

IRAQ: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

17 July 1998

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situation report no. 2

period covered: 11 February 1998 to 17 July 1998

The population at large in Iraq continues to suffer for shortages of basic food commodities and a deterioration in health care services and physical infrastructure. The 6 June decision by the country's Council of Ministers to stop accepting international humanitarian aid took agencies by surprise, and has resulted in some confusion re ongoing programmes. The Federation's agreement with the Iraqi government remains in place, and alongside the Iraqi Red Crescent it will continue to provide essential food and medical supplies throughout 1998. Improvement of the institutional development and service delivery capacity of the Iraqi Red Crescent must take priority and this is likely to be reflected in the Federation's 1999 Emergency Appeal for Iraq.

The context

In February, world attention once more focused on the Arab Gulf, and the threat of military operations during a stand-off between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq. The situation was apparently diffused after a four-day trip to Baghdad by the UN Secretary General. The episode ended on 20 February when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1153 increasing, on a *quid pro quo* basis, the export of Iraqi oil from USD 2 billion to USD 5.256 billion over a 180-day period. Part of the proceeds from oil sales, designed initially to allow Iraq to purchase the food and medicine goes to compensate for damage caused during the war and to finance the UN operations in Iraq. Out of each USD 2 billion raised, USD 680 million was retained for this purpose.

The current situation in Iraq is inextricably linked to the two decades of conflict, and the following seven years of virtually total sanctions. Despite increased efficiency in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution SCR 986 -- the "oil for food" deal -- the general population continues to suffer from severe shortages of basic food commodities and a

deterioration in health care services. Water and sanitation systems and the general infrastructure are in varying stages of disrepair or on the verge of collapsing.

UNOHCI reports that the Government of Iraq is again drawing on national reserves in order to be able to distribute a relatively complete ration basket for the month of June. All commodities will be distributed in their entirety except for the ration of lentils which will be reduced by half to 0.5 kg per person.

Preliminary results of the nutritional status survey of 15,804 children conducted by the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WFP during the Polio National Immunisation Days of 16 to 18 March 1998 indicate that the nutritional situation of children under five remains unchanged since the previous survey in March 1997.

The most recent data collected indicate that approximately 27 per cent of children were suffering from chronic malnutrition, 9 per cent from acute malnutrition and 24 per cent were underweight. It should be noted that these results are extrapolated from data on children presented for immunisation, most of whom were under one year of age.

Medicines and supplies delivered within the framework of SCR 986 are now arriving with increasing frequency. However, to date, UN observers have reported that most items were not available in adequate quantities, so that patients were left either without prescribed medicines or, worse, received only part of the recommended treatment. The practice of drug rationing continues throughout 15 Governorates, particularly in health centres and outpatient departments. Analysis for the period from January to March 1998 showed adequacy at an average level of about 26 per cent of requirements for intravenous fluids in hospitals and about 15 per cent for antibiotics in health centres.

However, there are doubts among local and international experts that lifting the embargo will bring immediate changes to the well-being of the majority of the Iraqi population. Responding to a question on how the anticipated lifting of sanctions will effect humanitarian programmes in South, Central and North Iraq, the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator, D. Halliday said, it will presumably give the Iraqi government authority over how to use its oil revenues in the best interests of the Iraqi people. "I think that they are to find that very challenging because I suspect the expectation of the average Iraqi person who may not be fully involved or understand completely the difficulties of production, pumping, oil price, revenues and priorities are probably very high and possibly unrealistic. They may be hoping that immediately after sanctions go away wonderful days will come. That seems to me to be the most unlikely situation...".

Latest events

On 6 June 1998, the Council of Ministers of Iraq took the decision that international humanitarian assistance was not required and will no longer be accepted. The Council expressed its appreciation of all agencies and countries which brought humanitarian aid to the people of Iraq, underscoring that the Iraqi Government had accepted these gifts in the belief that they would make it easier for these parties to be in touch with Iraq's attempts to bring its cause into focus.

The lack of clarity on the humanitarian aid issue following the Government decision, has greatly affected the process of preparation for the new phase of the Federation's programme in Iraq which was supposed to start beginning of July with the arrival of practically all relief supplies purchased with funds received in response to the 1998 Iraq Emergency Appeal.

These preparations which were started in the middle of April amid extensive discussions with the leadership of the National Society should have led by the end of June (practically all principle questions have been already discussed and agreed upon) to:

- complete reorganisation of the operational and management structure of the on-going operation;
- introduction of the new management positions for expatriate and local staff with an emphasis and planning of ongoing and future programmes;
- establishment of the logistics base and central distribution point in Baghdad with the renting of a Central Warehouse (excellent storage facilities were located and contract for rent was ready for signing on 15 June); and
- movement of the Federation's office to the new premises which would have considerably improved working conditions of the Delegation and accommodated both the expatriate and directly involved staff of the National Society under the same roof.

On 13 July the President of the Iraqi Red Crescent wrote to the Delegation, informing it that he received official approval from high authorities to continue the implementation of joint Federation/IRCS relief programmes. Measures are being taken to reactivate the transport of relief goods into Iraq prior to resuming distribution.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Medical Aid

The following quantities of medical kits were distributed to the maternity and paediatric departments of general hospitals in 15 governorates;

Cost Effective Drug Kits	15
Paediatric Emergency Kits	75
Maternity Emergency Kits	70
Anaesthesia Kits	76
Diagnostic & Disposable Kits	77

The kits were purchased by the Netherlands Red Cross, British Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross, German Red Cross and the Federation. Funding was provided by ECHO, the Norwegian Government, Swedish Red Cross, the Netherlands Government and private donors (including a donation channelled by Japanese Red Cross).

Food Aid

The operation procured and distributed 10,000 supplementary food rations for children under five years of age suffering from acute malnutrition. The rations cover the period until the end of the year.

Procurement of the following food items were made by the Federation and the Netherlands Red Cross. Funds were made available by ECHO, and by the Norwegian Government and the Netherlands Government, which channelled them through their respective National Societies.

Wheat Soya Blend	131.25 MT
Sugar	21.00 MT
Soya Bean Oil	212.00 MT
Rice	1,096.00 MT
Lentils	364.00 MT

Identification of Beneficiaries •

Beneficiaries of the health part of the programme are patients of the Maternity and Paediatric Departments of General Hospitals. The needs in medicines and other medical supplies which will be provided within this programme are confirmed by the UN observation units.

The Federation Delegation in Iraq and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society have their own Monitoring Department. Since 15 March 1998, the Federation Monitoring Team has visited 16 hospitals in 10 Governorates. An analysis of the available documentation, and the physical counting of the supplies available in the hospital pharmacies confirmed the acute shortage of medical supplies, even the most basic items. During a monitoring visit to the General Hospital in Najeh it was discovered that for a whole week the hospital did not have even one bottle of IV fluids.

Identification of beneficiaries for Children's Supplementary Feeding Programme continued through Regional Nutritional Centres managed by Ministry of Health of Iraq .

Rehabilitation Aid

Partial rehabilitation was carried out at the "Nineveh" (Mosul) IV Fluid Factory and spare parts, basic ingredients, packaging materials, cleaning agents and filters to increase the production of IV fluids to cover 60 per cent of the needs in Iraq for a period of 10 months were provided. A plan of action and list of requirements for this programme have been established in close co-operation with the Ministry of Health in Iraq.

All agencies concerned, including the Ministry of Health of Iraq, UNOHCI, WHO and UNICEF have been informed about the nature of supplies to be provided under this contract, delivery time to Iraq and the distribution schedule.

Parallel to the implementation of the appeal and the response by different NSs, other bilateral assistance, not requested in the appeal was dispatched by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society, the Bahrain Red Crescent Society, the Turkish Red Crescent and the Iranian Red Crescent Society, to the Iraqi Red Crescent Society. The Kuwait Red Crescent Society pursued its assistance to Iraqi refugees in Iran in collaboration with the Iranian Red Crescent Society. This bilateral programme started in 1994 and the cumulative amount to date is USD 2,000,000.

Outstanding needs

While needs are covered for the time being, additional requests are being evaluated and will be communicated to donors at a later stage.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation Delegation in Baghdad has ordered a colourful poster which explains the purpose of the programme and clearly displays the Federation and ECHO logo. One thousand posters will be displayed in Iraqi Red Crescent branches, at the distribution points and in the hospitals serviced by the medical supplies programme. A press conference will be held in Mosul when supplies are delivered to the "Nineveh" IV Fluids Factory. On the initiative of the International Federation, a Working Group on Nutrition was established in April. It is composed of the representatives of the Ministry of Health, WHO, UNICEF, the International Federation and other interested agencies.

Contributions

Please see Annex 1.

Conclusion

The Federation is continuing its efforts to contribute to the alleviation of suffering among the Iraqi people and is encouraged by the cash and in kind contributions to its programmes. However, as sanctions remain in place, the needs of the population are diversifying and augmenting. Food and medical supplies will remain essential throughout 1998. However, in the longer term, improvement of the institutional development and service delivery capacity of the Iraqi Red Crescent must take priority and this is likely to be reflected in the Federation's 1999 Emergency Appeal for Iraq.

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