



ICRC
Sri Lanka

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The ICRC is an impartial, neutral, independent, humanitarian organisation which has been mandated by the community of States to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and internal violence.

Since 1989, on invitation by the Government, the ICRC has been active in Sri Lanka in conflict areas, carrying out its traditional humanitarian activities such as protection of detainees, re-establishing of family ties, providing assistance to the civilian population, dissemination of rules of behaviour in combat and by acting as a neutral intermediary, whenever required.

NEWS LETTER

The long, agonising wait for someone 'missing'

"At least, if I knew he were no longer alive it would be easier for me. The anguish of not knowing is horrible..." explains a woman, whose husband went missing during the conflict.

This young woman is one of many who share her plight in Sri Lanka, where several thousands of families yearn for news of loved ones they have lost in the conflict.

Whether their loved one is a civilian or from the military, whether he or she is a Sinhalese, a Tamil or a Muslim, the suffering endured by the family is the same. The suffering is of universal nature. In order to have a slight chance to overcome this trauma, the families need to obtain answers on the fate of their loved one, they need to know, they need to grieve, they need to perform burial rites. Moreover, they need support in helping to solve economic and legal problems.

The issue of missing persons is a humanitarian one, not a political one. It is about people suffering as a result of the disappearance of a loved one.

The ICRC and the issue of Missing persons: A priority

The ICRC is increasingly concerned about the fate of persons unaccounted for in connection with armed conflict and internal violence throughout the world and the anguish this causes to their families. It is deeply committed to heightening awareness of this issue with governments, the arm carriers, national and international organisations – including the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent network – and the general public.

To that end, besides its activities on behalf of missing persons and their families in

countries affected by conflicts or internal violence, the ICRC held an international conference for governmental and non-governmental experts on the issue of

missing persons, in Geneva in February 2003.

Three representatives of Sri Lankan Governmental bodies and two representatives of families of missing persons participated in the conference.

ICRC activities on behalf of missing persons and their families in Sri Lanka: Prevention and action

During the conflict, the ICRC did all it could to prevent people disappearing in the first place. It constantly reminded the warring parties of their obligation to respect international humanitarian law, in particular to ensure that non-combatants, such as captured fighters, civilians and wounded, were treated with respect and dignity. It constantly reminds the parties of their responsibility to provide information and answers to the families.

Acting as a neutral intermediary between the families and the relevant authorities (Sri Lanka security forces or LTTE), the ICRC has been active since 1990 in



Awaiting for news.



News of a loved one.

helping people obtain information on the whereabouts of their missing loved ones.

The action of ICRC on behalf of the missing persons and their families involves all efforts that are made to locate the missing persons or obtain information. Over the last 12 years, the ICRC has been approached by the families of over 20,000 civilians and combatants of whom they have no news.

After receiving information providing details of these persons, the ICRC actively searches all the possible places where the person could be found (places of detention, displaced population's camps etc.). At the same time, the ICRC systematically submits the names of the persons to the parties in order to obtain information on what has become of them. Some 11,000 tracing requests are still unresolved and the ICRC will continue its work in the country until the families receive an answer.

International Humanitarian Law and the Missing Persons

Under international humanitarian law, the warring parties must respect the right of families to know what has become of relatives who went missing during the hostilities and carry out whatever research is required, in the territory under their control. However, in order to resolve the cases of missing persons, the

parties have to adopt the right policy: one that gives priority to the missing person and his or her family.

The parties should take necessary measures in order to prevent people from becoming unaccounted for. The concrete measures that can be taken include:

1. Providing means of personal identification to all members of the armed forces and armed groups (ID tags, dental records, etc.)
2. Respecting internationally recognised standards regarding the deprivation of liberty, providing immediate notification to families and other persons having a legitimate interest in the detained persons
3. Ensuring that family members wherever they may be, including members of armed forces or armed groups and their family members, can communicate with each other on a regular basis.

On 29 May 2000, the Government of Sri Lanka issued the following instructions to the Commanders of the Sri Lankan Security Forces:

Relatives of those missing or killed in action and disposal of dead bodies

The relatives of persons MIA and KIA are perturbed that dead bodies of personnel are sometimes disposed of, without adequate attention to identification. It also causes severe psychological scars to the members of the family when there is no definite identification. Field Commanders must be made aware of the importance of utilising all possible means of identification.

- Ensure that the identification disc (ID Tag) is **always** worn both around the neck as well as around the waist.
- Photographs of whole bodies, (both still and video), and if possible X-rays, dental records obtained on recruitment, could be used for identification.
- Bodies should never be cremated.
- As far as possible avoid delays in obtaining the bodies."

This directive reminds those concerned that "There is a lot of trauma when families are not informed early, of those believed to be missing in action. At the earliest possible time, the family should be kept informed..".

In its contacts with members of the LTTE, the ICRC strives to pass on a similar message, so that preventive measures are taken on both sides.

In Sri Lanka, what is next?

During the January 2003 round of peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, both parties agreed to ask the ICRC to help them set up a mechanism to ascertain the fate of persons unaccounted for in connection with the conflict. The ICRC has expressed its willingness to take on this task. The role of the ICRC as a neutral and independent organisation would be to advise the parties concerned in making decisions that take full account of the humanitarian nature of the problem and the needs of the families affected.■



Tag worn by the LTTE.



Tag worn by the SLA.

ICRC continues to maintain its active presence in the country

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continues to maintain its active presence in the country by carrying out its activities covering protection, assistance, information/ dissemination and co-operation.

ICRC's head office in Colombo coordinates the activities carried out in four sub delegations namely Batticaloa,

Vavuniya, Mallavi and Jaffna and five offices in Trincomalee, Puthukkudiyiruppu, Muttur, Mannar and Madhu.

PROTECTION ACTIVITIES

Under protection activities, the ICRC in Sri Lanka pays special attention to the protection of civilians, visiting detainees, tracing the missing, transport of mortal

remains and restoring family contacts.

Protecting civilians

The ICRC constantly reminds the LTTE and the Security Forces to respect and protect the civilian population and their property. In this regard whenever the rules protecting civilians are violated, the ICRC transmits such allegations

confidentially to the concerned parties with the aim of preventing recurrences.

The rules protecting civilians are governed by the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Visiting detainees

The purpose of ICRC visits to places of detention are purely humanitarian. When an ICRC delegate visits a detainee, the ICRC observes the material and psychological conditions of detention and the treatment accorded to detainees. The ICRC also provides them with relief supplies if required (clothing, toilet articles) and advises the authorities, if necessary, to take steps in order to improve the conditions of detention.

From January to June this year, the ICRC made 69 visits to 219 detainees held in 33 different places of detention. The ICRC also provided financial assistance to 111 families of detainees to visit them.



Transfer of mortal remains.

Tracing the missing

In order to alleviate the pain of mind of family members as to the whereabouts of people who have gone missing, the ICRC as a neutral intermediary makes confidential representations to the authorities. (Please see page one).

Transfer of mortal remains

The ICRC facilitates the handing over of mortal remains. Recently, the ICRC facilitated the transfer of the mortal remains of a sailor of a Chinese vessel that sank off the coast of Mullaitivu.

Restoring family contacts

The ICRC also transmits urgent family messages such as notification of death and serious illness of a family member where the mail service is inadequate. They also arrange for the exchange of Red Cross Messages (RCM)'s between detainees and families. The content of these messages is restricted to family



A lower leg prosthesis being fitted to a patient.

news and are subjected to censorship. In this connection the ICRC collected 39 (RCM)'s of which 13 were from detainees and delivered 26 of which eight were from detainees.

ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

Health

The ICRC's exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and provide them with assistance through health and relief measures.

At present the ICRC with the assistance of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) runs an ambulance service and a first aid post in Omanthai to cater to the needs of over 30,000 people who cross the neutral zone each week.

The ICRC also continues to provide technical and material support for the Jaipur Foot Workshop in Inuvil, Jaffna by introducing modern technology for the production of prostheses. In this regard the ICRC polypropylene (PP) artificial limbs technique proved most cost-efficient for both war and civilian amputees.

For the first half of the year, nine upper limbs and 103 lower limb prostheses were produced.

Besides this, ICRC Trincomalee donated dental equipment and medical products as well as a solar panel system to the Department of Health, Trincomalee.

Health programme in the Vanni

The ICRC also works together with other Partner National RC Societies (PNS) invited to support the victims of the conflict and assisting the SLRCS. One such example is the Canadian RC that,

alongside the ICRC and SLRCS, operates Red Cross Health Centers and Mobile Health Clinics in remote villages in the Vanni.

Health advice, treatment of common illnesses and basic drugs were given to 45,372 people during the past six months through the 26 SLRCS Health Centres supported by three doctors in Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, north of Vavuniya and north of Mannar Districts.

The Community Health Workers (CHW) visited 7,416 homes to give health advice to family members and conducted 1,081 health talks in schools, health centres and community gathering places in a bid to improve the health of their communities.

Water and habitat

In areas that are inaccessible for government development, the ICRC constructed wells and today it continues to maintain them paying special attention to repairs of water pumps and installing modern and more up to date water pumps where necessary.

In this regard, ICRC Mallavi installed 18 new M-3 hand pumps, installed five new bucket pumps and carried out rehabilitation/maintenance on 39 tube wells and hand pumps thereby benefiting 17,933 people. Four caretakers of hand pumps from the local community received training in maintenance.

The ICRC Batticaloa concluded its Water and Sanitation Project on June 30 and handed over the maintenance of the



Maintenance work on a tube well.

water project to the local authorities.

Acting as neutral intermediary

The ICRC continues to play the role of neutral intermediary between the GOSL

and the LTTE in the neutral zones of Omanthai, Muhamalai and Uyilankulam. The ICRC presence is at the request of the GOSL and the LTTE in order to facilitate the crossing of civilian passengers and goods seven days a week during the day.

DISSEMINATION AND INFORMATION

As part of its preventive work, the ICRC carries out dissemination of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the mandate and the role of the ICRC in the country.

The ICRC endeavours to influence the attitudes and behavior of the parties of the conflict in a bid to improve the protection of civilians and victims in times of armed conflicts, facilitate access to the victims and improve the security of humanitarian action.

The ICRC's activities in disseminating humanitarian law are three fold: It stimulates State awareness and reminds the state of its responsibility to spread the knowledge of the law. It also advises the State on how to translate legal provisions into rules of behaviour through the production of teaching aids and publications. Moreover, the ICRC directly promotes the law by organising its own teaching sessions especially to the armed forces and combatants.

The ICRC carried out dissemination sessions for the following categories:

Security Forces (Army and Navy): 174 officers and 764 personnel participated in 14 dissemination sessions.

LTTE (Cadres, Police and members of the Political Wing): The ICRC conducted three sessions to 154 LTTE members. The ICRC referred to the Rules for Behaviour in Combat and increased awareness and application of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) during each of its dissemination sessions. The role of the ICRC in the present context was also explained to the participants.

Police (Officers and Policemen): 188 Police Officers and 139 Policemen benefited from six dissemination sessions.

General Public (Media, Religious Leaders and Civilians): Seven sessions for 273 people belonging to the above categories were held.

Teachers and Students of Schools and Universities: The ICRC conducted 27 sessions for 249 teachers and 1,612 students.

Local Authorities: A total of 866 people attended 21 dissemination sessions.



Distribution of cadjan leaves.

Non-Governmental Organisations: The ICRC conducted 11 sessions for a total of 239 people belonging to the above category.

COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

All over the world the ICRC supports the National Societies (NS) of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In Sri Lanka the ICRC Cooperation Department has assisted the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) in various ways.

For instance the ICRC, together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been instrumental in strengthening the operational capacity of the SLRCS in a bid to enhance its credibility and image.

The ICRC has also helped the SLRCS to increase its services through humanitarian means in areas within which the ICRC has specific competencies such as relief, health care, restoring family links, conflict preparedness, advice in legal matters especially in amending Statutes and help in adoption of an Act to incorporate the SLRCS.

First Aid

The ICRC has supported the SLRCS in developing basic and advanced first aid training at SLRCS branch level enabling the National Societies to extend this service to external agencies as an

income-generating project.

The SLRCS first aid volunteers could be found caring for people participating in events ranging from festivals to national sports events.

During the floods in May this year the ICRC supported the SLRCS's relief activity by providing three four-wheel driven jeeps and a lorry along with their drivers. The ICRC also provided 2,900 cans each containing 20 liters of drinking water and 400 latrine plates.

On Red Cross Day – May 8, the ICRC Jaffna and the SLRCS jointly organised a blood donation campaign for the Jaffna Teaching Hospital.

Dissemination of Fundamental Principles

With support from the ICRC, the SLRCS has trained a team of resource persons, one from each of the 25 district branches that organize workshops on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Fundamental Principles (FP).

Information on these topics is also spread through art and drama competitions and various other national events.

For several years the ICRC has supported the activities organized on the World Red Cross Day on May 8 by propagating IHL and the Fundamental Principles.



Health education.

Cooperation Partners of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The SLRCS, encouraged by the success of its health programme in the Vanni as well as from a pilot programme focusing on community based health education and primary health service implemented in Kuru-negala, has developed a plan of action, which outlines its intention to spread and increase its

involvement in primary health care across the island. Several sister Red Cross Societies have already expressed their interest in supporting these projects.

The ICRC along with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the SLRCS signed a tri-partite agreement on March 19, 2003 introducing a more transparent and accountable structure thereby preventing the overlapping of responsibilities between the three organizations.■

Thierry Meyrat new Head of Delegation

Mr. Thierry Meyrat succeeded Mr. Marco Brudermann as the new Head of Delegation of the ICRC in Sri Lanka on July 1, 2003.

Mr. Brudermann who was Head of Delegation from July 1, 2002 until June 30, 2003 had to cut short his mission in order to take up an urgent assignment as Head of Delegation in Ethiopia.

Mr. Meyrat served as the Head of Delegation in Mexico for almost 4 years



before arriving in Sri Lanka to take up his new post.

Mr. Meyrat joined the ICRC in April 1982. During his tenure he has served in Iran, Salvador, Nicaragua, Thailand, Pakistan, Uganda, Romania, Yugoslavia, the Russian Federation and Albania.

He was also Chief of Operations for Asia and the Far East from November 1988 to January 1990. ■

Tributes to Nadisha, killed in Iraq 'You were the only reassuring link to home'

Our ICRC colleague Nadisha Yasasri Ranmuthu was killed in Iraq on July 22, 2003.

"Dear Nadisha

It was on a Tuesday, a Tuesday that we will never forget. We were all busy with our usual work when we heard the terrible news of the horrifying incident in Iraq that involved two of our colleagues, and your untimely demise. The entire delegation was plunged into a deep sense of shock and grief.

Days later we are still trying to come to terms with this loss and the great sense of emptiness that has enveloped our lives and the questions that have no answers. Why ? and why you ?

You joined the ICRC in December 1992, after having successfully completed your studies in Computer Science and acquired professional experience in Sri Lanka and in the Middle East.

During this period you met Priyadarshi, and in the friendship

and love that blossomed, you both decided to join your destinies together, as man and

assistance. You understood this need very well, better than most people, having yourself experienced the suffering and turmoil in your own country for the last twenty years.

Yes, you could have chosen to remain in your beloved island of Sri Lanka and with a comfortable job, especially since the country was at last experiencing a peaceful respite. But no, you made the courageous decision to join other colleagues to serve in another conflict area in the interest of humanity.

You worked without respite on installing

and improving the telecommunication network of the delegation in Baghdad, improving the security of your colleagues and enabling the ICRC mission to be carried out in the interest of the people of Iraq. We thank you for that and we pay tribute to your dedication, forever.

In Sri Lanka, your soft and gentle voice was known by us all. You



The casket bearing the mortal remains of Nadisha being carried by his colleagues into the delegation office in Colombo.

wife. Your love and commitment gave birth, in 1999, to Kavisha, a beautiful little girl, with whom you were passionately attached.

We remember your tremendous motivation, just before you left for Iraq; and how much we admired you for your dedication and loyalty and your willingness to generously offer your knowledge and talents to others who were in need of humanitarian

were always with us on the airwaves when we were travelling in our vehicle, and sometimes in the most remote places, when you were the only reassuring link with "home". Colleagues here in Sri Lanka have expressed their appreciation for this contribution that you have made.

You have left us in haste and with no time to farewell your beloved wife,



ICRC Vice President Jacques Forster reading a message at Nadisha's funeral.

daughter and friends. We, in the ICRC delegation in Sri Lanka, would like to reassure you that we will also not farewell you. You will always remain in our hearts. Nadisha, your voice will not be heard again. We miss you. You are leaving behind an emptiness that will

be difficult to replace. But you will always remain present in our hearts."

-Your ICRC friends and colleagues, Colombo.■

An Arab poem written for Nadisha by the ICRC employees in Iraq

"You did not die young but in the fullness of age.

For a man's age is the number of friends he has.

You did not die poor but abounding in riches.

For a man's wealth is the number of stars in the sky.

This is what you taught us Nadisha.

You who are an angel in Heaven now. You were treacherously murdered by cowards.

And coward is the most disgraceful name there is. Truth and men die every day. In the country of the Euphrates, that land of misery.

From Sri Lanka you came.

To help the innocents. And having completed your mission in Hilla.

With Mazen you returned in magnificence

Death ambushed you on the road.

And Mazen was grievously injured.

A calamity befell the Red Cross.

A great house accustomed to sacrifice.

You fell dead, and though Mazen was wounded.

In the evening his health improved.

My God, I asked you for strength and energy.

You are the one who gives patience, who gives hope.

Protect Mazen and give him health.

You can help, you can heal.

Take Nadisha, the good soul.

And place him high up in your world. Although criminals roam free on this earth.

You, my God, are just and stand in judgement.

Nadisha's death will not deter us.

Rather it will make us act with greater determination and generosity.

You my ICRC colleagues. Since we are together in this for better or for worse.

Don't weep for angels; don't speak of loss or

separation.

Nadisha is with us everywhere.

Certainly we will meet him again some day.

In God's hands and with the prophets. Farewell we will not say to our beloved.

But simply: until we meet again."

(Translated from Arabic). ■



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