



# mexico city (regional)

The Mexico delegation opened in 1998, becoming a regional delegation in 2002. It strengthens the tracing and dissemination capacities of the region's National Societies, assists Colombian refugees in Panama's Darién region and the local populations hosting them, monitors the conditions of detainees in Mexico and Panama, and endeavours to ascertain the fate of missing persons, particularly in Guatemala. It also seeks to integrate IHL into academic curricula and into the doctrine and training of the armed forces (and human rights norms applicable to the use of force in the case of the police). The delegation hosts the Advisory Service on IHL for Latin America and the Caribbean.

### COVERING

Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

### EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	<b>1,046</b>
Assistance	<b>1</b>
Prevention	<b>2,361</b>
Cooperation with National Societies	<b>652</b>
General	<b>-</b>

**► 4,059**

*of which: Overheads 248*

### IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	<b>74%</b>
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### PERSONNEL

<b>9</b> expatriates
<b>27</b> national staff (daily workers not included)

### KEY POINTS

#### In 2008, the ICRC:

- ▶ in Mexico, visited people detained for alleged links with armed groups or following clashes with law enforcement agencies, and in Panama, visited people detained in relation to the armed conflict in Colombia
- ▶ provided 1,194 National Society staff and volunteers in 8 violence-prone Mexican states with training and printed guidelines on the Safer Access approach
- ▶ signed a memorandum of understanding with Mexico's Secretariat of Public Security, enabling 18 federal police officers to be trained as certified human rights instructors
- ▶ welcomed the enactment of a new criminal code in Nicaragua incorporating a comprehensive chapter on the repression of war crimes and other IHL violations
- ▶ welcomed the signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama
- ▶ in Guatemala, provided financial and technical support to State institutions and NGOs dealing with the missing persons issue and gave administrative and legal advice to missing persons' families

## CONTEXT

The region was plagued by growing violence linked to the expansion of organized crime, mostly related to drug trafficking.

In Mexico, over 6,000 people reportedly died in the violence. Drug-related riots raged in prisons. Social unrest simmered in several states as protesters voiced their opposition to government policies.

There were fewer migrants detained by the Mexican authorities, the flow towards the United States of America having been curbed by harsher policies and diminishing economic opportunities there.

In Guatemala, the surge of organized crime and violence prompted the government to include the military more systematically in internal security operations. It involved local NGOs, international organizations and embassies in an action plan to establish short-term security and justice goals, as recommended by the International Commission against Impunity. In various regions, the authorities declared a state of emergency in response to violent social protests.

El Salvador and Nicaragua experienced sporadic outbursts of election-related violence. In Honduras, protests by teachers against education reform created social turmoil.

Cuba was admitted to the Rio Group, a regional grouping of States, and normalized its relations with Mexico. Devastating tropical storms struck the country in August and September.

## MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total		Total	Women	Children	
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)<sup>1</sup></b>		<b>CIVILIANS<sup>2</sup></b>				
Detainees visited	29	<i>Economic security, water and habitat</i>				
Detainees visited and monitored individually	29	Essential household items	Beneficiaries	330	25%	65%
	3	Agricultural inputs and micro-economic initiatives	Beneficiaries	120	25%	65%
	<i>of whom females</i>	<i>Health</i>				
Number of visits carried out	12	Health centres supported	Structures	12		
Number of places of detention visited	11	Consultations	Patients	1,558		
			<i>of which curative</i>		98	800
			<i>of which ante/post-natal</i>		110	480
		Immunizations	Doses	315		

1. Mexico and Panama

2. Panama

## ICRC ACTION

In Mexico, the ICRC continued to visit people detained for alleged links with armed groups and those arrested in connection with acts of protest. It also continued to seek a comprehensive agreement with the authorities on visits to detainees in all penitentiary facilities. In Chiapas and Morelos states, the ICRC followed the situation of people arrested as a result of public protests and offered to visit them. However, the detainees were released shortly afterwards.

The ICRC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Secretariat of Public Security, aiming to encourage law enforcement bodies to integrate human rights norms and humanitarian principles into their training, doctrine and disciplinary systems.

In Guatemala, the ICRC focused on providing financial and technical support to State institutions and NGOs concerned with the missing persons issue and on helping families address administrative, legal and economic problems in connection with the disappearance of relatives.

To address the needs of sick and injured migrants, the ICRC tendered assistance to the Guatemalan, Honduran and Mexican Red Cross Societies, enabling them to provide ambulance services to help these migrants return to their countries of origin. Through the Special Fund for the Disabled, the ICRC began supporting a local prosthetic/orthotic centre for migrants in Mexico's southern border region.

In Panama, the ICRC, together with the National Society, continued to look after the needs of Colombian refugees and IDPs in eight communities in the Darién region. It also registered detainees held in Panama in relation to the armed conflict in Colombia and revisited a detainee held in connection with the US military operation in Panama in 1989.

The ICRC cooperated with the region's National Societies, supporting programmes to restore family links, particularly during natural disasters, to promote IHL and the Fundamental Principles and to implement the Safer Access approach. It also helped fund a Honduran Red Cross project for young people in a deprived neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa, aimed at showing them alternatives to a life of crime.

Regionwide, the ICRC continued to encourage the armed forces to integrate IHL into military doctrine and provided them with technical support. Given increasing military involvement in law

enforcement operations, it engaged the top echelons of the armed forces in a dialogue on the applicability of human rights norms in such situations.

With ICRC expertise and technical support, governments in the region made good progress in adapting their criminal codes to include the repression of war crimes, in line with the Rome Statute.

The ICRC handed over to the Honduran education authorities the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme aimed at teaching secondary school pupils basic humanitarian principles. The Education Ministry, in cooperation with the ICRC, evaluated the programme's state of implementation.

## CIVILIANS

The families of people who went missing during Guatemala's non-international armed conflict continued to face administrative, legal and economic problems. In interviews conducted by five local organizations and the ICRC, 292 families in the Alta Verapaz, Quiché and Guatemala departments had a chance to express their needs, putting the ICRC in a better position to mobilize support for them from the authorities and other entities.

At an ICRC workshop, representatives of 17 NGOs discussed ways of helping missing persons' families.

Fifteen people who had been separated from their families as children during the non-international armed conflict were reunited with their relatives. The reunions were organized by local NGOs with the ICRC's financial support.

On the national and international Day of the Disappeared, Guatemalans had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the missing persons issue and available help through an ICRC TV spot aired by two networks, a photo exhibition and an article about a recent family reunification posted on the ICRC website.

At conferences and training courses, Guatemalan forensic experts, government experts from the region and other interested parties studied DNA technology and management of human remains in situations of violence and natural disaster. The events also enabled them to share best practices and updates on the state of ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which only eight countries, including, from the region, Cuba, Honduras and Mexico, had ratified.

- ▶ 110 families from 29 Mayan communities held burials, with ICRC support, after the remains of their missing relatives had been found
- ▶ 14 forensic and government experts from the region sponsored to attend conferences and training courses on the missing persons issue

### Assistance to refugees and residents in the Darién region, Panama

Colombian refugees and indigenous families displaced by the spillover of the Colombian conflict were struggling to survive in difficult conditions in Panama's remote jungle region of Darién. They were better equipped to cope after receiving assistance from the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of Panama.

Visits carried out in March, April and October to villages in the upper Río Tuira revealed that 12 families had completed their homes with building materials supplied in 2007, while 8 other families were still building theirs. Part of the materials had been used to build a school dining room and in one village had enabled the water supply network to be extended to the homes of families living on the outskirts. Newly arrived families found it easier to settle in after receiving farming tools, construction materials, clothes, and household and personal hygiene items. Refugees were able to contact relatives in Colombia via RCMs.

- ▶ 330 refugees/IDPs (55 households) received essential household items
- ▶ 120 refugees/IDPs (21 households) received tools
- ▶ 6 RCMs collected from and 2 RCMs distributed to civilians, 45 pre-paid telephone cards given out
- ▶ new tracing requests registered for 5 people; 10 people (4 females; 4 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought

People settled in communities in the upper Río Tuira received medical attention and dental care in 12 ICRC-supported health centres. Doctors of the mobile medical clinic helped deliver babies safely. Regular medical visits contributed to lowering the malnutrition rate among children, who were also vaccinated and treated for lice.

In the 12 ICRC-supported health centres (average monthly catchment population: 1,560):

- ▶ 1,558 people given consultations, including 590 attending ante/post-natal consultations and 968 attending curative consultations
- ▶ 394 people had dental consultations
- ▶ 315 vaccine doses administered (including 150 to children aged five or under and 15 to women of childbearing age)
- ▶ 11 patients referred to a second level of care
- ▶ 12 health education sessions held

### Addressing migrants' needs

Many migrants from the region headed for the United States of America, some of whom lost limbs or were otherwise injured while travelling as stowaways on freight trains bound for Mexico's northern border. After receiving medical treatment, they were redirected to a shelter near the Guatemalan border, where they were then left stranded without any means to return home. After an assessment of their needs, a local prosthetic/orthotic technician working at the shelter was offered the opportunity to attend a six-week training course at the Don Bosco University in El Salvador, funded by the ICRC's Special Fund for the Disabled. Under this new ICRC-supported

project, carried out in close cooperation with Guatemalan, Honduran and Mexican Red Cross branches working along the border, 11 sick or injured migrants were able to travel home to Guatemala and Honduras, with the ICRC covering their transport costs.

Humanitarian issues related to migration in the Americas were highlighted at a workshop organized by the International Federation in Antigua, Guatemala, which provided a forum for the ICRC to share its views.

### Showing young people alternatives to violence

In Honduras, some 2,000 young people in a deprived neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa attended music, art and theatre classes partly financed by the ICRC as part of a National Society programme to deter them from joining street gangs (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*).

### Studying other situations of violence

As situations of violence and unrest worsened across the region, an ICRC study was initiated in Guatemala in late 2008 to examine the origins and consequences of social violence from a humanitarian angle, with a view to defining appropriate responses.

## PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

In Mexico, people detained for alleged links with armed groups and those arrested in connection with acts of protest mainly in the southern states were visited by the ICRC to check that their treatment and living conditions complied with internationally recognized standards. The ICRC's findings and recommendations were shared, in confidence, with the authorities. The detainees were offered the RCM service to contact their relatives.

Indigenous protesters in Chiapas and teachers opposed to education reform in Morelos state were arrested during clashes with law enforcement agents. The ICRC approached the local authorities, offering to visit the detainees. However, they were released shortly afterwards.

The ICRC continued to seek a comprehensive agreement with the prison authorities to visit all detainees in Mexico, particularly those in five high-security prisons under the authority of the federal government.

At a seminar organized by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission on the national preventive mechanism against torture, participants deepened their understanding, through an ICRC presentation, of the ways in which ill-treatment and torture affected detainees.

As Mexico City's authorities were getting ready to restructure public services and upgrade temporary places of detention (*galeras*), they asked the ICRC to monitor conditions in four *galeras*. The authorities were then informed, in confidence, of the ICRC's findings and recommendations, which mainly concerned improvements in living conditions.

In Panama, a detainee held in connection with the 1989 US military operation in Panama benefited from renewed ICRC visits, during which his treatment and living conditions were monitored. Six Colombian nationals, arrested in February for alleged links with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), were similarly visited by the ICRC.

At the request of the Nicaraguan government, two Colombians and a Mexican received ad hoc ICRC visits. They had previously been visited in Ecuador, where they had been wounded during cross-border military operations by the Colombian armed forces.

- in Mexico, 22 detainees visited and monitored individually (2 females), during 8 visits to 7 places of detention; 6 detainees visited by their relatives with ICRC support
- in Panama, 7 detainees visited and monitored individually (1 female), of whom 6 newly registered (1 female), during 4 visits to 4 places of detention; 2 RCMs collected from detainees

## AUTHORITIES

Nicaragua's new penal code featured comprehensive measures to repress war crimes and other serious IHL violations. Similar legislation was being prepared by the Dominican and Mexican authorities. As new penal codes were being drafted in Guatemala and Honduras, the national IHL committees contributed proposals regarding the inclusion of IHL provisions. The authorities drew on the ICRC's technical expertise.

Costa Rica and Mexico presented draft resolutions on IHL and the International Criminal Court, which were approved at the 37th General Assembly of the Organization of American States.

The Central American Parliament approved a resolution promoting respect for IHL.

- Guatemala ratified Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and Additional Protocol III
- Honduras and Mexico ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- Costa Rica and Mexico acceded to Additional Protocol III
- Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions

## ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

As borne out by evaluations, the region's armed forces had made progress in integrating IHL into training. The ICRC encouraged them to incorporate IHL also into military doctrine. Given the armed forces' increasing involvement alongside security forces in situations of unrest, the ICRC engaged the top echelons in a dialogue regarding the need to observe human rights norms applicable to law enforcement. The chiefs of staff of the Guatemalan and Mexican armed forces (including the secretariat of the Mexican navy) were briefed on the ICRC's humanitarian concerns about the use of force in such situations.

- 50 Mexican military legal advisers deepened their IHL knowledge at 2 courses in Mexico City
- 18 Central American military legal advisers participated in a workshop on the repression of IHL violations
- 4,355 cadets and officers of the Mexican and Central American armed forces attended presentations on the use of force in law enforcement operations and IHL
- 41 army instructors from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua attended an advanced IHL train-the-trainer course

- 3 officers from El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico participated in the annual Senior Workshop on International Rules governing Military Operations, held in Switzerland

The Mexican Secretariat of Public Security signed a memorandum of understanding with the ICRC to advance the integration of human rights norms into law enforcement. This enabled 18 federal police officers to qualify as human rights instructors at two train-the-trainer courses held at the Academy for Public Security. In addition, 2,600 federal police officers were briefed on the use of force and assistance to victims in police operations.

Colombian refugees in Panama's border region of Darién were in a vulnerable situation. To make Panamanian law enforcement agents aware of refugees' right to protection, the ICRC and the Panamanian Red Cross co-organized two workshops on human rights norms for 60 border police officers, at both the national and Darién's provincial police headquarters.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

In Mexico, members of Oaxaca's human rights commission attended IHL talks. In two training sessions organized by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, 60 journalists from Michoacán and Oaxaca were briefed by the ICRC on the role of the media in conflict situations.

In Guatemala, 22 journalists participated in a similar training session organized by the news agency Centro de reportes informativos sobre Guatemala. The National Society contributed a presentation on first aid.

The general public was informed about ICRC activities mostly via electronic media. Journalists received materials on the plight of missing persons' families (see *Civilians*).

At the 26th Interdisciplinary Course on Human Rights organized by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, a multidisciplinary audience from across the region was informed about the ICRC's operational priorities.

Universities expanded IHL teaching, with 29 out of 31 selected universities in 8 countries integrating IHL into their curricula. Twenty ICRC-trained lecturers promoted IHL among the armed forces, authorities and academic audiences in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Two universities in Guatemala and Mexico organized their own teacher-training courses with ICRC-trained lecturers.

- 9 students from Mexico and Panama participated in the 20th Jean Pictet IHL competition in Switzerland
- 11 university lecturers in Guatemala took part in a round-table on emblem protection

Through the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme, pupils in Honduras were taught about IHL by 81 specially trained teachers. The education authorities took over the programme from the ICRC. An evaluation co-organized with the ICRC in 39 secondary schools showed that the importance of respecting humanitarian principles in situations of violence had been well understood, giving the programme particular relevance in a context of social protest.

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

With ICRC support, the Guatemalan, Honduran and Panamanian National Societies were developing their own manuals on emblem protection. Contingency plans in case of internal disturbances were prepared by the National Societies of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua and by four Mexican Red Cross branches.

National Societies in the region stood ready to activate their national tracing networks, and did so in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Panama during floods caused by tropical storms.

Supported by the ICRC and other Movement partners, the Honduran Red Cross expanded its project to reach out to more than 2,000 young people in deprived neighbourhoods of the capital (see *Civilians*).

Coordination with other Movement partners in Panama was strengthened.

With ICRC support:

- ▶ senior management of the Guatemalan, Mexican, Nicaraguan and Panamanian Red Cross Societies trained in emblem protection, the Seville Agreement, the Safer Access approach and the family-links strategy
- ▶ in the region, 5,160 Red Cross staff and volunteers trained in restoring family links, the Safer Access approach and the Seville Agreement, and over 5,230 people trained in IHL and the Fundamental Principles
- ▶ 300 emergency/paramedical staff in Mexico briefed on the ICRC's first-aid manual
- ▶ 3,700 staff and volunteers in violence-prone regions of Mexico received training and guidelines, or briefings on the Safer Access approach