



50,000 homeless in the hills of Kosovo

'A humanitarian catastrophe is imminent'

— Emma Bonino

Emma Bonino, Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, with Albanian children from Kosovo, during her mission there in August. As we went to press, humanitarian organisations were very concerned about the fate of thousands of people who were hiding in forests, without shelter. On 29 August, the UNHCR discovered 47 people, mainly women and children, soaked through by rain, shivering in the cold, only 15 kilometres from Pristina. One woman had just given birth there. They said they had nowhere to go, as their houses had been burned down, and that they were afraid of the police and of shooting at night.

'There is really a very short time ahead of us if we want to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe,' warned Emma Bonino, the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs. She sounded the alarm on August 19, after a three-day visit to Kosovo, the Yugoslav province where nine inhabitants out of 10 are ethnic Albanians.

Ms Bonino decided to go to Kosovo to draw the world's attention to the human drama behind the statistics. More than 230,000 Kosovo Albanians are reported to have fled their homes during the six-month-old conflict between separatists of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and Serb forces. The situation has escalated since mid-July, when the Yugoslav army and Serbian police launched a heavy offensive backed by tanks and helicopters in a largely successful bid to drive back the KLA and retake control of territory its rebels had captured. As ECHO News went to press, 170,000 people were reported as displaced within Kosovo itself. Others have sought refuge in Montenegro, Albania, and even, ironically, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is itself still dealing with the aftermath of all those displaced in the war there.

Women and children living under the open skies

Central Kosovo's civilian population is caught in the crossfire between the two sides in conflict. Whole families, overcome with panic, have fled their homes and gone into hiding in the hills and nearby forests.

Among them are many women with young children, roaming round in the open without water, food or any support, at the mercy of the elements. Others have travelled in tractors to villages outside the combat zones, where they are crammed into the houses of villagers who have taken them in, but who can only cope if they get help soon. Humanitarian organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross are trying to locate groups of displaced people in order to reach them with emergency aid. Worst off are children who have been forced to walk for days through the mountains. Acute dehydration and diarrhoea are taking their toll.

Ms Bonino visited Cirez in central Kosovo, where hundreds of families are packed into a school building. She crouched to listen as two small boys told her their story. One of them – his eyes swollen with tears and exhaustion – explained how their mother had died during childbirth three days after they had fled their home. When a visibly-moved Bonino asked who was looking after them, they told her it was their 14-year-old sister. 'Our father has gone home to reap the harvest,' said one.

(→ continued on p. 2)

SUDAN: A FRANTIC RACE AGAINST DEATH

The situation in southern Sudan is desperate despite the efforts of humanitarian organisations to meet the challenge. Queues of people suffering from severe malnutrition, some too weak to stand, form every day in front of nutrition centres.

Children are worst hit. The mortality rate here is 20 times higher than the level supposed to trigger alarm bells for emergency action. Five ECHO experts based in Nairobi (Kenya) are co-ordinating the efforts of ECHO partners in the field. As we went to press, torrential rains were hindering access to parts of the worst-hit region, Bar El Ghazal.

See article on page 3.

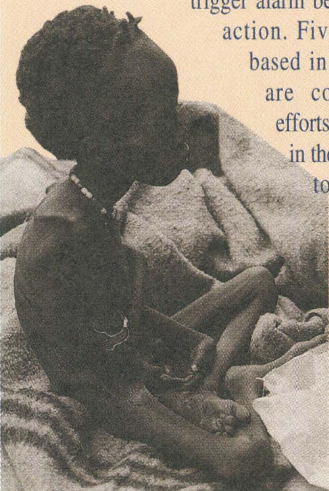


PHOTO © ECHO

CEE: VIII/57

Report from the field: **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Rebirth of a mountain village

We came across Zikrija and Tomo, two elderly, leathery-skinned men, deep in conversation outside the shell of a house buzzing with workmen. They were sitting amid piles of bright red bricks, clearly delighted to be there. 'I came this morning. We haven't seen each other for five years,' said Zikrija, 67. 'There's a lot of catching up to do.'

He and Tomo, 70, used to be neighbours in Grevici, a remote mountain village in the Mostar area of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zikrija is Bosniac (Bosnian Muslim), Tomo is Bosnian Croat. They are back for a party to mark the revival of the village, with its mixed pre-war population of just under 200. They and everyone else had already fled when the village was destroyed by retreating Bosnian Croat forces in 1994. 'We never had any quarrel among neighbours,' said Tomo of life before the war. 'Now we're coming back.'

The place is accessible only via a dirt track that weaves hair-raising hairpin bends up a lushly wooded mountain-side in an area of breathtaking natural beauty. It takes 40 minutes to get there from Jablanica, the nearest town, weather permitting. It's hard to comprehend the effort that must have gone into destroying houses in such an inaccessible place. It's almost as hard to fathom why people want to come back from the cities where they took refuge. But they do.

'I've never seen people as eager to return as I did here,' said Henrik Lemke, Danish Refugee Council (DRC) project manager for the region. He has been working on ECHO-funded programmes to assist people returning to their homes in four villages, two mixed, one Bosniac, and one Croat, in an area that had had little attention from aid agencies because of its remoteness.

DRC is in the first instance repairing houses. Its policy is to work closely with all sides to ensure any returns are sustainable. 'We don't want to contribute to any further divisions in this delicate patchwork. It's always a gamble, but we felt there was a good chance of getting the two sides together here – an opportunity for an example that could be followed elsewhere. For the first time, we're seeing the two communities, including officials, together here for a celebration,' he said as he prepared to end his assignment.

Party time: lamb and kebabs are barbecued in the open air, and passed down trestle tables perched on a narrow ledge of level land overlooking the main 'street', still a building site. Men, women and children have turned up in droves to mark the occasion. 'Today we planted fruit trees as a mark of self-confidence,' said one official. 'Tell people we're not just willing, we're determined to live together. But don't leave us too soon,' said another. 'We need proper back-up – a reliable water supply, a better road, buses to get

people to work in town, a health centre and a school.'

Zikrija had spent his time away in Jablanica, Tomo in Zagreb. When they and their families move back to Grevici, they will free up houses that others will reclaim, in a domino effect happening slowly throughout the region. Reviving Grevici was not exactly easy, but at least there was good will on both sides. Finely-tuned sensitivity to the tensions at play is essential in those negotiating returns, especially of minorities in any given spot. As one official put it: 'This country's going to be like a bowl of soup for some years as people move around.'

ECHO Information's Eva Kaluzynska was in Grevici as part of an ECHO mission to visit return projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



(→ Continued from p. 1)

50,000 homeless in the hills of Kosovo

'If we care about these people, there is really a very short time ahead' – Emma Bonino.

'If we still have the illusion that a policy of humanitarian aid alone will help people survive winter adequately, my message is that this is impossible without a political settlement. The families have to be able to return home - immediately, and their security has to be guaranteed by a peace accord.'

ECHO, in cooperation with its partners in the field, is doing its best to provide what aid it can for those displaced. It has transferred stocks of food and basic necessities such as mattresses, blankets and hygiene products from Bosnia and Croatia. 'Shelter is the most urgent issue for the 50,000 people who are hiding in the fields and mountains of Kosovo,' explained Esko Kentrschynskyj, ECHO head of unit. 'We are currently looking into all the possibilities, but there is no easy solution.'

ECHO's presence in the region since 1993 has helped it to respond swiftly to the situation in Kosovo. For instance, ECHO has been providing up to 80 percent of the support for a parallel health service. So it was able to redeploy teams already present in the region. The non-governmental organisations ECHO is supporting were able to mobilise promptly. Access to those displaced has improved over the past few weeks, but the security situation is still very difficult for humanitarian workers who are obliged to move around in convoy under the banner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, one of the only organisations to which the Yugoslav authorities have granted a radio licence. The dangers to the humanitarian community are very real: three members of the Mother Teresa charity were killed on August 25, 40 kilometres outside the capital Pristina, while transporting humanitarian parcels for the non-governmental organisation Médecins du Monde.

ECHO earmarked ECU 5.0 million for Kosovo at the beginning of August to help partners already up and running in the field there and in neighbouring Montenegro. In mid-June the Commission granted a further ECU 1.5 million for Kosovo refugees in Albania. ECHO's contacts in the field and in neighbouring countries are coordinating efforts and exchanging information in a bid to respond as efficiently as possible. Esko Kentrschynskyj fears the situation could deteriorate still further. 'The possible backlash by the separatists to the Serb offensive makes us fear an uncontrollable situation will develop as winter approaches,' he said.

Kosovo Crisis: population movements (August 1998)



Kosovo refugees in Albania: 14,000
Displaced persons from Kosovo in Montenegro: 35,000
Displaced persons within Kosovo: 170,000

An significant number of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo also fled to FYROM. Estimates not available.



ECHO's global reach

ASIA

SUDAN

KILLER FLOODS STRIKE A MAJOR BLOW TO FRAGILE ECONOMIES

Imagine over half the people in western Europe being up to their ankles in floodwaters – for over two months. In the worst-hit urban disaster areas, everything on the ground floor is under water.

That is the scale of the disaster that struck central China this summer. The flooding of the Yangtze River has affected some 240 million people, according to the latest estimates available. Over the last three months, flooding in Asia has left 2,000 people dead in China alone. In Bangladesh, there have been at least 300 casualties, in South Korea, 250, and around a hundred in Nepal.

The heavy loss of life came with a crippling blow to the fragile economies of the flood-stricken countries. Millions of houses have been destroyed, infrastructure ruined, and harvests spoiled. Two months after the flooding started, the Yangtze River shows no sign of receding. An area of farmland equivalent to the land mass of the United Kingdom and Ireland is still under water.

ECHO made available ECU 600,000 to provide emergency medical assistance for those worst hit – the floods swamped local health services. The International Committee of the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres are also providing temporary shelter for those unable to return to their homes.

The catastrophic impact of these floods has highlighted the pivotal role of preparedness and prevention. ECHO has launched the Disaster Preparedness ECHO (DIPECHO) programme in an attempt to reduce the vulnerability of people living in regions with a high risk of exposure to natural disasters. DIPECHO focuses on regions such as Central America and the Caribbean, South East Asia and Bangladesh. ECHO recently earmarked ECU 6.9 million to implement preparedness and prevention actions adapted to their needs.

In Ajiep, Southern Sudan this July, 67 people per 10,000 were dying every day. A death rate of two per 10,000 qualifies as an emergency under international humanitarian standards.

How could this happen? Blame a 15-year-long war, which has resulted in massive population displacements. Then there's the rain. It came too late for the harvests and is now causing torrents of mud in the worst-hit regions. And the parties to the conflict are at a whim preventing humanitarian access to those most vulnerable. The combination of all these factors is turning humanitarian operations into logistical nightmares.

ECHO is providing support for the main organisations active in the region. It is, for instance, providing around a quarter of the funding for the World Food Programme, which has established an impressive humanitarian air corridor: 15 planes take turns in a non-stop relay, carrying 15,000 tonnes of food a month into the disaster area.

It's not enough. Humanitarian organisations are finding new pockets of misery in southern Sudan every day. The needs are glaring, and despite the major humanitarian action being mounted, the situation may still be out of control.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF and non-governmental organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) are fighting against malnutrition in what has turned into a frantic race

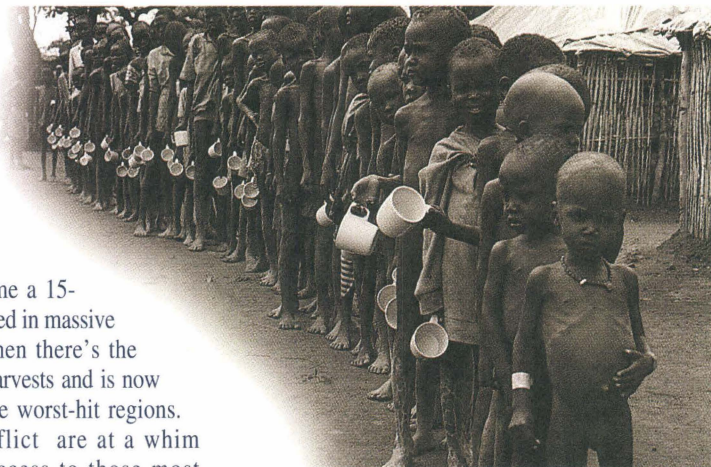


PHOTO © ECHO

against death. In Bahr El Gazhal – the province worst hit by the famine – MSF has opened 12 new nutrition centres designed to cope with 12,000 highly vulnerable children. But the number of children who meet the criteria for admission to the programme keeps rising.

'We take in 50 children every day at each new nutrition centre,' explains Stephanie Maxwell of MSF. 'The problem is that 250 children queue up every day and we do not have the capacity to feed them all. Selecting the 50 who will get something to eat is the most emotionally trying and painful part of our work. Everyone hates it.'

Since the start of the year, ECHO and the European Commission's DG VIII (which deals with food security) have joined forces help provide ECU 66 million for the people of southern Sudan. ECHO Director Alberto Navarro went into the field at the beginning of September with a delegation from Member States to take stock of the situation and weigh up future needs.

Report from the field: **Escape from terror in Sierra Leone**

A people traumatised

Alain the water technician from Action Contre la Faim and I are sitting around a small camp fire. On it is a pot of dubious mush made of green leaves foraged from the bush. A 'mama' adds a pinch of salt from a small twist of paper. Three small children sit next to us among a few tatty bundles of bits and pieces wrapped in cloth. They gaze intently at the pot. 'This is all I have,' says Mama, 'a few belongings and not even all my family'.

We are in Konnin, Guinea, just over the border from Sierra Leone. The people there are from the Kissy tribe, which lives in a region spanning three borders, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Konnin has attracted various waves of its Kissy kin. They come to take refuge from the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. They have been coming and going for over eight years now.

The latest arrivals, Mama among them, are the most bedraggled and traumatised Konnin has ever seen. They started coming over in February and two months later, their numbers were estimated to have swollen to over 100,000. There is nothing orderly or planned about their arrival. They have just plonked themselves, exhausted, in the first safe place across the river.

Konnin is a three-hour drive from Gekedou, the provincial capital where the UN and NGOs are based. It takes up to five hours to get there during the rainy season. Konnin is patently not prepared for refugees arriving in such numbers. At first, we are almost irritated by the refugees' lack of concern for our logistic problems. But when Mama and others tell us what happened to them, we are soon both chastened.

She tells her tale deadpan. She clearly has trouble believing it herself. Mama and her family come from Kono, the diamond-rich area in the far east of Sierra Leone. When the Nigerian-led West African ECO-MOG forces in February attacked the Military Junta-Revolutionary United Front coalition that had deposed

the democratic government, it was to Kono that the RUF fled. As they did so, establishing Kono region as their new bastion, the RUF killed, mutilated or enslaved all the civilians they came across. Why? That remains a mystery to most.

Mama was in the fields when they came to her village. Her son and husband were there, though, and friends who escaped told her that her husband was

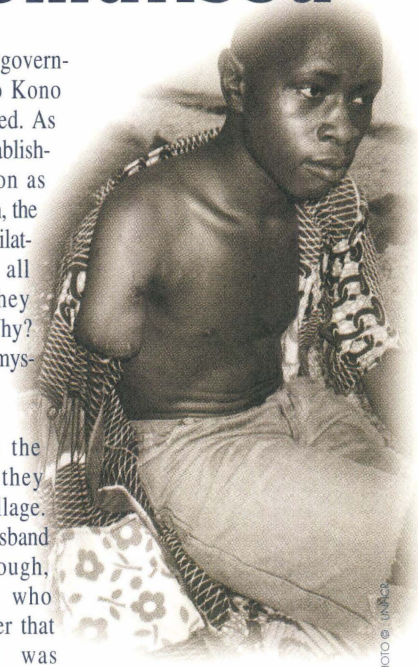


PHOTO © UNICEF

(→ continued on p. 4)

'ECHO: prime example of EU's capacity to react swiftly'

Bonita Ferrero Waldner, Austrian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The Austrian Presidency has made strengthening the EU policy on human rights its top priority. How will you implement your strategy?

'This year is not only five years since the Vienna Conference on human rights, but also the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration. Ensuring people's dignity, security and human rights values across the world is one of the principal objectives of the European Union. During our presidency we intend to improve the operational efficiency of all the procedures directly involved in the protection of human rights. We have to ensure that the European Union's capacity of responding effectively to emergencies and humanitarian crises is as effective and coherent as possible. The European Community Humanitarian Office is a prime example of the European Union working effectively, and will play a key role in enhancing the capacity of the EU to react swiftly in various fields. The Austrian Presidency has already set a firm timetable. A special conference dedicated to human rights will take place on 9 and 10 October, which will set concrete proposals for the EU's Human Rights policy well into the year 2000. I am sure that this and a special meeting of ministers focusing on



PHOTO © BERNARD HOJZNER

'I am personally very dedicated to the eradication of mines and the development of projects for the rehabilitation and reintegration of mine victims into society'

human rights will have a major impact on the European Council in Vienna this December.'

Do you feel the planning capacity of the EU is adequate to cope with humanitarian crises?

'Look at the reaction of the European Union to Kosovo. Even in the first stages of the crisis, the European

Union was there ensuring help to many of the Kosovo refugees in Albania. Commissioner Bonino went there to speak to refugees and assess the situation. Right now, we are trying to ensure open access for European Union monitors and NGOs in Kosovo through negotiations with the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.'

Situations such as Kosovo bring the question of intervention up again. How far do you think the EU should act in an interventionist manner?

'The question of intervention in countries undergoing internal conflicts is a delicate one for the EU, yet it is certain that through diplomatic dialogue and co-operation agreements we can go some way to ensuring mutual standards of democratisation and to improving understanding of human rights.'

Humanitarian workers are increasingly used as targets in countries which have internal conflicts. What solutions can be found to ensure their safety?

'It is a pressing problem. The EU can not resolve this problem on its own and must work together with all international organisations with workers in the field such as the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other NGOs. The establishment of an International Criminal Court is at least one concrete step made towards applying the law at an international level, which can in turn ensure that perpetrators of abuses against aid workers are brought to justice.'

Humanitarian affairs : Austrian presidency events diary

- October 3, Vienna : Conference on humanitarian aid and the media.
- December 3, Vienna : ECHO TV and Radio Awards 1998. Third annual presentation of awards for outstanding coverage of humanitarian issues.

For more details, please contact ECHO Information, ECHO, 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium. Tel : +32 2 295 4400, Fax : +32 2 295 4572, e-mail echo@echo.cec.be

Report from the field: **Escape from terror in Sierra Leone** - A people traumatised

(→Continued from p. 3)

immediately singled out, asked to join the rebels, and killed when he refused. Her eldest son, Abou, 14, was taken away and has not been seen since. Most of the men were killed, most of the boys abducted. But some men were taken aside and had their ears or hands cut off and told to go to ECOMOG to get them sewn back on again. The young women were raped and some were abducted. Finally, a dozen or so children and old women were herded into a shack, which the rebels set alight, incinerating all those inside.

After the rebels had left, Mama returned to the village, picked up a few belongings, and fled into the bush with her other children and a nephew. At first, she thought ECOMOG would soon liberate them, so she stayed close to her village. But only rebels came, and they looted the last of the rice stores. Then they started scouring the bush, looking for food stores concealed there, and so began Mama's long and sinister game of hide-and-seek with the rebels. She reached Konnin two months later. On the way, her baby and her nephew died. Weakened by malnutrition, they had succumbed to diarrhoea, probably from the river water they had had to drink.

Proofs of horror

Mama's tale was one I would hear repeatedly in one form or another from refugee after refugee. After touring their camps, I went to Gekedou Hospital. To my shame, I had only half-believed the extraordinary stories I had heard in the camps about maimings, but there they were, men, women and even children; some with their hands cut off or even the whole of their arm, some without a foot, some without their lips. I was later to see many more of these cases in Freetown Hospital. As a

doctor, I knew that for every one that had made it to a hospital and survived, there must have been 10 that had not. One man I saw had travelled for two weeks without arms - just imagine that. The trauma to these victims, their families, and indeed to the whole of Sierra Leonean society is unimaginable. They cannot understand why this is happening to them. What shocks them above all else is that many of the victims know those now involved in this butchery, and they cannot fathom why their cousin, uncle or neighbour is doing this.

ECHO and its partners are trying as best they can to feed and shelter these people and to patch up their wounds. There are also several initiatives to try and deal with the trauma, especially for children. But I fear Sierra Leone may never be the same again. Since my tour in the country, UNHCR, Médecins sans Frontières and others have systematically and formally put statements from many victims on the record. They hope that one day, an International Criminal Court will be able to use the statements to indict and convict the perpetrators of these crimes. Commissioner Emma Bonino herself drew attention to the plight of Sierra Leone in a successful campaign to have such a court established. For those who feel the activities of such a court are somewhat academic, bear in mind that people are still captives of the RUF and that anything, anything the international community and an International Court can do to try to save them and future victims must be done. Those responsible for Mama's plight must not go unpunished.

Philippe Maughan

The author is a medical doctor working as ECHO's regional coordinator in Coastal West Africa

ECHO has made available a total of ECU 7 million to assist victims of the crisis so far this year.

EMOTIONAL ACCORD ON INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

To emotional applause from exhausted negotiators, a five-week United Nations conference in Rome finally agreed on the draft statutes of an International Criminal Court. The agreement, reached on July 17, came after a last bid by the United States to amend it was overwhelmingly defeated by 120 votes to seven. Emma Bonino, the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, who has campaigned passionately in favour of the ICC, rushed up to the podium to embrace Canadian conference Chairman Philippe Kirsch who drafted the key compromise statute. Commissioner Bonino said later that it was better not to have the United States on board at all than to compromise on its key demand to protect U.S. peacekeepers from prosecution by the ICC.

Key facts about the ICC:

- It will become a reality when 60 countries have both signed and ratified its statutes.
- It will have the power to try war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.
- The ICC will have an independent prosecutor empowered to initiate proceedings on his or her own or after referral from a state party or the U.N. Security Council.
- The United States, China, Israel, Qatar, Libya, Algeria and Yemen voted against the draft statutes in the final vote.

OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

In the autumn of 1997 the European Union's anti-fraud task force UCLAF launched an inquiry into a number of humanitarian aid contracts signed by ECHO in 1993 and 1994 in favour of the former Yugoslavia and Central Africa's Great Lakes region. UCLAF had noticed irregularities in the execution of the contracts and in the course of its investigation said that there was a serious enough presumption of involvement of a Commission civil servant to justify the immediate notification of the Brussels public prosecutors' office. In the light of events the European Commission therefore contacted the competent legal authorities. UCLAF will cooperate fully with the judicial authorities. The Commission administration has launched disciplinary procedures against the civil servant concerned, in full respect of the provisions of the civil servants' statute.