

IRAQ: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

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period covered: July - November 1996

As basic conditions in Iraq worsened the Federation and Iraqi Red Crescent continued with scheduled medical and food distributions. Warning donors that benefits from the Oil for Food Programme would take several months to trickle through to the population and would not resolve all the problems, they also began preparations for maintaining relief in 1997, targeting in particular malnourished children.

The context

The continuing deterioration of the health and nutritional status of a large section of the population in Iraq is of serious concern. Some four million people are at risk because of food shortages. The country's health care system is close to collapse. In order to alleviate the hardship, the Federation/Iraqi Red Crescent is continuing to assist the most vulnerable in accordance with the plan outlined in the Emergency Appeal 1996, which provides for the delivery of basic medical supplies and drugs to 22 hospitals and food aid to 46,000 families.

Latest events

Although the UN and the Government of Iraq signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 986 (SCR 986) in May, action had to be suspended because of the political and military turmoil in the Northern Autonomous Region in September and October. It now seems likely that oil exports under the Oil for Food programme will begin shortly.

The past few months have been the hardest of all for people in Iraq. They have had to contend with a significant decline in the volume of international assistance, as donors anticipated the expected implementation of the SCR 986 programme.

A Federation needs assessment to review the current situation and measure the likely impact of SCR 986 was carried out in October by a team of Federation Secretariat staff and representatives from the British, German and Netherlands National Societies. Its findings stress that there will be a lead-time before the expected benefits of the Oil for Food programme reach the population. It

will take some three months before food reaches people and even longer before medical supplies become available. It also makes clear that the SCR 986 programme will not solve all the humanitarian problems arising from sanctions. The planned food distributions, for example, will not provide enough food to restore the health of people suffering from severe malnutrition. In these conditions, the Federation and the Iraqi Red Crescent have taken the position that the operation will continue throughout 1997, focusing aid on the most vulnerable, in particular malnourished children.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Food●

Under Phase 7 of the food aid programme, three distributions were carried out from July to October, with funds made available by the German Government through the German Red Cross. They were completed successfully despite political/military disturbances in the North. The number of beneficiaries has reached 46,000 families or 354,000 persons, as planned. The operation moved straight into phase 8, which is funded partly by ECHO through the National Societies in the Iraqi Consortium for South and Central Iraq and partly by Swiss Red Cross and Federation Secretariat funds for the North. The three distributions under this phase are expected to be completed by January 1997.

Nutrition programme●

An additional food aid programme targeting malnourished children, which will be the main Federation/IRCS relief activity in 1997, is being prepared. 196 MT of Wheat and Soya Blend (WSM) and 98 MT of Dry Skimmed Milk (DSM) have been ordered in Europe and will be delivered to Amman before the end of this year. A nutritionist is joining the Federation Team in Baghdad this month to oversee the programme. Funding for the first part of this programme has been pledged by the Italian Government. (The nutrition programme is described fully in the Emergency Appeal 1997, to be issued shortly).

Medical aid●

Five new medical kits were formulated after the review of changing needs in Iraq by a Federation medical expert in early 1996. They are: an Emergency Paediatric Kit, Emergency Maternity Kit, Cost Effective Drug Kit, X ray and Infusion Kit and Anaesthesia Drug Kit. The purchase and delivery of 25 each of these four kits, funded by the Japanese Red Cross, was completed in September. Another set of kits (25 kits each), funded by the British, Netherlands and Swiss Societies, were delivered to 22 paediatric and maternity hospitals in November.

Additional aid●

- The Federation facilitated a hand-over to the Iraqi Ministry of Health of a donation by the Sultanate of Oman of 256 MT of full cream milk powder, made through the Iraqi Red Crescent.
- The Norwegian Red Cross donated insulin and diabetes-related medicines worth CHF 194,000 to the IRCS through the Federation.
- The Bahrain Red Crescent donated 35 items of essential drugs in October.
- The Algerian Red Crescent donated 24 cartons of medical supplies in November.
- The Netherlands Red Cross donated 1,300 vials of Kalazar, medicine for Leishmaniasis worth CHF169,000 in December.
- The Swiss Red Cross is donating basic medicines worth CHF 500,000. Their ETA is end December.

Non-material support●

The Community Based First Aid programme was introduced at the branch presidents meeting, held 5 - 7 October in Baghdad and attended by presidents and administrators from 18 branches and headquarters staff. The same meeting discussed details of the implementation of the upcoming nutrition programme.

Monitoring•

The Federation's field support staff for the operation consists of a Head of Regional Delegation, a Finance/Administration Delegate and a Logistics Delegate in Amman, and a Relief Coordinator and three Relief Administrators in Baghdad. During this reporting period, all three Relief Administrators and the Relief Co-ordinator were replaced, as scheduled. A nutritionist will join the Team in Baghdad in December. The Regional Delegation in Amman will continue to be responsible for the overall management of Federation support in the field.

Outstanding needs

The beginning of a year, when funds from the previous year have been exhausted and pledges for the new year are yet to come, often brings financial difficulties for an operation. This will soon be the case of the assistance programme in Iraq. As mentioned above, the population in Iraq is entering on its hardest winter yet and people's situation will not improve until extra food under the SCR 986 Oil for Food programme filters through to them, making it absolutely vital to maintain distributions of general food rations in the first quarter of 1997. The necessary funding for these distributions, however, has not yet been secured.

The Emergency Appeal 1997, detailing assistance during the coming year, will be launched shortly. We are counting on a continuing and rapid response from donors in order to be able to start up the 1997 programme.

Contributions

Please see the attached list of contributions/pledges for 1996.

Conclusion

Although the long awaited implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 986 is beginning, there will be an increasing human toll during the next few months, as the findings of the Federation's needs assessment mission in October make clear. Donors are urged to provide the support needed to help the Federation/IRCS respond to the situation.

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