NINE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ALBANIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

1) THERE ARE OVER 350,000 REFUGEES IN ALBANIA, they have arrived over a period of three and a half weeks. From day one the Albanian Government has systematically moved people down from the northern border areas to the south and central regions of Albania.

2) THE REFUGEES ARE NOT IN TENTED CAMPS. There are currently fewer than 30,000 -less than 10pc of the total number of refugees- in eight camps set-up by bilateral NATO member state organisations/military. Only one NGO has established a refugee camp, MSF in Kukes!

3) THE REFUGEES ARE SPREAD OVER THE 12 PREFECTURES OF ALBANIA, they are not conveniently (for aid agencies) gathered in a couple of sites. There are no exact figures and HCR has STILL not registered anybody, latest guestimate is that 50% at least are staying with Albanian families and 40pc are in collective centres. There are probably 150 to 250 collective centres most with less than 500 people (20 min. / 5000 maximum). No one has inventoried these buildings yet and new sites are opening every day all over the country.

4) THE MEDICAL CONDITION OF THE REFUGEES IS NOT CATASTROPHIC. We have not seen any malnutrition and mortality is not preoccupying (always less than 0.5/10,000/day even in worst sites). The most urgent medical need is for psychological assistance and MSF has started a psychological support programme in Kukes. MSF has already started distributing family hygiene kits both for refugees in the warehouses and those hosted by families, the target is 18,000 kits.

5) MSF PRIORITY, WATER AND SANITATION IN THE COLLECTIVE CENTRES (17 sites, 15,000 people and rising). These places were not designed to accommodate hundreds of men, women and children. We are providing clean water and building latrines/sanitation systems. This work is not highly visible or sexy but is vital. Only Oxfam and IRC are working in this field.

6) MSF IS ALSO WORKING AT EACH OF THE THREE MAIN BORDER CROSSING AREAS. In Kukes MSF has established and is managing a camp -capacity 3200- and is planning a second. The idea is to increase transit camp capacity in Kukes and provide observation beds for the most vulnerable when the Serbs send in the next wave of refugees. MSF is also providing medical assistance in Korce transit camp for refugees from Macedonia and has obtained the right to work at the Montenegro border post.

7) WE CAN REASONABLY EXPECT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF KOSOVO AND PERHAPS MONTENEGRO ALBANIANS TO ARRIVE IN ALBANIA (1 TO 1.5M??). We can expect Milosevic to send them across when it will best hamper NATO military preparations in Albania (human flood on the roads to Kukes) and best limit NATO operational space in Kossovo (human shields). Kosovo is currently closed, it was opened last week to push 45,000 across in 72hours.

8) ALBANIA IS ENTERING INTO THE SECOND PHASE OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS. Local capacity is reaching saturation (collective centres are becoming scarce, families overstretched), NATO troops are arriving, in theory to "support/assist UNHCR" (window-dressing?). NATO will effectively build 50/60,000 new tent capacity across the South of the country in order to clear the North (ease military operations into Kosovo?). WE ARE NOW TRULY ENTERING INTO THE LARGE MILITARY CAMP PHASE. OSCE + bilaterals are very active although uncoordinated (most armies are not yet under NATO command). UNHCR remains disorganised, overtaken by events. There are over a hundred NGOs (latest estimate, and counting). This is a fantastic mess that has to be seen to be believed.

9) The MSF movement as a whole has to recognise that the future of non-governmental independent aid is at stake in this crisis. We will have to remain true to our values while not leaving the refugees in the hands of NATO which has served them so poorly up to now.

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