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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 13

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

According to the Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC) and the Commissioner for Refugees in Serbia, 11,402 Kosovan IDPs have been registered. Rough estimates from the YRC indicate up to one million people have moved from urban areas to safer, rural areas.

Following recent joint field visits, the following Red Cross assistance is being provided: in Kosovo, the Red Cross branch is providing some basic assistance in the form of first aid and medicines. Plastic sheeting, candles, water cans, wood stoves, generators, baby food, milk powder and baby nappies are urgently needed.

The Red Cross branch in Krusevac estimates that out of a total population of 140,000, 30,000 have now applied for assistance. Prior to the crisis, the branch had organized 70 first aid courses to train an additional 1,800 people in providing emergency care. The branch is providing clothes, hygiene and food assistance.

In Vranje, there has been a dramatic increase in the population in the municipality and in particular in the population in the villages outside Vranje. As a result, the population in the neighboring village of Targoviste has increased from 7,000 to 21,000 within the space of only a few weeks, and many are now asking for Red Cross assistance. The Red Cross is focusing on delivering 1,200 lunch packs each day for children in school. Contingency plans are based on a 'worst case' scenario of 30,000 - 50,000 IDPs if the situation deteriorates further.

In Leskovac, an estimated 10,000 IDPs have arrived from other regions since the start of the current crisis, and it is believed that 35-40% of the local population has moved to other regions since the crisis began. In Nis, 2,000 registered IDPs and an estimated 20,000 unregistered IDPs from Kosovo and other regions are being assisted.

In Montenegro, the latest influx of IDPs continues, though at a slower pace. The Red Cross reports 500 – 1000 new arrivals a day during the past weekend, with close to 70,000 Kosovan IDPs arrived since March 24. However, it is still very difficult to determine with accuracy the total figure. The situation in Rozaje remains volatile with around 20,000 newly arrived IDPs, almost half of them accommodated in collective centres (three factory halls, eight mosques, and

a tent settlement). Food and hygiene conditions are far from ideal. The Red Cross branch in Rozaje has distributed wheat flour, individual parcels and 2,000 loaves of bread to 5,000 displaced persons. Given the accommodation problems, the Red Cross teams have set up 70 tents and distributed 80 mattresses and 2,000 blankets. In five of the collective centres, latrines and running water facilities have now been constructed servicing some 6,000 people. The Red Cross branch in Ulcinj claims that there are more than 30,000 newly arrived IDPs in a municipality which formerly had a total local population of only 26,000 inhabitants. The Red Cross branch in Plav reports an influx of some 8,000 IDPs.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

According to UNHCR, over 12,300 refugees from Kosovo crossed into the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) between Friday and Sunday, bring the total number of refugees in the country to an estimated 133,000. The main border crossing points were Blace, Jazince and the border village of Mali Malina.

Since 5 April through 18 April, almost 16,000 refugees have been evacuated to third countries. On Friday and Saturday, the majority of departures were to Germany, while departures to France and Belgium began Sunday, and movements to Poland and Turkey are expected early this week.

The government has turned down UNHCR's request to build new camps to house the increasing, daily influx of new refugees but has agreed in principle to the expansion of existing camps. Tensions in the country have increased over the weekend. Small groups of farmers gathered outside of camps to protest the use of agricultural land for the expansion of the camps. The OSCE has confirmed compensation to farmers for loss of income.

The situation within the camps has worsened as a result of heavy rains this past weekend and the initially orderly queues - up to one kilometre in length for daily food distributions - have become disorganized amid scenes of increasing tension.

On Friday, 16 April, the UNHCR stated that of the total number of refugees in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 78,000 are living with host families. On Saturday, 17 April, the Macedonian Red Cross confirmed that the number of refugees (in host family accommodation) and registered as its beneficiaries had increased to over 64,500.

Red Cross assistance has included the provision of non-food relief to refugees living with host families that have registered with the local branches of the Macedonian Red Cross. The refugees in camps have been provided with health, water purification, limited food and tracing/family reunification assistance.

Relief Distribution

The initial planning figure of 48,481 beneficiaries for April was based on the number of refugees living with host families that had registered with the Macedonian Red Cross by 1 April. The number of registered Red Cross beneficiaries has now increased to 64,544. Through 17 April, a total of 24,281 refugees had received relief assistance from the majority of the branches (18,782 hygiene parcels, 45,111 blankets, and 13,873 mattresses).

Health

Over the weekend, an additional eight local Red Cross health staff and three cleaning staff began working at the Red Cross field hospital in Brazda camp. Several refugees arriving Friday and Saturday, who had experienced long, exhausting days of travel, were treated for hypothermia immediately upon their arrival in the camp. Replenishment and supply of specialized medicines

to treat chronic diseases, ordinarily not part of the emergency supply kits, has been arranged with Pharmacists Without Borders.

Shelter

Present capacities of the six established camps (Stenkovac-Brazda, Stenkovac-French, Neprosteno, Bojane, Senokos and Radusa) are inadequate. Existing sites will have to be expanded in the short term to address increasing shelter needs.

Logistics

Various procurement requests have been forwarded to the joint Federation/ICRC Logistics department in Geneva for contingency stocks to cover an additional influx of up to 20,000 refugees.

Telecommunications

The application for a dedicated radio frequency was submitted to the local authorities and received verbal approval.

External Relations and Publicity

The Movement's information delegates have provided or arranged interviews with over twenty international print, television and radio stations including Reuters, CNN, BBC Radio, AFP, Sky in recent days.

Briefings were given to the Norwegian Ministers of Justice and the Interior and the Secretary General of the Norwegian Red Cross on Sunday (18 April) about the operations undertaken by the Red Cross, the role of the Macedonian Red Cross, and long term needs. The Norwegian delegation also travelled to the Brazda camp where they visited the Red Cross field hospital and the ICRC's tracing 'tent'.

A number of situations have been observed where abuse of the Red Cross emblem has occurred, and these are being followed up.

Albania

Since the beginning of the crisis, more than 355,000 refugees from Kosovo have entered Albania; in excess of 45,000 entered the country over the past weekend. With the backlog of refugees on the Yugoslav border estimated at some 70 km in length, according to unconfirmed reports, a great influx is expected in the immediate future. Of the total number of refugees who have arrived in Albania, approximately 150,000 are located in the Kukes area, which serves as the entry point for most of the refugees. In Kukes alone, there are 62 collective centres at the present time. Albanian Red Cross volunteers, working around the clock to provide assistance, have been hampered by poor weather. Elderly refugees are particularly vulnerable, and require urgent assistance.

The Albanian Red Cross is distributing WFP-supplied food as well as non-food items through 36 branches country-wide. The Basic Health Centre in Kukes was established over the weekend, treating 115 patients on the first day. Immunization of the refugees has become a concern, and a Task Force was established by the government ministry, UNICEF, and the WHO.

HRH Princess Margriet of the Netherlands arrived on 19 April, meeting with the Albanian Red Cross and the government leadership. On 20 April she is scheduled to visit host families and collective centres in Tirana.

On Saturday, 17 April, two ICRC delegates carried out a visit to a member of the Yugoslav armed forces held by the United States army in Tirana, Albania. The visit was carried out at around 4 am. The delegates held a private talk with him and registered his personal details in order to notify the Yugoslav authorities. The prisoner wrote a Red Cross message which the ICRC will forward to his family. Under the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC has the right to make further visits to the prisoner of war as long as he is detained.

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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