



ICRC

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LOOK OUT FOR...

Three emblems, one movement,
serving humanity.

A comprehensive package that provides detailed information on the origin of all the emblems, its protective use in wartime and its indicative use in peacetime. It also recalls the importance of the fundamental principles of unity and universality in the work carried out by the different components of the Movement.

This publication can be obtained through the Pretoria Delegation or ordered directly from the ICRC website on www.icrc.org

MISSION Statement

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

ICRC celebrates the International Day of the Disappeared

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) marked the International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August this year by calling on the international community to renew its commitment to addressing the plight of missing persons and their families.

ICRC also unveiled a report entitled *Missing Persons- A Hidden Tragedy*, which calls attention to the tragic predicament –all too often ignored– of people unaccounted for in connection with armed conflict and other situations of violence, and of their families. The report includes personal accounts and narratives conveying the agony and great sense of loss that bereaved families endure over many years.

According to Pierre Krähenbühl, the ICRC's Director of Operations, "Not enough is being done. It is imperative to deal with this tragedy and help the tens of thousands of families of missing persons discover what happened to their loved ones. Not knowing whether a loved one is dead or alive causes anxiety, anger and a deep sense of injustice, and makes it impossible for relatives to mourn and ultimately reach a sense of closure".

Unfortunately, missing persons have different, often tragic, stories, whether they are captured, abducted or arrested civilians; prisoners who die in custody or are held in secret locations; victims of mass executions hastily buried in unmarked graves; men, women and children fleeing conflict in mass displacements, separated from their loved ones for years on end; soldiers killed whose remains are improperly disposed of, or whose bodies are left unidentified on the battlefield.

One of the aims of International Humanitarian Law is to prevent disappearances in times of armed conflict or internal violence. If civilians, sick, wounded or captured members of armed groups and other persons deprived of their liberty are treated in conformity with the law and if humanitarian organizations are given access to persons at risk, few people will go missing and the relatives of those who have died will be informed about the

fate of their next-of-kin.

ICRC has a specific mandate conferred on it by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols to ensure that people are protected against threats to their lives, physical integrity and dignity, preventing disappearances, restoring family ties, and ascertaining the fate of people whose families are without news of them.

However, the absence of political will among those directly concerned and the lack of cooperation on the part of those who might persuade them to act often make the prevention and clarification of disappearances related to armed conflicts or internal violence an extremely arduous task. In many instances, in particular when disappearances result from massacres or deliberate attacks against civilians, the relevant authorities and leaders may be unable and unwilling to provide answers because they took no measures to stop the attacks and because they fear they will be held accountable for what happened.

The adoption in December 2006 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a legally binding document that prohibits enforced disappearance should contribute to the improvement of the situation as long as all the states decide to sign, ratify and implement this treaty.



A Kashmiri boy cries as his mother displays a photo of his father during a demonstration organized by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons in Srinagar, India © Reuters/D.Ishmail.

Afghanistan: Civilians are paying a heavy price

Section III of Part II (which part deals with the 'wounded, sick and shipwrecked') of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions addresses the 'Missing and the Dead'. The general principle, contained in article 32, is to the effect that all parties to the Conventions, as well as humanitarian organizations, shall, in their dealing with the wounded, the sick and the dead, be prompted by acknowledging the right of families to know the fate of their relatives caught up in an armed conflict. Thus, as soon as circumstances permit, the contracting parties are obliged to search for persons who have been reported missing. All relevant information must be shared between the parties so as to facilitate the search.

If necessary, the International Committee of the Red Cross ('ICRC') is specifically mandated to assist in the information sharing process. Having been so mandated, the plight of the missing as a result of an armed conflict is an important priority for the ICRC. It is for this reason that the ICRC takes seriously its honouring of the International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August. All too often, an end to hostilities signals also an end to concern about those unaccounted for. The ICRC is determined that this should not be the norm. Families have a right to know the fate of their loved ones; only then are they able meaningfully to come to terms with the loss and so move forward in an attempt to reconstruct their lives. It is sincerely to be hoped that the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance will go some way in ensuring that the missing remain of concern to all.

Throughout the world the ICRC fulfils its mandate in respect of the missing through recourse to various strategies. One of those strategies is the Restoring Family Links ('RFL') project. The modus operandi of RFL is to keep track of individuals incarcerated in prisons, kept in hospitals, refugee camps and, sadly, morgues. A register is maintained of the vulnerable separated from their families and of unaccompanied children. The aim, in all circumstances, is to ensure that families have some knowledge of the whereabouts of their loved ones – ultimately, with a view to securing a reunification. The ICRC, often in conjunction with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, co-ordinates such operations in virtually all theatres of conflict – defined in its broadest sense – whether in southern Africa or in Afghanistan.

Because of its crucial contributory role in assisting the ICRC to carry out its own mandate – not to mention the tasks it autonomously assumes for itself – in any country with which it has contact, the relationship between the ICRC and the local national society is a crucial one. Ordinarily the ICRC attempts to appoint a delegate specifically charged with fostering and nurturing that relationship. The designated delegate is then referred to as a 'Co-operation Delegate'. Within the Pretoria Delegation of the ICRC, the Co-operation Delegate is responsible for maintaining relations with the Red Cross Societies of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Madagascar and Mauritius, and the Red Crescent society of the Comoros. Over the past three years that position has very ably been filled by Martin Hahn, who has also filled the position of Deputy Head of Delegation over the last year. Sadly, Martin is now leaving the Pretoria Delegation to take up a senior position with the German Red Cross. We wish Martin and his family every success in their new venture.

Garth Abraham

Since 2006, the conflict pitting Afghans and international forces against the armed opposition has significantly intensified in the south and east of the country and is spreading to the north and west. Civilians suffer horribly from mounting threats to their security, such as increasing numbers of roadside bombs and suicide attacks, and regular aerial bombing raids. The result has been a growing number of civilian casualties.

The persistence of armed conflict also means that many civilians remain in dire need of emergency assistance. They mainly lack access to basic services. It is incredibly difficult for ordinary Afghans to lead a normal life. According to UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan), the number of civilians dying from conflict-related violence doubled from 2005 to 2006. During that period alone, the resurgence of armed conflict in southern Afghanistan resulted in 80,000 newly displaced people.

Against this worrying backdrop, the ICRC and Afghan Red Crescent Society are stepping up their efforts to

protect and assist the most vulnerable, in particular by actively helping local medical facilities to cope with the increasing number of war-wounded in the south and east. They are also carrying out the task of recovering mortal remains and returning them to their families after identification.

In addition, the ICRC is visiting an increasing number of persons detained by the Afghan authorities or international forces in connection with the armed conflict in order to ensure that they are being treated humanely and in accordance with International Humanitarian Law.

International Humanitarian Law places restrictions on the military operations of all parties to an armed conflict. State armed forces and opposition armed groups are prohibited from intentionally targeting civilians or civilian objects, conducting attacks that discriminate between civilians and combatants or are anticipated to cause civilian loss that is disproportionate to the military gain; conducting attacks or threats primarily intended to spread terror amidst the civilian population; and attacking military targets using perfidious methods. In all attacks, combatants must take all feasible steps to minimize harm to civilians.

The ICRC maintains a structured and transparent dialogue with all parties to the conflict-the Afghan authorities, international forces and the armed opposition- to promote acceptance of and respect for its independent and neutral humanitarian action and to obtain better security guarantees and access to conflict victims throughout the country.

More recently, the ICRC has successfully facilitated the release of South Korean hostages who had been held by an armed opposition group in Ghazi Province for more than four weeks. This facilitation was requested by both the armed group and the South Korean government.



An Afghan mine victim learning to walk with her new prothesis © ICRC/Adrian Brooks.

Restoring family links in Southern Africa



Facilitators at the Regional Tracing Workshop: Mr Martin Hahn, Cooperation Delegate , ICRC Pretoria, Mr Ion Smochina, Protection Delegate, ICRC Pretoria, Mr Mbuso Mthembu, Provincial Manager, SARCS and Mrs Caroline Vagniers, Tracing Delegate, ICRC Harare.

In response to changes in the nature of conflicts and disasters, which are increasingly affecting the civilian populations, causing people movements, detentions and disappearances, the task of Restoring Family Links (RFL) has become more specialised.

Depending on the context of the situation, Restoring of Family Links consists of tracing individuals in places such as prisons, hospitals, refugee camps, morgues..., registering vulnerable individuals especially the elderly, separated and unaccompanied children, reuniting families as well as collecting and forwarding information on the results of the various requests.

To enhance the service provided to the affected victims, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have reacted by intensifying their efforts to trace those reported missing, facilitate the re-establishment of family links, protect vulnerable groups, unaccompanied and separated children.

In order to refine these tools the delegation hosted a three day Regional Tracing Workshop in June 2007 in Pretoria. Participants came from the Red Cross Societies of Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa, mainly from the provinces of Gauteng, Kwa-Zulu Natal, East London, Western Cape, and the facilitators

from ICRC delegations of Pretoria and Harare.

The objective of this workshop was to build the capacity and performance of these National Societies on the RFL programme especially on the aspects of coordination mechanisms, networking between National Societies and ICRC, sharing of information and field experiences as well as reporting tools.

Regardless of the circumstances leading to the separation, Restoring of Family Links Network seeks to ensure that basic human rights are respected. Receiving news, being able to share feelings and thoughts with loved ones, and ultimately being reunited with them makes the Restoring Family Links a fulfilling task.

Some facts:

- Since the beginning of 2007 the National Societies from the Region and the ICRC have processed:
- Exchange of Red Cross Messages: 271
- Tracing Requests: 95
- Travel documents issued for resettlement to 3rd countries through foreign embassies: 62

A Fruitful Second IHL Commonwealth Conference

From 29 to 31 August in Wellington, New Zealand, the ICRC co-organised, together with the New Zealand Government, the New Zealand Red Cross Society, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the British Red Cross Society, the Second Commonwealth Red Cross and Red Crescent IHL Conference. The aim of the Conference was to continue the work of the First Commonwealth Conference held in London in 2005 and the 2003 Nairobi meeting of Commonwealth National Committees on IHL.

The Wellington conference was attended by more than 130 delegates from most of the 53 countries in the Commonwealth, including all Commonwealth countries covered by the Delegation, namely Lesotho, Mauritius, Swaziland, Seychelles, and South Africa.

Following a traditional Maori welcome, the conference was opened by New Zealand’s Deputy Prime Minister Dr Michael Cullen. In his address, he underscored the importance of IHL in protecting the innocent during times of armed conflict, caring for the sick and wounded and respecting the lives and dignity of human beings. Speakers during the three-day event included Dr Hans Blix, Head of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission in Stockholm, representatives from the ICRC and world experts on IHL.

Strong interest in the creation of National and Regional IHL Committees was expressed by participants, and good discussions were held with respect to pledges to be made at the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement scheduled for November in Geneva.

IHL implementation, direct participation in hostilities, and the auxiliary role of National Societies were also considered. An Outcome Statement was concluded which called for, “inter alia”, greater IHL implementation and an encouragement of the issuance of pledges at the 30th Conference.

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ICRC to host Statutory Meetings: 23-30 November 2007 in Geneva

As the founder of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC participates actively in policy making and together with the International Federation prepares the Movement's statutory meetings.

The ICRC takes part in the development and adoption of Movement policy across many sectors that are submitted to the Council of Delegates and the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. These universal statutory bodies of the Movement provide important opportunities to address pressing humanitarian challenges. The ICRC is particularly involved in issues relating to humanitarian action in situations of conflict.

Conventions that were ratified by all States. It provides an opportunity to discuss humanitarian issues of common concern, inform and update States on Movement policies and, where appropriate, include them in their implementation. The debates of the International Conference and the resolutions it adopts often pave the way for developments in the field of International Humanitarian Law promoted by the international community of States.

•The Council of Delegates

The Council of Delegates adopts the agenda of the International Conference. It is a universal deliberative body, exclusively for Movement members, that usually meets every two years to discuss and adopt resolutions concerning all the Movement's components. These resolutions may endorse Movement positions or policies that provide important frameworks for strengthening cooperation among its components with regard to organizational matters (e.g. Seville Agreement, 1997) or to specific fields of Action (e.g. Plan of Action for Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1995; Movement Strategy on Landmines, 1999 and 2003).

•The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is one of the most important humanitarian forums in the world. Every four years, this unique gathering brings together all the Movement's components with all the States party to the 1949 Geneva



Participants at the international conference held in Vienna in 1965.