

DAKAR

Regional delegation

(Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal)

A number of countries in the region went through peaceful political change in 2000. Senegal and Guinea-Bissau elected Presidents, Mali had a new Prime Minister and Cape Verde held elections in which the opposition made gains. Security in the region was generally good. Senegal still faced a separatist problem in Casamance, and a dispute with Mauritania over use of the Senegal river. Niger symbolically signalled the end of the rebellion in the north and east of the country in a public ceremony in Agadez, and launched a process to integrate former rebels. The internal situation in Gambia remained tense, however, following the attempted *coup* at the beginning of the year.

The ICRC had many opportunities to promote humanitarian law and to support National Societies throughout the region. Significant numbers of detainees of concern to the ICRC were visited in four of the countries. Material assistance was given to the victims of a series of violent incidents in Casamance, but there were no major displacements of people on the scale seen in other parts of West Africa.

Peaceful change in Senegal

In March 2000 Abdoulaye Wade was elected President with 58.5% of the popular vote and a smooth transfer of power followed. The new coalition government continued the search for a negotiated settlement to the separatist problem in Casamance. Despite the commitment to negotiate by both sides, looting incidents and violent attacks still occurred in some areas of Ziguinchor and Kolda, forcing over 8,000 people to leave their homes. Incidents involving the Senegalese army and separatist groups continued along the border with Guinea-Bissau, further raising the tension. In July and August local Senegalese blockaded the border with Guinea-Bissau in order to prevent cross-border looting. Although intervention by the two Presidents calmed the situation, the border area remained uneasy. In response to these events, the ICRC and the Senegalese Red Cross Society provided displaced people in Ziguinchor and Kolda with rice and millet throughout the year.

The dispute with Mauritania over the waters of the Senegal river resulted in several thousand Senegalese fleeing Mauritania.

Support for the National Society

Both the ICRC and the International Federation helped the Senegalese Red Cross to prepare a contingency plan to cope with any violence following the presidential election. The plan was based on the experience gained during two previous presidential polls and relied on the Society's strong regional network. The ICRC gave financial support for emergency planning at regional committee level and for the construction of a new regional headquarters at Ziguinchor, where it also provided a vehicle.

In its work in prisons, the ICRC continued its regular visits and presented a report on its recommendations to the government at the end of the year. The vegetable production projects launched to improve nutrition in three prisons were a moderate success and there were no more deaths at Kolda prison from vitamin deficiency.

In mid-September the ICRC was invited to give a presentation to 65 junior officers as part of a course organized by the United States army under the African Crisis Response Initiative. Later in the month the ICRC held two information sessions on the law of armed conflict for the Senegalese contingent preparing to join the UN mission (MONUC) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and a separate session for the contingent's 90 officers to explain the ICRC's mandate and the implementation of humanitarian law.

Mali: a country at peace

The conflicts between different ethnic groups in Mali which led to intervention by the security forces in 1999 did not recur in 2000. The country remained calm and most of the problems which had sparked the disputes were resolved. In the far north of the country occasional incidents of banditry in the first few months of the year resulted in the death of three tourists and three soldiers who were escorting an ambulance. The Malian army intervened and restored calm.

Change of role for the ICRC

The ICRC had a significant presence in the north of the country for most of the 1990s. This came to an end when its post-conflict rehabilitation activities were wound up in 1999.⁵ In 2000 the ICRC concentrated on its normal peacetime activities. A trainers' course was held for 40 officers of the Malian armed forces, and a further 19 officers attended a course on humanitarian law. The ICRC also revived discussions with the government on ratification and implementation of humanitarian treaties. Support for the Mali Red Cross included financial and technical help in reorganizing its secretariat and first-aid training for 36 prison officers.

New Prime Minister

In February, the Malian President appointed a new Prime Minister, whose task was to invigorate the anti-corruption drive and tackle the related problem of attracting investment to Mali. In August a number of influential people were arrested on corruption charges.

While political stability and internal security remained priorities for the government, the continuing level of poverty was the greatest challenge. Government figures published in 2000 showed that three-quarters of rural Malians and one-third of urban dwellers lived below the poverty line.

Guinea-Bissau

In January 2000 Kumba Yala was elected President of Guinea-Bissau in a peaceful transition to democratic rule. A new coalition government followed. One of the early decisions of the new government was to release nearly all detainees temporarily, pending trial. This relieved the workload of the ICRC which until that point had made regular visits to many of the detainees, providing them with basic necessities such as soap and other hygiene items.

Although a new democratic government was in power, the former co-President of the junta still maintained a high profile until he was killed in a challenge to the government in November. This led to a new wave of arrests. In the meantime, the government committed itself to significant demobilization of Guinea-Bissau's disproportionately large army to reduce it from 25,000 to 15,000 men.

Despite tensions between the civilian and military authorities, on the border with Senegal and between certain ethnic groups, internal security was generally good in 2000, allowing the ICRC to concentrate on detainees, develop relations with the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau and embark on a major dissemination programme with the armed forces. Between July and December, the ICRC distributed its *Soldier's Handbook* to 5,000 soldiers – one-fifth of the army – and was invited to participate in officer training in humanitarian law.

Internal tensions in Gambia

Following the abortive *coup* against the government in January 2000, a number of soldiers and civilians were arrested. In April, during violent clashes with student demonstrators near the capital Banjul, the security forces opened fire on the crowd, killing 11 people, including a Red Cross volunteer, and wounding over 60. The Red Cross volunteer, part of a Gambia Red Cross Society first-aid team, was shot in the chest as he stepped out of an ambulance despite the fact that he was bearing clear identification. Six hundred students were arrested after the incident and held for up to two weeks. The President of the Gambia Students Union fled to Senegal. The President of Gambia, who was out of the country at the time, declared a week of national mourning and set up a commission of enquiry.

In June clashes between the ruling party and the main opposition led to the death of a government party activist and the subsequent arrest of the opposition leader and 23 others, charged with his murder.

Impact on ICRC activities

The attempted *coup* and the student disturbances in April resulted in a slowdown in dissemination programmes for the army. However, humanitarian law sessions were held for 25 prison guards and 130 police. Government contacts were maintained, and lobbying for ratification of the Ottawa treaty was successful. In June progress was also made in improving the situation of security detainees when the authorities agreed to allow family visits.

⁵ See the ICRC's 1999 *Annual Report*, p. 62.

Burkina Faso and Niger

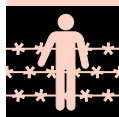
Both countries were absorbed with internal political issues in 2000 linked in each case to prominent assassinations, and governments came under pressure. In Burkina Faso, the *Collectif contre l'impunité* staged demonstrations in April to draw attention to the fact that no one had been arrested for the murder of a prominent journalist nor for the killing of the driver of the President's brother. Similarly, in Niger there were no arrests for the assassination of the President, although several people were detained and accused of abducting a former junta spokesman in June 2000. While the debate on these issues was lively, there was no serious civil unrest in either country. The leaders of the *Collectif* were briefly detained, but the government subsequently entered into dialogue with opposition groups with the aim of promoting national reconciliation. In Niger, too, there was a major act of reconciliation in November when ammunition surrendered by former Tuareg and Toubou rebels was ceremonially burned in the northern city of Agadez, and the process of reintegrating former rebels was begun.

In Niger the ICRC was allowed, in July, to visit the soldiers in Kollo prison arrested in connection with the abduction of the former junta spokesman and to provide them with medical assistance and hygiene items. In both countries ICRC contacts with the government to promote humanitarian law and the ratification of humanitarian conventions continued, and in Burkina Faso agreement was reached on the creation of a national committee for national implementation of humanitarian law and the formulation of a law regulating use of the red cross emblem.

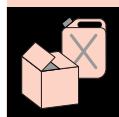
Relations were also developed with the National Societies of the two countries. The ICRC jointly organized a workshop for information staff in Bobo-Dioulasso with the Burkinabé Red Cross, and trained newly appointed Red Cross officials in Niger. In both countries sup-

port was provided for emergency preparedness, including the installation of three high-frequency radio transmitters in Niamey, Agadez and Diffa to improve emergency response.

IN 2000 THE ICRC:



- made 104 visits to individual detainees in Senegal and provided medical and hygiene materials;
- made 356 visits to individual detainees in Guinea-Bissau and provided cleaning materials;
- made 98 visits to individual detainees in Gambia and provided non-food and hygiene items;
- visited 7 soldiers detained in Niger and provided them with medical and hygiene items;



- distributed 65 tonnes of rice and 38 tonnes of millet to displaced people in the Ziguinchor and Kolda districts of Senegal;

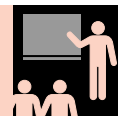


- delivered a consignment of orthopaedic materials to Mali's national prosthetic/orthotic centre;



- trained Red Cross staff and volunteers in dissemination, emergency preparedness and first aid;
- supported the

institutional development of National Societies in the region and provided material support for communication and emergency response, including the production of newsletters and the installation of HF radio transmitters;



- worked with all governments in the region to encourage ratification and implementation of humanitarian treaties, and promoted the establishment of national committees on humanitarian law and the adoption of national legislation on humanitarian law and the emblem;
- took part in training sessions and workshops throughout the region on the law of armed conflict and the role of the ICRC for the armed forces, police and security forces, in particular launching a programme which reached 5,000 soldiers in Guinea-Bissau;
- trained the officers of the Senegalese contingent preparing to join the UN mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.