

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. 05AA72

Programme Update no. 2

Period covered: June to November 2005

Appeal coverage: [<click here>](#)

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

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals:

Chernobyl Annual Appeal 2005 [<click here>](#)

Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine 2005 Appeal [<click here>](#)

Russian Federation 2005 Appeal [<click here>](#)

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This Programme Update reflects activities to be implemented over a one-year period. This forms part of, and

is based on, longer-term, multi-year planning (refer below to access the detailed logframe documents). All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

Operational development

In September 2005, a United Nations study "Chernobyl's Legacy: Health, Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts", has been released which came to conclusion that the health effects had been far smaller than expected.¹ The Report says 4,000 cases of thyroid cancer, mainly in children, were attributable to the accident. In 99 percent of the cases this illness has been curable. Only 50 deaths - all among the reactor staff and emergency workers - could be directly attributed to acute radiation exposure after Chernobyl's Reactor No. 4 exploded in April 1986, the panel found. The experts consider the impacts of poverty and psychic diseases caused by the living conditions in the former Soviet Union to have much greater health effects than the radiation from Chernobyl.



The sign reads:
RADIOACTIVE POLLUTION!
NO GRAZING CATTLE.
MOWING HAY, COLLECTING MUSHROOMS AND BERRIES, STOCKING FIREWOOD FORBIDDEN!
How much land remains contaminated as a result of the Chernobyl accident? The question is difficult: half-lives of radioactive isotopes range from days to thousands of years. The weather, human intervention and time all play their part. Experts cannot agree where the safe zone begins, or which land can be used for agriculture.

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Despite of the fact that the report was criticised as "quite inappropriate" by radiation scientists and Chernobyl relief organisations, it admits the **fact of thyroid cancer growth and calls for focused screening of those people, especially children, who were exposed by radioiodine just after the disaster for detection cancer and other thyroid gland pathologies.** This statement unconditionally justifies the role and importance of CHARP, as thyroid gland screening is being provided for more than 15 years by six mobile diagnostic laboratories (MDLs).

Another key recommendation the report addresses, is the fact that large parts of the population, especially in rural areas still lack accurate information and emphasizes the need to find better ways both **to inform the public, especially in remote rural areas, to promote healthy lifestyles, deliver information how to reduce internal and external radiation exposure and address the main causes of diseases, to relieve psychosocial stress.** Namely these activities are stated as a part of the overall objective of CHARP, and are aimed at reduction of stress and anxiety linked to radiation through psychosocial support and provision of accurate information.

¹ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/dev2539.doc.htm>

The international environmental organisation Greenpeace International is going to present its own report on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. This was announced by the Greenpeace expert Jan van de Putte on Monday, October 24, during the round-table discussion of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA²) concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. According to him, Greenpeace experts arrived in Ukraine to do their own research because they disagree with the conclusions of IAEA experts concerning the consequences of Chernobyl disaster.

On 14 November 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on Chernobyl. The resolution admits efforts of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus in efficient mitigating consequences of the Chernobyl disaster and orients the international community on continuation of rendering assistance to these countries.

The resolution appreciates the role of the C.I.S. countries in the process of preparation of events devoted to the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. In this context the 26th of April was announced as the Day of memory to victims of radiation accidents and disasters. It was also decided to convene a special meeting of the UN General Assembly in the connection of the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

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 November 2005, the specialists of six MDLs, working within CHARP, have checked **75,232** people (37,308 people for the period from June to November). In accordance with recommendations of the latest evaluation (March 2005), the MDL doctors focused their efforts on checking the priority target group, i.e. individuals who were between 0-40 at the time of the accident and living in contaminated areas. In **17,650** out of 37,308 checked during the last six months abnormal scans (i.e. pathologies) were detected.

² <http://www.iaea.org/About/index.html>

- The laboratory doctors continued to carry out the diagnosis and treatment of other ailments upon complaints of patients or results of clinic tests. However, this is a complementary work to the thyroid screening as the MDLs do not provide mass blood and urine testing any more. Nevertheless, this work is still important 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.



Children at the village school in Narodichni, Ukraine, are among 24,000 children living in highly contaminated areas who receive multivitamins containing C, D and B group with iron, folic acid and stable iodine from the Red Cross. This gives their immune systems a vital boost.

CHARP (Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Relief Programme) is the longest-running International Federation's humanitarian programme. Over 15 years of its operation, Red Cross workers have distributed 122 million vitamin tablets to children.

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- During the reporting period CHARP continued to provide psychosocial support (PSS) to the population affected by the Chernobyl disaster. This work was aimed at diminishing stress in people through counselling, active listening, and delivering accurate information about the long-term health effects of the accident. It was carried out by the MDL specialists, Red Cross workers and volunteers. Belarus and Ukrainian Red Cross Societies organised PSS workshops on methods and tools for providing psychosocial assistance to the victims of Chernobyl. In Belarus two workshops (one in July and one in October) were organised. In Ukraine the workshop was held in October. In Bryansk Region (Russia) the workshop is scheduled for December 2005.
- In November the next consignment of multivitamins in amount of **2,400,000** tabs was supplied by the Netherlands Red Cross logistics services to the National Societies. At present the goods are passing through the customs clearance procedure and after this the multivitamins will be distributed to children living in highly contaminated areas.

Impact

During the June – October 2005 the specialists of the RC MDLs referred **3,773** (3,033 people in the first six months of 2005) people to specialized medical institutions for further examinations. Some **351** (918 people in the first six months of 2005) patients with a suspicion for the thyroid gland cancer underwent fine needle biopsy. In **49** patients (89 people in the first six months of 2005) the supposed thyroid cancer cases were confirmed by cytological examinations and the information on this was provided by these clinics to the Red Cross.³

Besides thyroid cancer, the MDLs via screening have detected other pathologies which might be pre-cancer conditions. In particular, nodular pathology was detected in **7,713** cases or **44%** of the total number of all

³ The figures for the second half of the year are lower than for the first six months of 2005 due to the following reasons:

- a) Summer holidays of MDL teams
- b) The results of MDL work for 12 months are available only in the beginning of the following year

abnormal scans. The number of pathologies detected during the reporting period is higher than for the first six months of 2005, when the MDLs had detected **4,885** nodular pathologies.

Thyroiditis was suspected in **2,060** cases (**12%**). The above mentioned patients receive the necessary treatment; they are under monitoring of RC MDLs and healthcare institutions and should undergo ultrasound screening every six months.

High results have been achieved by Brest MDL (Belarus). Its doctors conduct biopsy right in the field on the basis of any medical point relevant for this (provided appropriate sanitary-hygiene conditions exist). Owing to fine needle biopsy, during June-October 2005 the Brest MDL team detected **35** thyroid cancer cases, which makes a total of **87** thyroid cancer cases detected in the first ten months of 2005.

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.

The only pending issue was creation of a centralised electronic data base for medical data collected by the RC MDLs. In fact, all lab teams have computers with installed software. The teams collect the data, enter it into the computers and then share this information with the medical institutions. However, the software differs from country to country and the objective is to create a unified centralised network in order to improve analysis of the medical data at the Delegation level.

In October a new Health Adviser was employed for CHARP whose special task became creation of the centralised programme data base. It is planned that the software for this will be developed already by the end of the current year, so as to start using it from the beginning of the next year.

Analysis and outlook

At present CHARP is well organised and functioning programme. This was confirmed by all latest evaluations (in 2002, 2003, and 2005). The technical infrastructure of CHARP has been essentially improved. Owing to the Netherlands Red Cross funding new sophisticated medical equipment, computers, and vehicles have been supplied for CHARP. Along with this the MDL personnel was provided with advanced training. This ensures a good technical basis for future work of MDLs in the years to come.

Gradually CHARP improves the efficiency of the screening by using modern diagnosis techniques. Application of biopsies in MDLs' work in order to improve diagnostics abilities of the lab teams is in progress. In November 2005, doctors of Zhitomir and Rovno MDLs had three week training sessions in Ukrainian Endocrinology Institute for thyroid gland screening. In particular, the doctors have been trained to perform fine needle biopsies. It is supposed that the Ukrainian MDLs will introduce the biopsies in their work already in December 2005.

Along with this it is important to develop further cooperation with local authorities and medical institutions in order to increase local input to CHARP.

Coordination

The Chernobyl disaster continues to affect the lives of those living in affected regions. Therefore the relevance of the programme at present is high, especially taking into consideration the fact that the incidence of thyroid cancer is supposed to peak in 2006-2020. So far in recognition of this, CHARP has continued to receive support from a number of national societies. At present, the main CHARP donors are the Netherlands Red Cross, the Japanese Red Cross and the British Government/DFID.

However, in general, due to the fact that more than nineteen years have passed after the disaster, the topic of the Chernobyl accident has been floating gradually away from minds of people in western countries. It has a certain negative impact on CHARP funding, which is not secure for 2006 and onwards, and this can have an effect on the mid and long term sustainability of the operation. Therefore the Federation undertook efforts to draw again the attention of the international community to humanitarian consequences of this technological catastrophe.

In June Minsk Delegation employed a professional free lance photographer in order to produce photo materials which could be used for CHARP fundraising. In July the photographer, together with the Federation representatives, visited the Chernobyl affected areas in all six CHARP regions. They collected materials on CHARP activities and Chernobyl issues, taking pictures of MDLs and their patients, interviewing people. As a result of their work a book "CHARP focus", devoted to the 15th anniversary of the programme and to the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, was produced in October. The book draws attention to Chernobyl issues and CHARP and will be used for fundraising for the programme.⁴

There were also other activities highlighting CHARP carried out. The Minsk Delegation/Kiev Representative Office together with Ukraine Red Cross organized a round table meeting devoted to the presentation of the World Disasters Report (WDR) 2005 and to CHARP as a forgotten disaster. This event was held on 5 October 2005 in Kiev and hosted representatives from the UN, Ministry of Emergency Situations, other governmental and non-governmental organisations, mass-media – 77 participants in total.

The Chernobyl and CHARP topics were intensively highlighted and discussed at the round table. Specifically, the CHARP coordinator made a presentation on the Red Cross Chernobyl Programme. The Head of Minsk Delegation delivered a presentation on Federation's Appeal programmes including CHARP Appeal 2006-2007. These presentations aroused an interest and questions from the participants. In the hall where the WDR launch was held a photo exhibition on Chernobyl and CHARP was placed. Later this exhibition moved to the windows of Ukrinform agency in the centre of Kiev where thousands of citizens could see it.

This above mentioned PR event received an extensive TV coverage. Three TV channels, two national radio stations, several newspapers and information agencies, including Internet, highlighted the event.

In October two Dutch correspondents visited Ukraine to collect information on CHARP. They visited Rovno region and took pictures of local MDL, interviewed RC workers and beneficiaries. The materials will be published in connection with the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

In November 2005, representatives of the Chernobyl Children Fund (Ireland) together with an Irish documentary filmmaker visited the Gomel MDL in a milk factory in Rogachev. The Head of Kiev Office, the Gomel MDL team and patients were interviewed. The work of the journalist will result in a film that will be aired on Irish television in April 2006.

⁴ The electronic version of this book is available on the Federation website (<http://www.ifrc.org/photo/Chernobyl1005/index.asp>)