

**CHERNOBYL HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE AND REHABILITATION
PROGRAMME (CHARP) : BELARUS,
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AND UKRAINE**

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The health of the population in the affected area remains poor, with continued high levels of thyroid gland pathologies and cancer especially among children, and those who were children at the time of the accident. A donor meeting in June received good support, but the overall financial situation for the start of the operation in 2000 as well as the long-term funding remains of concern in view of the vital nature of the ongoing screening activities in remote areas.

The context

The explosion of the fourth unit of the Chernobyl nuclear plant on April 26, 1986 resulted in the world's biggest technological disaster, contaminating huge areas in Ukraine, Belarus and Russian Federation affecting a population of over 4 million people. Since early hours of the Chernobyl disaster the Red Cross National Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have been actively involved in assisting the affected population. In 1990 the Federation launched the Red Cross Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP). It concentrated at first on screening of food supplies and the surrounding environment of people through radiometric testing. From 1992 onwards, six mobile diagnostic laboratories (MDLs), based in six highly affected regions, screened background radiation and provided medical examinations to adults and children in remote areas. They also distributed basic health information to the population on measures to avoid radioactive contamination.

In 1996, CHARP underwent certain modifications. Since the radiation situation stabilised, the dosimetric part was reduced. Instead, the number of people targeted for medical screening was increased from 60,000 to 90,000 per annum, with a special focus on children and people who were children at the moment of the accident and who are most vulnerable in terms of thyroid gland pathologies. Radioactive iodine accumulated in the thyroid gland of children just after the disaster in

1986. This destroyed cells and gradually continued growing particularly in the bodies of children and developing easily into thyroid cancer or other pathologies.

In June 1997, six new MDLs, redesigned to facilitate the increase in examinations, replaced the old ones. Three still relatively new MDLs now operate in Belarus, two in Ukraine and one in the Russian Federation.

A further element of the revised CHARP was the introduction of *a psycho-social-service project* (PSS). This began as a pilot project in 1997 in Belarus. Red Cross staff and volunteers are being trained in PSS helping techniques. Since then, they have assisted people living in contaminated areas of Belarus as well as people resettled after the catastrophe. In November 1998 the PSS was started in Ukraine. Russia has been included in the PSS since November, 1999.

Besides medical screening and psycho-social support, CHARP supplies multivitamins, milk powder and some medicaments, including 'Levothyroxine', which is used for the treatment of people with thyroid pathologies.

Latest events

Belarus/Russia

Thirty cases of thyroid cancer were revealed in the regions of Brest, Gomel and Mogilev in January-June, Galina Nesterenko, deputy chief physician at the National Radiation Medicine Centre, told BelaPAN. In all, according to Ms. Nesterenko, 128,000 of 246,500 people were examined in Chernobyl-affected-areas, including the districts of Bragin, Vetka, Khoiniki, Krasnopolye, Slavgorod, Cherikov, Luninets and Stolin, in January-June. In 500 cases radiation overdoses apparently resulted from the consumption of contaminated berries, mushrooms or game. Persons who were under 18 at the time of the catastrophe and those who were within 30 kilometres of the Chernobyl power plant in 1986 are most vulnerable to thyroid disorders. As a result of the campaign, thousands of people were sent to hospitals for further examination and treatment. More than 4,000 of them were sent to the Radiation Medicine Research Institute at Aksakovshchina near Minsk.

On September 6, a Japanese delegation from Hiroshima and Nagasaki arrived in Belarus for the second time since 1991. Over the past eight years, the Japanese RED CROSS rendered methodical and financial assistance to Belarus within the framework of the international humanitarian and rehabilitation programme for the victims of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident. In 1997, Japan earmarked almost 226 trillion yens to support children's rehabilitation and health improvement centres in Belarus, Itar-Tass reported in the context of the visit.

In October, Electricite de France donated \$260,000 worth of medications to the Hospital of the Belarusian Scientific Research Institute of Radiation Medicine in the settlement of Aksakovshchina near Minsk. The shipment is intended for victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. Drugs manufactured by Lipla and Leo, the French pharmaceutical companies, will be used for treating 2,000 thyroid cancer patients in two years and satisfy the hospital's demand for medicines. This is the third shipment delivered by France in the framework of a humanitarian aid program. The first two deliveries of medicines took place in 1996 and 1998, each of them were sufficient for a year. In addition, the centre was provided with medical equipment and Belarusian doctors received training at French medical institutions.

On November 22, the Executive Committee of the Belarusian-Russian Union authorised a 3-year joint programme aimed at boosting the production of food, rich in vitamins and drugs, of a new generation, including blood substitutes, in the two countries. The programme is expected to lead to an increase in the life expectancy of the Belarusians and Russians and make their immune system more resistant to an unfavourable environment, especially in the areas contaminated as a result of the Chernobyl accident. The program, which is to be launched in 2000, is expected to significantly

reduce the two countries' dependency on similar imported products. The availability of food produced under the programme is hoped to result in a 20 to 25 percent decrease in cardiovascular diseases and cancers, a reduction in child mortality and a 10 percent increase in the life expectancy.

On November 22-23, a Belarusian-Russian conference on Chernobyl was held in Moscow . The conference was attended by Belarusian and Russian experts, members of the Belarusian-Russian Union's Parliamentary Assembly and Executive Committee, and representatives of the two countries' Ministries of Emergency Situations. They discussed the implementation of the Belarusian-Russian Chernobyl Programme and considered a draft bill on social support of the population affected by the nuclear disaster. Among other measures, the programme envisages the establishment of an integrated system for monitoring levels of water pollution on the Dnieper and the Sozh, uniform methods of registering radiation doses received by evacuees and participants in cleanup operations as well as a uniform pattern for medical certificates issued to persons affected by the disaster. The programme is financed out of the union budget and covers the years 1998 through 2000. Funding is supposed to total 333,7 million Russian rubles.

In the Grodno region, only 18 out of 345 nuclear power engineers examined by doctors in the districts of Novogrudok, Dyatlovo and Iyve were in good health. The most common disorders were chronic hepatitis and the abnormal functioning of liver. Novogrudok, Dyatlovo and Iyve were affected by Chernobyl worst than any other districts. In all, about 28,000 people in 150 towns and villages are still exposed to abnormal levels of radiation in the Grodno region. The region also accommodates 16,000 evacuees from polluted areas of the Gomel region and 6,300 participants in the Chernobyl cleanup.

In September, an operational contract was signed between the Federation and ECHO for EUR 360,000 aimed at providing financial support to the Clinic of the Scientific Research Institute of Radiation Medicine and Endocrinology of the Ministry of Health of the Republic Belarus, Aksakovtchina, Minsk District. These funds will be used to supply the equipment for the Clinic's department of radio-iodine therapy. The purchase and delivery of the equipment will be provided by the Logistics Service of the Federation. This activity is done on request of UN-OCHA and runs outside the Appeal System of the Federation. The CHARP team is playing an implementing role.

Ukraine

On June 30, the Ministry of Emergency Situations and the UN Representative office in Ukraine signed a partnership and co-operation agreement to enhance their co-operation in assisting people who suffered as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986. The agreement provides for the creation in 1999-2000 of two new centres for social and psychological rehabilitation in Korosten, Zhytomyr oblast, and at the Kiev oblast children's hospital in Boyarka. The project is financed by the US Agency for International Development in the amount of \$400,000, with the help of the United Nations.

As a result of the disaster, millions of Ukrainians received additional doses of radiation. Among the liquidators (people cleaning the scene of the disaster in the early days) 85% are having pathologies. About 82,469 persons are reported to have already become invalids. The incidence of thyroid gland cancer has increased several times. During the past seven years, Ukraine is independently financing measures for the liquidation of consequences of the accident, which makes up 5-7% of the needs of the annual budget. In the period from 1991 to 1998, costs of mitigation in view of the accident accounted for more than 5 billion USD. On the whole, total economic losses of Ukraine owing to the accident equal about 130 billion USD. Despite the difficult economic situation in the country, the basic share of Chernobyl in the state budget will not decrease in the nearest future. (Press Release of the Ukraine Ministry of emergencies and affairs of population protection from the consequences of Chernobyl catastrophe on occasion of the photo exhibition "Chernobyl Catastrophe: 13 years later", November 1999).

In December, during a meeting with a group of directors of large French companies that have shown interest in investing in the Ukrainian economy, in Paris, President Kuchma was asked about

the destiny of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Leonid Kuchma said, that Ukraine is fulfilling the commitments given to the international community concerning Chernobyl closure in the year 2000. Two reactors at the station have already been shut down and only one reactor is operating at present, he added. Kuchma also reminded that the G-7 countries have not so far fulfilled their commitments to finance Chernobyl closure. In light of this, he proposed that France initiates the second pledging forum for raising money to complete the construction of two reactors at the Rivne and Khmelnytskyi nuclear power plants, which are necessary, according to Kuchma, to compensate the closure of the Chernobyl. "Ukraine is waiting for the G-7 to fulfil the commitments it gave Ukraine within the framework of the memorandum on Chernobyl closure," Kuchma added, according to a report of the Ukrainian Television News (UTN) programme, broadcast on the UT-1 television channel.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Medical examination

The results of the medical screening, performed during June-November 1999, the number and the percentage of sick people, detected by MDLs specialists, is seen in the following table:

MDL	Numbers examined	Adults	Sick	%	Children	Sick	%
BREST	7,815	4,031	2,774	68.8	3,784	3,163	83.6
GOMEL	7,783	1,832	789	43.1	5,951	2,751	46.2
MOGILEV	7,364	4,178	3,871	92.6	3,186	2,911	91.4
BRYANSK	7,842	3,036	2,707	89.2	4,806	4,243	88.3
ZHITOMIR	9,664	2,732	2,499	91.5	6,932	6,095	87.9
ROVNO	6,896	1,237	916	74.0	5,659	3,809	67.3
TOTAL	47,364	17,046	13,556	79.5	30,318	22,972	75.7

In the course of the medical screening various pathologies were detected in 13,556 out of 17,046 adults (79,5 %) and 22,972 out of 30,318 children (75,7 %) . These cases were referred for further examination or treatment.

Thyroid gland cancer and other pathologies: during June-November the MDL personnel have examined through ultrasound diagnostics 15,888 adults and 27,290 children. The main attention was paid to the risk group of young adults under 30 years old, as among this group the thyroid gland pathologies, especially cancer, are found more frequently.

The results of the detected pathologies of the thyroid gland in absolute figures and per 1000 examined are presented in the following table:

	Diseases	Adults		Children	
		abs	per 1000	abs	per 1000
1	Developmental anomalies	49	3.1	58	2.1
2	Hypothyrosis	48	3.0	22	0.8
3	Thyrotoxicosis	40	2.5	1	0.03
4	Thyroiditis	456	28.7	84	3.1
5	Nontoxic diffuse goitre	3,177	200.0	7,472	273.8
6	Nontoxic diffuse & nodular goitre	553	34.8	94	3.4
7	Nontoxic nodular goitre	1,081	68.0	107	3.9
8	Node of "cyst" type	207	13.0	56	2.1

The importance of the provided screening was noted in the report of the 3rd Evaluation Mission for CHARP (30 August-10 September 1999), where a special emphasis was put on the ultrasound examinations of the thyroid gland aimed at diagnosis of pre-cancer conditions and detection of all forms of cancer of the thyroid gland at early stages.

Psycho-Social Support (PSS)

CHARP psychological support to people affected by the Chernobyl disaster continued, provided by Red Cross local staff and volunteers at medico-social centres, as well as by the MDL personnel. It aimed at restoring a person's inner resources and the ability to control his/her life. The counselling process includes cognitive reinterpretation, "stress ventilation" and correction of inadequate coping. This support was given first of all to people with severe emotional disturbances, caused by a crisis situation (a major disease, such as thyroid gland cancer) as well as to lonely elderly. In total about four thousand people have received this kind of psychological assistance in Belarus and Ukraine.

An important part of the PSS provides information and training for the population. Information on radiation and stress-related illness reduces anxiety caused by a lack of knowledge, and diminishes psychosomatic reactions.

The Red Cross staff also provide information on the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, methods of coping with stress and reducing the risk of radiation. On these topics 60 lectures and group meetings were organised, attended by 3,000 people. Besides 30 newspapers articles, radio and TV interviews were given. In addition, relief workers, mostly the MDL staff members, who are also vulnerable to stress, were counselled on coping with stress and preventing professional burnout. In Ukraine, with this purpose counselling sessions in the field were conducted for Red cross staff. In Belarus, professional psychologists met with the members of the MDLs teams before and after their trips to the field.

Training of RED CROSS staff and volunteers in PSS continued in Belarus and Ukraine. Two follow-up workshops were run in Brest region. Two workshops on stress management for Red Cross staff were run in Minsk region and in the city of Baranovichi, Belarus. The training includes case studies and exercises.

Training of the Russian Red Cross trainers in psycho-social support was started in November 1999 with a Training of Trainers Workshop in Bryansk. The purpose of the workshop was to give information and provide the participants with some practical training, in order to strengthen the Red Cross staff's role in problem solving and crisis intervention, based on simple and reliable skills and tools. After the workshop, the participants started to train their colleagues, volunteers and other helpers in the contaminated zones. Altogether, 67 Red Cross workers and volunteers were trained during the PSS workshops. They run 97 seminars/lectures for their colleagues and volunteers at the local level afterwards.

PSS Evaluation Mission

On 21 June - 28 June, an evaluation of PSS in Belarus was carried out by Dr. Jacques Gauguin, external expert employed by the Danish Red Cross for this mission. The aim of the mission was to evaluate the involvement of the Federation Reference Centre in CHARP/PSS programme. Dr. Gauguin together with the PSS Co-ordinator undertook field trips to visit Belarus Red Cross regional, district and local branches in Minsk, Brest and Gomel regions, the areas in which the programme works and develops, and met with local authority, visiting nurses, volunteers.

CHARP Funding Situation

As it was mentioned in the previous report, CHARP found itself in serious financial difficulties, as it had funds available only till June 1999. An urgent meeting of donors had to be convened to discuss the standing and further handling of CHARP. This meeting was held at Frankfurt/M - Airport on 21 June 1999.

As a result of the meeting, CHARP received the following contributions from the National Societies: Japan - CHF 350,000; Great Britain - CHF 219,000; Denmark (PSS) - CHF 53,000; Germany - CHF 65,000; *Austria - CHF 30,000. * The Austrian Red Cross did not participate but announced its contribution before the meeting.

However, the funding situation at the end of 1999 is again critical when looking into the running of next year's activities. There is a need for at least mid-term commitments of interested donors.

ICCC Meeting

On 6 July, a regular meeting of the International Chernobyl Coordinative Committee (ICCC) was held in Volyn Region, Ukraine. The following important issues were discussed: follow-up of the minutes of the previous ICCC meeting, results of the donors' meeting in Frankfurt, funding situation and plans, survey on the thyroid gland cancer incidence, updated information on beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance within CHARP, next evaluation mission.

3rd Evaluation Mission for CHARP

On August 30 - September 10 the 3rd Assessment Mission for CHARP was carried out with the objective to review programme achievements since the last mission in February 1996 as well as to survey its impact on NSs.

The mission was lead by Dr. Jean Pierre Revel, Senior Officer Relief Health at the Federation Secretariat, and consisted of the following team members: Professor Pierre Pellerin, External Federation Consultant, Ms. Daniela Huber, German RED CROSS Desk Officer for Former Soviet Union (FSU), Nikolai Nagorny, CHARP Co-ordinator and Alexander Komov, CHARP Medical Co-ordinator. Representatives of the relevant National Societies accompanied the mission during the visit to each country.

The mission visited five Regions out of six involved in CHARP and met with top officials at the Ministries of Health, Ministries of Emergencies, Regional Dispensaries, Red Cross National and Regional Headquarters. The team visited four MDLs in the field and met with people in the communities.

The evaluation team provided at the end of the mission some recommendations for the future orientation and development of the programme (medical screening, promotion of rehabilitation aspects, drug supplies, milk powder distribution, administrative management). These recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- to continue screening for thyroid gland cancer; the health check-up as a complementary service offered to the community also to be continued;
- the rehabilitation of affected communities should become a priority for all partners; dissemination of messages providing information help to take away stigmatisation of the radiated area; National Societies should invite media and governments to develop more activities in this field; Red Cross National Societies should play a significant role in developing PSS into a service delivery within other RED CROSS programmes among which Visiting Nurses Programme will be a key element;
- drug supplies (L-thyroxin and multivitamins) should be kept as a second rank priority. Such items may be considered if specific earmarked funding is provided or if the core activities of CHARP are adequately covered;
- milk powder is of no significant relevance for the programme;
- from the administrative point of view, more communication techniques should be used and less ICCC (International Chernobyl Coordinative Committee) as well as Working Group meetings should take place.

Working Group Meeting

A regular meeting of the Working Group was held on 5 October, 1999 in Bryansk. The main points of discussion were: a) conclusions and recommendations of the last Assessment Mission (30 August-10 September; b) role of the PSS and possible ways to transfer its contents into other services of the ONSs. Participants decided to convene an extraordinary session of the Working Group in Minsk to meet on the Plan of Action for PSS. The next ICCC meeting is scheduled to take place in March, 2000 in Belarus.

Information activities

The Minsk Delegation distributed to the Ministers of Emergency of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia the draft of the CHARP appeal document for 2000-2001. At the request of the British Red Cross Magazine, "Dignity for all", an article (accompanied with some pictures) on CHARP activities was prepared, and published in its Autumn 1999 Issue. A "life story" (with a photo) about the Red Cross Mobile Diagnostic Laboratory team's activities in the Brest region was sent to "Direct From The Field", and placed on the Federation's web site. Quarterly newsletters on CHARP were produced and distributed to the Governmental institutions, Embassies and Representatives of the International Organisations based in the countries as well as to the donor community.

The Delegation's Information Department has been actively involved in preparations for the next World Disasters Report 2000. A chapter will look at Chernobyl and the accident's long-term health effects. In addition, in November, a 'life-story' under the headline 'Thyroid gland cancer: who cares?' (Red Cross MDL medical screening in the Mogilev region of Belarus) was sent to the editorial staff of the World Disaster Report 2000 for a special box in the report covering Chernobyl.

Outstanding needs

Funding of the programme, both immediate and long-term, remains of serious concern. A further CHF 700,000 is required for 1999, though the budget for the year 2000 will be cut by some CHF 200,000 as the supply of milk-powder will be discontinued.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

In June, the PSS co-ordinator attended two international meetings, covering aspects on psycho-social traumatization and consequences of disasters. At the 7th Conference of European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies, the PSS co-ordinator attended a symposium devoted to issues ranging from psychological effects of crisis to specialised psycho-social trauma care. At the International Conference on Disaster Management and Medical Relief, the PSS co-ordinator presented a report on psycho-social programmes for the populations affected by the Chernobyl accident.

On June 19, the ECHO Desk Officer visited Kiev. The visit provided an opportunity to become acquainted with the activities of the URCS and the IFRC in visits to the CHARP Mobile Laboratory in Zhytomyr region and medical social centres in Zhytomyr and Kiev.

On June 21, members of the Kiev Representative Office and the Ukrainian RED CROSS participated in a meeting with representatives of the German Organisation "Children of Chernobyl" from Hannover, discussing Chernobyl issues and possible ways of co-operation between the Red Cross and the Fund. The parties exchanged the information about their activities on the assistance provided to the Chernobyl victims and in general agreed to find a way to cooperate.

The Information Officer and the CHARP Programme Co-ordinator facilitated the arrival of a French journalist and a press photographer. The aim of the visit was to follow one of the Mobile Diagnostic Laboratories in the framework of the CHARP Programme and to realise a newspaper report on the action of the International Red Cross. The 5 page report is expected to be published in January 2000 in the French weekly "La Vie".

On October 20, the Kiev Representative Office participated in the UN Theme Group on Chernobyl. The agenda of the meeting included the presentation of 'The Concept of protection of the Ukrainian Population from the Consequences of the Chernobyl Catastrophe' by the Chief of Radiological Protection Department of the Ministry of Emergencies; review of the UN Country Team activities; UN Secretary General's report on Chernobyl to the 54th General Assembly; the OCHA briefing at the Interagency Task Force meeting on Chernobyl. The UN has plans to issue a booklet/database on Chernobyl related activities aimed to update what has been done in relation to Chernobyl. The Federation's "CAS on CHARP" and Minsk Delegation's Chernobyl Newsletter (issue n.2) were distributed to the participants. There was also a short presentation about the CHARP, made Mr. Dusan Zubka, Head of the Chernobyl Department, Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva. He expressed appreciation of what the Federation does to assist the Chernobyl victims in the region.

All relevant Embassies from donor countries have been visited in Kiev and Minsk to introduce the CAS (Country Assistance Strategy) including CHARP and the planning activities of the Federation 2000-2001.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

According to the data, collected by the MDLs, the state of health of the population from the affected areas remains poor. The incidence of the thyroid gland pathologies and cancer in general is still comparatively high. This is observed especially among children and persons who were children at the time of the disaster. The psycho-social effects of the Chernobyl disaster is affecting the quality of life and well-being of the affected people. More than thirteen and a half years after the disaster, people are still touched by symptoms of stress, anxiety and related diseases in the radiated communities.

During the period under consideration, CHARP gradually increased the number of medical check-ups, focusing on the thyroid gland examinations, improving and expanding the psycho-social assistance to the population. In November 1999, the PSS Programme was started in the Regions of Russian Federation, affected by the Chernobyl disaster and is run now in all three countries.

The 3rd Evaluation Mission, carried out in September 1999, confirmed that CHARP is an important programme and is well organised, providing the population with vital medical and psychological assistance. The government, due to economic considerations, is not in a position to provide the kind of services provided by CHARP, and therefore cannot assume responsibility for the interventions. It is proposed that the Programme should be continued at least till the year 2006. However, to reach this goal a more sustainable funding base must be established.

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