

# ***ALBANIA: REFUGEE INFLUX FROM KOSOVO***

**appeal no: 17/98**  
**11 June 1998**

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 3,223,000  
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES  
TO ASSIST 10,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR FOUR MONTHS***

## ***Summary***

As the influx of refugees from Kosovo continues, border communities in northern Albanian are reaching saturation point. With no surplus food production in the area, the local population already lives a precarious existence. Family reserves are being exhausted as they respond to the refugees' needs. The International Federation is launching this appeal to assist 10,000 refugees for four months and to support those affected by the refugee influx.

## ***The Disaster***

On 29 May particularly heavy fighting was reported in the Decani-Djakovica area in the Serbian province of Kosovo, close to the Albanian border. The following day, refugees began to arrive in the Tropoje commune in northern Albania, the majority passing through the village of Padeshi close to the border.

To date, over 8,000 refugees have been registered by Albanian officials in the commune of Tropoje, although UNHCR estimates that over 10,000 have actually entered the country. Refugees continue to arrive although the rate appears to be slowing down. All have crossed the border on foot and are mainly women, children and elderly. First estimates indicate that 50% are under 16 years of age, 30% are women and 20% are men, many of them traumatised by the sudden and violent events which have caused them to flee their homes.

The district of Tropoje is a remote mountainous region and the poorest in Albania. The economy is based on agriculture but there is no surplus food production in the area. Telephone communication to the area is difficult and roads within the region are bad.

So far, registered refugees have been received by local families, many of whom are related to the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo. Conditions are deteriorating, with some 15 to 20 refugees sharing a single room. Hygiene is a major concern. The commune of Tropoje and others surrounding it have now reached saturation point and refugees are being moved to communes further away. The point has also been reached where the UNHCR is considering housing refugees in empty buildings.

## ***The Response so far***

### **Government Action w**

Albanian law entitles ethnic Albanians in Kosovo to receive Albanian citizenship and so technically they are not refugees. However, in the present situation they are being treated as such and are receiving all assistance entitled to refugees.

The Ministry of Interior and Office of Refugees is monitoring the situation closely and registering the arrivals. Following the initial and inevitable confusion, the Government has set up a management committee in Bajram Curri, the administrative centre of Tropoje district, to report on the situation and improve registration, transport and communication. Daily management and co-ordination meetings are held and attended by all agencies, including the Albanian Red Cross (ARC), the International Federation and ICRC. The Government appears to be mindful of the needs of host families housing refugees and it is anticipated that they will receive a financial allowance.

#### **Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w**

The emergency preparedness stock of 60 mt of food and non-food items put in place by the International Federation in Albania following a request to donors on 19 March has proved invaluable in enabling the Red Cross to respond rapidly to the emergency. The CHF 190,000 raised by the request was generously provided by the British, Swedish, American and Italian Red Cross Societies and the Libyan Red Crescent.

A joint ARC/International Federation/ICRC mission arrived in Tropoje on the second day of the crisis with seven mt of food and medical supplies. Since then, the ARC, with support from the Federation and the ICRC, has sent 50 mt of food, 600 mattresses, 400 blankets, medical supplies, soap and detergent. In addition to the emergency stocks provided by the Federation, the Albanian Red Cross has purchased locally quantities of wheat flour, white beans, oil, salt and sugar to meet the refugees' needs before the arrival of further stocks.

Due to the narrow and dangerous mountain roads, only small trucks of a maximum 10 mt capacity can reach the Tropoje area. The ARC has three such trucks provided by the International Federation following last year's emergency and these vehicles are carrying the relief items to the affected areas.

Food and non-food items are being distributed according to the standard ration norm to refugees in the Tropoje area and also to groups of refugees in other locations. Three branches of the ARC in the border region with Kosovo will be closely involved in providing assistance. They are supported by experienced staff from the Albanian Red Cross headquarters, two Federation relief delegates and an information delegate.

The disaster preparedness stock established by the Federation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM) will — contrary to initial plans described in the *Alert* of 4 June — be kept in Skopje. The Federation has decided that instead of moving it to Albania, larger procurements will be made immediately in local and regional markets in order to continue to cover the needs of the refugees in the coming weeks.

Regional procurement utilising the best prices and suppliers identified in the tendering procedure for the disaster preparedness stocks in March-April have therefore already been authorised by the Federation Secretariat totalling CHF 608,000 to meet the urgent food and non-food needs. The Federation would like to stress the importance of and preference for cash donations in response to this appeal, which while ensuring flexibility and the speedy procurement of relief items, will also provide a healthy boost to local and regional markets. In-kind donations will, however, be integrated into regionally-procured relief supplies.

The International Federation is co-ordinating the international Red Cross assistance effort in Albania. Working in conjunction with the ICRC, the Federation is responsible for mobilising the supply of food and non-food items, while the ICRC is providing medical supplies and services to the refugees and is concentrating on protection and tracing issues. The ICRC has a doctor and a delegate in Tropoje and will be increasing its presence in the area. In Kosovo itself, the ICRC is directing and co-ordinating the international relief operation, where an overall needs

assessment will be carried out in consultation with the International Federation and Yugoslav Red Cross.

#### **Other Agencies' Action w**

UNHCR is co-ordinating the UN's emergency contingency plan in Albania which was updated in May this year. It is distributing a stock of 10,000 ready-to-eat meals, 2,000 blankets, 200 kitchen sets and 5,000 pieces of soap. Although WFP had no food stocks in the country prior to the emergency, it has begun to implement its contingency plan and is transporting emergency food rations from the region to Bajram Curri to feed 40,000 people for one month.

OXFAM will be responsible for water and sanitation, Médecins sans Frontieres, Merlin and Children's Aid Direct have volunteered to assist in the health sector and UNICEF has delivered a limited quantity of medical supplies and soap.

## ***The Intended Operation***

#### **Immediate Needs •**

The emergency stock pre-positioned by the Federation in Tirana has succeeded in meeting the most immediate needs. This stock, supplemented by local and regional purchases now being made by ARC/Federation, will cover the needs of the present refugee population for up to three weeks.

#### **Anticipated Later Needs •**

Due to the uncertain nature of events taking place in Kosovo, and the paucity of reliable information from the sector sealed off by the Serbian authorities, it is very difficult to estimate the number of refugees who will eventually seek refuge in Albania — or how long they are likely to stay.

As the main humanitarian organisation in Albania, with its network of branches throughout the country, the Albanian Red Cross is well placed to identify refugee groups, and to monitor and respond to their needs outside the Tropoje area.

A quick settlement of the situation is seen as unlikely and the ARC has therefore requested the International Federation's support in providing medium-term assistance to the refugee population.

The area of Tropoje is economically very poor and conditions in winter extremely harsh. It is therefore expected that many refugees will move away from this area in time. Already a number of refugees have drifted to some of the larger towns and cities such as the port of Durres, which has received a group of 400 refugees which ARC is assisting with food and non food items.

It is anticipated that at least 10,000 refugees will require food and non-food support for the next four months. However, the local population, hosting large numbers of refugees from Kosovo is equally vulnerable. In a region struggling to meet the basic food needs of the existing population, reserves have been exhausted and assistance will be needed to support host families. Due to the dispersal of refugees amongst the local families, the distribution of individual food parcels providing the full calorific needs for one month is recommended, together with water purification tablets. Mattresses, bed-linen, blankets and clothing will also be distributed. A sufficient number of hygiene parcels designed for the needs of a large proportion of women amongst the refugee population is required, as is to baby food to support the significant numbers of babies (1,500) and young children amongst the refugees.

#### **Red Cross Objective •**

w To provide food and non-food assistance to 10,000 refugees for four months.

## ***National Society/Federation Plan of Action***

### **Emergency Phase: 31 May - June 1998 •**

The emergency phase of this operation began on 31 May and is expected to last three weeks. The local branch and its volunteers in the Tropoje area are now working with the support of two Albanian Red Cross co-ordinators and two International Federation relief delegates.

### **Phase Two: June - October 1998 •**

Given the anticipated movement of refugees away from the Tropoje area, ARC branches and their volunteers elsewhere are likely to need similar support. At the same time, the International Federation will need to review its staffing and transport requirements. This medium-term support is intended at this stage to last no longer than four months. If there are longer-term needs, the Federation would anticipate WFP stepping up its own food supplies. In this event, the Albanian Red Cross will constitute the only effective national distribution network in the country and be well placed to identify needs in communities outside Tropoje.

### **Capacity of the National Society •**

The ARC has 30 staff members at its headquarters in Tirana; 12 full-time paid staff in major districts and an additional 15 paid part-time staff. It supports 36 projects in local communities, with current activities including disaster preparedness, first aid, social activities, health activities and fund raising.

It is a major participant in a joint contingency plan for the current emergency and sits on six of the eight UN-chaired committees. It has been closely involved in all stages of the planning and is the main humanitarian organisation in Albania with 36 branch offices. The Albanian Red Cross was involved in a major emergency food and medical supply distribution in 1997 in a joint operation with the ICRC and the International Federation.

It has four landcruisers and three 10 mt trucks. The internal transport needs can presently be covered by the National Society, but communications between Tirana and the region of Tropoje will need improving.

### **Present Capacity of the Federation in Albania •**

The International Federation has reopened a Delegation in Albania, staffed by a Head of Delegation (co-ordinating the relief efforts), two relief/logistics delegates and an information delegate. The Federation's regional communications delegate is assisting the Delegation in assessing and improving communications between the capital and the field operations in the Tropoje area.

### **Evaluation •**

An evaluation of the programme is planned for October, at the end of the second emergency response phase.

## ***Budget summary***

See Annex 1 for budget details and Annexes 2, 3 and 4 for the list of items included in the food and hygiene parcels.

## ***Conclusion***

Through effective disaster preparedness planning, the International Red Cross Movement has become the major contributor to the relief operation in support of the 10,000 ethnic Albanian refugees who have arrived in the last ten days in the Tropoje region.

In order to continue this level of support cash and in-kind donations are urgently required. The Norwegian Government and the Norwegian Red Cross have already pledged CHF 430,000. The International Federation urges the international community to respond rapidly and generously to this appeal.

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