



## 20 years of ICRC in Liberia

### Working hand-in-hand with the Liberia National Red Cross Society

**Most Liberians remember the activities of the Red Cross during the war: the long convoys of Red Cross trucks that brought relief to thousands of internally displaced people; the ambulances that evacuated the wounded during the fierce battles in Monrovia to JFK hospital, where ICRC surgeons operated day and night; and the posters with the faces of more than 2'000 children, reunited with their families by the ICRC, working in close collaboration with the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS).**

Those who were detained by one of the warring factions certainly remember the ICRC delegates, who: visited and registered them; monitored that they were correctly treated; helped improve their material conditions; and repatriated them after release. Hopefully, those who were part of the various fighting forces, remember the tireless efforts of the ICRC urging all parties to the conflict to abide by the rules of war. The "Geneva Conventions", which protect those who are not, or no longer, taking part in the conflict: the wounded and sick; the detained; and the civilians.

More often than not, these rules were not respected. As part of the 2009 campaign "Our World.Your Move", the ICRC commissioned a global research study, designed to capture the experiences and opinions of civilians who are living with the everyday reality of armed conflict. In Liberia, the study confirmed the devastating effects the war had on almost all its citizen: out of 500 persons interviewed, virtually everyone (96%) reported to have experienced violence during the conflict.

But what is the ICRC - a neutral, independent and

impartial humanitarian actor working predominantly in conflicts and situations of violence - doing in Liberia today? Since the end of the war in 2003, the ICRC has gradually shifted its activities from direct assistance and protection of those affected by conflict to supporting the rehabilitation and rebuilding process in Liberia. The ICRC does this through a strong partnership with the Liberia National Red Cross Society, who works in the field of emergency preparedness, community based health, promotion of humanitarian principles and restoring of family links.

Besides being a strong partner of the Liberian Red Cross, some 110 ICRC staff members working in three offices in Monrovia, Voinjama and Zwedru, continue to: promote humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law to international and national security forces, civil authorities and members of the civil society; help improve access to water, sanitation, health care and hygienic conditions for those detained in Liberia's prisons; and further assists vulnerable populations in urban Monrovia and Lofa, supporting them through agriculture, health or water and sanitation projects.

2010 marks 20 years of ICRC presence in Liberia. The ICRC and the LNRCS together want to duly mark this important anniversary by remembering the victims, who suffered immensely during those long years of conflict, and by paying tribute to all Red Cross workers, who did not spare any effort to bring assistance and protection to Liberians to reduce their suffering.

The anniversary is commemorated with a photo exhibition of Red Cross activities between 1990 and 2010 at the Liberia's National Museum in Monrovia, in Voinjama, Zwedru, Saniquellie, Gbarnga and Tubmanburg. During different side events, the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the basics of international humanitarian law will be explained to students of LNRCS school clubs, scouts and youth organizations, Human Rights groups, women's groups and the Media.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will continue to play a strong part in Liberia's endeavour to lifting the country further to stability, peace and prosperity. The task to rebuild Liberia however needs the support of everyone. As the ICRC's founder Henry Dunant said: "All can, in one way or another, each in his own sphere and within his own limitations, do something to help the good work forward."

**Karin Hofmann**  
Head of Delegation  
ICRC Liberia

# COOPERATION WITH THE LNRCS

**The ICRC aims to increase the operational capacities of National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies in countries affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence, and to work in partnership with them. The ICRC has a longstanding history and partnership with the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) which, like the ICRC, has adapted its activities to the needs of a country in transition from war to peace in the past years.**



Reunification of family members. Buchanan, Robert Town village. 2002

**Restoring Family Links:** LNRCS' volunteers were the backbone of the tracing service in Liberia. Over 200 of them, operating in more than 150 locations throughout the country, collected tracing and Red Cross messages and distributed them to the remotest areas of the country by bicycle, public transport, boat or on foot, searching for separated children and their parents, relatives and loved ones. In 2010, with advice from an ICRC restoring family-links expert, the LNRCS' tracing service carried out an assessment on post-conflict tracing needs and conducted interviews in seven counties. The study led to the drafting of a new family-links policy, aimed at restoring links between separated family members of vulnerable groups such as detainees, migrants and foreigners, trafficked children or Liberians living abroad.

**First Aid:** During the conflict, the LNRCS assigned several first aid volunteers to streets and suburbs of Monrovia, where they assisted

thousands of injured people in the streets of Monrovia and its suburbs. The Red Cross ambulance service operated in Monrovia and in rural Liberia transporting patients to hospitals or other health facilities. Today, first aid is still one of the core activities of the LNRCS, providing care and safe transportation to the injured and people affected by violence, accidents and disasters. The LNRCS also provides tailored first aid training to the Liberian National Police, school-clubs members, farmers, its staff and volunteers and any private entity interested.

## **Relief assistance and medical services:**

The LNRCS played a major role in providing humanitarian services to the population during the Liberian conflict. When rural Liberia became inaccessible for the ICRC due to security constraints, the LNRCS, through ICRC support, provided medical and relief assistance to thousands of people in that part of the country.

By 2001, the LNRCS provided medical services in 12 throughout the country, supported by the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. After the peace agreement, the LNRCS enhanced its capacities to mobilize staff and volunteers during emergencies, such as assisting victims



Training for police officers on First Aid and Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. Monrovia, 2010



# COOPERATION WITH THE LNRCS

of floods and fire. Furthermore, the LNRCS developed its capacities in implementing and evaluating assistance operations run in cooperation with the ICRC, such as support to water committees and farmers in rural Liberia.

## **Child advocacy and rehabilitation (CAR) and women training and integration (WIN):**

The LNRCS currently runs two child advocacy and rehabilitation centres in Montserrado and Grand Gedeh. Both centres aim to change the attitudes and practices of children who had traumatic experiences due to the effects of the war. Some of these children had survived violence in its most brutal form or had been forcefully recruited by fighting forces. Today, the LNRCS supports the children through psychosocial and education activities. They acquire skills training in pastry, masonry, tailoring, carpentry, welding, tie and dye and soap making. Since the inauguration of the programme in 2005, over 900 children have completed their education and graduated from the centre. A similar center called the "Women training and integration project" had been opened in 2010 in Monrovia, providing



The ICRC Head of delegation Mrs. Karin Hofmann and the LNRCS President Mrs. Theresa Leigh-Sherman celebrating the Red Cross/Red Crescent day. Monrovia, May 8, 2010

training and psychosocial counselling to 200 vulnerable young women.

## **Promoting humanitarian principles and respect for the Red Cross emblem:** As part

of its programme to promote humanitarian principles, especially to the youth, the LNRCS launched Red Cross school clubs in 2006. The clubs work with "The Battle of the Villages", a comic booklet produced by the ICRC that highlights respect for human dignity and humanitarian principles. Nowadays, the LNRCS has over 100 school clubs throughout the country comprising more than 2,200 students.

In 2008, the Government of Liberia passed an Act officially establishing the Liberia National Red Cross Society and protecting the use of the Red Cross emblem.

*In 2011, the ICRC's partnership with the Liberia National Red Cross Society will continue to be the centrepiece of its activities in the country. The ICRC works in close cooperation with the LNRCS in the areas of Emergency preparedness, Community based health, Promotion of humanitarian principles and the Restoring of Family Links.*



LNRCS visiting a beneficiary of a swamp rice project. Liberia, 2010

**The ICRC strives to ensure protection of the victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, such as residents and displaced civilians, people deprived of their freedom, people separated from their relatives, and missing people and their families.**

**Protection of the civilian population:**

During years of conflict, protecting the civilian population remained the ICRC's major concern. Violence and widespread insecurity made the ICRC's work at times difficult and dangerous. Nevertheless, ICRC staff tried to prevent and put an end to crimes committed against civilians by urging the various fighting forces to observe the international humanitarian law.

By engaging in a dialogue with all the relevant parties to the conflict at all levels, the ICRC was able to ensure access to the population and enabling other humanitarian agencies to continue or resume relief activities. This was the case, for instance, in 1992 when the ICRC opened the road leading to the north-western part of Lofa County, where the population and some 100'000 Sierra Leonean refugees had been cut off relief supplies for months.

However, the rules applying in armed conflict were not always respected by the various fighting forces: for instance in July 1990, when the Lutheran Church and the J.J Roberts' school

were attacked and hundreds of civilians were killed, despite the fact that both centres were protected by the Red Cross emblem.

**Restoring family links:** The magnitude of the conflict and the extreme insecurity prompted population movements on a vast scale. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes to seek refuge in other regions of Liberia or in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, displaced populations often moved from one region to another, contributing to the breakdown of family ties. Thousands of children were abandoned or lost when their parents had fled.

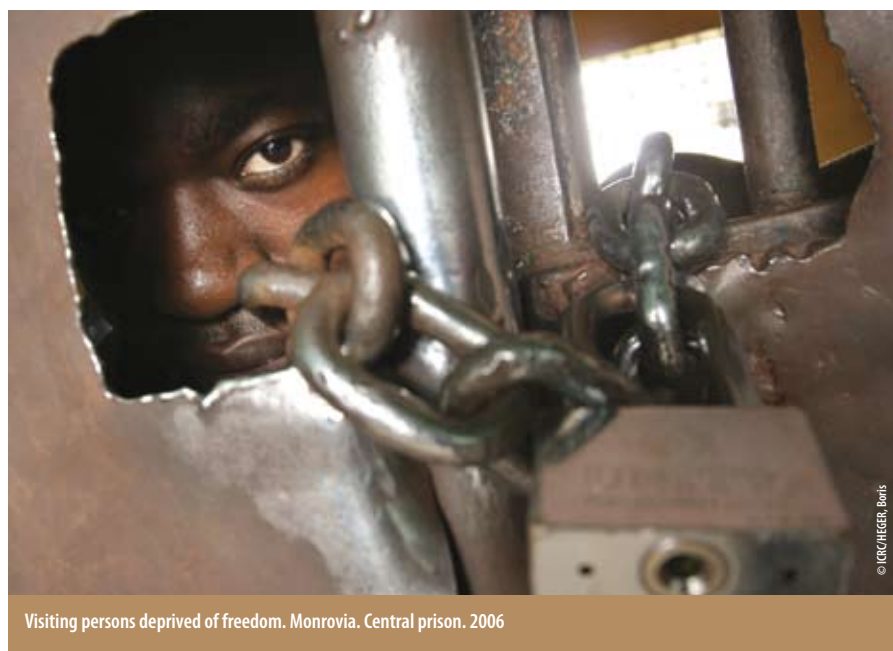
To deal with this dramatic situation, a vast Red Cross Tracing Agency network was set up, which covered Liberia itself, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana. By 2008, the ICRC in collaboration with the LNRCs had reunited more than 2,000 unaccompanied children with their families. The Red Cross Tracing Agency also handled the repatriation to their regions and home countries of members

of the army and other fighting forces, as well as detained or interned civilians after release. Thousands of tracing requests were processed concerning missing persons every year. Lists of people sought were posted in public places and in camps for displaced persons and published in the press.

**People deprived of their freedom:** As a neutral, independent and impartial organization, the ICRC spared no efforts in trying to gain access to all persons detained by the various parties to the conflict. Between 1990 to 2008, the ICRC visited over 3'500 persons in more than 110 official and non-official detention places and established contacts with their families through Red Cross messages. Whenever it was necessary, the ICRC distributed blankets, hygiene products, water containers, food, clothing, bedding, recreational items, and medical supplies, and carried out medical check-ups at detention places throughout the country. The ICRC also rehabilitated sanitary facilities and electrical systems.

Until today, the ICRC continues to identify urgent needs for detainees in the field of material conditions, water and sanitation and access to health care. In 2010, efforts have been on the rise again to improve access to clean water and sanitation facilities for the detainees in Liberia's prisons. The Bureau of Correction and Rehabilitation selected seven officials from the penitentiary administration to undertake ICRC training in infrastructure maintenance.

*In 2011, the ICRC and the Ministry of Justice will continue to jointly identify priorities aiming at improving material conditions, especially with regard to access to water, sanitation and health care and provision of items of basic necessity for all detainees in the Liberian prison system. The ICRC's longstanding expertise in detention worldwide will continue to be regularly shared with the detaining authorities in order to help build further capacity.*



Visiting persons deprived of freedom. Monrovia. Central prison. 2006



# PREVENTION

**Preventive action aims at fostering the respect for the live and dignity of those who have been affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence. Preventive action adopts its strategy according to the role and responsibilities of arms carriers, national authorities, civil society and the general public.**

**Promoting awareness of and respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) among arms carriers:** Throughout the 20 years of its presence in Liberia, the ICRC has been striving to prevent suffering by engaging with all those who had an impact on the fate of the people affected by armed violence and who could facilitate ICRC's access to civilians in need of protection and assistance. The ICRC reached out to all arms carriers such as ECOMOG, UNMIL, the Armed Forces of Liberia, the Liberia National Police and other security agencies as well as to any other fighting force involved in the Liberian conflict.

**Raising knowledge of ICRC and IHL among the civil society and the public at large:** The ICRC conducted hundreds of workshops and seminars for media institutions, NGOs and local committees aiming at promoting respect for international humanitarian law and for the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent. Over the years, the ICRC and the Liberian Red Cross organized several campaigns throughout the country, such as the:

**"Red Cross emblem awareness" campaign (1991):** to improve the knowledge of the wider public on the proper use of the Red Cross Emblem and convince them to remove all Red Cross emblems that had been improperly used for selling purposes on shops, houses, vehicles, etc and replace it with the caduceus or the green cross.

**"Respect the Rules of war" campaign (1998 & 2003):** a football match in Monrovia



1. Session for communities' leaders on ICRC and basic IHL principles, 2005
2. Promoting IHL and fundamental principles among youth. Lofa county, Fissebu, 2006
3. ICRC and IHL session for UNMIL. UNMIL training centre Monrovia, 2007

that attracted 15,000 spectators, helping to increase the knowledge of the public that rules need to be applied and respected in times of conflict. Due to the success of the campaign, it was extended to rural Liberia in 2003 where six football events were organized at different locations, bringing together 7,200 spectators.

**Celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions (1999):** various concerts, among them one that featured the late South African singer Lucky Dube took place in Monrovia and many other counties, targeting more than 30,000 people.

**"Bringing the Red Cross to the people" campaign (2003):** a month-long cleaning up exercise in Monrovia, with street theatre, traditional songs, dances and drama took place at the Water Side, Red Light, and Rally Town Markets.

**Battle of Solferino "Our World. Your Move" campaign (2009):** in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Solferino, the spotlight was put on the value of vulnerabilities and expectations of those affected by conflict. Liberia was chosen as one of the eight highlighted countries for the opinion and in-depth research on humanity in

war and the ICRC. According to the study, the vast majority of Liberians (96%) claimed to have personally been affected by the conflict in one way or the other.

**Supporting the implementation of IHL:** through its legal department, the ICRC provides regular support to the government regarding the integration of IHL treaties into domestic law. In this regard, over the years, the ICRC supported the participation of several government officials in regional and international events such as the joint ECOWAS-ICRC seminar on the integration of IHL held in Abuja annually; the Third Universal Meeting of IHL National Committees in Geneva, the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child etc.

*In 2011, the ICRC will continue to raise awareness of and support for humanitarian principles and Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement activities. They will promote the understanding of International Humanitarian Law and the protective properties of the emblems to civilian authorities; weapon bearers, such as UNMIL forces, AFL and LNP; and other members of society likely to have an influence during Liberia's reconstruction phase.*

# ECONOMIC SECURITY

**ICRC Economic security programs are designed to ensure that households and communities can meet their essential economic needs. In times of conflict, the programs focus on relief activities by providing people in need with goods and services essential to their survival. After a conflict ends, the population often faces considerable hardship and needs substantial support to maintain or recover its source of income.**

**Large scale relief assistance to IDPs:** As the conflict escalated, the people fled their homes and took refuge in surrounding towns and villages fearing for their lives. While some stayed with friends or relatives, others lived in camps for displaced people, and abandoned villages with no access to food and other basic commodities. The large-scale displacement of civilians, coupled with the damage to civilian infrastructure and the country's economy, weighted heavily on the internally displaced persons, as well as the hosting communities. To respond to the alarming needs, the ICRC launched a large scale emergency distribution, handing out tonnes of food and other basic relief items such as blankets, kitchen sets, tarpaulins, hygienic products, clothes etc. to hundreds of thousands of persons across the country throughout the years. Insecurity and constant population displacement often hampered access to beneficiaries of ICRC assistance programs and made it necessary to constantly adapt to changing needs.

**Livelihood support through micro-economic initiatives after the war:** When the conflict ended, and with the return of refugees from neighbouring countries and internally displaced persons to their homes, the ICRC gradually adapted its relief activities to meet the needs of a post-conflict situation. Most of the returning persons came back to their original homes empty handed and many returned to fields that had not been cultivated for years. Through the



Single household women benefiting from agricultural projects. Lofa county, Zorzor, 2006.

distribution of agricultural tools, food, and seed, the ICRC enabled the residents and returnees to prepare their fields in time. For the first time in years, many of them were able to harvest rice and vegetables. The humanitarian operation was however not without challenges as the bad condition of roads and impassable bridges made it difficult to reach affected people. In some areas, the ICRC had to repair many bridges that were unsafe or destroyed.

In 2006, the ICRC launched a micro-economic initiative programme aiming at assisting people still suffering from the aftermath of the conflict in securing a source of income and gaining self-

sufficiency. The programme supported several projects including farming, house gardening, planting cash crops (cocoa, coffee, palm), and maintaining fish ponds. The ICRC also provided thousands of tools and other agricultural implements.

In 2009, the ICRC distributed a metric tonne of Nerica seed rice to 20 communities in the Voinjama and Kolahun districts for multiplication. A portion of the harvested rice was returned to the ICRC, who handed it over to the Ministry of Agriculture for further distribution to other communities in the country. The ICRC also delivered some 10,000 coffee seedlings, 25,000 palm seedlings and around 50 kilogram of different vegetable seed to farmers' associations and women's groups in Lofa county and provided training for more than 3,600 people in agriculture techniques and marketing.

*In 2011, the ICRC will continue its support to vulnerable farming communities, cooperatives and women associations by providing them with further training and advice to maintain their livelihoods in the long term. The ICRC will also support the National Society in implementing its own agricultural initiatives and provide material as well as expert back-up in the field.*



ICRC convoy on its way to Voinjama. 2006



Farming training graduation and distribution of tools. 2005



**Health-related activities are designed to ensure that the health needs of people in armed conflict or other situations of violence are met according to basic health care standards. Curative and preventive health care remain at the heart of ICRC projects; saving lives and alleviating suffering are at the centre of health assistance.**

## **Supporting the JFK and other medical facilities:**

During the years of conflict, the sharp drop in the number of functioning medical facilities, the lack of qualified medical staff and the high number of war-wounded people quickly overstretched the Ministry of Health's capacities. As a response to the crisis, the ICRC regularly distributed medical supplies and equipment to various hospitals and clinics throughout the country. Moreover, in 2002 the ICRC set up a ward within the hospital with 130 beds and a medical team comprising 12 men and women to provide surgery and post-operative care in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the John F. Kennedy Hospital Management. In 2003, the ICRC surgical team was handling a daily influx of around 50 military and civilian war-wounded. The ICRC also conducted war-surgery seminars and provided on-the-job training in war surgery techniques and post-operative care. Later on, the ICRC withdrew its surgical team, but it continued to support the trauma and surgical department and supplied medical materials, food for patients and staff incentives.

Children were the most vulnerable to suffer from malnutrition due the scarce availability



Providing medical services for internal displaced persons. Blamassee camp, Monrovia. 2003



ICRC surgical team in JFK trauma centre. 2004

of food during the peak of the conflict. The ICRC paid special attention to respond to their needs by operating intensive feeding centres, providing food to orphanages and hospitals.

## **Supporting clinics and health centres in**

**Lofa and Grand Kru:** after the conflict ended, the health care system was struggling to meet the needs of the population. In its effort to improve the quality of health services, the ICRC constructed or rehabilitated, 14 health facilities in Lofa and Grand Kru Counties, where the needs were most acute and supported and supervised their smooth operation. The support ranged from supplies of drugs, equipment, and training of staff and payment of salary incentives. These facilities provided basic health

care to hundred of thousands of people in the form of consultations, vaccination campaigns and laboratory tests. They also increased health awareness by providing sessions on various topics such as prevention of malaria, which was coupled with distribution of mosquito nets mainly to children and pregnant women more at risk. The ICRC, in response to the continuous shortage in hospitals, donated several tonnes of medical supplies to the Redemption Hospital in Monrovia in 2008.

**Midwives training:** The ICRC, in partnership with the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and with the county health teams of Lofa and Grand Kru, supported the training of 280 traditional midwives and equipped them with basic delivery kits between 2005 and 2009. The training aimed at enabling the midwives to follow pregnancies, give health education messages to pregnant women, and detect risky pregnancies for referral to adequate facilities. The new mothers also received advice about the nutrition of newborns and the importance of vaccination.

*In 2011, as part of its continuous cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare the ICRC will resume support to four health clinics in Lofa County through the County Health Team, thus improving access to health care in vulnerable parts of rural Liberia.*



Health clinic rehabilitated and supported by ICRC. Voinjama, Lofa. 2005

# WATER AND HABITAT

**ICRC Water and Habitat programs aim at ensuring access to water (for both drinking and household use) and to a safe living environment in both urban and rural contexts. In situations of crisis, damaged infrastructure and basic services may also be restored.**

**Ensuring access to clean water & environment during the conflict:** The conflict heavily affected the water and sanitation infrastructures across the country. Water borne diseases were a danger for the population. To prevent possible epidemics, the ICRC constructed or rehabilitated hundreds of wells with hand pumps and sanitation infrastructures to ensure access to clean water and improve hygiene conditions. Due to the exodus of internally displaced people all over the country, the ICRC also operated a water tanker, installed bladder tanks, taps stands and trucked 4,000 gallons of clean water three times a day to communities, orphanages, displaced camps, targeting over 680,000 people.

In 1991, Monrovia's main source of clean water, the Luke Plant Power Station, stopped functioning. ICRC engineers restored about 46% of the normal output of clean water in Monrovia. In order to achieve the project, the ICRC had to repair the plant's main electricity supply provided by the Luke Plant Power Station. Additionally, some 15,000 leaks were repaired, 10,000 connections cut off and 52 public standpipes installed, thus enhancing access to clean water in Monrovia.

Whenever the security situation permitted, the ICRC organized sanitation groups to clean

up Monrovia and its environs as well as several displaced camps in rural Liberia and tried to restore the supply of clean water.

As another round of the conflict hit rural Liberia in 2003, thousands of displaced people soon overwhelmed the capital leading to the establishment of 30 transit centres and displacement camps in the suburbs of the Monrovia. The need for water became eminent. On a daily basis, the ICRC trucked 100,000 litres of water to the camps as well as to hospitals and clinics. From June to August, 60 percent of the water distribution focused on IDPs in Monrovia, for whom 35 wells, more than 600 pit latrines and 122 bathhouses were constructed.

**Improving access to water after the conflict:** many wells had been neglected for several years and once again became a source of water for drinking and domestic use, when IDPs returned home after the conflict ended. The ICRC repaired and chlorinated more than 1000 wells and at the same time embarked on the process of hand pump rehabilitation and construction. In Monrovia, the return of large a number of people in the capital overstretched the water capacity. To address this mammoth task, in consultation with the national water board, the ICRC constructed 13 water storage and distribution points of 20,000 litres storage



Hand pump in Blamacee internally displaced persons' camp, Monrovia, 2002

capacity each in Monrovia and its surroundings targeting over 110'000 people. Ten of these facilities were handed over to the Liberia Water and Sewage Corporation in 2009 and 2010.

With the aim of empowering the communities to take charge of ensuring a continuous access to clean water and safe environment, the ICRC organized hundreds of training sessions to over 15'000 community members, among them 10,000 trained as hygiene promoters and 5'000 as pump mechanics in the various counties. Moreover, through radio and other outreach activities, the ICRC broadcasted key messages on basic hygiene and sanitation in Grand Kru, Montserrado, Maryland and Lofa.

*In 2011, the ICRC will continue its water and hygiene-awareness in rural Liberia. It will also continue to work with the National Society to extend the water supply more widely, constructing further water distribution stations and rehabilitating wells and hand pumps in flood-prone districts. To encourage community ownership, residents are encouraged to set up their own water committees, which are then trained by the ICRC to maintain the facilities.*



Water hand pump installed in a prison, 2010



Inauguration of a water point, 2010



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**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** is an impartial, neutral and independent organization with an exclusively humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. The founding of the ICRC in 1863 led to the evolution of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

For further information, visit our website at [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)



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