

ADRA ESD

PAVEL M. KULAKOV

Pavel M. Kulakov was the first ADRA director in the territory of the Euro-Asia Division from 1990 to 2000.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) was established and began operating in the territory of the Euro-Asia Division in the early 1990s.

Historical Frame

Traditions of charity in Russia have deep historical roots.¹ The famous Russian historian, V. O. Kluchevsky, in his speech “Good People of Ancient Russia,” spoke about the Christian understanding of charity and mercy:

Charity was not so much an auxiliary means of public welfare as a necessary condition of personal moral health: it was more necessary for the giver than for the beggar. The healing power of alms was not so much to wipe the tears of the sufferer, giving him a part of one’s property, as to suffer with him and, when looking at his tears and sufferings, to experience the feeling called benignity.²

The birth of charity in Kievan Rus is undoubtedly connected with the adoption of Christianity. For many centuries, churches and monasteries remained the centers of social assistance to the old, the poor, and the sick. In pre-revolutionary times, there were numerous dynasties of merchants and industrialists in Russia who donated money to acts of mercy. The names of philanthropists from the Strogov dynasty of businessmen, the Bosov dynasty of merchants, and the Demidov dynasty of factory owners were known throughout the country.

The tradition of Russian charity was broken by the revolution of 1917. All funds of public and private charitable organizations were nationalized quickly, with their property being transferred to the state, and special degrees abolished the organizations themselves. A characteristic feature of the Soviet period of Russian history was the assumption by the state of full responsibility for solving all social problems, which practically excluded the need for public charitable organizations, although the existence of acute social issues, for example, mass child neglect, forced the society even at this stage to organized forms of mercy and charity (such as, for example, the establishment of the V.I. Lenin Children's Fund).³

In the late 1980s, the state recognized the need to provide citizens with the opportunity to proactively participate in social mutual aid, seeing this not only as a way to partially free the state budget from social spending, but also as one of the means of forming a civil society. During this period of “perestroika,” several foundations were established to cover the entire territory of the Soviet Union, namely, the Soviet Culture Fund,

the Children's Fund, and the Mercy Health Foundation. According to the meaning of the charters adopted by their founding conferences, these were charitable organizations. In the following years, a large number of smaller charitable foundations and organizations were established.⁴

For seven decades, all religious organizations and associations in the territory of the former USSR were forcibly deprived of the opportunity to engage in works of mercy. It took years of joint work by governmental social protection agencies and church organizations to rebuild, in close cooperation with other non-governmental organizations, a non-state social infrastructure capable of assuming a share of social responsibility for the fate of the most vulnerable groups of the population.

ADRA Activities in the 1990s

In the mid-1980s, volunteers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church actively performed the ministry of mercy in the 4th Municipal Hospital of Moscow. The head of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the USSR, Mikhail Petrovich Kulakov, was a regular member of the executive boards of public organizations such as the Children's Fund and the Mercy Health Foundation. However, it was only after the devastating earthquake in Spitak (Armenia) in December 1988 that the country became open to accepting foreign aid. As a result of this earthquake, between 25,000 and 50,000 were killed and up to 130,000 were injured. At that time, the Soviet government, led by Mikhail Gorbachev, appealed to the international community for support for the first time. More than 130 countries responded and participated in helping the long-suffering people of Armenia. To coordinate these efforts, the ADRA International and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sent to the USSR the GC Vice President Kenneth Mittleider, ADRA International's Disaster&Relief Director Harold Siddle, and ADRA Germany's Director Erich Lischek.⁵

Since a vast number of children were affected during this earthquake, the Ministry of Health of Armenia requested to build a children's rehabilitation center in the city of Yerevan. In a relatively short time, under the leadership of ADRA Germany and ADRA International, this project was implemented, and several medical specialists from Armenia were trained at Loma Linda University Medical Center. In the first months after the earthquake in Armenia, ADRA delivered hundreds of tons of food, medicines, and other vital items to the victims.

Since, at that time, all international communications were carried out mainly through Moscow, Pavel Mikhailovich Kulakov, an Adventist pastor from Moscow, was actively involved in the work of ADRA. In October 1990, the ADRA USSR was established. A month later, at the year-end meeting of the USSR Division, P. M. Kulakov was elected director of the ADRA USSR, which later became known as ADRA ESD.⁶ He worked in this position until 2000, when he moved to the United States. Given the vast territory of the former Soviet Union, P. M. Kulakov's responsibilities included the organization of ADRA offices in the CIS countries and the coordination of efforts to implement disaster response projects in various territories.

After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, the logistics of trade in the formerly united country was completely destroyed. It was a time when food warehouses and grocery stores were empty. In those years, the most extensive food aid project was financed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture from 1992 to 1993. The aid was channeled through non-governmental organizations such as World Vision, Care, Catholic Relief, and ADRA. The ADRA efforts on the Urals, including the Perm and Tyumen Regions, in a huge project to distribute over six thousand metric tons of food in a short period of time. ADRA International and ADRA Germany were involved in this project. The project director in the Urals was Lamar Phillips.

In parallel with this project, ADRA Germany and ADRA Austria actively supplied humanitarian aid to the countries of Central Asia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. Good friendly relations were developed between P. M. Kulakov and ADRA Japan Director Kiyoshi Fujita. In this connection, the Japanese government allocated grants to open free canteens for the people experiencing poverty in several large cities in Central Russia. The project began in 1993 with the provision of hot meals to poor and disadvantaged people on the streets of St. Petersburg. That same year the Soup Kitchen program for needy people started in Moscow.

In December 1993, ADRA International and ADRA Denmark launched the humanitarian assistance project for the Correction Prison of Teenagers in the Omsk Region. The inmates were provided with medicines and boots totaling \$5,200.

In 1993, ADRA ESD offices were established in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Tajikistan, Georgia, and Moldova. In 1994, great opportunities opened up for ADRA's work in Azerbaijan. ADRA ESD managed to become the sole distributor of international food aid to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, an isolated territory belonging to Azerbaijan, as well as the responsible agency in the western part of Azerbaijan. ADRA Azerbaijan directors Yan Ridley and Wagner Kuhn played a major role in this work and in the implementation of other projects.

Along with food aid to Azerbaijan, ADRA ESD implemented agricultural development programs in this country for several years, including planting fruit trees and building greenhouses.

Having received foreign grants in the mid-1990s, ADRA Armenia and ADRA Georgia implemented healthcare programs in their countries. In 1996, ADRA ESD opened the first private secondary school in Sukhumi, Abkhazia. At the same time, ADRA Kazakhstan and ADRA Kyrgyzstan conducted an English language training program.

In 1995, ADRA ESD created warehousing facilities for rapid response to natural disasters in various regions of the division. One of such projects was to assist earthquake victims in the town of Neftegorsk on Sakhalin Island. Then, in 1995, ADRA airlifted tons of clothes to this town. Vladimir V. Teppone and Ivan I. Velgosha led the project.

During the Chechen wars, ADRA ESD distributed food and opened free canteens. The governments of Japan and the Czech Republic funded these activities.

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NOTES

1. The article presents a brief overview of the activities of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in the Euro-Asia Division in the 1990s under the guidance of its first director, Pavel Mikhailovich Kulakov. This article will be updated in the future. This article was translated from Russian by Vladimir Ievchenko.
2. V.O. Kluchevsky, *Dobryye ludi Drevney Rusi* [“Good People of Ancient Russia”] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2008), 1.
3. O.O. Korsukova, “Sovetskaya blagotvoritelnost’ 1920-ch godov: nauchnyye mify i realnost’” [Charity in Soviet Union in 1920s: Scientific myths and reality], *Bulletin of Tomsk State University*, no. 471 (2021): 139-150.
4. “Blagotvoritelonost’ v Rossii: Istoriya razvitiya” [Charity in Russia: Development history], Blagotvoritelnyy fond “Podari shans,” February 6, 2020, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://chance.su/124-blagotvoritelnost-v-rossii-istorija-razvitija.html>.
5. A. Cisternas, H. Philip, J.C. Bousquet, et al., “The Spitak (Armenia) Earthquake of 7 December 1988: Field Observations, Seismology and Tectonics,” *Nature* 339, no. 6227 (29 June 1989): 675-679.
6. *Rabochiy Kurs Evro-Aziatskogo Divisiona* [Working Policy of the Euro-Asia Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists] (Zaokskiy: Istochnik Zhizni, 2022), 558-559.

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