

Autumn 2004 - Kosovo

Keith Sinclair

Ford has been assisting the charity Hope and Aid Direct with the movement of humanitarian aid into KOSOVO for several years. This year I was asked if I would like to assist them and actually see for myself what conditions in the tiny Balkan country were actually like. The recently published statistics on the resurgence of fighting in the area were disturbing with further deaths and injuries and further increases in the number of homeless and more misery. It was against this backdrop that I flew into Pristina at the end of September with two other 'airborne' to join the 21 people who had driven out from the UK.

The convoy, including our two 40ft rigs and the 7.5 tonne unit from Tops Cologne, had arrived at the warehouse which had been arranged by the United Nations (UN) and United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the team were in the process of 'handballing' over 60 tonnes of aid into hastily identified storage areas. It was not a pretty sight when completed – neither the warehouse nor the team.

Once the aid was unloaded it became a race against time to build consolidated loads for the distribution process. Reasonable lists for each days recipients were available and the majority of the food stuffs had been pre-packed into banana box sized family packs but clothing, shoes, gardening tools, toys etc all needed to be sorted and everything had to be loaded back onto the smaller vehicles for delivery.



In total all 60 tonnes plus of humanitarian aid was distributed amongst 1,451 families comprising over 6,600 people. Aid distribution took place across 19 municipalities comprising 112 villages including transit and collective centres for refugees. The days were long, reaching the warehouse at 07.30 am and arriving back at the hotel at 23.00 hours and left little time to develop any kind of understanding as to why this was happening. Looking around the country and meeting its people leaves you with a deep feeling of emptiness, almost hopelessness, and then you truly understand where the charity gets its name from. **Aid** part is simple. **Hope** comes from the long term support that the charity offers to various schools, orphanages, sports and youth clubs, medical centres, hospital and even the prison to give people's lives back some meaning, something resembling normality.

I guess that it's difficult to place a value on the impact of what we did, and what the charity will continue to do, but I was left with the overall impression that it does make a huge difference. I know the charity is already planning a convoy for Easter 2005 and I will be there if it's at all possible.