

# CENTRAL ASIA

## CHF 8,519,000

### Programme No. 01.63/2000

### *Regional Context*

The Regional Delegation provides support to five National Societies in Central Asia; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Since they became independent in 1991, severe economic dislocation has ravaged the economies of these five countries. Even as fragile signs of economic improvements appear, the situation of the most vulnerable continues to deteriorate. The 1998 crisis in the Russian economy devastated the national economies of Central Asia. Local currencies have devalued by almost 100%, and unemployment, both declared and hidden, is mushrooming.

The result is that throughout all Central Asian countries, vulnerable groups increasingly do not have the resources to buy enough food or winter clothes. These people also often have no extended family to rely on and the incidence of tuberculosis, vitamin deficiencies and general malnutrition is growing.



In addition to the serious problem of increasing structural poverty, the countries of Central Asia are prone to a variety of disasters. The most frequent localised disasters include: floods, avalanches, landslides, mud and debris flows, steppe fires and gas explosions. In this century alone three of the five capital cities (Ashgabad, Tashkent & Almaty) have been levelled by earthquakes, and statistics indicate the probability of a major event in the next 8 years. Technological disasters also constitute a major threat in some areas. Ecological disasters with long term implications (nuclear contamination in Semipalatinsk, and changing water levels in the Aral Sea for example) continue to threaten the region. The ongoing socio-economic crisis has increased the vulnerability of many people to these disasters.

Regional stability has also deteriorated with the recent hostage taking by armed insurgents in Southern Kyrgyzstan, serious terrorist bomb blasts in formerly stable Tashkent, social unrest in Turkmenistan, and a general feeling of concern about emerging opposition groups within the region with the potential to use terrorism to support their causes.

## ***Regional Assistance Strategy***

At the start of 1999, there was a fundamental shift in the Federation's strategy for Central Asia. Recognising the problem of donor fatigue in the face of overwhelming relief needs and the drawbacks inherent in maintaining pan-regional programmes in a diverse part of the world, there was a strategic move towards decentralising Federation operations and personnel and a greater focus on the other core areas of the Federation's activities. With the decentralisation process completed in 1999, some programmes carry forward into early 2000 with a regional approach. An example of this is the Information Officer support programme. However, during the course of 2000 - 2001, such programmes will refocus into individual country programmes, allowing a greater local focus to suit the specific needs of individual communities and operating environments.

Formulated in concert with the respective National Societies, the Federation's Regional Assistance Strategy for 2000-2001 aims to build capacity in the four core areas of disaster response, disaster preparedness, health, and humanitarian values, carried out in conjunction with institutional and resource development programmes.

While providing relief goods continues to be a key assistance activity, it will be scaled back to allow greater focus upon the other core areas, leaving the National Societies freer to develop bilateral relief programmes. Within these core areas, population movement programmes, information and advocacy, youth activities, fund-raising and volunteer management will all be emphasised. These programmes are vital, not only because they will eventually benefit thousands of people, but because they will also help the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of Central Asia carry out their humanitarian mandate in a sustainable manner.

The Regional Delegation will continue supporting the five National Societies as they increasingly take full responsibility for all aspects of relief provision including budgeting and reporting elements. Training provision for the National Societies in financial management and accountability and logistic support will be complemented by continuing encouragement to seek local fund-raising opportunities and media exposure. This is in line with the Federation Development Policy, the Code of Conduct, and the Almaty and Copenhagen Declarations.

In the light of the dramatic conclusions of the Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan Vulnerability Surveys, there will be a renewed emphasis on providing assistance to the lowland countries of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This assistance will be targeted to the most vulnerable: children, especially those in institutions, isolated elderly, and multi-children families. Much of this help will be concentrated on the Aral Sea area which, in addition to economic dislocation, is the scene of ecological devastation. The Regional Delegation is committed to supporting the Tajikistan Country Delegation, as required, in providing much-needed relief to Tajikistan.

## ***Programme Objectives***

### ***Disaster Response***

Disaster response in Central Asia tackles natural and environmental disasters, the huge and deepening structural poverty, populations in movement, and major transportation/industrial accidents. Response is built on a foundation of the disaster preparedness programme. Logistical support, including procurement, transport and warehousing, covers all of Central Asia and will include support to neighbouring countries on request. While the thrust of the preparedness programmes has been directed towards natural disasters, the response mechanism is not restricted to these events. Gas explosions, urban and forest fires, bomb blasts and dam bursts have all been, and may again feature in the rapid response activities of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. While sudden disasters capture the headlines, the National Societies and the Federation will continue to identify and expose the deepening crisis of prolonged structural poverty. Through extensive vulnerability surveys, the most vulnerable will be identified and brought to the attention of national and international authorities and at the same time will provide data on the most needed and effective forms of support from which poverty mitigation programmes can be based. Surveys have been carried out in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and will be conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan as a priority.

Data collection and dissemination will result in relief activities though this will reduce in the future as the Federation moves away from operational intervention towards encouraging the National Societies to take the lead. To combat the effects of the bitter six month winters, winter clothes and boots will be provided and a public canteen programme will be run for six months each year to help particularly isolated pensioners and multi-children families to cope in the urban areas. Public canteens have been a popular mode of donation for the local donor community in Central Asia, providing high visibility and effective relief, and increasingly the National Societies will be encouraged and assisted to canvas these local donors actively for continued support, thereby also increasing National Society resource development and self-reliance.

A more specific programme is underway to combat the impact of the draining of the Aral Sea, a situation which has gradually come to the world's attention as one of the greatest ecological and humanitarian disasters. Due to a loss of nearly three quarters of the water from the Aral Sea over the last three decades, thousands of square kilometres of sea bed now lie exposed to the harsh desert elements. The result has been a virtual domino effect of environmental degradation and human suffering. Huge expanses of glaring white sea salt now lie exposed to the wind and sun, drifting at times into small hills, whipped up by desert storms and deposited onto nearby fields, creating a soil which is unable to nurture crops. In a cycle that feeds on itself, every year more land is laid barren and claimed by the desert, which in turn spreads the "desertification" effect even further the following season. This growing desert, combined with the decrease in vegetation, has changed the microclimate around the sea, increasing summer temperatures, lowering winter temperatures, and creating wind storms.

In an attempt to address some of the human suffering resulting from this situation, an extensive relief and development programme has commenced in the three countries bordering the Aral Sea: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The two year relief programme started in mid-1999, with a strong emphasis on food relief for the first year. However this will provide an entry into the region for a community based programme in the second and subsequent years, based on local knowledge and relationships built up in the first year. Although disaster response is the main focus of the first year's programme, an important impact will be the increased skill base and development of the National Society branches in the region around the Aral Sea. An evaluation on the effects of the assistance provided is part of this programme.

Another important component of disaster response in 2000 is the Population Movement (PM) programme, with small scale projects specifically targeting refugees, returnees and IDPs. Surveys of migrant needs will be made, and information on assistance measures disseminated to branch staff. All National Societies in the programme have constructed country strategies, stating core areas and providing a 2-5 year time-frame through which they will establish their roles and responsibilities, including obtaining a legal basis in this field. Each National

Society's PM co-ordinator will continue to seek funding to reduce dependency on the Regional Delegation, both financial and functional, so that within two years, the Regional Delegation will be involved only in emergency situations.

### ***Disaster Preparedness***

The Regional Disaster Preparedness programme began in 1996 and has built solid foundations with personnel and structures to give the five National Societies strong and professional disaster preparedness and response capabilities. Intensive training programmes have been conducted during the past three years for both National Societies and Government emergency services staff at Rayon, Oblast, Republican and Regional levels. The training has challenged the old attitude of covering up disasters, with an attitude that information about disasters should be open, and publicised. This changing attitude has thrust the Red Cross/Red Crescent to the fore as a leader in disaster preparedness and response. In addition, hardware such as radio communication equipment, vehicles and decentralised stocks of relief goods have provided the tools to respond quickly to disasters.

The disaster information/public education effort has been successful in reaching a significant number of people. However it is necessary to target these activities more effectively to ensure that they are more focused on the most vulnerable who have less capacity to withstand disasters. In order to establish a solid DP base for National Society activities, and credibility with Government Emergency Agencies, the training to date has largely been directed towards National Society personnel and their Government Emergency Services counterparts.

The strategy for 2000 and beyond is to focus more at oblast branch levels through trained staff and DP volunteers, first to identify disaster-prone and vulnerable communities and then jointly to analyse that vulnerability and develop community-based disaster mitigation and prevention plans and activities. The first phase of this new approach will commence early in 2000 with two pilot Community Based DP Training workshops. These will also include Community Based First Aid.

### ***Health***

Traditionally the National Societies of Central Asia, in common with sister National Societies in the former Soviet Union, have focused their health assistance on the "Visiting Nurses Programme" (VNP) and on the Social Medical Centres (SMCs). Unfortunately the funding shortages that followed the independence of the Republics resulted in the near total collapse of these programmes. Some of them have continued on a decentralised basis, but their operations have for the most part been very limited. Support to SMCs will focus on promotion of healthy lifestyles and preventive health care.

First aid programmes in Central Asia have generally not been well co-ordinated. Within National Societies there is a need for adoption of common standards and certification and for a structured programme approach based on the Training of Trainers model. Once this system is firmly in place the National Societies' efforts in first aid will be targeted to vulnerable communities as part of a Community Based First Aid (CBFA) programme which will be closely tied to the Disaster Preparedness programme. At the same time the National Societies will utilise their trained instructors to provide first aid training to commercial and other organisations and individuals on a payment for service basis which will provide the National Societies with an income with which to sustain their Health and First Aid Programme in the future.

### ***Humanitarian Values***

The promotion of humanitarian values is an integral part of the National Societies' information programmes which began in early 1997, and underpins all the work carried out in the region. Ongoing training of National Society information officers will continue to be a priority combined with maximising the resources of the National Societies and the Federation, relationships with governments, UN, NGOs and international organisations and diplomatic missions to present a coherent message about humanitarian values.

### ***Capacity Building***

The strategy for institutional development of National Societies has been to raise awareness, and advocate adherence to good practice and integrity of governance and operation, through training programmes and relief

operations. Considering the changed and adverse financial and operational environment since independence of these former Soviet states, progress in establishing essentially new National Societies, their core programmes and relief operation capacities, their identities with governments, and their means of survival has been remarkable.

It is essential now that the Federation and the respective National Societies move forward with clear strategies and measurable objectives for a specified range of institutional development issues related to service delivery to the most vulnerable. This means setting agreed levels of integrity in governance, financial procedures, management, operational performance, policy formulation and resource development.

Recognising that each National Society has different external and internal operational environments and levels of achievement, the methodology will be first to evaluate and then to undertake to achieve the specified development in management, performance and governance. Federation support will also be provided for youth organisation and training in volunteer recruitment, leadership and management, and in resource development.