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U.S. AGENCY FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

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Subject: Completion of Assignment Report—Duration: 7/26/01-9/7/01

Background: As result of the escalating conflict between ethnic population divisions in Macedonia, particularly during and succeeding events in neighboring Kosovo over the past four years, OFDA has become increasingly tasked to assist in the provision and coordination of USG disaster assistance in support of the Macedonia government and its citizens. In the past 6 months, armed conflict between ethnic Albanian rebels and Macdeonian security forces have produced a displaced population of some 125,000 in Kosovo and Macedonia proper. As of August 28, 2001, UNHCR/Macedonia noted that there were 70,728 IDPS from 80 villages along the Northwest to Northeastern border areas. Of these, some 3,857 were living in Collective Centers, while the remainder were living with "host families".

As the conflict proceeded, OFDA, in early 2001 provided TDY technical and program staff to assist the U.S mission with needs assessment and planning to assure that appropriate aid measures would be in place and closely coordinated within the U.S. Mission and with the Macedonian Government, International and Non-Governmental organizations. In July, OFDA determined that evolving circumstances would require the temporary presence of a team that could assure not only assessment and planning, but coordination with other USG H/A programs (i.e., Dept. of State Bureau for Refugee and Migration Affairs, NATO military tactical units expected to become involved in resolution of the conflict and with management of additional USAID conflict-management measures, especially that of the addition of a program to be undertaken by BHR/OTI. It was agreed that a team of 5 (Senior Regional Director, Military Liaison staff (2), and an Administrative Support Officer and a Program Officer) would be placed in country.

However, before a full OFDA Team could be deployed, deteriorating security conditions in Macedonia required the U.S. mission to declare an "Ordered Departure" emergency draw down of USG personnel and dependents from post. As a result, only 4 USAID staff were to be permitted in Macedonia. Of the 4 designated staff, 1 OFDA program officer was allowed to staff in country. In order for OFDA to proceed with accelerated coordination efforts, it was agreed that only the Senior Regional BHR Advisor should be placed in-country immediately while the current OFDA program officer would be temporarily detailed to Pristina, Kosovo.

Assignment Summary:

General:

Following extensive background briefings and consultation with pertinent offices and staff, I arrived in Macedonia on August 8, 2001. After meeting briefly with the TDY OFDA Program Officer prior to her departure to Pristina, I proceeded to establish appropriate contact with US Mission, Macedonian Government, I/O and NGO personnel immediately involved in assessment and planning measures for provision of humanitarian aid to those affected by the escalating conflict.

While the drastic draw down of U.S. personnel and initially severe curfew measures inhibited coordination efforts, I was able to quickly establish an effective working relationship within the US mission, in particular with the State Refugee Officer, also in the process of preparing potential assistance measures to be funded by State BPRM.

Although still evolving, the I/O community, at this time, led by UNHCR, OCHA and ICRC had established an effective central coordination mechanism to deal with the conflict emergency. Additionally, the Gov. of Macedonia had in place a Crisis Management Committee which had assumed responsibility for coordination of its efforts with the international aid community.

IDP Winterization/Shelter Effort:

In order for the USG to proceed with immediate (e.g., pending expiration of U.S. FY and need for projected Sept. 1 program initiation to assure completion of "winterization" assistance in time for weather change) consideration of assistance to those affected, I/O and NGO's in Macedonia had been requested earlier to provide proposal/concept papers focused on assuring the survival of Macedonia's displaced population through an emergency winter period of approximately 4-6 months. During the period of my assignment, concept and proposal documentation which had been requested and partly reviewed by the OFDA TDY Program Officer in Pristina, were fully reviewed in final with the

organizations involved and, in particular, with the State Refugee Officer at the U.S. Embassy to assure appropriate collaboration and division of funding. Simultaneously with the in-country review process, individual organizations also submitted proposal requests directly to OFDA and State BPRM for review and expeditious approval. As a result of these actions and the assistance of the TDY Program Officer in Pristina, an appropriate array and level of assistance documentation was prepared and presented for USAID and State PRM consideration in a timely manner.

OTI/IOM Project:

A major feature of my assignment involved assisting in assuring the early initiation of a BHR funded effort by OTI to be carried out by the International Organization for Migration. Issues had been raised with BHR/W, within the USAID Mission and by the Ambassador about potentially duplicative and conflictive activities of the new OTGI/IOM project with an already existing, on-going project (CHSI). Additional disagreement exists about how the OTI/IOM project is to be managed in country as a separate USG activity.

As a result of efforts initiated by both USAID and OTI/W, a number of issues with respect to how the two projects would collaborate were resolved early on my arrival resulting in basic USAID acceptance of the activity. Efforts were begun to assure provision of necessary OTI/IOM staff in Macedonia to begin project start-up. However, before appropriate arguments could be prepared for consideration by the Ambassador for a revision of staffing levels to permit the initiation, a new initiative for a national Media Campaign was presented to USAID for consideration. In the process, it was agreed that it could be funded, staffed through the CHSI activity, utilizing funds previously provided by OTI.

Unfortunately, the discussion/agreement surrounding this activity resulted in some agitation about the initiation, impact and management of additional USAID and/or OTI project activities, and the insertion of additional US staff into the current restricted environment. When the discussion about OTI initiation of the project was brought to the Ambassador for policy discussion, relative to the level and impact of OTI's program, the Ambassador was unwilling to consider any introduction of the OTI effort until such time as security, village access issues were resolved and full staffing was again permitted. He advised that he did not believe this would happen before about October 1, 2001 and he would not, therefore, consider allowing the project to begin before that time. Additionally, the Ambassador requested a revised country program document, to be reviewed and concurred with in country, which would detail project activity, how the OTI program would collaborate with CHSI and the timing and manner of mobilization by OTI/IOM before he would again consider allowing the project to proceed. The Ambassador would not permit further discussion of OTI.

OTI/W as advised of the Ambassador's request and documentation is being prepared at this time.

Other Issues: Staffing

There was, and is, considerable frustration within the Embassy over the "ordered departure" emergency draw down of USG personnel at post. Although it was not apparent to me until it resulted in my early departure from this assignment (and it was also evidently not apparent to USAID management), a number of decisions which had to be made concerning which staff would stay, which would go, etc., evidently resulted in some unhappiness among staff, many of whom also had to see their families depart. As a result, every time that an exception was raised for consideration by the Ambassador, I got the impression that he apparently did not want to be the "bad guy".

In an extensive exit discussion, the DCM advised that the case for any/all actions related to the need for staff beyond the emergency draw down levels needed to be made/resolved in Washington and not raised for debate within the US mission. In other words, as long as it comes from headquarters and doesn't involve those at post seeming partial at a particularly sensitive time, it could work.

Conclusions/Recommendations:

Given the level of I/O and NGO activity in Macedonian relative to the magnitude of the current IDP situation, I believe the level of shelter winterization and other emergency aid support presently recommended by OFDA and PRM, assuming similar responses which are now in final preparation by other governments and organizations, will be sufficient to assure the safe transition of those affected by this crisis through the winter period. Assuming that the EU does assume its stated desire to provide major reconstruction assistance in the spring, basic living requirements and economic recovery should be also be assured.

If circumstances worsen, it may be necessary for the US and other countries to increase temporary non-shelter assistance to additional IDPs, although this is not clear at this time.

What is not going away is the deepening hostility between ethnic groups, especially Macedonian Albanians and Macedonian Slavs. It is clear that programs like those of OTI, CHSI and others aimed at democratic confidence-building and conflict mitigation at basic community levels will be, along with more effective national Macedonian government leadership in resolving hostility and economic differences, absolutely essential to any eventual achievement of normal social relationships in Macedonia..

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I believe that every effort should continue to assure that the OTI/IOM project is implanted as rapidly as possible so that its intended objectives can be undertaken as quickly as possible. Implementation and staffing plans should be forwarded at once. Staff recommendations should be approved by USAID and concurred in and authorized by State to avoid Post personnel issues.

I recommend that a unified USAID mission management structure be considered for overall implementation of the OTI project.

Unless circumstances deteriorate dramatically, I do not believe there is any current or continuing requirement for either a large DART or a BHR Management Team, per se. in Macedonia at this time. If the conflict resumes and produces additional IDP's during the winter, recommend that an additional TDY program officer be assigned for consultation, review and preparation of such additional program assistance as may be needed.

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