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Update on Kosovo

Humanitarian Situation Report 78
25 January 1998 - 2 February 1999

(231)

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KOSOVO

ORIGINAL

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StF. 4

Displacement

1. Despite the recent initiatives by the international community to bring Serbian authorities and ethnic Albanian leaders to the negotiating table, the security situation in various parts of Kosovo continues to deteriorate leading to rising levels of displacement. Renewed fighting between the authorities and the KLA in the Podujevo region lasted 2 days, temporarily closing the Belgrade-Pristina road and forcing several thousand people to flee villages in the vicinity. In Rogovo, a village in the municipality of Djakovica near the Albanian border, 23 KLA members were killed in clashes with the police after the KLA attacked a police patrol and killed a policeman. This incident led to the displacement of an estimated 4,000 people from Rogovo village and some 2,000 from the nearby village of Romaja. An encounter at Nevoljane in Vucitrn, in which an Albanian was killed one week after the KLA abducted five elderly Serbians, forced 3,000 people to flee.

2. As at 1 February UNHCR estimates that there are approximately 210,000 displaced in Kosovo. Since late December 1998 some 45,000 people have been uprooted in about 40 villages throughout Kosovo. More than 15,000 of them have returned; the rest are sheltered in houses in regions far from the conflict. It is estimated that a total of some 125,000 have now returned.

3. Although there have been persistent reports of displaced living under plastic in the snow-covered hills in Kosovo, UNHCR, OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) and other humanitarian agencies who have investigated these reports have yet to confirm any cases. By the time the location of displaced in the open air is reached, they have already moved to warm shelters. It has been confirmed, however, that there are often more than 50 people living in one house. Humanitarian agencies have observed that there has been no major damage to houses in areas affected by recent conflict, unlike last Summer when large numbers of houses were burned down, but there have been reports of looting.

Returns

4. The extent to which those displaced by recent conflict have returned to their home areas is mixed. In the Podujevo region, where more than 23,000 people have fled 17 villages since late December, the displaced have been reluctant to return due to the prolonged standoff between the KLA and Government security forces. Similarly, in the Racak area of Stimlje municipality, where 45 people were found massacred in mid-January, no substantial returns have taken place. The 5,000 people who fled have remained mostly in the nearby towns of Stimlje, Urosevac and Suva Reka.

5. Nevertheless, displaced from more recent clashes have generally returned to their homes after fighting has died down due to a large extent to the extreme cold. In Kosovska Mitrovica, where 6,000 people fled from four villages after a clash between the KLA and the police in mid January (See point 3, Update 77), the displaced returned to their homes after the troops withdrew.

6. Returns of those who have been displaced for longer periods continues, albeit at a slow pace. In addition to the case of Malisevo, where an estimated 1,800 of the original 3,000 population have now returned, it has been reported that 18 families have now returned to Prilep in Decane municipality. In Junik, located on the Albanian border, approximately 1,500 of its 6,500 residents have returned. In both these areas residents are encouraging KVM to establish a more permanent presence.

Relief Distribution

7. The delivery of humanitarian assistance has become more difficult in recent weeks due to the escalation of fighting in Kosovo. On two occasions during the latter part of January the humanitarian community was unable to offload urgently needed supplies for the newly dislocated people after UNHCR-led convoys were caught in the conflict. On these occasions humanitarian personnel helped frightened women and children to cross police lines and evacuated sick and elderly men and women for urgent medical treatment.

8. In spite of the difficulties UNHCR led 3 interagency convoys per day supplying food and non-food items to meet the needs of some 70,000 displaced, host families and returnees in the municipalities of Suva Reka, Podujevo, Prizren, Vucitrn, Djakovica, Mitrovica, Glogovac, Pec, Orahovac and Klina. The relief items were provided by UNHCR, WFP, Mercy Corps International, Children's Aid Direct and Mother Theresa Society.

Human rights

9. In a statement to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 28 January the UN Secretary-General called for "full and unconditional respect for human rights of all citizens in Kosovo, full and unconditional acceptance

of peaceful negotiation as the only way to resolve the conflict in Kosovo; and full and unconditional respect for the authority of the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal throughout all of the territory of the former Yugoslavia."

10. In its most recent report, which covers the period from mid November 1998 to 19 January 1999 the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) witnessed the worst period for human rights since the opening of its field operation in early 1996. The report states: "Incidents involving substantial violations of human rights increased dramatically, not only in total number of incidents, but also severity of individual incidents and types of violations. The crisis in Kosovo dominated OHCHR's efforts. Away from the international headlines on Kosovo, the governments of the republics of Serbia and Montenegro during this reporting period took significant actions affecting freedom of media, freedom of association, and judicial protections, which OHCHR monitored on site."

11. OHCHR has recently strengthened its presence in FRY and the office now has 7 international staff and 8 national staff. 4 international and 2 local staff members are based in Pristina.

Food Aid Programme related to Kosovo

12. WFP reports that 800 MT WFP food grain and 500 MT of NGO flour were despatched from the Montenegrin port of Bar to Kosovo during the last week of January. A further 500 MT of WFP wheat grain and 150 MT of wheat flour provided by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Mercy Corps International (MCI) have been sent to warehouses to meet the needs of the Kosovo displaced in Montenegro. 7,500 MT of WFP mixed commodities have arrived in Bar and are awaiting customs and sanitary clearance. WFP wheat grain is being milled in Pristina and Podgorica in preparation for distribution in Kosovo and Montenegro respectively. WFP has procured five stitching machines to assist with the bagging process. In February WFP will establish a new food commodity tracking system in FRY known as Commodity Movement Processing and Analysis System (COMPAS). FRY is the first country where the system is being installed.

13. WFP food has been used on the convoys delivering relief supplies during the period under review. 9 villages were targeted including Stimlje which received a delivery of 1.2 MT of high-energy biscuits. Future distributions are being planned on a monthly basis within the areas of operations agreed by the different food agencies. A monitoring form to gauge feedback from beneficiaries is now being used in Kosovo. The form was developed by WFP, MCI and CRS and data extracted from the form will be entered into a single database and shared between different food agencies.

Health

14. The distribution of 1 million water purification tablets, donated by the Ireland National Committee for UNICEF, is underway in Srbica, Klina, Stimlje

and Malisevo, the areas with the highest concentration of displaced where cases of Hepatitis A have been reported. Public health units of Kosovo and Mother Theresa Society are organising the distribution.

15. The Institute of Public Health in Pristina registered 17,293 cases of infectious disease in Kosovo during 1998. 122 deaths attributable to communicable disease were also recorded. The data, which has been analysed by WHO, reveals that diarrhoeal disease remains the greatest public health problem in Kosovo as 41.5 % of communicable diseases were attributable to problems of this nature. The highest mortality rates were registered for bacterial meningitis (25.5 %), haemorrhagic fever (14.3%), viral meningo-encephalitis (4.2%), Hepatitis B (3.4%) and pertusis (2.1%). The overall incidence of Hepatitis A, while still relatively low, indicated a significant increase throughout the course of the year.

16. At the most recent mobile medical clinics meeting, coordinated by WHO, it was reported that five different agencies are currently operating mobile clinics in Kosovo. Medecins du Monde (MdM) has 4 teams, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) 3 teams and International Medical Corps (IMC) and Pharmaciens sans Frontieres (PSF) have 3 joint teams. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has two semi-mobile clinics / temporary ambulancias.

17. On 28 January there was a joint meeting on vaccination with a presentation from the Institute of Public Health in Pristina and international agencies involved in the vaccination campaign in Kosovo. Data on the vaccination campaign is currently being analysed and will be available in due course.

Education

18. The fieldwork for an assessment of school conditions in Kosovo has been completed and the data is currently being analysed. The survey covers the 12 municipalities most affected by the 1998 conflict and constitutes the first phase of a province wide assessment. Preliminary findings indicate that more than half of the schools in these areas have been completely or partially destroyed and need serious repair. Many of those which remain intact are antiquated, have poor sanitary facilities and are in serious need of school equipment. UNICEF, which conducted the survey in collaboration with six NGOs and representatives from the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM), is currently producing a more detailed report.

19. UNICEF has started to distribute school kits to schools in the municipalities of Suva Reka, Orahovac, Vucitrn and Glogovac. Plans are underway to distribute an additional 80,000 school kits, estimated to meet one third of existing needs. UNICEF will distribute 10,000 kits to beneficiaries in 4 different municipalities and Children's Aid Direct, an implementing partner of UNHCR, will distribute 70,000 kits in 25 municipalities in Kosovo. Target groups include displaced, returnees, refugees and social cases.

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MONTENEGRO

20. The information campaign in Montenegro to inform displaced from Kosovo to register has begun and the actual registration exercise is expected to start within the next few days. Each individual will receive a picture identification and all will be systematically registered in a database by the office of the Montenegrin Commissioner for Displaced Persons (MCDP). This will facilitate the monitoring of this caseload and will provide the humanitarian community with more detailed information about the areas of origin, gender breakdown and age of the displaced in Montenegro.

21. UNICEF continues to assist displaced children from Kosovo in Montenegro. UNICEF has recently provided school material and 1,000 text books for children in the first grade, as well as winter jackets and underwear for 700 children in Collective Centres. An emergency distribution of washable diapers, sanitary napkins and disposable diapers was also made to the Maternity Clinic in the Podgorica Medical Center.

ALBANIA

22. On 21 January UNHCR successfully transported food parcels provided by the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) to Bajram Curri in Tropoje district in Northern Albania to meet the needs of some 500 refugees from Kosovo who remain in the area. The food was distributed by the Albanian Red Cross the following day. This was a significant achievement as the humanitarian community has been unable to distributed food or any other humanitarian assistance since October 1998 due to insecurity. An IFRC food consignment earmarked for Bajram Curri in November 1998 was stolen by bandits. With the exception of OSCE, which maintains a small presence in Bajram Curri, there has been no international presence in Tropoje district since October 1998 although UNHCR did help some 900 refugees from Bajram Curri to relocate voluntarily to other parts of Albania during the last two months of 1998 in response to the deteriorating security situation.

23. UNHCR reports that there has been no refugee movement across the border with Kosovo during January 1999, with the exception of a group of 17 who entered Has district in Northern Albania during the first week of the month. The group, which consisted of 4 women, 11 children under the age of 15 and two other teenagers, originated from Dubrova village in Decane municipality. The group remained in Has district for two days before moving to Tirana.

For information, please contact:

Fernando del Mundo, UNHCR Pristina Tel: 381-38-321-09

David Carden (OCHA), UNHCR Belgrade

Tel: 381-11-344-2091

Fax: 381-11-344-2947

E-mail: carden@unhcr.ch

