

Geneva, 11 July 2002

**Israel, the occupied and the autonomous territories:
Facts and figures on recent ICRC activities
(March - May 2002)**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- An unprecedented upsurge of violence in the region in the spring months of this year has resulted in high numbers of casualties and much human suffering on both sides to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From the start of the second Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*) against Israeli occupation in September 2000 until the end of May 2002, more than 1,400 Palestinians and around 500 Israelis had been killed and thousands more wounded.
- By March 2002 it was clear to the ICRC that larger-scale and some fully new activities were needed to respond to the humanitarian needs caused by the spiralling violence. In particular, the military incursions, prolonged closures and curfews, destruction of public infrastructure and private property have led to the socio-economic collapse of Palestinian society, resulting in extreme hardship for the population.

The ICRC, on 26 May, thus launched a Budget Extension Appeal for SFr 44 million, more than doubling the initial 2002 budget of SFr 35 million for Israel, the occupied and the autonomous territories (cf. OP/REX 02/438, Budg. Ext. App. N° 2/2002, 24 May 2002)

- The overall 2002 appeal for its operations in this context – further to the budget extension - amount to SFr 79 million. To date, the ICRC has registered donations (pledged and received) to the amount of SFr 21.5 million (USD 14.4 million / EUR 14.6 million). **Outstanding needs stand at SFr 58.5 million (USD 39.2 million / EUR 39.8 million), some 74% of the overall budget.**

ICRC PRESENCE

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has maintained a permanent presence in Israel and the Palestinian territories since 1967. Monitoring compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) has constantly been at the forefront of the institution's activities in this troubled region over the past 35 years, particularly with regard to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians in times of war and occupation.

At the end of May 2002 there were 75 ICRC expatriate delegates and 105 national staff working in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. They operate from a delegation in Tel Aviv, sub-delegations in Jerusalem and Gaza and offices in Jericho, Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Qalqiliya, Nablus, Jenin, Khan Yunis and Majdel Shams.

The ICRC is more than ever committed to protecting the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations. The new and expanded ICRC programmes for the region reflect the dire needs of a growing number of people who simply can no longer cope in the prevailing economic and security situation. The ICRC is, however, intent not to substitute the occupying power, which has the obligation to allow civilians in the occupied territories to lead daily lives which are as normal as possible.

Its activities primarily involve a major increase in aid to civilians living in both rural and urban areas. For example, the existing food relief programmes for West Bank villages are being expanded to cover 30,000 families, rather than the 10,000 originally planned, while aid will be provided for some 20,000 families in the nine largest West Bank towns. Preparations for implementation of the new programmes are now well under way.

The following provides an update and selected facts and figures on the activities of the ICRC in Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories during the months of March, April and May 2002.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Civilian Population

The scale and scope of violations of IHL in Israel, the occupied and the autonomous territories increased substantially in the three months under review. These violations are reflected in the alarming increase of civilian casualties in both Israel and the Palestinian territories.

In response, the ICRC has repeatedly called on all parties to spare the lives of civilians in conformity with IHL and has lodged representations with the relevant authorities wherever cases of non-compliance with IHL were documented.

Assistance

The Israeli military incursions in the West Bank in late March, April and early May had a devastating impact on the Palestinian civilian population. Living conditions have sharply deteriorated as a direct consequence of military occupation, prolonged closures and curfews, destruction of private property and the subsequent collapse of socio-economic infrastructure.

As a result, the ICRC elaborated new and expanded programmes geared to protecting and assisting the most vulnerable civilian population groups. This includes an extension of food and non-food assistance to families who have little or no regular income. The programmes will increase the number of beneficiaries fivefold to reach more than 300,000 persons, for a limited period of time. Preparations for implementation of these programmes, as outlined in the ICRC's Budget Extension Appeal, are currently underway.

- From March to May more than 12,000 ICRC food and hygiene parcels were distributed to some 5,400 families (i.e. over 32,000 people) in Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah, Hebron, Jenin, Nablus and Salfit districts.
- More than 1,000 poor families in Hebron's old city received monthly food aid during this period.
- Basic household items were distributed to at least 600 West Bank and Gaza Strip families, displaced after their homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.

During curfew periods, the ICRC was frequently called upon by individuals, organizations and government bodies to assist with the emergency distribution of essential items such as food and medical supplies. ICRC access to victims in areas under curfew enabled its delegates to distribute urgently needed food and medical supplies to hospitals, schools and other institutions. As an example, more than 50 metric tons of food and medical supplies were transported to Bethlehem during the month of April alone.

Water and Electricity

The ICRC facilitated the carrying out of repair and maintenance work on damaged electricity and water supply networks and ensured access for water tankers into rural areas.

An ICRC water and sanitation engineer conducted a needs assessment in April and May. He identified 270 villages which have no regular access to clean drinking water.

- Some 4,400 of the poorest families will be provided with 20 litres of water per day.

People deprived of their freedom

The protection of people deprived of their freedom in Israel and the occupied and autonomous territories has been an ongoing ICRC priority from the outset of its activities in the region. The ICRC regularly visits Palestinian detention centres to monitor detainees' living and treatment conditions. Furthermore, the security of people suspected of collaboration with Israel remains a source of concern for the ICRC.

- By the end of May 2002, the total number of Palestinian detainees in Israeli places of detention had increased to approximately 6,600, compared to 4,250 at the end of February this year. The number of administrative detainees increased from 35 last February to some 350 by May 2002.
- During the five-week Israeli 'Operation Defensive Shield' military incursion into the West Bank, launched 29 March, several thousand Palestinians were arrested by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), most of whom were released a few days after being detained.
- The IDF recently opened two new detention centres in order to accommodate increasing numbers of Palestinian detainees. ICRC delegates were able to visit the two new places of detention a few weeks after they became operational.
- The number of detainees held by the Palestinian Authority and visited by the ICRC in the West Bank and Gaza Strip decreased from 800 in February to 280 last May. Over the period under review, arrests and detention by Palestinian security forces were brought to a halt, many detention facilities were destroyed, and many detainees were released during military operations.

Restoring Family Links

Since the start of the current Intifada in September 2000 the ICRC family visits programme has been suspended on a number of occasions by the Israeli authorities for unspecified reasons. The programme has been severely disrupted during recent months by military operations and tight closure measures imposed in the West Bank and Gaza. As a result, family links were frequently severed between detainees and close relatives.

In Gaza :

- During the last week of March, 674 Palestinians were able to visit family members detained in Israel.
- Family visits were suspended in April and resumed on 20 May, but were again suspended ten days later.
- In May, only 610 Palestinians were allowed to visit relatives detained in Israel, although a total of 1,242 were initially registered for visits.

In the West Bank :

- the family visits programme was operational for only three days in March when 602 people were authorized to visit relatives detained in Israel. Thereafter, visits were suspended and had not been resumed by the end of May.

Visits organized every two weeks by the ICRC for East Jerusalem residents to see relatives detained in Israel and for relatives of detainees held in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan went ahead as scheduled during the months of March, April and May.

During this three-month period, 958 Red Cross messages (RCMs) were collected, including 722 from detainees, and 7,084 certificates of detention were issued.

Wounded and sick

In the period under review, three ICRC surgeons worked with their Palestinian counterparts in hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Specialists in neuro-traumology and vascular and orthopaedic surgery conducted a training programme in war surgery and trauma techniques. At the height of the Israeli military offensive, restrictions of movement prevented the surgeons from working in peripheral hospitals as planned, and their programme was adapted accordingly.

Following the Israeli incursion in the West Bank an extensive assessment was carried out to determine health care needs among the population and at hospitals.

The ICRC also continued to assist the Ministry of Health to transport medical supplies from central warehouses to hospitals in the various districts.

Cooperation with the Palestine Red Crescent (PRCS) and the Magen David Adom (MDA)

Strengthening capacity and enhancing respect for the medical mission of the PRCS and the MDA is one of the ICRC's most important activities.

Since 1995, the ICRC has assisted the PRCS in improving its emergency medical services (EMS). This assistance has included financial support towards running costs, training centres, radio communications, public first-aid training and mass casualty management. The ICRC currently covers the running costs of 80 PRCS ambulances, 22 PRCS field hospitals and 240 staff members. It also provides support for PRCS dissemination and information departments.

The ICRC played a crucial intermediary role during the recent fighting by facilitating PRCS ambulance mobility in an extremely difficult environment through direct negotiations with Israeli authorities.

Promoting awareness of the risk of mines or unexploded ordnance (UXO) is a new area of cooperation with the PRCS. Although the danger is currently low-scale, it is a recurrent problem that needs to be addressed. The ICRC is training approximately 60 people, mostly PRCS volunteers, to enhance awareness at the local community level. As part of this awareness campaign, the ICRC has established four billboards in Jenin refugee camp alerting residents to the dangers of mines and UXO. The ICRC is involved in setting up two playgrounds in Jenin in order to provide safe areas for children and adolescents to play.

The ICRC also cooperates with the MDA in the field of EMS, tracing, IHL dissemination and disaster preparedness. Recently, the ICRC provided the MDA with 25,000 blood bags for its EMS. The ICRC also assists the MDA in organizing International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement training courses.

As lead agency for the Movement in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the ICRC is coordinating the work of some 20 National Societies involved in various cooperation activities, for instance psychological trauma management (German Red Cross), fleet and medical logistics management (Norwegian Red Cross), mother and child health care (French Red Cross), etc. Furthermore, the ICRC has facilitated the transport, storage and distribution of essential commodities donated by the Red Crescent Societies of Kuwait, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Promoting International Humanitarian Law

The ICRC is regarded as a reliable and neutral information source by various interlocutors and the media. It has issued several press releases in recent months expressing its concern over harm caused to civilians in the current violence. The ICRC has also organized press conferences to highlight its activities in the region.

Spreading knowledge of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) remains a high priority for the ICRC. A series of six training courses has started for the Bar Association in Gaza. A seminar on IHL was organized at the Arab-American University in Jenin during this period. Publications on IHL were provided on request to different universities and NGOs. Dissemination sessions are also conducted for PRCS volunteers in Gaza and the West Bank as well as for the MDA in Israel.

International Red Cross Day on 8 May and the 25th anniversary of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions were marked in Gaza by a photo exhibition open to the public.

For further information, please contact the External Resources Division.