

## P r e s s   r e l e a s e

Belgrade, September 24th 2014

### **With support from USAID/OFDA and ECHO, Mercy Corps and UniCredit Bank team up to provide flood relief**

Through funding provided by USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the European Commission's Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), a total of 3,090 households will have the opportunity to start renovating their homes and small businesses over the next three months. As part of these efforts, Mercy Corps has recently delivered UniCredit Bank gift cards to families affected by the May floods in both Sabac and Koceljeva.

Mercy Corps is also implementing a large-scale REHAB program (Restoring Households and Businesses from Floods) in Serbia, reaching 14 municipalities of western and central Serbia with 900,000 USD from USAID/OFDA and 800,000 USD from ECHO, Mercy Corps is implementing the REHAB program in partnership with the local NGO, Bread of Life, and the local microfinance institution Agroinvest. As a reliable partner, UniCredit Bank is lifting all fees and charges associated with the utilization of gift cards.

Beneficiaries of the program include the most vulnerable households: households living below or near the poverty line, large families, single-headed households or those with family members who have a disability, the elderly, and refugees or internally displaced persons. The cards can be used at all UniCredit Bank ATMs, as well as at all points of sale that accept MasterCard.

The gift cards, which amount to 28,500 RSD, can be used to restore a primary residence. This includes repairing damaged assets, purchasing new commodities, testing or purifying well water; or renting temporary accommodation. They can also be used as reimbursement to other families that extended critical support in wake of the disaster. Additionally, small agricultural producers and micro-entrepreneurs received grants in the amounts of 65,000 RSD or 130,000 RSD to restart their livelihoods and contribute with restoring the local economy.

Mercy Corps has continued with the distribution of gift cards in Ub, Obrenovac, Krupanj and Ljubovija. The fourth and fifth tranches of financial aid have brought the total number of UniCredit

Bank gift cards to 1,194, providing a total of RSD 49.2 million to the citizens of Obrenovac, Loznica, Ub, Sabac, Koceljeva, Krupanj and Ljubovija.

Mercy Corps and partners are implementing the program in close cooperation with local government. "As someone who has been involved in the implementation of this very important project since its first days, I would emphasize that this is the right model for the distribution of aid to citizens. Fully transparent, with clear criteria and evenly to all parts of our community", emphasized Mr. Dragan Milenkovic, member of Obrenovac community council.

"This is the first assistance I ever received of any kind. Trust me, they've pleasantly surprised me. I'm glad. We've lost everything. So, from this we'll see to buy what's most needed for the house", said Mr. Goran Jovanovic about the donation, a beneficiary from the community Rvati.

### **Mercy Corps**

Mercy Corps is an international humanitarian and development organization with headquarters in Portland, Oregon and Edinburgh, Scotland. The mission of Mercy Corps is to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities. Currently Mercy Corps implements programs in more than 40 countries around the world, including the Western Balkans: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

### **UniCredit Bank Serbia JSC**

UniCredit Bank Serbia is member of UniCredit, one of Europe's leading financial groups with a strong presence in 17 countries. Through a network of approximately 8,900 branches and more than 147,000 employees, the Group is present in about 50 markets. In central and eastern Europe, UniCredit operates the largest international banking network with nearly 3,600 branches. The Group is present in Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine.

### **European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO)**

ECHO is the European Commission's department for humanitarian aid and civil protection. Headquartered in Brussels with a global network of field offices, ECHO ensures rapid and effective delivery of EU relief assistance. The EU's humanitarian aid funds relief operations for victims of natural disasters and conflicts outside the European Union. Aid is provided impartially, directly to people in need, without discrimination of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

