



# NEWSLETTER

ICRC - JULY 2012

## ICRC IN SOUTH SUDAN

### INTERVIEW WITH THE ICRC HEAD OF DELEGATION

Melker Mabeck arrived in Juba in late April as the ICRC head of delegation in South Sudan. He assumes this role as the ICRC expands its activities in the country, bringing humanitarian assistance to people who need it most.

#### **What was the human cost of the recent fighting between South Sudan and Sudan?**

There were grave consequences for people living in border areas. Thousands of families fled their homes, leaving their belongings behind them. Part of our job is to remind those involved in the fighting that they must always take steps to protect civilians and avoid causing displacement. The ICRC and its partner the South Sudan Red Cross were alone in providing food and essential items like mosquito nets to many of those displaced families.

#### **What is your role in visiting detainees?**

A key part of the ICRC's worldwide humanitarian mandate is to visit prisoners of war and other conflict-related detainees to ensure they are treated decently and kept in reasonable conditions. The South Sudanese government has confirmed the ICRC's unconditional access to prisoners of war. As a neutral intermediary in the armed conflict, the ICRC has also recently facilitated the repatriation of prisoners of war with the consent of both countries.

#### **How do you see the situation developing in South Sudan?**

Unfortunately, it is difficult to foresee much positive change in the near future. South Sudan is prey to a range of humanitarian

challenges generated by armed conflict. The country is also suffering the consequences of fighting in the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile in Sudan, from where many thousands of families flood into refugee camps on this side of the border. The ICRC takes action to tackle emergencies. For instance, we are piping water into Jamam camp to alleviate severe shortages and stave off a potential cholera outbreak.

Moreover, a number of armed groups operate in different parts of the country. Whether in Northern Jonglei or in Western Equatoria, fighting has often targeted civilians and their property, causing death, injury and loss of livelihoods. Sporadic but intense inter-communal violence has also been a sad feature of the South Sudanese landscape.

#### **What are the ICRC's priorities and challenges in South Sudan over the next six months?**

Given the scale of the population's needs, the ICRC will continue to step up its activities, particularly in the north of the country.

We are committed to supporting Malakal Teaching Hospital and providing access to clean water for urban and rural communities in Unity state. We will pursue our efforts to restore contact between family members separated by fighting. We will also remain very much focused on promoting compliance

with international humanitarian law and intervening swiftly when weapon bearers violate those rules.

Logistics will always be a challenge in South Sudan, especially in the rainy season. The strength of the ICRC lies in delivering a broad range of humanitarian activities to meet the needs of communities affected by armed conflict, from providing health care to restoring contact between family members. We help people get through an emergency by providing food, water and shelter, but we are also looking to bring a degree of self-sufficiency to those affected by fighting through longer-term programmes.



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# KEEPING THE WATER FLOWING IN RURAL UNITY STATE

**“When the well runs dry, we learn the worth of water.” The ICRC has launched a three-year project to improve access to clean water for the population of Pariang county in the north of conflict-affected Unity state.**

Wengoth village consists of a modest array of huts scattered for kilometres along the road to nearby Yida refugee camp. Early each morning, women and children trek across scorched earth to the water pump that stands alone on a patch of scrubland to the village’s northern edge. That solitary pump is the only source of clean water for Wengoth and another six neighbouring villages, a lifeline for thousands of people surviving in an inhospitable landscape.

At 7 a.m. one April morning, a group of women chat and laugh together as they wait their turn at the pump, jostling for space with a flock of thirsty goats. Ajak Biem, a young mother of two, explains that it takes her an hour to get there from home. “Life here is hard. I leave my children at home while I fetch water because they’re too small to help. When

I get back, they’ll be hungry and I’ll need to cook for them and then clean the house.”

Life became even harder when the Wengoth pump broke down earlier this year. “The impact on villagers is enormous,” says Claudio Deola, ICRC chief water engineer in South Sudan. “If a pump breaks down, people are forced to walk much longer distances to get clean water or they drink from open ponds. Either way, this is bad for communities. It creates a public-health risk or reduces the time available for people to farm, fish or carry out other activities essential for their livelihood.”

In this remote area where communities struggle to acquire the spare parts, the expertise and the tools required to make repairs, the ICRC has begun overhauling existing water facilities. So far this year, more than 20 hand pumps and a water yard have been repaired, ensuring that 12,000 people living in isolated villages have access to clean water within a reasonable walking distance.

The next stage of the three-year project

includes installing solar panels to power three key water yards – a sustainable and cost-effective way to replace generator-run systems.

Back in Wengoth, Ajak explains how her own life was affected. “When the pump stopped working here, I had to walk all the way to Yida to fetch water, which is a round trip of about four hours from my house. Now it is up and running again, my journey has been halved. It means the children aren’t clamouring for food when I get back, it means I have more time to get the chores done.”

**“If a pump breaks down, people are forced to walk much longer distances to get clean water or they drink from open ponds.”**

The ICRC has made it easier for 12,000 people to access clean water in rural Unity state



# REBUILDING LIFE AFTER A LANDMINE ACCIDENT



the centre's courtyards are an ideal place for disabled patients to begin rebuilding their strength

**At 20 years old, Mary has spent most of her life in and out of hospital. The trouble started in 1997 when, aged six, she went out for a walk and life was never the same again.**

In the courtyards of the centre for people with physical disabilities in Juba, with one operation completed and another on the horizon, Mary takes a moment to reflect on her life. "My parents are both dead; my mum passed away after we fled to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. I came back to South Sudan in 2008 to start over."

The intervening years have not clouded Mary's memory of a walk she took 14 years ago. She can still see the path up ahead, where children were playing with a metallic-looking object. She can still hear the vast explosion that rang out as she passed them by, sending her reeling. She also remembers how it felt when she tried to pick herself up and run, only to find she no longer could.

Gerd Van de Velde, ICRC technical orthopaedist at the centre for people with physical disabilities, has been working on Mary's case for several months. "Because Mary lost her leg very young, we have had to replace her prosthesis regularly as she has grown. The

X-ray of her thighbone shows a lack of development and strength because it has borne little or no weight."



Mary and a friend at the centre for the physically disabled in Juba, where thousands of disabled people receive treatment every year

A few weeks after her right leg was shattered in the mine accident, Mary was flown to Lokichoggio in Kenya where until 2006 the ICRC ran a hospital for war-wounded patients. The terrible extent of the damage left surgeons with no choice but to amputate above the knee. Lucky to be alive, Mary spent much of the following year in the hospital slowly learning to walk again with an artificial leg. Hospital stays became a part of life from then on.

"Mary's thighbone has grown needle-shaped and is digging painfully into her skin when she walks. She now needs corrective surgery," explains Mr Van de Velde. So next stop for Mary is Malakal Teaching Hospital, where ICRC surgeons will perform an operation that could transform her life.

"I am the lucky one because I survived that day and those other children did not. I am grateful for the chances I have. Now, I am back at school. My brother helps me with the fees but it is not always easy. I'm in Senior 1 now and I want to keep learning, that's the most important thing."

## SEED, TOOLS AND FOOD REACH THOUSANDS DISPLACED IN THE ABYEI AREA



15,000 people were given sesame, groundnuts and sorghum seed, plus tools for tilling and some food



Two boys in a village near Agok, Abyei area, during a distribution of seed and tools to displaced people

**Clashes in the Abyei area last year caused over 100,000 people to flee south, leaving their homes and belongings behind. Most do not yet feel safe enough to return home.**

Aciei Lual is 35 years old and used to cook and sell food at Moulom village market in Abyei. When her village was attacked, she fled with her seven children. As they ran, her brother-in-law was shot dead. "I saw people dropping on my left, on my right and behind me," recalls Lual. "But God said it was not my day to die. We stepped over many dead bodies and kept on going."

Since clashes broke out last year in Abyei, thousands of families have been forced to flee. Many, like Lual, ended up in remote villages around Agok, a town in the southern part of the disputed Abyei area. Months after leaving home, these families are struggling to survive.

In April 2012, the ICRC provided seed and farming tools to approximately 15,000 people affected by the fighting. Katia De Keukeleire, the head of the ICRC sub-delegation in Wau, explains that the aim is to help families with some land to become self-sufficient. "The arrival of so many families has placed a burden on host communities, whose food resources were already limited. Some villages in the area have seen their populations double."

"With the rains approaching, it will soon be very difficult to reach this area," says Ms De Keukeleire. "The aid we distributed will enable families to produce food to eat or sell. They cannot afford to lose another harvest."

Ahead of the planting season, each family received staples such as sesame, groundnuts and sorghum seed, plus tools for tilling and some food to ensure that the seed was planted and not eaten.

This aid is part of a sustained effort by the ICRC to support those displaced by armed conflict in the area. In October and November 2011, the organization distributed over 1,200 fishing kits to families living in villages north of Agok. The same families also received various household essentials, such as mosquito nets and kitchen sets.

For Lual, the aid represents a chance to build a life for herself and her family. "It is good to receive these seeds and tools because then we can survive on what we produce."



The ICRC regularly visits SPLA divisions and brigades to conduct IHL information sessions for officers

## ARMY OFFICERS LEARN HOW TO TEACH THE LAW OF WAR

**As South Sudan prepares to accede to the Geneva Conventions, the new country's army (the Sudan People's Liberation Army, SPLA) is taking measures to ensure its soldiers know and obey the rules.**

The SPLA Command and Staff College in Malou, near Rumbek, is housed in a former British barracks built around the middle of last century. Set amid the peace and quiet of the countryside, Malou is the ideal place to apply the mind to the rigours of international humanitarian law (IHL).

IHL, also called the law of war and the law of armed conflict, is a set of universally applicable rules that apply in situations of armed conflict. These rules limit the methods and means of warfare in order to protect people who are not, or are no longer, taking part in hostilities. IHL seeks to protect human dignity and alleviate suffering in times of war.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions are the core of IHL, and newly independent South Sudan is on the point of acceding to them, with a bill currently going through the National

Legislative Assembly. When the bill passes into law, South Sudan will be committed to ensuring that its army complies with the rules.

SPLA regulations already make it clear that all personnel are required to comply with IHL. Of course, soldiers need to know the law to comply with it, and to this end the ICRC has held regular IHL information sessions for SPLA troops since it began working in southern Sudan in 1986. To help the SPLA develop its own pool of qualified IHL instructors, the ICRC recently invited 20 officers to gather in Malou to learn how to teach the law to others.

During 10 days in February, the officers, who work in the main SPLA training institutions across the country, learnt about all aspects of IHL and the techniques required to teach it. In one exercise, the officers had to lead a platoon of men on a mock operation against a fictitious enemy, making sure the rules were respected at all times.

"The course was very clear, practical and well

structured," said Major Johnson Malual Aciek, the chief instructor at the Command and Staff College in Malou, who attended the training course. "All soldiers should know the rules of IHL off by heart to keep the army disciplined and to protect civilians, and our task now is to make sure they do."

Delivering the training in Malou, Andrew Bell, ICRC Armed Forces delegate, said he was pleased with the commitment shown by the participants. "As a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, South Sudan's army will need to ensure the rules set out in the Conventions are incorporated into training, policy and operations. It can count on ICRC support for that task."

**"All soldiers should know the rules of IHL off by heart."**



Volunteers are the driving force behind the South Sudan Red Cross Society, says its secretary general Arthur Poole

## SOUTH SUDAN RED CROSS ON TRACK FOR INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

**The South Sudan Red Cross is a volunteer-led humanitarian organization that is working towards becoming the 189th member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It is developing its response capacity with wide-ranging support from the ICRC.**

March 2012 was a landmark month in the life of the South Sudan Red Cross, which was officially founded following the independence of South Sudan. It was in March that the President of the Republic signed an act recognizing the SSRC as the new country's only Red Cross, guaranteeing its status as an independent organization with a key role as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

This marked a moment of great achievement for all those who had dedicated their time over the last 40 years to developing the organization and its network of 10 branches nationwide. The South Sudan Red Cross Act is a vital step along the path to international recognition, as is the development of the Society's governance structures. As the SSRC prepares to hold its first General Assembly later this year, its Secretary-General, Arthur Poole, says the organization is growing.

"The SSRC has over 2,000 members nationwide. These members elect their peers to positions in the branches or on national governing boards and committees, which guide the South Sudan Red Cross in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities," explains Mr Poole. "These developments will ensure the SSRC is truly representative of South Sudanese society and that it abides by the fundamental principles at the heart of the Movement, like neutrality and impartiality."

According to Mr Poole, fully-fledged membership of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will enhance staff and volunteers' sense of belonging. "The SSRC will be connected to and supported by a worldwide humanitarian movement but led by South Sudanese volunteers throughout the country, on hand to respond to emergencies and support local communities. International recognition is a huge milestone but, at local level, it's about people giving their time to help those in need."

Along with other Movement partners, the ICRC provides structural, financial, material and logistical support to the South Sudan Red Cross Society, as well as training and advice to develop its ability to respond to the needs of the people of South Sudan.

### TO FIND OUT MORE:

Visit our website at [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) or contact:

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### MISSION

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 armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC 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 Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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