



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

ALBANIA: HEAVY SNOWFALLS

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Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) allocated: 75,000

This operation was a solid example of the benefits of effective co-operation. The Albanian Red Cross (ARC) worked closely with partner national societies, the Regional Delegation in Budapest, national societies in the region, the Albanian government and other organizations working in the country. The results were a fast and co-ordinated response, an avoidance of duplication, and a successful operation. The most important result was that the vulnerable, even in the most remote and isolated areas cut-off by the heavy snows, received assistance and relief.

The Situation

Albania was blanketed by heavy snows in December of 2001. By late December, as the snow continued to fall, it was clear that an emergency situation was close at hand. The new year saw no let up in the snow-storms. In the north-east of the country, roads quickly became blocked, and after several weeks the more isolated regions were completely cut-off. The country had not seen such heavy and persistent snowfalls in over fifteen years. Generally unprepared for such an inundation, the affected population did not have sufficient food reserves and other basic items to last through an extended period of isolation, and were particularly vulnerable. Even at the best of times, the populations of these rural areas face daily hardships, poverty, a lack of resources and a weak economy. With the arrival of the snow their situation became critical. On January 7 the Albanian government declared a fifteen day state of emergency for the four districts affected. An inter-ministerial committee was established to co-ordinate relief efforts.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Albanian Red Cross immediately responded to the emergency situation. Under the auspices of the President of the Albanian Red Cross, a monitoring group was established at headquarters, charged with the task of monitoring the emergency situation. Each member of the group was assigned a specific task, and in daily meetings all newly emerging information was exchanged and discussed. Regular contacts were maintained with government offices and local Red Cross branches. Good contacts with the Emergency Group at the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Local Authorities were also established. These close contacts allowed for a better co-ordinated relief distribution effort, avoiding overlapping. The Regional Delegation in Budapest was also informed about ongoing events, which resulted in the release of Information Bulletins. A Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)



allocation of CHF 75 000 was requested and granted. The Albanian Red Cross response occurred in two phases, which are detailed below.

The first phase, which was from December 22 until January 20, saw the fastest possible response as soon as the need arose. The Albanian Red Cross immediately made available a large quantity of relief assistance (for 20,000 beneficiaries). Emergency stocks kept in Red Cross warehouses for disaster situations were immediately utilised. In addition, purchases of items such as wheat flour and oil were made. Due to roads being completely blocked, the Albanian Red Cross trucks were not able to reach the communities in need. As a result, from the district centres, the Ministry of Defence made both vehicles and helicopters available for distribution to remote villages and communes. Later on KFOR also made helicopters available for relief distribution to the most isolated areas. The Albanian Red Cross disseminated information to national and international media, including organisations such as the BBC, Reuters and VOA, among others.

Lessons learned:

On the positive side, there was a very fast response to the emergency situation. As well, the close co-operation with government structures allowed for better co-ordination of relief distribution.

The extreme weather conditions caused some difficulties. There were cases when helicopters loaded with relief supplies had to be diverted (due to fog or other bad weather) to different communities than originally designated in the plan. As a result, Red Cross staff and structures were not in place (as they had been waiting in the originally planned locations). Additionally, the distribution standards of the Red Cross were not always able to be respected. This was due to the weight restrictions in the helicopters, which meant that only 800 kg of goods at a time could be transported. The packaging of the relief supplies meant that it was difficult to split them into smaller sizes more suitable for helicopter transport. Another constraint was that Red Cross staff were not always able to travel to the areas where the relief supplies were distributed. In such cases local authorities took charge of the distribution. The Albanian Red Cross also encountered some difficulties in collecting beneficiary lists from communes after the distributions had taken place.

Phase One Distributions:

- ◆ 110 metric tonnes of wheat flour
- ◆ 8,000 litres of oil
- ◆ 51 tonnes of canned meat and vegetables
- ◆ 8,000 blankets
- ◆ 3.2 tonnes of soap

The second phase of operations covered the period from January 20 to February 20, 2002.

Significant developments occurred which allowed for a change in the operation. The improvement of weather conditions combined with the opening of the roads meant that Red Cross personnel and vehicles were able to directly access the communities affected.

Assessment visits were made by three different working groups. This was done in co-operation with the American, German and Spanish Red Cross delegations in the country. These groups collected information about the conditions and needs of the affected populations. One conclusion was that food assistance would be necessary for at least an additional one month period. The distribution of food relief was carried out completely by the Albanian Red Cross. Items were sent directly to the Kukes Red Cross branch, along with clear instructions regarding logistics, volunteer management, expenses and so on. To avoid duplication of assistance, co-operation continued with the Civil Emergency Directory. Following their proposal, villages were selected for relief distribution (the criteria used was to select poor villages which had remained cut off for a thirty day period). This resulted in the selection of the ten most affected communities of the Kukes prefecture. The Kukes Red Cross branch also organised the distribution for the Has and Tropoja districts. This was the first real test for the new organisational structure of the Albanian Red Cross.

An appropriate warehouse was identified and rented in Kukes. From there, relief items were distributed (via locally rented vehicles) directly to the targeted villages. In most cases the vehicles themselves served as the distribution points in the villages.



The distribution food item norm for each family was established at 30 kg of wheat flour and two additional food parcels (of 10.7 kg each) as well as canned food.

Lessons learned:

The operation showed that there was very good organisation of relief distribution at the headquarters and district levels. The distribution points were also well run and efficient, with no problems relating to security during the entire distribution period. There was good Red Cross volunteer visibility, with some eighty volunteers being involved. The time period of operations was short. Within twenty days the response stage was over, and included the transportation of items from Tirana to Kukes, the drafting of beneficiary lists and the transportation of items to remote villages. There was also excellent media coverage of the operation.

<p>Phase Two Distributions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 125 tonnes of wheat flour ◆ 8 352 food parcels ◆ 10 tonnes of canned food ◆ 21 000 beneficiaries
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Considerations for improvement have also been noted. The lists of beneficiary families did not show the actual number of people in the families. A figure of five was used in the absence of this information. In some cases a relative of the beneficiary family would sign for the goods, rather than the beneficiary family themselves. As well, beneficiary identification cards were not used. This was allowed to happen due to the small size of the villages and the fact that all concerned knew each other. No irregularities were reported.

The fact that there were three different types of wheat flour packages (a result of three different donors) caused some concern and misunderstandings regarding the distribution norms. There were some volunteers involved in the operation who had not received proper relief training. The distribution process was not combined with any other awareness activities, which is a point for future consideration. During the second phase of distributions the American Red Cross organised monitoring activities in the Red Cross branch in Kukes and in some of the communes of that district.

Donor Support for the Operation:	
<u>American RC:</u>	80 tonnes of wheat flour, 10,000 food parcels brought from Bulgaria, with collaboration from the Bulgarian RC
<u>Austrian RC:</u>	60 tonnes of wheat flour
<u>DREF funds:</u>	75,000 CHF
<u>Canadian Embassy:</u>	12,450 USD
<u>Federation Funds:</u>	34,000 CHF
<u>Norwegian RC:</u>	10,000 CHF

Evaluation of the operation:

An overall evaluation of the operation was carried out on March 5, 2002. The conclusions of the evaluation are the following:

- ◆ The Albanian Red Cross responded well, although the overall planning could have been improved. It is important to note that difficulties encountered during

the first phase were corrected in the second phase.

- ◆ More care should have been taken to stress the Red Cross identity during the operation in order to facilitate future projects and operations.
- ◆ The partner national societies were a definite part of the relief operation, and should consider themselves as such
- ◆ The Albanian Red Cross standard for disaster response was shown to be a good one, but there is room for improvement
- ◆ More attention should have been paid to the fund-raising aspect of the operation, in order to better absorb all of the pledges that were made
- ◆ Overall co-ordination can be improved.

DREF allocation information:

The well developed disaster preparedness capacity of the Albanian Red Cross meant that the DREF funds were able to be used rapidly and directly in areas where funds were specifically needed. A total of 75 000 CHF in DREF funds were quickly made available for covering needs in the first phase of the emergency. Due to the fact that the Albanian Red Cross had already established a well stocked warehouse (in line with its general Disaster Preparedness strategy), the DREF funds were not used directly for purchasing relief supplies and so on, but were

instead used to *replenish* the stocks of the warehouse (which had been immediately used for relief operations). In addition, DREF funds were used to cover related immediate expenses, such as the hiring of trucks, the rental of temporary warehouse facilities, and for other essential costs. The Albanian Red Cross has reported that the DREF funds were of a sufficient amount, and that they were received in a timely manner (through the bank account of the Federation office in Albania). A specific project code was established for the DREF funds (PAL 517). As a result of the disaster preparedness programme in place, it was not necessary to rely on previously established agreements to acquire stock quickly, since these stocks were already ready and in place in the DP warehouse.

Conclusion:

The Albanian Red Cross received valuable lessons from this emergency situation. The response was swift and effective, and involved a variety of players. The good co-operation and co-ordination achieved during the operation was both encouraging and instructive. Concrete lessons were learned, and steps for improvement were immediately implemented. The importance and value of the disaster preparedness stocks in the warehouse proved themselves beyond doubt, allowing for the quickest possible response, providing much needed relief supplies to those vulnerable people cut-off by the heavy snows.

The Albanian Red Cross ably demonstrated its abilities during this emergency. Thanks to the support and assistance of partner national societies and donors, the Albanian Red Cross will now be even more capable and effective should the need arise in the future.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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