



NEWSLETTER

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60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

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EDITORIAL By Jean-Daniel Tauxe,
Head of Delegation

On 12 August, the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions – an important milestone for the treaties, which place limits on how war is waged and form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law (IHL). In 1949, States met in Geneva to revise the existing Geneva Conventions and add a fourth one dedicated to the protection of civilians. Since then, these treaties have been supplemented by three Additional Protocols and by important developments in customary international humanitarian law.

The Geneva Conventions emerged from the ashes of World War II and the revulsion of

humanity against the horrors experienced by millions of people most of whom were civilians caught in the fighting. Remarkably, they have been universally ratified, meaning every single State in the world is party to them. The Philippines was one of the first signatories to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

The Conventions have saved numerous lives, given comfort to thousands of prisoners of war, helped reunite millions of families and contributed to the restoration of peace. They have also served the ICRC well in seeking access to prisoners, in tending to the wounded the sick, and the displaced, in addressing the needs of civilians under occupation and in offering its services to parties in non-international armed conflicts.

The ICRC recently commissioned an opinion poll in eight conflict- and violence-affected nations, including the Philippines, which asked people about their views on the conduct of hostilities and other related issues. The vast majority of people support the core principles of IHL and the idea that even wars should have limits, but the research also shows that, in reality, far fewer are aware that the rules exist. Meanwhile, many of those who are aware of the Geneva

Conventions are doubtful that they have a real impact on the ground.

This anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges that lie ahead and ensure that the Geneva Conventions remain relevant to the evolving nature of armed conflict, particularly in non-international armed conflicts, which by far are the most prevalent type of armed conflict today.

The ICRC, as the guardian of IHL, has a responsibility to ensure that the Geneva Conventions will continue to stand the test of time. Nevertheless, it remains for the States and non-State armed groups, who are also bound by the rules, to show the political will needed to turn the legal provisions into a reality on the ground. Sixty years on, the Conventions, together with their Additional Protocols continue to provide the best available framework for protecting civilians and those no longer participating in combat.



ICRC

ICRC in the Philippines:

Activities from January - August 2009

“The ICRC’s humanitarian action in the Philippines focuses on protecting and assisting vulnerable populations affected by armed conflicts and other situations of violence.”

In Central Mindanao, where active hostilities have been suspended since the end of July 2009, over 200,000 civilians remain displaced. Between January and August 2009, ICRC assistance teams have worked continuously, along with the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) to distribute food rations and essential household items to more than 150,000 displaced persons. ICRC teams have also improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation and health care by assisting several hospitals and primary health care centres.

DETENTION VISITS

The ICRC monitors the living conditions and treatment of those detained due to the country’s internal armed conflicts. In addition, the ICRC continues its systemic approach to achieve structural improvements of the humanitarian conditions in prisons for the benefit of the entire population of inmates.

From January to August 2009, ICRC teams have:

- carried out 139 visits to over 55,000 inmates held in 99 places of detention;
- monitored the individual cases of 526 inmates;
- worked together with the PNRC to enable 252 inmates to receive visits from family members;
- provided two prison infirmaries with medical items and equipment;
- trained 67 Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) engineers and management staff on internationally recognized standards on living conditions regarding water, sanitation, hygiene and habitat in jails;
- launched technical projects benefiting 11’000 inmates in 20 jails for the improvement of safe water supply, treatment of wastewater, ventilation, sleeping facilities, conditions of kitchens and infirmaries;
- in cooperation with the Department of Health, the BJMP, the Bureau of Corrections and the Philippine Tuberculosis Society,

worked to achieve implementation of the National Tuberculosis Programme in 7 pilot jails and prisons.

ICRC health teams also continue to carry out numerous activities to improve and support infrastructure and healthcare in prisons.

SERVING AS A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY

When needed, the ICRC serves as a neutral and impartial intermediary to facilitate the handover to their families of people captured and detained in connection with conflict. It facilitated the release and handover of one soldier and three police officers captured by the New People’s Army to their families and government authorities. The soldier was released in Compostela Valley Province (Mindanao) in January and the three police officers were released in Rizal Province (Luzon) in March.

ASSISTANCE



An ICRC nurse monitors the blood pressure of a displaced person. The ICRC, in cooperation with local authorities, has improved access to healthcare for thousands of displaced people and residents in Central Mindanao.

HEALTH

One of the first vital services that is affected in times of conflict is healthcare. With this in mind, the ICRC health team in Mindanao has kept up with efforts to support health authorities in the area, helping to maintain much-needed care for the displaced and communities. From January to August 2009, ICRC assistance has included:

- equipment, medicines and technical support provided to 6 primary healthcare centers that cater to around 170,000 resident and displaced people in Central Mindanao;
- donation of medical and surgical items to 8 hospitals caring for the wounded and the sick;
- with the assistance of local social services, individual support to over 200 patients since January 2009 to cover surgical needs;
- facilitation of physical rehabilitation and prosthetic support to over 20 amputees;
- training opportunities for the technical staff of the Davao Jubilee Centre, which provides assistance for amputees;
- capacity building for civilian and military surgical staff working in hospitals most exposed to violence and fighting.

WATER AND HABITAT SERVICES FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE AND RESIDENT COMMUNITIES

Access to safe water and proper sanitation is vital to any community. Since the beginning of the year, 30,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and resident communities have benefited from ICRC technical projects for the improvement of water sources and construction of sanitation facilities in evacuation centers. In Central Mindanao, the ICRC:

- has built 10 wells and 2 small-scale distribution networks, installed 23 hand pumps and constructed 125 toilets with septic tanks in 5 major evacuation areas;
- has started structural rehabilitation of 5 Rural Health Units and 1 Barangay Health Centers in Maguindanao and North Cotabato.

In the conflict-affected areas of the Visayas region, the ICRC has been improving access to safe water and sanitation for over 2,000 residents through the construction of two new gravity-fed water supply systems. All



ICRC engineers set up a water point in a barangay in Mindanao. The ICRC works to help improve access to water in conflict-affected areas.

water and sanitation projects have been implemented in coordination with the local authorities.

DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AND OTHER ITEMS

Despite the suspension of hostilities, access to vital resources for IDPs in Central Mindanao remains still affected. Livelihoods have been disrupted, and displaced families continue to have trouble securing food and other basic supplies. The ICRC has done its best to contribute to alleviating this pressure on the displaced families.

- More than 150,000 displaced people in Central Mindanao have received half monthly food rations (rice, coconut oil, sardines, noodles, sugar, salt, coffee and soy sauce) and laundry soap;
- Around 1,400 families have received essential household items (tarpaulins, blankets, kitchen sets, sleeping mats, hygiene kits, plastic basins and mosquito nets).

The ICRC monitors its beneficiary population and the impact of the assistance, through

regular post distribution visits to the displaced households. In addition, the ICRC has coordinated closely with all authorities and humanitarian actors working in the same areas of concern.

PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

It is often said that prevention is better than cure, and reminding parties to the conflicts of their obligations to protect civilians is a fundamental part of the ICRC's work. The ICRC also works to integrate IHL into national legislation and promote knowledge and respect for this body of law among the authorities, armed and security forces, university students and civil society.

To this end, the ICRC:

- provides technical expertise on IHL to state legislators. As a result of these efforts, bills penalizing international crimes and protecting the distinctive emblems are due to become law before the end of 2009;
- maintains regular dialogue with the armed forces, police and various armed groups;
- supports integration of IHL into military training and raises awareness of international policing standards within police forces;
- invites participants from various higher-education institutions and law schools to participate in IHL events, such as the IHL Debates held in June 2009, in the spirit of developing and supporting legal expertise of future decision makers;
- raises awareness of humanitarian challenges, fundamental principles and IHL among decision makers and civil society. As part of these efforts, Inter

Arma Caritas photo exhibition, organized in partnership with the Supreme Court of the Philippines and the PNRC is touring nine halls of justice in the country.

Within the frames of the worldwide "Our world. Your move." campaign marking the 150th anniversary of the battle of Solferino and the 60th anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions, the ICRC launched two photo exhibitions: Our World - At War in Manila, and Humanity in War in General Santos and Cotabato cities of Mindanao.

COOPERATION WITH THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL RED CROSS

The PNRC is the ICRC's strategic partner in its operations in the Philippines. In Central Mindanao, the ICRC and the PNRC work together to assist thousands of displaced families.

The ICRC has also worked with the PNRC through various workshops and seminars aimed at boosting the latter's capabilities in providing psychosocial support during emergencies, first aid response in conflict and other situations of violence, water and sanitation, assessment, and in gaining safer access to conflict-affected areas. The ICRC also supports the PNRC in its continued efforts to disseminate Red Cross and IHL principles at the barangay-level, and provides training to upgrade the skills of its disseminators.

Displaced families gather to receive food at a distribution point in Mindanao. ICRC food distributions have benefited thousands of those who have been forced to flee the fighting in Central Mindanao.



“Call for Action”: Ensuring Respect and Improving Living Conditions of Prisoners in the Philippines

For 40 years now, the ICRC has been visiting people detained in connection with armed conflicts and other situations of violence in the Philippines to monitor their conditions of detention and treatment.

Since 2007, the ICRC has been working with national authorities as part of the “Call for Action” process to address the causes of jail congestion and its consequences on health and living conditions of all detainees.

To this end, the ICRC has worked with the national authorities to set up an inter-agency mechanism that will coordinate existing decongestion and paralegal programs. This mechanism is due to be launched in Manila in November 2009, bringing together technical experts and decision-makers from the different pillars of the criminal justice



system and involving the three different branches of the government.

As part of the “Call for Action” process, the ICRC carries out rehabilitation projects improving water, sanitation and access to healthcare in detention facilities and supports training of jail engineers and staff on technical standards on living conditions. Throughout 2009, 11,000 inmates in 20 jails are benefiting from the improvements and

67 BJMP engineers have attended trainings to date.

The ICRC also actively facilitates the implementation of the National TB Programme in BJMP and Bureau of Correction jails and prisons in collaboration with the Department of Health and other national agencies. Implementation has started in seven pilot jails, involving over 30,000 inmates.

International Committee of the Red Cross in the Philippines

Manila

5th Floor Erechem Building corner
Rufino and Salcedo Streets
Legaspi Village, Makati City 1229
T +63 2 892 8901/4
F +63 2 819 5997
Email manila.man@icrc.org

Tacloban

House 3, Kalipayan Road,
Sagkahan District,
Tacloban City
T +63 53 321 4431
F +63 53 321 4432
Email mob_tacloban.man@icrc.org

Davao

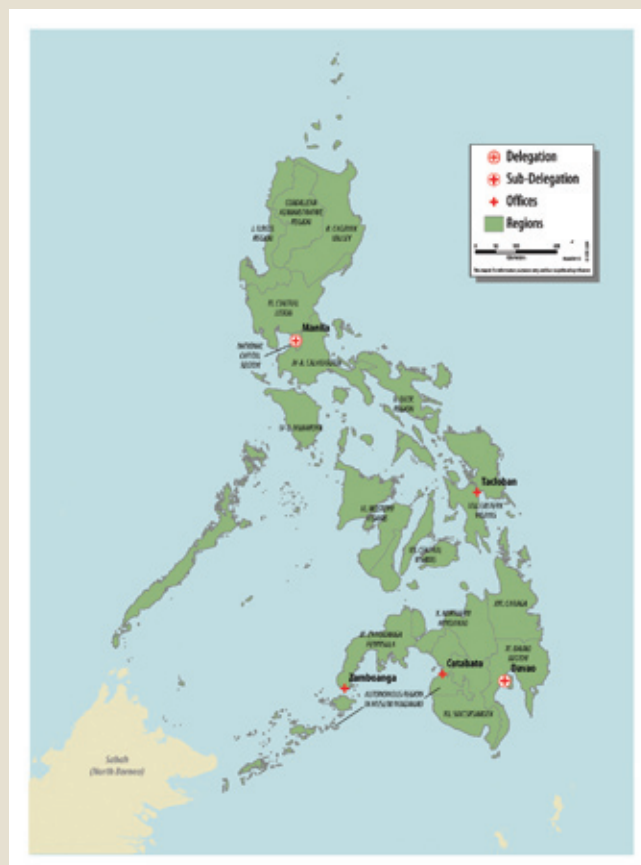
4th Floor Central Plaza 1 Building,
J.P. Laurel Ave, Bajada 8000
Davao City
T +63 82 222 8870/1
F +63 82 222 8694
Email davao.dav@icrc.org

Zamboanga

Unit 02 Red Cross Youth Hostel Building,
Valderosa St.,
Zamboanga City 7000
T +63 62 993 2536
F +63 62 990 1560
Email mob_zamboanga.dav@icrc.org

Cotabato

016 R. Garcia Street,
9600 Cotabato City
T +63 64 421 8377 / 55
F +63 64 421 8695
Email cotabato.cot@icrc.org



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