



ICRC

NEWSLETTER

of the ICRC Regional Delegation,
covering Serbia, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro

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(PHOTO: © ICRC)

Young Red Cross volunteers discuss PHV projects at a workshop in Macedonia.

RED CROSS PROGRAMME CATCHES ON IN THE REGION

For over a decade now, the Macedonian Red Cross has had great success carrying out a programme called Red Cross in Action / Promotion of Human Values (RCA-PHV). The programme is a Red Cross educational tool, which, in a systematic, cost-effective and interactive way, targets young people in order to promote activism and culture of dialogue among them. It strives to do so by entwining the spreading of the knowledge of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its principles (known in the Red Cross lingo as “dissemination”) with humanitarian action. It was developed in Macedonia within the Macedonian Red Cross with the support of ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross. Many National Societies from the region and wider afield have been acquainted with RCA-PHV and expressed interest in applying it in their own environment. Three National Societies in the region have already initiated the process of implementing the programme so far. The first was the Serbian Red Cross, which appointed a National RCA-PHV Coordinator and launched a pilot project in late 2006. It resulted in the creation of a working group made up of Serbian Red Cross volunteers as well

as Youth and Dissemination Coordinators who are now running the programme in Serbia. In mid January this year, a similar pilot phase was initiated in Albania, involving six Albanian Red Cross branches from Korçë, Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Berat and Dures. In late February, the same project phase was launched in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Red Cross branches of Brcko, Modrica, Lukavac, Orasje, Gorazde, Trebinje and Foca. During the initial implementation phase, workshops were held for some 30 junior Red Cross volunteers from each branch, who were trained in basic project management, communication and ways of putting in practice Red Cross values through concrete social action. They not only learned how to make community-needs assessments, develop and document small projects, but they also engaged in activities designed to help them adopt positive human values, get to know the principles of humanitarian action and grasp the basics of international humanitarian law. These workshops applied a new working model of the RCA-PHV programme, where complete training is conducted on field level, within the local branch. After the

completion of the workshop, the young volunteers should put the knowledge they acquired to practical use by starting small projects for the benefit of their own local communities. After the phase of creating these small project is over, the authors of the best and most successful ones will be invited to the final workshop, due to be held in May, in Albania, and in June, in B-H. The best achievers from these workshops will be invited to the international RCA-PHV summer camp scheduled for August this year in Struga, Macedonia.

Programme History

Since 1998, the ICRC in Macedonia has actively pursued the implementation of the PHV programme. The project, initiated in 1996 in co-operation with the National Red Cross and approved by the Ministry of Education, was originally aimed at enhancing inter-ethnic communication among young people of different ethnic backgrounds. The project is raising the image of the Red Cross, boosting the number of volunteers and assisting dissemination among the young.

Women and the Missing

LIVING BETWEEN HOPE AND DESPAIR

A decade of armed conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s caused nearly 35,000 people to disappear. For the women left behind, one of the worst consequences of their disappearance is the long and agonizing wait for news about their missing husbands, sons, brothers and fathers. Here are the stories of two of them.

Olja: Olja's husband Rade, who used to run a well-known travel agency in Kosovo, was kidnapped in August 1999 in Pristina, without his wife ever finding out how or why. Taking a single bag with her,

which she served as secretary-general. The work had a therapeutic value for Olja and helped her adopt a constructive approach which benefited both herself and others.

from a recovered bone, some, like Dzidza, either remained sceptical or refused to confront the dreaded fears that their loved ones may not be alive.

"The biggest joy is to have a child, the biggest tragedy is to have him taken away," says Dzidza, summing up her grief.

It saw her through the most difficult moments, which came in September 2002 when she was finally given her husband's remains identified through a DNA analysis. But the grief she felt that day was also mixed with relief that her painful search was finally over and that she was now able to go on with her life.

In 2005, she finally agreed to give a blood sample after a neighbour talked her into it. Two years later, Dzidza received news that one of her sons had been identified, but they couldn't tell which one because they were too close in age (Almir was born in 1977, Azmir in 1974). Her husband Abdullah was also identified through a single bone, the only one they have recovered of his from a mass grave. At that moment, everything went black

(PHOTO: Nick Danziger © ICRC)



Olja lights a candle for her husband's soul.

Olja fled Kosovo only to find herself in Belgrade with no work, no place to live and no money to buy food. What she did have was the burden of a missing husband, an interrupted life and no visible way out.

One day, she read in the newspaper that there were other people like her. She tried to contact them to share experiences and make sure she wasn't forgetting to do something she could be doing to find out what happened to her husband. She

"(These three years,) I was lost and felt as if I had no body, no soul, no feelings... That state of helplessness and pain is indescribable. I was almost unaware of my own existence and could feel nothing but how torn apart I was. Horror!"

went to a meeting the ICRC organised for the families of missing persons. She found them all equally disturbed, unhappy and helpless, but at least there was someone listening to them. The ICRC suggested that they join forces and form an association to make themselves heard - an idea they readily embraced.

For three years, Olja devoted all of her time and effort to the association, in

The families of more than 17,000 persons missing as a result of the 1990s' 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. The ICRC persists in reminding the authorities of their responsibility to address this fundamental right of the families by releasing official information on the whereabouts of people unaccounted for. It also provides material, psycho-social and technical support to family associations of the missing, largely made up of women, and helps ensure that their interests are represented in various forums.

Dzidza: For 12 long years, Dzidza lived in hope of finding her two sons and husband alive after they went missing in Srebrenica in 1995.

Before DNA testing became available, there was only the Book of Belongings - two photo albums published by the ICRC, showing clothing and belongings found with the remains. In 2001, Dzidza leafed through every page of the thick albums but found nothing that belonged to her husband and sons. "I prayed to God not to recognize anything, even though I wanted to end this uncertainty," she says. When DNA became a method of matching a living relative's blood sample to one taken

around her, as her darkest fears had been confirmed.

Today, Dzidza regularly visits the memorial near Srebrenica, where one of her brothers is also buried. Although she now lives beyond grief, she exists on her memories only and dreams of bringing peace to the souls of Abdullah, Almir and Azmir.



Dzidza prays at the tomb of one of her brothers.

(PHOTO: Nick Danziger © ICRC)

Family Detention Visits

LONG AWAITED REUNIONS

ICRC assistance in maintaining links between detainees and their families is one of its longest-standing activities in the region. For many of those arrested during the 1991-95 conflict in Croatia, the family visits organized by the ICRC remain, even now, more than 10 years after the conflict, the only way to maintain regular eye-to-eye contact with their families who moved to live in Serbia.

Most of them are serving their sentences in Lepoglava, a little town in north-west Croatia, close to the border with Slovenia. Once in three months, the detainees' families, led by an ICRC staff, set out on a journey from Belgrade in the early morning hours. The trip is long, and the eager anti-

thankful for being able to see each other for even that long. Grandfathers seeing their grandchildren for the first time, daughters bringing their fiancés for the father to meet... It is hard to pass any judgements in such situations. The trip back seems to be longer and is certainly much quieter as the emotions and the tiredness are overwhelming. Anyhow, it is the eyes of the trav-



(PHOTO: Agnes Montanari © ICRC)

Eager to hear news from home.

The ICRC visits detainees held in relation to a conflict or internal violence to verify whether they are being treated according to relevant international standards. The visits aim to ensure respect for the life and dignity of prisoners and to prevent torture and ill-treatment. They enable the ICRC to keep track of prisoners and make recommendations to the authorities to improve their conditions if necessary. Every year, it visits around half a million detainees in more than 70 countries worldwide. The ICRC also works on re-establishing contact between detainees and their families. Here, in the region, it has regularly facilitated visits from Serbia to Croatia since 1997, as lack of complete travel documents, as well as security and financial concerns, make it difficult for most families to visit their relatives in prison, especially abroad.

pation of the moment when they will see their loved ones is almost palpable. Despite this, the mood is high and chatter fills out the bus throughout the journey. The visit lasts two hours, hardly enough to exchange all the news, but people are

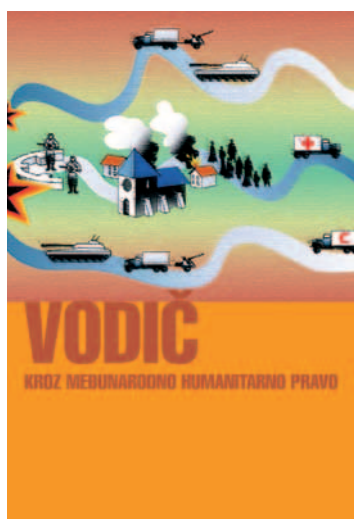
ellers that say it all and no words are needed.

It takes six hours to get to Lepoglava and another six to travel back in such an arrangement, but by regular train or bus lines it would take at least two days to

and back, given the poor connections. For those family members who don't have a travel document, the family visits organized by the ICRC are of immeasur-

"Before a visit, I have a thousands questions swarming in my head and then when we see each other, they all vanish into thin air and the only thing that matters is to hug, look at each other, touch hands," says a detainee's wife.

able importance. They are welcome even by those who do have it, as the financial strain of each individual trip is more often than not an insurmountable obstacle.



IHL GUIDE PUBLISHED

In early 2008, the IHL Centre of the Belgrade Faculty of Political Science, supported by the ICRC and the Red Cross of Serbia, published a "Guide to International Humanitarian Law (IHL)" in the Serbian language. This colourful, easy-to-read booklet is laid out in the form of a glossary, containing a total of 59 abbreviations, acronyms and definitions of key IHL terms in alphabetical order. The Guide explains a carefully selected range of basic IHL concepts and terms, assembled with a focus on their common usage and understanding within a humanitarian context, particularly in relation to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. It does so in simple, lay language that can be readily

understood even by non-experts uninitiated in the intricacies of humanitarian law. As such, it primarily targets EHL (Exploring Humanitarian Law) teachers and other non-legal professionals, but can also be a useful reference tool for humanitarian workers, NGO activists, journalists, those working with victims of war, educators involved in creating the curricula for, or actually teaching, civic education, businessmen and state government policymakers. It is hoped that the Guide gets established as a practical reference to IHL terms often used within humanitarian situations, and that it will be reviewed, updated and possibly enlarged periodically.

News in brief

EHL TO BECOME SCHOOL SUBJECT

In March this year, the ICRC, together with the Macedonian Bureau of Educational Development organised the second round of the so-called In-Service (on-the-job) training for the future teachers of Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) subject. In the course of the twelve one-day trainings, the teachers attended a special refresher course in preparation for the start of the final phase of integrating EHL into the Macedonian elementary school system. After the completion of this important step, Macedonia will become the first country in the region to integrate EHL in standard school curriculum.

ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS TURN 30

In a joint conference, the ICRC and the Macedonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs marked the 30th anniversary of the two Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions, the most universal and best known International Humanitarian Law (IHL) treaties. The Protocols were drawn up essentially as a response to the increased suffering of civilians, brought about by modern developments in weapons technology and proliferation of internal armed conflicts. They also formulated the key principle of distinction between civilians and combatants as well as between civilian objects and military objectives.

ARMY TRAINED IN MONTENEGRO

A training in IHL was organised by the ICRC in early December 2007 for 15 officers - future IHL trainers - of the Montenegrin Armed Forces (MAF). Besides the training, the ICRC also provided the teaching material for the three-day workshop held in Podgorica. Also in December, one MAF officer attended the renowned San Remo Course in Italy organised for Directors of the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) Training. This enabled the MAF to carry out IHL training of its troops independently and on its own, with the ICRC giving support when needed through special presentations and provision of literature.

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.

What the ICRC does in the region:



Missing Persons: Collects and consolidates information that might help the responsible authorities to clarify the fate of persons gone missing during the conflicts in the region, and to recover their remains. Offers legal advice to the governments on how to legislate in favour of the families of missing persons so that the legal obstacles caused by the absence of a missing person can be overcome, allowing the family to get on with their lives.

Detention: Visits persons deprived of freedom held in relation to a conflict or internal violence to ensure that their conditions and treatment meet relevant international standards. It establishes a dialogue with the concerned authorities, to whom it submits its observations and appropriate recommendations.



Promotion of IHL:

Promotes the knowledge and implementation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), especially with the armed and security forces, and national authorities responsible for integrating IHL into national legislation.

Introduces IHL as well as humanitarian values into the curricula of public education with its Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) and Promotion of Human Values (PHV) programmes for adolescents.

Supports academic institutions in promoting IHL and international exchange of IHL experiences.



Cooperation with National Red Cross Societies:

Contributes to building and maintaining the capacity of the National Red Cross Societies to promote IHL, the principles and humanitarian values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Consolidates the National Red Cross Societies' capacity to restore family links as part of the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing network. Strengthens the National Societies' capacity to respond to the humanitarian needs arising from armed conflict or internal strife.

Assists the National Society in coping with other humanitarian activities, such as dealing with problems posed by the still present risk of mines and explosive remnants of war.



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