



ICRC

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ANGOLA

ICRC tracing activities: One year on



Executive summary

- The protracted civil war in Angola (1975-2002) resulted in huge displacements of population and the separation of families both within the country and across international borders. Within Angola, barriers between areas controlled by the different parties to the conflict, coupled with the threat of landmines, meant that many areas were cut off. This has resulted in a large number of cases where the loss of family contact dates back to the first decades of the war.

- Since the cease-fire one year ago, working in cooperation with the Angola Red Cross (*Cruz Vermelha de Angola*), the ICRC has set up a major tracing programme and opened 139 tracing offices around the country to allow the Angolan people to: re-establish and maintain family links interrupted during the war, open tracing requests to find family members whose fate or location is unknown and find families of separated children and trace children based on parents' requests.
- In addition to traditional tracing methods, the ICRC has launched the Red Cross Gazette, listing the names of people sought by their loved ones. This list is also available on the ICRC website: <http://www.familylinks.icrc.org>.
- This comprehensive programme aims to help rebuild the social fabric of Angola. By enabling people to contact loved ones, through the exchange of thousands of Red Cross messages, and by locating their missing family members the ICRC hopes to contribute to stability in the country.

ICRC tracing activities in Angola

The death of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi on 22 February 2002, the subsequent signing of a cease-fire agreement and ensuing peace and reconciliation initiatives have resulted in new opportunities and challenges for Angola and its people. Before the cease-fire agreement, most of Angolan territory had been inaccessible to humanitarian organizations. Security and accessibility, however, have since improved throughout the country enabling the extent of the problems faced by the people of Angola to be better ascertained.

During the long conflict, huge numbers of people lost contact with family members and are desperate to find their loved ones again. Children, in particular, have been significantly affected by the war, both through being separated from their families during displacements and by being recruited to fight.

In response to the events of 2002, the ICRC quickly adapted its objectives and issued a budget extension appeal for its tracing activities in order to provide a better service for potential beneficiaries. The ICRC tracing network within Angola is now that second largest in the world after neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This challenge could not have been met without the support of the Angola Red Cross Society (*Cruz Vermelha de Angola*, CVA) and its unique network reaching all parts of the country.

Since the cease-fire:

- 139 tracing points (see map) have been established throughout Angola with the support of the ICRC
- 138 Red Cross volunteers have been given training in tracing in all 18 provinces, equipped with office material, bicycles, motorbikes and receive monthly incentives
- most of the tracing points have been repaired or upgraded to improve the services offered to beneficiaries
- 62,421 Red Cross messages have been collected and 61,136 delivered
- 3,519 tracing requests have been completed
- 1,188 unaccompanied children have been registered and 358 reunited with their families.

The CVA network supplements the ICRC delegation in Luanda, sub-delegations in Huambo, Kuito and Lobito, and offices in Luena, Lubango and Menongue, where 40 ICRC staff members are working to reunite families.

In addition to its traditional tracing methods, the ICRC has introduced two new initiatives in the quest to reunite separated family members. At the end of March 2003 it launched the Red Cross Gazette (see below) and its Angolan family links website, both of which list people being sought by loved ones.

The ICRC has also been working to ensure acceptance of its activities by the various Angolan government ministries involved in these issues. In December 2002, a cooperation agreement was signed between the ICRC and the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration regarding family reunifications for unaccompanied children and demobilized child soldiers. As per the agreement, the Ministry has handed over to the ICRC 134 copies of tracing requests from parents looking for their children to be cross-checked and entered into the ICRC database. The ICRC has provided the Ministry with details of all children reunited with their families since the beginning of 2002.

Traditional activities

There are three main aspects to ICRC tracing activities:

1. **Unaccompanied children** and vulnerable individuals are registered by the ICRC or CVA which then search for their relatives.
2. Anybody can write a **Red Cross message** to relatives with whom they have lost contact. The messages are distributed in Angola via the ICRC/CVA network or abroad by other National Societies.
3. When it is not possible to write a message because the recipients' address is not known or because he or she has moved on from the last known address causing a Red Cross message to be returned to sender, a **tracing request** can be completed.

1) Unaccompanied children and vulnerable individuals

The ICRC has given priority to cases involving unaccompanied children and demobilized child soldiers and also other vulnerable individuals such as the elderly or disabled. These people are registered and their cases followed on an individual basis by the ICRC, with the support of the CVA, until they are reunited with their family. In many of these cases tracing is very difficult as separation occurred years ago and the individual has had no information about the whereabouts of family members since. The search is conducted through word of mouth with traditional leaders, local authorities and local administrators and is backed up with software and digital cameras. Photographs are taken of children unable to give enough information about themselves or their background in the hope that their parents will recognize them.

Since February 2002, the ICRC has registered 1,188 unaccompanied children and underage fighters in IDP camps, orphanages, foster families and quartering areas (camps for surrendering UNITA fighters and their families). Of these, 358 have been reunited with family members.

The registration of unaccompanied children and vulnerable individuals, searching for their families and reuniting them where possible is an ongoing process. The ICRC works in close coordination with the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration and other organizations, both international and non-governmental, which deal with child protection issues in order to maximize results given the limited resources available and the topographical and logistical constraints encountered in Angola.

2) Red Cross messages (RCMs)

To enable family members separated as a result of the conflict to communicate with each other, the RCM network throughout the country has been expanded through the ICRC's sub-delegations and offices and through the 142 CVA offices and tracing points. This network enables the collection and distribution of RCMs. The RCM is an open form on which individuals may communicate personal news to family members. It has proved to be a valuable tool in Angola, and

neighbouring countries, to help large numbers of people to determine the whereabouts of family members and to maintain contact with them. Knowing that family members are still living in, or have returned safely to, their place of origin may encourage the others to return as well.

Since 2002, more than 62,421 RCMs have been collected and 61,136 have been delivered across the country through the ICRC and the CVA network, and over 50,000 RCMs have been exchanged between Angola, Namibia and Zambia.

3) Tracing requests

A tracing request is filled in when the person seeking news of a family member is unable to provide a last known address or the whereabouts of the person being sought. (Where a last known address or location can be provided, the Red Cross message is the first step in trying to re-establish contact). The number people filling out tracing requests has been increasing steadily since the end of the conflict and the scale of needs across the country is huge.

One year on...

It is now more than one year since the signing of the cease-fire agreement and the situation is still developing. The existence of the problem of families dispersed by war is all too apparent but the number of people affected is largely unknown. The closure of the quartering and family areas at the end of March has resulted in a large number of people congregating in transit camps quickly set up around provincial capitals and increasingly around municipal centres. This has created a new concentration of people in need of tracing services. Some areas of the country are still not accessible because of the danger of mines, and not everyone is aware of the tracing services on offer. The ICRC and the CVA are working to spread the word so that as many people as possible are able to re-establish contact with their loved ones.

Thanks to the worldwide presence of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, tracing activities are also carried out in all countries hosting Angolan refugees.

Country	Estimated number of Angolan refugees (UN source)
DRC	430,000
Namibia	18,000
Zambia	211,000

In the DRC, Namibia and Zambia, the ICRC is active in communities and refugee camps in cooperation with the National Red Cross Societies of these countries (see map). Other National Societies are active in countries with large numbers of Angolans such as Brazil, Cuba, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland. The ICRC also coordinates with the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration, Unicef, the UNHCR, Save the Children Fund-UK and the Christian Children's Fund regarding the return of Angolan refugees and unaccompanied children in particular.

Following the tripartite agreements which the Angolan government and the UNHCR have signed with Zambia and the DRC, and intend to sign with the Republic of the Congo, the organized return of some 450,000 refugees is due to start in June 2003 and will last approximately two years.

Gazeta Cruz Vermelha

In Angola, the most important event so far this year, in terms of tracing, has been the launch of the Red Cross Gazette published in response to the large numbers of Angolan adults seeking other

adult relatives. Finding a person who has been missing for many years is an extremely difficult and long process. One of the main difficulties is finding people who can provide information on the missing persons. In order to reach as many people as possible, the ICRC decided to publish the Red Cross Gazette - a booklet which lists the missing Angolans on the ICRC's register (more than 3,500 people).

This booklet will be widely distributed across the country for consultation by people looking for family members. It will be available in all Red Cross offices and tracing points, and also in official administrative offices and churches. Some 1,600 copies will be circulated in Angola, the DRC, Namibia and Zambia. The Gazette will also be distributed internally to all ICRC delegations in Africa and other National Societies participating in ICRC activities. The list has also been made available on the ICRC website (see below) which will make the information accessible to the Angolan diaspora. When a person recognizes a name in the Gazette, he or she will be able to re-establish contact by writing a Red Cross message. If the relative's name is not to be found, the person may then complete a tracing request which will, in turn, appear in subsequent issues of the Gazette.

The Red Cross Gazette is the first of its kind on the African continent. An updated version is planned for every four months – an additional 2,000 tracing requests have already been received and will be added to the unsolved cases in the next edition due in July. The main challenge is now to make sure that Angolan people know about the existence of the Gazette and of Red Cross tracing activities. The support of the Angolan media is therefore crucial in raising awareness of the list, and support from the authorities, churches and humanitarian organizations countrywide will increase the chance that Angolan family members will find one another again.

<http://www.familylinks.icrc.org>

The information in the Gazette has also been posted on the ICRC's website (in English and Portuguese) to facilitate the tracing of Angolans living abroad as refugees or residents. Such information is also available on the site for other contexts (Liberia-Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gulf 2003). The site will be updated regularly as new tracing requests are received. The information concerning Angola is shown in the form of three different lists containing information collected by the ICRC/CVA:

- people being sought by their families
- people looking for their relatives
- unaccompanied children registered by the ICRC

If a person (a) sees his or her name on the list of people being sought by their families, (b) sees the name of a relative on the list of people seeking family members, or (c) has accurate information on other people being sought by their family, that person can click on the "Contact ICRC" option to shed light of the fate of the people in the lists.

"Courageous Nation"

The Red Cross is also working in close cooperation with the television programme *Nação Coragem* (Courageous Nation). This weekly public affairs programme on Angolan television broadcasts a string of the 15- to 30-second messages from people seeking loved ones in a section of the show called *Ponto de Reencontro* (Meeting Point). These messages are now available online at <http://www.icrc.org/eng>. Furthermore, during the weekly filming of the programme, while hundreds of people wait for their turn in front of the cameras, the Red Cross is on site to provide its tracing services. There it enables people looking for a relative to fill out a tracing request, consult existing lists of missing persons and look through photographs of unaccompanied children, thus increasing their chances of re-establishing contact.

Looking to the future

The need for ICRC tracing activities in Angola is going to remain for years to come. Tracking down missing persons and putting them back in touch with their loved ones may be a slow and difficult process, hindered further by the danger posed by mines and unexploded ordnance remaining from conflict, but it is invaluable in helping to rebuild the social fabric of Angola after so many years of war.

Other activities in Angola

In addition to developing its tracing activities, the ICRC:

- maintains a constructive dialogue with the authorities on the protection needs of people detained in connection with the past conflict and the current situation, particularly in the enclave of Cabinda, based on observations made during private interviews with inmates during complete visits to places of detention
- is expanding its medical and water and sanitation programmes in the Greater Planalto (the provinces of Huambo, Bié, north and east Huila) mainly for returnees, by constructing or repairing rural water points
- is helping to reduce dependency on food assistance by promoting self-sufficiency among to IDPs formerly in camps assisted by the ICRC, and displaced families returning home to Huambo province. This is being done through agricultural programmes in which the ICRC provides food as well as seed to ensure that the seed is sown and not eaten. During the first three months of 2003, 18,374 IDP families and 18,733 returnee families received food and basic household items. The distribution phase of this operation terminated at the end of March
- provides 18 health posts with medical supplies, is carrying out repairs to some of the posts, and continues to support the paediatric department of the Huambo hospital and three Ministry of Health prosthetic/orthotic centres
- is developing mine-awareness activities in conjunction with the CVA with the aim of preventing casualties and other suffering caused by mines/UXO. Community surveys have been conducted in four municipalities in Bié province and will be carried out in three municipalities in Benguela to ensure that awareness-raising activities are tailored to the needs of the people.