



ICRC

# NEWSLETTER

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

September 2008



*Families of missing lay roses at the memorial plaque at Nikola Pasic square.*

## STILL NO NEWS ON NEARLY 17,000 MISSING PERSONS

August 30 this year marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Day of the Disappeared, providing the families of missing persons all over the globe with another sad occasion to call the world's attention to their continued quest for learning the fate of their loved ones.

This time too, the associations of families of missing persons from across former Yugoslavia staged public events throughout the region to demand renewed efforts at addressing this still unresolved issue. Despite significant progress made so far, nearly half (16,713) of the original number of over 34,000 persons listed as missing at the end of the Balkan conflicts are still unaccounted for. What is more, the process of elucidating their fate is still too slow as fewer than 1,000 cases have been resolved in the past 12 months.

As in previous years, the Day was also commemorated in Serbia, where relatives of missing persons gathered at Belgrade's main square to once again remind the authorities and the general public of their continuing plight. Carrying flowers, plac-

ards with photos of their lost kin and banners which read Give us a place to lay flowers at for our missing loved ones, they read open letters to the authorities and listened to poems recited by drama artists and children of missing parents. After that, they laid hundreds of roses at an improvised memorial plaque honouring all the victims of the past decade's conflicts in the region. A family delegation carried the plaque to the Belgrade City Hall where they reminded the councillors of their promise to erect a monument in the capital to keep alive the memory of these victims.

**The right to know** the fate of a relative gone missing in an armed conflict must be respected. The Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols and the new International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance clearly say: it is illegal to make people disappear and next-of-kin must be informed about captured, wounded or deceased relatives without delay.

Joining its voice with the families, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) repeated its call to the authorities throughout the Western Balkans to pick up the pace in determining what happened to those who went missing in connection with the conflict.

*"The answers to what happened to these people lie with the former warring parties. The authorities have an obligation to provide them to the families, who have been waiting far too long," says Paul-Henri Arni, head of the ICRC delegation in Serbia.*

Meanwhile, the prolonged uncertainty over the fate of their loved ones is taking a heavy emotional toll on the families, who also lack legal and administrative help in finding out what happened to their relatives.

Firmly committed to helping them get the answers they are entitled to, the ICRC continues to stand by the families and to support the tracing services of the region's Red Cross Societies to resolve this burning humanitarian problem.



# Photo Gallery - Day Of The Disappeared

PHOTO: © ICRG



▲ Banner at Nikola Pasic square reads: "Give us a place to lay flowers at for our missing loved ones"



▲ Mother with missing son's photo



▲ Well-known drama artists recite poetry



▲ Families with placards bearing photos of missing relatives



▲ A delegation of FA representatives on its way to the City Hall



▲ Presenting the plaque to city authorities



## New ICRC Book Releases

### HELPING FAMILIES OF MISSING COPE WITH THEIR HARDSHIP

This summer, the ICRC has released a manual on psycho-social support to the families of missing persons in the hope that it will make it easier for their associations and Red Cross Societies to help relatives of missing persons cope with their loss in a more appropriate way.

The idea for the book was born out of the need to alleviate the huge suffering caused by the uncertainty in which families of missing persons live, and to diminish lasting psychological wounds and social consequences that years of anguish, despair and self-imposed isolation typically leave on them.

The origin of this form of assistance dates back to the year 2000, when the ICRC launched its psychological support programme in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was soon followed in Serbia and in Kosovo. In the years that followed, it simply made sense that the experience and knowledge gained through these activities be collected in the form of a guide for non-specialist humanitarian practitioners involved in helping families come to grips with the disappearance of a loved one.

This resulted in the production of a 220-page publication called *Accompanying Families of Missing Persons - A Practical Handbook*, written by ICRC experts and with the invaluable support of relatives of missing persons, as well as psychologists and Red Cross societies from across the Western Balkans.

The manual aims to support primarily persons accompanying and assisting families



(PHOTO: © ICRC)

of the missing. It provides an overview and understanding of the specific psychological and social issues that the families are faced with in the process of searching for answers, together with practical tools and recommendations based on positive experiences in this domain.

This concept is reflected in the handbook's division into two main parts. The first one describes the basic notion of accompanying as well as issues related to the psycho-social difficulties faced by the families. The second part deals with practical tools designed to help those accompanying the families to establish supportive communication with them, assess their needs and

develop projects that would benefit them in the best way possible.

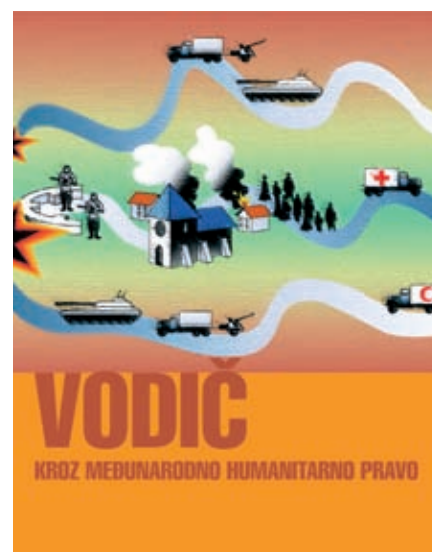
The manual is abundantly illustrated with cases based on the experiences in the Balkans and gives special attention to working with children and adolescents as well as to a range of especially difficult moments (e.g. handovers of human remains) that typically arise in the process of looking for a missing relative.

It is hoped that this publication will establish itself as a useful tool not only for those who have already taken up assisting the families, but also for those seeking a more in-depth understanding of the subject from a psycho-social viewpoint.

### IHL GUIDE PRESENTED TO NGOs AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The IHL Centre of the Faculty of Political Science, the Red Cross of Serbia (RCS) and the ICRC presented the *Guide to International Humanitarian Law* to the national non-governmental and international organisations active in Serbia in the field of humanitarian law and humanitarian issues. This publication, produced by the IHL Centre with the support of the RCS and the ICRC, is a glossary of basic IHL concepts explained in a manner easy to understand by non-legal professionals, such as NGO activists, journalists, educators or government policy-makers.

In addition to getting acquainted with the *Guide*, the forum also discussed questions of practical interest in relation to IHL in Serbia. The need to speed up the process of clarification of the fate of missing persons and to support their families was especially underlined as the most important humanitarian problem remaining after the recent conflicts in the region. In view of the judicial and legislative processes in the country, the ICRC and the RCS also explained the basic principles of their work, most notably confidentiality and independence.



## News in Brief

### EHL GATHERINGS IN SLOVENIA

Representatives of education authorities from the countries of the region participated in an international meeting on Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL), hosted in June, in Ljubljana, by the Slovenian and Austrian Ministries of Education and Sports and co-organized by the two countries' Red Cross Societies. Simultaneously, schoolchildren from Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania, together with their peers from other European countries, were putting their humanitarian education to practice in a youth camp organised at the nearby Bohinj Lake. The two EHL gatherings were held under the auspices of the Slovenian Presidency to the European Union.

### ARMY GETS TRAINED IN IHL

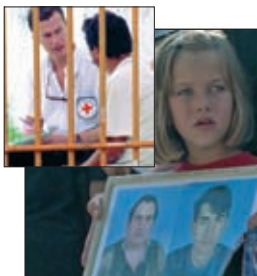
A Round Table on IHL integration into military training and education in Serbia was held in June in Belgrade. The event has been organised every year since 2004 and has proved a good tool to determine the status of IHL in the Serbian Army's training. It was hosted and co-organised by the Training and Doctrine Directorate of the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) General Staff and the Norwegian Embassy, which provided a guest lecturer from Oslo. Also participating were the Training Command of the SAF General Staff, the Defence Ministry's Education Directorate, the Peace-Keeping Operations Centre, the Defence Attaché of the Dutch Embassy and the Red Cross of Serbia.

### HAT-TRICK FOR SERBIAN RED CROSS

The Red Cross (RC) of Serbia's team has accomplished an astonishing feat, winning for the third time in a row the championship title at the First-Aid Convention in Europe (FACE) competition, held in July in Liverpool, England. Beating 27 rival teams at the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of FACE, young RC volunteers from Belgrade's Palilula branch scored best in a series of real-life scenarios similar to the ones they would face as RC volunteers back home. Other highlights included a series of dramatic water rescue displays by British RC teams using cutting-edge equipment and an opportunity for the competitors to try out new, state-of-the-art computerised resuscitation models.

**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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[www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)

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