

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: WINTER SUPPORT FOR SIBERIAN NORTHERN TERRITORIES

appeal no: 29/99
2 November 1999

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 47,500,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 770,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR 10 MONTHS***

Summary

Millions of Russians are trapped in the bleakest poverty. The most conservative estimates (government data) report that one third of its 147 million citizens live below a poverty line of USD 1 per day, while the Russian Centre for the Standard of Living puts the figure at over 50 per cent. The Russian Red Cross (RRC) and the International Federation have, over the past two years, mounted massive broad-spectrum aid campaigns to bring emergency food, clothing, medical and hygiene assistance to over a million of the worst-hit: including elderly living alone, multi-child and single-headed families, isolated communities, invalids, those living in institutions and specialised programmes for the vulnerable living in isolated communities. These programmes have been generously supported, but limited in their ability to provide much more than token help in emergency situations.

As the winter has already begun in this part of Russia and governmental services and individual coping mechanisms are insufficient to meet many basic needs, the Russian Red Cross will be called upon to provide support for those most vulnerable. The Russian Red Cross, working with the Federation's Delegation in Moscow, will reduce beneficiary numbers, in order to target the extremely vulnerable in the poorest, most isolated regions of this vast territory. Limited emergency aid will again be given, but this year there will be an increased focus on community development, with ten pilot income-generation programmes planned, and a strong bias towards community health and sanitation, concentrating on keeping people healthy and out of hospitals. Included in the budget of this year's Appeal is a bulk food component for the Northern region.

The Russian Red Cross has used data from assessment missions, monitoring reports and state statistics to target 20 regions in west, central and eastern Siberia. A major refinement of distribution lists has taken place, with only the most vulnerable five per cent considered as beneficiaries and will prioritise elderly living alone, multi-child families, single-headed families, bedridden invalids, those living in elderly homes and specialised institutions, and homes for orphans and abandoned children. The Federation's health strategy for Russia focuses on the prevention of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases through the Visiting Nurses programme and information and educational activities. By protecting

the culture of the many indigenous groups in Northern Russia and Central Siberia, emphasis will be placed on recovering traditional coping mechanisms.

The Humanitarian Situation

Russia's descent into poverty has been well chronicled. From a humanitarian point of view, the single most important contributory factor in recent history has been the financial crisis of 17 August 1998, which ruined the cash economy in many areas, caused salary payments to be frozen, put hundreds of thousands out of work, and highlighted the government's inability to cater for the new needs, unknown in Soviet times. In 1998, there was a near-failure of the traditional summer shipment of millions of tonnes of life-sustaining supplies into the remote areas of Siberia. Even if governmental support improves in 1999, it is expected to be insufficient to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

In Soviet times, huge communities were established in the North. An enormous fishing industry sprang up, together with sensitive scientific and defence bases, employing millions of European Russians in areas where beforehand only indigenous groups possessed the necessary skills to survive.

In 1998, the Far North Route failed, with only about 25 per cent of vital supplies (fuel, medicaments, and food) getting through. Living conditions plummeted, and an emergency was avoided in Kamchatka only when an icebreaker entered the port of Petropavlovsk in November, ferrying in urgent supplies of coal for power stations. The Federation responded by sending assessment teams to four regions in the Far Northeast, and launching an Appeal (No. 05/99) on 8 February to help over 80,000 people in early 1999.

Many government resources which may have been available to support the region are presently supporting developments in the North Caucasus.

It is anticipated that this year only 15 percent of vital supplies will be channelled through the Far Northeast Route, leaving already vulnerable groups in isolated regions in a precarious humanitarian situation. Working in such isolated regions presents particular challenges to the Red Cross. Any aid must be efficiently targeted, and provision must be made for higher logistics costs than other operations.

In Russia, males can expect to live to an average of just 58 years, while 16 children per thousand die in infancy, compared to 11 in western Europe. Seven times the number of children between one and nineteen die every year, compared to the figure in the UK, with the major causes of death being accidents, injuries, poisonings, violence, malnutrition and poor living conditions. The World Health Organisation has blamed the country's shrinking life expectancy on poverty, unemployment, homelessness, excessive drinking and smoking.

More disturbingly, communicable diseases like AIDS and tuberculosis are spreading at alarming rates, with one Russian dying every 25 minutes of TB. International health officials agree that drug resistant TB is ominously close to spreading across Russia's borders into Europe.

Increased vulnerability to natural hazards such as floods and agricultural pests compound the problem. When living so close to destitution, few households or health facilities can muster enough resources to protect themselves from such additional shocks.

The Response so far

Government Action

The Russian government has been severely stretched by the socio-economic crisis, particularly since the financial collapse of August 1998. There is no countrywide strategy to deal with the national emergency, and economic reform has been almost halted by impending elections. Observers agree that without political stability no reforms will be effected, leaving the most vulnerable highly exposed. Different regions have responded to the crisis in various ways. Almost all have prioritised the payment of pensions

over salaries, although monthly pensions for elderly living lone remain at about USD 8 per month in most cases. In some areas power rationing is used as a means to conserve dwindling energy stocks, while in others the rocketing price of petroleum products has led to street protests.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w

This will be the third large-scale winter operation undertaken by the Red Cross in Russia. In the past two years, over three million Russians have been assisted through direct Federation/RRC programmes, with up to four million more helped by bilateral programmes and project delegations run by the American, Finnish, Netherlands and Norwegian Red Cross Societies.

The programmes to date have concentrated on mitigating the effects of the socio-economic crisis in Russia, through provision of supplementary food aid. The programmes have impacted less than one per cent of the population, at a cost per beneficiary of USD 13. Programmes have lasted longer than intended, while aid has not started to reach beneficiaries until later than planned due to customs difficulties, logistical and transport problems, readiness of funds and procurement procedures.

However, in such a highly-complex environment, covering ten time zones and reaching remote, sparsely-populated and cold regions, extreme challenges are expected. It is felt that in this third winter programme most of the difficulties have already been foreseen.

In the past, much support has been in-kind, either from governments, National Societies, groups or corporations. While in-kind support is sought in this Appeal, cash contributions are more urgently needed, particularly for in-country procurement, which has had a proven benefit on local economies (supply and production) as well as easing restrictions caused by importation, customs clearance, and onward shipping, especially cash contributions towards air lifting humanitarian supplies over long distances are important.

Of crucial importance to the survival of the most vulnerable in Russia have been bilateral Red Cross programmes and project delegations. These have been concentrated in Murmansk/Archangelsk (Norwegian Red Cross), Karelia (Finnish Red Cross), Magadan (Netherlands Red Cross) and Central Siberia (American Red Cross, Project Delegation). This Appeal recognises the importance of these programmes. In 1999-2000, the Red Cross will be covering a significant portion of central Siberia and the Northern Far-East. A single, co-ordinated Red Cross programme will thus reach some of the world's most isolated and needy populations in an area straddling the borders of three continents.

The **Norwegian Red Cross** plans to provide assistance in Murmansk, Archangelsk, Karelia and Nenets Okrug. Activities will include soup kitchens, family food parcels, second hand clothes as well as supplementary food for TB treatment institutions.

The **Netherlands Red Cross** plans to assist 15 regions. The programmes will consist of providing family food parcels, soup kitchens, and possibly hygiene parcels, over a six-month period.

The **Finnish Red Cross** has ongoing programmes in Karelia and Murmansk, covering hospitals and children homes with medicines.

Other Agencies' Action w

International and Russian relief organisations generally operate in the larger cities, usually supporting soup kitchens and providing clothes to schools, hospitals, church groups and street children. The United Nations works with refugees and forced migrants, but has no large scale humanitarian programmes. It is currently elaborating a country strategy, cosponsored by the International Federation. At present, the UN agencies refer donors to the International Federation's Appeals for Russia. MSF, Merlin and PWHHA/Soros Foundation collaborate with the Federation/RRC on tuberculosis-related issues, and also run programmes, notably in prisons, in Tomsk and Buryatia. However, it is well recognised that only Russian Red Cross has the network to make effective, large-scale humanitarian interventions particularly in the remoter rural areas where the greatest concentrations of vulnerable are located. Some church groups have airlifted food aid into the Northern regions.

Co-ordination w

It is unlikely that any other agencies will launch countrywide programmes this winter, and certainly not in the inaccessible, low media profile regions outlined in this Appeal. Therefore, the International Federation and the Russian Red Cross will co-ordinate primarily with governmental ministries and local administrations. Excellent collaboration has been established to date, and good collaboration is expected in the areas added to this operation in 1999/2000. High levels of co-ordination will continue within the Movement, with particular reference to the Bilateral/Project Delegations outlines above and with the ICRC, notably on issues relating to population movements from and within the North Caucasus.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

Prior experience, international assessments, anticipated trends, detailed analysis of the situation in Russia and reports from Red Cross branches has confirmed the urgent need for limited emergency aid to specific groups in Russia. With up to 40 million persons regarded as living below the poverty line, the Federation and RRC has had to make difficult choices related to how many people they can help, in which regions and in what categories. Acting on the recommendations of the British/Swedish/Russian Red Cross evaluation of July 1999, it was decided to reduce beneficiary numbers in order to increase material aid given to individuals. Thus, instead of giving limited aid to large groups, beneficiary criteria refinement will enable the Red Cross to make meaningful impacts on the lives and living conditions of those most in need. Broader sections of the community will be reached through ten pilot development programmes, which will focus on establishing, enhancing or revitalising community coping mechanisms, many of which were lost during the Soviet era. Among indigenous communities this might include fish processing, handicrafts, and agriculture, while more traditional community-based programmes will be started in areas populated by migrant European Russians.

Immediate Needs •

The immediate need is to ensure the survival of the most vulnerable throughout the long Siberian winter. To do this, it is proposed to supply food parcels and bulk food to selected areas in 20 regions.

Elderly individuals living alone, bedridden invalids, multi-child families and single-headed families identified by the Red cross will receive a food parcel consisting of: 2 kg of flour, 2 kg of buckwheat, 2 kg of sugar, 2 kg of macaroni, 1 kg of dried fruit, 1 litre of vegetable oil, 4 tins of beef, 2 kg of beans, 1 kg of condensed milk, and 0.5 kg of tea.

The areas to be served are located within Komi, Nenetsk, Kirov, Komi/Perm, Kurgan, Tyumen, Yamalo Nemensk, Khanti Mansiisk, Altai Krai, Altai Republic, Taimyr, Evenkia, Khakassia, Tuva, Buryatia, Chita, Chukotka, Koryak, Magadan, Kamchatka and Yakutia.

Bulk food aid will be delivered to the Northern regions, as logistical (transport, distribution) difficulties preclude food parcel distribution. Deliveries may have to be made by air, as all sea and river ports have frozen from mid-October. The only other forms of transport are caterpillar trucks or dogsleds across ice roads - known as "winter roads" - which form during the winter months.

Bulk food aid, for families and for persons confined to institutions will consist of a three-month food allocation per person. The contents are: 2 kg of wheat flour, 2 kg of rice, 2 kg of beans, 2 kg of buckwheat, 2 kg of sugar and 2 litres of vegetable oil.

Anticipated Later Needs •

Three rounds of distributions are planned in all non-arctic regions. Depending on accessibility, arctic regions will receive one or two rounds of bulk food aid distributions.

Although there is an evident need for emergency food aid, the Federation and RRC recognise that food aid cannot be considered a universal remedy for community problems. Accordingly, up to ten pilot programmes will be implemented to provide the tools and skills for achieving self-sufficiency.

High emphasis will be placed on recuperating or developing local coping mechanisms, particularly among indigenous communities, whose natural coping mechanisms were eradicated during the Soviet era. Projects under research include animal husbandry, seed for crops and multiplication, knitting, traditional handicrafts, drop-in centres for elderly people, and manufacturing traditional felt boots.

Red Cross Objectives •

- to provide humanitarian assistance to 770,000 of Russia's most isolated and vulnerable, primarily focusing on children and elderly living alone;
- to procure, transport, deliver and monitor emergency aid (food parcels, bulk food, hygienic items, seeds and soup kitchens) to lone elderly, multi-child families, single-headed families, bedridden invalids, residents in elderly homes, abandoned or orphaned children and specialised hospitals;
- to protect and nurture indigenous coping mechanisms through initiating ten pilot small-scale community development/income-generation programmes in order to achieve self-sufficiency;
- to prioritise healthy lifestyles focusing on nutritional support, sanitation, personal hygiene and health education; and,
- to promote the development of the Russian Red Cross.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

First Phase: November - December 1999 •

Workshop for all involved regions; tendering and procurement process; start of production and first distribution of food parcels; transport and initial distribution of second-hand clothes; cash transfers to Red Cross branches; serving hot meals through soup kitchens; identification of community development projects.

Phase Two: January - May 2000 •

Start of second round of distribution; shipping and distribution of bulk food supplies; distribution of second-hand clothes; procurement of seeds; procurement and distribution of hygiene items; monitoring; elaboration and implementation of community development projects.

Phase Three: April - June 2000 •

Finalising distribution of the third round of food parcels, bulk food, second-hand clothes and hygiene items; seed distribution; monitoring; closure of soup kitchens; evaluation of community developments programmes.

Final phase: July - August 2000 •

Closing seminar for RRC branches and headquarters.

Capacity of the National Society •

This is a Russian Red Cross operation, supported by the International Federation. The RRC is now undergoing a reform process, aimed at making it, among other things, a prime provider of humanitarian assistance to the population, without reliance on international expertise. It is vital that if the institutional development process is to succeed, the RRC must be recognised as more than a distribution agent for the International Federation, and that its capacity to run large-scale aid programmes is not only recognised, but nurtured. At present, RRC has a staff of 65 at its Moscow headquarters, with some 400,000 people officially listed as members.

Present Capacity of the Federation in Russia •

The Federation is currently represented by a Head of Delegation, Relief Co-ordinator, Programme Co-ordinator for the American Red Cross bulk food aid, Information Delegate, Resource Development Delegate, Health Delegate and seven field Delegates (three for the Far Northeast programme and four for the American Bulk Food Programme). Delegates have been supplied by the Federation, Swedish Red Cross, British Red Cross, American Red Cross and Canadian Red Cross. There are three consultants (Legal, Relief, Water-Sanitation), a Peace Corps-sponsored Resource Development volunteer, and a TACIS/EU-sponsored ID consultant also working with the delegation. The Delegation has 20 National staff, most of them attached to specific programmes.

The International Federation supports Russian Red Cross not only in the main emergency relief programmes (Winter Emergency, Yakutia Floods, Sakhalin Earthquake, Tuberculosis Prevention, Far Northeast Appeal) but also with its internal reform, legal status, resource development, Youth, Blood, Membership, public relations, first aid, disaster preparedness and response, visiting nurses programme and translations service.

Evaluation •

The 1999 Winter Emergency Appeal was the subject of an in-depth evaluation, jointly undertaken by the British, Swedish and Russian Red Cross Societies. Many of its recommendations have been included in this year's Appeal.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The Russian Red Cross is committed to meeting the most urgent needs of vulnerable groups which have been most affected by the country's continued socio-economic difficulties and will face real challenges to survive the forthcoming winter. Using valuable experiences gained from the implementation of winter assistance programmes the past two years, this Appeal will provide not only humanitarian support but will also include programmes to help increase self-sufficiency of individuals and communities.

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