



CANADIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY SOLIDARITY ASSISTANCE PROJECT

by *Nina Romas*
with *Red Cross Files*

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In the wake of the break-up of the political structure of the USSR also came the disintegration of the infrastructure of its industries and services. In a society which was never consumer-oriented in the first place, the deterioration of the health care system and the pharmaceutical industry has been very evident. In the USSR, the pharmaceutical production was decentralized. Individual republics were responsible for the production of certain medicines, or even more likely, for the provision of their raw materials. As a result, no republic had its own comprehensive industry. All the medicines produced were amassed by Moscow and then redistributed to the republics. Furthermore, the output of the Soviet pharmaceutical industry never satisfied domestic demand even then, and the country depended on Moscow's

domination of COMECON for access to the pharmaceutical products from countries like East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria at a very low cost. Today, none of the republics possesses the hard currency necessary for the purchase of medicines from eastern Europe, let alone from the West.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION GOAL

It was against this background that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched the *Solidarity Assistance Programme*, a multi-national medical assistance program directed at vulnerable groups in the FSU. The approach is one of Public Health, that is, to provide basic but essential medicines in vast quantities for targeted segments of the population. In this case, three groups were defined as the most vulnerable, namely sick children in hospitals, pregnant women in

maternity wards, and some 150,000 sick, elderly people living alone. The assistance is mainly given in the form of hospital kits, developed in consultation with the World Health Organization (WHO). Each kit covers the needs of either 25 or 50 hospital beds for one year. The pediatric and maternity kits are aimed at fighting the foremost deadly diseases among infants, children, and pregnant women: respiratory, intestinal, and infectious diseases. The nursing kits enable Red Cross nurses to deliver health care to sick elderly people in their homes.

CANADA'S COMMITMENT

Since the inception of the Federation's *Solidarity Assistance Program* in 1991, the Canadian Red Cross, with the financial backing of Canadian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Bureau of Assistance for Central and Eastern Europe, has provided Can. \$20,5 million worth of medicine and medical equipment for three Phases of the program, aimed at specific republics of the FSU, mainly Russia and the Baltic states (Ukraine was included in Phase I). In addition, another \$3 million in humanitarian assistance was delivered to Ukraine in Phase IV during the summer of 1994 (another \$1.5 million was simultaneously targeted for the Baltics).

PHASE IV - UKRAINE

Ukraine was once regarded as having an above average health care system within the USSR. The severe economic conditions over the past few years have seriously undermined the health care system so that today, according to the Red Cross, Ukraine displays the sharpest decline in health and health services of all the former Soviet republics. Ukraine's antiquated indigenous pharmaceutical



OPERATION BOREAL: Canadian Air Forces personnel unload medicines and supplies in Donetsk destined for Ukrainian Hospitals.
(Photo Credit: Guy Tessier/CRCS)