



**IRO TEST OF MISSION READINESS
IG - LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA,
7- 9 Nov 2003**

Due to the importance of training to a very high standard as well as countering the increasingly prevalent appearance of »Disaster Tourism« in the last several years, the IRO Board of Directors has decided to allow only specially tested teams on IRO missions. To this end, an annual Test of Mission Readiness has been established for rescue dog teams and group commanders. Upon successful completion of the test, participants receive an «International Mission License» that is valid worldwide for all disaster missions under the flag of the IRO. The first test was due to be held in May of 2003 – by chance immediately following the earthquake disaster in Algeria. Due to the fact that an IRO contingent was engaged in that mission, the IRO was forced to postpone the first test until the autumn of that year.

The event was held from 7 – 9 November 2003 in Ig, near Ljubljana (Slovenia) and was flawlessly organized by the Civil Defense Department of Ljubljana and the IRO-affiliated NRO »Društvo vodnikov reševalnih psov (DVRPS) «. A total of 31 rescue dog handlers and group commanders came together representing Austria (SKV-KHD, Vienna), Germany (BRH), the Czech Republic (SZBK), Italy (RHST Bruneck), Romania (CdeC) and Slovenia (DVRPS und ERPS).

The performance and work of the participants were evaluated for a period of 2 days and 2 nights in a simulated earthquake disaster setting. In addition to having to be completely self-sufficient, rescue dog handlers were given several assignments designed to test the abilities of both man and dog: immediately after setting up a communal materiel depot on the first day, participants were faced with a helicopter transport and an ensuing search operation. Immediately following that, a thorough veterinary examination was conducted. Teams were then challenged to a rappelling exercise followed by transport to an isolated camp where the first short break was allowed after establishing camp. The break was very short-lived due to the sudden sounding of an alarm and a night orientation march of 15km. The following morning brought three search operations. In addition to observing the physical conditioning and orientation ability of the dog handlers and group commanders, their overall conduct during this period of physical and mental stress – especially while simply waiting – were evaluated. The main focus was of course placed on good, solid, sure interactions between the dogs and their handlers while searching through rubble. A total of 4 disaster areas were searched with attention also being paid to empty searches. Another thorough veterinary examination was given at the end to ensure that the dogs were able to physically withstand the rigors of a mission.

The conclusions of the first Test of Mission Readiness showed nearly all participants delivering a good performance in rainy and cold weather (0°-6° C). Nonetheless, quite a few of the rescue dog teams were unable to meet the strict criteria and expectations of the 7 judges, the veterinary doctor and the IRO Spokesperson for

Deployment. Strict standards were established for group commanders as well – some of which failed to pass the test.

With this Test of Mission Readiness, which will be followed by another one in the spring of 2004, the IRO has taken the first steps towards ensuring that only the most highly qualified rescue dog teams are allowed at the scene of international disasters. We are hopeful that other organisations will follow our example and that stricter mission readiness guidelines will be established for international operations.