

PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

THE CAUCASUS - SPECIAL FOCUS ON GEORGIA: EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO CHECHEN REFUGEES, OTHER DISPLACED AND THE LOCAL POPULATION IN PANKISI VALLEY

25 July 2001

This Programme Update is intended for reporting on Annual Appeals.

Appeal No. 01.58/01

Programme Update No. 2

“At a Glance”

In June 2001 current funding for the emergency assistance programme to Chechen refugees and other displaced in Georgia's Pankisi Valley ended with an unexpected delay for the planned further support. The immediate closure of this vital project, part of the annual appeal for the Caucasus, is unavoidable unless immediate funding is forthcoming. Taking into account the already tense security situation in the area, the International Federation fears an abrupt closure of the operation could lead to severe social unrest and security concerns. The purpose of this Operations Update on this particular project is to alert the donor community of the necessity to extend the operation by a few months while allowing time to review the Federation's continued presence and activities in the area.

Operational Developments:

This project assists Chechen refugees and other displaced, who crossed into Georgia to escape bombing and acts of violence against civilians on the territory of Chechnya and are currently living in the region of Akhmeta (Pankisi Valley, Georgia), mainly in the village of Duisi, but also in the neighbouring hamlets of Omalo, Birkiani and Jokolo.

As the result of the Federation's intervention, the quality of health care, as well as the living and sanitary conditions of the project's beneficiaries improved. The need for assistance, however, persists.

As the return of Chechen refugees to their homes in Chechnya is yet to be determined, both they and the local population in the Pankisi Valley remain vulnerable to disease due to overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions and poor diet. Because of financial constraints or the condition of the administration, the capacity either by individuals or the government to assist these victims is very limited. Sadly, after two years of support, this vulnerable group continues to depend on assistance from the international community. Without logistical and administrative sustenance for local health authorities in the valley or the provision of essential drugs, the health status (physical and mental) and living conditions of both the refugees and the local host population will deteriorate. The lack of external support will provoke short and long term health problems. The prevalence of morbidity will increase. The beneficiaries will not be able to respond to day-to-day health problems and accidents, which might lead to an increased incidence of disability among the population. The knowledge, skills and attitudes of clinical staff as well as hygiene practices will remain substandard. The termination of the acute emergency referral programme will lead to a high rate of mortality.

Despite first efforts, clinical practice remains substandard both in Duisi and Jokolo polyclinics; important mistakes in diagnosis and prescriptions are still made regularly. This is due to a lack of knowledge of modern clinical practice. During the past years, the Federation organized tutorials for the doctors on improved methods of disease management and drug prescriptions and on nutrition/healthy eating. These have been well received with requests for more. Further efforts should be made to achieve the necessary changes to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the health care staff.

A complementary part of the Federation's operation in the Pankisi Valley was supplied by Médecins sans Frontières - France (MSF). However, after the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed a preference for having one organization overseeing all medical services in the valley, the Federation took over the responsibility of implementing the services previously provided by MSF. This was intended to last until the end of 2001. In case of the Federation's abrupt withdrawal, the workload of other humanitarian agencies operating in the area will substantially increase. This may have a negative impact on the quality of aid delivered to the vulnerable groups. The frustrated beneficiaries could easily become aggressive. Having in mind the history of recent developments in this area, the violent behaviour of the population might further deteriorate the situation and undermine the safety and security of those who are receiving assistance, as well as those who are responsible for its provision.

The Pankisi Valley is one of the poorest regions of Georgia. The income generation possibilities of the population are near to zero. The sudden termination of this humanitarian operation in the valley might arouse social unrest, an increased rate of criminality and destabilize the political landscape in the area. The tension between the local population and Chechen refugees in the valley will further aggravate the situation. The host families will be unable to continue coping with their enlarged households, which might provoke a forced repatriation of the refugees. Though pressure may be increased by the international community on the governmental authorities to take over responsibility for this vulnerable group, in the absence of adequate resources, it is unlikely that the government will be able provide the required assistance. Inevitably, the Federation and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will be blamed for all of the consequences.

Red Cross Red Crescent action w

Since December 1999, the Federation, in cooperation with the Red Cross Society of Georgia (RCSG), the relevant governmental structures of Georgia and international organizations, has been providing humanitarian assistance to the Chechen refugees and the most vulnerable local population living in the Pankisi Valley. Activities included the provision of essential drugs, maintenance of a health surveillance system, monitoring sanitary conditions, implementing a health education campaign, case management training for health personnel and setting up a nutritional monitoring system.

As a result of the activities undertaken by the Federation with financial support of the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), approximately 17,000 persons (refugees and local population) in the Pankisi Valley were provided with basic health care. The health and nutrition surveillance system enabled collection of information on specific topics and health problems and enabled the Federation to take adequate measures in a timely manner. The Federation's health department was successfully implementing evidence based knowledge

through clinical and health promotion activities. The Pankisi Valley population had access to basic health care services. Within the framework of the operation, about 30 patients per day were admitted for outpatient consultations in Duisi and Jokolo clinics. Analysis of the hospital data revealed less than 50 patients per month being admitted for in-patient care in the Akhmeta Hospital and Maternity Hospital. Also, the refugees and the vulnerable local population were provided with emergency medical service, transportation and intensive medical care at appropriate hospitals in Akhmeta, Telavi and Tbilisi. Some 50 home visits of an emergency nature were made by Pankisi Valley medical staff every day using the ambulance service. Twenty emergency referrals were made to Telavi and Tbilisi Hospitals per month. About 100 patients per month received out-patient medical services in Akhmeta hospital and polyclinic.

Efforts were made to further improve the quality of clinical practice. By providing health education and health promotion activities for the community at large, the Federation and the RCSG helped the population to become more independent and self-sufficient in regard to their health and in responding to day-to-day health problems and accidents. Standards of hygiene practice have improved.

In total, 2,500 most vulnerable refugees and members of the local population were provided with winter jackets and boots and 3,000 refugees and vulnerable local families (approximately 12,000 beneficiaries) received hygiene parcels on a bimonthly basis for an eight-month period.

Outstanding needs

With full consideration to the humanitarian environment in Georgia, the Federation strongly believes it should continue to address the outstanding needs of this vulnerable group. The full extent of the Federation's intervention, however, depends on an adequate donor response. Funding is urgently required to implement the planned activities, at least until the end of the year. Specific needs include:

	CHF
Medical supplies	43'000
Medical equipment	3'000
Referral costs	97'000
Secondary health care	32'000
Transport and storage	24'000
National staff	43'000
General and administration	18'000
TOTAL	260'000

For further details please contact: Sylvie Chevalley, Federation Desk Officer, Phone: 41 22 730 4276

Fax: 41 22 733 03 95; email: chevalle@ifrc.org

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation web site at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

Head a.i.
Relationship Management Department

Head
Europe Department