

# SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC



## EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	1,081
Assistance	1,238
Prevention	752
Cooperation with National Societies	2,989
General	-

► **6,060**

of which: Overheads 370

## IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	175%
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## PERSONNEL

Expatriates	11
National staff (daily workers not included)	14

## KEY POINTS

### In 2011, the ICRC:

- reminded all those engaged in violence to ensure respect for human life and dignity and to allow the wounded and sick unhindered access to medical care
- supported the delivery of effective emergency treatment by supplying medical materials and equipment to health care providers and donating 4 fully equipped mobile health units and an ambulance to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent
- with the National Society, distributed emergency food parcels to 70,000 people in violence-affected areas
- conducted its first-ever visit to a Syrian prison, engaging in ongoing discussions with the relevant authorities to reach a common understanding of its standard working procedures for future visits
- launched further projects in the north-east to alleviate the consequences of protracted drought
- continued to facilitate family contacts and movements between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic

The ICRC has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It works with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to assist people affected by civil unrest and to improve water supply and sanitation. The ICRC has also started visits to people detained under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary in issues of humanitarian concern for Syrian inhabitants of the Golan occupied by Israel and facilitates travel for certain categories of person between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic. It enables separated family members to maintain contact.

## CONTEXT

Unrest that began in March in the southern province of Dara'a spread rapidly through many other urban areas, reportedly leaving thousands of people dead and injured by year-end. Thousands fled across the border to take refuge in neighbouring countries, notably Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Initial calls for economic and social change quickly translated into demands for fundamental political reform, including the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Protesters were unappeased by concessions from the authorities, whose crackdown was reported to have become increasingly violent. Opposition groups became more defiant as some armed forces and security personnel allegedly defected and armed fighters emerged among some communities. The situation took another turn in December when car bombs exploded in Damascus shortly before observers from the League of Arab States arrived to monitor the violence. There were serious concerns about people experiencing difficulties in accessing medical treatment with abuses of medical staff and other humanitarian workers widely reported.

The unrest disrupted the country's economy and increased hardship. Local economies suffered as the security situation restricted the movement of people and goods and prevented farmers from tending their land. The annual harvest was diminished thereby reducing the amount of produce getting to market. Single-headed households, whose breadwinner was dead or unaccounted for, became increasingly dependent on hand-outs. Sanctions by the West and the League of Arab States further complicated the situation. A protracted drought in the north-east and other areas continued to have adverse effects, while the civil unrest and sanctions hindered the maintenance of water supply systems.

Meanwhile, Israel's ongoing occupation of part of the Golan Heights continued to be a major issue of contention between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel. Owing to the deadlock, some 22,000 Syrian inhabitants of the occupied Golan remained cut off from their families in the Syrian Arab Republic.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

As the situation deteriorated, the ICRC urged all those engaged in violence to respect human life and dignity and to exercise restraint. It issued a reminder that the wounded and sick should have safe and unimpeded access to medical care and that humanitarian workers should be free to travel to areas requiring their presence. In the framework of intensified discussions with the authorities, the ICRC president travelled to Damascus twice, once in June when he met

Main figures and indicators	PROTECTION	Total		
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
Red Cross messages (RCMs)			UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs collected		145		
RCMs distributed		126		
Phone calls facilitated between family members		2		
<b>Reunifications, transfers and repatriations</b>				
People transferred/repatriated		793		
Human remains transferred/repatriated		3		
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</b>				
			Women	Minors
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		112	11	10
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		44		
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	11		
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2011 (people)		80	5	5
<b>Documents</b>				
People to whom travel documents were issued		257		
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines		172		
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>				
<b>ICRC visits</b>				
			Women	Minors
Detainees visited and monitored individually		23		
Detainees newly registered		23		
Number of visits carried out		1		
Number of places of detention visited		1		

\* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

Main figures and indicators	ASSISTANCE	Total	Women	Children
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
<b>Economic security, water and habitat</b>				
Food	Beneficiaries	70,000	20%	60%
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	40,860	20%	60%
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	36,400	30%	10%

the Syrian prime minister and again in September for talks with President Assad. While this dialogue somewhat improved the scope of the humanitarian response by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the ICRC, restrictions and security conditions often limited their capacities to meet the needs of thousands of violence-affected people.

Despite these limitations, National Society/ICRC teams were able to conduct assessments in some of the worst-affected areas, subsequently distributing food parcels to 70,000 vulnerable people, as well as essential items such as hygiene articles and school kits, to more than 40,000. With access to medical care severely restricted, supplies and equipment were distributed to health care providers, including National Society emergency teams. As the ICRC's main operational partner, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent received technical support in adapting and strengthening its emergency response structures and services.

The Syrian authorities accepted the ICRC's offer to begin visiting some of those detained in connection with the unrest to monitor their treatment and living conditions. In September, the ICRC conducted its first-ever detention visit in the country to detainees held at the main prison in Damascus, sharing its initial findings and recommendations confidentially with the authorities. Subsequent visits had not taken place by year-end, with discussions continuing in efforts to build trust and mutual confidence and to reach a common understanding of the ICRC's standard working procedures with the aim of expanding visits throughout the country.

Within the severe limitations imposed by the violence, contact was made whenever possible with the Syrian armed and security forces to remind them of applicable international law and standards.

The ICRC established itself as an important reference on the humanitarian situation in the country, with the international and regional media reports based partly on ICRC interviews, news releases and updates.

In parallel, the ICRC continued to conduct longstanding operations related to the occupied Golan. Relatives separated for decades by the demarcation line between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic maintained some contact through the ICRC acting as a neutral intermediary with the authorities concerned. No progress was made in efforts to enable inhabitants of the occupied Golan to visit their families in the Syrian Arab Republic. The ICRC facilitated the transport of the largest apple harvest from the occupied Golan to Syrian markets since the operation began in 2005.

In partnership with the National Society and the authorities, the ICRC pursued a number of projects to alleviate the effects of the drought, including, in hard-to-reach areas, the construction of underground reservoirs, boreholes and water treatment plants.

## CIVILIANS

Following the outbreak of widespread unrest in March, people in many areas faced not only the direct threat of being caught up in violence but also increased difficulties in obtaining access to food and other basic essentials. Their ability to receive emergency treatment and medical care was also seriously affected (see *Wounded and sick*). The ICRC therefore called repeatedly on all those involved in the violence to respect human life and dignity at all times, to exercise restraint and to allow humanitarian workers and medical staff access to those in need. People approached ICRC delegates to report allegations of abuse, although the security situation prevented the organization from collecting such allegations systematically. Families also contacted the ICRC requiring help in locating relatives that they believed had been arrested. Where possible, the ICRC raised these matters with the relevant actors, encouraging them to take measures to prevent the recurrence of abuse and to inform people of the whereabouts of detained family members. Meanwhile, the ICRC/Syrian Arab Red Crescent endeavoured to locate the latter group through their tracing service (see below).

### **Victims receive some aid amidst worsening violence**

At the beginning of the crisis, access to violence-affected areas remained extremely limited. By engaging in talks at the highest level (see *Authorities*), the ICRC and the National Society were gradually able to widen their operational reach to areas including Dara'a, Deir Ez Zor, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Lattakia and rural Damascus, better placing them to clarify the humanitarian situation and economic hardship on the ground (see *Context*). Against this backdrop and to release cash to be used for other purposes, 70,000 people (14,000 households) in the worst-affected areas received a one-off food parcel and baby milk, while 40,860 people were provided with essential items, including some 8,200 with hygiene kits and 30,000 children with school kits.

### **Civilians in the occupied Golan and Syrian Arab Republic maintain contact**

Movements between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be restricted, preventing people in the occupied Golan from visiting relatives living on the other side of the demarcation line. The restrictions remained in place despite ongoing ICRC diplomatic efforts for such visits, discontinued by the Israeli authorities in 1992, to be resumed.

Despite these restrictions and growing civil unrest, civilians living in the occupied Golan were able to maintain limited links facilitated by the ICRC working as a neutral intermediary. During the year, a total of 793 students, pilgrims and other humanitarian cases, including three brides wishing to join their husbands-to-be in the occupied Golan, travelled both ways across the demarcation line with the help of the ICRC in coordination with the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the Israeli and Syrian authorities. A family in the occupied Golan buried a deceased relative after a facilitated transfer over the demarcation line. Syrian nationals in the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic also continued to rely on the ICRC to convey official papers such as power-of-attorney documents, property claims and birth, death and marriage certificates, back and forth between them, enabling recipients to qualify for State allowances or to settle issues such as inheritance or property rights. Furthermore despite the internal strife in the Syrian Arab Republic, Golan farmers increased their income by sending their apple harvest (a record 12,000 tonnes) to markets there for the seventh consecutive year using transportation provided by the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary at the request of the farmers and in coordination with the Israeli and Syrian authorities.

### **Relatives stay in touch through family-links services**

Through the ICRC/Syrian Arab Red Crescent family-links network, including by means of RCMs and telephone calls, people located and maintained contact with relatives detained/interned abroad, notably in Iraq, Lebanon and at the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that Syrian nationals released from the Guantanamo Bay internment facility and transferred to and detained in European countries were able to stay in touch with their families. According to their expressed wishes, two Syrian nationals were helped to return home after their release from detention in Iraq, while the remains of another two former Syrian detainees were repatriated from the same country under the auspices of the ICRC. The ICRC remained at the disposal of Syrian families wishing to visit detained relatives in Iraq or Lebanon.

In total, 257 refugees, primarily Iraqi and stateless persons without valid identification papers, resettled in third countries using travel

documents issued by the ICRC in coordination with the Syrian authorities, organizations such as UNHCR and the embassies concerned.

The prevailing situation of unrest hindered dialogue relating to nationals of other countries unaccounted for and presumed to have gone missing in the Syrian Arab Republic and to Syrian nationals unaccounted for in Israel and Lebanon.

The National Society signalled its aim of strengthening its family-links services by signing an agreement on capacity building with the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC to develop its skills in this field and enhance its information management. The partners were finalizing a plan of action at year-end.

### **Rural farming communities access better quality water supplies**

With the support of the ICRC and the National Society, local water authorities pursued efforts to alleviate the effects of the drought in the north-east of the country, which was entering its fifth year. Each community (in total some 36,400 people) benefited from a response tailored to its location and needs. For example, nomadic families saw the rehabilitation of underground reservoirs and ponds both for their own use and for their livestock. The local authorities in Al-Hassakeh and Deir Ez Zor provinces continued to use the five cistern trucks donated by the ICRC in 2010 to collect water from existing plants and transport it directly to villagers in rural areas free of charge. Where water trucking was not logistically or economically feasible in more remote areas of Deir Ez Zor, Homs and Raqqqa provinces, other solutions were pursued on the basis of field assessments and evaluations carried out in 2010. These included the excavation of underground reservoirs and the construction of reverse osmosis water treatment plants to render salt water drinkable. Plans to construct economical irrigation systems for farming communities were cancelled in favour of other solutions.

## **PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM**

As the numbers of people arrested and detained in connection with the unrest reportedly increased, the ICRC, based on the right of initiative conferred on it by the Movement's Statutes, offered to visit people deprived of their freedom to monitor their treatment and living conditions. Following discussions engaged in during the ICRC president's first visit to Damascus in June (see *Authorities*), the Syrian authorities accepted this offer. In September, thousands of detainees held under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior in Damascus central prison received the first-ever visits by ICRC delegates in the Syrian Arab Republic, during which only 23 had private interviews with the delegates.

Subsequently, delegates' initial findings and recommendations were shared confidentially with the detaining authorities. For the rest of the year, these authorities and the ICRC pursued dialogue aimed at reaching a common understanding of the ICRC's standard working procedures so that detainees, including those in other prisons, could receive regular visits and benefit from the full range of ICRC services. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the vice-minister, and of the Ministry of the Interior, including the minister himself, held a series of bilateral meetings with the ICRC and organized two collective round-tables to explore the issue further. These discussions were ongoing at year-end.

## **WOUNDED AND SICK**

### **Wounded gain better access to medical treatment**

As the internal strife took an increasingly violent turn, the numbers of wounded continued to rise, while the sick experienced greater difficulties in accessing health care owing to the security situation.



To boost these people's chances of getting treatment, State-managed and private hospitals, as well as National Society volunteers, received dressing materials, medical supplies and equipment from the ICRC. With many wounded unable to or wary of seeking treatment in the official health facilities that remained open, many wounded and sick depended increasingly on National Society emergency health teams. Some of them could seek help from four fully equipped mobile health units donated by the ICRC, while the severely injured could be evacuated to hospital with the help of a similarly donated ambulance. In order to deal with the crisis, National Society staff/volunteers also enhanced their own capacities. Volunteers from 13 of the National Society's 14 branches honed their first-aid skills and knowledge of the Safer Access approach at a three-day workshop, while 72 volunteer doctors attended an advanced first-aid course conducted by ICRC surgeons from Geneva, with each participant receiving a minor-surgery kit.

In addition, allegations of abuses against patients, ambulances and medical staff and facilities were documented by the ICRC. This information formed the basis of specific representations to the authorities and others involved in the unrest (see *Civilians*) regarding the respect owed to medical personnel and infrastructure and to unimpeded access to health care. General reminders of this obligation were conveyed through media releases (see *Civil Society*) to reach as wide an audience as possible.

## AUTHORITIES

As the crisis unfolded, dialogue was intensified with the Syrian authorities, including the Interior and Foreign Ministries, to gain their support for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and where necessary remind them of their obligations under applicable laws and norms. In June, the authorities took up the ICRC president's offer to travel to Damascus, where talks were held with the Syrian prime minister. Following this dialogue, the authorities granted the ICRC and the National Society wider access to violence-affected areas (see *Civilians*) and announced they would allow delegates to visit some of those detained in connection with the unrest (see *People deprived of their freedom*). In September, President Assad hosted the ICRC president for further discussions on the humanitarian situation and for the rest of the year dialogue with the Interior and Foreign Ministries continued at the delegation level regarding ICRC visits to detainees.

Owing to the violence, and because the national IHL committee had yet to resume its work, joint training courses and events had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Red Crescent Affairs and the National Society, with ICRC support, organized seminars during which 200 judges enhanced their knowledge of IHL/international human rights law. Furthermore, a senior government official participated in a regional IHL seminar and three judges attended a regional two week train-the-trainer course both held in Beirut (see *Lebanon*).

## ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Early in 2011, the Syrian Armed Forces training unit completed the integration of the IHL curriculum developed in 2008 in cooperation with the ICRC into all levels of the forces' training. Training of high-ranking officers of all branches of the military continued, with 56 such officers strengthening their ability to teach IHL at a four-day ICRC workshop. The onset of the unrest and the involvement of the armed forces and police in the response, however, meant all other training for military and security personnel was cancelled.

Whenever possible within the limitations imposed by the security situation, the armed forces, police and others engaged in violence were reminded of their obligations under applicable international laws and standards.

Briefings for UN peacekeepers deployed along the Israeli-Syrian border continued. Following a significant turnover in UNDOF ranks, around 160 personnel attended briefings on IHL and the ICRC's mandate and activities.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

International and regional media reported on the country's unrest based partly on ICRC news releases, interviews with its staff and updates available through the organization's website, relaying key humanitarian messages to broad audiences. These included calls for all those involved to respect human life and dignity at all times and to respect the wounded and sick and medical workers. National and local media also increased their coverage of the annual transportation of the apple harvest from the occupied Golan to Syrian markets (see *Civilians*), for the first time describing both the ICRC's role in the operation and its other activities in the occupied Golan. Owing to the security situation, Syrian journalists were unable to travel abroad to a regional seminar on IHL, although briefings and seminars took place within the country.

Other influential sectors of society, such as lawyers and university students, reinforced their understanding of the ICRC's mandate and activities and of IHL and humanitarian principles during similar ICRC/National Society events backed up by reference materials. For example, journalism students from private universities deepened their knowledge of the Movement at a course co-organized with the European Commission. Despite the absence of the national IHL committee, law lecturers at Damascus University continued to work on a strategy promoting the inclusion of IHL in the university's curriculum, while lecturers from three law faculties attended a regional IHL course in Beirut (see *Lebanon*).

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

With the ICRC's support, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent played an increasingly important role as the violence intensified, especially in providing relief to affected families and treatment to the wounded and sick wherever security allowed (see *Civilians* and *Wounded and sick*). The National Society reorganized its emergency response set-up, upgraded its radio network and rehabilitated its training centre. These priorities, however, meant that work on reviewing the National Society's statutes and other institutional matters was put on hold.

Although mine-risk education activities and the organization of a summer camp for children were cancelled, the National Society, with ICRC input, drew up a plan of action to play its part in the global communication campaign relating to the Health Care in Danger project, and ran another campaign to promote correct use of the Movement's emblems and introduce its own new logo with the aim of strengthening its identity. To aid in these endeavours, communication staff sharpened their skills at a three-day workshop.

Movement partners in the country met regularly to coordinate their activities.