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Helping Hands in a Shattered Republic: Victim Assistance in Chechnya

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In some countries, where international organizations have been managing services and have reached a very high level of proficiency, when the country's government began to take over management of the facilities, budget levels, quality of care and the number of patients served all dropped significantly. It is our feeling that, had some of the NGOs been able to operate more freely, they would have been able to attract private funds and other donor funds that could not go to the government.

In addition, we also feel that the focus on patient care is, in many cases, just as important—if not more important—than the type of device that is being used. We put a lot of emphasis on the training of supportive supervision and capacity building of service delivery to orthopedic patients.

In conclusion, it is clear that every country has different problems. In Angola, the main problem is the lack of infrastructure. In Chechnya, the main problem is the lack of funding. In both cases, the NGOs have been able to provide some level of care, but they need more support to continue their work. As more countries adopt the "Sports for Life" program, it will become easier to provide care to these individuals. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has focused on the provision of medical care and prosthetic manufacturing to help these individuals. It is important that we continue to support these NGOs in their efforts to help these individuals.

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The humanitarian response the ICRC has provided to the area of the northern Caucasus is admirable. Not only does the ICRC deliver food and other supplies to the IDPs, they also ensure that these people have adequate access to chlorinated water, provide medical assistance to hospitals, encourage mine awareness, and work with other national organizations and societies. In the republic of Chechnya, the ICRC focuses on vulnerable groups in Grozny, Shali, Gudermes, Argun, Martan, Ashkari, and Khasavyurt.

In addition to the delivery of these goods, the ICRC has revived the population of Chechnya in other ways. A water pumping station in Grozny has been restored and now delivers chlorinated water to the population of the city from two tanks. However, this supply is only enough to cover the needs of about 370,000 citizens. The ICRC assists medical care structures in various ways as well. Donations of medical supplies and drugs have been made to nine different hospitals in Chechnya. A substantial amount of surgical equipment was also provided to these hospitals during the month of April. On March 1, 2002, the ICRC began a primary health care program. This project ensures that 23 primary medical care facilities in Chechnya are providing people with health care that they need as ICRC specialists monitor the hospitals. In April and May 2002, the medical facilities supported by ICRC donations carried out 3,501 consultations—1,960 of those cases concerned children. Mobile medical teams have also been introduced in Chechnya. These teams, consisting of two doctors (a general practitioner and a pediatrician), a nurse and a driver, give "basic medical advice and, if needed, distribute medicine."

Mine awareness programs attempt to teach groups of people the dangers of landmines. As IDPs begin to move through the republic, the threat of injury becomes imminent. It is for this reason that awareness is an important facet of victim assistance. Mine awareness has already been applied to many of the IDPs living throughout the Caucasus—with a close focus on children. The Chechen republic faces a long road ahead of them, in terms of the landmine crisis. Therefore, this is an essential method for reducing the risk of being killed or maimed by landmines. An example of an effective mine awareness program has been implemented in Chechnya via the ICRC. To target the youth, a puppet show called "The New Adventures of Chechin" went on a tour in the republic between February and May this year. Eighty-eight performances were brought to 13,483 children in schools in the Grozny-Soldat, Shali-Tashkenty, Naho-Tyurbyovskiy, Ura-Martanovsky and Grozny region. This puppet show has also been performing at the Graphic Arts Department of the Pedagogical Institute to help our design ideas for mine awareness billboards. A Chechen children's magazine, "Duma" (Rainbow), has expressed the desire to work alongside the ICRC to help push mine awareness information and advice to the youth.

The ICRC's attempts to assist the
people of Chechnya deserves praise and applause. The Republic of Ingushetia and Daghestan receive similar goods and aid on a scale that is almost up to par with the assistance Chechnya has received throughout the two wars. However, the ICRC has also been permitted to visit Chechnia held in detention facilities in the Russian Federation and Chechnya. Here, delegations observe and assess the conditions in which detainees are held to ensure that treatment of these people complies with the Geneva Conventions and international law.

Let's Save the Generation

Let's Save the Generation (LSG) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was founded on June 1, 2001. The goal of LSG in Chechnia is to "provide humanitarian aid to disabled children, orphans and other socially vulnerable groups." LSG has established close working relations with many organizations including: UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Memorial (a human rights center) and many others. It is alongside these cooperating groups that LSG hopes to alleviate the humanitarian crisis throughout the area.

As the name of this organization implies, children are the primary focus of the humanitarian aid that is provided and the majority of their efforts revolve around weekly trips from Vladikavkaz, provided by LSG, to Chechnia. The ICRC, provided by LSG, transport children the dangers of landmines and UXO, they also monitor them to make certain that they are receiving medical aid. To facilitate medical assistance, a new rehabilitation center consisting of three tents opened for handicapped children in Camp Bella on April 18, 2002. Many UN agencies and NGOs participated in the opening ceremony. The World Health Organization (WHO) contributed by donating toys, books and craft materials to the new center.

International Rescue Committee

According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) website, "The IRC helps people facing racial, religious and ethnic persecution, as well as those uprooted by war and violence." As the owner of an emergency situation, the IRC will send our assistance to the masses in the form of food, medical and health services and shelter. Assistance to Chechnia began during the first conflict with Russia from 1994-1996 and since 1999 to respond to the thousands of people migrating to the surrounding areas. The organization involvement in Chechnia has been critical, due to the massive number of people who have been displaced by the war with Russia. The IRC has estimated that over 500,000 have fled their homes to seek refuge in the Republic of Ingushetia, and another 100,000 others have been displaced inside Chechnia. With this tremendous inflow of IDPs, Ingushetia's population has practically doubled.

The current role of the IRC is to implement programs that will aid the IDP population in a number of underserved locations. According to their website publication, "The IRC is currently active in four sectors of the northern Caucasus: water and sanitation, shelter, education, and distribution of non-food commodities, in both Chechnia and neighboring Ingushetia."

Water and Sanitation

The water and sanitation program is one of the most far-reaching programs in the region, serving settlements and camps throughout Chechnia and Ingushetia. The water supply to communities has limited access to this basic commodity. In addition, the ICRC collects garbage and uproots sewage, pit latrines and hedging facilities. Fifty-six "safe water points" have been established, serving close to 60,000 people.

Shelter

When thousands of people become uprooted by war, severe problems arise due to the lack of suitable living conditions. As a result, IDPs migrating into Ingushetia have created a heavy burden to its already poor population. The IRC provides improved living conditions for those living in camps and settlements. This is done by conducting extensive repairs to walls, floors, and roofs and upgrading and fitting safe gas and electrical systems.

In addition, houses in Gornoey, where most of the heavy damage exists, are being repaired to their original state.

Education and Distribution of Non-food Goods

Basic education and distribution of non-food commodities address the vital needs that the IRC has been providing for the Chechen IDPs. The educational program consists of formal schooling and has been serving 16 schools in settlements throughout Ingushetia. Aside from this, it also includes activities such as sports, clubs, art and other types of recreation. A vocational training course offered to IDP teenagers in Ingushetia has given 109 participants an opportunity to receive a state certificate in one of six alternative professions. People in both Chechnia and Ingushetia have received a wide variety of non-food goods, such as blankets, clothing, hygiene products and other supplies have been distributed on a regular basis by the IRC.

Conclusion

As long as Chechnia's ongoing war with Russia endures, the effects on the civilian population will be devastating. Landmines will continue to be planted, which will lead us to experience lifelong physical injuries and also perpetuate the fear that will drive others to become IDPs. This short-term migratory situation can lead to several long-term problems that can have disastrous repercussions within the Caucasus: overpopulation, epidemics, and overburdened society. It is for this reason that the problems landmines have caused have become exceedingly obvious. The overall extent that landmines have permeated the lives of the Chechens has made it a necessity for victim assistance to carry over to those who have not yet been injured. In addition to the aid organizations previously mentioned in the article, many other international agencies and NGOs, have been actively involved in alleviating the crisis in Chechnia. These other organizations, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), International Human Initiative, Voice of the Mountains, World Vision International, Care International and Médecins du Monde (Doctors in the World), have helped support hospitals, health posts and clinics in several towns and IDP camps. The time and effort that have been put into assisting the IDP population in the Caucasus today has created hope for a better tomorrow.

Endnotes

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