



ICRC
in
Sri Lanka

NEWS LETTER

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Retrospective 2011

Contributing to addressing the remaining humanitarian consequences of the conflict



Dear Reader,

Let me welcome you to this first edition of the "Newsletter of the ICRC Delegation in Sri Lanka". The new format, intended to provide periodic updates on the ongoing developments of our humanitarian undertakings in the country,

replaces the "ICRC Operational Update" which had previously been issued on a quarterly basis. As such, it reflects the change of our organization's modus operandi in the post-conflict environment. While emergency operations implemented by a duly recognized neutral humanitarian intermediary between the parties to the conflict are no longer required, there are still humanitarian needs in different parts of the country, resulting from the past conflict, which have to be addressed mostly through mid and longer-term approaches and projects.

The ICRC's main ambition in Sri Lanka remains, indeed, to contribute in a meaningful and concrete way to alleviating, as much as possible, the plight of Sri Lankans affected by the direct consequences of the past conflict - the disabled, conflict-related detainees separated from their relatives, families of persons unaccounted for and economically vulnerable households.

The humanitarian narrative underpinning the protracted ordeal of these victims is no longer one of

life-saving or urgent dispensation of relief items and medical assistance. Instead, theirs is one of step-by-step improvements and recovery, while strengthening their self-esteem and dignity. At the same time, the promotion of essential humanitarian norms ought to be pursued along with the relevant national institutions - also a long term undertaking.

This outlook for the slower, yet incremental pace of humanitarian endeavour to address the remaining needs and the transition, through recovery, to development and normal everyday life is what the ICRC delegation is attempting to portray through the enclosed articles and human interest stories.

The ICRC delegation in Sri Lanka is of course aware that many Sri Lankan institutions and organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, as well as other international organizations, in particular the UN agencies, are also working to address the remaining humanitarian challenges that resulted from the past armed conflict and to promote essential humanitarian norms. With due regard to the specialized professional expertise it can offer in certain specific areas, our organization hopes to represent a significant added value to the various ongoing efforts. In fact, we are seeking to foster convergent approaches by joining hands with institutions and organizations working on similar matters.

Naturally, the partner of predilection of the ICRC in Sri Lanka is the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS), which through its wide network of branches and thousands of staff members and volunteers can rely on a substantial potential for addressing the humanitarian needs at the level of the community. Therefore, the ICRC also engages with other Red

Cross Movement partners, foremost the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, with a view to supporting the post-conflict programmes and to strengthening the response capacity of the SLRCS, in particular, in case of disasters.



Training for senior police officers on the adequate use of force and firearms

Looking back at 2011 and the progress initiated in the different areas which feature in more detail in this Newsletter, I feel confident that in order to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing humanitarian undertakings, including the promotion of international humanitarian norms, my team of experienced Sri Lankan and international colleagues and myself can continue to rely on the support of the relevant government authorities and close cooperation with important Sri Lankan institutions, foremost the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society.

Needless to say, a lot remains to be done and 2012 will be a crucial year where the ICRC's ability to make sustainable contributions in the phase of transition that Sri Lanka is undergoing will determine its future scope of action. Meanwhile, I hope the following pages and pictures will convey to you, dear Reader, a sense of the remaining humanitarian challenges and the need to work together to overcome these issues.

Yves Giovannoni
Head of the ICRC Delegation In Sri Lanka



Micro Economic Initiatives providing sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable households in the Vavuniya district

crossed approaches by joining hands with institutions and organizations working on similar matters.

HIGHLIGHTS

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The Sri Lanka Police Force and the ICRC in Joint Training Endeavour

Following the positive response of the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence in July 2011 on the ICRC's offer of service to cooperate with the Sri Lanka Police Force to strengthen their knowledge on the adequate use of force and firearms in situations of public unrest, two test lectures were held in Colombo, in September, with a view to adapting the ICRC's training programme to the specific requirements of Sri Lanka.

Subsequently in November, more than 200 senior police officers from around the country attended another workshop in Colombo and a series of training lectures at the Kalutara Police Training College. Regular training sessions and a refresher course have now been planned for 2012.

Yves Giovannoni, the head of the ICRC in Sri Lanka addressing the participants at the first test lecture, observed that the lectures were part of a process of transition to normalcy from the time of conflict to the prevailing situation of peace. *"Talking about the use of force, what happens when a country is exposed to a hardening of law enforcement owing to a conflict situation is that law enforcement officers, sometimes, come close to being militarised. Organizing the process of getting back to the appropriate use of force*

and firearms, search and seizure inevitably takes some time", he said.

The ICRC has been accumulating comparative expertise on this matter in many different countries and is now glad to be able to transmit it to the Sri Lanka Police Force. In 2012, an ICRC regional police expert will be based in Colombo (see his interview on page 3). Together with senior police officers, he will seek to ensure the sustainability of the training programmes and the elaboration of the Standing Operating Procedures (SOP).

"Training on the applicable norms often cannot serve the purpose alone", emphasises Mr Giovannoni. *"A corresponding revision of the Standing Operating Procedures might also be required. This is a complex task as it involves many different aspects. Our organization, which over the last 20 years has developed preventative programmes with many police forces worldwide, can offer its comparative experience to this end"*, he said.

"Many people believe that the ICRC works only in times of armed conflict. However, since the adequate use of force and firearms allows to prevent humanitarian problems also, in other situations prone to violence,

we try to address this matter with the security forces concerned in different contexts. This requires a collaborative approach, which, in turn allows us to enrich our programme, like what is already happening here with the Sri Lankan Police", he added.

Mr Ajith Rohana, Director Police Public Relations and Media Spokesman, in his address pointed out that the theme was a timely topic. *"In days gone by, the use of force by the police at times of public disorder was guided by Police Departmental orders. Now, we need a modern operational concept on the use of force that will allow us to be better in line with international instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which have been ratified by Sri Lanka"*.

A "steering group" of senior police officials is due to be established with a view to reviewing the adequacy of existing SOPs, to which the ICRC will have the opportunity to impart its comparative experience on the respective approaches chosen in a variety of countries. The final goal is to achieve adequate procedures that need to be tailor-made for Sri Lanka, while ensuring conformity with international standards and practices.

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN THE USE OF FORCE AND PUBLIC SECURITY

Lilram Deal is a serving Mauritian Police Officer, who for the past 12 years, has been working in different capacities with the ICRC. He has also worked with several other international and regional organizations. Further to his latest interaction with the Sri Lanka Police Force, here he shares his impressions and thoughts on the prospect ahead:

1. How timely is your visit to Sri Lanka?

Until recently I imagine the priority of the police was on another front. Now that the conflict is behind, priorities have changed and the Sri Lanka Police Force is heading towards a more community based and service oriented approach. The ICRC is ready to support the police with their training needs on the very specific topic of the use of force in situations of public unrest. My visits to the country have allowed me, in consultation with the police, to assess these needs to elaborate on an adequate work plan.

2. What expertise can you offer to the Sri Lankan context?

Having been in the police service in Mauritius for 20 years, and having worked with many different national police forces as well as regional organisations in different contexts, including in other post conflict situations with the ICRC, I am now in a position to share my varied police experience with my Sri Lankan counterparts.

3. How relevant is the ICRC's work with the police?

The police are mainly tasked with the responsibilities of maintaining public order and security, preventing and detecting crime and providing help and assistance to the public. To fulfil their mission,

they are granted the basic powers of arrest and detention, search and seizure and the use of force and firearms when required. A police officers' work in keeping public order is quite different from that of the armed forces in combat operations, except for specialized units which perform their function in groups – such as anti-riot police – police officers usually work alone or in pairs and have to decide for themselves how to react to incidents. Unlike the military, they typically work without immediate supervision and, despite working in a framework set out by law (including International Human Rights law) and their internal operational procedures, they have wide personal discretion: ie: police laws often indicate that “an officer MAY arrest / detain /use force etc.”; not that they MUST do so. To ensure the rights of the people of the country are always respected, it is crucial to remind the police constantly of their obligations towards the public.

4. How does the ICRC work with the police ?

In different contexts in the world the ICRC has been working in collaboration with different police forces, be it in terms of training support, curriculum review and bringing the training levels as per international standards. Though the ICRC has police experts and consultants working on specific domains, the ICRC does not interfere in or question the way the police carries out its duties but rather, in consultation with the respective police force, we try to support their training curriculum so that it serves the public better.

5. How important is the role of the police in maintaining law and order in a country?

In any country, law and order is one of the most important factors that guarantees all other functions of a country such as economic development and investment. Maintaining security for the public, at large, and investors in particular as well as tourists is critical for the survival of any country. Therefore the efficiency of the police should be of such a standard that it guarantees these interests.

6. Maintaining law and order vs use of force. How do you strike a balance and what is its importance?

As law enforcement officers the police not only have powers but also a lot of responsibilities. Maintaining public order is a responsibility whereas the use of force is a power. If more power is used than the responsibility requires then it is excessive and you automatically end up violating a human right. Therefore, the police have to be trained to perform their duties in such a way that they strike this balance between responsibility and power. During my meetings with Sri Lankan police officials the need for specific training on these matters have come up and we are working along these lines to prepare our future programmes to meet these challenges. Adequate use of force goes along with protecting the rights of people as well as of the police. It is important for the police to know how to use the proportionate amount of force when absolutely necessary while remaining within the legal parameters to achieve their legitimate objectives. Having said this, it is also important to understand there are other means available before even using force such as negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution and persuasion.



Enhancing the mobility of disabled persons

The ICRC seeks to work with Sri Lankan institutions and organisations, which also endeavour to address remaining humanitarian problems that have resulted from the past. The Jaffna Jaipur Centre for Disability Rehabilitation (JJCDR) has over the years provided a haven for disabled people, including landmine victims, seeking to live an autonomous life.

The ICRC's commitment to addressing needs of amputees and supporting the JJCDR, which was founded in 1987 as the Jaffna branch of the Friend in Need Society, goes back to 1994.

The Centre is regularly provided with supplies, including raw materials such as polypropylene and components for building artificial limbs and technical knowledge

to produce them and other orthotic devices. Physiotherapists and orthopaedic specialists from the ICRC have trained staff to assist beneficiaries before and after they have been fitted with artificial limbs.

The JJCDR currently assists a caseload of more than 1250 people. Support for the Centre will continue until 2014 when the ICRC, together with the JJCDR, will take appropriate measures to ensure its longer term sustainability.

For more information on the Jaipur Centre please visit the ICRC website at: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/srilanka-feature-071008.htm>

In 2011, the ICRC delegation's medical department linked up with other national orthopaedic organisations. One such organisation was the Navajeevana Ortho Centre in Tangalle, which provides mobility aids to disabled in the surrounding area. Twenty six financially less privileged amputees from the Tangalle area have benefitted from prostheses from this Centre.

The cooperation established with another orthopaedic institution in the South, the Sanasuma Orthopaedic Centre, relates to a very specific project, as it provides artificial lower limbs (prostheses) to persons held at the Boosa Detention Centre. ICRC delegates have been visiting these persons regularly since 2007 to assess their material conditions and the treatment they are afforded. This cooperation allowed the detaining authorities to grant the necessary authorisation for the measurement, moulding and fitting of the prostheses to be done inside the detention centre.

"This project was a win - win situation for all involved - beneficiaries, prison authorities, Sanasuma and us", explains Imthath Basar, a health assistant working with the ICRC. "The amputated detainees had, of course, a dire need for prostheses. In some places of detention, the ICRC was the 'only' organization which has been allowed entry and therefore able to address these needs. But we needed a partner to provide good quality limbs".

According to Basar, the help of an ICRC specialist in physical rehabilitation who had carried out an island wide study of orthopaedic centres also contributed to making this project a success.

"The specialist carried out monitoring visits to the detention centre and assured the quality of prostheses during their production. The cost of the prostheses was borne by ICRC".

Forty - eight prostheses (13 above knee prostheses and 35 below knee prostheses) were produced during the eight- month duration of the project.



◀ An amputee being given gait-training before he is fitted with an artificial leg

A technician putting the finishing touches to a prostheses ▶



Between January and November 2011 the JJCDR, Navajeevana Centre and Sanasuma have:

- provided over 320 prostheses to amputees;
- produced more than 140 walking aids such as crutches and sticks;
- delivered ten wheelchairs and
- provided 48 prostheses to persons held at Boosa Detention Centre

Health on wheels for resettled communities in Jaffna



Patients queuing to see the doctor at the mobile health clinic in Maruthankerny



Open wide.... a child being examined by the doctor

It is a balmy Saturday morning. A mobile health clinic, complete with a doctor, Sri Lanka Red Cross (SLRCS) volunteers, pharmacist and a stock of medicines slowly winds its way along a sandy road track adjacent to the sea. It is heading to Maruthankerny in the Jaffna district where it eventually comes to a halt. Soon a queue of villagers forms. Most of them have brought their sick children. They patiently await their turn to see the doctor. Seated under the shade of a large tree he diagnoses their ailments and prescribes medicines, which they collect free of charge from the mobile clinic.

The clinic has been a familiar sight in Maruthankerny where it has been providing health care to local communities who have resettled after their displacement

from the tsunami and hostilities of the past. The service started in September 2010 and by the end of that year had treated more than 1800 patients.

The service, operated by the SLRCS with support from the ICRC, started on the request of the Ministry of Health. Through such cooperation with the SLRC, the ICRC is able to support post conflict programmes and strengthen the response capacity of its national partner.

Every week the clinic travels between Aliyavalai, Chempianpatru, Uduthurai, Kattai-kkadu, Vetrilaikerny and Kevil in Maruthankerny, treating people for coughs, colds, fever, ear, eye and skin infections, arthritis, diarrhoea and respiratory track infections.

“The work of the Clinic is invaluable to local communities who do not have easy access to health care”, said Savunthala Sellmutthu, who organises the ICRC’s support for the project. “Because it provides a regular service, the communities are able to rely on it until the traditional health structures in the area start functioning again”.

Since October this year, the SLRCS with the support of the ICRC, has been operating a weekly mobile health clinic for the islanders of Mandaitivu in Jaffna

Between January and November last year 9292 patients benefitted from 147 mobile clinics in Maruthankerny and Mandaitivu in the Jaffna Peninsula.



A SLRCS volunteer handing over medicines prescribed by the doctor

LOOKING BACK



Jaipur Centre celebrates 24 years of service

The Jaffna Jaipur Centre for Disability Rehabilitation (JJCDR) completed 24 years of service in July 2011. The Centre celebrated its achievements with a sports meet, where male and female beneficiaries who have been fitted with prostheses competed in five kilometre bicycle and tricycle races. The events ended with a cultural performance at the Chundukuli Girls School which included a drama by beneficiaries using prosthesis and orthoses (mobility aids) and Centre staff as well as a dance performed by two amputees.

"Every year, we try to have an event to celebrate our anniversary as these events not only motivates the beneficiaries but also creates awareness about the services we offer", said Dr Ganesahmoorthy, Chairperson of JJCDR. "The races prove that disabled persons can also engage in activity like any other".

MEI for vulnerable households

The Red Cross Micro Economic Initiative (MEI) programme, which is run as a SLRCS-ICRC partnership project, provides financial assistance to vulnerable households including single female headed households and people with disabilities, to start a small business. The Programme started in 2011 as a pilot project in

Vavuniya to address the remaining humanitarian problems that resulted from the conflict of the past. Applicants have to prove that the MEI which can be in agriculture, crafts, services or trade can provide a sustainable income to the beneficiary household.



ON 2011

Ensuring the welfare of persons in detention



ICRC staff have been visiting places of detention throughout the country since 1989 on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sri Lanka government. During the elapsed year, ICRC teams continued to visit places of detention to assess the material conditions of detention and the treatment afforded to the inmates and conveyed their findings through confidential reports to the authorities. In 2012, the ICRC's contribution to the improvement of prison conditions is due to focus resolutely on the systemic problem of overcrowding, an issue that requires convergent cooperation among all authorities concerned.



Farewell to staff at ICRC offices in Vavuniya (above) and Jaffna (below)



Closure of ICRC offices in Jaffna and Vavuniya

In February and March of 2011, the ICRC offices in Jaffna and Vavuniya, which had rendered appreciable humanitarian services during the last 21 and 14 years respectively, were closed down. Out of the 170 staff members who were made redundant, three had worked with the ICRC for more than 20 years, nine for more than 15 years and 20 for more than 10 years. The closure of the last ICRC office outside the Colombo head office, prompted the SLRCS and the ICRC to swiftly find ways to pursue together, programmes deemed essential for beneficiaries such as the Family Visit Programme.

ICRC briefings for UN peacekeepers

The ICRC conducts briefing sessions on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to contingents of Sri Lankan Army, Navy and Air Force personnel going as UN peacekeepers to Haiti, Lebanon and the Ivory Coast. The aim of these briefings is to promote awareness of and respect for IHL and humanitarian norms as well as preparing these peacekeepers for their countries of destination where the ICRC has been present for many years. This is especially important in view of Sri Lanka's role as a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations.



Going back in time with the ICRC.....

When the ICRC established its office in Sri Lanka in 1989 on the invitation of the late President Premadasa, visiting detainees formed a large chunk of its humanitarian undertaking. To date, ICRC teams continue to make regular visits to places of detention to assess the material conditions of detention and treatment afforded to persons held in connection with the past hostilities. After each visit, their findings are shared confidentially with the authorities concerned.

For the last two decades, Lynn Graham, Duncan Bond and Patric Morin have been the backbone of the ICRC's humanitarian visits to detainees in Sri Lanka. Together, they worked as Sinhala and Tamil interpreters and Delegates, initially visiting persons detained in police stations for their alleged involvement in the JVP uprising of the late 1980's. With the subsequent escalation of hostilities between the GoSL and LTTE, they started visiting detainees suspected of having links with the LTTE in various places of detention. They were also visiting security forces personnel held by the LTTE. During this time their work involved other ICRC activities such as ensuring the safety of civilians in areas where there was fighting and relocating the displaced to safe areas.

Lynn, Duncan and Patric left the ICRC delegation in Sri Lanka at the end of last year, moving on to other destinies, including new assignments with the ICRC. Before

departing, they shared some highlights of their more than 20 years of work for the ICRC in Sri Lanka.

Duncan arrived in the country in 1981 with the Voluntary Services Organisation (VSO). Almost immediately, he went to work in Ginigath-hena, in rural Sri Lanka, as an agriculture instructor for a Norwegian organisation.

"There was hardly anyone who spoke English and I had no choice but to learn Sinhala", Duncan explains. "I was able to speak the language in six months. I started loving the community I lived in", he says fondly recalling his sense of affinity.

Rich from his experiences in Sri Lanka, Duncan returned home to the UK in 1984 to study for a degree in Fine Art. In 1991, he came back for a holiday and found that the ICRC was looking for Sinhala interpreters to visit persons detained because of the JVP insurrection.

Soon he was working for the ICRC from its office in Matara, visiting these detainees in police stations in the Hambantota and Sambaragamuwa areas. It was here he met Patrick, who had also started working for the ICRC in 1990 as a Sinhala interpreter.

Patrick came to Sri Lanka in 1986 to study Buddhism. He had already studied Sinhala and Tamil in France. *"I was living in a temple in Pannipitiya and was studying for a Diploma in Buddhism and Pali but could not complete it because of the JVP uprising".* Patric joined the ICRC in 1990 and started work in the Matara office. After it was closed in 1993, he moved to the ICRC Head Office in Colombo and continued his visits to places of detention in the South. He also started visiting a growing number of persons who were detained in the East due to hostilities which prevailed there and in the North. After working in Jaffna for two years between 1998 and 2000 he started working from Colombo where he continued to visit detainees until the time of his departure.

Lynn came to Sri Lanka in 1986 with VSO, working as a speech therapist for the Department of Social Services. *"I spent four years working with children with hearing impairment and learning disabilities. This is how I learnt Sinhala," she muses. "Around 1990, I heard ICRC was looking for Sinhala interpreters. I met the Head of Delegation, got the job and started work in Kandy where the ICRC had an office. I too was visiting persons who had been detained in Badulla, Moneragala and Nuwara Eliya because of the JVP insurrection. Eventually I moved to Colombo where I have been working since, visiting detention centres all over the island. The ICRC's working relations with the prison*

authorities were cemented over the years with a growing understanding of and respect for the confidential way in which the organization works and the testimonial immunity it has in all its undertakings", Lynn remembers.

Duncan meanwhile worked in the ICRC office in Batticaloa where in addition to visiting detainees with alleged LTTE links, he was conducting briefings on International Humanitarian Law to the armed forces. He had started to learn Tamil when he was in Anuradhapura and this helped him.

Duncan dwells on his travels to Jaffna while working in Batticaloa in the 1990's to visit 30 policemen held by the LTTE and for whom the ICRC was organising humanitarian visits every six weeks or so:

"The LTTE used to bring them to the political wing office near the Jaffna Teaching Hospital for us to see them. During these visits, which lasted around three to four days, we made sure we took them good food and correspondence from the families. Once the policemen staged a hunger strike demanding their release. The ICRC arranged for all the families of these policemen to visit them. It was a big operation since normal road travel was not possible. We took the families by boat from Trincomalee to Point Pedro where they met with their detained relatives in the Subash Hotel building. The families stayed for several weeks, refusing to leave until the release of their loved ones. Eventually, the LTTE did release around eight to ten of their captives, mainly those who were married. The families left and the ICRC resumed normal visits to the policemen, most of who were released during the ceasefire of 1994".

"In its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC transported the Peninsula's food supplies on ships chartered by it since normal travel by road was not possible. The ICRC even carried the mail", he says recalling how the ICRC was a part of daily life in Jaffna at the time.



"The ICRC even carried the mail"

He has lasting memories of the weekly patient convoys where patients needing specialised treatment were taken by ship from Point Pedro to Trincomalee. *"It was my Saturday work", he recalls. "The ships we used to transport the patients were big and getting the patients on*



An ICRC chartered ferry transports passengers and goods to Jaffna in the 1990's

board was both a difficult and delicate operation. We had to put the patients in a cage and a crane would lift it up into the big ship. We worked very closely with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society”.

“When I was in Malawi, setting up the crossing point near Madhu in early 2000, was one of the important activities I was involved in. This required long and difficult negotiations with the Army and especially the LTTE. The ICRC rules of confidentiality and its neutral and independent approach to humanitarian issues helped win the trust and confidence of the parties”. After working in nearly all the ICRC offices outstation - Trincomalee and Vavuniya - Duncan too settled to work in Colombo.

“My life at the ICRC has been intertwined more or less with that of Lynn and Duncan. We have shared a lot of work and experiences”, says Patric looking back, his face crinkling as he breaks into a smile.

Patrick who has a degree in Tamil combined with Sinhala from the National Institute of Oriental Language and Culture in France, intends to pursue further his passion for languages after he leaves the ICRC. This time he will be going to Israel and Palestine to study Hebrew and Arabic. However, Sri Lanka will always be his anchor he confesses.

“For me, Sri Lanka is definitely my home since my wife and daughter who is 13 are here as well. I have spent more of my life here than in my native France”. Patrick’s interest in Buddhism and Hinduism has also been the inspiration for his paintings on Buddhist and Hindu themes. A celebrated painter, he has held over six exhibitions in Sri Lanka so far. Duncan meanwhile wants to return to the UK. His immediate ambition is to



Duncan, Lynn and Patric: a humanitarian force

hold an exhibition of landscape paintings of Sri Lanka.

As for Lynn she is due to take up another assignment with the ICRC, elsewhere.

As the three of them are now about to leave the ICRC undertakings in Sri Lanka after more than two decades, they look back on all these years with a sense of “mission accomplished”. “Over the years, the ICRC managed, step by step, to make a difference in terms of the treatment of people in detention and slowly the relationship between the authorities and ICRC improved. Trust was gradually built up and the relevance of the ICRC’s work was acknowledged. The ICRC came to be respected once they realised its confidential way of working and this helped improve working relations”.

“Of course, in times of conflict everything is upside down and there have been many humanitarian needs for which we could not do anything. But for those for whom we could really do something, assist them or contribute to their protection, I believe this has been essential, sometimes even crucial”.

As concerns the remaining humanitarian needs of those still affected by the past conflict Lynn, Duncan and Patric are convinced that owing to its specific professional expertise and the support it can offer, the ICRC can represent a meaningful added value to the efforts already undertaken by national institutions and other organizations.

Maintaining essential links through the Red Cross Family Visit Program (FVP)



The FVP in progress at the SLRCS office in Vavuniya

The Red Cross Family Visit Program (FVP) provides travel allowances to families requiring financial support to visit relatives held in relation with the past conflict. This typically humanitarian service, pursued since 1999, enables the families to re-establish and or maintain essential links with their relatives who are being held in different places throughout the country.

The ICRC and Sri Lanka Red Cross Society deliver the service jointly to the families who can collect their travel allowances either from the ICRC office in Colombo or the SLRCS office in Vavuniya. The spouse or a close relative of the person held can receive the travel allowance following verification to determine their eligibility. A family can avail themselves of the allowance once every two months.

In 2011, more than 5000 families of persons held in prisons, detention centres and places of rehabilitation received a travel allowance under the Family Visit Programme.

In addition to maintaining essential ties, the FVP also gives families an opportunity to take personal items such as clothing and toiletries to their detained relative.

Between January and November 2011, ICRC teams:
made 128 visits to 64 places of detention and met privately with over 2372 detainees;
provided 14,819 detainees with toiletries, clothes and games;
paid for 28 detainees to return home by public transport following their release, and
collected 638 Red Cross messages and distributed 617, mostly between detainees and their families.

ICRC and SLRCS promoting humanitarian spirit through well cleaning training

Training volunteers in humanitarian recovery programs is a core task jointly undertaken by the ICRC and SLRC. These activities strengthen their capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable populations while promoting the humanitarian spirit of the Red Cross Movement.

Last year, the ICRC trained 105 volunteers from the SLRCS branches in the Ampara, Polonaruwa, Batticaloa, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts to clean contaminated wells. They had fallen into disuse after the local population was displaced following the conflict or the floods that ravaged these regions. During the training period some 125 public and private wells in these areas were cleaned by emptying the water, cleaning the well walls and disinfecting them. Following the training, volunteers continue with well cleaning operations. In the Polonaruwa district for example, over 800 wells were cleaned.

"It was the success of the initial trainings in the Polonaruwa district which prompted subsequent ones. We conducted four training sessions last year", said Anjelina Adler, who

leads the ICRC's water and habitat team in Sri Lanka which is instrumental for the training. *"All stakeholders in the project - trainers, volunteers and beneficiaries - participated in the field work actively which made it very inclusive".*

The training provided to the volunteers included technical training on pump operation, maintenance and possible failure problems, testing of pH, turbidity and conductivity, preparation of chlorine solution, calculating the needed quantity of chlorine for disinfecting, filling in the monitoring table, dewatering methods and other safety measures.

Charles, a volunteer at the newly re-established Kilinochchi branch of the SLRCS explains he was chosen for the training because of his experience in this type of work with two other organisations in Kilinochchi. *"The practical elements of the training made it very interesting since it was the first time I was exposed to it despite my previous experience",* he points out.

"There is a big need for these wells, which

were abandoned when the residents fled, to be cleaned so the people have clean water for their daily ablutions. I am happy I have the opportunity to get involved in this work to help the community I live in".

Sivanantharajah Tharulaxmy, his colleague in the SLRCS branch in Mullaitivu, also recently re opened, echoes similar sentiments. *"I think people forget the technical aspects. The volunteers in our Branch are mostly women and I don't think gender is an issue when it comes to well cleaning. I can do whatever task related to well cleaning with the knowledge and practical techniques I learnt during the training, just like any man would".*

To consolidate the success of these trainings, the ICRC together with the SLRCS will embark on a plan to train volunteers to become trainers. Four trainings have been planned for 2012.

"This will ensure that the technical knowledge the volunteers acquire will be imparted to an island wide network of volunteers, with the ultimate objective of ensuring hazard free water to rural communities", added Angelina.



ICRC personnel training volunteers from SLRCS to clean wells



Working in partnership in the Red Cross Movement

As outlined in other articles of this Newsletter, in 2011, the ICRC has continued to strengthen its partnership with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) to reach, through a variety of core programs, vulnerable communities and individuals in the recovery phase, focusing particularly on groups and individuals whose already fragile situation was compounded by natural disasters.

Support for disaster preparedness and re-establishing Northern branches

Building on efforts to assist the SLRCS disaster response and preparedness during the flood response earlier in the year, the ICRC stepped up its support to response planning, management and deployment. Geographical Information System (GIS) facilities were developed together with the SLRCS and disaster response staff were trained. A special emphasis was put on re-establishing the SLRCS branches in Mullaitivu and Killinochchi by providing them with vehicles, motorcycles, data facilities, generators and equipment for an Emergency Operation Room. Basic disaster response items & two converted containers for office & storage facilities were also provided. Through their very encouraging revival, the SLRCS branches in Killinochchi and Mullaitivu have also retrieved their capacity to implement valuable livelihood and recovery activities at the community level.

Vulnerable households take up their recovery

To seek to improve the daily life of vulnerable households, in 2011, the SLRCS and ICRC launched a pilot project in the Vavuniya district to promote and support Micro Economic Initiatives (MEI) for families where the breadwinner is absent (deceased, unaccounted for or in detention) and for persons with disability. The beneficiaries of this income generating programme receive productive grants and/or vocational training to enhance their resources and skills with a view to improving their income in a sus-



Training SLRCS volunteers and staff members on the Fundamental Red Cross Principles and Humanitarian Values

tainable and dignified manner. The beneficiaries can engage in any business ranging from agriculture, fisheries, livestock, trade or the provision of services such as hairdressing, bakery, or tailoring.

Provided the pilot project is successful, in 2012, its methodology will be transferred to other SLRCS branches to assist vulnerable households in other districts. In the Vavuniya district alone, 300 households are due to benefit from this partnership program to start a small business.

"The objective of this project is twofold", explains Vincent Gremion, who heads the ICRC's Economic Security Department in Sri Lanka and who together with his team is spearheading the project in its initial phase. "One is to boost the income of these vulnerable households by at least 50 percent and provide them with a sustainable means of livelihood. The other is to enhance the SLRCS's experience and capacity to run such programmes. Nine employees from the National Society are getting on the job training to implement the programme, which we hope will be a launch pad for similar programmes elsewhere in the country".

Work on the programme started with information sessions for community leaders and local communities in the target areas.

These sessions paved the way for interested persons and households to submit their applications, which the ICRC and SLRCS assessed.

The successful applicants will receive business management skills training, at the end of which if fully attended, they will receive a cash grant to start their venture. The beneficiaries will be provided technical support and practical tips throughout the duration of the program to ensure its success.

The pilot phase of the program is expected to conclude in 2012.

Organising transport for amputees to be fitted with artificial limbs

Joining hands to address the needs of disabled persons in remote communities, in 2011, the ICRC and SLRCS established a programme to transport amputees living in the Vavuniya district to the Vavuniya General Hospital so they can be fitted with artificial limbs.

Promoting Humanitarian Values through volunteer training

The support to the aforementioned operational programs and preparedness schemes usually comes with training of volunteers and staff members on the Fundamental Red Cross Principles and Humanitarian Values, along with the requisite promotional materials. On World Red Cross day, commemorated on 8th May 2011, the SLRCS provided forums locally and centrally to promote these values through a country wide art competition for school children culminating in an event held at the National Art Gallery in Colombo. Over 200 drawings by school children from around the country were on display. Strong and emotional illustrations reflected on the role of the Red Cross in times of conflict as well as natural disasters, bearing testament to vivid memories of the recent past.



SLRCS volunteers engaged in Branch Disaster Response Training (BDRT). The ICRC supports the National Society by providing equipment to respond to disasters

Colombo University Law Faculty students take Sri Lanka to IHL Moot Court finals in Hong Kong



ICRC in Sri Lanka



Dhanushka, Nishadi and Michael from the Colombo Law Faculty who came runners-up at the South Asia rounds of the Henry Dunant Moot Court Competition in Nepal, receiving their trophy

"We did not go with a lot of expectations, we went with a clean slate," laughs Michael Mendis, a second year student at the Faculty of Law in the University of Colombo recalling the success of the Sri Lankan team at the South Asian rounds of the Henry Dunant Moot Court Competition held in October last year. His two team mates, Dhanushka Rajaratnam and Nishadi Wickramasinghe, also second year law students at the Faculty nod their heads in agreement. The team became runners-up at the South Asian rounds in Nepal, where the moot involved six teams arguing a fictitious International Humanitarian Law (IHL) case before a mock International Criminal Court.

"The day we landed in Nepal, we noticed that some of the teams were constantly practicing and strategising. Although initially we were a bit nervous, when we started mooting, we felt fine", says Nishadi. "Meeting a lot of IHL enthusiasts in Nepal was a bonus."

The Law Faculty team qualified to participate in the South Asia rounds of the Competition, where they competed with teams from the Royal Institute and the Asia Pacific Institute for Information Technology (APIIT), both of whom were first time participants at the national rounds.

"We can study IHL as a subject and unlike in other Asian countries mooting is not commonplace in Sri Lanka", say the team. "Sri Lanka traditionally has had three institutions offering mooting – the Faculty of Law of the University of Colombo, Law College and the Open University. It is good the Royal Institute and APIIT, took part for the first time", points out Micheal.

Justice Priyasath Dep, Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. Palitha Fernando, Solicitor General and Dr. Mario Gomez, Legal Consultant, judged the national rounds of the Competition. Mr. Anura Meddegoda, Attorney at Law and former prosecuting trial

counsel of the UN International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague, assisted all three teams, individually and at a workshop held prior to the Competition. For the first time, the University of Jaffna and Sri Lanka Law College participated in the workshop, in addition to the three teams.

Mr Palitha Fernando also attended the South Asia Moot Competition as a judge.

The Henry Dunant Moot Court Competition, named after the founder of the International Red Cross Movement, allows for the teams who become winners and runners-up to represent South Asia at the Asia Pacific rounds in Hong Kong in February 2012.

The Sri Lankan team is excited and enthusiastic about getting a second chance to prove themselves in Hong Kong. *"We will go all out with our preparation and give it our best shot".*

In Sri Lanka, the national rounds have been jointly organised by the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo and the ICRC Delegation since 2005 to promote awareness of IHL. Aside from its cooperation with academic institutions in Sri Lanka, the ICRC is also pursuing the promotion and implementation of humanitarian law with armed forces as well as with the National International Humanitarian Law Committee which is headed by the Ministry of External Affairs.

The ICRC's Mission

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization, which works in over 80 countries worldwide. Its humanitarian mandate has been bestowed upon it by States which are parties to the Geneva Conventions. Today, all countries of the world are a party to the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC belongs to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, within which it has the specific humanitarian assignment to contribute, as a neutral intermediary, to the protection of the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence and provide them with assistance whenever required.

In all countries where it is present, the ICRC cooperates with National Societies of the Red Cross or Red Crescent and supports the undertakings of the authorities and national institutions in addressing humanitarian issues, in particular as concerns the consequences of an armed conflict.

The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening international humanitarian norms and universal humanitarian principles along with the national institutions and organizations concerned.

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