



30 May 2014 - "How can we know it is safe?" , asked a worried farmer, Vasic Miroljub, when the UN team of experts visited his village, Donja Crvica, on the bank of the Drina river.

He and his family had a lucky escape when a large landslide fell on the barn right next to the house where his wife, children and grandchildren were fast asleep at 2 o'clock at night.

They have had to stay with neighbors, but are desperate to get back home.

Unfortunately such questions cannot be answered immediately, but a UN team of experts is finalizing a report that will be handed to the government of Serbia, providing assessments of the damage done and options and recommendations in response to the recent natural disasters.

The team of experts from UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) has for the last ten days visited affected areas to assess the impact of floods and landslides.

Being lucky or unlucky can be relative. The UN team stopped to talk to local residents who were busy removing a landslide that fell on a cluster of houses. Someone comments that the owner

of one of the houses affected, was lucky to have been absent when it fell. “Well, he was in Obrenovac when he lost his home to the floods,” said a local resident.

The river Drina still shows clear signs of the unusually heavy rains where it flows through Bajina Basta, but in this area landslides are the biggest cause of concern.

Michael Elmquist, the leader of UNDAC, expert team, expresses his admiration of the local municipalities ‘and citizens’ endeavors, not least the fact that roads have been cleared even in quite remote and sparsely populated areas. Elmquist, who has considerable international experience in recovery work, underlines that the natural disasters were “massive.” “It is a miracle that the number of casualties wasn’t much higher.”

Family graveyards next to farms in the slopes show that people have lived generation after generation has on farms in these steep slopes. Still, the Nenadovic Radoje’s family doesn’t need to wait for the expert’s views to understand that their lives will not continue as before. They have evacuated their home and they will not continue to enjoy the beautiful view of the Drina from the same place as five generations of the family have done before them.

Close by the ground has literally moved beneath houses in the village of Gvozdac. Large chunks of earth have crashed from the hill below, undermining the very foundations of houses so some have them have partly collapsed. Others have literally been ripped apart, leaving cracks and gaps in the walls. Part of the road has been washed away, and in many places there are gaping holes in the ground.

The earth may have moved but the villagers are unmoved and offer traditional hospitality in the form of a glass of Rakija to the multi-national UN team from countries as far away as Denmark and Iceland as well as other central European countries such as Germany and Switzerland.

“We have heard a lot of individual stories and actually talked to people who have been affected by floods and landslides. Their homes may be lost, but their hope certainly isn’t. Still, it is a tragedy, and they need our help” – says the UN RC Ms. Vojackova-Sollorano.