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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

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This report is published thrice-weekly 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

Joint Declaration by the Federation Executive Council and the ICRC

The following Joint Declaration was issued in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday (13 May 1999) by the Federation Executive Council and the ICRC:

Deeply affected by the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the crisis in the Balkans and by the physical and moral suffering it is inflicting on the victim populations,

Aware of their responsibility under these circumstances and of the major challenge confronting the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in its mission to assist all victims of these dramatic events as well as in its activities for protection,

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross again urgently appeal to governments to assume the grave responsibilities falling to them to ensure that the standards of international humanitarian law are respected and that humanitarian organizations have widespread access to the victims,

They furthermore appeal to all government leaders to permit and support generous and lasting humanitarian assistance to all victims, in particular to refugees and displaced persons,

They reaffirm their firm desire to pursue and develop, in every way possible, the joint humanitarian action the Movement has been carrying out in the region since March,

They address a message of strong and warm solidarity and encouragement to the Red Cross Societies in the countries directly afflicted by these events as well as to their local branches and sections, to their leaders and volunteers and to the ICRC and International Federation delegates. They assure them of their full support in the great hardships these countries are now experiencing.

They also extend appreciation to all the National Societies that are contributing to the humanitarian action in support of the victims of this tragedy.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The ICRC today began its first exploratory mission to Kosovo since having to withdraw from the province on 29 March. The mission, which includes two trucks of relief supplies (food, hygiene parcels and plastic sheeting) has now arrived in Pristina. The mission is being carried out by the Head of the ICRC Delegation in Belgrade. The Secretary General of the Yugoslav Red Cross is accompanying the ICRC for the first day of the mission.

The visit, which is expected to last several days, is intended as a tentative first step towards re-establishing an ICRC operation in Kosovo. The ICRC will make contact with the local authorities and the Red Cross, visit medical facilities and make a preliminary assessment of needs among the civilian population.

Two Norwegian Red Cross units of surgical materials (sufficient for treating 200 wounded for 10 days), 624 bottles of infusion and 700 infusion sets were delivered to Nis hospital on Tuesday, 11 May. The water/sanitation engineer has completed his survey of Novi Sad and is proposing to improve the present system of water distributions by installing water reservoirs in the affected parts of town and/or improving the quality of raw water through the removal of the excess of iron element.

A distribution plan for some 57,500 German Red Cross hygiene parcels has been approved and will start shortly. Distribution to final beneficiaries of 168,674 hygiene parcels funded by the Swedish Red Cross is ongoing, except in Kosovo. Four trucks with beans and one with oil have arrived in Belgrade.

The Planecvo Red Cross branch is currently distributing food assistance to social cases and to elderly refugees donated by a twin city of Resice in Romania. Citizens from Resice have collected and sent canned fruit and vegetables, rice, sugar, vegetable oil and milk powder for 1,000 beneficiaries as well as 600 family parcels.

The Valjevo Red Cross branch will start to distribute goods delivered by ICRC shortly. However, this food assistance is insufficient to cover the most vulnerable in Valjevo, so the branch secretary intends to launch an appeal for additional food assistance. There are 6,000 workers from Krusik who are left without any means of support and over 1,500 people made homeless following the destruction of their houses/apartments.

With the launch of a psycho-social support programme, the Red Cross branch in Pozega has opened a helpline run by a team of professional psychologists. The Red Cross soup kitchen is serving 170 daily meals to the most vulnerable beneficiaries among social cases. However at least 100 new beneficiaries should be covered by the expanded programme.

Premises for joint Federation/ICRC/YRC field offices in Novi Sad and Nis have been found. The YRC has also pointed out the need for another integrated field office in Serbia.

In Montenegro, the situation of the displaced is currently quite stable with departures of displaced people from the north now greater than new arrivals. Red Cross teams both in the north and in the south report improvement in coordination with other agencies, which is now considered satisfactory.

The Red Cross in Montenegro and ICRC distributed relief to some 1,500 displaced people who arrived in the north last week. According to Montenegrin Red Cross, there were 86,236 beneficiaries among the displaced population in April, while the planning beneficiary figure for May is set at 81,000 beneficiaries.

In Ulcinj, three telephone lines have been set up capable of providing up to 300 phone calls per day for the displaced who wish to establish contact with their family members. In the first five days 1,076 persons made use of this facility. By 11 May, 250 names had been collected for broadcast over radio networks.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Latest UNHCR reports indicate that 258 refugees crossed the border between 11 and 12 May. Departures to third countries over the same period numbered 4,006 to: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and USA. Macedonian Red Cross figures show 129,236 refugees are now registered in host families.

Relief Distributions: Monthly rations for refugees currently comprise, per person: flour (12 kg), cooking oil (1 litre), sugar (1 kg), and beans (1 kg). Host families each receive flour (25 kg), beans (3 kg), cooking oil (3 litres), sugar (2 kg) and salt (0.5 kg).

Distributions to 5,800 Macedonian 'category one' social cases - the mentally handicapped and those unable to work - is near completion. This group have been receiving the ECHO/InterSOS food and Red Cross hygiene parcels, distributed by the Macedonian Red Cross to 28 branches, 56 sub branches, and numerous village level distribution points. In June, this activity will be expanded to other categories of poor and needy Macedonians, with an overall target of 60,000.

Health: The Norwegian Red Cross field hospital in Cegrane camp is fully operational and received its first patients yesterday (13 May). The first arrivals included a woman who had started premature labour and a young boy with a snake bite. The Medecins Sans Frontieres' clinic will be referring patients to the hospital. Medical staff from the Norwegian Red Cross and the Palestine Red Crescent have all worked tirelessly to ensure the speedy construction of the hospital and early start to patient treatment.

General conditions at the camp are improving. The population in the Cegrane area is largely ethnic Albanian, and refugees can freely move in and out of the camp with access to markets and shops. However, lack of basic information (on registration, documentation etc) is a major difficulty for the refugees, who invariably make the Red Cross tracing tent their first stop.

The situation at the German Red Cross hospital at Stenkovac I/Brazda camp is calmer due to the reduction in refugees crossing at Blace, with a consequent decrease in the camp population.

Logistics: Dispatches from the Red Cross Red Crescent central warehouse through Thursday (13 May) included: 6,251 mattresses, 10,318 hygiene parcels (donated by ECHO), 4,352 hygiene parcels (donated by the Swiss Red Cross), 152 cooking sets and 120 litres of milk. Deliveries included: 4,000 mattresses (3,000 from the Netherlands), 10,020 blankets and 11,088 hygiene parcels from ECHO and 4,160 from the Swiss Red Cross. Nine tons of food and non-food aid has arrived from the Jordanian Red Crescent, though the shipment is delayed in customs due to documentation difficulties.

Tracing: The Red Cross tracing agency has registered 583 vulnerable people (the majority of which are unaccompanied children, but also include elderly, physically and mentally disabled persons). Since the start of the influx in late March, a total of 1,235 people made a tracing request through Monday. There have been 244 families reunited. (NB: This is a corrected

figure since earlier reports included some double-counting within the database, which has been rectified.)

External Relations, Information and Publicity: The President of the New Zealand Red Cross arrives today in Macedonia. He will visit the Blace border crossing area, Stenkovac I refugee camp and an aid distribution centre in Tetevo. The traveling ambassador for Finland is visiting local Red Cross offices throughout the region this week.

On Wednesday, 25 representatives from 15 local Macedonian press were briefed by Heads of Delegation from the ICRC and International Federation and the Secretary General of the Macedonian Red Cross, on the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and its activities across the Balkan region. There was particular interest in Macedonian Red Cross aid programmes to host families and local social cases. So far, there have been broadcasts on Macedonian TV-Channels 1 & 2, Sitel TV, Channel 5 and Macedonia radio in Macedonian and Albanian language, and their international broadcasting service; and published reports in Dnevnik, Nova Makedonija, Vecer and Mia. The general tone of the reports has been positive, with straight-forward description of programmes.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent delegates conducted interviews or briefings with the following media on 12 and 13 May: Sky News, Daily Mail, VG/Norway, Sat I, Radio Canada, Swiss TV, TF1/France, Tribune de Geneve, ITN/Channel 4, and the UK's Sun newspaper.

Albania

According to the latest figures from Albania's emergency management group (EMG), there are now more than 440,400 refugees in the country following the latest influx. Once again, the total for Kukes is falling, to just over 100,000 - a drop of some 7,000 in the last few days, reflecting the government's efforts to move the refugees south. Since the crisis began, more than 339,000 have left Kukes for other parts of the country. Even though this number is significant, many refugees remain reluctant to leave the area, due to their desire to stay close to Kosovo and because of logistical problems with the transport of their possessions (*see also 'Kukes Report' below*).

The figures for refugees living with host families continue to rise - to 300,142 accommodated with 38,321 host families. In recent days, an Italian NGO distributing food near Tirana has reported that rent is being paid by 95% of the refugees living with host families in Kruja, calling into question distributions to host families in this area.

There are more reports of insecurity in the Tropoje district, with a build up of the Albanian military along the northern border. According to OSCE, sporadic fighting has resulted in some casualties.

Relief distributions: Distribution of food parcels has begun in the Shkodra area and are proceeding to plan. The numbers of beneficiaries served in the Tirana region has risen to almost 42,000, including distributions of food parcels (and an additional 8 kg of wheat flour and a blanket) provided by the Spanish and French Red Cross Societies. Beneficiaries in areas around the city have received bulk materials, including wheat flour, rice, pasta, sugar, oil, yeast; soap, detergent and a Belgian Red Cross food parcel. Officials from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent also distributed food parcels in Tirana during mid-week.

The latest review of the current food supply situation indicates that the Red Cross Red Crescent will be able to provide the necessary food assistance to the refugees living with host

families, to the end of May. In the pipeline, there are purchase orders for 8,938 MT of goods (including 3,698 MT of standard food parcels, 2,016 MT of French Red Cross food parcels and 3,224 MT of wheat flour).

Health: WHO is performing an evaluation of the vaccination campaign in which the delegation's ERU basic health clinic took part. The UN organization has stated that support to Albania's health services at the tertiary level remains very weak. Mental health of children was discussed with representatives of UNICEF.

Social welfare: At a recent meeting with UNICEF, the issue of 'child friendly spaces' was discussed, as was the need for educational materials. The agency estimates that 50% of the refugee population is below the age of 15, representing a total of more than 200,000 school-aged children and such materials would help their entry to schools in Albania later in the year. The agency also estimates that there are up to 5,000 teachers among the refugee population, capable of adapting to the school system.

Logistics: According to a recent review of the logistics situation in Albania, some 420 truck 'runs' will be needed to deliver all of the goods currently in the pipeline to their planned delivery points. In the coming days six flights are expected into Tirana with food parcels for the operation.

Current stock levels (quantities in parentheses) in the delegation's main warehouses in Tirana and Durres include: clothing (13,352 kg); 3.7 kg food parcels (11,416); 5 kg food parcels (11,231); 10.5 kg food parcels (94); pasta (2,300 kg); milk powder (48 cartons/ 12 boxes per carton); meals-ready-to-eat (182,024); oil (85,246 litres); rice (840 kg); sugar (96,710 kg); tinned food (51,429); high protein biscuits (26,935 kg); wheat flour (12,884 kg); diapers (1,864 cartons); hygiene parcels (27,184); bed linen sets (3,792); stretchers (180); blankets (5,119); cooking sets (2,001); various tents (319); and stoves (619).

Telecommunications: The installation of HF radio communications in the vehicle fleet is continuing and programming of identification numbers on each radio/car has also started. Troubleshooting computer problems and software installation in the newly purchased computers is now included in the daily workload of the telecommunications team. The mobile phones are operational once more.

Tracing: As the refugee population in Albania climbs, so too does the number of people seeking assistance from the Red Cross tracing department. The latest totals are: visits (1,905); telephone calls (8,075); typed radio messages (4,956); cases of unaccompanied vulnerable (65); tracing cases opened (15); tracing cases closed (1); cases of parents with missing children (85); cases of unaccompanied children (85); cases of family reunions opened (83); cases of family reunions closed (16); and Red Cross messages out (49).

Albanian Red Cross: The Society is struggling to respond to requests for information from government authorities on incoming relief shipments, mainly due to indifferent documentation and prior notification from the port of embarkation.

Participating National Societies: Due to the interest in tracing shown by various PNSs, the ICRC presented the current and planned activities of the tracing department at the third PNS meeting, held in Tirana. PNSs with camp involvements were encouraged to start thinking about winterisation programmes.

This weekend, the joint Belgian/Netherlands Red Cross team will begin accepting refugees into its camp at Vlore. Identification of 200 'first phase' families is underway. Family cooking

tents have been erected and outfitted with gas stoves. Food for this camp will be provided by the WFP, whereas Oxfam and UNHCR will offer water-sanitation.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: On the initiative of the Head of Delegation, Mr K Islami, the Minister for the EMG, will visit the delegation today (Friday) to be briefed on the operation and to meet the representatives of the Albanian Red Cross and Red Cross Red Crescent delegates.

In recent days, National Geographic television and BBC TV News have interviewed a Red Cross Red Crescent delegate.

Kukes Report

Insecurity close to the Albanian border has intensified over the last two days. Reports of artillery fire within Northern Albania have also increased over the same period, resulting in fluctuating refugee movements into Albania. Special security measures for movements in the border area, particularly in Has district, have been implemented by the Kukes sub-delegation.

The UNHCR information campaign, intended to encourage refugees to move further into Albania, continued in the MSF/UNHCR camp. However, many refugees in the camps remain reluctant to move away from Kukes as long as the reception capacity and the hosting conditions in the rest of the country are unclear. On 13 May the municipal authorities promised that re-registration of host families and refugees living in host families will be completed shortly.

The official figures regarding the movement of refugees on 12 and 13 May was as follows: 3,901 refugees into the area and 10,164 moving south.

Relief distributions: On 12 and 13 May, relief distributions took place in Krume town and Krume "old town" for 1,906 refugees in host families and 252 host families - 2,158 beneficiaries, who received a total of 2,158 French food parcels and 18.5 MTs of WFP wheat flour.

Health (Focus on Finnish Red Cross ERU basic health clinic): The Finnish Red Cross basic health clinic presently has a team comprising eight delegates, 60 Albanian/Kosovo staff and four volunteers. On 12 and 13 May, treatment was given to some 1,052 adult patients, of whom 53% were suffering from acute upper respiratory infections and the vast majority had post traumatic stress disorder. On the same days the polio and measles vaccination programme (for children under 12 years) administered 327 vaccinations. As part of this activity, the patients are always given a general health check and while the children are being vaccinated, mothers are provided with preventative health care leaflets. When necessary, hygiene kits, oral rehydration salts and used clothes are also distributed.

The Finnish Red Cross basic health clinic also has gynecologists, pediatricians and a maternity ward. Over the past two days, the pediatricians gave 304 consultations to girls and boys from 1-5 years old and the local gynecologist gave 47 consultations to expectant mothers and 273 consultations to babies 0-1 years old.

While treating mothers/babies, the clinic's maternity ward distributes diapers and hygiene kits, which are extremely popular. The distribution management of preventative health care leaflets, (which are also given to mothers at the clinic) to the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent and Italian Red Cross hospital is also coordinated by the clinic.

In addition, mothers who are pregnant and/or have children under 4 years old, are given a very comprehensive educational book, produced by the Albanian Red Cross, on all aspects of pregnancy/birth and baby care. Staff at the maternity ward refer many gynecological cases and mothers with complicated pregnancies to the Kukes maternity hospital, which is integrated with Kukes general hospital. Now 70% of all patients at the maternity hospital are from Kosovo, and sadly one third of mothers treated from the province give birth to premature babies.

Logistics: On 12 and 13 May, the Red Cross Red Crescent warehouse in Kukes received 35.5 MT of French Red Cross food parcels. The new parking area by the office was completed yesterday, which should improve vehicle security. Two guards (for the parking area) and one additional driver have been employed locally to strengthen the logistics team. In order to also secure the evening movement of delegates, a duty driver system has been introduced from 07h00 - 23h00 daily. The fleet in the Kukes sub-delegation now consists of 14 landcruisers and 6 trucks with trailers.

Tracing: Due to the increased demand from refugees seeking assistance, from today (Friday), the protection team have opened an additional information/tracing office in Kukes Town and also recruited an extra local staff member.

The protection team are generally finding the special radio messages very successful, and during the past two days have transmitted 31 messages by these means. Indeed, yesterday, the special radio message facility resulted in the relatives of a 90 year old abandoned, blind and diabetic woman being found in the village of Peshkopi, 80 km south of Kukes. Her son-in-law immediately came to Kukes and the full family reunification will occur today .

During 12 and 13 May, the protection team registered abandoned, elderly and disabled people in the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent camp, the Finnish Red Cross basic health clinic and visited the Morine border. This, and other work, resulted in the following cases/requests being opened: 6 unaccompanied children; 9 elderly abandoned people; 2 disabled abandoned people; 2 special tracing requests; 4 requests for family reunification and 11 debriefings. Over the same period, 109 telephone calls and 478 radio messages were transmitted.

External Relations, Information and Publicity: Yesterday (13 May), the ICRC's Operations Director, accompanied by senior ICRC and International Federation officials from Tirana, visited the sub-delegation. All aspects of the International Red Cross Red Crescent operation in northern Albania were discussed. Particular attention was given to the issue of access to victims in the increasingly conflictual border areas of Has and Tropoje districts.

On 12 May, a Red Cross Red Crescent delegate conducted an interview with the Koha Ditore (Kosovo newspaper), featuring general International Red Cross Red Crescent activities. An Australian Television company also conducted an interview in the Italian Red Cross camp. Yesterday, Agence France Press interviewed the relief coordinator from the sub-delegation concerning French Red Cross food parcels presently being distributed to refugees and their host families in the Kukes and Has Districts.

Bosnia Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is still facing major challenges with the influx of refugees from Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Latest figures from the UNHCR show that some 58,000 refugees from the Federal Republic have fled to Bosnia and Herzegovina since the start of the current crisis; approximately 17,580 are in the Bosnian Serb entity - Republika Srpska - and another 40,000 refugees have entered the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A total of 526 people have registered in Southern Republika Srpska ('old' Herzegovina) and 1,050 people have registered in eastern Republika Srpska (eastern Herzegovina), but some Red Cross evaluations indicate there are more than 3,000 refugees from the Federal Republic in the Serb part of eastern Herzegovina and more than 2,500 in 'old' Herzegovina.

The process of registering refugees from the Federal Republic is still ongoing in the rest of Republika Srpska. The influx is in addition to the previous BiH refugee/displaced caseload, which numbers more than 1.1 million people. Overall, the needs for the BiH population as a whole are huge, particularly for food, hygiene items and blankets, with special needs for children, pregnant or lactating women, elderly and sick people.

BiH government figures show that by the end of last month, 15 refugee camps had been opened, providing shelter for almost 4,000 people. The remainder of the refugees have found accommodation with host families.

Since the beginning of the current crisis in the Balkans, all components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in BiH have been working to assist refugees from the Federal Republic. The ICRC through the local Red Crosses in both Bosnian entities - Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBH) - have already distributed quantities of humanitarian aid, including 21,000 kilograms of wheat flour, 420 infant parcels, 420 hygiene parcels, 874 bed sheets and 1,160 blankets in eastern part of Republika Srpska; in FBH, the ICRC has distributed 3,000 food parcels.

The International Federation has distributed 2,000 hygiene parcels in Republika Srpska and 2,880 hygiene parcels and 936 cooking sets in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The two entity Red Crosses BiH are also distributing items such as second hand clothes, shoes, bed sheets, blankets, dishes and so on, given by private donors.

At the end of last month, the Red Cross of Sarajevo Canton opened a 'reception point' at the city's central bus station to provide incoming refugees with food and beverages. In the ensuing two weeks, over 4,200 sandwiches and 1,120 litres of milk/tea have been distributed. In addition to food, refugees have been able to access information on registration, Red Cross messages etc. Currently, this is the only reception point opened in BiH.

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