlands. The team visited the mobile diagnostic laboratories in the field and had extensive discussions with the staff of the MDL and senior staff of government services and medical institutions on national, regional and district level involved in Programme implementation.

The general conclusion of the mission is that the impact of the programme is high in the areas where Red Cross MDLs are working as there are only limited state medical services available for inhabitants of the remote areas. However, because of this, the demand for thyroid screening and general medical consultations is much higher than can be offered by the current Red Cross programme. This programme is seen by the Government Health services as a model for staff training working in the area of thyroid pathologies and for organizing mobile type of medical service.

The most important recommendations of the evaluation are:

- As recent screening data has shown that the age group at risk of thyroid cancer is now between 0 – 40 at the time of the accident, the initial target group should be enlarged and included in routine thyroid screening.
- The focus of further screening should be within the CHARP operational areas which have not been screened recently or not screened at all in the past.
- Improve the data collection and information systems.
- Continue the process of strategy development and internal exchange of information between the senior staff to increase cohesion within the Programme organization.
- Study the possibility to include screening of women’s breast cancer into the program.

(The full version of mid-term evaluation report can be provided by the Minsk Delegation upon request)



Warwick Inder, Head of Federation's Delegation in Minsk and Nikolay Nagorny, CHARP coordinator, are using their chance to tell about the importance of CHARP to the people in New Zealand and Australia

On 19 April 2005, the next meeting of the International Chernobyl Coordination Committee (ICCC) was held in Rivne Oblast, Ukraine. The main topic considered at this meeting was the results of the above mentioned CHARP evaluation and future development of the programme in the light of this evaluation. The participants have discussed and adopted the report of the evaluation team without major changes. The ICCC members also discussed CHARP funding opportunities for 2006 and onwards. They outlined the need for elaboration of a fundraising campaign for CHARP. In this connection, the participants agreed that instead of an expensive high-profile conference in Moscow initially planned, a smaller-scale donor meeting could be held in Kiev in September-October 2005. The idea was supported by the ICCC members.

Minsk Delegation and its Kiev Office undertake active efforts to provide mass media and public relations coverage for CHARP. In the middle of April 2004, the region was visited by TV crew from New Zealand. The journalists prepared video materials on the work of MDLs. In particular, the crew filmed the thyroid screening and biopsies performed by Brest MDL specialists. They interviewed patients examined by MDL doctors and people living in the villages affected by the disaster. The crew visited abandoned areas and Chernobyl plant. The work of the NZ TV crew resulted in a 30-minute film which will be demonstrated in New Zealand and Australia.

In May 2005, the Ukraine hosted a jubilee Eurovision Song Contest (50th anniversary). The Ukraine Red Cross, being a partner in organising of this big event with multi-million audience, carried out some activities including involvement of CHARP. In particular, Zhitomir Red Cross MDL was working at the venue of the Contest screening people and providing other medical assistance. The Chernobyl topic and work of the MDL draw attention of foreign mass media who were present at the Eurovision.

In June, the Minsk Delegation employed a professional photographer (from UK) to produce photo materials which could be used for CHARP fundraising. In particular, the photographer will visit the Chernobyl affected areas in order to collect materials on CHARP activities and Chernobyl issues. This photo material will be used for organising CHARP exhibitions, producing a book and CD about 15-years experience of programme implementation and other purposes linked with the promotion of CHARP.

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