



ICRC

NEWS LETTER

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The ICRC: mission

The ICRC is an impartial, neutral and independent organisation. Its exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance.

The ICRC directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in situations of armed conflict.

The ICRC also endeavours to alleviate 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.

Since 1986, the ICRC has had a permanent presence in Afghanistan, carrying out its humanitarian activities such as visits to detainees, re-establishment of family ties, assistance to the civilian population, promotion of International Humanitarian Law, and support to the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS).



Protect and assist

Many humanitarian actors are present in Afghanistan today but very few organisations have access to assist persons deprived of freedom, an extremely vulnerable segment of the population. Detainees are often forgotten by the general public and foreign organisations alike.

The ICRC has visited detainees in Afghanistan since 1986. As many detainees have no one else than the ICRC to turn to, their fate and well-being is of major concern to us. This is not only the case in Afghanistan, but also around the world. As this issue of the *ICRC Newsletter* explains, visiting men and women deprived of their freedom is a central component of the ICRC's humanitarian mandate.

Having started to visit prisoners of war in 1915 and with visits carried out in 75 countries in 2002, the ICRC has a long experience in dealing with detainees and detaining authorities worldwide. This expertise is particularly valuable in Afghanistan where the internal conflict between Governmental and US-Coalition forces on the one hand, and opposition groups on the other, results in a number of persons detained.

The visits of the ICRC make an important difference for many detainees as well as their families in many countries torn by conflict. We work to ensure that detainees are provided with decent conditions, are treated humanely and are able to stay in touch with their families through Red Cross Messages - often the only link between the detainees and their loved ones.

Since it started visiting Afghan detention places in the mid-eighties, the ICRC as a neutral organisation has been able to work with all governments and opposition groups because it always works in strict confidentiality in order to obtain tangible results. The ICRC also visits detainees held by Coalition forces.

As Afghanistan moves towards reconstruction, the country is going through changes and transition. Our commitment to those deprived of their freedom doesn't change. It remains as strong as ever.

Pierre Wettach
Head of the International Committee
of the Red Cross in Afghanistan

Ensuring respect for the life and dignity of

All people deprived of their freedom, including those detained for political reasons or due to conflict, are entitled to be treated humanely.

To ensure this, the ICRC visits detainees in 75 countries and monitors their treatment and conditions of detention. In Afghanistan, where the internal conflict between Governmental and Coalition forces on the one hand, and opposition groups on the other, results in a number of persons detained, the ICRC visits some 60 Afghan and US places of detention, including prisons, police stations, and interrogation centres.

Our actions and methods

The ICRC as a neutral organisation enters into a confidential dialogue on these subjects with the authorities in charge. The organisation does not speak in public about the conditions in the places of detention.

However, the visits of its delegates and their findings are the subject of reports and recommendations to the authorities.

In order that its visits to detainees may lead to concrete and credible proposals, the ICRC first submits to the detaining authorities - in Afghanistan these are the Afghan and Coalition authorities - its requirements in order for visits to take place.

For ICRC detention visits to take place, delegates must be allowed:

- to have access to all persons detained and to all places where they are held.
- to speak freely and in private with all detainees.
- to record identities and particulars of the detainees, and to be informed by the detaining authorities about arrests, transfers, releases, etc.
- to repeat the visits on a regular basis.

For various reasons, detainees have difficulties to maintain contact with their families. As a principle, they should be allowed to exchange news of strictly familial character with their next of kin. The ICRC offers the possibility to use Red Cross Messages (RCMs) to that effect.

Depending on the needs, the ICRC also contributes to the well-being of the detainees by providing some essential items such as soap, blankets and clothes.

In Afghanistan, years of conflict have caused massive destruction and lack of maintenance throughout the country. Detention places have also been affected, and in some cases the ICRC has supported rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities.





The difference they made

Detention authorities throughout the world do not always welcome delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as warmly as the director in Kunduz Central Prison does. Abdul Halim Rahimi - a former detainee himself - knows from his own experience what difference a visit from the Red Cross can mean to many prisoners and is thankful that the organisation visits the people detained in his prison. At the age of 28, he was detained in the Pul-i-Charkhi prison in Kabul in 1988 where he spent two years. When the ICRC came to register him it was his first meeting with the organisation he had heard about ever since he went to school. "The ICRC brought us some very basic items such as soap, shampoo and clothing to improve conditions a little bit. I was lucky to be visited by my family, but I knew lots of other detainees who only managed to stay in contact with their relatives through Red Cross messages," says Abdul Halim Rahimi.

His experience from when he was detained in the late 1980's is part of the reason that he warmly welcomes the ICRC in the central prison of Kunduz today.

"I have been a detainee myself and I know what it is like to be deprived of your freedom," he says.

Being on the other side of the table, Mr. Rahimi today believes that every detainee - no matter what the reason for his or her detention is - should be treated humanely. He struggles to provide the basic needs with very little funding. Some prisoners receive assistance and visits from their families - others don't.

"Medicine and winter clothing are examples of assistance which make an important difference for the detainees. With the funding I get at the moment I haven't got the budget for all the basic needs," explains Abdul Halim Rahimi.

In Kunduz Central Prison, the ICRC has access to register and see all detainees, to interview them individually and carry out repeated visits. Mr. Rahimi says that he does not in any way find the presence of the delegates as interfering with his job - on the contrary.

"I am very pleased to let the ICRC see every single detainee. If there is something wrong, they will tell me. I wish the best possible conditions for the detainees and that way I can improve them," says Abdul Halim Rahimi.

The ICRC works to re-establish family links in all situations of armed conflict or internal violence. Each year, hundreds of thousands of new cases of people sought by their relatives are treated. Those who are located are given the opportunity to send and receive Red Cross Messages (RCM) and/or are put in contact with their families thanks to the worldwide network supported by the ICRC and consisting of more than 180 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

For detainees and their families, receiving news of their loved ones is always of huge importance. In a wide range of contexts, including Afghanistan, the ICRC has given prisoners of war, civilian internees, security detainees and sometimes also common-law detainees the opportunity to communicate with their relatives.

RCMs are a simple way to restore family links worldwide and in Afghanistan. RCMs in Afghanistan are collected and distributed by the ICRC in collaboration with the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS). These messages allow many families separated by the conflict to keep in touch with each other and exchange family news. For detainees, RCMs often represent the only link they have with their loved ones. The messages are for sharing personal news only and may not include any political statements.

While visiting detainees, ICRC delegates offer them the chance to write to their family. In Afghanistan, the ICRC every year collects and distributes thousands of Red Cross messages. In the months September and October 2003 alone more than 3,500 messages were exchanged.

1	 RED CROSS FAMILY MESSAGE	
پیغام خانوادگی صلیب سرخ دسره صلیب کورني پیغام		
سر مياشت		
2. SENDER		
فرستنده پیغام / دپیغام استونکي		
نام مکمل مطابق رسم معمول		
FULL NAME: (as expressed locally) پوره نوم چی وړباندی شهرت لری		
نام پدر		
Father's name: دپلار نوم		
Grand Father's name: نام پدر کلان		
TRIBE: دټبرکه نوم		
کام (قوم)		
PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY OR SUBGOVERNMENT AND PROVINCE):		
دزیادهلو ځای (شکار یا ولسوالی او ولایت) محل تولد (شهر، ولسوالی و ولایت)		
FULL ADDRESS: آدرس مکمل فعلی:		
Street and number: کوچه و نره ځای		
Locality and Postal code: کوچه او نره ځای		
Region/ Country: محل و نره پوسټی		
Telephone No: ناحیه او دپوسټی ټبر		
منطقه، ولایت، مملکت		
نره ټیلفون / دټیلفون ټبر		
3. ADDRESSEE		
مرسل الیه / دپیغام اخستونکي		
نام مکمل مطابق رسم معمول		
FULL NAME: (as expressed locally) پوره نوم چی وړباندی شهرت لری		
نام پدر		
Father's name: دپلار نوم		
Grand Father's name: نام پدر کلان		
TRIBE: دټبرکه نوم		
کام (قوم)		
PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY OR SUBGOVERNMENT AND PROVINCE):		
دزیادهلو ځای (شکار یا ولسوالی او ولایت) محل تولد (شهر، ولسوالی و ولایت)		
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Region/ Country: محل و نره پوسټی		
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منطقه، ولایت، مملکت		
نره ټیلفون / دټیلفون ټبر		
4. INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS		
کمیته بین المللی صلیب سرخ		
دسره صلیبکب نړیواله کمیټه		
19, AVENUE DE LA PAIX		
ژنیو (سوئیس)		
CH - 1202 GENEVA		

"Dear father, I am alive"

Adam Khan is clearly full of expectations when he greets the small delegation from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in front of his house.

"You haven't been here for a long time. I have been waiting for you", he says though pleasantly surprised with the visit. He knows that the ICRC carries a message from his son currently detained by U.S. authorities in Guantanamo, Cuba.

He invites the guests into his house, and tea and nuts are brought into the room. Mr. Khan's other sons, cousins and grandchildren left their early morning duties in the house or in the fields when they saw the ICRC car. Now they all gather close to get the news from their detained relative.

None of the members of Adam Khan's family can read or write, so Mr. Khan asks the staff member from the ICRC to read the message to him. While listening, it is difficult for him to hold back his tears:

"I am well, healthy and I hope all the family is fine. ...Don't worry about me..I am still alive. I think about you," the son writes in the message.

Having received four Red Cross messages from his son over the past two years, Adam Khan knows that the ICRC has no influence on the release of his son - or any other detainee. But still the letters make a big difference to him and the rest of the family.

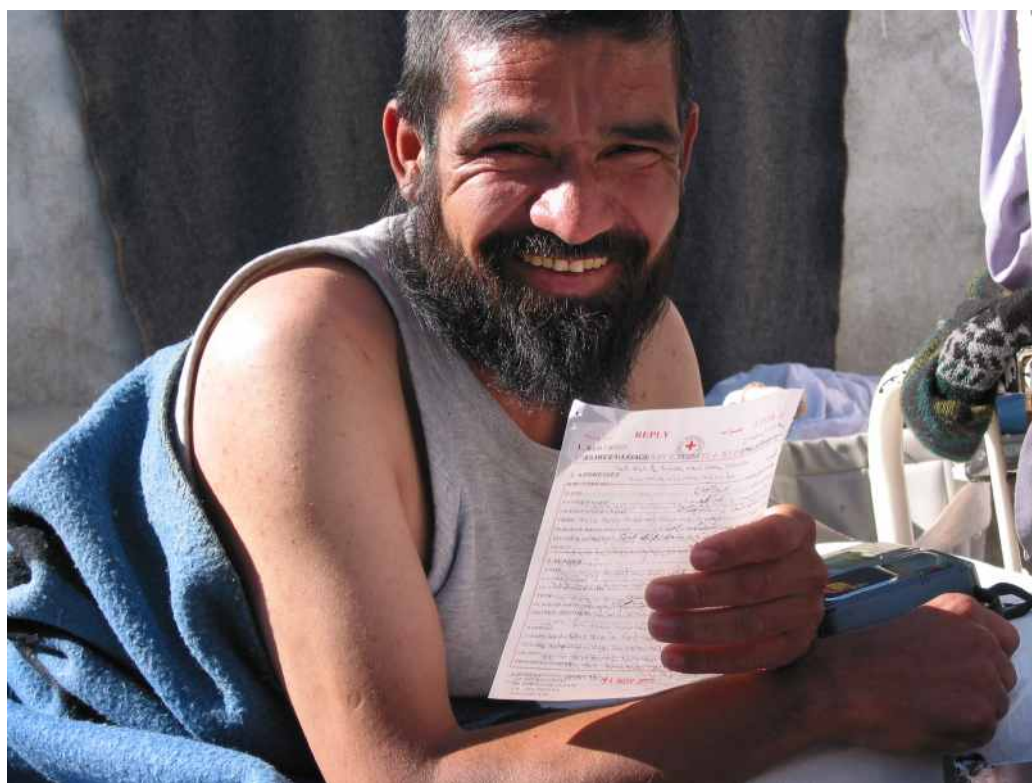
"These letters from the Red Cross are the only opportunity we have to know that our son is alive and in good health. And we can tell him how we are at home", he says, adding that his son might worry a lot about them. "We will tell that our lives go on and we still work on the land. It will be good for him to know that we are all fine, that we miss him and are waiting for him", says Adam Khan.

The first time Adam Khan learned that his son was detained was two years ago when the ICRC brought him a message written in Kandahar where the son was detained at the time.

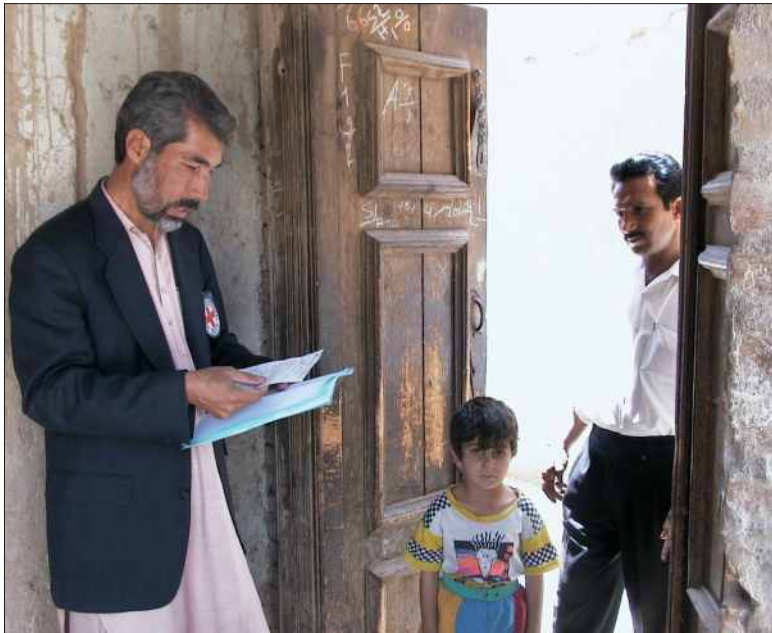
Later, he was transferred to Guantanamo where the ICRC continued to visit him and enabled him to write Red Cross messages to which the family has replied.

This morning, Mr. Khan is keen to write back to his son whom he hasn't seen for more than two years. He dictates to the ICRC representative what he wants to write to his son.

"If we didn't have these messages we wouldn't know where our son was or if he was dead or alive - and he wouldn't know how we are at home," says Adam Khan.



(Library Photo)



Despite efforts to achieve world peace in the wake of two world wars, armed conflict remains a prominent feature of our human landscape. The resort to arms continues to be a means of settling differences between nations, peoples and ethnic groups with the accompanying toll of death and suffering.

The guiding principle of the ICRC is that even in war there are limits on how warfare is conducted and how combatants behave. The set of rules that were established with this in mind is known as international humanitarian law. The bedrock of this is the Geneva

Conventions signed by more than 190 countries in the world including Afghanistan. The ICRC's special role has been assigned to it by these States. However, while it maintains a constant dialogue with States, it insists at all times on its independence.

Only if it is free to act independently of any government or other authority can the ICRC serve the true interests of the victims of conflict, which lie at the heart of its humanitarian mission.

The tasks of the ICRC include:

- visits to people deprived of their freedom
- Transmission of news between family members separated by conflict
- reunification of dispersed families
- provision of food, water and medical assistance to civilians without access to these basic necessities
- spreading knowledge of humanitarian law
- monitoring compliance with that law
- drawing attention to violations and contributing to the development of humanitarian law

The ICRC has delegations in some 60 countries around the world and has activities in more than 80. The organisation employs some 12.000 people world wide.



The ICRC operation in Afghanistan

The ICRC started working in the Afghan context in 1979, when it provided medical assistance to the war-wounded in Peshawar and Quetta in neighbouring Pakistan. A permanent ICRC presence in Afghanistan was established in 1986. Since then, the ICRC has been active without interruption in Afghanistan.

In 2004 the ICRC in Afghanistan has a staff of some 100 expatriates and 1,300 national staff based in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif as well as Kunduz, Faizabad, Gulbahar, Ghazni, and Bamyan.

In addition to the protection activities that are the focus of this issue of the *ICRC Newsletter*, the organisation carries out the following activities in Afghanistan:

Health

The ICRC participates in the re-establishment of an effective health system disrupted by over 20 years of conflict. The ICRC improves health care by supporting and renovating hospitals in Kandahar, Ghazni, Mazar, Shiberghan, Samanghan, Jalalabad and Kabul. In September 2003 only, the facilities assisted by the ICRC provided health services to some 6,500 in-patients, some 30,000 out-patients, and performed more than 3,500 operations.

Water and sanitation

To re-establish access to drinking water for the population, the ICRC rehabilitates urban and rural water networks and develops various sanitation projects countrywide. On top of major latrine construction projects, drilling of wells, and repair of pumps, the ICRC has reconstructed the electrical supply network at the Logar Well. It supplies water to over 500,000 persons in southeast Kabul.

Orthopaedic centres

The ICRC runs 6 orthopaedic centres in the country (Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Gulbahar, Faizabad, and Jalalabad).

38 per cent of the amputees assisted are mine victims. Over 55,000 patients have been assisted since 1988.

Mine data collection and mine awareness programmes

The ICRC aims at preventing accidents caused by mines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) by gathering information on the causes of accidents and by promoting safe behaviour through mine awareness sessions. In collaboration with the Afghan Red Crescent Society, over 1,500 mine awareness sessions for at least 60,000 people were conducted in 2002 in Bamyan, Kabul, Parwan, Logar, Laghman, Nangarhar, and the northern provinces.

Dissemination of International Humanitarian Law

The ICRC also promotes International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the body of laws that protect victims of armed conflict. Dissemination sessions on IHL are held for members of the armed forces, police, and national security countrywide, as well as other sectors of the public such as university students and staff.

Cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society

The ICRC, as the leading agency of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Afghanistan, helps the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) technically and financially. The ICRC supports vocational training programmes and 5 homes for the destitute (marastoons) in Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. The ICRC also works with the ARCS to deliver Red Cross Messages and to promote safe behaviour in heavily mined areas.

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