



**The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral, independent and strictly humanitarian international organisation. Its mandate, recognised by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 on the protection of war victims, is to work for the respect of international humanitarian law in times of armed conflicts and to alleviate the suffering of the victims of such conflicts.**

**The ICRC opened its delegation in Eritrea in 1998 and worked throughout the 1998 – 2000 conflict with Ethiopia, protecting and assisting persons affected by the conflict. Nowadays, the ICRC remains active in the country to alleviate the sufferings arising from this war and the difficulties in the implementation of the border delimitation.**

## Overview of the main ICRC activities in 2008

The ICRC, in accordance with its mandate, focused on meeting the needs of people still affected by the 1998–2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia. It worked mainly in the war-affected southern border regions. In Gash Barka, it remained the only international aid agency with a permanent presence. The ICRC programmes were carried out in cooperation with the authorities and local communities, and coordinated with international organizations still active in Eritrea.

The ICRC focused on implementing livelihood-support projects designed to help border communities affected by the consequences of the conflict to improve their economic situation. The ICRC provided, as food security measure, tractor ploughing to residents, mainly women headed families affected by the lack of men labour and by the lack of access to fuel. The delegation also worked to improve the household economical assets through the distribution of foot pumps, donkeys, water bags and goats. Projects included treating livestock against parasite-diseases.

Evaluations confirmed that the 2008 tractor-ploughing initiatives had been less effective in boosting food security because of the limited rain-falls during the year. Returnees and resettled families, as well as residents, also received shelter and other essential household items. Selected families were provided with construction materials and funds to build homes. The

delegation also worked with the authorities and communities to improve access to safe water in the border regions, by installing solar-powered water systems, a self-sustainable source of energy much appreciated by the authorities and in line with the general policy of the country. In Debub, the ICRC provided specifically technical and financial assistance to resettled IDPs and distributed construction materials for the production of energy saving ovens.

Delegates continued to follow the situation in the border areas, ready to document alleged incidents of violence in the area. The ICRC visited detainees of Ethiopian origin, including two new POWs captured during a late December 2007 border skirmish. It also kept on monitoring the situation of the Ethiopian community in Eritrea and addressing specific issues with the concerned authorities. The aim is to ensure that the rights of those people, regarding living conditions and repatriation are respected, in accordance with international humanitarian standards and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. With the authorities' approval, the ICRC also resumed financial aid to help vulnerable people of Ethiopian origin wishing to remain in the country to obtain or renew their Eritrean residence permits.

Furthermore, the ICRC assisted in repatriating people who wished to return to Ethiopia or Eritrea and, when requested, reunited children and other vulnerable people with their families

across the border. While maintaining the tracing services, the ICRC delegation started handing over the Red Cross Messages network to the Red Cross Society of Eritrea so that relatives could communicate across the closed border.

The surgical training programme for general practitioners, anaesthetists and nurses in three Gash Barka hospitals (Barentu, Tesseney, and Agordat) was put on hold in mid-August 2008 due to the lack of fuel. The delegation is working on alternative energy options, such as the installation of solar systems at the office and residences in Barentu to be able to resume its surgical training activities. In the meantime, following graduation of 50 medical students that are being dispatched to the different hospitals in the country to carry out their internship, the ICRC

delegation with and the Ministry of Health signed a new Memorandum of Understanding to support medical facilities and referral hospitals in their surgical training programme.

Small-scale programmes to promote IHL progressed as planned with the Eritrean armed forces and civil society. The military, for example, sent senior officers to an IHL course abroad, under ICRC sponsorship, and completed a Tigrinya translation of the ICRC's IHL instructor's manual.

Since the suspension of the Eritrean Red Cross activities was lifted by the government in April, the ICRC resumed its cooperation with the National Society in the fields of Tracing, Assistance and Dissemination.

## Population in the border areas

### Providing potable water in adequate quantity

During the first part of the year 2008, the ICRC responded to needs of drinking water of people living in remote areas located in the border zone with Ethiopia. In these areas, the sources of water are usually far from the villages, seasonal and providing contaminated water. The villagers, particularly women and children, walk for hours to reach shallow hand dug wells or ponds used also by animals.

The ICRC worked closely with the Eritrean Water Authorities to identify suitable sites for drilling. After having drilled and tested the boreholes ICRC technicians install solar-powered water pumps. The villagers under the supervision of and together with the ICRC technical staff build the pipeline and the public fountains that will provide water. Every system is designed to provide 20 litres per day per person. The size of each system is based on the yield of the borehole and on the number of beneficiaries. Considering the shortage of fuel and the limited resources of the rural communities, solar-powered water supply systems continued to be favoured for all permanent structures.

During the second part of the period under review, because of the lack of fuel no new water systems were constructed.

A WaSH (Water Sanitation Hygiene) training run by the ICRC field officers, took place in the villages where a solar water supply system had been built. The training aims to constitute the water committee that will manage the water system, gives basic hygiene education and knowledge of financial management to ensure sustainability of the action.

#### In 2008

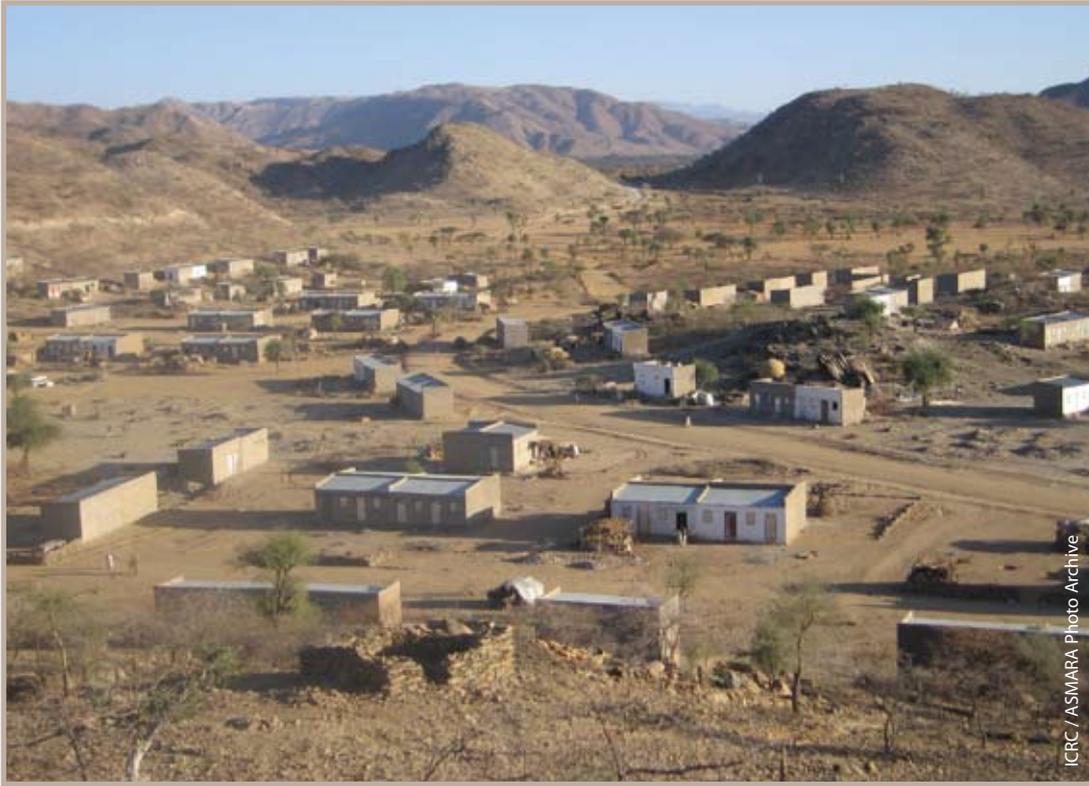
**21'100 persons benefited from improved access to drinking water through the construction of 8 solar-powered water supply systems, the drilling of 4 boreholes, the construction of 1 water catchment's dam, the construction of 1 semi-urban water supply system and the reparation of 1 dam.**



Solar-powered water supply system built by the ICRC, Aklelet, Gash – Barka region.



Solar-powered water supply system built by the ICRC, Berik Hutsa, Debub Region.



ICRC Housing Project, Una Nazo and Kudoweyba resettlers, Tsorona Subzone, Debug region.

people in two instalments: The first when the external walls of the house were constructed, the second when the construction was completed. The incentive enabled the beneficiaries to hire masons and carpenters to build the house, or to improve the quality of the construction.

## Capacity building of Eritrean water authorities

To ensure long-term sustainability of water supply systems in Eritrea and to enable

## Construction of Houses

Despite the lack of fuel that has hampered assistance operations since April 2008, the construction of 250 houses for resettled IDPs that initiated in October 2007, and the construction of 300 houses that started in January 2008 was accomplished at the end of the year. Cars were rented in order to be able to monitor the activities (at least two times per month) and rented trucks transported the necessary construction materials on site.

The ICRC distributed all the materials (sand, gravel, stones, cement, hollow blocks, nails, and iron sheets) and provided technical and financial assistance to IDPs that have been resettled to areas where no shelter was available. The beneficiaries are responsible for the construction of the houses. The financial contribution (an incentive of 4000 Nakfa per family) was distributed directly to the

the water authorities to design new systems and maintain them, the ICRC organised two training sessions for Water Resource Department (WRD) employees. Participants coming from the six Regions and from the central office in Asmara attended a three weeks course on GIS software (Geographic Information System: captures, stores, analyzes, manages and presents data that refer to a specific location) and a one week course on water network design with Epanet software (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Network).



Energy saving oven built for resettlers, Tsorona Subzone, Debug region.

### In 2008

- **2'750 persons benefited from adequate shelter through the construction of 550 houses.**
- **250 persons are now able to build energy saving ovens thanks to the materials and training provided.**
- **Following attendance of the GIS and Epanet courses, 39 WRD employees are now able to plan and design new water networks and to improve the hydraulic performances of the existent.**

# Boosting economic security of resident population

## Distribution of household items

Returning or resettled families were able to set up home in the border area using tarpaulins, rope, blankets, jerry cans and soap provided by the ICRC. The assistance was coordinated with the authorities, UNDP, which financed the transport of the former IDPs, and UNICEF, which rehabilitated health posts and schools. Temporary shelters and essential households' items were distributed to 22,989 individuals representing 5,599 households among whom 12,830 individuals representing 3,005 households were assisted twice.



Distribution of temporary shelter and essential household items, Dehub region.

## Tractor Ploughing

Some 8,000 struggling families in Dehub region, most of them headed by women, had their fields ploughed in May and July, ahead of the planting season, by tractors hired by the ICRC. The



Tractor ploughing in Dehub region.

tractors ploughed a total of 7,700 hectares of fertile land. The families lacked the farm equipment or manpower, or both, to do the work, and would otherwise have had to leave their land fallow, thereby reducing their already meagre income. After the ploughing, the families began planting crops or rented their field to other farmers, thus increasing their income. Assessments showed that the 2007 tractor-ploughing initiatives helped boost food security, so 7,000 more beneficiaries than planned were added to the 2008 programme.

**In 2008,**

- **39,905 individuals, representing 7,981 households, benefited from the services of tractor ploughing of (twice) 3,850 hectares of land**
- **22,989 individuals representing 5,599 households who returned or were recently resettled received 14,527 kg of soap, 5,184 tarpaulins, 4,894 jerry cans, 2,002 buckets, 11,781 blankets 113,875 meters of rope.**

## Distribution of Donkeys and water containers

Poor families in the border region who live far from a water point were given donkeys and a large water container. This allowed women and girls to fetch more water in a shorter time, which freed them up for other productive activities. Families also used the donkeys to collect and carry crops, firewood and fodder, and take products to market to sell or barter.



Distribution of donkeys and Jirbas, Dehub Region.

**In 2008,**

- **1,830 people benefited from the provision of donkeys and water containers.**
- **1,115 people benefited from the provision of goats.**

## Distribution of goats

Other families opted to receive goats from the ICRC. The animals are resilient and need little upkeep, which facilitate their survival in lean periods, and provide milk and meat, or can be sold. To increase the availability of meat, milk and income, the ICRC distributed 5 goats (each) to selected households with extremely low income.



Distribution of goats to returnees to the border area, Debub Region.



Distribution of foot pump to gardeners in border areas, Senafe sub zone, Debub Region.

## Distribution of foot pumps

To increase the income and the variety of food available, residents living along the border received foot pumps, tools and seeds, enabling beneficiaries to sell their harvest. The items were distributed to households having a basic knowledge in gardening and possessing a land plot near a water source. The foot pumps require only manual labour, therefore the beneficiaries are independent from the availability of fuel to run the pumps.

The monitoring and evaluation field trips proved that the people who received the materials managed to enhance their income by increasing the size of land cultivated.

### In 2008,

- **368 households representing 1,840 individuals received 92 foot pumps and 92 kits of seeds and tools. The average is one pump, one kit of seeds and tools for 4 households.**
- **18,908 households representing 94,540 individuals were supported in the anti-parasite treatment of 470,958 animals.**

## Livestock treatment

To strengthen the physical condition of livestock before the rainy season the ICRC planned to inoculate with parasites control drugs 470,958 animals belonging to 18,908 households living in border areas in two phases (before and after the rainy season). Because of the lack of fuel availability that hampered the implementation of the project only the first phase of the programme was implemented.



Anti-parasite treatment of livestock, Debub Region.

# Restoring/ Maintaining of Family Links

## Exchange of family news

Families separated by the war continued to be able to communicate across the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border through the tracing and RCM services. At their request, people of Eritrean or Ethiopian origin were repatriated and the children, the elderly and the sick, reunited with their families across the border, under ICRC auspices. This remained their only legal means of returning to their country of origin. Following ICRC interventions, both governments continued to approve the reunification of couples of mixed origin. This mainly concerned women of Eritrean origin joining their husbands in Ethiopia, but in March, for the first time, a woman of Ethiopian origin, with her nine-year-old son, was reunited with her husband in Eritrea. Prior to repatriations, 148 needy people obtained their exit visas from Eritrea with ICRC financial support. People also had their official documents forwarded so that they could apply for jobs or pursue their studies.



Distribution of Red Cross Message to a family in Debub Region.

The ICRC was temporarily running the Red Cross Message (RCM) service during the first part of the year until the Eritrean Red Cross fully resumed its activities.

The ICRC also monitored the situation of civilians of Ethiopian origin living in Eritrea and made necessary representations on their behalf to the relevant authorities. With ICRC financial assistance, 166 such people who had little or no income or support obtained or renewed their Eritrean residence permits. The beneficiaries included women with children wishing to stay in Eritrea whose husbands were in the national service, and who wished to stay in Eritrea, and elderly people who had no close family in Ethiopia.

In 2008,

- **5750 RCMs collected from and 8339 RCMs distributed to civilians.**
- **new tracing requests registered for 25 people (6 females; 2 minors at the time of disappearance); 61 people located; 209 people (60 females; 53 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought.**
- **1714 people voluntarily repatriated from Eritrea to Ethiopia (out of which 85 people in Eritrea reunited with their families in Ethiopia, including 56 unaccompanied/separated children) and 52 people voluntarily repatriated from Ethiopia to Eritrea.**
- **21 unaccompanied/separated children registered; 3 cases of unaccompanied/separated child still being handled.**
- **33 persons in Ethiopia received official documents relayed from Eritrea and 30 persons in Eritrea received documents from Ethiopia.**



The two POWs of Ethiopian origin captured by Eritrean forces in late December 2007 during a border skirmish were visited by the ICRC, with the Eritrean government's approval and according to the organization's standard procedures. The delegates monitored detention conditions, and both were able to exchange messages with their families. The ICRC also monitored the situation of the few remaining former POWs who had declined repatriation in

2002. Two of whom were repatriated at their request in March and June respectively.

The ICRC also visited detainees of Ethiopian origin held in Eritrea and informed the local detaining authorities confidentially of its findings and recommendations, in accordance with humanitarian principles and the relevant provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Inmates were offered the RCM service to communicate with relatives and received, where necessary, blankets, clothing, and hygiene products.



ICRC / ASMARA Photo Archive

Family reunion from Ethiopia to Eritrea, Mendefera transit camp.

**In 2008,**

- **492 detainees visited and monitored individually (103 females; 29 minors) and 402 newly registered (96 females; 25 minors), during 115 visits to 49 places of detention.**
- **174 RCMs collected from and 190 RCMs distributed to detainees.**



ICRC / ASMARA Photo Archive

## Health

### Surgical trainings and trauma management

Eritrea continues to face a shortage of qualified medical personnel, leaving the country short of surgical and physical rehabilitation services.

To boost surgical capacities, general practitioners, anaesthetists and nurses at three hospitals in the Gash Barka border region (population 700'000) were participating in a training programme conducted by a four-person ICRC surgical team. The ICRC had to suspend the surgical training programme in August 2008 because of the shortage of fuel. Patients from the Gash Barka region in need of particular surgical care are now referred to other hospitals in the region, or to Asmara.

The Ministry of Health selected the Barentu Referral Hospital in Gash Barka as a training centre for newly graduated medical staff. The delegation signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Health to support medical facilities and referral hospitals in their training programme.

**In 2008,**

**Under ICRC supervision, in the 3 ICRC-supported hospitals:**

- **278 surgical cases admitted, of whom 15 weapon-wounded (including 1 woman, 1 child, and 3 men injured by mines or explosive remnants of war)**

- **259 surgical operations performed.**
- **147 general practitioners and nursing staff enhanced their surgical skills through participation in two Emergency Room Trauma Courses and one War Wounded Surgery Seminar organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.**
- **14 permanent staff of the Barentu Hospital received training in nursing care and operating theatre management (hygiene, sterilization, preparation of sets).**
- **35 medical personnel working in Barentu and Glass (Keren) Military Hospitals attended a workshop on trauma management that was organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence.**



Certificate handing over ceremony Refresher Course for physiotherapists, Asmara.

## Promotion of International Humanitarian Law

As in other countries, the ICRC's ability to protect and assist populations affected by conflict depends upon the authorities' support for IHL and the ICRC's related mandate. The Eritrean government had not yet officially endorsed the ICRC's Tigrinya translation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, but the Ministry of Justice received a printed version to circulate as an aid in drafting domestic laws implementing IHL.

At the local level, authorities in various regions received publications on IHL and the ICRC. In addition, during two Emergency Room Trauma Courses conducted in July and September, 56 Health Ministry medical personnel learned about their rights and duties under IHL during armed conflict.

### Training to Eritrean Defence Force

The Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) expressed their ongoing commitment to work with the ICRC on a small-scale programme aimed at integrating IHL into military training.

Under ICRC sponsorship, two high-ranking EDF instructors completed an IHL course in San Remo in March. The EDF also produced a Tigrinya translation of the ICRC IHL instructors' manual for use in the three courses agreed on for 2008, and Ministry of Defence received a standard set of IHL reference documents. Senior military officers' knowledge of IHL and the ICRC contributed to facilitating ICRC activities, for example the visit to the two new POWs. In the field, soldiers at checkpoints were given IHL promotional materials.

Senior EDF-officers enhanced their knowledge of IHL through participating in a one week legal advisor course. A two weeks' IHL train-the-trainers' course for EDF officers was conducted by the ICRC, in collaboration with the EDF. Following the course, the newly appointed trainers are now able to teach troops in



War Surgery Seminar, Asmara.

### Physical Rehabilitation and physiotherapy trainings

Following extensive negotiations with local authorities, the delegation signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Physical Rehabilitation with the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare and started upgrading the three orthopaedic workshops in Eritrea with orthopaedic production material.

**In 2008,**

**4 refresher courses for 43 physiotherapists conducted by the ICRC in coordination with Ministry of Health to help Eritrea meet the demand for physiotherapy services.**

their respective operational zones about basic principles of IHL in armed conflict.

**In 2008,**

- **Nineteen local physiotherapists attended a two-hour session on ICRC and IHL during a two-week physiotherapist training co-organised by the ICRC and the Ministry of Health in Asmara.**
- **Similarly, during a War Wounded Surgery Seminar co-organized by the ICRC and the Ministry of Health in November in Asmara, 86 health professionals (Surgeons, GPs, Nurses, internship medical doctors) from the six regions of Eritrea were briefed about the ICRC and their rights and duties under IHL during armed conflict.**
- **Fifty-three police officers of various police stations of the Central Region attended a session on the ICRC and IHL during a first aid training organized by the Red Cross Society of Eritrea.**
- **Thirty-six prison officers of the Eritrean Prison and Rehabilitation Services, who came from the 11 prisons located in the six regions of Eritrea, attended a 10-day ICRC-sponsored legal training for prison officials. Legal advisors from the prison service and Ministry of Justice legal experts conducted the training. The ICRC briefed participants on basic principles of IHL and on its mandate, role and activities in prisons.**
- **16 EDF officers took part in a one-week legal advisor course in August.**
- **31 EDF officers attended a two-weeks' train-the-trainers course on IHL in August.**
- **25 officers attended a one-week refresher course on IHL in October.**



IHL course, Eritrean Defence Forces trainers, Embatkalla.

## Civil Society

Opinion-makers and the general public took part in information and dissemination sessions to generate support for IHL and the work of the ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. IHL promotional material was handed over to them.



Dissemination to kudo Weyba and Una Nazo ICRC housing project beneficiaries, Debub Region.

**In 2008,**

- **over 100 key stakeholders, including senior representatives of the government and diplomatic community, attended an event in Asmara held by Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners to mark the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May); publications on ICRC and IHL were distributed during the event.**
- **Some 4,500 visitors, many of them teachers or students stopped by the ICRC's stand at the 10-day National Book Fair in Asmara and received information material about the ICRC and IHL.**
- **20 students of the Evangelical Lutheran Church took part in an introductory session on IHL and the ICRC.**
- **The Heads of the Sawa National Centre of Vocational Training were briefed on the ICRC and IHL with a view to promote IHL to college students in the future. An information page that explains ICRC's mandate and activities was posted in the graduation bulletin, which was distributed to 3000 graduates of the vocational centre.**
- **40 staff members of the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students for the first time attended a session on IHL and the ICRC in Asmara.**
- **in November, 23 volunteers of the Red Cross Society of Eritrea, who came to attend a Mine Risk Education session, were briefed about the ICRC and IHL .**
- **some 80 beneficiaries of the ICRC housing project in the Southern Region were briefed on the ICRC and IHL in December.**

# Cooperation with the Red Cross Society of Eritrea

The Red Cross Society of Eritrea (RCSE) was notified by the government on 8 April that the suspension of its activities had been lifted. At the government's request, the Society had ceased work from early February 2007, pending the outcome of an investigation into its internal affairs. The government also transferred patronage of the Eritrean Red Cross from the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare to the Ministry of Health. The National Society reactivated its branches and resumed its activities during the second half of the year. In coordination with Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, the ICRC defined through ad hoc agreements its support for the tracing, assistance and communication programmes of the National Society.

## Tracing

During the suspension of the RCSE, the ICRC ensured the distribution and collection of RCMs throughout Eritrea. Following an agreement signed in August 2008 with the National Society,

the ICRC focused on reactivating the RCSE's network in three identified priority regions (Maekel, Gash Barka and Debub), where more than 80% of the RCMs are collected/distributed. In order to ensure the optimal working of the network, specific training was conducted for 88 volunteers in the three regions on modalities for the collection and distribution of RCMs. The complete hand-over of the RCMs distribution/collection in the three above-mentioned regions was finalized in December.

**In 2008,**

**1'499 RCMs were handed over to the National Society,  
564 RCMs were collected by the National Society.**

## Dissemination

In September 2008, with financial support of the ICRC, the Law and Fundamental Principles department of the National Society resumed its basic dissemination sessions which targeted 390 officials and business community members, 614 community members, 6100 students and 90 governmental officials with the aim of informing the general public on the Red Cross and

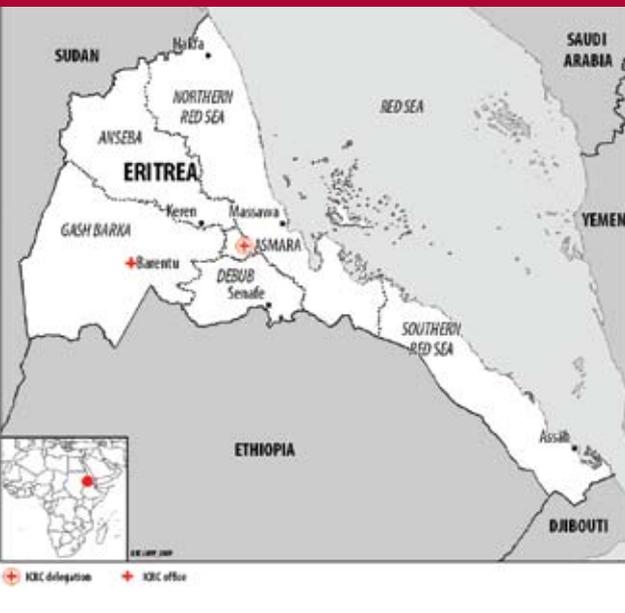


World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8th of May) Celebration, Asmara.

Red Crescent Movement, its principles and activities and thus strengthen the support needed for the National Society to gain recognition from Eritrean authorities. 98 RCSE volunteers were trained about the mandate and principles of the Red Cross to enable them to disseminate their knowledge to local communities. 23 volunteers took the Mine Risk Education (MRE) awareness training. Consequently, 2300 community members attended MRE sessions aimed at reinforcing their awareness of mine risks.

## **Assistance**

The RCSE continued giving First Aid trainings with the support of ICRC to industrial workers, transport company drivers, police forces and students (872 persons). The ICRC has supported the NS to further develop its human resources in the field of First Aid by conducting five-days of First Aid train-the-trainers session for 26 staff and volunteers. 150 RCAT members (Branch disaster response teams) attended a course on Relief Management aimed at creating a core-group within the National Society able to efficiently address emergency situations caused by natural disasters in the country.



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