



ICRC

ICRC

IN THE PHILIPPINES

Protecting People Affected by Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence

The ICRC has been working in the Philippines since 1982. It entered into a Headquarters Agreement with the Philippine Government in 1985 and has offices in Manila, Davao and Zamboanga.

The ICRC protects and assists civilians displaced or otherwise affected by armed clashes between the government and armed opposition groups, primarily on the southern island of Mindanao. It works to minimize the effects of armed conflicts and violence on the population and acts as a neutral intermediary between opposing forces on humanitarian matters.

The ICRC visits detainees and cooperates with the Philippine National Red Cross, through its network of regional chapters and local branches, to assist displaced people and promote compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL). It seeks to prevent abuses through teaching, promotion and integration of IHL.



ICRC delegation ICRC sub-delegation ICRC office

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in situations of armed conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening the implementation of international humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM

The ICRC monitors the treatment and conditions of detention of persons detained in relation to armed conflict and violence in the Philippines. It visits detention facilities under the authority of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), the provincial authorities and the security forces.

At the end of 2006, in agreement with the Philippine authorities, the ICRC took the initiative to launch a comprehensive process aiming at raising the awareness, at the political level, on the need of improving the material conditions of detention of the persons deprived of freedom in the country.

The process entails the mobilization of a wide range of relevant stakeholders in the Philippines - including executive, legislative

and judiciary bodies - to discuss issues related to the shortcomings prevailing in the criminal justice system which leads to serious humanitarian concerns in various prisons of the country and to find concrete solutions.

In 2007, one of the outcomes of a high-level meeting at Malacañang Palace has been to convene an inter-agency committee to work on analysing the prevailing shortcomings and on identifying potential solutions. It has also been recommended to increase the budgetary allocation for jail improvements in the 2008 national appropriations.

Finally, in the jails, while avoiding to substitute the authorities in their responsibility to provide adequate conditions of detention to detainees, the ICRC also carries out small-scale assistance and rehabilitation projects. It does so in order to address the most urgent needs observed, such as the ones resulting from the dramatic situation of the recurrent problem of overcrowding prevailing in the Philippine jails.

These projects include improvements to water and sanitation facilities, exploring the use of sustainable energy, monitoring the detainees' health, providing training to prison staff on health issues and the distribution of hygiene articles and recreational items. Biogas pilot projects were initiated in 2007 in Manila City Jail and Metro Manila District Jail aiming at improving environmental conditions and boosting energy conservation in the prison for use as cooking fuel in the kitchen and for other applications.

Detention visits

The ICRC visits people deprived of freedom to ensure that they are treated humanely with respect for their dignity, that essential judicial guarantees are respected and more generally that they are treated in conformity with domestic and international law.

On the basis of these visits, the ICRC maintains an open and constructive dialogue with the relevant authorities, informs them confidentially of its findings and, whenever necessary, recommends changes that would improve the conditions in which the detainees are living.



Cooperating with the Philippine National Red Cross

The ICRC and the PNRC share a common adherence to the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and a responsibility to respond to the humanitarian consequences endured by victims of armed conflict.



George Cabig/ICRC

PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

To address the needs of the victims of armed conflict, the ICRC in the Philippines focuses simultaneously on both protection and assistance issues.

The ICRC monitors the situation of civilians in conflict-affected areas and, where necessary, makes oral and written representations to the relevant parties to the conflict to remind them of their obligations under IHL to protect civilians.

In cooperation with the PNRC, ICRC field activities are oriented to reach the victims and to respond to the humanitarian consequences, mostly in Mindanao.

According to the needs, food and essential household items are provided to the victims; access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities are ensured for IDPs and the resident population in evacuation sites such as in Sulu, Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Western Samar; the medical costs of people wounded in

armed conflict-related incidents are also covered, supplies to hospitals treating such persons are provided, external resources and stakeholders are mobilised and specialized surgery training to civilian and military medical professionals are provided.

In addition to short-term assistance, the ICRC's assistance programmes also include projects that help local villagers improve their livelihood capacity. The long-term aim is to restore self-sufficiency and thereby, protecting the dignity of these populations.

Protection is key

Protection is the mainstay of ICRC activities and at the heart of its mandate. Civilians often endure horrific ordeals in today's armed conflicts. People who are not, or no longer, taking part in the hostilities may, under no circumstances, be attacked. They must be spared and protected.

ICRC delegates maintain a regular presence in areas where civilians are particularly at risk, and keep up a dialogue with all weapon bearers, whether members of the armed forces, police forces, paramilitary forces or other weapon bearers taking part in the fighting.

The ICRC seeks to minimize the danger to which people are exposed, to prevent and stop abuses to which they are subjected, to draw attention to their rights and make their voices heard -- by remaining close to the victims and through confidential dialogue with both state and other weapons bearer, asking them to take corrective measures if necessary.



The PNRC's extensive network and intimate knowledge of local conditions are essential in the planning and conduct of ICRC's operations. Enhanced cooperation with PNRC brings ICRC in closer contact with victims of armed violence. Through its substantial expertise in IHL and vast experience of humanitarian action in armed conflicts, the ICRC supports the expansion of the operations of the PNRC in conflict-prone areas, monitoring the humanitarian situation there, providing assistance and making other interventions when needed.

ICRC cooperation activities with the PNRC range from providing financial assistance and expertise to enhancing skills, adapting structures and ensuring operational coordination.

This includes :

- training PNRC disaster management personnel on conflict preparedness through field exercises and study cases.
- providing hands-on water and sanitation training for PNRC Emergency Response Unit staff and trained PNRC field staff on assessing economic security needs in conflict-affected areas.
- supporting the Family Visit Programme enabling detainees to maintain contact with their families.
- supporting PNRC dissemination and communication activities on IHL aimed at raising awareness of IHL and RC knowledge.



Promoting IHL

The promotion of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), also known as Law of Armed Conflict (LoAC), is mainly addressed to the key actors determining the fate of victims of armed conflict. Therefore, the ICRC maintains a confidential dialogue with the parties to the armed conflict about the way they conduct hostilities as part of a long-term strategy to reduce alleged IHL violations.

In addition to oral and written representations, the ICRC organizes dissemination sessions and workshops for members of the security

forces and the different rebel groups to acquaint them with its protection mandate and activities and with their obligations under IHL.

In this framework, the ICRC supports "Training of Trainers Programs" for IHL instructors in both the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP), and supported the production of a new teaching kit for the AFP. Finally, the ICRC facilitates the participation of Philippine officers to various IHL trainings abroad like the Workshop Governing Military Operations in Geneva; Law Enforcement in Peacekeeping Operations in Australia and the Regional Peace Support Operations Trainers' Seminar in Kuala Lumpur.

The ICRC also works on IHL promotion with other sectors of Filipino society. Its dialogue with the media, NGOs, think-tanks and religious leaders focuses on garnering support for the work of the ICRC and of the PNRC, assisting them in increasing awareness of humanitarian issues among the public and decision-makers and thus achieving greater respect for human dignity.

Promoting the teaching of IHL in the academic curricula of leading universities and other educational institutions is another way to ensure that future leaders and decision-makers will understand their obligations under IHL. The ICRC supports both military and civilian applicants to complete the distance-learning course on IHL offered by the NALSAR University of Law in India.

In 2007, for the first time in the Philippines, the Supreme Court was the venue for the final round of the Third National IHL Moot Court Competition, strongly manifesting the high court's support for the provisions and principles of IHL, and proactive stance on its relevance for the Philippines.

A New Emblem: The Red Crystal

The emblems of the **International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent** serve a double purpose. In times of peace as in times of armed conflict, they indicate that a person or an object is related to the Movement and thus respects its principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. In times of armed conflict, they are the visible sign of the protection conferred by IHL on relief workers and on medical personnel, facilities and means of transport. Persons and objects legitimately displaying one of the emblems shall at all times be respected and protected from attack. Any misuse of the emblems may diminish their protective value and undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Therefore, their use is regulated by national and international law.

Even though the red cross and red crescent emblems have been in wide use since the 19th century, unfortunately certain States find it difficult to identify with one or the other. To resolve this issue, an additional emblem was adopted, the **Red Crystal**. The new emblem enjoys the same legal status as the red cross and the red crescent, and may be used in the same way.

The Philippines ratified the Protocol introducing the new emblem on August 22, 2006, and was one of the first countries to do so.



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