

# Programme Update



## Chernobyl Humanitarian Assistance and Rehabilitation Programme (CHARP)

Appeal No. MAA67002

31 August 2008

This report covers the period 01/01/2008  
to 30/06/2008



BELARUS: A doctor from the Brest Red Cross MDL, Vladimir Sivuda, screens thyroid gland of a young woman residing in Chernobyl affected area. **Photo: Belarus Red Cross**

### In brief

**Programme purpose:** Effective medical, social and psychological assistance is provided to targeted individuals in the regions affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

**Programme summary:** CHARP continued to provide general medical, social and psychological assistance in the six regions of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia affected by the Chernobyl disaster. The core activity was thyroid cancer screening in the priority group of people who were aged 0-40 at the time of the Chernobyl accident and live in the radiation contaminated areas.

**Financial situation:** The total 2008 budget is CHF 603,072 (USD 548,247 or EUR 373,419), of which 57 per cent covered. The overall expenditures against received funding constituted about 46 per cent.

[Click here to go directly to the attached financial report.](#)

**No. of people we help:** According to reports from the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia from January to June, about 90,600 people have benefited directly from CHARP programme interventions including:

- Medical screening – 44,412 people

- Distribution of multivitamins – 31,500 children
- Psychosocial support –15,350 people

**Our partners:** CHARP is implemented by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the ministries of health of all three countries.

## Context

Being a member of the UN Inter-Agency Task-Force on Chernobyl, the International Federation took an active part in developing the UN Action Plan on Chernobyl for the third decade after the disaster. This plan was mandated by a General Assembly resolution adopted in November 2007 at the 62nd session of UNGA which proclaimed 2006-2016 as the *Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of areas affected by Chernobyl*. In this connection the International Federation has developed a CHARP concept for programme implementation during this period.

The UN resolution recognizes the contribution of the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine and the International Federation in response to the Chernobyl disaster and in support of the efforts of the affected countries. This important document confirms the fact that the Red Cross is one of the most serious actors in Chernobyl-related activities.

At a high-level meeting of UN agencies convened in New York to mark the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, UNDP presented a draft action plan covering UN work on Chernobyl until 2016. The International Federation's New York delegation as well as Red Cross representatives from the field monitored and actively participated in this event. The country representative for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine and the CHARP coordinator took part in this meeting through video conference and offered their review of the plan and an update on CHARP, stressing that the International Federation is in line with the UN and governmental strategy of helping people get back to "normality" by providing them with information on their health status. It is planned that the International Federation along with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine will continue in the years to come to provide screening for thyroid cancer and psychosocial support (PSS). After review by all the participants (IAEA, UNICEF, WHO and other agencies involved in recovery efforts), the UN action plan will be approved later this year.

On 16 April 2008, the Parliament of Ukraine held hearings on "Conditions, measures and prospects for diminishing consequences of Chernobyl disaster" that gathered representatives of central and local authorities, public and international organizations and scientists. CHARP coordinator took part in this event. In general, the hearings were devoted to issues of social protection of *liquidators* and the affected populations. The Ministry of Health submitted a short report on the health consequences of the disaster which confirmed the growing incidence rate in diseases caused by radiation. In particular it was mentioned in the report that 70 per cent of all thyroid cancer cases existing in Ukraine at the present time were induced by radioactive iodine released from the damaged fourth unit of the Chernobyl reactor.

## Progress towards outcomes

The main focus in CHARP in the first half of 2008 was on providing thyroid health screening and psychosocial support to the affected population. The programme activities were aimed at timely identification of thyroid gland cancer and other thyroid pathologies among people in the most remote areas, where state health authorities have little, if any, capacity. These services were rendered by the six mobile diagnostic laboratories (MDLs), three of which are situated in the Brest, Gomel and Mogilev regions of Belarus, two in the Rovno and Zhitomir regions of Ukraine and one in the Bryansk region of the Russian Federation.

## Outcomes

### ***Medical examinations***

From January to June, specialists of six mobile diagnostics laboratories working within CHARP have examined 44,412 people, mainly in the priority target group, i.e. individuals who were aged 0-40 at the time of the accident and live in remote contaminated territories. The screening was focused on operational areas which have not been screened recently or were not screened at all in the past. Therefore, among all people screened during this period, about 58 per cent (25,901 people) were screened for the first time since the Chernobyl disaster.

In addition to thyroid screening, the laboratory doctors diagnosed and treated other ailments upon receiving patient requests or the results of clinical tests. The capacity of the primary healthcare system is limited in rural areas, and CHARP is needed to fill the gaps as much as possible.

In addition, the Mogilev Red Cross MDL team, alongside thyroid screening, partially carried out breast screening in a target group of women who were adolescents at the time of the Chernobyl disaster. In total 5,502 women have been examined during the reporting period.

### ***Psychosocial support (PSS)***

CHARP continued to provide PSS to populations affected by the Chernobyl disaster. These activities were focused on disseminating accurate information about the long-term health effects of the accident and on diminishing stress in the affected communities.

In late 2007 the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia organized PSS workshops on methods and tools for providing psychosocial assistance to the victims of Chernobyl. The knowledge obtained at these workshops was used in the first half of 2008 to help the MDL staff, Red Cross workers and volunteers to better inform the population on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, to explain methods on how to decrease the risk of radioactivity and how to cope with stress. This work was performed through counselling, active listening, discussions and other PSS tools. Besides, Red Cross workers published articles in newspapers, gave interviews to local radio highlighting the consequences of the accident, explaining preventative methods against stress and related diseases and social problems and ways to cope with crisis situations. The Belarus Red Cross arranged production and distribution of leaflets containing recommendations on prophylaxis of thyroid gland illnesses.

### ***Distribution of multivitamins***

Between February and April the National Societies of Belarus and Ukraine, as well as the Bryansk branch of the Russian Red Cross provided procurement and distribution of multivitamins to children living in the areas contaminated by radiation. Each National Society organized procurements on the basis of a tender approach from least three suppliers, thereby strictly following the International Federation's logistics procedures.

The Belarus Red Cross procured 552,540 multivitamins tablets, which the manufacture sent directly to Brest, Gomel and Mogilev regions. The regional Red Cross committees arranged distribution through schools, children hospitals and other children's institutions. According to the target plan the multivitamins were distributed to 18,100 children during April and May.

The Ukraine Red Cross held a tender to purchase multivitamins in February. Commercial bids were received from five companies, from which it selected one, purchasing 310,100 multivitamins from it. The supplier delivered the goods directly to Zhitomir and Rovno regions and the vitamins were distributed to 6,200 children.

The Bryansk regional Red Cross branch of the Russian Red Cross distributed tablets to 7,200 children in Novozybkov, Klinty and Unecha districts; the most contaminated in this region.

### ***Other supplies***

This includes supplying ultrasound equipment and reagents for mobile diagnostics laboratories. The procurements, including reagents for blood tests and for urine tests, were arranged by the Logistics and Resource Mobilization Department of the International Federation. In March the department supplied the Belarus Red Cross with a portable ultrasound scanner and leaner probe to be used by the Gomel MDL.

Some goods available on the local market were procured by the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russian Federation. In particular they purchased reagents for fine needle biopsies. The Belarus Red Cross is in the process of buying three new laptops for the three Belarusian laboratories (Brest, Gomel, Mogilev) to replace the old ones.

At present CHARP is a well-equipped and organized programme. The most critical issue in the programme in terms of its infrastructure is the vehicle of Gomel MDL. This van was supplied in 1997 and it is now in rather poor shape. Therefore, the Belarus Red Cross addressed the Irish Chernobyl Children's International Programme with a request to supply a vehicle for the Gomel Red Cross MDL. This Irish NGO already supplied a vehicle Mercedes-Benz "Sprinter" 312D in 2006, which has been used within CHARP as a Red Cross MDL in the Mogilev Region.

This time the Irish Chernobyl Children's International Programme is considering supplying a Toyota "Hiace" van which will be used by the Gomel Red Cross MDL as a lab for carrying out thyroid screening and performing fine needle biopsies straight in the field. As this van is converted into a wheelchair-accessible minibus, when necessary it will be also used for transporting patients with disabilities from remote villages to the regional centre for in-depth examinations or treatment at the specialised medical institutions.

### **Achievements**

In the first half of 2008 specialists of the six Red Cross MDLs referred 6,946 patients with possible cases of thyroid gland cancer to specialised medical institutions for in-depth examination and surgery if needed. Suspected thyroid cancer cases were confirmed in 56 cases by cytological examinations; information on these cases was provided by clinics to the Red Cross. The patients with confirmed thyroid cancer have received necessary treatment and are under monitoring by the Red Cross MDLs and healthcare institutions.

In the examined group, MDL specialists have detected 18,135 cases of abnormal scans (i.e. pathologies). This means that on average about 41 per cent of all screened people have pathologies of the thyroid gland in various stages of development. Among the above mentioned abnormal scans the three primary thyroid pathologies detected by MDLs via screening were nodular pathology (8,300 cases), diffuse goitre (5,950 cases) and thyroiditis (3521 cases).

Special concern was aroused by the steady increase in cases of nodular pathology detected by Red Cross MDLs. In Belarus these pathologies constitute about 53 per cent and in Bryansk region about 70 per cent of all detected thyroid pathologies. The patients diagnosed with the mentioned thyroid pathologies are under constant monitoring by Red Cross MDLs because, if left undiagnosed or untreated, there is a risk that these conditions may develop into thyroid cancer. Experience shows that nodules in the thyroid gland caused by radiation, even comparatively small ones (3-5 mm), can be cancerous. Therefore, the Red Cross doctors have to carefully examine every such case and keep it under monitoring.

As a result of breast screening in Mogilev, 311 women were referred to the oncology dispensary for further examination. Some 59 women have received surgery operations due to detected breast pathologies including 6 women with detected and confirmed breast cancer.

An especially important impact of CHARP activities was provided via psychosocial support. Hundreds of thousands of people still live in an informational limbo, not knowing if the radiation they were exposed to in 1986 and the following years has triggered any cancers in their bodies. A quick, painless examination allay these fears and encourages those living in or near

contaminated regions to improve their lifestyles - the depression engendered by the fear of cancer has been shown to increase unhealthy activities- particularly smoking and alcohol abuse, but also drug abuse and unsafe sexual practices.

The impact of the programme activities is also seen in supplying multivitamins to children. During the reporting period the immunity of about 31,500 children living in radiation contaminated areas has been improved thanks to this initiative. This is confirmed by reports the Red Cross committees have received from schools, kindergartens and children's hospitals in the radiation-contaminated areas showing that after taking multivitamins children complain less of fatigue and headaches, and they are less subject to acute respiratory diseases.

## Working in partnership

CHARP is being implemented by the International Federation together with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in close cooperation with the ministries of health of all three countries. Legal basis for this were memorandums of understanding signed between the National Societies and ministries of health in their respective countries. At the regional level agreements on cooperation were concluded between the regional Red Cross committees and medical institutions where the MDLs are based.

At present the local input constitutes about one third of the overall budget. Together with the authorities, the regional Red Cross branches in all three countries fund part of the running costs; mainly office rentals, fuel and vehicle maintenance and salaries and accommodation for MDL personnel during their trips to the field.

The International Federation provides financial support to National Society personnel (MDL staff's salaries and per diem), laboratory equipment and reagents, vehicles, fuel and maintenance. Since 2006, the main international donors of the programme have been the Irish government and the Japanese Red Cross Society.

As mentioned, the International Federation is a member of the UN inter-agency task force for Chernobyl issues. Since it was launched, CHARP has maintained cooperation with several international agencies, including WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and other NGOs. At present work is ongoing on the UN Action Plan on Chernobyl for the third decade after the disaster.

## Contributing to longer-term impact

At present the International Federation together with the National Societies of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia is working on the CHARP Plan for 2009-2010 and for a long-term perspective up to 2016. It is foreseen that in the years to come the core activities will remain thyroid cancer screening and psychosocial support. In addition, the plan envisages adding screening for breast cancer to the work of MDLs. The International Federation intends to establish a reference centre for technological disasters in order to consolidate, develop and disseminate knowledge and expertise related to National Society response to nuclear accidents and other large-scale radiation events.

As mentioned, it is planned to include HIV and AIDS preventive activities in the CHARP framework though this disease is not directly linked with the health consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. However, working in rural areas and screening about 90,000 people annually the MDL teams could give people important information on HIV and carry out necessary blood testing. This would be significant support to help the National Societies implement their HIV projects.

In February, the International Federation's New York delegation proposed to promote the international representation of CHARP. The idea is to demonstrate the Red Cross work by building a best practice case around the International Federation's Chernobyl engagement.

Such a study could be disseminated internationally and thereby boost awareness and possible support of donors. The work on preparing this best practise case is underway.

## Looking ahead

Based on outputs of the programme in the first half of 2008 it is planned that the same conceptual basis will remain in the second half of the current year. The core activities will be thyroid screening in remote areas of those who were aged 0-40 at the time of the disaster and psychosocial support for the affected population.

Along with this certain efforts will be taken to spread the experience obtained by Mogilev MDL team in breast screening to other laboratory teams. Besides a preparatory work will be conducted for including HIV and AIDS preventive activities into the CHARP framework in order that as from January 2009 the MDL teams would be able to carry out HIV counselling/ testing.

One of most important issues will be providing sustainability for the programme because future activities of CHARP depend on funding, which at present has not yet been secured. This issue will be addressed in the second half of 2008 at a meeting of the International Chernobyl Coordination Committee (ICCC) which is the coordination body of the programme, composed of presidents of the Ukraine and Russian Red Cross, the secretary general of the Belarus Red Cross, and the head of the International Federation's country representation. The ICCC will discuss ways of mobilizing further funds from the international community and, of increasing local input together with the National Societies.

How we work	
<p>The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".</p>	<p><b>Global Agenda Goals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.</li> <li>• Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.</li> <li>• Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.</li> <li>• Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.</li> </ul>
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