

ALBANIA: CIVIL UNREST

13 June 1997

***Special appeal ICRC/Federation 1997
situation report no. 1
period covered: April/May 1997***

Following the collapse of pyramid saving schemes the situation in Albania deteriorated, resulting in mass emigration, a period of anarchy, destruction of factories and of private business, leading to a sharp increase in the numbers of vulnerable persons. The economy, although suffering high inflation, is not yet in free fall but serious problems are likely to develop during the year if the political situation does not improve and if winter is not preceded by a good harvest.

The context

Following the unrest in Albania, the ICRC and the Federation launched a special integrated appeal on 18 March to provide emergency assistance to social and medical institutions and to the most vulnerable and to reactivate and strengthen Albanian Red Cross branches.

Latest events

The Government, local authorities and UN bodies all state that at present there is no humanitarian crisis in terms of lack of food or medical supplies. There are no fuel shortfalls and supplies of water and electricity remain mostly constant. Whatever shortages there were in the aftermath of the crisis have mostly been made up by the intervention of the Red Cross and, to a lesser extent, other organisations. Vulnerable groups identified during the selection of beneficiaries for food assistance are those one would expect to find in any emerging economy.

Industrial and agricultural production has effectively ceased and the Government continues to print money to pay salaries without any taxation base. Armed gangs continue to operate in many areas of Albania, particularly the South where the Government has no authority. The numbers

killed and wounded has fallen over recent weeks but insecurity and the ineffectiveness of law enforcement throughout the country remain the greatest obstacles to normalisation.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Albanian Red Cross (ARC) is among the very few humanitarian organisations able to cope with the emergency thanks to the effective co-operation/co-ordination and the joint efforts of the three members of the Movement.

Assistance to Institutions •

(Hospitals, homes for elderly, orphanages, handicapped centres). Together with ICRC ARC delivered 100 mt of food and medical supplies to 63 institutions throughout Albania over the last three months. The programme has gone well and establishments are now receiving their normal state budgets. Distributions in future will be made on an ad hoc basis following an assessment of special needs.

Vulnerable group feeding programme •

On the basis of an ARC assessment -- showing 10% of the total population needs assistance -- 70,000 families will receive three food parcels until the end of September. The Albanian Red Cross, through its branch network, is responsible for the distribution programme from the moment that food parcels are delivered by ICRC to their warehouses.

ARC branches in 25 of the 36 districts have worked with their respective social security departments to produce lists of vulnerable families. These districts will receive distributions in June. The remaining districts are presently on standby either because secure warehousing cannot be guaranteed or for fear of disruption of the distribution by local gangs.

A total of 12,455 parcels have been supplied by the Federation and distribution commenced on 26 May in Tirana. This has gone smoothly and to date 11,300 have been distributed to 5,650 families. Due to the small size of the parcels (12kgs) -- half the size of the standard parcel -- two have been distributed to each family.

Federation Support to ARC •

Three Landcruisers have been supplied to ARC by the Federation, together with VHF and HF radio equipment. This has been vital in providing the ARC co-ordinators independent means to support the branches and to provide escorts to ICRC vehicles and convoys. Three Mercedes 8mt trucks have just arrived in Albania. These will be especially useful in delivering supplies to the mountainous rural areas.

The appeal also allocates funds for office equipment, branch strengthening, and for the purchase of 20 premises and/or land for new branch offices. A local building advisor is being contracted to advise on building standards and prices of premises. A secure warehouse in Tirana is still needed before the office equipment (fax machines, photocopiers etc) for the branches can be obtained either locally or from Geneva.

Outstanding needs

The ARC development programme for 1997 has been postponed due to the crisis. ARC now needs

to assess the likely effects on particular vulnerable groups such as pensioners, large families on welfare, single parent families, expectant mothers etc and also to concentrate on

Disaster Preparedness activities and First Aid. A Development Delegate position will be opened soon. For more information please contact Leopoldo Principe on ++4122 7304319.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Government: Relations with the Reconciliation government are good. However, due to the temporary status of this administration, no major policy decisions are being taken. This makes it impossible for the ARC to enter into any agreements over Health and Social Welfare programmes or to establish what the Government policy is or will be in this area.

United Nations: WHO and UNICEF are providing limited support to the Ministry of Health through the provision of medical supplies to institutions and a vaccination programme. WFP has brought in approximately 1,300 mt of flour for supply to beneficiaries and has 60 mt of high protein biscuits in the port waiting for suitable but as yet unidentified beneficiaries. Medical and relief co-ordination meetings are held weekly chaired by WHO and WFP respectively.

NGOs: A large number of NGOs, particularly from the medical field, attend co-ordination meetings but have as yet no activities. The only active NGOs at present are Caritas and CRS who run small distributions of food parcels and medical supplies to institutions.

The Red Cross still remains therefore the most active player in Albania in the medical and food distribution fields.

Conclusion

The ARC/ICRC/Federation partnership is in a good position and Albanian Red Cross is possibly the sole humanitarian organisation in Albania with the knowledge and logistical capacity to react quickly in an emergency such as the one the country now faces. ARC will be a major factor in supporting an ailing nation and its population until peace and prosperity are attained.

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