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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

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This report is published daily as a general update on Red Cross Red Crescent activities during the Balkans crisis, targeting primarily the Movement's components and supporters. Today's text can also be found on the internet: www.ifrc.org and www.icrc.org.

LATEST EVENTS

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Mr Maksim Korac, the Federal Governments' Co-ordinator for Humanitarian Assistance, in a letter to the major international humanitarian organisations still in Belgrade, states that according to preliminary information obtained by the local Red Cross branches, 900,000 people have been affected by the current crisis. The letter requests each organisation to inform their secretariat on the urgent need for emergency assistance. In the local media, the number of reports on actual needs for affected areas and the arrival of humanitarian assistance is growing.

In Serbia, a joint assessment trip was made on 14 April to Kragujevac, Cuprija, Nis and Leskovac by the ICRC, the Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC) and the Federation. Another survey was conducted in Cacak on 15 April. The missions undertaken so far in the eastern and southern parts of Serbia indicate immediate needs to be satisfied, particularly for the civilians whose homes have been damaged or destroyed during the crisis, and for the medical institutions treating the wounded.

The local Red Cross estimates the number of displaced persons in Raska district at over 5,000.

In Montenegro, in addition to relief deliveries, the action is increasingly focusing on tracing needs and improving the water and sanitation situation, especially in collective shelters in the Rozaje area. The ICRC water and sanitation engineer is currently providing invaluable assistance in the area.

The Federation's Sub-Delegation in Montenegro has requested an experienced Relief Administrator to assist with the current crisis. The delegate will, in close cooperation with ICRC, support the Montenegro Red Cross with training, reporting, and logistics as well as assisting 28,300 Bosnian and Croatian refugees living in the Republic.

In Loznica, 57 refugees from Bosnia and Croatia were relocated from the 'Gucevo' collective centre (which was badly damaged) and are now living in a dugout (zemunica), and require additional food assistance (canned food). In Novi Sad, the Red Cross have been arranging for the shipment of emergency drinking water to three districts cut off from the main supply for the

past two weeks. In Pancevo and Sombor, first aid training is being carried out in factories and at business premises.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

UNHCR confirmed the arrival of 6,000 new refugees on 15 April through the Lojane border crossing. Buses were organised to transport the refugees from the border. According to latest figures, there are over 72,000 refugees living with host families, some 350 in collective centres and a camp population of more than 45,400. UNHCR and OSCE sources in Blace have reported that a 10-car train packed to capacity (estimates indicate over 3,000 persons) was seen in Blace, but was reportedly sent back to Kosovo.

Logistics

NATO has informed the Red Cross that it can no longer provide off-loading and transportation services (to the warehouse and camps) for relief goods arriving by air freight. The Red Cross will now have to follow normal customs procedures. As a result, 7-10 days are needed for food and medicines to clear customs. This is due to the Governments required sanitary and health procedures.

Concerns remain about the timely transfer of the 16 vehicles from the Finnish UN, resulting in a negative impact on the ability of field staff to implement activities. The vehicles have been made available to the Delegation but delays in deployment are being caused by registration with the Macedonian authorities. A Finnish Red Cross Delegate is in charge of this operation.

Relief distribution

No goods were distributed on 15 April due to the processing of the incoming shipment of relief supplied by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent.

Some 150 refugees accommodated in the border village, Malino, were provided relief assistance by the Skopje branch of the Macedonian Red Cross.

Health

Two local Macedonian Red Cross health personnel began working in the Red Cross field hospital in Brazda on 15 April. The hospital is close to capacity, however, expansion of the facility is contingent on receiving permission from the neighbouring mosque (a temporary tent). The water purification station (German Red Cross) is producing 100,000 litres for the health centres in Brazda (25,000 persons) and Stenkovac (8,000 persons).

MSF has identified a dentist for the large number of refugees requiring dental extractions.

Tracing

The reunification of families separated during the recent population displacements remains a priority for the Red Cross. The emphasis is on reuniting children under 18 years of age with their families, but priority is also given to lonely elderly cases.

Since Red Cross tracing activities began earlier this week, 270 unaccompanied children and some 750 parents looking for their children have been registered. On 15 April, three more families were reunited between the Bojane and Brazda camps. However, after a first cross-check of data there are no matches.

The ICRC estimates 40,000 tracing reunification files must be opened because "every single family is looking for a relative. The most unusual tool being used in the family reunification

process is the mobile phone, one of the first times this method to help reunite families has been used on such a massive scale".

Albania

In Kukes, the heavy rain and cold temperatures are having an impact on the refugees general condition, and the security situation has deteriorated. 6-8 victims of armed incidents at the border were admitted between Wednesday and Thursday to the Kukes local hospital. Gunshot wounds and fractures to arms and legs are prevalent. While the risk of epidemic is low and diarrheal diseases are decreasing, scabies caused by the lack of hygiene is now a major problem among children under 5. Supplies of benzylbenzoate to treat this are enroute.

The Federation currently has 3 health components in the Kukes area: sanitation, 2 health posts presently run by the 2 Red Cross nurses, and the Basic Health Care (BHC) Emergency Response Unit (ERU) with 1 doctor, 4 nurses, 1 technician, 1 administrative, and 1 telecom staff. The ICRC team currently consists of 2 nurses and 1 water and sanitation engineer. The setting-up of the ERU clinic was delayed due to problems with locating land, but the ERU team estimates that they will be operational on 16 April.

The health authorities and Unicef have advised that with the low risk of a measles epidemic no mass vaccination campaign will take place. However, an extended EPI programme for the refugee and host country population will be implemented next week. This campaign will be performed by the local authorities, but the Red Cross may be asked for assistance in the Kukes area.

Among the objectives being pursued by the Red Cross are: assessing the involvement in psycho-social programmes; assessing further involvement in the sanitation programmes; establishing medical evacuation procedures for the delegates; preparing for an influx of war wounded in Tirana; allocating and setting-up the second BHC ERU; assessing Red Cross health involvement in the south or other areas of Albania; implementing psychosocial programmes; and assisting unaccompanied minors.

A Red Cross team of two psychologists and one social welfare specialist left today for Tirana, after briefing in Geneva. After arriving in Tirana they will proceed to Kukes where they will evaluate the psycho-social needs of the refugee population. The team will work on setting up a community based programme of support and identifying local personnel who could help staff the programme and ensure it is given the appropriate cultural context. (The programme will not include psychiatric therapy.)

The integrated Red Cross relief action in Albania has distributed the following to refugees and host families during the 26 March to 11 April period:

- w Food: 22,000 food parcels and 40,000 cartons of ready meals, 3.85 MT of baby food, 20,450 jars of baby food, 4.8 MT of biscuits, 96 MT of BP-5 (high-protein biscuits);
- w Relief items: 68,100 blankets, 500 bedlinen sets, 9,000 tarpaulins, 300 mattresses, 400 kitchen sets, 240 cooking sets;
- w Hygiene: 2,000 hygiene parcels;

Other Issues

Significant logistics problems are still being encountered. The International Federation and the ICRC advise National Societies that no further unsolicited donations can be accepted by the operation. All donations must be co-ordinated with the Geneva logistics unit.

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