



at home. The Canadian Red Cross is helping to sustain 3,000 Red Cross nurses working throughout the country, providing home medical care for 150,000 people. Canada is also supplying the medicines and supplies needed by these nurses. However, there are insufficient funds to support the program, with shortages of basic equipment as well as a lack of funds to pay the nurses' salaries. The International Federation recognizes the need to train nurses, nursing managers, and volunteers for all the Newly Independent States (NIS), and the Canadian Red Cross is assessing the program to determine the best form of future assistance.

The Canadian Red Cross Society has followed up with a major assessment of the Solidarity Assistance Project which has confirmed that, overall, hospitals are satisfied with the size and contents of the kits, as well as with the quality and packaging of the drugs and supplies. The hospitals have shown good control over the use of the drugs -- both in terms of usage and in storage. An earlier problem with a lack of information about dosages and warnings about possible side-effects was taken care of by the IV-th phase for Ukraine. However, with the deteriorating economic conditions in certain republics, including Ukraine, the International Federation has confirmed that the Solidarity Assistance program will have to continue for some time to come.

## CHORNOBYL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Eight years after the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine exploded, spewing radiation across Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, an estimated four million people are now considered to be at risk. The long term effects, as evidenced in increasing cancer rates and birth defects, are only now beginning to emerge, and genetic studies indicate that future generations are at risk. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies started the



*Canadian Red Cross medical supplies, with each box containing 25- and 50-bed kits with supplies for one year, destined for maternity wards in Ukraine.  
(Photo credit: Guy Tessier/CRCS)*

Chernobyl Program in January, 1990, and it is now carried out by the National Red Cross Societies of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia with the support of the Federation.

Since it began, approximately 200,000 people have been assisted by this program. One focus has been the early diagnosis of cancerous diseases and the quick referral for specialized treatment. A second has been the provision of information for the prevention of further contamination. In addition, it has been estimated that up to 90% of people in affected areas live under daily psychological stress, constantly anxious about the state of their health and the environment in which they live, with resulting nervous and/or mental disorders. Special counselling is now available.

After the successful initial resettlement of tens of thousands of families, authorities have recently become alarmed at the numbers returning to their contaminated homes. This situation is providing new information on long-term low-radiation exposure, and confirming that suspected radiation-related diseases are occurring at an alarming rate.

There are two Mobile Diagnostic Laboratories working in Ukraine (as well as two each in Belarus and Russia). They are equipped to carry out measurements of gamma radiation in the air and alpha-beta radiation levels in the soil, thereby identifying concentrations of

contamination and problem areas. The mobility of the units enables testing in remote areas where people would not normally have access to either screening or preventative information. These units are able to screen up to 60 people a day. Testing of blood and urine is carried out along with ultrasound examination of the thyroid gland and special screening of the abdominal cavity. In about 6% of those tested, radiation levels are found to be above acceptable levels. The main source of radioactive accumulation in people's organs has been found to be from contaminated foodstuffs, especially cow's milk, mushrooms and berries. As a result, the Red Cross has started distributing water filters and milk powder to kindergartens, schools and children's hospitals in the most contaminated areas. As a result of an international evaluation of the entire program in November, 1993, the program has now been focused on community screening to provide the population with reliable and understandable information on radiation levels and their effects on health. The International Federation budgeted over 1 million dollars to Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia for this program for 1994.

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