

# REPORT 2009 COLOMBIA



ICRC

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# Foreword

# Increasing the visibility of all conflict victims in Colombia

In recent years, fighting has become less intense around densely populated areas of the country and in some regions living conditions have improved. For certain rural communities, however, it is a different story.

Thousands still encounter the harsh consequences of the armed conflict in their day-to-day lives – yet they remain anonymous. Many live in villages in Antioquia, Arauca, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Córdoba, Guaviare, Huila, Meta, Nariño, Putumayo, Tolima and the Catatumbo region.

## **Though invisible, the victims of the conflict are many:**

- Rural inhabitants unable to move freely in and out of their villages because of the fighting;
- Families mourning the death of a relative or enduring years of agony due to the disappearance of a loved one;
- Victims of weapon contamination, whether they have suffered death, mutilation or psychological trauma;
- Members of medical teams threatened, attacked or prosecuted, simply for doing their job;
- Men, women and children suffering abuse – often sexual – in silence;

- Civilians fleeing their homes to escape fighting or threats, leaving almost everything behind;
- Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities who, among the thousands of civilians exposed to the armed clashes, find themselves especially affected;
- Hostages and members of the police and armed forces deprived of their freedom, and their relatives back home, clinging to the hope that one day they will be reunited with their loved ones;
- People detained in connection with the armed conflict, in overcrowded prisons.

The humanitarian principles that guide the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement give each of us the individual responsibility to raise awareness of all conflict victims in Colombia. By acknowledging their plight, we are able to improve our prevention, protection and assistance activities for those not, or no longer, participating in the hostilities. Equally, the victims will be able to access the services offered by the Colombian government in accordance with national legislation.



The humanitarian operation run by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Colombia is one of its largest in the world. During 2009, the ICRC continued to work alongside the Colombian Red Cross on a range of programmes and projects designed to meet the most pressing needs of the victims in an impartial and independent manner. The organization focuses on around 20 areas of the country where access is particularly difficult and needs are greatest.

To be able to reach the victims, the ICRC holds regular dialogue with all armed groups, regardless of the label given to them. In order to ensure this exchange is constructive, with the sole aim of enhancing the protection of the victims of the conflict and the provision of aid, the ICRC must not only act in a neutral and independent manner, but must also be seen to be doing so. The same rule applies to its main partner, the Colombian Red Cross, with which the organization carries out part of its humanitarian work.

The ICRC always makes its own decisions and takes direct action using its own staff and financial resources, entirely independently of the State. It does, however, coordinate with government bodies, such as Acción Social, when bringing aid to the internally displaced, in order to ensure tasks are not duplicated.

The government has a responsibility and an obligation to assist and protect its citizens. However, during armed conflict there is a risk of “humanitarian” activities being instrumentalized and used for political or military ends. Such a move would distort the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, would potentially put civilians in danger, and would undermine the work of humanitarian actors, such as the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross. For all these reasons, the specific mandate entrusted to the ICRC, and its founding principles, must be preserved.



Christoph von Toggenburg / ICRC

The ICRC believes that humanitarian action must remain strictly humanitarian. Only in this way is the organization able to be neutral, independent and impartial, and be perceived and recognized as such by all parties to the armed conflict. Neutrality is not easy: no-one is neutral by nature or by simple self-declaration. It is a quality that the parties themselves must recognize in the ICRC, through the way the organization acts and communicates. In Colombia, as in any other context where armed conflict has an impact on the civilian population, the ICRC will continue to bring aid to those in need, in its capacity as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization.



Christophe Beney  
Head of delegation  
ICRC Colombia







Artículo 3.º *Acuerdo de Ginebra de 1964*  
de las *Comisiones de Ginebra de 1964*  
Ley 6.ª de 1969

*Protocolo adicional II*  
de 1977  
Ley 111 de 1994

# Derecho Internacional Humanitario

Aplicable en C



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# What is international humanitarian law?

International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict.

In the terms of international humanitarian law, the current situation in Colombia presents all the characteristics of a non-international armed conflict – that is, a conflict between the State and organized armed opposition groups – to which Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II are applicable.

Classifying it as such is fundamental, as this places certain obligations on the parties to the conflict. In particular, during the conduct of hostilities, government armed forces and organized armed opposition groups must respect and ensure respect for the rules and principles of international humanitarian law.

Today, regardless of how we classify the conflict in Colombia, humanitarian work must urgently seek to limit its consequences and apply international humanitarian law, in order to prevent serious violations from being committed against the civilian population and, more generally, against any person not directly participating in the hostilities.

## **Customary international humanitarian law enhances the legal protection of those affected by armed conflict**

Unlike treaty law, customary international law is not written down. To prove that a certain rule is customary, one has to show that it is reflected in State practice and that there exists a conviction in the international community that such practice is required as a matter of law.

Though there are many detailed treaties of international humanitarian law in force today, customary law plays a key role in mitigating the impact of armed conflict on people's health, integrity and dignity.

An ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law clearly demonstrates that, in the case of non-international armed conflict, customary rules go far beyond those set out in treaties. For example, those treaties governing internal armed conflicts do not expressly prohibit attacks on civilian objects; customary law compensates for this omission. It should also be noted that all parties to the conflict – both the State and armed opposition groups – are bound by any customary international humanitarian law applicable to internal armed conflict.

The Spanish version of this study was presented in Bogotá in March 2008, detailing 161 rules now considered customary.

**You will find a selection of these rules in relevant sections of this report.**





# Introduction

## What is the impact of the Colombian armed conflict on the population?

Armed clashes in rural areas are putting local communities in constant danger and exposing them to violations of international humanitarian law. These include: murder of and/or attacks on persons protected by international humanitarian law; enforced disappearances; sexual violence; hostage-taking; forced recruitment; physical and/or psychological abuse; and forced displacement.

The lives of local inhabitants are also affected by the parties' failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians, by stigmatization, by pressure to collaborate with direct repercussions for civilians, by the seizure of private or public civilian objects, and by weapon contamination.

Such violations are driving people from their homes, and they are losing everything in the process. There is no doubt that

limiting the number of violations of international humanitarian law can help to ensure that fewer people feel the vital need to flee to safety.

In addition, the armed conflict makes access to basic services difficult for the civilian population, including health care, education, water and sanitation, especially in remote areas. This situation is further complicated by the repercussions of the economic crisis and a drop in State investment.

The movements of communities living in remote areas are becoming increasingly constrained by limitations placed upon them by the parties to the conflict. Furthermore, their access to basic necessities is restricted, harming the already fragile financial position of these families.



### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

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**Rule 55.** *The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control.*

Over and above insisting on the importance of applying humanitarian law, it is essential that political leaders and armed groups involved in the conflict take all the necessary precautions to protect those not, or no longer, participating in the hostilities.

### What is the ICRC doing to protect and assist those affected by the armed conflict?

The ICRC is in a unique position; its mandate, strong presence in conflict zones, neutrality and working methods enable it to hold confidential dialogue with all parties to the conflict in order to ensure greater respect for international humanitarian law.

The ICRC seeks to establish and maintain a relationship of trust both with the police and government armed forces, and with armed opposition groups, in order to obtain reliable security guarantees ensuring that its staff can safely reach the victims of the armed conflict. It is essential that the organization be seen as neutral by all parties to the conflict, something that it can achieve by bringing effective aid to affected communities – aid that will ultimately be perceived by the parties as important for the victims.

When violations of international humanitarian law occur, the ICRC does not publicly denounce these events; rather, it documents the cases and shares them exclusively and on a confidential basis with the persons who are presumed to be responsible in order to prevent such cases from recurring. The ICRC does not make public pronouncements regarding the behaviour of the police, government armed forces or armed opposition groups; rather, it discusses the allegations of abuses committed by these actors with them directly, provided that it has obtained the express consent of the victim or his or her relatives to do so.

The ICRC provides protection and assistance through its proximity to victims in the areas most affected by the armed conflict, where, for various reasons, government bodies or relief organizations have a limited presence. Having access to these areas is essential in order for the ICRC to understand the needs of all the victims and provide a comprehensive response. ICRC multidisciplinary teams work in remote areas of the country in order to respond to the victims' most pressing needs for protection and assistance. This approach enables communities to stabilize their finances, through income-generating projects, and to have better access to basic services such as health care, education, water and sanitation, thanks to small-scale infrastructure projects.

The ICRC is continuing to promote joint operations with the Colombian Red Cross, involving individual assistance to displaced people, care and treatment for victims of weapon contamination, and other activities that seek to address the effects of armed conflict on civilians or of natural disasters in conflict zones. During the second half of 2009, impetus was given to strengthening cooperation between the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross, with an emphasis on the local, operational and volunteer level, from where the initial response to any type of emergency arises.



Pascal Jequier/ICRC





# 1. Civilian population

## Impact of the armed conflict

The armed conflict in Colombia has had a devastating impact on the lives of civilians, and the ICRC is working hard to provide a timely and effective response. Worst affected are those living in rural areas, where the fighting is most intense. It is in these parts of the country that the ICRC is most active.

In 2009, the ICRC documented 800 alleged violations of international humanitarian law and other conflict-related incidents, affecting individuals or communities living in rural areas.

From the figures alone, it would seem that the situation had improved since 2008, when a startling 1,600 incidents of this kind were recorded. This is not necessarily the case; in fact, the difference could simply be due to a change in the way the ICRC documents incidents, with a focus now on events rather than on the individuals involved.

The most frequently reported violations were:

- Enforced disappearance
- Murder of, and direct attacks on, persons protected by international humanitarian law
- Seizure of private or public civilian objects
- Sexual violence
- Recruitment of children
- Physical and/or psychological abuse and threats
- Weapon contamination affecting the life of a community
- Forced displacement

**WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?**

**Rule 1.** *The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks must not be directed against civilians.*



*"I felt bored, depressed and extremely agitated because all the fighting and the bombs were making the children cry. I was terrified of being alone in the house. What if a guerrilla group were to come, then the army show up and armed fighting break out? Who would suffer? No doubt it would be us civilians. We have to do all we can to find protection.*

*Where we are now, I feel calm; I'm not scared, but I am pretty bored of having to move all the time."*

**Rosa**



## 1.1 Missing persons

According to the Colombian Commission on the Search for Missing Persons, over 40,000 people have been officially registered as missing since the armed conflict began. Thousands of families still have no idea whether their loved ones are alive or dead; it is impossible for them to begin the grieving process or resolve any related legal matters.

Enforced disappearance is prohibited by international humanitarian law. The parties to the conflict have an obligation to take all measures to prevent disappearances and to account for any persons who do go missing as a result of the conflict. For example, when a person dies in combat, his or her body must be recovered, identified and properly buried, and the family informed.

There are two categories of victim in a disappearance case: the person who has gone missing and his or her friends and family, tirelessly searching for their loved one with a mixture of hope and fear.

It is the responsibility of the State to take the necessary steps to account for missing persons and to help families cope with the consequences of a loved one going missing.

### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 98.** *Enforced disappearance is prohibited.*

**Rule 116.** *With a view to the identification of the dead, each party to the conflict must record all available information prior to disposal and mark the location of the graves.*

**Rule 117.** *Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate.*



## Missing persons The response of the ICRC

Through confidential dialogue with all parties to the conflict, the ICRC seeks to prevent disappearances and clarify the fate of missing persons. In 2009, the ICRC documented 84 cases of people missing in connection with the armed conflict. It also handed over to the authorities the mortal remains of two people who had died as a result of the conflict.

In addition, ICRC delegates succeeded in locating 107 people previously reported as missing by their families.

In recent years, the ICRC has increasingly stepped up its efforts to ensure the families of the missing receive the support they need. In 2009, for example, it remained in close contact with the members of Congress working on the *Ley de Homenaje* on missing persons. This law specifies, among other things, the measures to be used to locate individuals buried in mass graves. Once mass graves have been located and the bodies exhumed, it is essential that the mortal remains be stored correctly, for the purposes of identification.

At the request of the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the ICRC evaluated these processes in Bogotá, Barranquilla and Medellín, and submitted its findings and recommendations to the institutions concerned.

The ICRC also assessed SIRDEC, an online information database used by all forensic institutions in the identification of bodies, on behalf of the National Institute for Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INMLCF). The aim was to improve the organization and usability of the database. Furthermore, in 2009, it helped update the INMLCF's forensic manual for body identification.

Recognizing that the international community can offer valuable support in this field, the ICRC worked alongside the INMLCF in 2009 to organize the third meeting of the Ibero-American Network of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science Institutes, in Bogotá. With its regular meetings, this network is a vital medium for sharing experiences, developing forensic skills, and facilitating mutual support where necessary.



Franco Paguetti/ICRC VII

## The ICRC coordinated the evacuation of the wounded and facilitated the identification of the dead

After periods of conflict, including air raids by government armed forces, the ICRC arranged for the war-wounded to be transported to medical facilities.

At the relatives' request, it encouraged the authorities to speed up the identification of some of those who had died in combat. The ICRC also collected and accompanied the families to identify and receive the bodies, so they could do so without fear of reprisals and would finally be able to give their loved ones a decent burial.

Another important ICRC activity in the wake of armed clashes was to restore contact between persons arrested during military operations, and their families. Through visits to places of detention or the sending of Red Cross messages (brief messages containing family news), relatives were able to learn the fate of their loved ones and, in some cases, see them again.

## WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 6.** *Civilians are protected against attack unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.*

**Rule 7.** *The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may only be directed against military objectives. Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects.*

## 1.2 Murder of, attacks on and threats made against persons protected by international humanitarian law

Most of the civilians killed during the hostilities live in areas severely affected by the armed conflict, where the day-to-day proximity of the belligerents poses a constant, underlying threat. This threat is one of the main causes of displacement.

In 2009, the ICRC recorded 28 murders and 61 attacks against persons protected by international humanitarian law. The attacks left 54 dead and 7 wounded.

During the same period, the ICRC provided 140 families of people who had died as a result of the conflict with the financial means to be able to give their loved ones a decent burial. It also helped 362 people who had received threats move to safety.



*"We fled from our village because they murdered my brother. We were inside the house when we heard shots being fired. When we got out to the yard, we saw him lying on the ground. They let us bury him, but threatened us, forcing us to leave. Some friends of ours helped us escape, hidden in a boat... Who knows what would have happened if we had stayed. Maybe another of us would have been killed."*

**Maria**

### 1.3 Seizure of private or public civilian objects

Civilian objects such as homes and schools are often taken over by belligerents for them to defend themselves or launch attacks against the enemy. This puts the civilian population in extreme danger – a fact the parties to the conflict should take into account.

In 2009, the ICRC recorded 148 incidents in which the parties to the conflict did not take the necessary precautions to protect civilians and their property against the effects of attacks. They took over schools, health posts and inhabited houses, and the ensuing clashes left civilians wounded and civilian objects destroyed. The owners of occupied properties suffered various reprisals; some were even killed by one side of the conflict, under suspicion of collaborating with the other. In several cases, the residents decided to leave to avoid further trouble.

The ICRC maintains confidential dialogue with all parties to the conflict to encourage compliance with international humanitarian law.

#### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 22.** *The parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks.*

**Rule 23.** *Each party to the conflict must, to the extent feasible, avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas.*





## WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

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**Rule 93.** *Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited.*

### 1.4 Sexual violence

Sexual violence is still one of the most under-reported of all violations committed during conflict. Although common, especially in remote rural areas, victims are often too ashamed and afraid of repercussions to speak up. Their health suffers greatly as a result, since they do not receive the specialist medical care they urgently need to prevent sexually-transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies.

In 2009, in strict confidentiality, the ICRC provided 82 victims of sexual abuse with medical and psychosocial care (45 boys, girls and adolescents, 31 women and 6 men). Among this group, 53 were directed to the national health system.



*“Two armed men broke down the door of my house, came in and sexually abused me. From that moment on, every minute was a living hell. I was very shaken up. I didn’t want to stay there, so I decided to flee to the city. A month later, I found out I was pregnant with twins. I didn’t know what to do – I thought of everything. One day, I decided to contact the ICRC and tell them my story. They gave me a lot of support, and with the help of a psychologist I got through it. They were there for me throughout my pregnancy and the birth of my twins.*

*I’ve started to forget what happened a bit now, thank God. I feel I’m a strong mother – I’m determined to move on for the sake of my children.”*

**Martha**



## 1.5 Recruitment of children

Although international humanitarian law expressly prohibits it, girls and boys continue to participate in the hostilities. Some are recruited by force, though it is also common for children in rural areas to join an armed group through a lack of alternatives, in terms of education or work. It is impossible to give precise figures, but scores of children are used to carry out intelligence work, acting as messengers or guides during the fighting.

This is an issue of particular concern to the ICRC; in 2009, it recorded 18 cases of child recruitment, not including six incidences of threatened recruitment, where the children's families were forced to flee.

### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

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**Rule 136.** *Children must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups.*

**Rule 137.** *Children must not be allowed to take part in hostilities.*



## 1.6 Weapon contamination

Weapon contamination is a serious problem in Colombia, and has become especially so over the last few years. Anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war (artillery shells, mortar bombs and grenades) lead to death, serious physical injury, considerable psychological trauma and disastrous socioeconomic repercussions for thousands of victims in rural areas, along with their families and communities. Considered indiscriminate weapons, anti-personnel mines are prohibited under international humanitarian law by the Mine Ban Convention, ratified by Colombia.

In certain rural areas, weapon contamination prevents residents from accessing cultivable land, water sources, schools, medical centres, and places of worship. It greatly restricts their movements and some dare not leave their small village at all. It also leads to displacement, and makes it difficult for people to return home once they have left.

In 2007, the ICRC established a database of weapon-contamination victims in order to gauge the scale of the problem. Continuously updated, the database is used by the organization to tailor its response to the needs of the victims. The ICRC recorded 34 communities as being affected by weapon contamination in 2009.

*“Three years ago, I was walking with my family when we came across some explosives in our path. I picked up a grenade and, just by touching it, managed to set it off. I lost my right hand, left arm and right eye.*

*I was taken to Bogotá, where I spent five months between surgery and rehabilitation. It was awful – I missed my family so much. My two children were taken far away from me by their father: he thought I wouldn’t be able to look after them. I decided to go home before my therapy was over. The ICRC gave me two prostheses, but I got an infection that meant I couldn’t use them. I had no medicines or access to a doctor – I cut myself off from everyone.*

*But the ICRC has not left my side. I want to move on, keep working and help feed my family, despite my disability.”*

**Nubia**



Bibiana Mosquera/ICRC

## WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 70.** *The use of means and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering is prohibited.*



## Weapon contamination The response of the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross

The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross (with support from the Norwegian Red Cross) are working together to reduce the impact of weapon contamination in Colombia on civilians, following the strategy on landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The combined action of the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross seeks, among other things, to prevent accidents, assist victims and strengthen physical rehabilitation services.

**WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?**

**Rule 71.** *The use of weapons which are by nature indiscriminate is prohibited.*

## Preventing accidents

To give communities safe access to water, cultivable land, schools and other basic services, the ICRC:

- builds and repairs infrastructure in safe places, in cooperation with local authorities and communities;
- runs programmes, such as agricultural projects, to help communities living in contaminated zones become more self-sufficient;
- maintains confidential dialogue with the parties to the conflict to discuss the use and abandonment of weapons and the effects this has on the civilian population.

In 2009, the ICRC held 127 meetings for over 2,560 people in rural areas affected by the conflict, where access is difficult. Participants included members of the community and local authority representatives. The Colombian Red Cross ran 164 sessions for around 30 communities, with a total of approximately 6,000 participants. These sessions covered a range of topics, such as:

- safe behaviour for preventing accidents;
- first aid;
- transporting victims of weapon contamination to medical facilities;
- the different phases of care for victims;
- victims' rights.



Christoph von Toggenburg / ICRC

## WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 17.** *Each party to the conflict must take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of warfare with a view to avoiding, and in any event to minimising, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.*

## Assisting the victims

When a victim of weapon contamination is unable to access State medical services, or finds that these do not meet his or her needs, the ICRC offers the individual financial support to obtain treatment elsewhere. For example, if the individual lives in a rural area, far from any rehabilitation services, the organization pays for him or her to travel to a city for treatment. It covers the cost of accommodation for the victim, plus one companion.

In 2009, the ICRC launched a pilot project designed to help victims regain self-sufficiency through sustainable income-generating initiatives. This is an integral part of the rehabilitation process, as it can help them recover emotionally and improve their – and their families' – quality of life.

In addition, the ICRC distributed orthotic and prosthetic appliances to 87 individuals deprived of their liberty.





## Strengthening physical rehabilitation services

A large proportion of civilian victims of weapon contamination live in rural areas, far from any rehabilitation services. In view of this, the ICRC helped convert two rural hostels into physical rehabilitation centres and created a training workshop for people with limited mobility.

The ICRC is working to improve the services of five existing rehabilitation centres, offering staff expert advice and ongoing training. Thanks to this support, the centres were able to fit 150 patients with a prosthesis and 25 with an orthosis, in 2009. In addition, 156 appliances were distributed to patients, including wheelchairs, crutches, walking frames and walking sticks.

It is essential that prosthetist-orthotists receive ongoing training in order to be able to provide patients with the highest-quality appliances. In light of this, the ICRC awarded seven grants to Colombian staff working in this field, in 2009.

*“Being in a wheelchair, losing an arm or leg, or having some other kind of disability is not a handicap in itself, it’s just a limitation – one you must overcome with courage and a sense of purpose if you are to succeed in life.”*

**Olindo**





Pascal Jequier/ICRC

### **Developing an agricultural project to stabilize a community's economic situation**

Weapon contamination around one village in Tolima has had a major economic impact on the local community. Stockbreeding is the inhabitants' main source of income, but safe areas for grazing are now hard to find; some animals have even died in accidents caused by weapon contamination.

To provide affected families with a means of subsistence and an alternative way of generating income, the ICRC distributed seeds, tools and fertilizers. An agricultural engineer advised and assisted the community to ensure the initiative would deliver the best possible results.

In addition, the ICRC ran sessions for members of the community on safe behaviour, to prevent further accidents involving explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, and on the rights and services available to weapon-contamination victims and their families.

## 1.7 Lack of infrastructure and basic services

Communities living in remote areas of the country struggle with major social and economic problems on a daily basis – a situation further aggravated by the consequences of the armed conflict. There is a lack of State investment in the construction and upkeep of infrastructure, and basic services are limited. Isolated, stigmatized and socially and economically marginalized, these communities have little chance of finding a suitable solution.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities is generally limited in these areas. To overcome this problem, local inhabitants build facilities by hand, using their own materials, without any input from an expert. Water is wasted, and the water that is used is often insufficient and of poor quality. In this situation, there is a greater risk of contracting water-borne or hygiene-related diseases. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups are even more vulnerable, as they traditionally live in greater poverty than other sectors of the population.

Children, also vulnerable, have great difficulty in accessing education in areas affected by the armed conflict. Schools are deserted: pupils are too scared to go owing to weapon contamination, fighting, the presence of soldiers, and the risk of recruitment. Sometimes, teachers are absent because they have received threats.

In some rural areas, however, school boarding houses prove essential. They keep the children out of danger, boost academic performance and help improve the families' financial situation.



Christoph von Toggenburg / ICRC

## Small-scale community infrastructure projects improve living conditions

In 2009, the ICRC launched 41 projects in areas seriously affected by the armed conflict: renovating 28 schools, building four school boarding houses for 2,000 children and young people, constructing seven health posts serving 21,570 people, and building two aqueducts to carry water to over 1,000 people. All building work is based on earthquake-proof designs and complies with national regulations in force.



*“One afternoon, a few months ago, we were at school when we suddenly heard the ‘ta-ta-ta’ of gunfire, followed by massive explosions. We were really scared; we hid behind the classrooms. Recently, there was armed fighting in our neighbour’s house. We’re afraid the same thing is going to happen in our house.”*

**John Freddy and Carolina**



## Building a new boarding house for a village school in Guaviare

The village school had a wooden lodge that could accommodate 15 children. Twenty-eight children were living there, in very crowded conditions. Their parents preferred them to stay there rather than travel long distances to school every day, exposed to the dangers of the armed conflict.

The ICRC decided to help support the building of a new boarding house for the school. The community was actively involved in the project, from the initial concept right through to construction. Once the building was completed, the community started organizing how it would be run and maintained.

A solar energy system was also installed to generate electricity for the school. The local authorities contributed to the project by building sanitary facilities, showers and an extra classroom, as well as providing bunk beds and mattresses for the dormitories.

The new accommodation offers children a safe and comfortable place to live and study. Student numbers have increased by around 15%.

## 1.8 Difficulties in accessing health care

While inhabitants of rural areas have difficulties in accessing health care, the situation is even more complicated for people living in rural areas heavily affected by the armed conflict. In addition to the shortage of timely, high-quality health services, the lack of security guarantees in areas frequently marked by armed clashes, threats and weapon contamination, among other factors, prevents residents from leaving their homes to seek medical care. Moreover, for those wounded in events related to the armed conflict, and for displaced people with health concerns, access to services is often hampered by administrative problems.



Threats and attacks against medical personnel, equipment and facilities occur frequently in rural areas, leading to the suspension or cancellation of health services, to the detriment of communities.

The problem is exacerbated by other factors besides security conditions, such as:

- the vast distances between rural areas and municipal and departmental seats, and the lack of transportation;
- the inability of the national health system to dispatch personnel to rural areas and to meet the pressing medical needs of the inhabitants;
- the absence of medical personnel from rural areas for fear of being threatened, attacked or prosecuted for engaging in actions that are part of their medical duties.

### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 26.** *Punishing a person for performing medical duties compatible with medical ethics or compelling a person engaged in medical activities to perform acts contrary to medical ethics is prohibited.*

**Rule 28.** *Medical units exclusively assigned to medical purposes must be respected and protected in all circumstances.*



## The ICRC's humanitarian response with regard to health care

In view of this situation, the ICRC is implementing a programme in Colombia to improve access to health care for:

- residents of conflict-affected areas with limited or no access to health services (areas whose inhabitants face restrictions on entry and departure);
- people displaced for reasons related to the armed conflict;
- people wounded in the context of the armed conflict.

Medical activities are carried out through various mechanisms.

### Protection of medical duties

In 2009, the ICRC documented 31 violations of the rules protecting the performance of medical duties. The key issues were threats to medical personnel and prohibitions on the provision of medical services, including cases in which patients were summarily executed. Some members of medical teams were also prosecuted for engaging in medical activities.

The ICRC is interested in ensuring that medical personnel know their rights and obligations and that the parties to the conflict respect and





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permit medical activities. In 2009, the ICRC held 51 dissemination sessions on international humanitarian law, attended by 1,739 people, including members of the police and armed forces and representatives of the health sector and various universities.

### Facilitating access

The ICRC participates in an ongoing and confidential dialogue with the health authorities, the police and armed forces, and the organized armed groups to persuade them to facilitate access by the population to health care and access by medical personnel to conflict-affected areas. Once the ICRC has obtained security guarantees from the parties to the conflict, it accompanies local health workers. ICRC accompaniment enables primary health care to be provided in different areas of the country. The ICRC accompanied health workers in areas affected by the armed conflict on two occasions in 2009.

### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 59.** *The improper use of the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions is prohibited.*



## Referral and financial assistance for patients

In addition to the difficulties that rural inhabitants face in accessing basic health services, they have little knowledge of the care maps offered by the State. For this reason, the ICRC refers residents of rural areas to the relevant health authorities. With the aid of the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC referred 2,476 patients to various health authorities during 2009.

In some cases where the national health system does not cover all the vital needs of victims, or where victims do not have the necessary resources, the ICRC offers financial assistance with the aid of some branches of the Colombian Red Cross. During the previous year, 1,420 people received assistance to cover the costs of transportation, food, shelter, medicines and medical care.



## Training

The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross provide first-aid training to members of rural communities to prepare them for emergencies and ensure that they know the immediate temporary procedures for handling them. Thirteen workshops, attended by 374 members of different communities, were organized in 2009.

To ensure that people wounded in events related to the armed conflict can receive better-quality care, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross organized 14 medical update courses in 2009 that were attended by nursing auxiliaries, nurses, doctors, surgeons and physical rehabilitation specialists.

### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 25.** *Medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties must be respected and protected in all circumstances. They lose their protection if they commit, outside their humanitarian function, acts harmful to the enemy.*





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## **Aided by the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC's mobile health unit provided basic health care to displaced people and residents of the rural area of Teteyé, Putumayo**

In exceptional cases, in areas where armed actors completely or partially prevent access to government-sponsored basic health care, the ICRC carries out medical substitution activities. In 2009, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross formed a mobile health unit that offered basic health services.

The displaced people and inhabitants of the rural area of Teteyé, Putumayo department, who had no access to medical care because of events related to the armed conflict, were visited by the mobile health unit, which evaluated, diagnosed and treated 1,312 cases of basic illnesses, many of which arose from lack of timely attention. In addition, two patients with life-threatening emergencies were referred for more complex medical treatment.

Pregnant women had prenatal check-ups, child vaccination charts were reviewed, and promotion and prevention activities were carried out with a view to optimizing the community's health.

The medical team's presence in these remote areas of the country makes it possible to diagnose and treat basic illnesses that can put people's lives at risk for lack of timely attention.





# 2. The displaced civilian population

## Causes of displacement

Displacement of civilians in Colombia has been a recurrent characteristic of an armed conflict that has lasted for more than 40 years. Encouraging greater respect for the rules of international humanitarian law will help to reduce the phenomenon of displacement.

While the number of displaced people in Colombia is a source of particular controversy among various organizations, Acción Social reports that a total of 3,300,000 people had been displaced by 31 December 2009.

The crisis of displacement in Colombia is one of the most serious in the world. It also disproportionately affects Afro-Colombians and indigenous people, who are among the country's most vulnerable groups.

The principal causes of displacement observed by the ICRC in 2009 were armed clashes, death threats, psychological ill-treatment and forced recruitment. In addition, the eradication of illicit crops has forced thousands of people to leave their land because they have lost their source of income, and because they fear harassment.

Despite the high number of displaced people living in precarious conditions in urban centres around the country, few of them can return to their places of origin. The lack of security and lack of support for their social and economic recovery are the main causes; in some cases, this is associated with the meagre opportunities for displaced people to recover the land that they abandoned for reasons related to the conflict.

## **The ICRC's humanitarian response on behalf of displaced people**

### **Agricultural projects in areas heavily affected by the armed conflict**

To prevent and reduce the phenomenon of displacement and contribute to improving the financial situation of inhabitants of the areas concerned, the ICRC distributed emergency aid and implemented agricultural projects. These projects are executed with community participation, taking into account local customs and preferences.

During 2009, 4,436 residents and displaced people benefited from 22 projects, including implementation of community gardens, growing star apples (caimito) and raising pigs, birds and other small animals.



## Agricultural projects in Putumayo department

The ICRC helped some 200 families (more than 1,000 people) in 10 villages in Putumayo department to regain food stability through agricultural projects. The villages were isolated by the lack of communication routes and heavily affected by the armed conflict and by crop spraying.

Some time ago, these communities earned their livelihood by planting and marketing plantains, cassava and maize and raising small animals. However, the effects of the conflict are preventing residents from travelling on the river, their sole communication route, in order to market and exchange their products.

Through these agricultural projects, the communities received seeds, tools and animals, as well as training designed to optimize the benefits that they can derive from these products.



### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 53.** *The use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is prohibited.*



**WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?**

**Rule 131.** *In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.*

**Rule 132.** *Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety to their homes or places of habitual residence as soon as the reasons for their displacement cease to exist.*

**Rule 133.** *The property rights of displaced persons must be respected.*



## Specific assistance to the displaced population

Many years after leaving their regions, thousands of people are still living in precarious conditions in the most depressed urban areas. This has turned them into the poorest of the poor.

For more than a decade, the ICRC's economic security programme in Colombia has been aimed at addressing the needs of displaced people, the vast majority of whom have fled rural areas after armed clashes or threats from armed parties to the conflict, or both. The programme ranges from basic services, such as delivering food and essential household items, to the development of income-generating projects.

In order to improve the Colombian government's response to the needs of the displaced, the ICRC negotiates with entities of the National System for Integrated Assistance to Displaced People (SNAIPD), mainly Acción Social (the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation) and the city councils.

During 2009, the ICRC provided computers and furniture to 21 assistance and guidance units for displaced people (UAOs). The ICRC also financed infrastructural upgrades for five UAOs and organized technical training courses for 126 UAO staff.

In the context of its programme of support for organizations addressing the needs of displaced people in Colombia, the ICRC in 2009 provided equipment, furniture, materials and small-scale infrastructural improvements to the following organizations: Cúcuta Migration Centre, Psychosocial Care Centre in Florencia, and Corporación Luz de Vida (CORPOVIDA), an organization that supports educational processes in Bogotá. It also subsidized the dissemination of care maps to displaced people in Villavicencio.



## In figures

During 2009, the ICRC assisted a total of 51,176 displaced people, providing them with food or vouchers, essential household items and hygiene articles. The ICRC observed a 30% reduction in the number of people it aided in 2009 compared with 2008.

### Individual assistance

The ICRC assisted 40,000 people in 14 Colombian cities. In carrying out these activities, the ICRC received support from the Colombian Red Cross, with which it signed six projects to provide aid on an individual basis to families who were being displaced in cities around the country. The ICRC observed a 32% reduction in the number of displaced people whom it aided on an individual basis in 2009 compared with the previous year.

### Massive assistance

In 25 cases of massive displacement in the departments of Nariño, Chocó, Córdoba, Arauca, Cauca and Bolívar, the ICRC assisted 11,217 people. The ICRC observed a 23% reduction in the number of people whom it aided in cases of massive displacement in 2009 compared with 2008.

The decrease in ICRC assistance can be explained by changes in the dynamic of the armed conflict, but also by inhabitants deciding not to leave in spite of the risks so as not to lose their means of livelihood. Other reasons are the closing of the ICRC's emergency humanitarian assistance projects in Apartadó, Valledupar and Sincelejo, and the strengthening of selection criteria for beneficiaries.



It is important to bear in mind that the ICRC does not have offices or operate assistance projects throughout the country; therefore, the information that it provides is based solely on its activities and its own figures. The ICRC does not have a national statistical registry of displacement.

One of the reasons for the decrease in the number of displaced people registered in the Information System on Displaced Persons (SIPOD) in 2009 is that not all of the displaced complete the procedure for inclusion in the Unified Register of Displaced Persons (RUPD). This is because of government delays in taking their declarations and delays in delivering aid once they are registered.

Although displacement fell in 2009, the cumulative total of displaced people is growing year by year. As of 31 December 2009, 3,303,979 displaced people had been registered by the government in the RUPD.

While return is currently a public policy priority in relation to displacement, few displaced people have returned to their places of origin owing to the lack of security guarantees.



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*"We had to leave because the conflict was close to the farm. Sometimes we were left in peace, but in the early morning, from one moment to the next, we could hear the bombardments nearby. My children, my wife and I lived in terror. The children cried all the time. ... The best thing was to leave the place. I hope the situation there will improve one day. We want to go home. I want some security to support my family."*

**Enrique**



# 3. People deprived of their liberty

## 3.1 People in the hands of armed groups

Among the various activities that the ICRC carries out in Colombia, its role in the freeing of hostages and members of the armed forces detained by armed groups is what best illustrates the importance of its being recognized as a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organization. The ICRC has taken part in the freeing of hundreds of people in Colombia since 1980.

In order to continue acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC has established and maintained a humanitarian dialogue with all parties to the conflict. It is only through that

dialogue that the ICRC can maintain the trust and acceptance of all parties concerned. That, in turn, enables it to operate safely in areas controlled by these actors under the protection of the red cross emblem, which is recognized and accepted by all.

The ICRC continually expresses its concern about the fate of people in the hands of armed groups and engages in dialogue with parties to the conflict to facilitate the release process. It also offers its services to help people who have been freed return home.



## WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 96.** *The taking of hostages is prohibited.*

**Rule 124 B.** *In non-international armed conflicts, the ICRC may offer its services to the parties to the conflict with a view to visiting all persons deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the conflict in order to verify the conditions of their detention and to restore contacts between those persons and their families.*

## Civilians in the hands of armed groups

During 2009, the ICRC facilitated the release of four civilians, two of whom were handed over by the FARC-EP to Colombians for Peace, with logistical support from the government of Brazil.

## Members of the police and armed forces in the hands of armed groups

In 2009, the ICRC facilitated the release of three members of the military and one police officer, handed over by the FARC-EP to Colombians for Peace, with logistical support from the government of Brazil.



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### **3.2 People deprived of their liberty in government-run detention facilities**

#### **Humanitarian issues for prison detainees**

Another consequence of the conflict is that people are deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the hostilities. The severest problems are access to health care and overcrowding in prisons.

In the past few years, overcrowding in facilities run by the National Prison System Institute (INPEC) has increased steadily and alarmingly. According to information provided by the INPEC, in December 2009, the prison population was 76,500 and had reached a critical overcrowding rate of 38%. In December 2006, that figure stood at 15%. It must also be noted that some prisons are much more affected by this problem than are others.

Overcrowding affects not only the health of detainees, but also the general conditions of detention and the working conditions of all staff responsible for the detainees. It may even have an impact on the general civilian population owing to problems arising from the lack of hygiene and insufficient medical services.





### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 119.** *Women who are deprived of their liberty must be held in quarters separate from those of men, except where families are accommodated as family units, and must be under the immediate supervision of women.*

## How does the ICRC work in prisons?

Through confidential interviews with detainees, the ICRC seeks to establish whether the detention process and conditions have been in compliance with international humanitarian law and recognized international standards.

In these interviews, the ICRC documents all problems related to a person's detention from the time he or she is taken into custody. In this dialogue, the ICRC also enquires about all the places in which the detainees have been held. When instances of ill-treatment or other problems are documented, and with the prior permission of the detainees concerned, the ICRC shares these allegations with the authorities who are presumed to be responsible. This is intended to prevent future incidents, request that corrective measures be taken, and make the authorities aware of the need to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and national legislation on the subject.

While essential, the information provided by detainees about their living conditions is not the only source of data used by the ICRC to assess the situation of the prison population. Information provided by the authorities, who can, for example, report budgetary or staffing problems, is also essential. In addition, there are the observations made by delegates during visits regarding the quality of the infrastructure, food and medical care. The ICRC uses all this information to form a general assessment that will be shared with the authorities.

In addition to monitoring the treatment received by people deprived of their liberty in connection with the conflict, the ICRC is also concerned with the detention conditions of the entire prison population, since these detainees are usually held in the same prisons.

The observations made during these visits are shared on a bilateral and confidential basis with the local and national authorities concerned.



## **The ICRC's humanitarian response on behalf of people deprived of their liberty in government-run detention facilities**

### **Visits to people deprived of their liberty**

In order to verify the detention conditions and treatment received by people deprived of their liberty, ICRC delegates visit permanent and temporary places of detention.

During 2009, the ICRC conducted, in accordance with its standard procedures, 199 visits to 121 places of detention located in different areas of the country. These visits were conducted mainly in prisons managed by the INPEC, but also in temporary places run by the national police and the army. The ICRC delegates closely monitored the cases of 6,000 people detained for reasons related to the armed conflict. Nearly 3,800 of them were monitored individually.

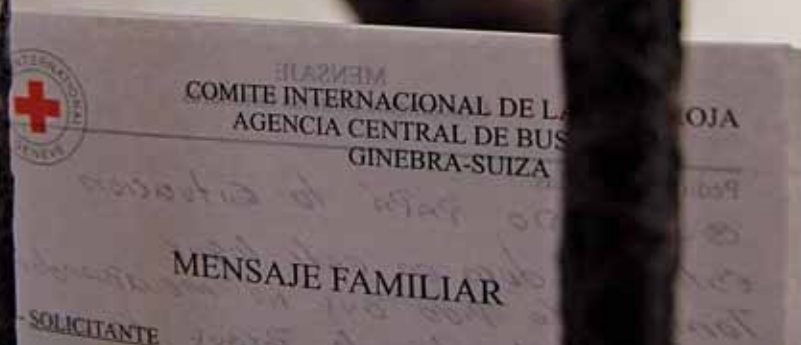
The ICRC also documented cases of medical personnel who were deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the performance of their duties in the context of the armed conflict.

## Restoring family links

When people are detained for reasons related to the armed conflict and transferred to different detention centres, they are often separated from their families.

In order to restore and maintain contacts between people detained for reasons related to the armed conflict and their families, the ICRC in 2009 arranged for the relatives of 1,835 detainees to receive ground transportation tickets in order to visit them. Eight branches of the Colombian Red Cross facilitated this effort. The ICRC paid for approximately 5,200 tickets.

It also collected 26 Red Cross messages of a strictly personal nature, addressed to relatives, and distributed another 19 between detainees and their families.



## Training in prison health

The ICRC organizes training seminars to supplement the activities that it carries out in detention centres.

During 2009, the ICRC and the INPEC organized the third national seminar on prison health, attended by 63 health officials from different prisons around the country, as well as training courses on prison health and its structural support; participants included 1,000 INPEC guards and 60 directors of various incarceration facilities.

## Watching for a reduction of overcrowding in prisons managed by the INPEC

The authorities plan to open 10 new detention centres during 2010. As these prisons are opened, the ICRC will pay attention to their impact on the detention conditions of people deprived of their liberty and on the problem of overcrowding.

**WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?**

**Rule 118.** *Persons deprived of their liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical attention.*



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# 4. Authorities and civil society: prevention activities

Through training, education and awareness-raising programmes, the ICRC seeks to disseminate the principles of international humanitarian law, and to influence the attitudes and behaviour of armed actors in order to provide greater protection to vulnerable groups in times of armed conflict, facilitate access to victims of the conflict, and improve the security conditions in which humanitarian action takes place.

Those to whom these activities are addressed include the armed forces, police and armed groups, as well as decision-makers and opinion leaders, both locally and internationally. Moreover, the ICRC endeavours to assist States party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 in complying with their obligation to promote humanitarian rules and principles in order

to prevent, or at least limit, the abuses committed in war.

## **4.1 Access to victims of the armed conflict is essential**

The ICRC strives constantly to ensure that all parties to a conflict are aware of its mission and the activities that it carries out on behalf of victims. It also addresses the consequences from a humanitarian standpoint that civilians face, especially those living in rural areas.

During 2009, the ICRC organized 176 information sessions on its activities, attended by 14,534 people, including members of the police and armed forces, civilian authorities, representatives of universities and members of armed groups.

With financial assistance from the ICRC, the Colombian Red Cross carried out 203 informational activities with 4,136 participants, including community leaders, civilian authorities, medical personnel, teachers and lecturers, and representatives of relief agencies, humanitarian organizations and the police and armed forces.

## **4.2 The armed forces and the national police: dialogue on the implementation of international humanitarian law**

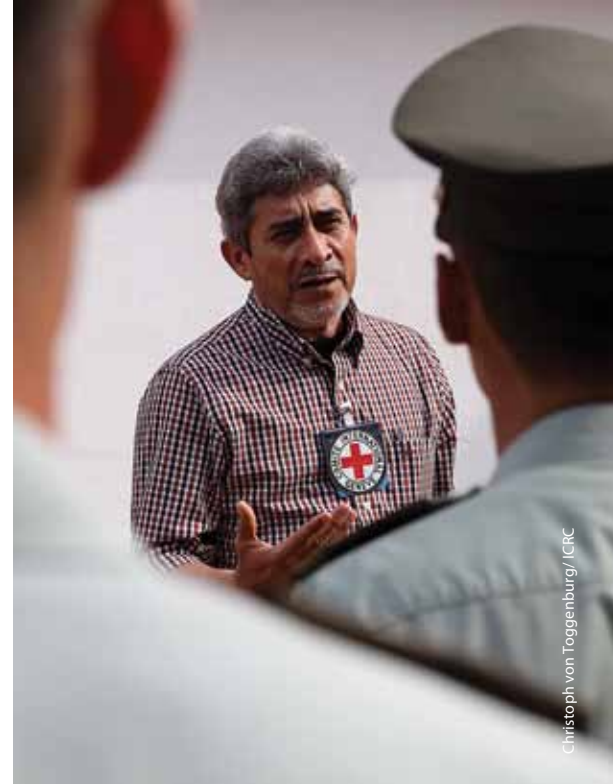
The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross are continuing to offer advice to the armed forces and the national police on strengthening the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL) through a preventive approach.

- The ICRC frequently discusses alleged violations of IHL that have been documented in the field with operational units of the Ministry of Defence.
- The ICRC prepares a confidential report each year on the trends observed and the results of its interventions in relation to alleged violations of IHL at the operational level, and submits it to the armed forces high command.



During 2009:

- Two “lessons learned” exercises were held in two army divisions to consider problems with regard to the implementation of IHL and propose measures to improve respect for IHL in the planning, conduct, control and evaluation of military operations.
- Overall, 508 members of the armed forces, including legal and operational military advisers, intelligence and operations commanders, officers in charge of human rights and IHL, and military training instructors participated in eight IHL workshops for military divisions and schools with advisers from the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross.
- The ICRC visited 14 police training schools to improve the IHL integration process.
- The Ministry of Defence received legal advice on strengthening the implementation of IHL in the new operational law manual.



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### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 139.** *Each party to the conflict must respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law by its armed forces and other persons or groups acting in fact on its instructions, or under its direction or control.*

**Rule 141.** *Each State must make legal advisers available, when necessary, to advise military commanders at the appropriate level on the application of international humanitarian law.*





### 4.3 National authorities and international humanitarian law

Colombia is a State party to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their two Additional Protocols I and II of 1977, and 15 other international treaties on IHL. The government has a legal obligation to disseminate, promote, respect and enforce the rules of IHL.

In 2009, Colombia ratified amended Article 1 of the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. This treaty strengthens the protection of victims of armed conflicts against the effects of weapons prohibited and restricted by IHL.

Since 2 November 2009, the International Criminal Court has had full jurisdiction to investigate and try war crimes committed in Colombia or by Colombians.

The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross are advising the government with a view to promoting ratification of the treaties that are part of IHL and adoption of the laws and administrative measures necessary to ensure compliance with the rules of IHL. They are also promoting the participation of public entities and civil society in special meetings.

#### WHAT DOES CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW SAY?

**Rule 142.** *States and parties to the conflict must provide instruction in international humanitarian law to their armed forces.*

**Rule 143.** *States must encourage the teaching of international humanitarian law to the civilian population.*



#### **4.4 Media: making victims of the armed conflict visible**

The difficult conditions in which victims of the armed conflict live, and their most pressing needs, are not well known. For this reason, the ICRC maintains ongoing contact with different national, regional and international media and shares with them the humanitarian concerns of the civilian population through various activities.

During 2009, the ICRC organized eight versions of the course “Journalists, armed conflict and IHL” in Arauca, Barraquilla, Cúcuta, Ibagué, Manizales, Pasto, Popayán and Puerto Asís. Nearly 300 journalists from the national and regional media took part in the working sessions. In these academic gatherings, the ICRC shares its experience and knowledge of humanitarian issues with communicators.

Between 2002 and 2009, 29 versions of the course were organized in 26 cities around the country and attended by more than 1,000 journalists.



# The ICRC in Colombia

## **Neutral and independent humanitarian action on behalf of victims of the armed conflict**

The ICRC delegation in Colombia provides protection and assistance to victims of the armed conflict. It reminds the armed forces, the police and organized armed groups of their obligation to respect and protect civilians, people performing medical duties, and those who are *hors de combat* as a result of wounds, illness, deprivation of liberty, or because they have laid down their weapons.

## Background on Colombia

**March 1969.** The Colombian government authorizes the ICRC to visit people detained in connection with the internal armed conflict.

**May 1980.** Colombia and the ICRC sign a headquarters agreement, which is approved by Law No. 42 of 1981.

**November 1990.** The Colombian authorities agree that the ICRC may facilitate the release of members of the police and armed forces who have been deprived of their liberty by organized armed groups.

**August 1991.** The national police undertake to provide the ICRC with information on people taken into custody in connection with the internal armed conflict.

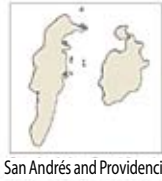
**November 1994.** The government of Colombia authorizes the ICRC to establish contact with organized armed groups.

**February 1996.** Protocol II of 8 June 1977 additional to the Geneva Conventions enters into force in Colombia. The government and the ICRC sign a memorandum of understanding enabling the ICRC to visit all persons deprived of their liberty, to move around the country without restrictions, to maintain contact with all parties to the conflict, and to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the armed conflict.

**February 1996.** The Colombian Ministry of Defence undertakes to provide the ICRC with information on all people taken into custody by the police and armed forces in connection with the armed conflict, and to allow it access to both temporary and permanent places of detention.

**November 2001.** The ICRC and the Social Solidarity Network, now the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (Acción Social), sign a letter of understanding for the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance to the displaced population.

**January 2006.** The ICRC and Acción Social renew the letter of understanding signed in 2001. The objective is to formalize the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance activities on behalf of the displaced.



## ICRC in Colombia 2010

- Delegation in Colombia
- Sub-delegation
- Office

### Sub-delegations

- Centro Colombia - CCO
- Bucaramanga - BUA
- Medellín - MEE
- Cali - CAL
- Florencia - FLO
- Areas in which the ICRC implements its operational approach



Source: IGAC

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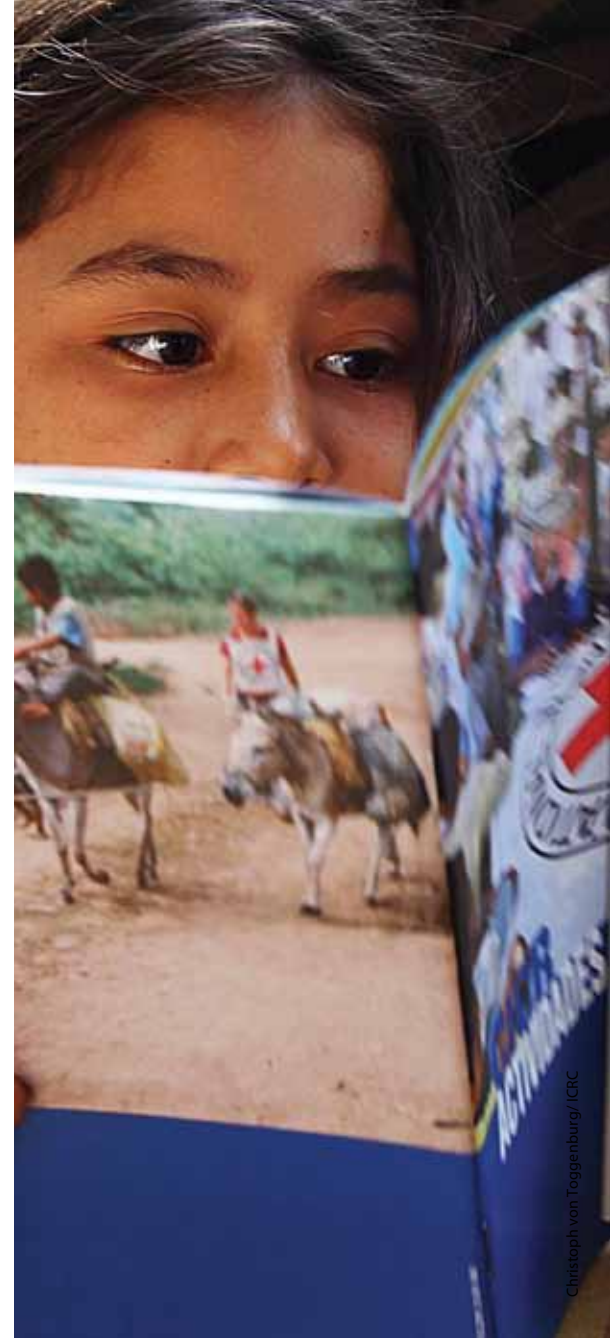
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**For more information about the ICRC in Colombia and around the world, visit the ICRC website, [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org), which contains:**

- the latest news
- details on topics of special interest to the ICRC
- IHL
- a summary of activities
- testimonies
- interviews
- features
- a collection of photographs
- multimedia
- publications
- the Family News Network
- articles from the International Review of the Red Cross
- and a link to the Colombian Red Cross website, [www.cruzrojacolombiana.org](http://www.cruzrojacolombiana.org)

**Produced by:** ICRC Communication Department, Bogotá, Colombia. April 2010.

## **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.



Photos ICRC



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