

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

CHERNOBYL: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMME (CHARP) IN BELARUS, UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

20 July 2001

Appeal No. 01.60/2001

Launched on 5 December 2000 for CHF 1,486,967 for 12 months.

Beneficiaries: 180,000

Operations Update No. 1 Period covered: 1 January to 31 May 2001 Next Ops Update No. 2 expected November 2001

“At a Glance”

Appeal coverage: 45.7%

Outstanding needs: CHF 807,152

The Disaster/Situation: The Red Cross' Chernobyl programme has supported vulnerable people for more than 10 years. Health projects have been scaled up in important areas but challenges remain to sustain funding so that vital community support can continue. Widespread vulnerability still exists 15 years on from the world's worst technological disaster and there is a clear need for continued effective programming.

Operational Developments:

In March, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved the construction of a plant to process liquid radioactive waste at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. The project will cost an estimated EUR17.4 million and is due to be financed with a loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. A consortium, comprised of Belgatom (Belgium), SGN (France), and ANSALDO (Spain), has drafted the project. Belgatom will head the project to build a plant with capacity to process

25,000 cubic meters of waste per year. The EU's programme to close Chernobyl is focusing on building a second concrete shelter over the destroyed fourth reactor and providing a loan to complete the construction of reactors at Rivne and Khmelnytsky. This will compensate for the closure of Chernobyl, which closed last December.

Scientists say that low radiation doses can cause multiple changes in human DNA, which are then passed on to future generations. Researchers found "an unexpectedly high increase" in mutations among children born after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The scientists, from Israel and Ukraine, have reported their findings in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society: Biological Sciences*, a UK journal. Children of fathers who had been exposed to radiation were screened.

The report says: "An unexpectedly high (sevenfold) increase in the number of new bands in individuals conceived after parental exposure compared with the level seen in controls was recorded. A strong tendency for the number of new bands to decrease with elapsed time between exposure and offspring conception was established for the Ukrainian families. These results indicate that low doses of radiation can induce multiple changes in human DNA." The report concludes: "The small contribution of these changes to the immediate genetic risk does not exclude the possibility of prolonged effects."

Red Cross Red Crescent action

The explosion of the fourth unit of the Chernobyl nuclear plant on 26 April 1986 resulted in the world's biggest technological disaster, contaminating huge areas in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation. It affected more than seven million people. Launched in 1990, the International Federation's long-term Red Cross Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP) addresses basic health needs of those living in the most contaminated areas. The programme first concentrated on screening food supplies and the surrounding environment through radiometric testing. From 1992 onwards, six mobile diagnostic laboratories (MDLs), based in six highly-affected regions, screened background radiation and examined adults and children in remote areas. Basic health information on measures to mitigate the impact of radioactive contamination on general health was also distributed.

In 1996, the CHARP programme was modified to meet new needs. Since the radiation situation stabilized, the number of people targeted for medical screening was increased from 60,000 to 90,000 per annum. There has been a focus on children and people who were children at the time of the accident, the groups most vulnerable to thyroid gland cancer. In June 1997, six new MDLs, redesigned to conduct an increased number of examinations, replaced the old ones. Three now operate in Belarus, two in Ukraine and one in the Russian Federation.

A psycho-social support (PSS) programme was also introduced. This began as a pilot project in 1997 in Belarus, where Red Cross workers and volunteers were trained in PSS helping techniques. In November 1998, the project was initiated in Ukraine, and then in Bryansk Oblast, in the Russian Federation, in November, 1999. CHARP also included the supply of multivitamins, milk powder and medication (including 'Levothyroxine') used for the treatment of people whose thyroid has been removed. At the beginning of 2000, two pilot projects introducing the fine needle biopsy supplementary to the medical screening were started in Brest (Belarus) and Bryansk (Russia) *oblasts*.

During 2001, CHARP continued to provide the target number of medical check-ups, focusing on thyroid gland examinations. It also improved and expanded psycho-social assistance to the population. However, in spite of efforts and new initiatives to find possible donors, the programme faces a shortage of funds. Accordingly, some activities were reduced, such as the supply of multivitamins.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Society

Health

Objective 1

To continue annual screening for up to 15,000 people by each mobile team (90,000 in total annually), focusing on high risk groups such as children and young people who were children at the time of the accident (aged between 0-18).

During the first five months of 2001 MDLs examined 42,900 people, over 3,000 patients more than during the same period of 2000 (39,876 patients). The following table presents the results of medical screening performed during January-May 2001:

Oblasts	Total	Adults	Sick Adults	%	Children	Sick	%
Brest	7,256	5,118	3,707	72.4	2,138	1,571	73.5
Gomel	7,678	2,749	2,064	75.1	4,929	3,378	68.5
Mogilev	7,137	4,305	3,886	90.3	2,832	2,491	88.0
Bryansk	6,709	3,388	2,589	76.4	3,321	2,554	76.9
Zhitomir	7,015	3,159	2,840	89.9	3,856	3,344	86.7
Rovno	7,105	2,464	1,990	57.4	4,641	3,771	81.3
Total	42,900	21,183	17,076	80.1	21,717	17,109	78.8

A trend of increasing diseases of blood and blood forming organs, endocrine, digestive systems and respiratory organs has been detected. The MDLs referred 17,148 patients for further examinations or treatment, almost 1,200 more than in the same period of 2000.

Thyroid gland pathology

There has been an increase of thyroid gland pathologies, in comparison with the same period of the previous year. Most were detected among young adults, who were children at the time of the disaster. Practically all MDLs teams have registered a growth in detected terioditis, cysts, defuse nodule goiter and other conditions.

There is a clear trend of increasing thyroid gland cancer. During the first five months of 2000, the MDLs detected **14 cases**, later confirmed by specialized medical institutions. Over a similar period this year, the number of detected cases is **27, almost a two-fold increase**. They were detected in the following *oblasts* of Belarus and Russia: Mogilev, 11 cases; Brest, eight; Bryansk, five; and Gomel, three.

Objective 2

To develop rehabilitation and psychological support (PSS) activities to strengthen stability and resources of the affected population to cope with stress and anxiety related to radiation

During the reporting period the Chernobyl programme's PSS service continued to provide psychosocial support for vulnerable groups. This support was given at medical and social centres, residential areas and in MDL catchment areas. Assistance was primarily given to those who experienced serious emotional suffering caused by the crisis (serious illness, etc.) and to elderly people.

Trained RC staff and volunteers informed people on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, how to decrease the risk of radioactivity as well as how to cope with stress. This was mainly done through lectures, discussions and small workshops. Overall, 1,300 people attended 64 sessions. Training was organized at educational and health care institutions. There were also several newspaper articles and

local radio interviews which highlighted the consequences of the accident, explained methods on stress prevention and related diseases and social problems. The coverage also dealt with ways of coping with crisis.

Within PSS, a pilot project “Psychologist on Board!”, funded by the Austrian Red Cross, has started in Ukraine. As such, professional psychologists were added to Rovno and Zhitomir MDLs staff. The psychologists provide psycho-social screening of the population and give psychological assistance to affected people. If the pilot is successful, the possibility of incorporating professional psychologists into all six MDLs can be explored.

Within the Austrian donation for CHARP, it is planned to produce a psychosocial brochure for pregnant women living in contaminated areas. On the request of the Austrian Red Cross, 10,000 copies will be produced by the CHARP team locally (in Belarus).

Objective 3

To supply multivitamins to children and needed medicines to thyroid cancer patients. To achieve this the Minsk delegation will arrange procurement and supply of vitamins (containing C, D, B-group with iron, folic acid, stable iodine) to be distributed to 40,000 children in the region between January and June 2001 (a period of high vitamin deficiency). Also, L-thyroxine will be distributed through the local medical network and Red Cross-covered regional communities to people suffering from thyroid cancer and other pathologies.

In cooperation with CHARP and the Ukrainian Red Cross, the Austrian Red Cross has supplied to Ukraine 720,000 tablets of multivitamins for children living in contaminated areas. Some have already been distributed in Narodichi and Luhini Districts, the most affected areas in Zhitomir Region. Distribution of the remainder is planned for late autumn.

In February 2001, 300,000 tablets of L-thyroxine, donated by the French Red Cross, was distributed among people in Belarus who had undergone operations for thyroid gland cancer.

National Society Capacity Building

Since the end of 1999, the PSS component contributes significantly to strengthening the Visiting Nurses Services (VNS) of the three National Societies by providing regular training on methods of psychological support to TB and HIV/AIDS patients.

CHARP is one of the best organized programmes carried out by the Red Cross in the region. By providing medical and psychological assistance to the affected population, the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia have strengthened their managerial capabilities and operational experience over the past 10 years.

Federation Delegation

To date, 51 people are involved in programme activities. They include:

- 44 personnel belonging to six Red Cross MDLs carrying out day-to-day medical screening and providing psycho-social support in the field;
- three National Society programme managers;
- one CHARP coordinator at the delegation dealing with overall programme management;
- one CHARP medical coordinator at the delegation responsible for the medical part of the programme; and
- an information officer and a reporting coordinator at the delegation to ensure information support.

Also, some 200 Red Cross visiting nurses provide psychosocial assistance in six Chernobyl affected *oblasts* of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

Coordination

Since its beginning, CHARP cooperates with a number of international agencies, including the WHO, UNICEF, USAID, Japanese Sasakawa Foundation, among others. Good working relations have been established with medical institutions, dispensaries and centres, as well as leading scientists and experts dealing with Chernobyl-related issues in the three countries and abroad.

The recent 15th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster was an opportunity to stress the importance of CHARP and to develop international cooperation within the programme. In April, representatives of the Federation's delegation and National Societies took part in a series of important events.

CHARP coordinators took part in three international conferences on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster that still endure. The meetings were held in Gomel and Kiev where cooperation with representatives of partner agencies was discussed. CHARP coordinators made a number of presentations on the Red Cross' Chernobyl programme.

The media carried several news items and numerous interviews were given to TV, radio and newspapers. Material about CHARP was placed on the Federation's web site and press releases were issued in Geneva and Minsk. Several exhibitions and stands presenting the programme were organized by the national and regional Red Cross committees in the three countries. A newsletter, covering 10 years of CHARP activities and connected to the 15th anniversary of the disaster was prepared by the regional delegation in Minsk. It was distributed to governmental institutions, embassies and representations of international organizations in the countries as well as to the donor community. A booklet describing CHARP was distributed to the participants of the Kiev Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent.

A visit by journalists to Chernobyl was organized in cooperation with the British Red Cross resulting in an article and pictures in the *Saturday Telegraph Magazine* (UK). A video about the Red Cross' programme, prepared by local correspondents, was shown in some European countries.

Outstanding needs

CHARP is a well organized and coordinated Federation disaster response programme, providing vital medical and psychological assistance. For more than ten years, CHARP specialists have accumulated significant practical expertise, resulting in qualitative and cost-effective services to the most vulnerable population in polluted areas.

However, the programme is struggling to be sustainable. This year, CHARP has so far only received donations from the Austrian and British Red Cross Societies. Following their commitment to support the programme, the British Red Cross, a traditional CHARP donor, allocated funds to cover the running costs of mobile diagnostic laboratories in Belarus. The Austrian Red Cross ran a fundraising campaign to mark the 15th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and donated funds earmarked to: cover running costs of Zhitomir and Rovno MDLs for six months; replace ultrasound equipment of two Ukrainian labs; supply multivitamins; and issue a manual for pregnant women in the contaminated areas.

The programme is currently covered only until September 2001.

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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 support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

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Chernobyl						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 01.60/2001		PLEDGES RECEIVED				20.07.2001
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				1'486'967		TOTAL COVERAGE 45.7%
CASH CARRIED FORWARD				158'320		
AUSTRIAN - RC				364'845	21.05.2001	CHARP SUPPORT, BROCHURE, PROGRAM ASSISTANT FOR 6 MONTHS
BRITISH - RC		65'000	GBP	156'650	07.03.01	RUNNING COSTS OF MDL
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				679'815	CHF	45.7%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				0	CHF	0.0%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0	CHF	