



ICRC

March 2011

REGIONAL DELEGATION BANGKOK

Editorial



As the new Head of the ICRC Regional Delegation Bangkok, I am very glad to address our readers with these few words. I discovered, as you will also do when reading this newsletter that the activities of a regional delegation are more than organizing seminars on various humanitarian topics.

Last November, for example, South Thailand suffered the worst floods in decades. As the ICRC was present in the Southern provinces, it was able, together with our Movement partner the Thai Red Cross Society (TRCS), to bring survival kits to about 4,000 families.

More recently, the ICRC worked closely with both the Thai and Cambodian Red Cross to assist thousands of affected people following border clashes.

In Thailand and Cambodia, the ICRC visits regularly thousands of detainees to assess their living conditions and treatment, with a special attention for vulnerable categories such as foreigners, women and children.

This indicates that the ICRC, in close cooperation with the National Societies and the authorities of the countries covered by the delegation, is close to the victims wherever and when the need arises.

It does not mean, however, that seminars are not important! They play a crucial role in preventing suffering by informing and training those who can influence the fate of the victims, whether it is in the field of health and sanitation in detention, or for those who suffer as a result of injuries caused by mines.

Jaques Stroun
Head of Regional Delegation Bangkok

Thailand-Cambodia: Assistance of People Affected by the Armed Clashes

Armed clashes between Thailand and Cambodia displaced some 30,000 people in the two countries between 4 and 8 February. The ICRC, the Thai Red Cross Society and the Cambodian Red Cross took steps to alleviate the human consequences of these clashes. The main effort focused on displaced persons, who lacked many basic necessities.

The National Societies distributed food, tarpaulins, blankets, clothes, mosquito nets, bottled water and buckets. The ICRC sent health personnel and water engineers to both countries, to help conduct a thorough assessment of the health and hygiene situation.

Following those assessments, the ICRC supported in Thailand one school damaged by a shell with tents, desks and chairs to replace temporarily the destroyed classrooms before their reconstruction. Villagers who had their home damaged received as well ICRC assistance in the form of kitchen ware, bedding sets and relief kits for 57 families. In Cambodia, the ICRC provided the frontline

military hospital C1, which also caters to the civilian population, with dressing kits and medicine. ICRC also provided 10 water tanks and replenished part of the Cambodian Red Cross emergency stock with 250 kits of food and kitchen ware.

“Thanks to our long presence in both countries, we were able immediately to contact both governments in Thailand and Cambodia to bring to their attention our humanitarian concern”, said Jacques Stroun, Head of the Regional Delegation Bangkok. “In the current situation, IHL regulating international armed conflicts applied. Consequently, the military operations must be conducted in conformity with the four 1949 Geneva Conventions”, he added.

Delegates of the ICRC will continue to follow the humanitarian situation closely, in order to perform their activities according to the needs identified and, whenever needs arise, to scale them up and fulfil the tasks entrusted to the ICRC by the Geneva Conventions.



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Visiting Detainees: An Often Misunderstood Activity



dialogue must be free from recriminatory exchange and political considerations that would be liable to divert ICRC activities from their sole objective, which is humanitarian. What is more, confidentiality undeniably facilitates access, particularly to places which the authorities are reluctant to open to external observers.

In 2010, ICRC delegates visited close to 500,000 detainees held in 1,890 places of detention in 74 countries, including those detained in four different international courts.

In Cambodia, in 2010, the ICRC delegates visited more than 8,000 detainees in 19 prisons around the country. Among those visited detainees were five Thai nationals arrested in late December 2010. Three detainees were released, and the remaining two were sentenced. Since then, the ICRC visited them regularly, as foreigners belong to the category of vulnerable detainees (far from home, different environment and language, difficulties to get family visits), as are women and children for example.

Moreover, in relation with the recent clashes at the Thai-Cambodia border, the ICRC met on 8 February a Thai soldier captured during the fighting, just before his release in Phnom Penh.

In Thailand, the ICRC visits people held in connection with the situation of unrest in the south of the country. In 2010, the ICRC visited some 650 detainees in various places of detention. On an ad hoc base, the ICRC provides also assistance when needed. For example, during the floods in November 2010, the ICRC distributed drinking water to six detention facilities.

Under its mandate granted to the organization by the international community, the ICRC has been visiting people deprived of their freedom since 1915. Since then, the organization has developed a considerable expertise in bringing a minimum of humanity to places of detention worldwide.

The purposes of ICRC visits to detainees are to assess their treatment and living conditions, and to ensure that their physical and mental well-being are fully respected. Visits only have a tangible effect on the treatment of prisoners if there is open and sincere dialogue with the authorities responsible for the places of detention, for they are the only authorities in a position to impose remedial measures aiming to correct the dysfunctional problems and to apply sanctions in the event of the abuse of power.

For the authorities, ICRC visits give an accurate and objective picture of the prisons' condition. It can help to ease potential tensions between detainees and prison's personnel and facilitate the daily management of the facility. When needed, the ICRC can also offer its expertise in improving the prison's infrastructure and health.

The ICRC is known and sometimes criticized for the discretion surrounding its visits and in particular its observations. Its attitude is often misunderstood, particularly by the media and certain public opinions. The organization is sometimes seen as a secret institution.

Confidentiality is a working method and a strategic choice in this specific activity. The ICRC seeks cooperation rather than confrontation with the authorities and is committed to maintaining direct and frank dialogue, which can make the difference if they can be persuaded to do so. That

A Long but Worthwhile Journey



Helping families visit their relatives in custody is an important part of ICRC detention work worldwide. In Thailand, since 2005, the ICRC has helped 90 families to make the long trip from southern Thailand to Bangkok, to visit relatives held there in connection with the violence travel from the south to Bangkok.

The visits are often emotional journeys for all

concerned, as they offer a chance for prisoners and families to speak to one another freely and for much longer than the standard prison visiting times allows. For most detainees, many of whom are married and have children, these visits are a rare opportunity to see their families.

As part of its international mandate, the ICRC conducts programmes like this one in many countries around the world.



Water and Habitat in Detention Places

Health in prison is also very much depended on hygiene and living conditions in places of detention. How to improve prisons' infrastructures was the focus of the seminar that took place in Jakarta in October 2010. Eighteen high-level penitentiary officers from eight countries gathered for the first time during three days to share ways to improve prison system in Southeast Asia, particularly issues concerning water and sanitation.

In addition to being a great platform for networking, the seminar allowed the participants to share knowledge and experiences through presentations – with hundreds of slides in some cases – and informal sessions.

Such cross-pollination led to the blossoming of many ideas. One of the issues that cropped up most often during discussions is of “national standard”. The delegates are concerned that without any clear standard, there would be no measurement. This would affect administration, implementation and even the budgets. The Philippine delegation for instance has proposed a future national standard in collaboration with the ICRC.

Participants have also shown interests in ICRC visits to help improve prison conditions.

The seminar wrapped up with all countries interested in holding similar seminar annually.

“Bad Health in Prison is Bad Public Health”

Detention centres are often popularly cast as places for the undesirables, those who live on the fringes of society. The standard of detainee treatment can therefore be below what is deemed acceptable. However, what happens inside these institutions has ramifications well beyond their barb-wired walls.

“Bad health in prison is bad public health because prison is a fantastic place to breed diseases,” said Dr Bruce Eshaya-Chauvin, ICRC Regional Health Delegate who was fresh off a workshop ICRC hosted with Cambodian detention authorities in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Within the region covered by the Bangkok Delegation, healthcare in detention is an activity that ICRC emphasises. The workshop in Cambodia is the latest development in boosting understanding of healthcare in detention with involved governmental bodies, and strengthened inter-ministerial cooperation.

In cooperation with the General Department of Prisons, the ICRC has organized for the second time an inter-ministerial seminar between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health from 28-

29 September on “Health in prison settings.” More than 150 participants, including deputy-governors, prison directors, prison health staff, heads of health departments of most provinces, as well as some hospital directors attended the seminar. All NGOs and International Organizations working on health or related issues in prisons in the country where also present.

Dr Eshaya-Chauvin said there was much advancement since the first seminar held last year, with cooperation between the Ministries of Health and Interior improving, and the Ministry of Health formally committing to support prison health posts through training and follow-up on HIV/ AIDS and TB treatments. A meeting is also held every two months in an effort to keep all parties involved abreast.

The seminar gave participants from neighbouring countries the chance to exchange ideas and cooperate. For example, a delegation of the Thai Department of Corrections was able to share their experiences in fighting TB in prisons and how to enhance cooperation between the Ministries of Justice and Public Health. In preparation of the seminar, a Khmer translation of the ‘Guidelines on TB in Prisons’ was printed and distributed across Cambodia, forming the basis of a coherent approach to TB for all relevant parties.

Southern Thailand: Baby Soraiya Symbolizes Hope as Flood Victims Recover

The floods that hit southern Thailand in November were the worst the region has experienced for 70 years. Families took to the rooftops in order to escape the rising water, with many remaining cut off for days after the rain had stopped. Working in close cooperation, the ICRC and the Thai Red Cross delivered emergency supplies and stoves to stranded families.

Not every two-day-old baby has her home submerged under two metres of water. But Soraiya Madao has survived Thailand's worst floods in decades.

The village of Nam Khang lies on the border of Songkhla and Pattani provinces, sandwiched between two canals, and flooding is an annual occurrence for the Madaos. But this year's flood went beyond anybody's imagination. Esah Madao is Soraiya's great-aunt and the matriarch of the family. "We get flooding every year, but it's never more than knee height. This year it just gushed in. After three days of non-stop rain, we all had to move upstairs."

The Madaos were well-prepared. They made a raft out of banana tree trunks and plastic barrels, so that all their possessions would rise along with the water. But despite all their precautions Esah's thatched shack was unable to resist the floods and the family fled to nearby Ban Tamnearb School along with their neighbours.

Esah had stored food for the family and shared it with her fellow flood victims at the school, but her stock soon ran out. The district office sent in a boat to deliver basic



supplies, but those were soon gone as well.

As the floods subsided, the ICRC was able to work with local NGO head Anchana Heemina to deliver emergency packages to Esah and her neighbours. Anchana's contacts with local communities gave her a crucial role in ensuring that people in remote hamlets received packages – especially along the border between the provinces of Songkhla and Pattani.

The operation proved a challenge for everyone, as Pattani and other southern provinces were hit by the worst floods in 70 years, with some areas submerged to a depth of three metres. Thailand suffered a series of floods after incessant rain in the north caused water to overflow into the central plain and parts of the north-east.

Bart Vermeiren heads the ICRC team in Pattani. He spoke enthusiastically of teamwork with other organizations, explaining that the ICRC "couldn't have done what we did without the Thai Red Cross and the local authorities."

Mariah Narapitakkul, Chairman of the Pattani

Provincial Red Cross Chapter, reciprocates: "We are grateful for the assistance of the ICRC," she said. "There was no food, no water and no cooking gas, and we couldn't get through to the affected areas because the roads were cut off."

Around 4,000 families received emergency deliveries of dry food packages, canned food and fresh eggs, and about 1,000 gas stoves were distributed to families stranded on the roofs of their homes so that they could cook.

For Esah and her friends and families, the eggs distributed by the ICRC and the Thai Red Cross became an important source of nourishment. "They give us energy and kept us going," she explained.

"Food and water were the most important items on the list," said Vermeiren. "These will enable people to survive as they start to rebuild their lives."

Esah smiles at her great-niece. But Soraiya is fast asleep in her mother's arms, oblivious to her role as a symbol of resilience, hope and a new beginning.

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