

Programme Update



Belarus, Russia and Ukraine: Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP)

Appeal No. MAA67002

31/08/2009

This report covers the period 01/01/2009
to 30/06/2009



Head of Europe Zone presents Canada's Governor General with a copy of the International Federation's history of the Chernobyl humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programme during her visit to the Chernobyl museum in Kiev in April 2009. **Photo: International Federation**

In brief

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

Programme summary:

In the first half of 2009, the CHARP programme continued to provide general medical, social and psychological assistance in the six regions of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The core activity was thyroid cancer screening in the priority group of people who were aged 0-40 at the time of the Chernobyl accident and live in radiation contaminated areas. This is a vital, life saving service. Psychosocial support, another important component of CHARP, contributed to the decrease of stress among the population.

Financial situation: The total 2009 budget is CHF 544,248 (USD 484,935 or EUR 360,429), of which 59 per cent covered. During the first six months of 2009, the programme has received a donation from the Irish government amounting to EUR 136,000 (CHF 206,248), JPY 3,000,000 (CHF 35,105) from the Japanese Red Cross, and USD 6,931 (CHF 7,836) from the International Federation's New York Delegation. The overall expenditure against received funding constituted about 39 per cent. The above mentioned donations arrived in April-June 2009. During the first three months of 2009 the funding of the programme was dangerously low, at only 13 per cent.

[Click here to go directly to the attached financial report.](#)

No. of people we help: According to reports from the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine from January to June 2009 about 64,152 people benefited directly from CHARP programme interventions as follows:

- Medical screening - 45,526 people
- Psychosocial support - 18,400 people
- Distribution of multivitamins - 226 children

Our partners: CHARP is implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the ministries of health of all three countries.

Context

In the first half of 2009 the International Federation together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine and continued the implementation of the long-term Chernobyl humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programme (CHARP). The main focus was on providing thyroid health screening and psychological support to the affected population in order to reduce and mitigate the impact of the disaster. This is in line with the Red Cross priority activities outlined in the UN Action Plan on Chernobyl for the third decade after the disaster, completed in 2008. The programme activities aimed at identifying thyroid gland cancer and other thyroid pathologies as soon as possible among people in the most remote areas, where state health authorities have little, if any, capacity. These services were rendered by six mobile diagnostic laboratories, three of which are situated in the Brest, Gomel and Mogilev regions of Belarus, two in the Rovno and Zhitomir regions of Ukraine and one in the Bryansk region of the Russian Federation.

In April 2009 the International Federation organized a meeting highlighting the humanitarian challenges in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster in Kiev. Representatives of diplomatic missions and offices of international organizations accredited to Ukraine attended. On the eve of the 23rd anniversary of Chernobyl disaster (25 April 2009) the International Federation's head of Europe zone and the president of Ukraine Red Cross met with the Governor General of Canada in the Chernobyl Museum in Kiev and briefed the head of the Canadian state on the Chernobyl humanitarian challenges and the CHARP programme. Meetings were also held with representatives of Canada's Ukrainian diaspora.

Progress towards outcomes

Outcomes/Expected results

The CHARP Plan for 2009-2010 envisages the following outcomes/expected results for two years of activities:

- Medical screening is provided to 180,000 people by six mobile diagnostics laboratories (MDLs) in the target group of individuals who were 40 years old or younger at the time of the accident and are living in contaminated areas.
- Stress and anxiety linked to radiation is reduced for 60,000 people through psychosocial support.
- Immunity is improved for 60,000 children living in highly contaminated areas through winter supplies of multivitamins containing the C, D and B groups with iron, folic acid and stable iodine.

Activities

Medical examinations

From January to June 2009, specialists from the six MDLs examined 45,526 people (about 51 per cent of the planned annual total) mainly in the priority target group, i.e. individuals who were

aged 0-40 at the time of the accident and live in remote contaminated areas. About half of those examined (22,856 people) were screened for the first time since the Chernobyl disaster. This is one of the greatest strengths of CHARP that it continues to reach communities that have remained unscreened in the past 23 years.

In addition to thyroid screening, the laboratory doctors diagnosed and treated other ailments upon receiving patient requests or the results of clinical tests. The capacity of the primary health care system is limited in rural areas, and CHARP fills many gaps. Furthermore, and in line with the new ethos of CHARP, the MDL teams provided HIV counselling among the target group and helped the three National Societies to organize other HIV activities such as peer education and information dissemination. This was facilitated by a special training session held in late 2008.

Psychosocial support

In September-December 2008, the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia organized workshops on methods and tools for providing psychosocial assistance to the victims of Chernobyl.

The knowledge obtained at these workshops helped the MDL staff, Red Cross workers and volunteers to better inform the population of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, to explain specifics of living in the areas affected by radioactive contamination and methods how to decrease the risk of radioactivity and how to cope with stress. This work was performed through counselling, active listening, discussions and other psychosocial support tools. The Ukraine Red Cross arranged the production of 5,000 leaflets and the Belarus Red Cross issued about 2,000 information bulletins which were distributed among the population. Besides, Red Cross workers published articles in newspapers, gave interviews via local radio broadcast highlighting the consequences of the accident, explaining preventative methods against stress and related diseases and social problems, and ways how to cope with crisis situations.

Distribution of multivitamins

In the first half of 2009 due to serious funding constraints the CHARP programme did not have funds for purchasing multivitamins for children living in the contaminated areas. However the National Societies tried to find local donors which would donate the goods in kind. In particular on request of the Belarus Red Cross the Belarusian pharmaceutical company "Farmland" donated 24,000 tablets of multivitamins "Multivit HM" which were distributed for 226 children in three children institutions in Gomel region by local Red Cross branches.

In June 2009, the Japanese Red Cross expressed its interest to donate some JPY 3,000,000 (about CHF 35,500) earmarked for supplying multivitamins for children. A project proposal for this donation has been developed and submitted to the Japanese Red Cross for their consideration. If approved, 380,000 tablets of multivitamins will be procured for 12,000 children.

Achievements

In the above mentioned examined group (45,526 people), MDL specialists have detected 19,239 cases of abnormal scans (i.e. pathologies) and this means that on average about 42 per cent of all screened people have pathologies of the thyroid gland in various stages of development. This fact alone shows that CHARP is providing a vital, life-saving service. Among these abnormal scans the three primary thyroid pathologies detected by MDLs via screening were nodular pathology (8,081 cases), diffuse goitre (5,545 cases) and thyroiditis (3,640 cases). The patients diagnosed with these thyroid pathologies are under constant monitoring by Red Cross MDLs because if left undiagnosed or untreated, there is a risk that these conditions may develop into thyroid cancer.

In the first half of 2009 the six MDLs referred 5,445 patients with suspicion for possible cases of thyroid gland cancer to specialised medical institutions for in-depth examination and surgery if needed. Suspected thyroid cancer cases were confirmed in 65 patients by cytological examinations; information on these cases was provided by clinics to the Red Cross. The

patients with confirmed thyroid cancer have received necessary treatment and are also being monitored by the Red Cross MDLs and healthcare institutions.

An important impact of CHARP activities can be seen through the decrease in the level of stress of the population achieved through psychosocial support. Hundreds of thousands of people still live in an informational limbo, not knowing if the radiation they were exposed to in 1986 and the following years have triggered any cancers in their bodies. UN and other institutions had also found that in the small towns and villages near the most heavily-contaminated zones people take great risks with their health which can be attributed to the “radiophobia” i.e. fatalism and pessimism associated with lack of clear information on their health status, living so close to the world’s worst nuclear accident. Delivering accurate information about the long-term health effects of the accident diminished the levels of stress in the population. During the reporting period about 18,400 people received psychosocial support.

Constraints or Challenges

The main constraint in implementation of the project was lack of funding. This problem became especially dramatic in January-March of the current year when the response to the plan for 2009 was only about 13 per cent of the budget. The International Federation undertook quick and active efforts in seeking necessary funds. These efforts were personally supported by the International Federation’s Secretary General. As a result in April-June 2009 the programme received support from the Irish government (CHF 206, 248), Japanese Red Cross (CHF 35,105) and from the International Federation’s New York Delegation (CHF 7,836). This support ensured the implementation of the programme at least till the end of 2009. The International Federation continues to seek funds for 2010 and later period, since in conformity with the UN strategy on Chernobyl the Red Cross CHARP programme needs to continue up to 2016.

Working in partnership

CHARP is being implemented by the International Federation together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the ministries of health of the three countries. At present the local input constitutes about one third of the overall budget. Together with the authorities, the regional Red Cross branches in all three countries fund part of the running costs: Red Cross office rentals, salaries and accommodation for MDL personnel during their trips to the field.

However the financial involvement of the National Society has its limits. Therefore the International Federation provides financial support to National Society personnel, equipment and reagents, vehicles, fuel and maintenance. During the first six months of 2009 the main international donors of the programme were the Irish Government, as well as the Japanese and Australian Red Cross Societies.

To solve the funding issue the Europe zone office organized a phone conference in March with partner National Societies regarding the status and further strategy for the CHARP programme and the immediate critical funding situation. As a result the Italian, Icelandic and Polish Red Cross Societies expressed interest in supporting CHARP and promised to explore this possibility with their governments. In particular the Icelandic Red Cross has already pledged CHF 40,000 in support of CHARP.

The International Federation is a member of the UN interagency task force for Chernobyl issues. Since its launch, CHARP maintains cooperation with several international agencies, including WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, and other NGOs. At present the International Federation and the other agencies are implementing the UN Action Plan on Chernobyl for the third decade after the disaster for the period till 2016.

Contributing to longer-term impact

At the moment the International Federation together with the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia is working on the CHARP Plan for 2010-2011 and for a long-term strategy in conformity with the above mentioned UN Action Plan. It is foreseen that in the years to come the core activities will remain thyroid cancer screening and psychosocial support. Along with this the Red Cross MDLs will provide screening for breast cancer. It is planned that the ministries of health in the three countries will provide appropriate training for MDL doctors. Besides, a workshop will be organised by the International Federation and the Belarus Red Cross in Mogilev, where the local MDL team has obtained a solid experience in conducting breast screening.

It is also planned to introduce HIV testing in the work of all MDLs along with counselling and awareness-raising activities. Even though HIV is not directly linked with the health consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, working in rural areas and screening about 90,000 people annually the MDL teams can provide people with important information on HIV and carry out necessary blood testing in areas where HIV rates are increasing, primarily due to injecting drug use. This will be a significant support to help the National Societies implement their HIV projects.

Looking ahead

In 2010 the CHARP programme will be 20 years old. In this connection the experience obtained by CHARP will be analysed and published as a best practice case around the International Federation's Chernobyl engagement to benefit all working in post-radiation circumstances. Publicising the success of the programme internationally will demonstrate the unique experience the Red Cross has obtained in the follow-up of a nuclear accident.

One of most important issues will be providing sustainability for the programme. This will be considered in the second half of 2009 during the next meeting of the International Chernobyl Coordination Committee (ICCC) in Moscow. ICCC is an overall coordinative body of the programme, composed of the presidents of the Ukraine and Russian Red Cross Societies, the secretary general of the Belarus Red Cross, and the International Federation's country representative. The committee will discuss ways of mobilizing further support from the international community and how to more actively increase local input which would allow gradually handing over the programme to the governmental healthcare system.

How we work

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

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