

ERITREA



ICRC delegation

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	859
Assistance	2,122
Prevention	242
Cooperation with National Societies	197
General	-

► **3,420**

of which: Overheads 209

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	67%
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PERSONNEL

Expatriates	6
National staff (daily workers not included)	43

KEY POINTS

In 2011, the ICRC:

- amid travel restrictions, worked with local authorities to assist rural communities in border areas affected by past armed conflict with Ethiopia
- through a livestock anti-parasite control campaign, land ploughing, and distributions of seed, tools and foot-operated irrigation pumps, helped struggling communities boost their economic security
- in cooperation with the Eritrean water authorities, provided clean water to thousands of people via solar-powered water supply systems
- helped people of Ethiopian origin either renew their Eritrean residence permits or, if they wished to be repatriated, meet administration fees and transport costs
- through dialogue, sought to persuade the authorities to allow ICRC visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including current or former POWs
- in cooperation with other organizations, reunited Eritrean families in cross-border operations

The ICRC opened a delegation in Eritrea in 1998 in the context of the international armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and continues to respond to the needs remaining from that two-year war. Its priorities are to assist the population displaced, detained or otherwise affected by the conflict and to ensure compliance with IHL with regard to any persons still protected by the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The ICRC also supports the development of the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea”.

CONTEXT

Eritrea returned to the African Union with the appointment of a new permanent representative, the first since 2009. The government also asked for Eritrea to be readmitted to the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development, it having withdrawn from the organization in 2007. In December, the UN Security Council approved a new resolution to reinforce sanctions against Eritrea, prompted by its alleged support to armed groups in Somalia. Eritrea denied the allegation.

Following the signing in June 2010 of an accord between Eritrea and Djibouti to normalize relations and establish a mechanism for resolving the border dispute, no further progress was made towards demarcation of the border. Meanwhile, troops from Qatar, which had been acting as mediator, remained stationed in the disputed region.

Elsewhere, relations remained tense between the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia (see *Ethiopia*). In regions adjoining Ethiopia, where thousands of civilians had returned or been resettled by Eritrea’s authorities since the end of the conflict, the effects of the past hostilities on infrastructure and livelihoods continued to be felt.

During 2011, the Eritrean government asked a number of international governmental organizations, UN agencies and NGOs to reduce or conclude their activities in Eritrea.

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

With government-imposed restrictions on movement, access and fuel still in place, the ICRC pursued dialogue with the authorities on widening access to vulnerable communities and individuals. Meanwhile, it continued to focus resources, as far as possible, on assisting communities in border regions most affected by past armed conflict.

As the government issued no travel permits and only a limited number of visas to ICRC expatriate staff during 2011, the organization delivered assistance to rural communities partially through “remote management”. Working with local authorities, national ICRC staff helped treat more than a million livestock against parasites and provided communities with the means to grow their own vegetables and/or produce fodder for livestock. It also supported the ploughing of land for households headed by women, who would otherwise have to pay for this work from part of their harvest.

The ICRC helped water authorities and local communities to maintain, repair and construct solar-powered water supply systems. These systems ensured sustainable and reliable supplies of

Main figures and indicators	PROTECTION	Total		
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Red Cross messages (RCMs)				
RCMs collected		3,332	UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs distributed		4,114		
Reunifications, transfers and repatriations				
People reunited with their families		32		
	<i>including people registered by another delegation</i>	1		
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		26	Women	Minors
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		34	6	5
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	22		
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2011 (people)		105	11	14
UAMs/SCs*, including unaccompanied demobilized child soldiers				
UAMs/SCs newly registered by the ICRC/Society		1	Girls	Demobilized children
UAMs/SCs reunited with their families by the ICRC/Society		24	5	
UAM/SC cases still being handled by the ICRC/Society at 31 December 2011		3	1	
Documents				
People to whom travel documents were issued		57		
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines		44		
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)				
Restoring family links				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		20		

* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

Main figures and indicators	ASSISTANCE	Total	Women	Children
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Economic security, water and habitat				
Food	Beneficiaries	18	20%	60%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	18		
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	23	20%	60%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	23		
Agricultural, veterinary and other micro-economic initiatives	Beneficiaries	117,714	20%	60%
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	19,685	20%	60%

fresh water to people who would otherwise have trekked long distances across sometimes unsafe terrain to retrieve water from unreliable and potentially polluted sources.

Given the presence of unexploded mines in border regions, the Eritrean Demining Authority and the ICRC, in cooperation with the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea”, trained around 30 volunteers to alert local communities to the dangers posed by mines, while documenting mine-related incidents. More than 37,500 people subsequently attended mine-risk education sessions.

The Eritrean authorities had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of civilians in March 2009. Within the constraints, the ICRC did its best to continue monitoring the situation of the Ethiopian community living in Eritrea to ensure that their rights under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, including voluntary repatriation in humane conditions, were respected. The ICRC also reminded the Eritrean government of these obligations.

People of Ethiopian origin received ICRC assistance to pay fees prior to repatriation or to renew residence permits. Meanwhile, relatives separated by the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border were still able to communicate through the family-links service, operated by the “Eritrean Red Cross” with ICRC support. Somali refugees also used this service.

With the support of the Movement family-links network, the ICRC facilitated family reunifications across borders, in particular for children. In April, an Eritrean man who had been living for

13 years in Ethiopia rejoined his wife and children in Asmara using an ICRC travel document.

Despite repeated requests to the authorities, the ICRC was not allowed to resume visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs and former POWs. The authorities had withdrawn authorization for such visits in 2009. The ICRC was also awaiting a reply from the Eritrean government to requests for any information it had about 19 Djiboutian soldiers reported by their government as missing after the Djibouti-Eritrea hostilities in June 2008.

Given the restrictions on its activities introduced by the Eritrean government, the ICRC made every effort to strengthen dialogue with the authorities. It sought to persuade them that it was in Eritrea’s interest to recognize that the 1949 Geneva Conventions applied to the Eritrean context. The ICRC worked to garner interest in IHL and the Movement among the public, including young people associated with the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, and community elders.

The “Eritrean Red Cross”, with ICRC funding, training and expertise, continued to develop its skills in restoring family links, administering first aid, briefing communities on mine risks and promoting IHL and the Fundamental Principles.

CIVILIANS

Vulnerable border communities alerted to mine risks

Some 37,500 civilians living in weapon-contaminated border areas learnt more about the dangers posed by mines, allowing them to take suitable precautions to reduce daily risks, during 245 awareness

sessions conducted by around 30 “Eritrean Red Cross” volunteers. The volunteers had earlier been trained to pass on this advice, and to gather information on mine-related incidents in order to inform and better protect civilians in high-risk areas, during a five-day training course held by the Eritrean Demining Authority and an ICRC specialist.

Villagers draw on solar technology to ensure safe water supply

In regions bordering Ethiopia, villagers with access to solar-powered water systems continued to benefit from supplies of clean water after they worked with local authorities and national ICRC staff to maintain and repair eight systems and completed four begun in late 2010. In all, 19,685 people benefited from this work. The installation of two new systems also got under way. Villagers drew 20 litres of fresh water per day, per inhabitant, from the solar-powered systems, proven to be the most effective means of providing rural communities with a dependable water supply in a country where fuel prices were high and shortages remained widespread.

Over 22 local water authority staff learnt more about the collection and analysis of hydrological and meteorological data during training sessions in Asmara, organized jointly by the Eritrean water authorities and the ICRC. Training enabled staff to better assess the performance of existing water systems and identify future needs.

Herders and farmers strengthen livelihoods

Communities in Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea, areas affected by past armed conflict and ongoing border tensions, worked towards rebuilding disrupted livelihoods and securing their economic future with ICRC support.

Over 17,928 pastoralist households (89,640 people) faced a better prospect of raising more resilient herds following the treatment in Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea of more than 1 million livestock, twice, against internal and external parasites in an ICRC-funded project. Some 95% (713 households) of pastoralists, when questioned about the impact of the project, reported positive changes in the body condition, skin appearance and behaviour of the treated animals.

Meanwhile, 1,550 vulnerable households (7,750 people), primarily headed by women, grew vegetables, both for their own consumption and for sale at market, using ICRC-supplied seed, farming tools and pedal pumps (for accessing available sub-surface water). This project enabled families to improve their diet and, by selling any surplus, increase their income. Livestock-dependent families also used the pumps to irrigate fodder crops, helping animals survive the difficult period before the onset of seasonal rains and the regeneration of pasture.

In Gash Barka, almost 3,984 women-led households (19,920 people) which had been resettled or returned to their home areas benefited from ICRC-funded ploughing of fields prior to the two planting seasons. Since ploughing in Eritrea was traditionally conducted by males (many of whom had been called up for military service or else killed or disabled during armed conflict), these families lacked the immediate means to prepare plots for cultivation. Furthermore, the hiring of labourers to carry out such work would have meant committing part of the harvest to pay for services. Tractor ploughing therefore ensured that households would reap the entire benefits of the next harvest.

Delays in the signing of memoranda of understanding between the Eritrean government and the ICRC meant that both tractor

ploughing and livestock vaccination began later than anticipated. Owing to the absence of a visa for an ICRC specialist, the planned restocking project (3,000 goats and 200 donkeys for vulnerable households) could not be implemented.

Struggling Ethiopians receive financial assistance

People of Ethiopian origin continued to be repatriated through Sudan by the Eritrean authorities. The government had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of civilians across the border in March 2009. Within the constraints, the ICRC did its best to continue monitoring the situation of the Ethiopian community living in Eritrea to ensure that their rights under the 1949 Geneva Conventions were respected, including voluntary repatriation in humane conditions. The ICRC also reminded the Eritrean government of these obligations.

More than 404 especially vulnerable Ethiopians, including elderly people, women, children and former detainees, received financial assistance from the ICRC in paying administrative and/or transport costs if they wished to repatriate and 956 in obtaining residence permits, if they wished to remain in Eritrea. Some 18 received food and 23 received essential household items. Forty-four Ethiopians who had formerly studied in Eritrea had their official documents, usually education certificates, sent across to Ethiopia with ICRC assistance so that they could apply for further studies or jobs.

Separated family members exchange news

RCMs were exchanged between family members divided by the sealed Eritrea-Ethiopia border (including unaccompanied Eritrean children living in refugee camps in Ethiopia), while Somali refugees in Eritrea continued to restore contact or exchange news through the family-links service run by the “Eritrean Red Cross” with ICRC training, supervision and material support. In Debub, family-links activities were suspended in February. Talks took place with the authorities with a view to resuming them.

Following coordination between UNHCR and the ICRC, 2 unaccompanied Somali minors re-established contact with their mothers in Djibouti and 57 travel documents were issued to enable Somalis to resettle in third countries. Twenty-two Eritreans, including 18 minors were reunited with their families in Sweden, in an operation conducted jointly by the Swedish Red Cross, the IOM and the ICRC. Seven other persons were reunited with relatives in Australia, New Zealand and Norway with ICRC support. In April, an Eritrean man who had been living for 13 years in Ethiopia was granted permission by the authorities to rejoin his wife and family in Asmara using an ICRC travel document. It was the first time that the ICRC had been authorized to carry out such a reunification since March 2009.

The ICRC continued to follow up with the authorities requests from families for news of relatives still missing in relation to the 1998–2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Despite regular written and oral requests from the ICRC, the authorities had not given the green light for delegates to resume visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs or former POWs. The authorities had withdrawn permission for such visits in 2009.

The ICRC was also awaiting replies from the Eritrean government to requests for any information it had about 19 Djiboutian

soldiers, reported by their government as missing after the Djibouti-Eritrea hostilities in June 2008, and to an ICRC proposal regarding the possible repatriation of a sick Eritrean POW held in Djibouti.

AUTHORITIES

Given the restrictions placed on the ICRC by the Eritrean government, dialogue with the authorities continued to focus on reinforcing trust. The director of the Office of the President, the director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Agriculture held meetings with the ICRC to discuss operational matters. Government officials were reminded of the neutral, impartial and independent stance of the Movement, its work and its mandate. The ICRC sought to persuade the authorities that it was in their interest to recognize that the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which the country acceded in 2000, applied to the Eritrean context, and that the ICRC was therefore mandated, whenever required, to act on behalf of people still affected by the 1998–2000 international conflict and by the border issue with Djibouti.

Local officials based in areas where the ICRC was working, including, for the first time, village administrators in Tio, Southern Red Sea, learnt more about the Movement's activities through briefings and printed materials.

Representatives of international organizations (including UN agencies), the European Union and the diplomatic community kept up a regular dialogue with the ICRC, which informed them of Movement activities via briefings and publications.

Plans for a booklet to stimulate discussion on IHL were cancelled when authorization for its publication could not be obtained from the authorities.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Some 23,000 people (including village elders, religious leaders, teachers, students, local administrators and "Eritrean Red Cross" volunteers), usually in border regions, attended briefings on the Movement and Fundamental Principles organized by the ICRC, "Eritrean Red Cross" and National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students. The distribution of IHL-related publications, including two articles featured in the youth union's magazine, and screenings of an ICRC video helped deepen communities' understanding of the Movement's mandate and activities.

An estimated 10,000 people visited the ICRC stand during the 10-day National Book Fair in Asmara. Photos illustrating ICRC activities were displayed on the streets of the capital during World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May).

Some 90 law students at the Ministry of Justice Training Centre in Mekele enriched their understanding of IHL during a briefing organized by the ICRC. In May, a student at the university's College of Arts and Social Sciences received reference materials from the ICRC for an IHL-related research project. He was the first student to request such information following the establishment of contact between the ICRC and the dean of the college in 2010.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

"Eritrean Red Cross" personnel continued to build their capacities and develop their tracing, assistance and communication skills (see *Civilians* and *Civil society*) – the latter including mine-risk education – with the help of ICRC funding, training, equipment and technical advice.

During ICRC-supported training sessions, some 33 "Eritrean Red Cross" personnel strengthened their expertise in restoring family links and 87 volunteers learnt about managing relief operations. In addition, more than 200 school teachers, nearly 600 students, 100 police officers and others acquired basic first-aid skills, enabling them to respond effectively to a variety of emergencies.