



ICRC

Operational Update

Iraq: final long journeys to camp Bucca for families of detainees

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) HAS BEEN WORKING IN IRAQ CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1980 RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARMED CONFLICTS

Overview

In September 2009, Iraqi families travelled for the last time to Camp Bucca, the American detention facility near Basra, in the extreme south of the country, to visit their relatives held there. With the closure of the facility, the ICRC ended its family-visit allowance programme which had enabled the families of tens of thousands of detainees to visit.

The journeys were not only long and perilous, but they also placed a heavy financial burden on the families. Starting in October 2005, the ICRC tried to ease that burden by covering part of the expense. "Families were visiting their detained relatives every day and we had to be here to help them," said Thamer, an ICRC field officer. "Families shared their stories with us, and their tears. There were times when as many as 350 visits were taking place daily. Those were days of very intense work."

During the four years that the programme ran, around 30,000 detainees received 146,000 visits from their relatives with ICRC financial support.

Restoring and maintaining links between detainees and their families remains one of the ICRC's priorities in Iraq and indeed in all countries where the organization carries out its humanitarian work.

Providing aid for vulnerable families during Ramadan

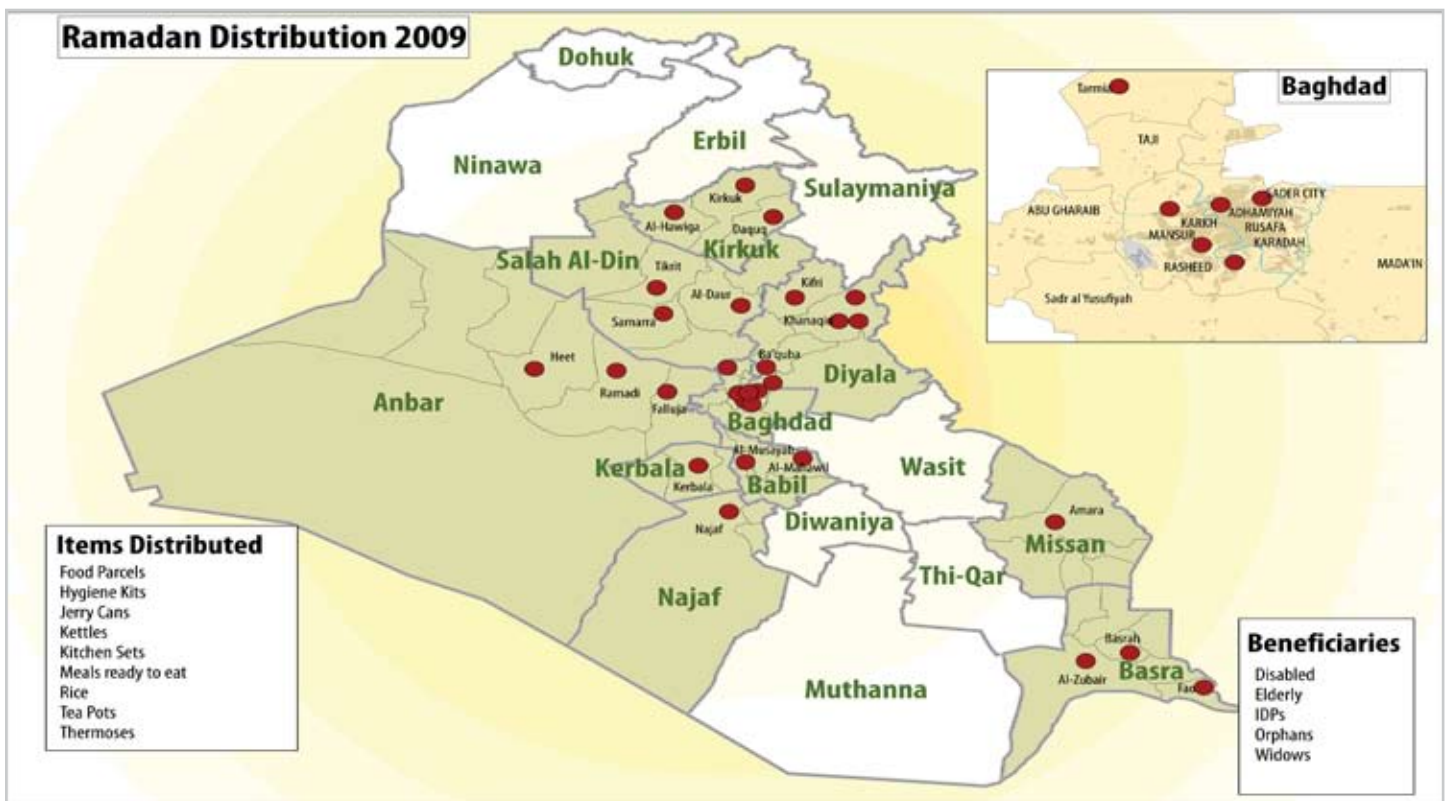
In today's Iraq, families live in difficult conditions and many of them struggle to make ends meet. Taking the customary special meal together with one's family during the holy month of Ramadan is an important tradition that many vulnerable members of society, such as households headed by women, disabled people, orphans and elderly people, cannot enjoy.

During the holy month of Ramadan, the ICRC distributed food and household items to more than 46,500 vulnerable people in the governorates of Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Missan, Najaf and Salah Al-Din. The distribution was carried out in cooperation with the local authorities and some non-governmental organizations.

In addition to the aid provided, the ICRC is also carrying out projects aiming to help these people regain economic self-sufficiency.

In September, the ICRC:

- organized an animal distribution fair near the village of Rahmánya, in Ninawa governorate, where it gave 280 head of productive sheep, 11 rams and 17 metric tonnes of barley to 420 people to help them resume their livestock production;
- immunized over 26,000 sheep and nearly 1,500 goats in Kirkuk governorate against pox, thereby protecting the livelihood of 720 people in 53 villages in Qadir Karam and Takya Jabari subdistricts.



Training medical personnel in trauma management and infection control

Throughout September, the ICRC maintained its support to hospitals and health-care centres by providing medical supplies and equipment to help them cope with mass casualties.

Together with the Ministry of Health, the ICRC continues to train medical staff from all over Iraq at Sulaimaniya Emergency Hospital and at Al Sadr Teaching Hospital in Najaf to help them deal with trauma and prevent and control the spread of infection. A total of 600 medical doctors and nurses will benefit from this programme, which started in May 2009 and will last for two years.

At Sulaimaniya Emergency Hospital, 95 of the 108 participants in the trauma course for doctors passed the final exam, and all 35 participants in the course for nurses successfully completed the exam. At Al Sadr Teaching Hospital, 22 of the 24 nurses enrolled in the trauma course passed the final exam.

Renovating the archive room at Al Zubair Martyr Centre

Thousands of people went missing as a result of the various recent conflicts that have afflicted Iraq, and it is still not known what happened to them. The agony and despair of their families is unrelenting. The human remains of the soldiers who went missing during the Iran-Iraq war and the 1990-1991 Gulf War are taken to Al Zubair Martyr Centre in Basra. After helping to expand the centre's storage capacity earlier this year, the ICRC helped renovate the archive room and install an archiving system in September.

Since 2003, the ICRC has been supporting the authorities in their efforts to determine what happened to missing persons.

Visiting detainees

The ICRC regularly visits detention facilities to monitor conditions of detention and the treatment of detainees. In September, ICRC delegates visited detainees:

- in US custody in Remembrance II, Baghdad governorate;
- held under the authority of the Ministry of Justice in Ma'aqal prison, Basra governorate, and in Fort Suse prison, Sulaimaniya governorate;
- held under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior in Ramadi and Khalis police stations;
- held under the authority of the Ministry of Interior and various security forces in northern Iraq in five prisons in Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaimaniya governorates;

Also in September, the ICRC helped an Indonesian national released from a prison in Erbil to travel back to her country.

Detainees and their families continued to use Red Cross messages, collected and distributed by the ICRC and the Iraqi Red Crescent, to stay in touch. In September, nearly 6,700 Red Cross messages were exchanged within Iraq and with relatives in other countries.

The ICRC issued travel documents in September to 99 Palestinian refugees from Al Waleed Camp, in Anbar governorate, to enable them to travel to the United States, where they will be resettled with the help of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

Providing clean water

Repairing and otherwise improving water infrastructure are ongoing ICRC activities in all parts of Iraq. In September, the ICRC:

- repaired and extended the Bazwaya primary health-care centre, in Ninawa governorate, serving around 30,000 people in the area, some 15,000 of whom are internally displaced (IDPs);
- installed an electro-chlorination system in Albu Hayat central unit, in Baghdad governorate, serving 5,000 people;
- restored the drinking-water production capacity of Nakheeb Wells, in Anbar governorate, serving 4,500 people;
- increased the water-storage capacity and repaired the compact unit supplying water in Al Rashad Psychiatric Hospital, in Baghdad governorate. As a result, the hospital now possesses its own potable water supply and no longer needs to rely on the ICRC to deliver water by truck, as it did during the past four years.

Water was delivered by truck to:

- 4,500 displaced people and Al Imam Ali General Hospital in Sadr City, Baghdad, and Al Kindi General Hospital and Al Yarmouk Teaching Hospital, also in Baghdad;
- Qalawa Quarter camp in Sulaimaniya, hosting around 360 internally displaced people. The quantity of water delivered was raised in September owing to the heat wave gripping the area and as a gesture during the holy month of Ramadan.

Promoting international humanitarian law

In line with its mandate, the ICRC spreads knowledge of international humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict, and works to promote compliance. In September, it organized seminars and presentations on international humanitarian law for various audiences all over Iraq.

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 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.