



**ICRC** **HOTLINE**  
ASSISTANCE FOR  
JOURNALISTS ON  
DANGEROUS  
ASSIGNMENTS

**In accordance with international humanitarian law,** journalists engaged in assignments in areas of armed conflict must be respected and protected, as long as they do not take action adversely affecting their status as civilians.

CALL

+ 41 79 217 32 85

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24 HOURS/DAY



**ICRC** **HOTLINE**

International Committee  
of the Red Cross

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Original: English

April 2002

**ASSISTANCE FOR  
JOURNALISTS ON  
DANGEROUS  
ASSIGNMENTS**





# ICRC **HOTLINE** ASSISTANCE FOR JOURNALISTS ON DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENTS

Every year, journalists are killed, injured, arrested, or simply disappear while on assignment.

The freedom of journalists to exercise their profession falls outside the terms of reference of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). However, the humanitarian issues involved in their disappearance or captivity in wartime or their detention in situations of internal disturbances and tension are matters that do concern the ICRC.

The ICRC can act more rapidly to provide protection and assistance for a journalist who has been captured or arrested or has disappeared if it is given all details as quickly as possible. It therefore operates a 24-hour **HOTLINE** for journalists' families and professional associations.

**This leaflet explains the following:**

- when to use the **HOTLINE**;
- who can use the **HOTLINE**;
- how to use the **HOTLINE**;
- what the ICRC can do for a journalist;
- what the ICRC cannot do.

### **When can the **HOTLINE** be used?**

Whenever a journalist on assignment:

- disappears;
- is captured or arrested;
- is detained.

### **Who can or should alert the ICRC?**

- the journalist's family;
- the journalist's editor;
- the journalist's national press association;
- regional or international press associations.

### **How to alert the ICRC**

T + 41 79 217 32 85 (24 hours/day)

E-mail: [press.gva@icrc.org](mailto:press.gva@icrc.org)

F + 41 22 733 20 57

### **International Committee of the Red Cross**

Press Division

Hotline

19 Avenue de la Paix

1202 Geneva, Switzerland

### **What information does the ICRC need?**

- Name and contact details of the person making the report.
- Name and details of the journalist, i.e.:
  - full name;
  - full name of father;
  - date and place of birth;
  - nationality;
  - details of how to contact the journalist while on assignment;
  - contact details of the journalist's family and other people to be contacted.

■ Circumstances of the incident:

- what happened (disappearance, arrest, etc.);
- where the incident occurred and under what circumstances;
- where and when the journalist was last seen/heard from;
- nature of the assignment;
- steps already taken, and by whom;
- any other information that might be useful.

**What the ICRC can do**

- Disappearance: seek to obtain information from the parties to the conflict and any other source.
- Once the detaining authorities (which may or may not be a government) have confirmed the journalist's capture, arrest or death, pass the information on to his/her family. The ICRC can also pass on the information to the authorities of origin and press association(s) concerned, but only if the family agrees.
- Captivity or detention: request permission for an ICRC delegate to visit the journalist, accompanied by a doctor if necessary.
- Enable the journalist and his/her family to exchange family news, possibly via Red Cross messages, which are collected by the ICRC and forwarded to the addressee.
- When the journalist is released: repatriate him/her if no other intermediary is available.

## **Legal basis for ICRC action**

The ICRC's work in situations of international armed conflict has a sound legal basis in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocol I of 1977.

In the case of non-international armed conflict, the ICRC can offer its services to the State concerned on the basis of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and of Additional Protocol II of 1977.

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The ICRC also has a broad right of humanitarian initiative acknowledged by the international community. This allows it, subject to the agreement of the authorities concerned, to take action in situations of internal disturbances and tension not covered by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

## **Means available**

The ICRC maintains a permanent presence in more than 60 countries via its network of delegations, and is currently conducting operations in about 80 countries. This network allows it to carry out humanitarian activities in virtually all today's armed conflicts, and in many countries beset by internal disturbances and tension.

Ever since it was founded in 1863, the ICRC has operated offices that specialize in compiling and forwarding personal and family information. All these offices are linked to the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency in Geneva, which handles several hundred thousand items of information every year relating to civilians and military personnel who have been detained or have disappeared, displaced persons, etc.

The ICRC is one of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and as such maintains close relations with the National

Societies of 178 countries, all of which can be called upon for support in this area of activity.

### **Constraints on methods used**

- The ICRC can offer its services only in countries where it is present and operational.
- The ICRC does not comment on the reasons for arrest or detention, nor on the circumstances in which it was carried out, and does not request the release of persons who have been detained. Delegates' visits to detainees are purely humanitarian, the purpose being to assess their material and psychological conditions of detention, provide them with material aid if necessary, and ask the authorities to take any steps required to improve those conditions.
- In general, the ICRC will deal with each case submitted to it in a confidential manner. It expects in return that those requesting its assistance will treat the information given them with the same discretion. Furthermore, the ICRC will not participate in and will refuse to be associated with press campaigns or other public initiatives concerning the journalists it is assisting. This policy is dictated by the principle of neutrality that has always governed the ICRC's activities.
- Finally, the ICRC must take into account the interests of all those it is called upon to protect and assist. In certain circumstances, it may have to postpone action on behalf of an individual or even refrain from such action altogether, if going ahead would jeopardize its efforts to help victims as a whole.

## External constraints and limitations

- Although the Geneva Conventions are binding on virtually all States, when it comes to their implementation the ICRC runs into innumerable difficulties, ranging from denial of their applicability to repeated violations of their provisions.
- In the event of war between States, the Geneva Conventions give the ICRC the unreserved right to carry out humanitarian activities. In situations of non-international armed conflict, however, the ICRC can only offer its services, and the authorities concerned are not obliged to accept the offer. Internal disturbances and tension are covered by neither the Geneva Conventions nor their Additional Protocols, which means that in such cases the ICRC can act only with the express permission of the government authorities concerned.

## Conclusion

The ICRC hopes that the **HOTLINE** will enable it to take more prompt and effective action when journalists are arrested or captured in areas where it is conducting its humanitarian activities. Its concern for the safety of journalists is part of its more general concern to protect anyone who is not or is no longer taking part in hostilities, especially the civilian population protected by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

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### **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.



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