

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

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Progress was made in strengthening the legal status of the Russian Red Cross (RRC) and several major programmes moved forward, including a diphtheria campaign in western Russia, the reshaping of the Visiting Nurses' service and the reintroduction of first aid training. Continuing funding shortages, however, paralysed other projects listed in the Emergency Appeal 1996 and scheduled for action this year

The context

President Yeltsin, having won the presidential election convincingly in a second round run-off against his Communist opponent, Gennady Zyuganov, in early July, disappeared from view due to ill health. His announcement at the beginning of September that he was to undergo heart surgery sent the stock market plummeting and did little to ease concerns in political and economic circles.

During January to August 1996, consumer prices rose by 16%. Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin told the upper house of parliament on 8 October that annual inflation should fall to 10% next year, from a likely 20-24% in 1996 and 130% in 1995. He also said the government would lower some prices for gas and electricity, thus helping troubled domestic firms.

Payment of wages remains a problem for many sectors of the population, from army personnel to energy workers (who have been on strike in the Far East, as have coal miners in Vorkuta). Staff at nuclear plants have also held demonstrations to highlight their plight over pay.

According to the government's Federal Migration Service, 498,000 people have been displaced as a result of the conflict in Chechnya. It puts the overall figure of registered displaced in Russia at 1,150,000; the RRC and other NGOs put the figure nearer 3 million, including non-registered.

The Chechnya peace deal, secured by the Head of the Security Council, Alexander Lebed, and the Chechen Chief of Staff at the end of August appears to be holding, with Russian troop withdrawals proceeding on schedule. A follow-up agreement, signed by Chernomyrdin and the Chechen separatist president, Yandarbiyev, was generally well received in the Duma, largely because it implies a continuing role for Russia in Chechnya's affairs.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The main focus for both the Delegation and Russian Red Cross was the ECHO-funded diphtheria campaign in Pskov and Leningrad oblasts and Karelia in North-West Russia.

Several months of Delegation/RRC co-operation concerning the national Society's legal status have resulted in a presidential decree on state support for the Russian Red Cross. It contains a commitment to pay statutory contributions to the International Federation. It also envisages state support in financing the RRC's programmes as well as a recommendation to transfer property -- both property already occupied by the national society and government-owned property -- to the RRC. Concessions on public utilities and rent are also envisaged in the Decree.

Development •

The report of an image survey of the RRC, carried out by the authoritative Moscow company VtSIOM, was received (in Russian and English). The findings suggest that although the RRC is seen as one of the most prominent charitable organisations in Russia, nearly 40% of the 1,600 people polled said they did not know whether the Society was governmental or independent, while 60% said there was no noticeable RRC activity in their neighbourhood.

The ID-RD Follow-up (small grant competition) was launched in Chelyabinsk oblast in September. Nine programmes were submitted by local RC committees and a Board of Jurors (comprising both Delegation and RRC representatives) met frequently, prior to visiting Chelyabinsk in October to announce the winners. The competition among local RRC committees in Nizhni Novgorod had to be postponed until the end of October due to leadership changes.

Diphtheria •

The Delegation's local colleagues (health and logistics officers) bore the main burden of planning and implementing the diphtheria programme, with close co-operation from the RRC branches and RRC Central Committee Relief Department. Several field trips were made to the three designated regions - Pskov and Leningrad oblasts and Karelia - before the start of the campaign in Pskov oblast in early September. The Logistics officer handled tenders and procurement as well as the dispatch of refrigerators, cold chain equipment, syringes, etc.

On the Delegation's side, the Head of Delegation and information assistant travelled with the RRC Central Committee representatives to each region for opening ceremonies and seminars, as well as for the campaign itself. The Delegation initiated considerable coverage of the campaign by the local media, which not only contributed to promoting the campaign but also to strengthening the Red Cross image.

The campaign itself revealed wide differences in the efficiency and capacities of the regional committees: Pskov emerged as strong whereas both Leningrad oblast and Karelia proved weak. In general, the campaign was regarded as successful - especially in Pskov, where the RC committee received a boost not only to its image among the general public, but also with the health authorities and civic administration.

Relief •

Medical equipment for Budyonnovsk hospital has been delivered with the assistance of the Stavropol RC Chairman.

Six medical kits for rayon hospitals and 10 nursing kits have been sent to Stavropol RC committee to be handed over to the Dagestan RC (as agreed with the ICRC).

Three second hand clothes consignments were received from the Swedish RC in August and September. Two additional trucks, each containing 18 tons of clothing were directed to St. Petersburg and Pskov oblast for the diphtheria campaign. Problems with customs clearance remain: each consignment takes more than a week to process.

The German Red Cross transferred funding for badly needed repair work at the RRC Ivanovo boarding school and for the completion of a building next to the RRC HQ in Moscow, which is destined to be a refugee centre and administrative facility.

Visiting Nurses programme •

This collaborative programme between the RRC and American RC, with Federation support, has progressed over the July-October period to cover both the training of four RRC nurses in the USA and the adaptation of the Amcross textbook for use in Russia.

In late August, two RRC Central Committee representatives, Vice-President Ludmila Potravnova and Head of Programmes Department, Valentina Shishkina, accompanied the Amcross delegate co-ordinating the project and her assistant to Washington. They were joined in Boston by four RRC nurses (from Astrakhan, Ulyanovsk, Ekaterinburg and Moscow City Committee) for a nine-day course on teaching caregiving at home, a programme presented by the Boston RC Chapter. They then visited the American RC HQs in Washington.

The Editorial Working Group has held a third meeting to discuss the Russian adaptation of the text. The next meeting will be in October.

An abbreviated version of a training seminar is due to take place in mid-October, in Moscow.

First Aid •

This programme, begun by the Canadian RC in 1995 to re-introduce First Aid (FA) training in Russia, is continuing in co-operation with the Delegation and RRC. The Ministry of Health sent a letter of support to the RRC, in which they identified a medical reviewer and editor for the FA manual. Members of the revision committee have revised the FA student manual, the instructor manual was translated and a meeting was held with the publishers in August.

The two Canadian RC delegates responsible for the programme met with the revision committee. The manual was generally welcomed. Meetings have also been held with potential publishers and a "manual specification sheet" for tendering has been translated. Discussions have taken place with the CRC concerning delivery of FA kits and mannequins.

Information •

The Information section of the Delegation has maintained close links with the RRC press department throughout the summer. The information assistant travelled to the three regions covered by the diphtheria campaign, giving presentations and co-ordinating information to the media on behalf of the Delegation and RRC.

Outstanding needs

Further funding is needed for the continuation and implementation of the programmes described above. It is also urgently required to maintain other programmes featured in the 1996 Appeal, specifically North Caucasus, AIDS Awareness, Soup Kitchens, and Regional Delegation Technical Support.

During the reporting period, two delegates (Development and Finance) left the delegation on completion of their contracts. A regional financial manager has been appointed to look after financial matters in both the Moscow and Minsk delegations.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

In July and August, the Head of Delegation took part in two ICRC dissemination workshops in Vladivostok and Sergiev Posad, near Moscow. Contacts with government bodies (including the Ministry of Health) were maintained, particularly concerning the drafting of statutes and the process of elaborating a Red Cross law.

A meeting was held with the local director of USAID prior to the RRC Central Committee representatives' trip to Amcross. Information was exchanged concerning current projects, as this organisation represents a potential major donor. Meetings were held with representatives of the US State Department, in order to maintain contacts for future funding possibilities.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

In the course of 1996, Russia has witnessed a growth in the number of vulnerable groups across its enormous territory. These groups have put extra pressure on the RRC at a time when it is struggling to redefine its role in society, as well as adjust to an austere funding climate. As the end of the year approaches, time is running out for funding some of the regional programmes in the Emergency Appeal, in which the Federation has invested considerable time and effort. In particular, further emergency relief is urgently needed in the North Caucasus, well as preparation for rehabilitation. The large number of migrants spread all over Russia as a result of the conflict in Chechnya is also a matter of continuing concern. And, as winter draws near, another priority is the RRC's Soup Kitchens programme, without which many impoverished and elderly people will be left to their fate.

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