

7 February 2000

## ***Central Asia: Regional Programmes***

***appeal no. 01.45/99  
situation report no. 2  
period covered: July - December 1999***

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*With slightly increased funding all major programmes planned for the second half of 1999 continue to be implemented. Capacity building through the implementation of the activities has been the major thrust of the regional activities of the Federation during the reporting period. The restructured regional delegation, which has been warmly welcomed by the National Societies, is expected to reinforce this by providing closer cooperation and support to the National Societies in the region. Progress has been achieved in major relief projects, particularly in the supplementary food distribution to the most vulnerable groups of the affected population of the Aral Sea areas, and the operation of public canteens in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Ongoing joint programmes encourage the development of the Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies in Central Asia.*

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### ***The context***

Despite reforms announced a few years ago by the Governments of the newly independent countries of Central Asia, progression toward a market-driven economy is much slower than expected. Initially, the transformation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan was accompanied by a decline in GDP similar in magnitude to that of the Great Depression. To date, countries have not recovered from the decline in production and their populations are struggling with poverty, vulnerability, insecurity, and rising inequality.

Sharp price rises were noticed in the region in 1999 in the wake of Russian inflation. The negative impact of the Russian crisis on the unstable economies of Central Asian countries added more problems to already difficult living conditions and caused a wave of protests from those with very low personal incomes. Pensioners, invalids, the sick and others, who rely on meager government social security payments have had their lives transformed from sometimes difficult subsistence living to deprivation and destitution.

In addition to the social and economic decline, consequences of environmental catastrophes in the Aral Sea and Semipalatinsk areas affected the health of the population. The collapse of the medical

infrastructure makes governmental institutions unable to undertake timely prevention and regular health testing, especially in rural areas. The result has been the reappearance and increase of diseases such as TB and hepatitis. There are shortages of general basic medical supplies and equipment.

Considering the general situation in the four Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the Federation Regional Delegation working together with the respective Red Crescent/Red Cross Societies, increasingly focuses on relief supplies of food, clothing, medical and other assistance. The implementation of ongoing programmes and Disaster Preparedness (DP) training gives an opportunity to develop and strengthen National Societies' capacities.

Responding to these needs, the Federation implemented a joint programme during the second half of 1999, and established the following objectives:

- *Planning*: The planned review of the Federation and Regional Delegation support to National Societies has been postponed until the next year.
- *Relief*: To enable the Red Crescent Red Cross Societies of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to support the most vulnerable groups of the affected population of the Aral Sea region.
- *Health*: To assist the National Societies to maintain preventive health programmes and provide support to the Red Crescent/Red Cross social-medical centres.
- *Social Welfare*: To assist the Red Crescent of Turkmenistan in providing equipment and training to refugee families to make them more self sufficient.
- *Disaster Preparedness and Response/Population Movement*: To further improve the capacities of Red Crescent Red Cross Societies to respond to emergencies throughout the region, and to promote the formalising of the National Societies' role in disaster response with their respective country authorities and integrate population movement activities into disaster preparedness.
- *Youth*: To assist the National Societies in developing volunteer recruitment strategies.
- *Assistance to National Societies*: To strengthen the capacity of the National Societies in the region.

## ***Latest events***

***Kazakhstan*** faced a widespread infestation of locusts in northern areas. This was the worst reported infestation in 40 years. The pests infested around 3 million 400 thousand hectares, almost two-thirds of arable lands. The Regional Relief Delegate together with staff from the Red Crescent Red Cross Society of Kazakhstan (RCRCK) visited affected areas. Based on the assessment the Federation and RCRCK conducted an emergency relief distribution of supplementary food for the winter months and seeds for the next year.

In ***Kyrgyzstan***, the problem of insecurity has been exacerbated by the poor social conditions in the region which encourages people to support extreme political alternatives. For the many people across Central Asia who once enjoyed guaranteed jobs, education, health care for all and pensions for the elderly, but now live in poverty, fundamentalist groups who blame the political regimes for people's difficulties and call people to fight, can seem to be a solution to their problems.

In ***Uzbekistan***, a failed assassination attempt against the President, Mr. Karimov on February 16th has resulted in a government crackdown on dissidents. The incident, in which six car bombs were detonated in Tashkent, killed 15 people and injured more than 100.

Although details of budget developments in Uzbekistan are scarce, the government's forecast of 4.5% real GDP growth in 1999 seems increasingly unrealistic. Some large state-owned firms are in financial difficulty. Inflation is high and late wages and pensions are not back-indexed to compensate for inflation. Presidential elections will be held early January 2000.

In ***Turkmenistan***, the parliamentary election on December 12th reinforced the power of the president, Saparmurat Niyazov. The economic crisis has resulted in relatively high levels of inflation. The severe shortage of hard currency and the fall in the value of the Manat, local currency, have forced up local

prices, particularly on imported goods. According to official figures, consumer price inflation over the first eight months of this year totaled just over 14%, while year-on-year rates climbed from around 19% in January to almost 29% in August. In the short term, the threat of social unrest has been reduced by a marked improvement in food availability. However, the intensive production methods that the government has supported to boost agricultural output have resulted in soil depletion and salination. This poses a serious risk of crop failures and food shortage within the next few years.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

The Red Crescent Red Cross Societies of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan responding to the needs in the region, continue to assist the increased number of vulnerable people - victims of disasters and environmental catastrophes, large families with low incomes, children's institutions, and elderly isolated people. The Federation's Regional Delegation following its decentralisation, is using the new structure to strengthen the capacities of the National Societies through the implementation of joint programmes.

### **Relief**

#### *Food Assistance to the most vulnerable in the Aral Sea area in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan*

The objective of this programme, funded by the American Red Cross, is to distribute 8,000 MT of food to approximately 70,000 beneficiaries - pregnant women, multi-child families and children's institutions, who are considered as the most vulnerable groups of the affected population. Rice, flour, beans and vegetable oil will be distributed to areas in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Two delegates are assigned for Dashaguz (Turkmenistan) and Kyzyl-Orda (Kazakhstan) to run the project under the lead of the Programme Co-ordinator based in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). The preparatory training for district chair people and officials, the major instruments in distribution, was held in July throughout all three countries. In terms of very limited National Societies' staff at the district level, co-operation with the local authorities is vital for the programme implementation and has been much appreciated. There has been increasing visibility of the National Societies and of the programme itself; 2,800 posters have been printed in five local languages and 1,200 Red Crescent vests were manufactured in the Red Crescent sewing factory in Shakhymardan (Uzbekistan).

Warehouses have been inspected and prepared to receive shipments in time. However, some delay in the first delivery made the warehousing more complicated as both shipments of food arrived at the same time in November. It has been agreed, that the remaining commodities will be held by shippers in Rotterdam until mid January when the first delivery will be moved out.

The first 920 beneficiaries in Kyzyl-Orda, Kazakhstan received their food by the end of November. The distribution in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan started in mid December.

### **Health**

#### *Red Crescent Centres/Medical Social Rooms improvements*

The objective of the programme is, by developing the facilities of the medical-social rooms, to create Red Crescent/Red Cross Centres for first aid training, preventive health care and disaster preparedness. RCRCK has received medical equipment for Karaganda Red Cross hospital. Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan has received 10 sets of portable medical equipment including physiotherapy, cardiograph, inhalator and other medical supplies. Uzbek Red Cross will also receive 10 units of portable medical equipment and medical supplies which have been purchased and are ready for dispatch.

#### *First Aid*

The Japanese Red Cross made a contribution to the Preventive Health Care training programme in Central Asia and a second round of first aid training has been carried out. Each of the five National Societies successfully completed the first stage of training and reported to the Regional Delegation.

In **Kazakhstan**, RCRC conducted first aid training in two medical centres for 6 months. Single mothers, students, schoolchildren, Red Cross volunteers, mothers with handicapped children were trained in basic skills in first aid and self-assistance in emergencies. A fully equipped first aid training room was opened in Almaty. 500 trained people received their certificates. The RCRC First Aid facilitators were approached by the Peace Corps to conduct first aid training for 40 people of their staff in Jezkazgan oblast in December 1999.

In **Uzbekistan**, the first aid training covered around 70 people including Red Crescent nurses and volunteers. The First Aid manual has been translated into the Uzbek language and will be published by the end of this year.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the First Aid training programme was conducted at branch level and covered more than 200 people mainly from the high-mountains remote areas who have no access to any Health facilities.

In **Turkmenistan**, during July and August (school holidays) the visiting nurses held first aid training for 90 enterprises and organisations. The RCST obtained an agreement with education authorities and introduced Preventive Health and First Aid classes into 72 schools for 4,466 school children. Twelve visiting nurses have received all necessary training material, mannequins and equipment. 150,000 leaflets covering 7 topics in Preventive Health Care and healthy life styles have been printed both in Russian and Turkmen languages. Publications have been distributed to schoolchildren and their parents. In July 1999 a three day workshop was held for the newly formed Red Cross Search and Rescue Team.

### **Social Welfare**

#### *Turkmenistan. Seeds and Tools (self-sufficiency project)*

A Seeds and Tools programme aiming to assist 280 refugee families including 30 local vulnerable families to become self-sufficient was commenced at the end of the year.

### **Disaster Preparedness and Response/Population Movement**

#### *Regional Disaster Preparedness*

With secured funding established in July, the DP programme gained momentum in the second part of the year. The Regional DP Delegate was, however, not entirely available to the programme during this period, since he contributed to the region as a whole in the role of Acting Head of Regional Delegation for a period of almost four months.

In line with the new focus of the programme, established after the external evaluation and review undertaken in January, close attention has been given to discussing with the National Societies, how the programme can better meet their country-specific needs. This involved an analysis of National Societies existing emergency stocks, requirements for replenishment of stocks utilised, and the suitability of those stocks, and the composition and location of training workshops. The results of these discussions were formal project agreements with each National Societies to reflect their country-specific DP needs and capacities.

The DP training programme has continued with a greater focus on Oblast (Branch)-level training involving participants from Rayons (districts or towns). These workshops are an integral part of this programme, and are essential in building the required National Societies structure and expertise to enable future community level training. 384 participants were trained in 13 Oblast-level workshops throughout the region. In addition, 25 Rayon-level workshops were conducted which trained 630 participants. A regional DP workshop was conducted by the Regional Delegation, in Almaty, over three days in December. This involved 21 participants and included sessions on Public Awareness campaigns, reporting and accountability, future activities, and sharing of information on current activities. First Aid Coordinators from National Societies also attended this workshop as part of the move to bring DP and First Aid closer together. Planned procurements of DP emergency stocks, in line with the project agreements made with the National Societies in the region, commenced in December.

#### *Regional - Population Movement (PM)*

Following the departure of the Population Movement Delegate in July, the remaining PM projects were handed over to the National Society PM Coordinators for implementation under the existing funding. National Society PM Coordinators participated in the regional PM workshop held in Tbilisi on December 21-22, 1999. With the hostage situation in Kyrgyzstan in August by rebel insurgents crossing from Tajikistan, and possible future implications on regional security, there were renewed discussions as to the need to have a Population Movement delegate in the region in 2000.

In *Kazakhstan*, the agricultural project demonstrated the following results: 230.9 tons of vegetables were harvested from 7 hectares of land. 6.4 tonnes of vegetables were sold (total amount received was 43,175 tenge = \$310), 118 tonnes were distributed among repatriants (71 families) amounting to a value of 1,150,354 tenge = \$8,276. Vegetables to the total value of 4,930 tenge (\$35.5) were given to the most vulnerable local families. 50 tonnes of onions and 7.5 tonnes of sunflower seeds were stored until spring. The programme is functioning in close cooperation with UNHCR, IOM, and ICRC.

In *Turkmenistan*, in the voluntary Tajik refugees repatriation programme, 5,000 people were repatriated in 1998 and 2,400 in 1999. In the water filters programme for ethnic Turkmens from Tajikistan, 25 water filters were constructed to provide clean water to 87 families (500 people).

## **Youth**

### *Regional - Youth Recruitment and Training of Volunteers*

In *Kazakhstan*, 27 youth clubs are operated throughout the country by the Red Crescent Red Cross Society of Kazakhstan (RCRCK). These clubs became a base for the training of volunteers in Red Cross History, Fundamental Principles of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Preventive Health. Under the First Aid training programme for school age children in Almaty, Karagandy and Uralsk, emergency teams are trained and prepared for disaster response. Youth volunteers organised in schools, an activity "From heart to heart" aiming to gather clothing and hygiene items for orphans. A Red Crescent Red Cross Youth Centre opened in Almaty. Approximately one hundred volunteers have been trained in this Centre and have already demonstrated their skills organising such activities as "Youth against AIDS", and "Youth and healthy life style".

In *Turkmenistan*, the Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan (RCST) organised a summer camp for Red Cross youth volunteers from all six youth clubs throughout the country. Apart from entertainment, youngsters trained in First Aid, discussed perspectives of youth clubs development and elected a President of the Red Crescent youth movement in Turkmenistan. During students' summer vacations youth leaders of RCST recruited and trained volunteers in some other youth summer camps across the country. One of these camps saw a competition in First Aid, organised by RCST.

*In Uzbekistan*, the youth programme is organised as part of the institutional development programme and major achievements have been made during this year (please see below under the section "Institutional development - Uzbekistan").

### *Regional - Kids to kids ( collection of clothes for Tajikistan)*

The programme has been delayed due to lack of funds.

### *Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan - Youth camps for children from the Aral Sea area*

The programme has been delayed due to lack of funds.

## **Assistance to National Societies**

### *Regional - Priorities for the five-year Plan*

The Regional Delegation put in considerable efforts in July to complete the first ever cycle of the Regional Assistance Strategy (RAS) covering the years 2000-2001. In November discussions started regarding the making of a review of Federation assistance in ID/RD, including bilateral support, provided to the five National Societies of Central Asia. The review is planned for four months and will start some time during the first six months of 2000. It will mainly focus on institutional development provided to National Societies in Central Asia during the nineties and its impact, including the support

provided by the ICRC National Society Cooperation component and its relation to Federation assistance.

*Regional - Support for National Societies' Information Officers*

This three year programme started in 1997 and will continue until the summer of 2000. Since the beginning each National Society has established an information department. All five of them have been equipped with a desk top computer, printer and scanner. Information officers from each National Society receive training on a regular basis through workshops and on an individual basis provided by the Regional Delegation through the regional information officer based in Almaty. Working towards creation of a new image of Red Crescent Red Cross Societies, National Societies succeeded in co-operation with media, both local and international, in presenting the profile of their respective National Societies. Information officers working together with all departments in National Societies have played an important role in National Societies' activities. A tighter co-operation and partnership with ICRC based in Tashkent characterised the work during this year. Two workshops for information and dissemination officers from National Societies were organised by joint efforts of Dissemination Delegate/ICRC and Regional Information Officer/Federation. This co-operation will be continued.

*Regional - Oblast Level Middle Management Training*

This programme will not be implemented in 1999 due a heavy workload in the regional delegation. It will be pursued in 2000 from each country based delegate.

*Regional - Governance and Management Training*

A leadership training for the five National Societies is planned for September 2000.

*Uzbekistan, Regional - Resource Development*

The resource development programme in Uzbekistan has several components:

- *Resource development workshop* was organised for the senior staff of RCSU headquarters and the leaders of the regional committees. Five more regional level workshops are planned for the early 2000. A resource person from the Swedish Red Cross facilitated presentation to the senior staff of RCSU on Federation Development Policy, the Federation Capacity Building Framework, Basics of strategic planning and shared the experience of change process in SRC.
- *Fund raising activities* follow the plan and proposals of the RCSU. The traditional annual fund raising campaign was organised in December across the country.
- *Revolving fund projects* - several revolving fund projects have been initiated including the hotel project, and production and selling of membership stamps. Both the programmes have been successfully implemented. The traffic security programme which was initiated in 1998 has faced some difficulties as the technology is not available in Uzbekistan for the production of the reflectors. Further development of this programme is under consideration.
- *Production of image-building materials* - The RCSU has already produced posters with a two-year calendar. Major activities of the RCSU are presented in a booklet which is now under production. Local media has shown continuous interest in RCSU activities and highlighted the main events in a number of articles, radio and TV interviews. Two press conferences organised by all three Movement components were broadcast on local TV.
- *Institutional Development* - the work on the development and production of the guidelines for branch development has started. The first draft of the Youth development guidelines has been prepared. The RCSU statutes for the branches have been elaborated and printing is underway. Pilot youth centre was established in Tashkent, since then two more youth centres have been established with Federation support in Samarkand and Urgench. The RCSU has managed to get funding for additional five youth centres in various areas of the country. Three youth seminars are being organised for newly recruited youth leaders.

Assistance to the RCSU finance department in upgrading computer equipment and training has been started this year and will be continued in 2000. The RCSU created its own website in October. A Head of International Department is now in place following a vacancy of more than two years. The RCSU was assisted in monthly reporting which started in October 1999. The work on the first ever RCSU

Development Plan has started and has shown that the concept is very new for the country and much more time is needed for adaptation.

#### *Turkmenistan - Institutional Development*

The institutional development of the RCST has been focused through youth, health and population movement programmes. The Preventive Health campaign is ongoing through six branch-level youth clubs. Publications, leaflets and flyers on drugs, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases were widely distributed to students in schools and Universities.

After the departure of the country based delegate in Turkmenistan in July, the successor arrived in late November. The intentional gap was a trial period for the National Society and a way for the Federation to view the institutional capacities of the RCST after one year of direct in-country presence.

#### **Delegation Capacity**

Continuous support to the National Societies in the region is being provided by the Regional Delegation for Central Asia (CARD). After seven months with an acting Head of Regional Delegation, which put a lot of strains on the limited capacity within the delegation given the existing workload, the newly appointed Head of Regional Delegation finally arrived mid October. Due to the HoRD's presence at the statutory meetings and the 27th International Conference, the HoRD was de facto operational in country only as of mid-November.

The lack of a Health Delegate and a Population Movement Delegate during the reporting period also put strains on the Relief and DP Delegates, both trying to monitor the implementation of programmes within their technical specialties as well as other programmes.

The partial decentralisation from last February, with Delegates also in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, resulted in a formalised new structure as of November. The new structure is fully supported by the National Societies with close co-operation and day-to-day working relations with the respective Delegates. The Head of Regional Delegation is based in Almaty together with a Regional Finance/Administration Delegate and a Regional Relief Delegate. The Programme Co-ordinator for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will be hosted by the National Society in Almaty. The newly appointed Regional Health Delegate together with the foreseen Regional Population Movement Delegate will be based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan as of February/March 2000. The Bishkek-based Regional DP Delegate will then move to Almaty. The Delegates for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are based in Tashkent and Ashgabat respectively. The Aral Sea Programme Co-ordinator is based in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and two relief administrators in Dashaguz (Turkmenistan) and Kzyl-Orda (Kazakhstan).

With the decentralised structure, the Regional Delegation foresees a more effective and co-ordinated approach supporting the National Societies in terms of planning, programme implementation, financial management, monitoring and reporting. Provided the operational circumstances and programmes remain the same, it is envisaged to maintain these twelve delegates during 2000.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The following Regional Programmes did not receive support and have not yet been implemented:

- Regional - Kids to Kids (collection of clothes for Tajikistan);
- Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan - Youth camp for Aral Sea;
- Regional - Oblast Level Middle Management Training;
- Regional - Governance and Management.

The following programmes are being implemented on a reduced scale:

- Regional - Red Crescent Centres/Medical Social Rooms reform;
- Regional - Youth Recruitment and Training of Volunteers;
- Regional - Governance and Management Training.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

Contacts are being maintained with the Governments in the operational areas. At some local Government levels in Kazakhstan there is a close cooperation with the National Society and the work done is recognised by covering the cost of some staff salaries, heating, water and gas charges. Continuous contacts have been made with the Government of Turkmenistan to conclude the Legal Status Agreement, which is the only one outstanding in the region.

Last September the Acting Head of Regional Delegation participated in a UN meeting held in Tokyo on the nuclear waste affected Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan. The Federation emphasised its competencies acquired in this field through its involvement following the Chernobyl accident, and expressed the interest of the National Society of Kazakhstan in the Primary Health Care Programmes. This was also underlined in a press conference in Almaty by the end of the year.

The Head of Regional Delegation has taken up contacts with the Diplomatic Corps and frequently visited receptions with the Government of Kazakhstan and at Embassies. Good relations were also established with local donors as private business companies as well as the International Women's Club and the Diplomatic Women's Club. Within the Disaster Preparedness Programme, excellent relationships have been maintained with the Government Emergency Ministries in all countries. Government staff continue to be included in the DP training programme at all levels. In Kazakhstan, a close relationship has been established with the UNDP programme which provides support to the Government in development of a National Disaster Management Plan.

Media interest is high related to programme implementation and the National Societies together with the Federation have good local coverage in newspapers, radio and TV channels. The BBC planned to cover the Aral Sea food distribution, however due to timing this has been postponed to early next year.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

The new decentralised structure of the Regional Delegation where delegates are based in the four countries with close co-operation with the National Societies, will enable more effective implementation and monitoring of programmes. The day to day contacts with National Society counterparts will also result in better understanding of Federation policies and practices.

The relief programme for Aral Sea is in full operation with the first distribution having taken place in December and there is good communication with the regional office in Almaty and also from the field offices in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Although the health programme implementation has been under the regional relief department, the appointment of a Regional Health Delegate from early next year will be a great advantage. The Social Welfare programme in Turkmenistan is running smoothly and co-funded by UNHCR with possible extension and expansion for next year. The Disaster Preparedness Programme has been successful and excellent relations with Government counterparts are established. Further training is planned for next year, with an increasing emphasis on reaching disaster prone communities. The youth sector in all National Societies has been growing and is supported by the NS as well as the Federation.

The assistance to National Societies has been comprehensive over the period with good feedback on reporting though there are more details to be looked into next year. More finance/reporting training is needed as well as building confidence and transparency. In general, the National Societies have responded to the needs linked to their capacity which can be improved with continuous training, advice and cooperation with the Federation delegates.

## ***Contributions***

Please see attached list.

***For further information please contact the following: International Federation, Geneva: Susanna Söderström; tel: +41 22 730 44 24; mobile: +41 79 276 00 21; email: <soderstr@ifrc.org>***

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