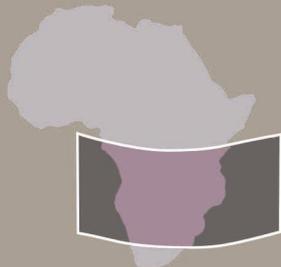




ICRC



Newsletter of the ICRC
Pretoria Regional
Delegation

LOOK OUT FOR...

The latest Red Cross / Red Crescent Magazine entitled "Shelter: beyond tents and tarpaulins" – Edition 2, 2008

How can we help people fleeing their homes following natural disaster or armed conflict? What type of shelter can the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement offer them? Also in this issue: the global food crisis; fighting in Chad; the cyclone in Myanmar; the earthquake in China and female genital mutilation in Cameroon.

The magazine is free of charge and can be ordered online. Ref B101. You can also view the latest magazine or previous issues online at 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.

Themba

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THIRD QUARTER



ICRC action in the Comoros

Since 2007 the situation in the islands of the Comoros gradually deteriorated into a serious internal crisis. The crisis worsened in 2008 when several rounds of diplomatic negotiations failed and the central government, backed by the African Union, launched a military operation "Democracy in Comoros" to oust the President of the island of Anjouan and restore constitutional order.

Prior to the military operation, the ICRC Pretoria Regional Delegation, which covers the island from Pretoria, intensified its operational relationship with the Comorian Red Crescent Society (CRCS) in order to prepare the volunteers to operate first aid posts. To support the activity of the CRCS, the ICRC airlifted first aid material and supplied 100 war wounded kits to the main referral hospitals in Anjouan.

The military operations lasted two days and fortunately resulted in minimal casualties. However, the ICRC medical surgical team deployed to Anjouan was already providing the support needed by the local surgical team at the Hombo

hospital. In addition to the deployment of the surgical team, the Pretoria Regional Delegation's Protection Delegate took care of the initial ICRC action and together with the Administrator set up an initial office to operate from. Finally, the ICRC Headquarters, deployed one Administrator for two months and one delegate for three months to run the operations on the islands in close coordination with the CRCS.

During and after the military operations, hundreds of people were arrested. ICRC protection delegates conducted numerous visits to several places of detention, to monitor the conditions of detention and ensure the minimum humanitarian standards were afforded to detainees.

Since then, most of the detainees have been released, but the ICRC continues with its protection activities, together with other programmes such as the advancement of ratification of IHL treaties and strengthening the capacities of the CRCS to respond to other challenges facing the country.



Relief supplies arrive in the Comoros prior to the military action in March 2008.

Pakistan: civilians continue to pay the price of conflict

Interview

As clashes escalate between the Pakistani military and armed opposition along the Afghan border, civilians bear the brunt. Pascal Cuttat, Head of the ICRC Delegation in Islamabad, talks about how the organization is helping them.

How concerned are you about the humanitarian situation in Bajaur Agency on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

The recent escalation in the fighting forced more than 200,000 people to flee their homes in Bajaur Agency with little more than the clothes on their backs. From 31 August the government suspended military operations in the border region for the Ramadan season. Some sections of the armed opposition did the same. This prompted tens of thousands of displaced people to return to their villages in Bajaur.

However the humanitarian situation is still extremely volatile, and there is no guarantee that the current lull in hostilities will last. We therefore remain very concerned about internally displaced people, the majority of whom are women and children. Around 50,000 are staying with host families or in improvised camps in locations such as schools. To give you an idea of just how desperate the situation is, some 14,000 people crossed over



North-West Frontier Province, Mardan, North of Peshawar. ICRC distribution of emergency household items to displaced persons from Bajaur Agency. Volunteers from the camp help unloading the truck. Clothes, mats, jerry cans, blankets are about to be distributed to 320 families. ICRC/MAJEED A. 2008.

into Afghanistan because they felt that they would be safer there.

The displaced people most urgently need clean water and sanitation facilities, as well as shelter, food and access to health care.

What sort of assistance is the ICRC bringing to those caught up in the fighting?

This is a very complex conflict, with the situation changing constantly. While fighting seems to be calming down in certain regions, it is escalating elsewhere. There are large numbers of people on the move, some returning to their homes, others fleeing.

We are determined to make a real difference and to alleviate the suffering of those affected. Together with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society, we have been responding to the needs of the most vulnerable among the displaced.

Considering the cramped conditions in which displaced people are living and the risk of disease, our primary concern is to ensure that they have access to clean water and sanitation facilities. No amount of food, medication, or shelter is going to do much good if people contract water-borne diseases. The ICRC has brought equipment into Lower Dir District in the North-West Frontier Province, which absorbed some 50,000 displaced people, to facilitate the installation of water-supply and sanitation facilities. Seven engineers are on the spot and have been installing systems, including water tanks and distribution ramps which are now operational. Clean water is being trucked in.

Some of the people wounded in the fighting were evacuated in ambulances organized by the Pakistan Red Crescent and treated with medical materials and drugs supplied by the ICRC. We are providing medical care for the wounded and organizing it for the displaced. We want to maintain this momentum.

We are distributing blankets, kitchen sets, tarpaulins and other emergency household items to hundreds of families every day. Together with the Pakistan Red Crescent we provided hot meals to families arriving in Peshawar. We are also distributing food.



North-West Frontier Province, Mardan, North of Peshawar. Camp for displaced persons from Bajaur Agency. ICRC distributes emergency household items in the camp. ICRC/MAJEED A. 2008.

Do you have free access to all those in need of assistance?

This is a conflict in a very volatile environment, and has implications for our own operational security. Therefore access to civilians in need is a challenge. However we are confident that we will continue reaching out to them. ICRC and Pakistani Red Crescent teams are present in areas with concentrations of displaced people. Together, they identify the most vulnerable among the displaced and assist them.

At the same time, the ICRC delegation in Afghanistan is assisting more than 14,000 people who have left Bajaur Agency for the other side of the border. We are convinced that together with the Pakistani Red Crescent Society, we have deployed our humanitarian efforts in a way regarded by all actors on the ground as neutral and independent.

Does the ICRC already have operational experience in the areas you have mentioned?

The ICRC has been permanently present in Pakistan since 1981. This includes work in the Tribal Areas and the North West Frontier Province. The situation has of course changed over the years and the current conflict is complex,

and its outcome, unpredictable. We are nevertheless confident that the government of Pakistan, its armed and security forces, as well as the armed opposition and the civilian population know us well, and acknowledge our neutrality and independence. This will give us the credibility on which we count to be able to move and work in the midst of armed conflict.

Do you expect those who have returned home to stay there, or are they likely to flee again?

For the sake of the victims we must hope that they will be able to stay in their villages, regain their dignity and resume their lives. A situation where women, children and the elderly live in camps and with host families, separated from their husbands, fathers and sons because the men have remained in the area affected by fighting to protect their property, is not ideal.

This said, we must be ready for all eventualities. Before the latest escalation, the conflict in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan had already been going on for some time. We are therefore monitoring developments on the ground very closely and stand ready to intervene if and when necessary.

During the last few months the world saw an international armed conflict unfold between Russia and Georgia (South Ossetia) and renewed fighting in Pakistan. Once again the cost of civilian lives as well as the plight of those who are directly affected by the fighting or are left behind in all the confusion came under the spotlight

It is in times like these that the core mandate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is highlighted. To protect and assist the most vulnerable people and to provide them with assistance.

In Georgia the ICRC is assisting the thousands of people who were displaced or isolated by the fighting. One of the priority areas for the ICRC in this conflict is the protection of vulnerable people and especially restoring of family links that have been severed by the conflict. In this conflict the ICRC is not only concentrating on the immediate and emergency needs of the victims and vulnerable people but is also trying to establish a longer-term assistance with winter around the corner. To know more about the ICRC's operation in this conflict, please visit the website www.icrc.org

In this edition of Themba you can read all about the ICRC's response to renewed fighting in Pakistan. The Head of Delegation for the ICRC in Pakistan, Pascal Cuttat, talks about the response of the ICRC in conjunction with the Pakistani Red Cross on pages two and three.

The year is almost at its end but once again the Pretoria Regional Delegation will host the All Africa Course on IHL which is aimed at academics who want to introduce international humanitarian law (IHL) into their curricula. The course will take place from 3 – 12 November.

Furthermore, the Delegation will, in collaboration with the School of Health Systems and Public Health (SHSPH) of the University of Pretoria, host the Health Emergencies in Large Populations (HELP) Course. This will be the 11th year that the course is held. For the past two years the South African Military Health School has also been running a HELP course for their students with great success.

At the end of September the Delegation will host its inaugural IHL course for journalists, which we hope to make an annual event.

We would like to congratulate the National Institute of Education in the Seychelles, and especially Ms Odile Jean-Louis and her affable team, for all their hard work in ensuring that the Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) Programme is integrated into their school curriculum. The 'End-of-experience' event on 24 September 2008 was organised by the Institute, in conjunction with the ICRC, to celebrate the Institutes' commitment to ensuring that EHL, as a series of explorations aimed at improving the understanding of humanitarian issues related to situations of conflict, is successfully integrated into the Seychelles Education curriculum.

Lastly, at the end of September we said goodbye to our Protection Delegate and Deputy Head of Delegation, Ion Smochina who is ending his mission with ICRC Pretoria. We wish him and his family all the best for the future. We would also like to extend a warm welcome to Kedir Awol and his family. Kedir is replacing Ion.

Annemarie Watt



ICRC

Themba



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Protection Delegate /
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Andrew Carswell

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Andrè von Ah

Educating the media on the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

The manner in which journalists report stories can make a huge impact in societies. It is important for journalists to report accurately and factually. The Red Cross Movement is a complex one and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has taken the initiative to educate journalism students from different universities on the work of the ICRC and the different roles the components of the Movement (ICRC, International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies and National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies) play in different situations.

For the past three years, first-year Journalism students from the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) have been given lectures on the history, the mandate, the different emblems and work of the ICRC worldwide. The second year students are given a more complex lecture on the basics of international humanitarian law (IHL) and how this law protects journalists and other media practitioners working in a conflict situation.

Lectures to date this year include the postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand and the first year students at the University of Johannesburg who were also given an exercise to discuss the different activities of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement during the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa.



First year Journalism students at the University of Johannesburg during a lecture on the ICRC which was held in September.

The exercise proved that there is still some confusion of "who is who?" and "who does what and when?" The biggest confusion or misunderstanding with regard to the work of the Red Cross Red Crescent is that their work is related to medical services.

The feedback from the students was very positive and also showed the importance of disseminating the work of the Red Cross Red Crescent and different components of the Movement. The lectures are focused only in Gauteng but we plan to extend to other universities around the country.

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If you would like to receive further issues of THEMBA, or to be on the mailing list, please contact the Communications Unit. Or for additional information concerning various ICRC programmes, please contact us at:
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Women's Day



Community women celebrate Women's Day together at the South African Red Cross Society Soweto Branch. The celebration was filled with joy and encouraging speeches from community leaders. A delightful lunch ended the day.