FOCUS

The International Committee of the Red Cross in Kosovo

The mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict and internal violence. ICRC entered Kosovo in 1992 to visit detainees; since 1998 it has been engaged in a wide-ranging operation and now has eight offices and sub-offices throughout the province and coordinates the work of the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Visiting detainees

ICRC visits places of detention in Serbia and Kosovo to promote compliance with International Humanitarian Law and other humanitarian standards. It aims to improve the conditions of those who have been detained because of the conflict and the continuing violence in the province. A particular concern is to enable detainees to maintain regular contact with their families through the exchange of Red Cross Messages and family visits.

Since July 1999, ICRC has transported over 1,700 detainees released by the authorities in Serbia proper back to Kosovo. It was ICRC that brought the Gjakovo Group home on 27th April, after the Group’s members were released by the Serbian Supreme Court. (ICRC has no part in the review of such cases).

Searching for answers on Missing Persons

Almost two years after the end of the conflict, the fate of 3,525 people remains unknown. Since January 1998 ICRC has been collecting information on missing persons and the circumstances under which they disappeared. To both widen the search and provide a tool for all organisations involved in tracing missing persons, in June 2000, ICRC published the Book of Missing Persons based on information gathered from the families: the latest edition was published in March 2001.

ICRC has presented all its information on Missing Persons to the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina, with whom it is engaged in on-going dialogue. It urges them to take all steps necessary to discover the fate of the missing and reminds them of their responsibilities to the families involved.

ICRC also closely co-operates with the organisations involved in exhumation and identification of bodies.

Monitoring the situation of isolated communities

Regular visits to isolated communities are conducted to monitor the security situation as well as access to basic services and social welfare; interventions are made with the relevant authorities whenever necessary. In cooperation with the National Societies of the Red Cross, food and non-food assistance is given and projects to support agriculture, sanitation and health facilities are developed.

Providing emergency relief to IDPs and refugees

In co-operation with other humanitarian agencies, ICRC has been organising assistance for displaced persons and refugees from the Ground Safety Zone and FYROM. It has delivered over 10,000 monthly food ration
packs to people in host families in co-operation with the Red Cross of Kosova and provides hot meals to those in transit centres.

**Strengthening local capacity**

As the emergency phase (soup kitchens, reconstruction of houses, schools and health facilities) is coming to an end, the assistance provided by the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent now focuses on programmes which aim at promoting local self-sufficiency.

ICRC’s agricultural programmes support Ulpiana Agricultural High School, supply seeds and fertiliser to help relaunch the production of sunflower oil in Ferizaj/Urosevac oil factory, and assist tractor repair workshops. Municipal water boards and the Institute of Public Health receive equipment and training from the organisation.

National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent offer ongoing support in equipment and training to over 30 health facilities; mobile clinics continue operating in the Gjilan/Gnilane and Prizren areas. The Danish Red Cross runs a psycho-social programme for traumatised children in Mitrovica and Vushtrri/Vucitri, while the International Federation provides para-professional counselling, support groups and therapeutic activities for over 2,500 psychologically vulnerable people a month through psycho-social centres and mobile teams. The Norwegian Red Cross continues improving the living conditions and treatment for the patients in Shtime/Stimle Mental Institute.

**Raising awareness**

Mine awareness education is carried out through a network of over 100 village representatives in risk areas. The mine awareness programme has been introduced into the school curriculum.

ICRC also organises information sessions on ICRC, humanitarian principles and on specific issues, such as the Missing, for example for KFOR, UNMIK Police, Kosovo Police Service School, Municipal Authorities, etc.

In Kosovo, as elsewhere around the world, the International Committee of the Red Cross activities are aimed at protecting and assisting the victims of conflict and internal violence so as to preserve their physical integrity and their dignity and to enable them to regain their autonomy as quickly as possible.

*Contact: Elizabeth Twinch on pristina.pri@icrc.org*

Sadly in the course of their work, six ICRC staff members were murdered in the Democratic Republic of Congo at the end of April. At the time of writing no reason has been given for the killing and the perpetrators have not been caught.
1. GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS

1.1 The ‘Gjakove Group’ of 143 Kosovar Albanians returned to Kosovo under the auspices of ICRC, on Wednesday, 25th April after being freed from Serb prisons.

All the former detainees came from Gjakove/Djakovica where they were arrested in 1999 on suspicion of terrorism. In May 2000 they were sentenced to between seven and 13 years of imprisonment. However, on Monday, 23rd April Serbia’s Supreme Court threw out the convictions and ordered their immediate release.

The Group was greeted by the SRSG, Hans Haekkerup, who told them that it was a historic day for Kosovo and that, as a father and husband, he shared their families’ joy.

The SRSG’s position is that all Kosovar detainees in Serbian jails should be returned to Kosovo, including those that do not fall within the scope of the FRY Amnesty Law. He believes that where necessary they should have their cases processed through a judicial review in Kosovo.

Contact: UNMIK Press Office on 504 604 5711

1.2 On 29 March, the financing agreement for the Municipal Local Investment Fund II (MLIF II) for the new financial year was signed between the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) and the Department of Local Administration (DLA). The agreement provides for an EAR contribution of 2.6 million euros for small-scale municipal infrastructure rehabilitation projects in 2001-2002.

The objective of the Fund is to improve the quality of municipal services for the people of Kosovo through investment in infrastructure rehabilitation while building the administrative and technical capacity of municipalities.

According to this agreement, DLA is responsible for the overall supervision and management of the MLIF II, while the municipalities are responsible for identifying and implementing small-scale municipal projects with the assistance of the technical team provided by EAR.

Contact: Kriton Begolli on kriton.begolli@ear.eu.int

1.3 At the beginning of 2002 the Euro will replace the Deutschmark as the currency of Kosovo. On 1st January 2002 all DM accounts will be automatically converted into Euros and payments of wages and salaries should be made exclusively in Euros. To facilitate the transition, retailers are recommended to display prices in both currencies in the current year and, from 1st January until 28th February, both the Euro and the DM can be used; although payments from public bodies and companies should only be made in Euros.

During that two-month period, DM can be exchanged for Euros at banks and through the Banking and Payments Authority of Kosovo (BPK). Additional temporary facilities will be set up for this purpose to accommodate vulnerable, minority and remote populations.

The exchange can be made as follows:

- Up to 1,000 dm in cash – no fee
- Up to 10,000 DM in cash – fee to be determined
- Any amount over 10,000 DM must be paid into the bank before it can be exchanged.

From 1st March 2002, all transactions must be made in Euros. However banks and the BPK will send DM banknotes to the Bundesbank to be exchanged for Euros for the customer who will then be credited with the equivalent amount. A fee will be charged for this service.

This change of currency has been decided on by UNMIK as, from 1st January 2002, Germany will withdraw the DM and replace it with the Euro. It will no longer be appropriate to use the Deutschmark in Kosovo.

Contact: Mike Todd, UNMIK EU Pillar on 038 504 604 5498.

1.4 Four months into this year’s Consolidated Appeal donor response has been so slow that many UN agencies are having to cut or delay their projects. OCHA is therefore compiling information on the amount of money agencies have so far received, the number and type of programmes that are being affected by lack of funds and the implications of non-completion or non-implementation of projects on the proposed beneficiaries.
The information will form part of the Mid-Term Review, which OCHA Geneva will present to donors at the end of May.

Contact: Jeanne Boisclair on BOISCLAIR@unhcr.org

1.5 Over the past year, the International NGO Council of Kosovo has engaged UNMIK in an ongoing discussion over the issue of NGO annual reports. All registered humanitarian organisations working in Kosovo are required to submit these reports in order to retain their tax-free status. The Council, a body made up of more than thirty of the major humanitarian organisations in Kosovo, has succeeded in clarifying many points within UNMIK’s reporting requirements and has spurred a movement within UNMIK to seriously alter the regulation. The NGOs have argued that certain points within the current regulation, most specifically the audit requirement, are inappropriate to such a report and without precedent elsewhere in the world. Due to the efforts of the Council, UNMIK is presently re-drafting the pertinent regulation. Although the draft is still forthcoming, discussions with those involved in the process indicate that it will satisfactorily address the NGOs’ concerns. Following the release of the draft, UNMIK will consult with the NGOs to gain their feedback on the new document.

Contact: Jeremy Konyndyk on larsenf@main.kfor.nato.int

1.6 Facilities at Pristina Airport continue to improve with the provision of 34 luggage trolleys and eight rows of 32 seats provided by IOM and the New York Port Authority. In addition to its humanitarian programmes, IOM is building the capacity of the Pristina airport authorities.

Contact: Tamara Osorio on TOsorio@iom.ipko.org

1.7 War Child Holland has moved. The new address is: Muje Ulqinaku 9, Peyton area (between the Grand hotel and Dardania, close to United Nations Development Programme and Care International).

The telephone number remains the same - 038-518 086 – but is not yet connected. So in the meantime please use: 044-168447 - Mathijs Euwema, Head of Mission; 044-188309: Eveline Jansveld, Project Coordinator.

2. SECURITY

2.1 A bomb, targeting a vehicle in which five people were travelling, exploded outside the Centre for Peace and Tolerance in central Pristina on Friday, 18th April. One person, the head of the Yugoslav passport office in Pristina, was killed and four others were injured. A second device planted nearby failed to detonate. A German passport holder is being detained by UNMIK police.

On Saturday, 28th April a car bomb exploded outside Kosovo Electrical Company (KEK). No one was injured. There is not thought to be any connection between the two incidents. KEK has recently made 2,000 people redundant.

Also on 28th April eight FYROM policemen were killed and several others wounded when a patrol was attacked by a group of ethnic Albanians approximately seven kilometres north west of Tetovo.

Tension continues in Mitrovica and roads remain blocked by Kosovo Serbs in protest against the opening of tax collection points. UNMIK Police and KFOR are carrying out joint foot patrols.

In FYROM, following the killing of eight policemen last weekend in the Tetovo area, several villages around Kumanovo have been occupied by groups of armed Albanians. It is expected that FYROM authorities will retaliate quickly.

Several other incidents have also occurred but it is unclear whether they are related to inter-ethnic violence or organised crime.

Contact: Kjell Lauvik on Lauvik@unhcr.org

3. RECONSTRUCTION

3.1 The OCHA HCIC works to build links between organisations and to support the sustainable long-term economic, social and civic development of Kosovo.
The HCIC provides open access to information and data to assist organisations plan and implement rehabilitation and development projects. Agencies are invited to visit the Centre for advice on standardised data collection and to share their survey and assessment data, reports and other materials with the wider community through the HCIC.

To maximise information and data sharing among UN agencies, UNMIK Departments, JIAS, KFOR, NGOs and donors, the HCIC organises a fortnightly Information Specialists’ Forum. A Web Masters’ Forum is also being set up to encourage dialogue and generate synergy between the information providers.

An updated version of the Kosovo Encyclopaedia cd is being prepared for June 2001. The Encyclopaedia is a useful resource for those working in Kosovo (and other interested parties), as it gathers together a large amount of information from a variety of sources, including UN agencies, the NGO community, KFOR, and UNMIK. Some of the information is already available on the Internet, but is included in the cd for those who do not have regular access to the World Wide Web. The Encyclopaedia is a snapshot of the situation in Kosovo now, what has been achieved in the past, and a starting point for further information-gathering after this transition period. Over 2,400 copies of the last 2 versions of the Encyclopaedia were distributed.

The Who does What Where (W3) database currently being established gives the nature and activities of all organisations involved in Kosovo: NGOs, donors, UN agencies, KFOR, etc. The HCIC has dedicated resources to building and maintaining communications channels to ensure that data remain current, complete and accurate. However, this all depends on the international community providing us with the necessary information.

Contact: Arnaud Blasco, Humanitarian Affairs Officer – Data Coordinator, OCHA HCIC on Blascoa@email.com

3.2 Ten small businesses have been able to start up or expand thanks to a micro-grant project implemented by IOM in North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zubin Potok and Zvecan. Some of the beneficiaries are former Trepca employees and one is physically disabled.

A further 10 business plans are in the final review stage and 34 new requests are being processed.

Contact: Tamara Osorio on TOsorio@iom.ipko.org

3.3 The recent closure of the FYROM-Kosovo border caused serious problems for many institutions and organisations in Kosovo, including the Pristina Municipal Water Service.

Chlorine is vital for the purification of drinking water and the appropriate amount must be constantly available to all water-producing companies to enable them to provide properly-treated tap water. Chlorine for the Kosovo water supply is imported through FYROM, however, due to the fighting in the north and west of the country, the lorries carrying the chlorine were not allowed to pass through the border.

After a few fast calls by the Public Utilities Department to KFOR J9 CIMIC through its liaison officers at UNMIK, the chlorine canisters were loaded onto KFOR vehicles and carried over the military bypass into Kosovo. Good co-operation between KFOR and the Water Service and thorough planning and monitoring ensured the lengthy process of exchanging the empty canisters for the full ones was carried out in time to prevent several water companies from running out of chlorine.

By helping avert a water crisis, it was once again proved that, when needed, KFOR comes through.

Contact: Flemming Larsen on larsenf@main.kfor.nato.int.

4. RETURNS

4.1 From July 1999 to March 2001, 176,457 Kosovars have returned to Kosovo: 17,546 from neighbouring countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Montenegro) and 158,921 from non-neighbouring countries (Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Austria, Belgium, USA, Australia, UK, Netherlands, France, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, Turkey, Slovenia, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Czech Republic, Croatia, Poland, Finland, Hungary, Luxemburg, Italy, Israel, Slovakia, Malta, Romania, Iceland, New Zealand and Japan). It is expected that by the end of
September 2001, a further 20,000 migrants will have returned. Returns are organised by IOM in close co-operation with UNHCR, UNMIK and the relevant government.

Contact: Tamara Osorio on T Osorio@iom.ipko.org

5. SECTORAL ACTIVITIES

5.1 FOOD

5.1.1 WFP ended the post-conflict phase of its assistance programme on 31 March 2001, with some 170,000 of the final beneficiary caseload transferred to the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS). Since 1 April, WFP has been implementing the ‘Safety Net’ programme, whereby those needy families excluded from the SAS by strict selection criteria receive food aid as an alternative form of assistance until their needs can be met through other, more sustainable means.

Capacity-building initiatives are underway, to enable local distribution partners to continue assistance to beneficiaries once WFP assistance is phased down.

Contact: Liliana D’Aniello on lili ana.Daniello@wfp.org

5.2 EDUCATION

5.2.1 UNICEF Supports Catch-Up Classes For Roma Youth

Many young Roma children in Kosovo have never been inside a school classroom before. In some cases, their parents keep them at home out of fear for their safety in a still tense post-conflict environment. In other cases, parents do not send their children to school because they do not place a high value on formal education, preferring to have their children at home with them. Often, it is a combination of both these factors. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that many children are being denied their Right to Education, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the cornerstone of international law addressing the human rights of children.

To tackle this problem, UNICEF is working with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in four Kosovo municipalities on projects that have some 2,200 Roma children attending catch-up classes. These classes are designed to bring the children ‘up to speed’ so they can then join the regular education system in Kosovo and go to school along with children from different ethnic backgrounds. The project also involves a series of community meetings where issues that keep Roma children away from school are discussed; the hope is that Roma family concerns can be addressed in such a way that these children will be able to have a normal education.

Contact: Patrick Fruchet on pfruchet@unicef.org

5.2.2 Warm Weather Helps School Reconstruction Efforts

Mother Nature lent a hand to UNICEF’s school reconstruction project this past winter. Kosovo’s unseasonably mild winter has helped ensure 18 schools that UNICEF and its implementing partners started rebuilding late last year will be ready to be handed over to local school authorities well ahead of the beginning of the new school year in September. “We got very lucky with the weather,” said Orestes D. Gonzalez, UNICEF’s Senior Project Officer in charge of the school rebuilding effort. “I always thought we would bring these projects in on time, but help from the heavens is always welcome!”

Beyond the pressing task of rebuilding schools destroyed during the Kosovo conflict, UNICEF is also involved in rehabilitating a number of other schools not directly touched by the fighting, but suffering from years of neglect. The refurbishment of water and sanitation facilities and other construction work is on-going at schools throughout Kosovo. As a component of this project, local school officials are being trained in how to supervise the maintenance of their facilities and children are being taught to respect their school buildings.

By the end of this year, UNICEF will have worked on some 147 different schools in Kosovo; schools that are attended by more than one hundred thousand children.

Contact: Patrick Fruchet on pfruchet@unicef.org

5.3 HEALTH
5.3.1 Responsibility for the Kosovo HIV/AIDS Committee has been taken over by the Department of Health and Social Welfare (DHSW). After negotiations between WHO and DHSW, DHSW co-director Dr. Pleurat Sejdiu has agreed to be committee chairman, with responsibility for the HIV/AIDS action plan 2001.

Factors contributing to the increased threat of an AIDS epidemic in Kosovo are the very young population, the break down of traditional values, the strong international presence and the increasing use of drugs among youth in Kosovo.

During the past five months, the HIV/AIDS Committee has developed a programme aimed at educating the population, providing voluntary testing for those who wish it and monitoring the HIV/AIDS situation in the province. The programme has been approved by the newly established UNAIDS Theme Group and endorsed by the Department of Health and Social Welfare. The committee is to be managed by Dr. Xhevat Jakupi, who will be seconded to the Department and have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the committee’s work. Dr Jakupi was previously a member of WHO staff. DHSW has not allocated a budget to the AIDS programme, so one of Dr. Jakupi’s first tasks will be to seek funding. WHO and UNICEF have indicated willingness to support some components of the programme.

Contact: Edward Poultney on poultney@who.kosovo.org

5.4 SOCIAL ISSUES AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

5.4.1 ‘I’ve been there and I know the consequences, don’t let drugs take away your dreams...’ was the message UK DJ and former addict, Nicky Holloway brought to Kosovo youth earlier in the month at a disco in the Radio Club, Pristina.

The event, at which materials on drugs and their effects were distributed, was organised by IOM in association with local youth NGOs Hajde, Post Pessimists and Urban FM and promoted the idea that ‘you can dance and have a good time without drugs.’

A documentary has also been produced as part of this drugs awareness campaign.

Contact: Tamara Osorio on TOSorio@iom.ipko.org

5.4.2 Postcards from Peje", a film by Peje/Pec teenagers, which was shown at the Sundance Film Festival in January, has been selected for the Human Rights Film Festival, an annual New York event in June featuring outstanding human rights works from around the world.

The film, a 15 minute tour of the teenagers’ lives and their city a year after the Kosovo conflict, was developed in an month-long August 2000 workshop with youth film educator Mark Landsman. The Peje Video Project is a Balkan Sunflowers programme which received support from UNICEF, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

In the film, the teenagers talk about their experiences during the conflict and also their concern about the continuing inter-ethnic violence.

Contact: Rand Engel on bsfkosovo@kohamail.net

Please note the following contact information for the Humanitarian Community Information Centre (HCIC) in Pristina:

Telephone/Fax: 501 507 or 549 168/69
Email: yugheic@unhcr.org

For comments and further information, please contact:
Mary Millar
Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Kosovo
Pristina, Kosovo
(phone) 381-38-501-509 ~ 516 ext. 2762
(fax) 871-761-843-891

This report is also available from the Humanitarian Community Information Centre (HCIC) in Pristina and through the Internet at: http://www.reliefweb.int