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NEWSLETTER

LIBERIA



2004: IN ACTION ALL OVER LIBERIA

At the beginning of the year, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) took the decision to shift its assistance from internally displaced persons (IDPs) around Monrovia towards residents and returnees in rural Liberia. At the end of the year, the head of ICRC Liberia, Reto Stocker, assesses the situation. "In my point of view, we have successfully shifted our operations towards rural Liberia", he explains. After Zwedru and Voinjama at the end of 2003, a third sub-delegation was opened in April in Sanniquellie, Nimba County. Thanks to these offices and operational bases in Tapeta, Harper, Cestos, Kolahun and Zorzor, the institution is now able to cover the whole territory of Liberia.

"One of the most significant achievements was the distribution of tools and seeds to around 30'000 families in rural Liberia", continues Mr. Stocker. The ICRC has provided 600 metric tons of rice seed, and 60

metric tons of bean seed in Lofa, Gbarpolu, Grand Gedeh, Sinoe, and Nimba Counties. Reaching remote villages was a huge logistical challenge. Harvesting began in October and has already greatly helped many families to restart their lives in dignity. Next year, the ICRC plans to distribute tools and seeds for around 65'000 families in Lofa, Gbarpolu and the South East.

Another important program was the reconstruction of wells to provide safe drinking water to the population. Around 160 wells have been rehabilitated and 90 new wells built in IDPs camps around Monrovia and in rural Liberia. In health services, the ICRC has closed its project at JFK Surgical Trauma Centre at the end of June but continued to provide material and financial support. Assistance has focused on the Stephen A. Tolbert Hospital in Buchanan and more recently the Rally

Time Hospital in Grand Krue and in primary health care clinics in Lofa (see also p.8).

With the help of the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS), the ICRC intensified its tracing network to find the parents of Liberian children displaced because of the conflict. More than 700 children, living mainly in neighbouring countries such as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, were reunified with their families. Some children have already restarted a new life (see also p. 3 and 4). "However, this work is ongoing and we are still trying to find the relatives of around 40% of the cases followed", Mr. Stocker insists. A new campaign has been launched in December to trace the families of Liberian children separated because of the conflict.

During the whole year, the ICRC also supported the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) to rebuild the capacities and structures of its 15 county chapters.

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Help us come home

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in collaboration with the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS) has launched on 8th of December its new tracing campaign "Help us come home". The campaign involves ICRC delegations and Red Cross Societies throughout West Africa, who are joining forces to trace the relatives of Liberian children separated from their families during the civil war.

The pictures of 350 Liberian children registered by the ICRC in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria appear on posters and booklets under the slogan "Help us come home". The materials will be displayed in public places, such as markets, hospitals, schools and refugee camps, both in Liberia and in the surrounding countries.

The exercise involves other ICRC delegations and national societies throughout West Africa who are working tirelessly to find the relatives of those unaccompanied Liberian children waiting to be reunited. Over 200 volunteers from the LNRCS are also involved.

The launch has taken place in Liberia at the Crusaders for Peace Theatre in Monrovia. Children have danced and played music in the middle of an African village, built for the occasion. The ICRC will embark on a nation-wide sensitisation campaign to explain the purpose of the posters and booklets. A theatre group composed of volunteers of the LNRCS will perform upcountry. Four similar poster campaigns have been launched in December 2002, March, October 2003

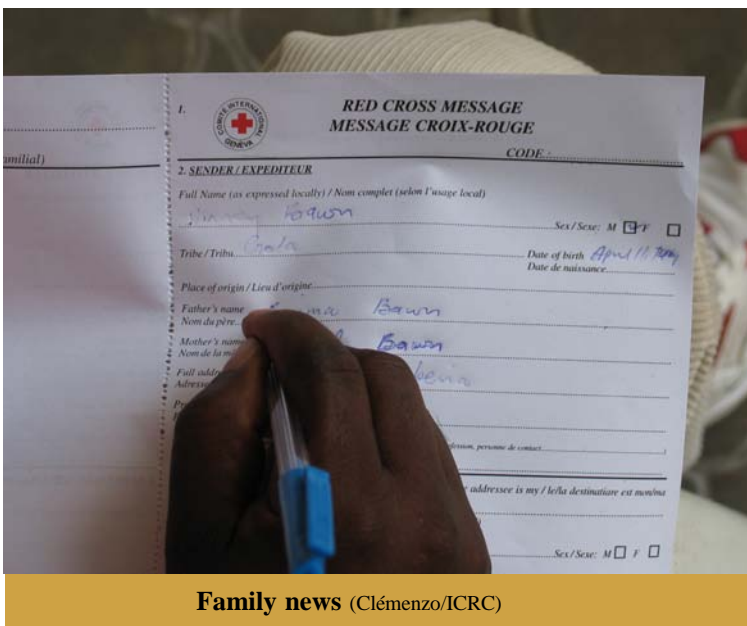


A child, accompanied by an ICRC Delegate, arrives at the airport in Monrovia (Clémento/ICRC)

and April 2004. Since the end of the war last August, the ICRC has intensified its work to reunite separated families; especially in the northern, north western and south eastern counties. More than 600 Liberian children have so far been reunited with their families.

At present the ICRC is dealing with some 1500 separated Liberian children in West Africa. An average of 15 children a week are being returned to their families.

Restoring and maintaining family links is one of the long-lasting activities of the ICRC. Last year, the institution reunited 2640 individuals with their families worldwide, most of them children.



Family news (Clémento/ICRC)

2004: IN ACTION

To promote international humanitarian law, the rules of conduct in armed conflicts, the ICRC started training sessions in August at the Police Academy in Monrovia (see p.6). The ICRC also organised presentations for ex-fighters of GOL, LURD and MODEL and regularly taught at the UNMIL training cell.

Next year the ICRC will continue its work in all these sectors with a particular emphasis on the return process. "Return and reintegration will be critical, particularly with regards to the reconciliation of the Liberian society", concludes Mr. Stocker. The humanitarian organisation will also maintain its capacity to react quickly in situations of emergency like during the riots of last November in Monrovia. A lot remains to be done.

Reunified, Mojama learns tailoring

Mojama, now 17 years old, was part of the first group of six separated Liberian children that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reunited with their relatives and parents in Liberia, in November 2003, after the end of the war. *The Newsletter* visited her at her home, one year after her reunification.

Mojama had fled the war in 2002 and was living in refugee camps in Guinea. The cross-border reunification, on 19th November 2003, followed the launch in October of the tracing campaign dubbed: "Where Are Our Parents", publicizing more than 700 pictures of separated Liberian children in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana.

Reunited in Monrovia with her elder sister Massa Tulay, Mojama has settled in well. She has become a dependable house-assistant; made new friends; attends kick-ball practices, and is a member of the youth choir of her congregation. In addition, the girl is learning new skills while continuing her primary education. "I am learning how to sew while I am going to school. Right now, I can make shirts for men", Mojama said happily. Mojama commenced the training at a private tailor shop situated at Capitol Bye-pass



Mojama and her sister at home (Karpeh/ICRC)

in Monrovia in August, first learning how to sew shirts. She expects to move on to dressmaking. Boima Kollie, her tutor, finds Mojama very enthusiastic and willing to learn the skills. "At first, she was finding it difficult to hold scissors and to propel the sewing machine. Now, Mojama is getting better because she takes correction", Boima testifies.

The training lasts for six months. Nevertheless, the trainee already faces setbacks. She is unable to pay a monthly

training fee of three hundred Liberian dollars, about five United States dollars. Moreover, the unwillingness of her mother to return to Liberia from a refugee camp in Guinea perplexes her. Regardless of the obstacles, the girl is determined to complete high school and later acquire professional training in nursing. Thus, she takes science and arithmetic lessons very seriously.

Dear Mother,

I extend my greetings to you in the name of our Lord. It takes me a great opportunity and pleasure to compose you this letter. My reason for me writing you this few of mine is to have you informed that I will soon be home so I own you to keep all the good things you have at home please. I thank God that I am alive now. I am in the 10 Grade. I thank ICRC for what they have done for me in my life. May God bless them, because they have done good thing for me in my life once again. I thank the ICRC for their cooperation because without their cooperation I was not going to find my people.

Mother, I have a good news for you. I am very happy to be with you, to be back in my country because in Freetown I suffer too much. I have no one to take care of me. I am alone.

Your son Aaron.

(Letter of a Liberian 10th Grade boy, written before his reunification)

Boy lives on "blacksmithing"

Brought back in June 2004 from the Largo Refugee Camp in Eastern Sierra Leone to his grand mother Esther at Harbel, Firestone, 17-year-old Momo makes a living from "blacksmithing". He makes knives, cutlasses, axes and cook-pots – a local cooker powered by charcoal.

In October, 2004, ICRC visited and found the lad busy making the knives and cook-pots which his grandma sells at a Harbel general market. "For now, I want to focus on my small business. Maybe, I will go to school next year or not", Momo told the visiting tracing team. As a routine, Momo designs and makes the machetes based on the sizes and quantity requested by potential buyers. Although his mother resides in the same community, the boy was reunited with his grandma who he prefers to live with.

Picture Gallery

Activities August-November 2004

Pictures Clémento-Karpeh/ICRC



The medical logistics team prepares to supply the Rally Time Hospital in Grand Kru



Monserrado agro project



The Buchanan Tolbert Memorial Hospital team



IHL / Human Rights workshop at the ICRC delegation in Monrovia



Rehabilitation of a well in Cestos



ICRC film crew at work

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ALL TOGETHER!

The last few months have shown what kind of challenges and opportunities were lying ahead of the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS).

In the aftermath of last year's "World Wars", the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has deployed a considerable amount of resources and energy to support the LNRCS. Beyond the equipments and resources the National Society had lost last year, it would be wrong to say that the LNRCS and the Movement in general in Liberia has started from zero. In fact, the motivation and energy deployed by the National Society staff and volunteers have remained throughout if not grown.

The mobilization of volunteers and staff across the country has been such that for almost a year long, the LNRCS along with the ICRC was the only organization with a country-wide presence. In doing and being so, it has gained a new credibility that serves Red Cross ideals.

The support of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has allowed the speedy revitalization of all fifteen chapters. More than 70 bicycles and 15 motorbikes were provided, 7 chapters have been rehabilitated or reconstructed for minimum operations. Most chapters will have radio link with their HQs in Monrovia by the end of the year. More than 270 volunteers in tracing received training twice this year. 120 volunteers and 15 chapter field officers have been trained on the basics of relief, first aid, food security, water and sanitation, personnel safety, roles and responsibility of Red Cross. This support has allowed the LNRCS to provide basic relief to fire victims in Monrovia. The National Society in Lofa and Southeast region has built and rehabilitated more than 50 wells. More than 250 volunteers are involved in ICRC operations.

More recently, the National Society has engaged in addressing the needs



Emergency response team in Grand Kru (Puillet-Breton/ICRC)

and traumas of children affected by war and plans to open a Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation Center in Monrovia for 150 children. A second center should open next year. The LNRCS will also set up Community Animation Peace Support to address the need for reintegration of children and adults affected by war into their communities.

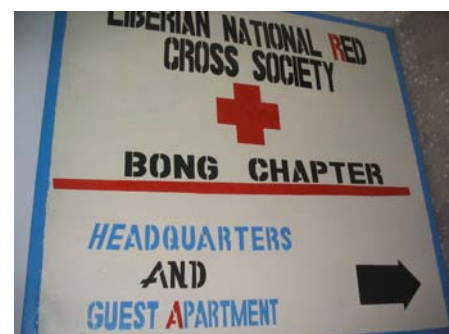
Next year, the LNRCS will deploy a food security programme for the most vulnerable for more than 2000 families across the country. Red Cross principles and ideals will be also publicised in more than 50 schools countrywide. Last but not least, the LNRCS has actively engaged in renewing its leadership and governance members by promoting statutory elections in all chapters. These elections will allow a general assembly to take place and set the standard for the 4 forthcoming years. In the light of recent events in Liberia and in relation with the above summary, as one can see, with the support of the ICRC and the Federation, one of the greatest challenges for the LNRCS will be to remain prepared to play its role whatever the situation and also establish sound foundations for its future development.

D. Puillet-Breton, Cooperation Delegate

One of the oldest in Africa

The LNRCS was first a voluntary relief committee funded in 1919 during the period of World War I by the late Daniel E. Howard, 18th President of Liberia. Later, the relief committee was reactivated as the Liberian National Red Cross in 1949 by the late William V.S. Tubman, 19th President of Liberia (1944-1971) and recognised by the ICRC in 1959.

The LNRCS is a voluntary humanitarian organisation, member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and plays an auxiliary role for the Government of Liberia and its social welfare programs. Today, the LNRCS areas of intervention are: disaster management, tracing, health care, watsan and dissemination of humanitarian values and International Humanitarian Law.



ICRC LESSONS FOR THE LIBERIAN POLICE

The ICRC has been spreading knowledge of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the code of conduct during armed conflicts, and humanitarian principles since it started to work in Liberia. In August, the humanitarian organization began to teach the recruits of the new Liberian police at the Academy in Paynesville, Monrovia.



A course at the Police Academy (Clémento/ICRC)

It is very important to spread knowledge of humanitarian principles and the law of war before a conflict, during a time of peace or relative calm. Since the end of the Liberian civil war last year the ICRC has restarted its programmes of dissemination.

In terms of prevention, the institution targets in particular those people and groups who could determine the fate of victims in case of armed conflicts or internal disturbances, or who can obstruct or facilitate humanitarian actions. These groups include the armed forces, police and other weapon bearers, decision-makers and opinion-leaders at local and international level and, with an eye to the future, teenagers, students and their teachers.

Training the new Police

As institutions in Liberia such as the Armed Forces or the police must be restructured, the ICRC has decided to put energy in giving lessons to the new policewomen and men of the country. Since August, the delegates accompanied by national staff have

been involved in the training of some 480 police recruits in 15 sessions at the Police Academy in Paynesville through the good collaboration of UNMIL CIVPOL.

The objective is to influence these recruits' attitudes and behaviour so as to improve the protection of civilians and detainees in times of peace and internal disturbances and to improve the security of humanitarian action. 3500 police officers are expected to be trained and about 1900 of them will work along with UNMIL during the general and presidential elections set for October 2005.

Prisoners have Rights

The ICRC instructors explain the history of the birth of the Red Cross and the fundamental principles of their institution. This introduction is followed by an explanation of the detention work of the ICRC. The humanitarian organization has visited prisoners since the First World War and, for instance last year, has seen more than 400'000 people deprived of freedom all over the world.

The instructors explain how these visits are carried out and tell police recruits essential rights of persons arrested such as the presumption of innocence, prohibition of torture and respect of judicial guarantees. Recruits are taught that detention of women must be dealt with and supervised by female law enforcement officers. Children should receive special protection and be kept separately from adults. Finally, ICRC instructors give an introduction in international humanitarian law. All the topics are discussed and illustrated with videos.

Dissemination to Armed Forces

Additionally, between February and October 2004, the ICRC spread knowledge of IHL and humanitarian principles to more than 900 former combatants in Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Gbapolu, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, River Gee, Rivercess and Sinoe Counties.

Similar dissemination sessions took place at the training cell of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in Monrovia. The ICRC gives briefings to all new military observers, trainers of contingents and special forces. Delegates highlight the humanitarian law applicable to peacekeeping operations. 430 peacekeepers from the Namibian, Ethiopian, Senegalese, Pakistani, Chinese, Philippines, American, Irish and Bangladeshi contingents stationed in Monrovia, Bomi, Bong, Montserrado, Nimba and Maryland Counties participated in such sessions. The ICRC also gave several refresher courses in IHL for senior officers of the Armed Forces of Liberia in Monrovia and in Sanniquellie.

“For the children, the best place is the family”

Visits to prisoners of war, protection of the civilian population and respect of International Humanitarian Law are among the traditional activities of the ICRC. Just before her departure to her home country, Italy, the protection coordinator of the ICRC, Giovanna Schmid, gives an interview to *the Newsletter* and reflects on her mission after more than one year in Liberia.

Newsletter: What is the meaning of protection for the ICRC ?

For the ICRC, protection includes all activities aimed at the respect of rights of the people, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights.

Practically, what do you do?

We have in Liberia two major programs. Firstly, we have a tracing agency. We exchange messages all over the country and abroad. This allows families to keep in touch. We also try to reunify separated children with their parents, to restore family links. It is a big challenge. We have already reunified more than 600 children from the neighboring countries since the end of the war and we are currently following around 1500 cases. Our aim is to finish this job by the end of 2005. It will be of course easier with a normalisation of the situation.

And the second program ?

The detention visits. This activity started more than twenty years ago in Liberia. Our delegates visit prisons to monitor the condition of detention and verify that detainees are treated humanely. We always follow the same process to visit the jails. We have an initial talk with the authorities of the prison. Then, we visit the premises such as the cells, the kitchen and the latrines. We talk in private with detainees and propose them to write messages to their families. At the end of the visits, we make recommendations to the authorities of the prison. All the visits are confidential. We want to establish a trustful and constructive dialogue with the authorities, who have the power to improve the situation.



Giovanna Schmid in her office (Clémento/ICRC)

After the scandal of Abu Ghraib in Iraq, some people criticised the silence of the ICRC. Why doesn't the ICRC speak out if it is aware of violations and ill treatment in prisons?

Confidentiality makes of course our work difficult, but it is the only way to have access to a maximum number of prisoners. Thanks to this modality of work, authorities trust us and allow us to visit people deprived of freedom. Last year, the ICRC visited around 400'000 detainees around the world. Confidentiality makes our work possible.

What do you do for ex-child soldiers?

We help them to re-establish family contacts. If they agree, we register them and start the procedure with the help of the Liberian National Red Cross to find their parents. For me, these

children have to find a way to be disconnected from their military environment and reintegrated in the society. This means the family is the best first step to reintegration.

You stayed more than one year in Liberia. What has changed since your arrival in November 2003?

The changes are enormous. In Monrovia, the situation has improved. The city is more lively and crowded. There are more shops, cars and schools are reopening, which is a good indicator of recovery.

Give us your impression about Liberia and its people ?

Liberia is a beautiful country with a lot of natural resources. I hope all Liberians living in this beautiful land acknowledge and respect it. Liberians deserve peace now for development and welfare.

IN THE MUD OF LOFA

One year after the end of the war, the health services are still poor in Liberia. The ICRC assists primary health care clinics in Lofa County. The access to these centres becomes difficult during the rainy season due to bad road conditions.

It is 7 A.M., the last Wednesday of October. Sun is slowly rising over Voinjama, the main city in Lofa. Marcelle Baltzinger, more than twenty years of work for the ICRC, is about to leave to visit the clinic of John's Town, 18 miles away. The delegate will supervise this health centre. The last visit was one month ago. "We usually go there every week, but the rain which fell so heavily last month prevented us to travel sooner", she explains. The ICRC Landcruiser moves suddenly off. "Voinjama, Voinjama, radio check", the driver Samuka Sheriff shouts loudly on his HF radio. Along the road, women carry pots and vegetables on their heads and walk at a slow pace. Two representatives of the Ministry of Health join the team inside the jeep. John's Town clinic is indeed under their responsibility. "We want Liberians to get involved and the medical structure should remain after our departure", Marcelle says.



Not an easy life ! (Clémentzo/ICRC)

to shovel the mud and, twenty minutes later, the journey continues. The Landcruiser arrives soon in front of a long stretch covered by mud and water. "Impossible to drive further. It is the famous mile 17", Marcelle explains. Passengers are compelled to continue the last mile on foot. John's Town clinic is located near the main road.

The humanitarian organisation works to give life again to health centres, which existed before the war in Lofa. Apart from John's Town, the ICRC supports the clinics of Voinjama and Velezale. It has rehabilitated the buildings and provides incentives for the staff and medicines for the patients. "The Ministry recruits the medical staff and is responsible. We are somehow advisers", the delegate explains.

Passengers have no time to get used to the trip when after half an hour, the Landcruiser gets stuck in the mud. Marcelle smiles. After ten years of humanitarian missions in Africa, this little incident will not stop her. The driver and two helpers start

One pharmacy, one waiting room, dressing room, delivery room and a short stay room are at the disposal of the patients. Most of them suffer from malaria or diarrhoea and, after consultation, go back home. For emergency cases, the closest hospital is in Gbarnga, 150 miles away. Among the 44 clinics before the war in Lofa, ten have been reopened so far. Marcelle discusses daily problems. The physician assistant, Edwin Seba, explains that they have registered around fifty patients per week during the last month. After the distribution of incentives, drugs and hygienic products, it is soon noon. The ICRC staff must leave without delay to go back to Voinjama before night falls.

Tracing movie

At the end of September, a film crew came from Sierra Leone to Liberia to film the reunification of a Liberian teenager, who was displaced in Sierra Leone. The images will be used for an ICRC documentary on its tracing activities worldwide. "The Liberian Express" published a picture of the team in action. Thank you.

Landmines

The first review conference on the Convention of Ottawa took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from the 28 November to the 3 December in the presence of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and the President of the ICRC, Jakob Kellenberger. Adopted in 1997, the treaty forbid the use of antipersonel mines. Liberia is part of the treaty.

Staff

Dedicated national staff is the backbone of each and everyone of the more than 80 ICRC delegations and missions worldwide. ICRC Liberia has reached its new record in term of human resources with 50 expatriates and 250 local staff. More than 600 volunteers, all Liberians, of the LNRCS work with the institution.



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Newsletter

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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 also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

