



ICRC

MISSING PERSONS

on the territory of former Yugoslavia

April 2008

More Than 17,000 Persons Still Missing

The families of more than 17,000 persons who went missing as a result of the past decade's conflicts in former Yugoslavia are still waiting for news on their missing relatives. They have the right to know the fate of their loved ones. It is the responsibility of respective authorities to address this fundamental right of the families by releasing official information on the whereabouts of people unaccounted for. Only answers can put an end to, or at least alleviate, the suffering of the families.

AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICTS ON THE TERRITORY OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA IN THE 1990S, A TOTAL OF

34,325 PERSONS

WERE REPORTED MISSING TO THE ICRC

THANKS TO THE EFFORTS OF RELEVANT AUTHORITIES AND BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS, THE FATE OF MISSING PERSONS HAS BEEN ELUCIDATED BY EITHER FINDING THEM ALIVE OR THROUGH IDENTIFICATION OF HUMAN REMAINS.

HOWEVER, UP TO DATE,

**OVER 17,000
PERSONS**

ARE STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR ACCORDING TO THE ICRC DATA.



**WE ONLY WANT
TO KNOW THEIR FATE**

What the ICRC stands for:

- *the right of families to officially know the fate of their missing relatives. Such information will help them not only to mourn their loved ones, but also to resolve most of their legal, material and social problems, and finally move on with their lives.*
- *resolute action of decision makers and all relevant national and international actors to bring answers to the families by getting all those who have any kind of information on missing persons to make it available to the relevant authorities or other institutions involved in the tracing process.*
- *direct material support to the families of missing persons, recognition of their status and psycho-social support.*
- *legislation amendments and/or new administrative procedures to help families exercise their rights and bridge the legal void left by their missing family member, who often remains the holder of important rights (property, marriage, inheritance, etc.).*

Working Group: In Kosovo, the Working Group on persons unaccounted for in relation to the events in Kosovo between January 1998 and December 2000 was set up in October 2003 as part of the dialogue between the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina. The ICRC chairs this Working Group in the capacity of a neutral intermediary. Its mandate is humanitarian and aims to ensure that families of the missing receive answers on the fate of their loved ones. Its main challenge today is to receive from responsible authorities new information on alleged gravesites and whereabouts of missing persons.

Previously, in 1996, the ICRC set up a Working Group on the missing in Bosnia-Herzegovina bringing onboard all those involved in tracing missing persons and serving as a channel through which tracing requests were submitted to the authorities and answers on missing cases were communicated.

In Croatia, the ICRC has transferred the data on the missing persons to the Croatian Red Cross. The ICRC remains as an observer in the joint forum established between the Commission for Missing Persons of the Republic of Serbia and the Department for Detained and Missing Persons within the Ministry of Family, Veteran Affairs and the Inter-Generation Solidarity of the Republic of Croatia mandated to deal with the cases related to the 1991-95 conflict – the so called **MisCom** – and continues to monitor events related to missing persons in the Republic of Croatia.

In B-H, the **Subcommittee on Regional Cooperation**, co-chaired by the ICRC and International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP), provides substantial results in cooperation between the authorities of B-H, Serbia, and Croatia, such as better coordination and acceleration of cross-border exhumations and repatriation of human remains. The Subcommittee meets two times a year.

Data Collection: In cooperation with National Societies of the Red Cross, the ICRC systematically collects tracing requests from the families of missing persons as well as the *ante-mortem data* (AMD), which is information on a missing person prior to his or her disappearance. Collected tracing requests are, on behalf of the families of the missing, submitted to the relevant authorities which are legally bound to provide the answers. The AMD are instrumental in assisting identification of exhumed human remains.

Book of Missing: The ICRC publishes the names of persons unaccounted for in separate Books of Missing Persons in all three states - Bosnia-Herzegovina (8 editions), Kosovo (4) and Croatia (1). Their purpose is to solicit additional information from both the authorities and the public at large that could help to clarify the fate of those unaccounted for. The lists for Kosovo and B-H conflicts can also be consulted online at www.icrc.org.

Missing Persons Institute: The *Missing Persons Institute* (MPI), co-founded by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Council of Ministers (CoM) and the ICMP, is the national institution tasked to resolve the fate of missing persons from B-H through locating the missing, exhuming and safeguarding human remains, examining and identifying, collecting, processing and protecting information. The MPI is also tasked with cooperating with the relevant authorities and judicial bodies, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The ICRC fully supports the functioning of the MPI through provision of legal, technical and financial support, and cooperation between the MPI and the B-H Red Cross Society.

Legal Assistance: In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Council of Ministers established a working group made up of representatives of the state and entities' governments, as well as of the ICRC and ICMP that drafted the Law on Missing Persons adopted by the B-H Parliament in 2004. The Law regulates a number of points, including the families' right to know, legal status of the missing persons and financial support to families of the missing, as well as penal provisions for non-compliance. The ICRC is engaged in encouraging and supporting the full implementation of this Law.

In Serbia and in Montenegro, the ICRC produced a **Legal Study**, involving specific recommendations for the authorities, regarding changes in legislation to ease the legal and administrative problems faced by the families of missing persons. The Study aims to provide a solid base for a more effective advocacy for changes in both the legislation and legal practice, and a more proactive approach of the authorities in informing families of their legal rights and benefits.

The Red Cross of Montenegro (RCM) is in process of becoming a reference point for the families of missing persons residing in Montenegro. The ICRC is supporting RCM's operational capacities, along with those of the newly established Montenegrin Commission for Missing Persons.

Support to families of the missing: The ICRC and the Red Cross Societies of the region assist associations of families through ad-hoc financial and technical means and psychosocial support activities. The ICRC has produced a handbook entitled "Accompanying the Families of Missing" – a product of regional experience and consultations with psychologists, activists of national Red Cross societies and missing persons' family members and associations in the region. This handbook is to serve as a helping hand in psychosocial support provided by non-professionals and/or individuals confronted with the devastating consequences of forced disappearances.

Breakdown by conflict: Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-95): **12,809** STILL MISSING (**9,581** CASES SOLVED*)

Croatia (1991-1995): PLEASE REFER TO THE CROATIAN RED CROSS

Kosovo (1998-2000): **1,967 STILL MISSING (**4,028** CASES SOLVED*)**

* persons whose human remains were found, identified and returned to their families, or their fate elucidated and officially communicated to the families.

THE MISSING
the right to know

Action to resolve the problem of people gone missing as a result of armed conflict or internal violence and to assist their families.

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