



NEWSLETTER

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ICRC REGIONAL DELEGATION BANGKOK

PROTECTING VICTIMS OF ARMED CONFLICT THROUGH PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

International humanitarian law is the body of rules that, in wartime, protects people who are not or no longer participating in the hostilities. Its central purpose is to prevent or limit human suffering in times of armed conflict. The four Geneva Conventions are the principal instruments of humanitarian law. They were adopted 60 years ago and have now been endorsed by 194 States. The ICRC is often called the “guardian” of international humanitarian law.

In a speech given in London on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, ICRC Vice-President Christine Beerli declared that: “In terms of dissemination, increased knowledge of international humanitarian law is clearly a prerequisite to better respect for the law. To this end, members of the armed forces at all levels must be properly trained in the application of the law. Civilians too should have at least a basic understanding of those parts of international humanitarian law which could affect them in the event of armed conflict. Young people in secondary level education should be targeted, as for example through the Exploring Humanitarian Law initiative, an education programme which introduces them to the basic rules and principles of international humanitarian law.”

To mark the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, Srinakharinwirot University of Thailand and the ICRC jointly organized a seminar on “The relevance of international humanitarian law and contemporary armed conflicts.” Experts from Chulalongkorn University, the ASEAN department of Ministry of foreign affairs, Ministry of defence, and the ICRC took part in the seminar. They discussed many of the current challenges of international humanitarian law, such as the “fight against terrorism,” the proliferation of non-State armed groups and the emergence of new actors such as private military and security companies, and emerging threats linked to new technological developments with potentially devastating humanitarian consequences. They acknowledged the need to develop new treaties. However, they argued that the main challenge, now as ever, is to spread knowledge of and promote compliance with the existing rules. Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn pointed out that “humanitarian law should be the business of everyone. An integrated approach is needed in order to change people’s attitudes and behaviour towards humanitarian issues. Outreach to power groups and community leaders is a must.”

Ninety-four representatives from the Thai armed forces, the police, non-governmental organizations as well as lecturers and students from various universities attended the event.



From left to right: Dr. Toni Pfanner, editor-in-chief of the International Review of the Red Cross, Dr. Vitit Muntarbhorn, professor of international law at Chulalongkorn University, and Veenarat Laopakakul, editor at Nation Broadcasting Cooperation.

Editorial

Last August, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. These treaties, which form the backbone of international humanitarian law, have saved countless lives. Unfortunately, violations remain frequent. Better knowledge of the treaties by all parts of society could help to curtail violations and thereby to reduce suffering. In this Newsletter, the reader will learn about the ICRC’s efforts to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law in the region.

This year, the ICRC is also looking back on 30 years of continuous activities in Cambodia, which experienced war almost without interruption from 1970 to 1999. We review the ICRC’s main activities in the country since 1979, from the initial emergency assistance to the current emphasis on capacity building and providing support for institutions.

Also in this Newsletter, you will find a report on a project carried out jointly by the Lao Red Cross and the ICRC, which are working together to address basic needs of vulnerable minorities.

Christian Brunner

Head of Regional Delegation Bangkok



ICRC

NEW THAI RED CROSS MASTER TRAINERS RECEIVE CERTIFICATION

On 25 August 2009, a ceremony was organized by the Thai Red Cross to award certificates to 16 new master trainers. The certificates were presented by the secretary-general of the Thai Red Cross, Khun Phan Wannamethee, in the presence of representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC.

The programme for Thai Red Cross trainers was launched in October 2008 by the International Federation and the ICRC. The participants attended a four-day introductory course on communication skills and topics related to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international humanitarian law and international activities of the Red Cross in times of conflict or of major disaster.

Between November 2008 and September 2009, the trainers disseminated these topics to 1,220 Thai Red Cross staff during five sessions in Bangkok and in the provinces. Until the end of 2009, more sessions will be organized for about 450 staff. International Federation and ICRC resource persons attend the sessions.

Khun Pitchaya Sutheeverakachon is one of the new master trainers. She works as a health instructor at the First-Aid and Health-Care Training Centre of the Thai Red Cross. She had never before received such training. "I wish we could have more training of trainers so that we could expand the pool of disseminators within the Thai Red Cross," she said. "Even though we work in the Red Cross, we may not truly understand the seven Fundamental Principles,



Khun Pitchaya Sutheeverakachon receiving her master-trainer certificate from the Thai Red Cross secretary-general.

what to do or how to deal with misuse of the red cross emblem. If we all truly understood the origin of our organization, our commitment to it would be even stronger."

HUMANITARIAN LAW FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In September 2009, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education, the Thai Red Cross and the ICRC signed an agreement to introduce basic elements of international humanitarian law and related issues into the Thai Red Cross youth curriculum. Exploring Humanitarian Law, an international education programme specifically designed for young people between the ages of 13 and 18, will be used. The primary goal of Exploring Humanitarian Law is to help young people embrace the principles of humanity in their daily lives and in the way they assess events at home and abroad. The learning materials, which are based on both historical and contemporary situations, show

how international humanitarian law aims to protect life and human dignity during armed conflict and to prevent or reduce the suffering and devastation caused by war.

The Thai Red Cross youth bureau has been associated with the development of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme since 2000. Tests were organized in selected Thai secondary schools in 2007 and the programme was adapted to the Thai context. Once the teaching materials have been translated into Thai, a national workshop will be organized for education ministry officials, Thai Red Cross staff and selected secondary-school teachers. The

programme will be introduced into classrooms next year.

Khun Manida Chotivanich, acting director of the Thai Red Cross youth bureau said: "We hope that this programme will help teachers to better disseminate international humanitarian law to our young Thai, and make them aware of the importance of humanity."

The Exploring Humanitarian Law programme is currently being implemented at various stages of advancement in 90 countries around the world.



Chinnapat Bhumirat, permanent secretary of the Thai education ministry, discussing the Exploring Humanitarian Law education programme with Khun Manida and colleagues from the Thai Red Cross and the ICRC.

TRAINING THE ARMED FORCES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Over the years, the ICRC has developed a working relationship with nearly all armed forces around the world in order to promote international humanitarian law. It has developed training tools and participates in workshops and seminars for officers in charge of instructing the troops in international humanitarian law.

In the framework of this cooperation, the ICRC provided support for the International Humanitarian Law Instructor Training course in August 2009 for Royal Thai Armed Forces instructors. Thirty officers underwent training organized and delivered jointly by the department of the judge advocate general of the defence ministry and the ICRC regional delegation.

The course was opened jointly by Lt Gen Piyapol Wattanakul, deputy judge advocate general of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, and by Christian

Brunner, head of the ICRC's regional delegation in Bangkok. In his remarks to the participants, Lt Gen Wattanakul said: "The objective of the instructor's course in international humanitarian law, sponsored by the ICRC, is to train each and every one of you to present the basics of international humanitarian law at your training institutions by applying the knowledge and skills you will acquire during the course."

From 20 to 24 October, at the request of Viet Nam's Peoples Army, the ICRC organized a training course on international humanitarian law for 25 military instructors from every major training institution of the People's Army. The one-week course, which was arranged by the army's general political affairs department, was held in Dalat, in the southern part of the country.



Christian Brunner, head of the ICRC's regional delegation in Bangkok, presenting a poster on international humanitarian law to Gen Sayan Athakasem, deputy judge advocate general of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, at the closing ceremony of the International Humanitarian Law Instructor Training course. The jointly developed poster illustrating main rules of international humanitarian law will be placed on display at prominent armed forces sites.

PROVIDING CLEAN WATER FOR LAO VILLAGERS

Laos is an ethnically diverse country. Minorities live mainly in remote and isolated mountainous areas inaccessible by road. They have limited opportunities for economic development. The Lao Red Cross endeavours to assist the most

vulnerable communities. Supported by partner National Red Cross Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC, it covers the basic needs, such as water, sanitation and primary health care.

After conducting the need assessment survey in early 2008, the Lao Red Cross set out, with ICRC support, to assist 800 vulnerable families in five villages in the Muang and Xanakham districts of Vientiane province. With the technical assistance of district health and water staff, the aim was to design and implement water supply systems and pour-flush latrines, and train Red Cross volunteers for community-based promotion of first aid and hygiene. In October 2009, the Lao Red Cross organized a final field visit together with the ICRC water engineer before handing over the project to local communities to make sure that villagers understood how to perform proper maintenance, as water quality – and the villagers' health – depends on it.

"We believe that if assistance is provided too easily, villagers sometimes take it for granted," said Phonekham Keovilay, who has worked with the Lao Red Cross for eight years. "Therefore, we encourage long-term development by promoting active participation from the villagers. When they are in charge of the project themselves, they tend to value it more."

"Before this pump was built, I had to walk 300 metres to the river to fetch water that was not always clean," said Nan, a 26-year-old mother from Non Nakab village. "Now I can do my washing here. It saves time for my family and me. All we need to do is take turns looking after the well and keeping things clean."



An ICRC water engineer insists on the importance of proper use and maintenance of new equipment.

Helping school children in southern Thailand



Children in makeshift school. Distribution of materials.

Last August, the primary school of Ban Tanyong in the province of Narathiwat was burnt down completely. Fortunately, there were no casualties as the children had just left the school to go for lunch, but all the books, computers and furniture were reduced to ashes.

"It was during the day, at noon," said a young girl. "We were leaving the school and boarding the school bus to go home when we saw the building catch fire all of a sudden. The flames were very big and the smoke was very dark." Another section of the school had burnt down one year before. The children said that that was why they were not afraid – in a way, they were "used to it."

A total of 250 primary-school children are enrolled in the school. Without waiting for the schoolhouse planned by the education ministry to be built, the villagers set up makeshift classrooms with wooden benches and tables so that the school could continue to function. On 23 September, following discussions with the authorities, the ICRC distributed geometry sets, whiteboards with markers and erasers, notebooks, drawing books, pens, pencils, rubbers and some sport equipment to the school.

LOOKING BACK ON 30 YEARS OF ICRC ACTIVITIES IN CAMBODIA

The Cambodian people experienced war, deadly political clashes and other violence almost continuously from 1969 to 1999. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives and millions were forced to leave their homes. The conflict devastated the country and large areas were turned into deadly mine fields.

The ICRC carried out humanitarian activities in Cambodia from 1970 to 1975, but had to leave the country during the rule of the Khmer Rouge.

In January 1979, Vietnamese troops drove the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh and large swaths of the country. The war continued to rage on, however, with tens of thousands of families fleeing their homes and seeking refuge elsewhere. After intensive negotiations with the new authorities in Cambodia, the ICRC and UNICEF launched a massive emergency operation in August 1979. By the end of 1980, the ICRC and UNICEF had delivered 250,000 metric tonnes of food. In agreement with the Thai authorities, the ICRC also stepped up its activities in the camps along the border between Thailand and Cambodia.

After the emergency operation ended, the ICRC continued to provide assistance for the Cambodian people and institutions. Together with Red Cross societies from a number of countries, it supported medical facilities

in Phnom Penh and in the provinces. ICRC delegates visited people detained in connection with the conflict and worked to restore contact between people who had been separated from one another. In 1999, when peace had finally been restored throughout the country and the last refugees had returned from Thailand, the ICRC gradually began to hand over responsibility for many activities to the Cambodian Red Cross and government institutions.

However, as in most conflicts, people's needs did not cease to exist from one day to the next. Many families remained dispersed. People continued to suffer mine injuries. Amputees needed affordable prostheses. Government institutions lacked the resources and know-how required to meet the needs of the people after decades of war. The ICRC therefore remained in the country. Its activities now focus on strengthening the capacities of the Cambodian Red Cross and the authorities in fields such as physical rehabilitation, and tracing and reuniting family members, in order to improve services available to needy people.

The ICRC will commemorate 30 years of continuous activities in Cambodia – from 1979 to 2009 – at various events to be held in Phnom Penh from 14 to 16 December. ICRC Vice-President Christine Beerli and François Bugnion, the delegate who restarted the ICRC's activities



in the country in 1979, will hand over to the Cambodian Red Cross a digital version of the ICRC archives relating to refugees and their families who were separated during the conflict. A photo exhibition will retrace 30 years of activities, from emergency relief to the aid provided to the Cambodian Red Cross and institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and the Ministry of the Interior.



MISSION STATEMENT

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 war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It 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 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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