

29 April 1999

RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

Report No. 21

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

In the Kraljevo Region, estimates indicate over 6,000 displaced persons from Kosovo are located in the following towns: 1,095 in Kraljevo itself; 3,700 in Novi Pazar; 924 in Vrnjacka Banja; 600 in Tutin; and 153 in Raska. The Red Cross has distributed emergency assistance consisting of blankets, hygiene items, oil, sugar, pasta and salt, flour to these beneficiaries.

Relief Distribution: In the Kragujevac region, a shipment of 20 MT of assistance from Thessaloniki (Greece) has reached the Red Cross. The local Red Cross branch continue to carry out one-day first aid training courses on a daily basis. A regular distribution of relief items for the month of April to refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is underway, including American Red Cross food items intended for elderly refugees over the age of 65. Because the quantities of the American food assistance were not sufficient in some branches, the balance was covered from ECHO-donated food.

A Yugoslav Red Cross (YRC) convoy of 12 trucks loaded with children's' clothing, fresh vegetables and hygiene parcels (provided by the YRC) as well as wheat flour, oil, sugar, salt and yeast (provided by the ICRC) left Belgrade and arrived in Pristina on Wednesday, 28 April. Some of the trucks were unloaded in Pristina and in Podujevo, while the others continued on to Klina, Istock, Glogovac and Jurekovac. The supplies were handed over to the local Red Cross for distribution to beneficiaries.

A Red Cross team undertook a mission to Surdulica on 28 April to carry out an emergency assessment, delivering minor surgery and first-aid material in the process.

At one of the Decor factory shelters in northern Montenegro, some 200 displaced (IDPs) now receive daily hot meals. Food for IDPs at the Napredak factory is channelled through the Montenegrin Red Cross (MRC) by the ICRC. The MRC remains the sole provider of fresh bread in Rozaje. Distribution of hygiene items to collective shelters will be completed by the end of this week, and kitchen sets were distributed to both campsites (for 1,300 IDPs) and to the Decor warehouse (a total of 300 kitchen sets, with one set per 5 IDPs).

In the south, the Red Cross has opened an office in Ulcinj and rented a new warehouse for the MRC, which will increase the distribution capacity. In Rozaje and Ulcinj, the greatest need is for hygiene articles, diapers, oil, pasta, canned food, milk powder, clothes, shoes and mattresses.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The flow of new refugees has been steady the past few days, with 5,000 crossing on Tuesday through the Blace border point. An estimated 3,900 crossed on Wednesday, through the Blace (3,500), Jazince (250) and Tabanovce (150) border points, according to the UNHCR.

The pace of departures has also increased in recent days. Over 1,100 people departed to third countries on Tuesday (27 April). The destinations included Austria, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Turkey. On Wednesday (28 April) 1,453 people were evacuated to the Czech Republic, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Turkey.

Relief Distribution: Distribution of non-food relief (hygiene parcels, blankets and mattresses) is ongoing. Over 55,200 refugees living with host families have received relief distributions from the branches of the Macedonian Red Cross. The completion of the April distribution is expected to be delayed as the number of registered refugees has increased to over 89,000 in the past week. Distribution is ongoing and gaining momentum in the Skopje branch, which faced initial logistical challenges. There are repeated requests from the branches for used clothing which are in great need by the refugees, most of whom fled their homes with only the clothes on their backs. A request has been forwarded to the Logistics unit in Geneva. On Thursday 29 April, the American Red Cross sent 2.2 Mt of tents and 9.1 Mt of blankets to Skopje.

Health: The Norwegian Red Cross will conduct an assessment visit regarding the placement of a referral hospital in the new camp being constructed by UNHCR, Cegrane, early next week. The government and the UNHCR have expressed the urgent need for such a facility within the camp and a formal request was forwarded to the Federation by UNHCR. The Health Co-ordinator visited the site of the new camp and observed some 400 tents were already in place and was told the first 2,000 refugees were expected to be moved in Wednesday night.

The expansion of the Red Cross field hospital in the Stenkovec-Brazda camp has been completed. An average of forty beds are occupied in the hospital presently.

Shelter: UNHCR reports the recent increase in the number of daily new arrivals of refugees from Kosovo has strained the capacity of the refugee camps to the breaking point. Health and sanitation conditions are beginning to deteriorate due to overcrowding and overburdening of the camp infrastructure. A transit camp/centre has been reopened at the Blace border crossing and has quickly filled to capacity, making it necessary for some new arrivals to sleep out in the open. UNHCR continues to urge the government to allow the construction of new camps and the expansion of existing ones. The government is also being urged to allow new arrivals with relatives to be accommodated by host families as a means of easing the extreme pressure on camps.

Logistics: Space has been allocated in the new Federation warehouse for the contingency stocks of the ICRC (to provide relief for 20,000 people for two days). The transfer of existing relief commodities from the 'old' warehouse to the new one has begun, while the balance of goods needed will be purchased locally. 1,875 blankets were received in the warehouse on Tuesday (27 April) as the last delivery of a large donation by the Iranian Red Crescent Society.

Warehouse dispatches on Wednesday (28 April) included: 450 mattresses, 450 blankets, and 300 hygiene parcels to the Ohrid branch of the Macedonian Red Cross; 100 mattresses, 100 blankets and 50 hygiene parcels to the Veles branch; 100 mattresses, 100 blankets and 50 hygiene parcels to the Bitola branch.

Security has been reinforced at the parking lot used for Federation vehicles after an attempted theft several days ago. A professional firm has been utilised and two guards are providing overnight security for the vehicles.

Tracing: The Tracing service of the ICRC has registered 342 children searching for their parents to date, and 1038 parents searching for their children. The number of cases closed is now at 70, while 93 additional cases are pending reunification.

External Relations and Publicity: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement delegates have recently conducted interviews or briefings with the BBC, CNN, ITN, APTN, EBU, CBS, Fox, Rai Uno, Macedonian TV, TFI, AFP, LA Times, CBC, a local Canadian radio station, Seattle Times newspaper, Deutsche Welle, Radio Malta, Boston Globe, CNN (separate contact), ARD, and Nova Makedonija (local TV).

Media information was also distributed at several locations in advance of the visit by the Acting President of the American Red Cross.

Albania

Overnight figures from Albania's Emergency Management Group show the number of refugees in the country growing slightly to 357,797: the largest influx - some 440 people - occurred in the Shkodra area.

In Kukes the refugee population has dropped to 97,500: since the crisis began more than 260,000 people have now transited through the prefecture and moved onto other parts of the country.

Following international media reports of the deteriorating security situation in the refugees camps, the Albanian authorities are revising public order plans nationwide.

To improve coordination between the international organisations and the Albanian government, a humanitarian information centre has been established in Tirana, with five regional offices at the planning stage.

Relief Distributions: Lack of transport capacity continues to be a major stumbling block to the timely delivery of relief. Additional difficulties are being encountered with food parcels which are not uniform in size, weight or content - delaying the relief department in forwarding these supplies to the six field operations around the country. Full food rations should be 20 kg, including 8 kg of wheat flour.

Distributions of food parcels provided by the French Red Cross are currently taking place in the villages around Tirana; it was also the intention to include blankets, but this was not possible due to insufficient stocks. Distributions of relief items to some 3,300 elderly in Tirana are near completion, while the arrival of food parcels from the Spanish Red Cross food parcels is a welcome addition to the pipeline. Preparations are also underway for distributions in the areas surrounding the capital, Lac and Kruja. A Red Cross distribution of individual food parcels will take place next week. Each parcel of 10.6 kg is meant for one person per month, and contains among other basics, 3 kg of rice, 3 kg of pasta, and 2 kg of chicken meat.

Health: The Red Cross of the United Arab Emirates has sent 71 MT of medical equipment to Tirana. In Tirana, a Red Cross nurse will take over responsibility for refugees injured in transit

and will also support the local military and orthopedic hospitals. Medical evacuation procedures for those patients that cannot be treated in Albania are being finalised.

The delegation's medical co-ordinator has traveled to Shkodra to assess the health situation in this prefecture. A report from the Danish psycho-social assessment team, which was in Albania earlier this month, is expected shortly.

Updated figures on vaccination programme indicate good progress with 19,500 children in Kukes receiving anti-measles shots and 6,000 immunised against poliomyelitis.

Shelter: According to latest estimates, an additional reserve shelter capacity for 150,000 refugees is necessary in case of a sudden influx and also to reduce the number living in unsatisfactory conditions in collective centres. Government officials are surveying 40 additional collective centres and international teams are reviewing another seven sites.

Of particular concern is the cigarette factory in Shkodra, which currently accommodates approximately 6,000 people in conditions that are far below minimum acceptable levels. Plans are in hand to move 2,000 people out of this location immediately.

Logistics: The delegation's logistics department is still facing difficulties with incoming shipments lacking complete documentation. Furthermore, packaging has not been uniform and some consignments have even arrived unboxed. Facilities for the off-loading of certain types of palletised goods cannot be found in Albania. As previously indicated, trucking capacities are very limited: only 800 MT of assistance can be transported at the present time on a weekly basis - some 400 MT short of the required capacity.

Arrangements have been made for the assignment of an expatriate vehicle fleet manager to coordinate the demands placed upon the delegation's cars and trucks.

New customs laws have been drafted and will come into force on 15 May. Among the most important points is a 48 hour advance notice provision and the requirement that recipients collect the goods at the customs points within three days of arrival.

Telecommunications: Much needed mobile radio equipment has arrived, enabling the Austrian Red Cross emergency response unit to begin installation. Over the next few days, members of the unit will be in Shkodra assessing the telecommunications needs in the area.

Tracing: Five tracing and protection teams are now established covering districts in: Central (Tirana and Durrës); South (Fier, Vlora, Berat and Gjirocastrë); South East (Korça, Elbasan); North West (Shkodra, Lezhë); and North East (Kukes). Delegates will be in their respective regions for between four and five days each week. Refugees will receive radios allowing them to receive five principal stations - Radio France International, BBC, Radio Tirana, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America. The British Red Cross has offered to send 30,000 radio sets to Tirana.

Albanian Red Cross: A number of incidents have occurred along the northern border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia due to unexploded ordinance and the threat to the entire population is considered significant. In order to warn the civilian population (among them many children), approximately 5,000 leaflets and 500 posters were produced and distributed by an ICRC mine awareness delegate.

Participating National Societies: The Japanese Red Cross has indicated its willingness to despatch a medical team shortly to assist hospitals and participate in health assessments.

External Relations and Publicity: The delegation is in regular contact with the "Spear Albania" project, a daily, 60 minute information programme broadcast on Radio Tirana, with refugees as the main target audience. Funded by the Soros Foundation and the British Government, the initiative could prove to be a useful channel for public information campaigns.

Recent media contacts include news organisations from the Netherlands, United States, Sweden, France and Denmark. The UK's Daily Mail newspaper, briefed by the delegation on the Red Cross Red Crescent operation in Albania, has raised more than seven million Swiss francs from its readers for a joint UK agency appeal, from which the Red Cross will benefit.

Outstanding Needs: As noted earlier in this report, the shortfall in transport capacity is delaying the distribution of aid to the beneficiaries. Computers and ancillary equipment are also needed urgently.

Outstanding needs

According to latest information from the Geneva logistics unit, among urgently needed items under the joint appeal mechanism are: food parcels, hygiene parcels, buckets, kitchen sets, blankets, flour, candles and folding jerry cans. An initial list of contributions to the joint appeal (cash and kind) is being prepared for dispatch to donors in the coming days.

Meanwhile logistics coordination remains essential, and the International Federation and the ICRC advise National Societies that no unsolicited in-kind donations can be accepted by the operation. All in-kind donations must be co-ordinated with the Geneva logistics unit:

Contact names and numbers: Charles Bernimolin, Federation, and John Wert, ICRC, at:

Phone: +41 22 730 2143 or 041 22 730 2204;

Fax: +41 22 730 2876;

email: fedicrcbalkanlog.gva@icrc.org

For further information from the International Federation, please contact Leopoldo Principe for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia & Herzegovina; tel: +41 22 730 4439; email: principe@ifrc.org and Penny Elghady for Albania and Macedonia; tel: +41 22 730 4319; email: elghady@ifrc.org

For further information from the ICRC, contact External Resources Department; tel: +41 22 734 6001) or Pierre Kraehenbuehl (tel: +41 22 730 2256, email: pkraehenbuehl.gva@icrc.org

Renny Nancholas
Director
Europe Department
International Federation of Red Cross
and Red Crescent Societies

Angelo Gnaedinger
Delegate General for Europe,
Middle East, and North America
ICRC

