“Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise”

On World AIDS Day, WHO supported the Republican AIDS centre in Chechnya to organise thematic presentations on HIV/AIDS issues and a concert with leading Chechen singers and dance groups. WHO also sponsored 10,500 condoms, 100 t-shirts with the World AIDS Day logo and two banners (3 x 6 m each) that were displayed on the central street of Grozny for the period of three months.

UNICEF, in co-operation with the Republican AIDS centre, youth-information centre (YIC) of the Chechen state youth committee and local NGO “Youth against Drugs”, demonstration of the movies “Philadelphia” and “Nastia’s Diary” for young people and contributed to the joint WHO/UNICEF concert in Grozny. In co-operation with WVI, UNICEF held a performance for senior schoolchildren in Urus-Martan village. In Ingushetia, in-cooperation with the MoH of Ingushetia, YIC (local NGO “Genesis”), Republican AIDS centre, a special performance was presented by the actors of the “Peace theatre” and

local students and a fair was set up in the Nazran “Palace of Culture”.

IMC distributed 4,000 booklets on prevention and contraception to nine ambulatories and FAPs in Ingushetia and 20 in Chechnya.

Behavioural research on risk of HIV infection among the population of the Republic of Northern Ossetia - Alania and their knowledge level of HIV/AIDS issues

In September - October 2005 WHO conducted in North –Ossetia Alania a KAP survey (knowledge, attitude and practice) funded by the SDC.

The survey revealed a high degree of awareness in the population on the issue of HIV/AIDS and the recognition that it is a socially important disease. It is likely that the HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns of the previous years conducted through a variety of international and national organisations in the republic have greatly contributed to this effect. Nevertheless, the results also revealed lack of in-depth knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases in general, possibly due to the reluctance in this community to discuss freely about sexual matters and the stigma related to being infected. (Full report is available from WHO).
MSF Holland in the North Caucasus

A little history...
MSF-Holland (MSFH) has been operational in the North Caucasus since 1999 when it began supplying medicines and medical materials to hospitals and clinics treating the large influx of IDPs in Ingushetia. Hospitals and clinics in Chechnya were included in the distributions from February 2000. MSFH began the rehabilitation of health facilities in Chechnya in April 2000. From August 2000 surgical facilities were also upgraded.

From May 2000 to June 2005, MSFH organized regular distributions of drugs and medical materials to over 22 health facilities in Chechnya. Distributions were also made to over eight health facilities in Ingushetia until September 2005.

Current programmes...

Ingushetia
The overall objective for MSFH projects in Ingushetia is to contribute to improved living standards and health status of IDPs in Ingushetia.

Mental Health: the programme started in 2002. Currently there is one stationary mental health centre in the Sunzha district, as well as 2 mobile mental health teams providing mental health services in and around 25-30 spontaneous settlements. The main focus of the programme is on individual and group counselling and psychosocial education in the community.

Medical Centre: in October 2005 MSFH opened a clinic in one of the IDPs’ settlements in Nazran. The medical team consists of a gynaecologist, a therapist, a paediatrician and a psychosocial counsellor who provide aid to IDPs as well as to the local population.

Chechnya
The overall objective of MSFH operations in Chechnya is to contribute to improved health status of the population in Chechnya by increasing access to quality healthcare services.

Mental Health: Since 2002 The Mental Health (MH) activities in Chechnya have included 3 components: emergency counselling, mental health in supported TB facilities and counselling in several Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs). 24-hour emergency counselling services are provided by MSFH in Grozny hospital #9, as well as planned counselling services for patients and for the hospital staff. Since July 2005, MSFH mobile teams also provide counselling for inhabitants of the Grozny (Rural) district of Chechnya.

Mobile Teams: Since 2004 a mobile medical team consisting of a therapist, gynaecologist, paediatrician and psychosocial counsellor has been serving six TACs in Grozny. From July 2005 an additional mobile team began to serve 5 settlements in Grozny (Rural) district. In December a third mobile team will start serving the population of 4 more settlements in Grozny (Rural) district.

Emergency Response: MSF is always on stand-by to intervene in emergencies when needed and has stocks of surgical kits available in Ingushetia and Chechnya.
**Surgical Support:** MSFH supports the neuro-surgery, trauma surgery departments and intensive care unit of the Grozny city hospital #9. The program includes (but is not limited to) improving the quality of surgical, nursing and longer-term physical and mental health rehabilitation services for the patients in these departments.

**Tuberculosis:** This program was initiated in 2002. Now MSFH supports the implementation of a DOTS programme in 3 TB hospitals in Nad-terechnaya, Gudermez and Shali which serves the population of 4 districts. DOTS corners have been set up and TB educators also work in the TB teams. In the coming months MSFH plans to expand its TB work to Karagalinka hospital in Shelkovskoi district.

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**INGUSHETIA AND CHECHNYA**

### Health situation

In early December mass poisoning was reported in Shelkovskoy district of Chechnya. By the end of the month nearly 90 people, mainly children and teenagers were registered with similar symptoms (eye and nose burning, suffocation, weakness and hysterical condition behaviour disturbance, convulsions). The majority of patients were hospitalized to the Shelkovskoi central district hospital and the republican children hospital in Grozny. The diagnosis could not be set immediately; however, food poisoning was excluded. Later on, a medical commission arriving from Moscow to investigate the situation and including, inter alia, the Deputy Chief of the Moscow Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry, named the condition psychological disorder and concluded that it was caused by psycho emotional stress.

### Health assistance

As of December 2005 there were 16 humanitarian organizations engaged in the health sector in Chechnya, 14 of them also implementing psychosocial projects. In Ingushetia were 13 organisations, six with psychosocial projects. In North Ossetia 12 are mainly operating psychosocial assistance projects and one organization works in Dagestan.

The Moscow based Fund “Guarantee” visited Chechnya on 24-31 November, to address the issue of anaemia: 1) haemoglobin screening; 2) results analysis; 3) detection of women and children who require additional tests and consultations; 4) free treatment for three months; 5) follow up tests in three months; 6) statistical analysis; 7) detection of helminths; 8) treatment of helminths; 9) consultation-diagnostic services to local population. The fund carried out blood analysis of 1200 people, mainly children of five schools in Kurchaloi, Chechen-Aul, Starie Atagi village, orphanage and hospital in Kurchaloi village. Each participant received a kit of vitamins and syrups for three months intake with further follow up testing.

The preliminary results indicated that Kurchaloi people had the worst anaemia rates; Chechen-Aul – average and better situation was in Novyi
Atagi village. The best haemoglobin rate was among children of Kurchaloi based orphanage. The fund specialists also lectured parents and medical students on prevention of anaemia.

In addition to regular supply of medicines and medical consumables to the hospitals in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, and provision of several hospitals in Chechnya with Insulin, ICRC has effected a donation of laboratory equipment to the Grozny city paediatric hospital no 2, provided ad hoc medical assistance to Shelkovskoy regional hospital, funded participation of one neonatologist of the Republican children clinical hospital in two months training in Ufa and facilitated training of the ENT expert of the Nadterechny Central district hospital in St. Petersburg.

IRC distributed multivitamins to school-aged children in 10 schools in Ingushetia and eight schools in Grozny as part of its public health program and carried out a dental hygiene training for school aged children in Sunzha, Ingushetia.

In addition to continuous support of settlements in Ingushetia through operation of “family medicine” mobile teams and operation of mobile teams in Gudermes, Achkhoi-Martan and Grozny-Selsky districts in Chechnya, IMC has repaired and provided basic equipment to the “reproductive health” rooms in five women consultations in Ingushetia and rehabilitated two FAPs in Voznesenovskaya and Nesterovskaya. Commemorating the International Day of Disabled IMC donated hygienic kits to the residents of the internat for disabled and children rehabilitation centre in Troitskaya village, Ingushetia.

IMC carried out two training courses on first aid for 27 primary health level staff and nine medical college representatives in Ingushetia in November.

Hammer Forum conducted three days workshop on treatment of helminths, anaemia and issues of general health facility management for 24 health workers from Chechnya and Ingushetia in late September, and a training on prevention and treatment of childhood diseases for the staff of its assisted facilities in Chechnya in December.

MDM arranged for 20 Chechen health care workers a training course in Nalchik on first aid in emergencies and on diagnosis and treatment of the most common diseases.

MSF-France funded participation of two doctors, one - from the Republican maternity hospital in Grozny and one – from CDH in Sleptsovskaya village, Ingushetia, in the state required certified course on gynaecology in October.

MSF-Holland carried out a one-week training for 15 nurses of neurosurgery, surgery and trauma departments of assisted hospitals in Chechnya in Stavropol in December.

WHO held a training course on TB/HIV monitoring and registration for 25 state TB specialists from Chechnya and Ingushetia in Nazran in December.
**HIV/AIDS**

In November, WHO donated within its Norway funded HIV/AIDS project, during the mission of the Norwegian Ambassador Mr Oyvind Nordset ten to the Republican AIDS centre in Chechnya 1200 booklets on HIV awareness and HIV test-systems.

WHO also sponsored participation of five specialists from AIDS centres from Chechnya and Ingushetia in the training course “HIV/AIDS: Epidemiology, clinic and treatment”, organized by the Federal AIDS centre in Moscow; and organized a training course on prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV for 30 Chechen and Ingush health workers in Nazran.

**UNICEF** organized a study tour to Saint-Petersburg’s Youth Centre ‘Yuventa’ for 12 health care providers working in YFSs in Chechnya and Ingushetia, within its programme on raising awareness on HIV/AIDS and healthier life styles among young people and teenagers in the two republics.

**WVI** conducted an internal training course on HIV for its staff in Nazran, Ingushetia and in Urus-Martan, Chechnya.

**Mother and child health**

In November-December, within the framework of the SDC funded WHO IMCI/MPS/PEPC programme a training course on IMCI for 28 health workers from MoH, city and district polyclinics, and local medical academy was held in Vladikavkaz/North Ossetia-Alania; two ten days courses on IMCI for 40 health workers (paediatricians, fieldshers, and nurses) were held in Nadterechny district of Chechnya; a training course on breastfeeding and HIV consultation for 20 Chechen neonatologists took place in Grozny; and a training course on obstetric and gynaecological care for 25 Ingush state health workers was arranged in Nazran.

In continuation of its Mother Empowerment Programme (MEP) **UNICEF** implementing partner Hammer Forum targeted in October - November over 800 pregnant women, lactating mothers and mothers with under-5 children living in Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs) in Grozny. In Ingushetia, up to 290 women residing in IDP temporary settlements in Malgobek districts were covered monthly. In Achkhoi-Martan district, around 1000 women attended MEP training sessions on a monthly basis. The Ingush Republican Centre for Disease Prevention conducted training sessions in Sleptsovskaya and Troitskaya.

In October UNICEF supported the participation of two health care professionals from the Ingush and Chechen MoHs in a training course held in Lviv (Ukraine), devoted to issues of Young Child Survival, Growth and Development.
In November, UNICEF distributed MEP brochures to health professionals, breast-feeding brochures to MEP training participants and medical registration forms to the Chechen Ministry of Health. (UNICEF)

IRC provided 8-hour educational sessions about key maternal and child health messages to pregnant women in schools in Grozny and completed a round of safe motherhood trainings in the communities of Alkhaurolovo and Surkhahi in Chechnya.

**Mental health**

UNICEF continued to support the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and adults affected by the school siege of school n.1. in Beslan. In November, 48 children completed the rehabilitation course at the UNICEF-supported centre. The treatment techniques included relaxation, therapeutic games, physiotherapy, oxygen cocktails, stress relief sessions and massage. A total of 256 children have been diagnosed by the local psychologists, with support from student-volunteers from the local university. A specialist from the Raul Wallenberg’s International University of the Family and Child (St.Petersburg) paid a monitoring/supervision visit to the Centre. He provided professional advice to families of crisis-affected children, conducted individual psycho-emotional relief sessions and delivered trainings for psychologists involved in the project. Three specialists from the Centre have been trained in working with the UNICEF-provided BOS (biological feedback) cabinets.

In the context of its emotional rehabilitation programme, implemented through the Centre of Ecological Education ‘Obninsk’, UNICEF continued the implementation of the ‘Thank You All Who Helped Beslan’ project, aiming at fostering the emotional healing of traumatised children. The specialists of the Centre developed over 50 thematic sessions taking into account the regional and traditional peculiarities and the psychological state of the children, parents and teachers in Beslan. In November 2005, IT and audio-visual equipment were provided to the Centre of Emotional Rehabilitation created in one of the two new schools of Beslan. Three workshops on ‘nature therapy’ were conducted for 57 primary school teachers. 150 children have been involved in the programme through the preparation of materials for the ‘Thank You’ postcards, book and a mobile exhibition. 31 traumatized children, 10 parents and teachers from Beslan took part in the three-day autumn camp held in November in the local mountains.

In November, UNICEF provided medical equipment to the therapeutic department of the municipal district hospital, and furniture to 8 schools of Beslan.

UNICEF, through the Russian Charity Foundation NAN, completed a Psychosocial Baseline Study (Stage 1) to assess the psychological state of Chechen children, as well as the availability and quality of the available governmental and non-governmental psychosocial programmes. NAN recommended focusing on the urgent need for the establishment of a comprehensive system of psychosocial assistance for children in Chechnya, jointly coordinated by the government, the UN and the NGOs, and the development of specific rehabilitation techniques.

The first follow-up step to the study was a training for 38 school psychologists from Chechnya, facilitated by ‘Harmony’, the Russian Institute of Psychotherapy and Counselling (St. Petersburg). (UNICEF)

Apart from its regular programmes UNICEF provided six sets of children furniture, bed linens and conditioner to the Republican psychoneurological children dispensary in Grozny.

While continuing its psychosocial programs in Grozny and in Ingushetia, IRC carried out an inter-sectoral assessment in the Maiskoe village in Prigorodni district of North Ossetia in order to briefly assess the psychosocial health of population. The results of the assessment revealed severe emotional distress of unspecified diagnosis and signs of incidents of major depression with many of the village population. The Hopkins Symptoms Checklist (HSCL), a cross-cultural screening instrument, measuring symptoms of anxiety and depression was applied for this assessment.
DRC continues operations of psychosocial centres in three schools and a TAC in Grozny. In November, DRC organised a retreat for 16 Chechen children in one of sanatoriums in Kislovodsk, where they also were able to undergo neurological treatment. In Ossetia, DRC continues working with women groups and local community on the basis of schools in Chermen, Maiskoe and Beslan. Regular group work takes place with pre-selected 15 girls, teenagers and local mothers on various subjects.

Hilfswerk Austria opened a new psychosocial rehabilitation centre in Vladikavkaz to provide care to Beslan crisis victims and the general population.

UNESCO funded the training course on psychological assistance to 70 children and adults, including school psychologists, students and teachers at the Chechen State University in Grozny. The course was facilitated by local Chechen specialists from the Republican narcology dispensary and psychology department of the Chechen state university.

**Handicap International** funded participation of eight specialists of rehabilitation facilities from Chechnya in the certified course in Kislovodsk technical college and provided 16 people with prosthesis in Grozny based prosthetic workshop. Alongside with this, HI is distributing wheelchairs, crutches, mattresses etc. for disabled in Chechnya through the regional centres of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

**Assistance to the disabled**

In November, UNICEF supported within its physical rehabilitation programme for children with disabilities, a one-month orthopaedic training for a doctor from Grozny’s Republican Clinical Hospital in St. Petersburg (Russian Scientific Research Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedics); a 10-day training has been organized for two doctors from the same hospital at the Medical Institute in Moscow; Grozny’s Prosthetic Workshop supported the production of prosthetic devices and orthopaedic footwear for 12 mine survivors; the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Centre in Grozny assisted some 27 children and their primary caregivers for individual and group counselling. (UNICEF)

ICRC conducted a workshop on prosthetic assistance for three Chechen specialists from Grozny based Orthopaedic Centre in Vladikavkaz in December.

**Other news**

The Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation published a Decree regulating the referral of patients for out-of-town treatment in November.


A delegation of the Council of Europe visited Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia in early November to meet the leaders of these republics and to discuss a variety of issues, including rendering financial assistance for the restoration and development of public health and educational institutions, economic development and prospects for foreign investment. The delegation included the official representative of the European Commission in Russia, the Austrian ambassador and British ambassadors to Russia. Member of the delegation voiced the decision of the EU to allocate 20 million euros next year for social programs in these three republics.
**List of abbreviations:**

- **DRC**: Danish Refugee Council
- **EPI**: Expanded Programme on Immunization
- **FAP**: Felshcer/obstetric post
- **GP**: General practitioner
- **HI**: Handicap International
- **ICRC**: International Committee of the Red Cross
- **IDPs**: Internally displaced persons
- **IMC**: International Medical Corps
- **IMSMA**: International Management System for Mine Action
- **IR**: Islamic Relief
- **IRC**: International Rescue Committee
- **LSG**: Lets Save the Generation
- **MDM**: Médecins du Monde
- **MoH I**: Ministry of Health of the Republic of Ingushetia
- **MoH RF**: Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation
- **MoH Ch**: Ministry of Health of Chechnya
- **MSF-B**: Médecins sans Frontières-Belgium
- **MSF-F**: Médecins sans Frontières-France
- **MSF-H**: Médecins sans Frontières-Holland
- **PHO**: Polish Humanitarian Organization
- **PTSD**: Post-traumatic stress disorder
- **OCHA**: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **SARC**: Saudi Red Crescent Society
- **SES**: Sanitary Epidemiological Surveillance
- **STI**: Sexually Transmitted Infections
- **TAC**: Temporary accommodation centre
- **UNICEF**: United Nations Children's Fund
- **UXO**: Unexploded ordnance
- **VOM**: Voice of the Mountains
- **WHO**: World Health Organization

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**Health Action in the North Caucasus** is a newsletter on the Disaster Preparedness and Response programme (DPR) of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. The information is compiled by the WHO Humanitarian Assistance Programme in the North Caucasus, the Russian Federation.

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