

ICRC in Africa



A long-term commitment

Africa is the world's second most populous continent after Asia. With more than 925 million people living in 53 countries, it accounts for about 14 percent of the world's human population. In their quest for economic and social development the African countries have taken various initiatives and made substantial progress over the years. Nevertheless, these efforts have been hampered by political instability, natural disasters and violence in many regions.

A number of African countries continue to be beset by armed conflict. Invariably, civilians bear the brunt of the suffering. Millions are displaced from their homes. Many are cut off from their families and from social services, detained, wounded, killed, exposed to danger, extortion and harassment. The

injured often do not receive adequate medical care, mothers have to rely on poor quality water for cooking and many children are forced to survive alone without the loving care of their parents.

To address the humanitarian needs a continuous effort is required. Access to food, clean water, health care and sanitation should be available to everyone. Moreover, all those involved in armed conflict must ensure that the dignity and lives of civilians, medical staff and those who no longer take part in the fighting such as detainees and wounded are respected. Humanitarian workers must not be hindered from carrying out their duties. These are obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) that applies to all parties to a conflict – both States and non-State actors.



Uganda: Internally displaced persons with household items and farm tools distributed by the ICRC.

Every year the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Africa represent half of its engagement around the globe. The organisation has over 5000 employees on the continent, most of them are recruited locally. Among ICRC's largest operations worldwide are the ones in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and Chad.

Despite the difficult security situation and a poor infrastructure in many regions, the ICRC has been able to help millions of people since it first started operating in Africa in 1935. It closely cooperates with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to assist and protect those affected by conflict, even if this implies accessing very remote areas.

In periods of transition, when active hostilities have come to an end, ICRC maintains its presence until a peaceful environment is restored and development agencies can step in. It adapts its activities to the evolving needs.

Displaced from home

During the past four decades, millions of people throughout the continent have been obliged to abandon their homes due to conflict and other forms of violence. Forced to seek safety elsewhere, they often lose the few possessions they have and suffer great hardship. In many areas, absence of state structures and pervasive lawlessness expose the displaced to extreme violence and abuse. They face attacks, hunger and disease exacerbated by a lack of appropriate shelter. Thousands of families are torn apart in the process, deprived of their breadwinner, and have relatives who are sick, injured or detained. The about two million people displaced within Sudan's Darfur, are a notable example. For many, displacement has proven to be a protracted experience, lasting for years and even decades on end such as in Northern Uganda.

"We had to flee our village over twenty years ago, when gunfire suddenly woke us up in the middle of the night. Staying would have meant certain death for all of us. Living in a camp has not been easy, but at least there is security. Since my husband died I have to take care of the children alone."

Josephine Akello, 42, mother of four, displaced in Uganda

The displaced that cross an international border are referred to as refugees while those who remain within their country of origin are described as 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs). IDPs are part of the affected civilian population and as such, lie at the heart of ICRC's mandate to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict. ICRC works to prevent population displacement, to ensure that those families, who are displaced, have the resources to cope with the displacement, and to assist IDPs who decide to return home in restoring their livelihoods. ICRC also assists the host communities. They often share all their available resources with the displaced and are therefore as much in need.

Statistics:

In 2007, ICRC assisted a total of 2,4 million people in Africa, most of them were IDPs in Somalia, Uganda and Sudan. ICRC distributed essential household items (such as blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans) to over 2 million IDPs and to approximately 300,000 other civilians in Africa. Food (such as wheat flour, maize, beans and oil) was distributed to some 690,000 IDPs and to 240,000 residents or returnees.

In 2007, ICRC provided access to clean water to over 440,000 IDPs and to more than 7 million residents and returnees on the African continent.

Deprived of appropriate health care

In many African countries, people do not have access to the most basic health care. In rural areas, reaching a medical facility often means travelling a full day. In times of conflict, poor security conditions might render such a trip too dangerous leaving the ill and wounded without any adequate help. Many first aid points, health care centres and hospitals are understaffed and often lack drugs and other essential items. Many women have to give birth without appropriate assistance and under poor hygienic conditions. The often highly motivated medical doctors and nurses are sometimes taking great risks for their own lives when assisting patients in conflict areas such as Darfur or Somalia.

"I was hit by a stray bullet while on my way home. The wound was bleeding and I could not walk anymore. Two days went by before my brother in law managed to take

me to the hospital. I had lost consciousness because of the pain. The doctors saved my life but I lost my leg."

Farah Yusuf, 32, injured in Somalia

ICRC's aim is to ensure that victims of conflict and other situations of violence have access to essential health care. Its health related activities range from deploying surgical and medical teams, supplying medicines and medical equipment to the training of medical staff.

Statistics:

In 2007, ICRC supported some 200 health centres in Africa covering an estimated population on a monthly basis of 1,2 million people. 65 hospitals and 19 first aid posts also received ICRC support. Doctors were able to perform over 20,000 operations on weapon wounded in those hospitals while the first aid posts treated 10,800 wounded. Furthermore, ICRC supported some 20 physical rehabilitation centres.

Shattered families



Democratic Republic of Congo: Family members separated due to armed conflict are re-united with the help of the ICRC.

Of all the suffering caused by war perhaps the bitterest anguish is not knowing what has happened to a son or brother gone off to fight, a wife or grandfather left behind in a village or a child lost during flight. In the general panic the youngest members of a family all too often lose their way, become separated from their parents and end up in a camp for the displaced with no one to take care of them. Also too often, they become orphans and prey to unofficial adoption or trafficking.

"I was separated from my parents when I was 4 years old and fighting broke out in our village. Everyone was

forced to run for their lives. A neighbour took me and my sister to Kigoma. I barely remember the faces of my family, but I am excited to go home."

Asende Kubwa, 12, Democratic Republic of Congo

In times of conflict, postal and telephone communications are often disrupted and direct contact may be impossible. In these circumstances, the ICRC helps families to locate their relatives and to communicate with them by means of a Red Cross message. Anyone who wishes can send news of a strictly personal nature to his or her family and receive such news. The messages are collected, forwarded and distributed by the ICRC in cooperation with volunteers from Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Where possible and appropriate, the ICRC organizes family reunifications. The priority is to reunite children with their parents or other vulnerable people such as the elderly.

"I lost my wife and my two sons long ago. My whole existence has been filled with sadness, but today I have been brought back to life. I don't mind if I die tomorrow. I am not alone anymore. I am with my brother at last. This is a dream come true."

Salih Ashgar 87, Sudan

Statistics:

In 2007, ICRC collected over 165,000 Red Cross Messages and distributed more than 150,000 on the African continent. 836 people were reunited with their families, among them 576 unaccompanied or separated minors and 166 demobilized child soldiers.



All prisoners are entitled to humane treatment.

Vulnerable detainees

Tens of thousands of people are detained across the continent due to armed conflict and internal disturbances. Being deprived of their freedom puts people in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the detaining authority and within the prison environment. This vulnerability is particularly acute in times of conflict and internal violence, when the excessive and illegal use of force can become commonplace and structural deficiencies are exacerbated.

ICRC delegates visit people held in detention facilities in order to monitor their treatment and living conditions, and encourage the authorities to make any necessary improvements, in line with internationally recognized standards. Concerns are raised in a confidential manner with the authorities. ICRC steps in to provide food rations when nutritional levels fall particularly low, supports medical structures and helps to improve hygiene conditions where appropriate.

Statistics:

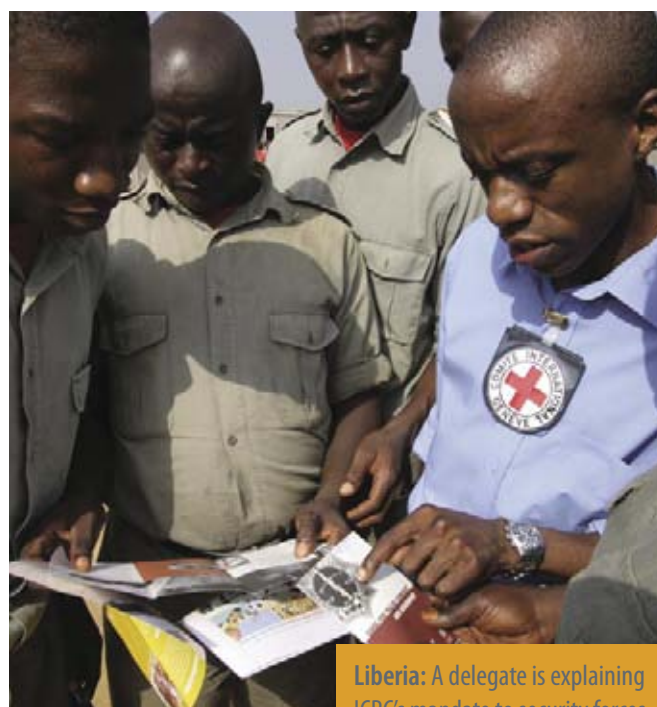
In 2007, ICRC visited about 200,000 detainees in more than 1000 places of detention on the African continent. Almost 7,000 cases were monitored individually.

Violations of the rules of war

Conflicts always bring suffering and destruction. However, increased respect for IHL, also known as the law of armed conflict, can prevent a lot of this suffering. It protects persons

who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities such as women and children, the wounded and detainees. It also limits the methods and means of warfare. The responsibility to respect IHL lies primarily with the parties to the conflict, both governments and non-State armed groups. The ICRC promotes respect for IHL, monitors the compliance with it and contributes to its development.

In 2007, the ICRC conducted IHL workshops and briefings for tens of thousands of military, security and police personnel, as well as non-State armed groups throughout Africa. IHL has also been included in the training of African Union peacekeepers.



Liberia: A delegate is explaining ICRC's mandate to security forces.



Somalia: The ICRC and the Somali Red-Crescent Society are preparing a distribution to internally displaced persons and residents.

Security and access

At times, poor security restricts access to people affected by armed conflict or violence. This is true of regions such as Sudan's Darfur, central and southern Somalia and eastern Chad. In the Sahel region, particularly in northern Niger, land mines are a serious threat. Nevertheless, ICRC manages to be present in areas where few and sometimes no other aid agencies can operate.

In order to ensure support for all its activities and to ensure the safety of its personnel, ICRC staff members maintain a constant dialogue with the authorities, armed forces and other bearers of weapons, explaining the strict principles on which the ICRC work is based. This is namely to carry out an exclusively humanitarian action in favour of all those in need regardless of their racial, religious or cultural background, independently from governments and other organizations and without taking sides in the conflict.

These principles also allow the ICRC to act as a neutral intermediary when needed and agreed upon. One example is Niger, where ICRC at the request of all sides facilitated the handover of a released hostage to the appropriate authorities.

Needs remain after the end of conflict

The need for assistance and protection often continues after the end of active hostilities. A relief action may well have to be extended beyond the immediate "post-conflict" stage in order to bridge the gap until development agencies arrive. Development operations may be put off for security reasons or because financial resources have not yet been committed.

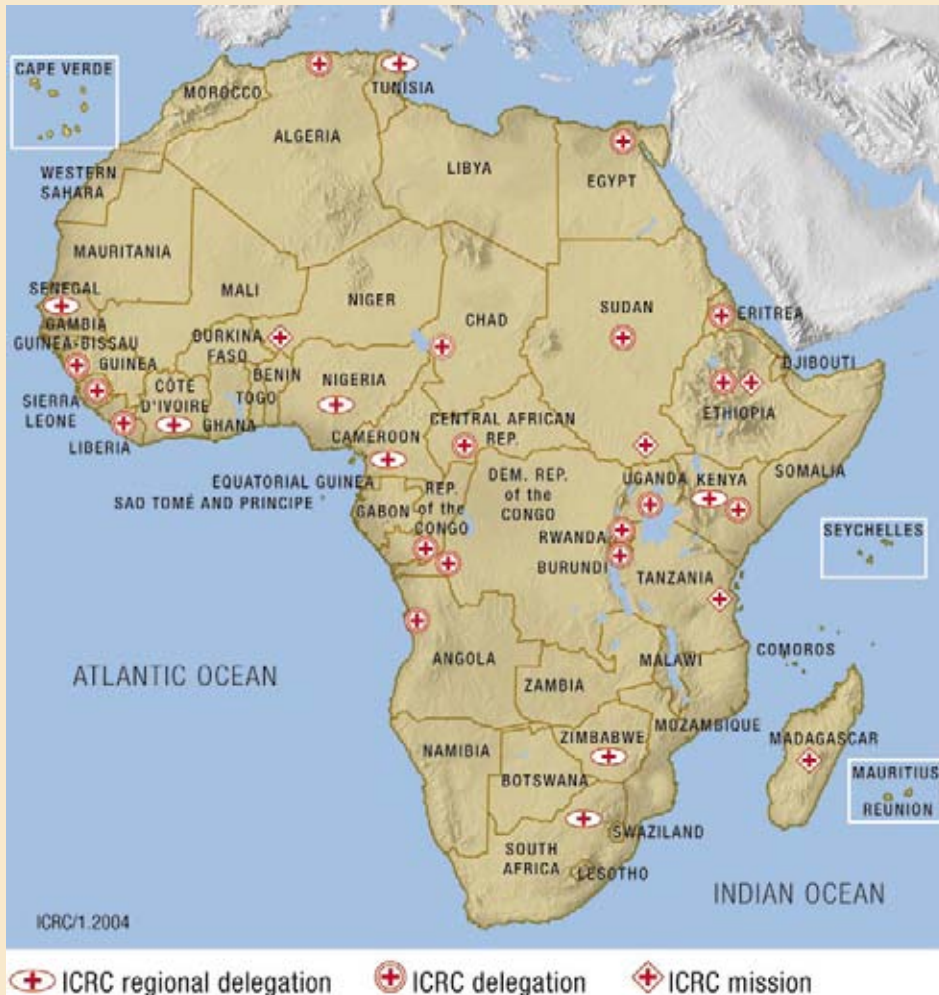
In such cases, the ICRC maintains its presence and adapts its activities to the evolving needs. Instead of merely distributing food or other items, it rather tries to implement assistance strategies that can constitute the basis for the future, such as cash-for-work programmes, training of medical personnel in public hospitals and building or repairing wells. In some countries in transition periods, the ICRC also still reunites children with their families.

"Humanitarian action during conflict saves lives, mitigates suffering and protects the dignity of people. Humanitarian action in a period of transition can help stabilize communities, rebuild social fabric and help people to become self-sustaining again."

Jacob Kellenberger, ICRC President

Cooperation with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

In countries affected by conflict and other forms of violence, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC work together to mitigate the suffering by mounting joint humanitarian operations. In many contexts such as Chad, DRC, and Sudan, National Societies have been key partners in delivering relief goods, carrying out medical activities, restoring family links and promoting IHL. In Somalia for example, the knowledge and the help of the Somali Red Crescent Society remain crucial to the operations and enable the ICRC to work safely and effectively in a difficult environment. At the same time, ICRC supports the local National Societies through various capacity-building measures in coordination with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.



In 2008, the ICRC has a permanent presence in approximately 35 countries in Africa, including 25 delegations, 5 missions and a number of country offices. The delegation for Somalia is based in Nairobi, Kenya. Over 5,000 people work for the ICRC in Africa both expatriates and national staff.

ICRC 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 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.



International Committee of the Red Cross
 19 Avenue de la Paix
 1202 Geneva, Switzerland
 T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 733 20 57
 E-mail: icrc.gva@icrc.org
www.icrc.org
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