

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA

COLOMBIA

PROTECTION

6,850,197

ASSISTANCE

12,130,167

PREVENTIVE ACTION

2,636,130

COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES

1,985,826

OVERHEADS

1,624,016

GENERAL

1,430,113

TOTAL EXPENDITURE Sfr 26,656,449



+ ICRC delegation
 + ICRC sub-delegation
 + ICRC office

Despite constant efforts to bring about a negotiated solution to the decades-old internal conflict, the general situation in Colombia deteriorated further as the various armed groups pursued their relentless struggle for control over territory, people and resources. At the same time, peace talks between the Colombian government and the armed groups continued, resulting in a midyear meeting in the *zona de despeje* (demilitarized zone) between government representatives and the FARC,* with the occasional participation of representatives of the European Union and several em-

* FARC: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces)

bassies. The ELN* and the Colombian government also started negotiations to create a *zona de encuentro* (meeting zone) for consultations with civil society on the country's future.

Consequences of the conflict

The arbitrary and horrendous methods of warfare employed caused extensive suffering among the civilian population and the displacement of thousands of people, either to areas in Colombia offering safer conditions or abroad. In particular, the *autodefensas* (AUC)*

* ELN: *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army)

* AUC: *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-defence Groups of Colombia)

stepped up their operations, increasing the mass movement of people, including indigenous communities. The intractable political situation directly affected not only the humanitarian situation but also, in many places, the economy. The inevitable exodus of human and economic resources contributed to the negative growth rate and high unemployment statistics, compounding Colombia's social problems.

"Plan Colombia"

In 2000 the government, backed by the United States, launched "Plan Colombia", a programme designed to eradicate drug production, which is a major economic factor in the internal conflict. One of the aims of the plan is to provide the armed and security forces with the necessary military means and training to combat the guerrilla groups which derive economic advantages from drug production. The plan attracted both approval and criticism at home and abroad, some observers fearing that its implementation would lead to a renewed escalation of violence and of the conflict.

ICRC response

The ICRC delegation in Colombia covers the entire country with its 16 sub-delegations and offices – a network which guarantees a rapid emergency response in terms of protection and assistance, while maintaining regular contacts with all armed groups. Activities in Bogotá, and occasionally in the field, were disrupted during the course of the year when the delegation was occupied by several hundred displaced persons seeking to put pressure on the government. Their aim was to obtain humanitarian aid that would enable them to achieve socio-economic rehabilitation.

The ICRC as a neutral intermediary

During the year the ICRC reinforced its role as a neutral intermediary between all parties to the conflict. It held bilateral discussions with the different armed groups and, in the case of the FARC and the AUC, issued confidential written reports on violations of humanitarian law. Discussions were backed up by information sessions aimed at enhancing awareness of the humanitarian principles and encouraging armed groups to apply the rules of humanitarian law in their operations. One workshop on this subject was held in Geneva for high-ranking members of the FARC and another for senior members of the ELN.

Humanitarian law, the emblem and the Ottawa treaty

The delegation continued to advise the government on national implementation of humanitarian law, and encouraged the adoption of national legislation regulating use of the red cross emblem.

In September the Colombian government ratified the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. Landmines nevertheless continued to be used in the internal conflict and caused many casualties among civilians.

Protection and assistance for civilians

During 2000, the ICRC observed a steady increase in the number of civilians displaced either individually or *en masse*. A total of 124,000 people received emergency assistance provided by the ICRC and, whenever circumstances permitted, by the Colombian Red Cross. The ICRC's technical support for the government rehabilitation programme for displaced persons was also increased.

The majority of the displaced continued to suffer directly or indirectly from the prevailing lack of security. The humanitarian assistance provided was therefore clearly linked to the protection work carried out nationwide by ICRC delegates, who recorded the incidents and violations of humanitarian law that caused displacement. Numerous representations were subsequently undertaken with the parties to the conflict so as to convince them of the need for greater compliance with international humanitarian rules.

More particularly, the common practice of hostage-taking remained a serious problem. The ICRC continued its efforts to persuade the parties concerned to abandon this practice, and urged kidnappers to respect the physical integrity and the dignity of hostages.

Post-emergency aid was channelled through formal ICRC programmes such as "Quick Impact Projects". These programmes, which were implemented by the ICRC in several departments in coordination with public agencies and other organizations, are designed to help displaced, returnee and host communities during the critical transition period between relief, rehabilitation and community integration. The projects focused on the restoration of small-scale infrastructure such as community centres, schools and bridges, and on income-generating projects in the agricultural and fisheries sector.

Medical personnel abandoned State-run health centres in several conflict areas owing to the steady deterioration in security conditions. In other areas the ongoing conflict prevented civilians from having access to health services. Together with Colombian Red Cross workers, the ICRC's four mobile health units (some of them water-borne) regularly visited isolated communities, providing basic medical assistance and conducting health-promotion activities.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA

Protecting detainees

In 2000, the number of people detained in Colombia in connection with the conflict reached 3,894. There was severe overcrowding in detention centres and throughout the year prison riots and internal disputes caused the death of dozens of detainees. On several occasions the ICRC played a decisive role as mediator between inmates and prison authorities. This action often had a conciliatory effect and helped to avoid further casualties.

During visits to detention centres, delegates focused on maintaining a dialogue with both detaining authorities and security detainees, and took every opportunity to insist on the detainees' fundamental right to physical integrity and human dignity. The ICRC continued its visits to security detainees held in State detention centres, but failed to gain access to members of the armed and police forces held by the FARC and the ELN despite repeated efforts. Nevertheless, it maintained close contact with leaders of the two groups, who supplied information on the state of health of captives and authorized the exchange of Red Cross messages with the families concerned.

Cooperation with National Societies and other humanitarian agencies

ICRC activities were often carried out with the Colombian Red Cross, and various delegated projects were run by the Canadian, German, Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross Societies. Widespread cooperation also included the Ombudsman's office, United Nations agencies, NGOs* and universities. The ICRC increased its support to the Social Solidarity Network, the government agency officially responsible for displaced persons. An ICRC pilot project for creation of an integrated aid network was handed over to this agency and, with ICRC guidance, the project was expanded to cover the entire country.

* NGOs: non-governmental organizations

IN 2000 THE ICRC:



- regularly visited 3,500 detainees, 1,114 of them for the first time, in 134 places of detention;
- issued 3,400 travel

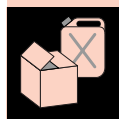
vouchers for family visits to detainees;

- organized the exchange of 720 Red Cross messages between families and hostages, detainees, displaced persons and members of the armed and police forces held by the FARC and the ELN;
- financed medical or surgical treatment for 564 detainees;
- supplied medical material to 12 detention centres;



- registered 745 cases of humanitarian law violations affecting 1,805 individuals;
- helped 1,620 civilians

whose lives were in danger to relocate to safer areas;



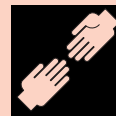
- in cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross, distributed food, hygiene kits and mattresses to 134,800 needy civilians;
- conducted agricultural micro-projects aimed at restoring food security and self-sufficiency for people affected by the conflict;
- completed 29 and started 43 new "Quick Impact Projects" in rural and urban areas for displaced persons, residents of host communities and returnees;
- continued a capacity-building programme for the State agency responsible for humanitarian assistance;



- through projects delegated to the National Societies of Canada, Germany, Norway and Sweden and maintained

medical assistance for 26,046 beneficiaries in conflict zones in Atrato, Bolivar, Caquetá and Putumayo using mobile health units;

- financed medical or surgical treatment for 300 wounded civilians and 375 displaced people;



- through a series of bilateral cooperation projects, continued to support the Colombian Red Cross in enhancing its

administration, staff training, telecommunications network, external communication and dissemination activities;






- conducted 190 sessions on humanitarian law for instructors from the armed forces;

• organized 105 dissemination sessions on humanitarian law for 1,187 members of irregular armed groups;

- in cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross, promoted the incorporation of humanitarian law and human rights into police training programmes by organizing 96 training courses for 2,643 police instructors;
- organized 164 dissemination sessions for 7,394 civil servants, NGO staff, university teachers and students, medical personnel, journalists and community leaders.



-  ICRC delegation
-  ICRC sub-delegation
-  ICRC office