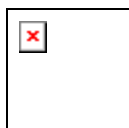


OVERSEAS AID: REPORT OF THE HONORARY EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S VISIT TO KOSOVO

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Foreword

The Jersey Overseas Aid Committee is pleased to present its Honorary Executive Officer's report on his visit to Kosovo in June 2000, together with the final report on the States' approved special funding allocation of £1,000,000 for the Kosovo disaster.

JERSEY OVERSEAS AID COMMITTEE

Honorary Executive Officer's visit to Kosovo June 2000

Purpose

The two principle aims of my visit were first to establish the possible extent and nature of grant aid that may be required in Kosovo over the next few years, and secondly to try and gauge the immediate and priority needs to be expected in emergency aid in general. This is to include how priorities are established and what degree of co-operation there is in the field among Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to avoid duplication of effort and funding, and ensuring needs are properly addressed.

Outcomes

I learned that a number of NGOs were already withdrawing and most others were gearing down and aiming to complete their tasks by the end of 2002. The problem with this target was that most agencies were concerned as to whether they would be able to obtain the further substantial funding needed due to "donor fatigue". Certainly much has been achieved in 12 months, but there is still much left to be done if this country is to return to something approaching normality. There is a substantial building programme to carry out and a great need to establish country and community infrastructures at all levels.

The degree of co-operation among agencies was substantial, well-organised, with good communications and areas of responsibility and priority clearly defined. This was essential in view of the number of agencies working in a relatively small country. Problems will arise as agencies pull out, some not having completed their tasks due to the lack of funding. With the Committee's increased allocation to Disaster and Emergencies grants, it is important to identify the priority for the need of a specific project as against the other needs of the disaster/emergency. Where a number of NGOs are involved in the disaster, the Committee need to know what steps have been taken to co-ordinate the efforts of NGOs and avoid duplication. These matters are now specifically addressed in the Committee's new explanatory booklet, which is sent to all agencies. The flexibility given in emergency grants is essential in the initial stages and confirms the Committee's policy, as is its immediate response that enables agencies to address the most urgent needs.

Thanks

My trip would not have been possible or as rewarding without the help of many people, in particular staff both in the field and at the United Kingdom offices of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Save the Children (SC) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). I was one of five people participating in a field trip organised by MAG, which, excluding travel time (which commenced at 5 a.m.!), provided a three-and-a-half day programme of their work plus one free day. I spent the morning of that day with SC and the afternoon with UNICEF, both involving field trips, and two free evenings enabled me to discuss problems with them on a one-to-one basis. I am indebted to them all for making the time available in their busy schedule and for their open and friendly contributions, which were extremely helpful to me.

General background

Kosovo is far from typical of any other emergency, as can be seen from the substantial presence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the United Nations (UN) in heavily armed troops and the armed police. Over 300 NGOs were working there and immense funding has been provided. After being under the communist regime for a long period, Kosovo suffered a further ten years of neglect and 78 days of war.

A year ago, food aid was the most urgent need, now it appears to be in abundant supply, and many crops and farming activities are visible. Schools and hospitals just about function; many public and community services either do not function at all or do so very poorly and unreliably.

The political situation is complex. In 1974 Kosovo became an autonomous province of Serbia. It is a country where ethnic Serbians represent less than ten per cent of the population, with over 80 per cent being Albanians. Its autonomy was, however, stripped by Serb President Milosevic in 1989, and for a decade human rights abuses against the ethnic Albanians were widespread and constant. Ethnic Serbs were in all the better-paid jobs and positions of authority, including the armed police. The recent uprising and war came about to end the oppression of the ethnic Albanians and to seek independence as the Republic of Kosova. The Kosovar Albanians consider they have won the war and independence for Kosovo. That independence has yet to be recognised internationally.

Left without any infrastructure or government funding, the UN have accepted Kosovo as a Protectorate and are trying to establish government systems to run the country, and so that revenue can be collected and that pensions and public workers,

including teaching and hospital staff, can be paid. This is carried out in the name of the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK). If the UN subsequently withdraw, the Albanian Kosovars fear all will be lost, that the Serbs will return and horrendous retribution will follow.

First impressions

The road from Skopje airport in Macedonia to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, situated slightly east of its centre, shows little evidence of the substantial damage the country has suffered. Indeed, the south-east corner of the country was relatively undamaged, apart from a few pockets, whereas virtually the whole of the remaining populated area was substantially damaged. One's first impressions are therefore of remarkable recovery, a massive military presence with many checkpoints: heavy traffic with tanks and military vehicles of all descriptions mixing with significant numbers of UN and NGO vehicles, heavily laden goods vehicles, and many private cars, 50 per cent of which are considered to have been stolen.

The military barracks destroyed by bombing are to the north of Pristina, the city being virtually undamaged. In the centre of Pristina, people eat and drink in the roadside cafés in apparent relaxation, having acclimatised themselves to the filthy streets, the uncollected refuse, the surrounding shabby and dilapidated buildings, and the abundance of the razor-type barbed wire, which is a real hazard to pedestrians. Reality comes later.

Mines awareness and clearance

MAG is one of 13 NGOs and two commercial organisations involved in unexploded ordinance (UXO) and mine clearance, and 22 NGOs engaged in mines and UXO awareness programmes. Clearance is, of necessity, painfully slow, but the use of the CAT, a £160,000 mechanical flail (the only one in the world) has enabled MAG to move much faster, subject to the actual terrain and its suitability. Many areas will probably never be cleared, and such areas will be made inaccessible. Clearance in other areas is essential to permit the population to travel, work and live in relative safety.

MAG had a very effective "Child to Child" awareness programme, where very enthusiastic specially trained local staff teach selected children in various schools to perform drama to carry the messages. Such education is vital and it is now planned that mines awareness will be incorporated into the school curriculum. Whilst this will ensure a fuller coverage of schools, there is concern that it will be less effective in terms of actual delivery. Adults are also targeted, particularly in known dangerous areas, and this programme will continue if funding can be found. These are extremely worthwhile projects and they also act as a conduit for information on the proximity of UXOs and mines, which can then be tackled.

I arrived during the week before the anniversary of NATO's entry into Kosovo, and the MAG officers were concerned with obtaining further funding. The European Community Humanitarian Office's (ECHO) finance was due to run out at the end of the month, and whilst other sources had been approached, nothing was actually in place. Additionally, most of their fleet of vehicles were on hire from other NGOs who wanted them back. On our last full day in Kosovo, news came that the funding, except for the CAT operations, could not be obtained, and other operations had to be closed and notice given to all the staff. The best de-miners were selected for the CAT and the rest, including office staff, were to go. That night it was a farewell evening in more ways than one. As for Jersey's contribution, we had paid for three vehicles, including an ambulance. These were the only vehicles MAG actually owned in Kosovo, and they will be used to support the CAT operation.

Housing

It is when one travels to the north, west or south-west of Pristina into the rural areas that one becomes aware of the damage that has been inflicted. I cannot recall a single village that escaped some form of destruction. Bombed buildings tend to be flattened and not visible from a distance, whereas many shelled or torched houses remain standing and the damage is not apparent from a distance. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics classified housing damage in various categories, and repairs and rebuilding have been concentrated at the lower level of damage. Over 128,000 houses were reported as damaged - 44,000 as slight or moderate, 34,000 severe and 50,000 destroyed.

The homeless live in any possible area of what remained of their home (which in many cases could not be classified as having a roof over their heads) or in tents, and their plight will be even more difficult when winter approaches. Funding is desperately short for the more severely damaged houses and, as more people return to Kosovo, those squatting in what remains of the returnees' homes will have to look elsewhere for shelter, increasing the homeless problem. Some 250,000 refugees are expected to return in 2000/2001, but to what? If they do return in such numbers, it is questionable as to whether the agencies and the little infrastructure in place will be able to cope, and another emergency may arise.

Education

Shortly after Milosevic became President of Serbia, teaching in the Albanian language in Kosovo's schools was effectively

suspended. Albanian Kosovars were no longer eligible to attend university, but being ever-resourceful some were taught in private homes, enabling them to obtain their degrees. By the time the Serb forces had departed from Kosovo, many of the schools were destroyed either by shell or torch. UNICEF assessed over 1,000 schools and found nearly 900 needed repair or reconstruction.

Tented schools were set up by aid agencies, two of which I visited, one with SC, the other with UNICEF. Each tent had desks and chairs, a blackboard and a stove. I saw no other equipment except for a single football at playtime. Space is scarce, so pupils are taught on a two-shift system to double its capacity. When visiting it was very hot, yet this was early summer, and one headmaster was that morning faced with the problem that he could only allow teaching in the tents for another hour due to the heat. He did not know where he could safely go to find some shade to continue.

The school I visited in the afternoon was more fortunate as it had double-skinned tenting with opening windows, which made the "classrooms" much cooler, though still hot. I thought of the dedication of the teachers and the pupils, and wondered how they survived last winter with their little stove in temperatures well below freezing. I learned from UNICEF that funding is in place for the rebuilding of all schools, but the one I visited in the morning did not appear to be on the list. SC was to consider making a proposal to Jersey Overseas Aid in respect of that school, but since my return I have established that funding has now been secured.

UNICEF also showed me one of their schemes for helping severely traumatised children, where volunteer staff were gradually encouraging them to communicate and mix with other children through play, and they were very pleased with the progress being made.

Health

Many health facilities were destroyed or badly damaged, and those that are in use are overcrowded. In one room I saw there were seven beds, you could not get another bed in. They were barely a foot apart, with no privacy, no lockers, visitors just having to stand and squeeze past one another. Water and the electricity supply are a problem in many of the health centres; immunisation services have to be re-established, as has much in the way of health education and clinics. Kosovo has one of the highest birth rates in Europe and the worst infant mortality rate. Children are also at risk through poverty, with over 3,000 one-parent families; mainly attributable to the men who have disappeared during the war, many having been massacred. In Pristina Hospital a playroom has been set up by UNICEF and SC to accommodate about 20 abandoned small children. Here they are looked after for 16 hours a day, and arrangements made to find suitable adoptive Kosova families. The abandonment problem is considered to be due to poverty and the mother not being able to support the child, or the consequence of rape.

The people

Communities have been devastated by the horrific experiences of the war: massacres, rapes, torture, displacement, imprisonment, and the absolute total destruction still surrounding most of them. In spite of this, people are rebuilding their lives and their homes. This is their country and if it wasn't for man-made destruction it would be very beautiful again, but the inner wounds and memories will only cease to hurt when they die. Minorities live in ghettos for self-protection and with the protection of the NATO armed forces. One senses the underlying atmosphere of fear, anger and hatred everywhere.

By chance I met an elderly farmer in the hills who beckoned me from the roadway to enter an open door of a walled garden. Therein was his completely destroyed house with two underfloor storage rooms, which now served as accommodation for four adults. They were not watertight, there was virtually no furniture other than a stove supplied by an NGO. When I returned he pulled up a trouser leg to show his artificial limb, no doubt lost in a mining accident when trying to farm his land. He came back to all that; for him it is home. Two of his neighbours had also lost their homes and they were living in tents. Farming had ceased due to the danger of UXOs and mines. They were entirely dependant on aid as there was no work, no social security, and everything they had worked for all their lives had been destroyed or looted.

And finally

There are many matters not covered in this report, but hopefully it will give the reader some little appreciation of the tragedy that is Kosovo and how people are trying to come to terms with it. My visit effectively only lasted four-and-a-half days yet I feel I could write a book. All I could offer them were prayers, and they need a lot of those too.

LESLIE R. CRAPP
August 2000.

KOSOVO DISASTER SPECIAL FUNDING - FINAL REPORT

The States approved additional funding from the General Reserve of £250,000 in March 1999, and a further £750,000 was granted, making a total of £1,000,000. This funding has now been fully allocated as follows -

1999		£
April	7 Disasters Emergency Committee	250,000
	27 Disasters Emergency Committee	230,000
	UNICEF	20,000
July	23 Christian Aid	50,000
	Mines Advisory Group	50,000
	UNICEF	50,000
Dec.	21 Oxfam - Winter shelter programme	
	Coal for Kragujevac	50,000
	Coal for Kraljevo	50,000
2000		
Feb.	15 Christian Aid, School rehab. programme	50,000
	Sue Ryder Foundation	31,800
	CARE	46,463
Mar.	23 Mines Advisory Group	20,000
July	25 Oxfam Waste water and sewage disposal	51,737
		<u>1,000,000</u>