

ICRC School Programme in Armenia

Their uniforms were different. Just hours earlier they had been enemies, ready to lunge at each other with their sabres, and now they were looking at one another as if they wanted to talk, say at least something, only sadly they couldn't understand each other because of the language. Suddenly, with some difficulty the younger man shifted, moved closer to the enemy and offered him some water, then tried to staunch the blood flowing from his wound.

from "Enemies" by V. Garchin (free translation)

At last they got there. It was a sombre autumn night when they arrived in Tbilisi. Zano thought that people would welcome her ... but no-one came. People passed them by without looking. Those who did come closer gave them things and treated them like poor people. That's when she understood for the first time that father wasn't father, Surik wasn't Surik, and even she herself wasn't Zano, but that they were all "refugees".

from "Joyous night" by H. Tumanian (free translation)

Excerpts from the ICRC-sponsored literature course books for 7th-grade pupils

Start: 1995

Course books

- *My little planet* (for pupils in grade 5, age 11) and *Man for man* (for pupils in grade 7, age 13). Both are based on Armenian and foreign literature (e.g. Hovhannes Tumanian, William Saroyan, Jean-Paul Sartre, Victor Hugo, Antoine St Exupéry) and deal with humanitarian principles. The second course book, while still literature-based, focuses more on basic rules of IHL.

Status: optional but officially recommended by the Ministry of Education, 17-20 lessons (out of 100) per year for grade 5; 10-12 lessons (out of 96) for grade 7.

Estimated number of pupils reached

1997 - end of 2002/03 school year:
410,000

Estimated number of teachers reached:

12,000

ICRC staff : 1 national staff based in Yerevan, 1 external consultant



Context

Armenia, with a population of some 3.4 million (official estimate), is experiencing a deep economic crisis which has prompted many of its inhabitants to emigrate in recent years. The unresolved conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan over the Nagorny Karabakh region is one of the factors hindering economic development, although a cease-fire has been in place since 1994.

The education system still bears the marks of the Soviet past, both in terms of content and methods. The country as a whole is locked in a political and economic crisis which also affects the education sector. Schools in rural areas are in poor condition, books and other supplies are lacking and teachers' salaries are low.

Teacher training

Teacher training is conducted for methodology specialists, who then go on to train the teachers. Between 1996 and 2002, four seminars were organized for methodology specialists, and some 3,350 teachers were trained in 37 seminars. For the second course book, the plan is to decentralize training and organize another 37 seminars in Armenia's various regions, to enable intensive work with teachers in smaller groups.

Cooperation with the education authorities and the National Society

The ICRC signed cooperation agreements with the Armenian Ministry of Education regarding the use of the two course books in 1996 and 2002.

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Course books	Printed and distributed	No. books for pupils/ teachers	Reprint
grade 5 age 11 <i>My little planet</i>	1997/98	73,000/ 4,000	due in 2004
grade 7 age 13 <i>Man for man</i>	2002/3	75,000/ 4,000	due in 2008

Programme development

Between 1996 and 2002 the ICRC team together with local experts prepared two literature course books for pupils in grades 5 and 7. Of the 5th-grade course book, 73,000 copies were printed and distributed to 1,550 schools across Armenia, along with some 4,000 teachers' guides. In 2002-2003, the schools received the textbook for the 7th grade (75,000 copies plus 4,000 teachers' guides).

The course books were prepared in cooperation with Armenia's Educational Reform Centre. As for teacher training, the ICRC is actively cooperating with 12 methodologists from institutes in 11 regions and Yerevan city. In addition, the ICRC cooperates with the regional education departments, which promote the distribution of books and organize seminars.

Armenia's Red Cross Society, well known in the country for its work for earthquake victims, is active in a variety of sectors such as disaster preparedness, restoring family links, dissemination, first aid and social welfare. The dissemination department of the Armenian National Society is familiar with the ICRC school programme and takes part in activities such as organizing competitions for young people on humanitarian themes.

Achievements, challenges and prospects

- Armenia's unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan remains a source of tension. The need to educate young people, many of whom are future weapon bearers, about IHL remains very real.
- In 2003 the ICRC school programme is completing its first phase — that of printing and distribution of two course books and teacher training. The programme is well perceived in Armenia. An internal evaluation by the ICRC team in 1998 showed that all teachers who had received the ICRC-sponsored course books were using them. Teachers cited the fact that the book is based on Armenian literature as a strong incentive for using it, given the major role the national literary heritage plays in Armenian culture.
- The cooperation agreement with the education authorities was renewed in August 2002. The first course book is coming up for reprinting in 2004. The Ministry of Education lacks the resources to take over the programme, of which reprinting the books is the costliest part. Providing the course books will remain an essential part of the programme, at least until IHL lessons can gain entry into civic education classes, which would be taken charge of by the Ministry of Education with other external support. To date, at its own initiative, the Ministry of Education has included a chapter on IHL in human rights instruction which is obligatory in grade 8 (one lesson out of 108). Further opportunities may arise to anchor IHL firmly in secondary education as reforms progress.

Determined to ensure the continuation of the programme, the ICRC is looking for a partner to take over the financing of it for the next five years.

The ICRC is planning:

in 2003

- 2 three-day seminars for methodologists and 1 seminar for National Society dissemination officers in charge of programme monitoring
- evaluation by a local consultancy agency
- complete distribution of seventh-grade course books across Armenia; teacher training

over the next 5 years

- concentrate on teacher training and refresher courses with a view to improving the quality of teaching, letting the programme "sink in" and keeping teachers motivated
- closely follow the reform process with a view to seizing opportunities for IHL to be made part of civic education programmes, and thereafter, of formal teacher training.