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To: MSF Paris

From: MSF SREBRENICA

CC: MSF Brussels
MSF Belgrade
HCR Srebrenica
ICRC Srebrenica
UNProFor Srebrenica

REPORT ON THE DETERIORATING SITUATION OF THE POPULATION OF SREBRENICA.

The intent of this report is a last attempt to change the deteriorating situation of the population in the enclave of Srebrenica.

Humanitarian relief organisations are trying since march of this year to bring assistance to the besieged town. Some of the assistance was called successful:

1. Food supply.

UNHCR convoys delivered some food to the enclaves but with great difficulties. Many times, convoys were stopped and returned to Belgrade.

The population received mainly wheat flour and minimum quantities of protein food like canned meat and fish. People did not starve until now because they consumed part of the existing live stock. Especially refugees have big problems to get this meat because it is swapped for a part of their wheat ration.

Apart from small quantities of beans no vegetables were brought in. People buy small quantities of fresh vegetables as tomatoes and peppers at the market at very high prices: 1 KG of tomatoes for 2 KG of wheat flour. Refugees cannot afford this because rations of wheat flour are too low.

Summer is over now and fresh vegetables will disappear from the market. Livestock has considerably diminished and prices will not be affordable to anyone very soon.

There are no signs of any improvement in the food supply. Any convoy depends on the goodwill of the Serb authorities in Pale who are setting more and more conditions for any change in the food pipeline.

Many people in Srebrenica will not survive the harsh conditions of the winter if there is no dramatic change in food supply.

2. Medical assistance.

1993 19:24 From Blaavand Inmarsat-C
Medecins Sans Frontieres started up relief activities in march. The hospital was supplied with basic drugs and equipment and a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a stomatologist and a nurse are assisting the local medical staff. Drugs arrived initially without problems, but 2 month old orders of

new drugs still are waiting for clearance by the sanctions committee of the UN to pass the serbian hungarian border. Requests for alternative routes to avoid passage to Serbia were dead letter on a paper until now. The hospital is lacking basic drugs and small quantities are bought at high prices in Belgrade to avoid disaster. This is insufficient and even planning to meet the increasing demand of drugs in the winter is excluded in these conditions.

The hospital might face closure in winter because of heating problems. The central heating system needs 60000 l of fuel, a generator of 20 KVA and 12000 l of fuel to run it.

It took MSF more than 2 months of negotiations with the bosnian serb authorities to bring in a small 5 KVA generator and diesel was never allowed to come in. UNPROFOR and UNHCR have undertaken little or no effort to change this situation.

The only diesel for life essential operations as water distribution, sterilization of equipment in the hospital and refuse collection comes from illegal siphoning of diesel out of the reservoirs of the HCR trucks.

Heating is for the moment organised by wood stoves but there is not enough wood. The hills around Srebrenica have suffered a lot of deforestation and there is no fuel available to cut the wood further from the city.

3. Water and sanitation

Medecins sans frontieres runs also a water and sanitation programme in Srebrenica. The city is without water since May and is surviving on 2 to 3 litres of drinking water per person per day. The water treatment plant of Zelini Jadar was captured by the bosnian serbs in april and blown up by them in june when UN and MSF asked permission to start it up again.

In a joint programme with the International Committee of the Red Cross some additional spring catchments were constructed which assured this amount of drinking water during the dry summer months. Approximately 10 l of non drinkable water per person per day was provided by a river catchment uptown. However, this water is extremely aggressive (Ph=3.5), contains high levels of metals and stains laundry.

The old water treatment plant of Srebrenica was rehabilitated in emergency, but the water cannot be treated by lack of some materials: The chemicals and the filtration sand have to be purchased in Serbia. The reason for this is that the transport through Serbia of these materials, if purchased abroad, is delayed by the sanction committee of the UN. e.g. The special pump ordered in Belgium has still not received clearance from the sanction committee. It is very doubtful that the bosnian serbs will allow for this material to come in. Last week, small sanitation material

The overcrowding in Srebrenica is beyond any standard.
90 % of all houses and buildings are damaged by the war.
10 % are totally burned or destroyed.
20 % are partially destroyed by impacts of mortar shells.
90 % of all windows are broken.

Medecins Sans Frontieres started the emergency rehabilitation of some destroyed buildings to relocate 2500 people from overcrowded places like the school building. Other buildings need to be prepared for the winter. More than 5000 people are facing to die of cold if these repairs are not done.

UNHCR funded MSF for it's rehabilitation programme and lots of material was purchased in Belgrade. However, none of it arrived in Srebrenica and the bosnian serbs are not likely to grant permission very soon. The programme could continue for a while with local materials. Bricks were recuperated from totally destroyed houses, some stoves were made from transformer units, some reservoirs and other materials were found in the local factories and cement was replaced by locally produced lime. This material is finished now, and the programme is stopped. It can only be started again when material from outside comes in.

Even if this material comes in, it will only solve the problem for a part of the population. It is necessary to bring in prefab housing for at least 5000 people very soon. Several suitable sites were located and the project was introduced to the local authorities before it was even introduced to the serbs. More than 100 trucks are necessary to bring in housing for 5000 people. The UN is powerless and negotiations with the serbs just have started. It is very doubtful that permission for these trucks will be granted and if, it will be at a high price.

5. Conclusion.

The population of Srebrenica is completely isolated from the outside world and is forced into self sufficiency. However, it is impossible to provide the structure for self sufficiency in the short term and even in the long term as long as the bosnian serbs are ruling the area. There are no local resources and there is no energy source, there are no institutions, and there are no people and material to start up these institutions: .e.g: The hospital, the first institution which was organized, (before it was only a dispensary), is completely depending on drugs and high qualified medical staff from Medecins Sans Frontieres. There are no local people to replace the surgeon, the anaesthetist and the stomatologist. None of them is able or has the power to get drugs from outside into the area. The hospital is only one example of the numerous other social and legal institutions which need to be created. They all face the same problems. There are no qualified persons available to run these institutions and they will not come from Sarajevo or Tuzla. The idea of a self sufficient enclave surrounded by a hostile population is a complete illusion.

The UN declared Srebrenica as a safe haven, but in fact sold it to the bosnian serbs who are turning it slowly into a legal

6 SEP 1993 19:25 From Blaavand Inmarsat-C

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P4

extermination camp. They are deciding on materials to come in, so they are the managers of all relief programme. The UN and the humanitarian organisations only function as a cheap labour force for them. They run a farm of 45000 people with a serbian manager who is only interested in getting rid of his animals.

The humiliation of the local population and the relief personnel is total. Even food and cigarettes for the expatriate personnel need to be declared and is often stopped and returned.

Farmers, many women among them, are regularly shot on their farmland by snipers from serb territory. The reaction of UNPROFOR is limited to a verbal protest to the local serb commander. On one occasion, a drunken serbian old man walked into the demilitarized zone and ended up in the hospital where he was killed at night by an extremist. However, at that moment UNPROFOR'S reaction was strong: Everybody was mobilized to arrest the killer and the prison was guarded with APC's in order not to make the serbian boss angry.

When UNPROFOR arrived in march, people thought it was the end of the nightmare and there was a general optimism. This optimism turns into bitterness now. Everybody realizes that the tragedy is not far off.

The only solution is an immediate corridor for material to Srebrenica controlled by UN without any control or interference from the bosnian serb authorities in Pale, and a massive aid programme.

The needs are known. Many times, people came in by helicopter to assess the situation. Many times, promises were made to the local authorities but nothing moved.

The nightmare from early this year is coming back with one little difference: It is still orchestrated by the bosnian serbs but completely implemented by the UN and the humanitarian organisations. To die of mortar shells is finally more humane than to die of cold and misery.

If the free passage of relief material is not possible, we prefer the retreat of all protection and assistance than to witness the latter.

For MSF Srebrenica:
Hans ULENS
16.09.93

Last Page : Total Page(s)