

# ICRC

## NEWSLETTER

### SIERRA LEONE

May - August 2001

## Adapting itself to a new reality



As the peace process moves forward, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has adapted its programmes to the new reality in Sierra Leone. In this reporting period (May to August), the ICRC's operation in Sierra Leone, its largest in West Africa, focused on helping displaced families resettle to safe areas and on rehabilitation programmes, such as construction of wells, sanitation facilities and the promotion of agricultural activities. These programmes aim to promote the restoration of adequate living conditions for those most affected by the conflict without creating long-term dependency on outside aid and taking the cultural context into account. Moreover, the ICRC's activities included help for sick and wounded, visits to detainees and re-establishment of family links, with a special focus on the needs of women and support for the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS).

Now that displaced persons are returning to their places of origin, the ICRC is moving its humanitarian operations to those newly settled areas where the needs are the greatest.

### **ICRC: Promoter and Guardian of International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**

***Supporting states in raising awareness of IHL is one of the mandates conferred on the ICRC, by the Four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.***

This law, which is otherwise known as the "Law of War", prescribes rules of behaviour for combatants in both international and non-international armed conflicts, and restricts the method and means of warfare. It protects civilians who do not take part in the fighting as well as wounded, sick, detained or surrendered combatants who are no longer taking part in the conduct of hostilities. The Four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 provide the main instrument of humanitarian law and deal mainly with protection and assistance of victims in armed conflicts. 189 states, including Sierra Leone (since 1965), are party to the Geneva Conventions.

***Supporting efforts to stability through dissemination to the Armed Forces...***  
Educating about IHL forms part of the

moral training component of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone (SLA). During the past twelve months the ICRC has been contributing to the training programme for the new SLA. Indeed it has taught over 8,000 soldiers about their responsibilities to spare and respect civilians, wounded, sick and detained fighters no longer taking part in hostilities. When combatants limit the use of violence and behave with honour in the conduct of hostilities, they prevent or reduce unnecessary suffering, win the hearts and minds of the people and, above all, keep a door open for reconciliation. Humanitarian rules are meant to be observed not only by governments and their armed forces, but also by all armed parties to a conflict. This explains why the ICRC also provides IHL training to commanders of the RUF and the CDF.

The ICRC has organised information sessions for hundreds of officers from the contingents of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, who also have an obligation to abide by IHL.



***Ignorance is no excuse: dissemination session to SLA in Benguema***

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. The ICRC has been working in Sierra Leone since 1991. In agreement with all parties to the conflict, the ICRC carries out humanitarian activities such as medical support, relief assistance to civilians, restoration of family ties and promotion of International Humanitarian law.



## Water and habitat

The ICRC provided material to construct traditional pit latrines in some of the rural communities in Port Loko, Tonkolili, Kailahun and Pujehun districts. So as to control the vectors of disease, health education campaigns are carried out on the spot and health committees are established in each location where the ICRC is working. The technical aspects are accomplished by the ICRC technicians and community volunteers.

Following requests from the local population and taking into consideration the socio-cultural aspects, the ICRC proposes a structure and design easy to make in the field (one bag of cement corresponds to one latrine) and the use of traditional material for the superstructure.

The slab can also be reused later in another pit dug by the community.

The same ICRC water and habitat unit, which deals with matters relating to the maintenance or restoration of water-supply systems, also visited Koidu Government Hospital. The ICRC launched a rapid rehabilitation of several wards to provide patients and medical teams with decent rooms.

Rehabilitation work included repairs of roof leakage, wall painting and the installation of mosquito mesh on the windows and doors. Latrines and showers of the hospital were also rehabilitated.

At the same time, a team of caretakers was trained on preventive measures for cleaning and disinfection of the rooms with special material. The same approach was also adopted for Segbwema Methodist Hospital.



**Water is life:** constructing water wells in Loko Masama chiefdom

### **from May to August, the ICRC:**

- constructed wells and latrines in 10 villages in South Kenema district;
- constructed wells and latrines in 3 villages in Makpele chiefdom, Pujehun district;
- installed wells with hand pumps and latrines in 8 villages in Lower Maforki chiefdom and in Loko Masama IDP host community, Port Loko district;
- supported the rehabilitation of the SLRCS clinic in Makeni;
- at the end of August hundreds latrines were under construction in Kailahun and Pujehun districts.

## Relief Activities : Supporting conflict victims to resettle and restore their means of production

The aftermath of every armed conflict usually involves the resettlement of displaced persons to their places of origin and to rehabilitate means of production to enhance self-sufficiency at household level.

This is now the focus of the ICRC/SLRCS humanitarian activities in Sierra Leone. The aim is to help displaced persons to cope with the effects of the conflict. The idea is based on the belief that "it is better to teach a man how to fish than to provide him with fish for the rest of his life."

Tens of thousands of internally displaced persons as well other as vulnerable families received assistance from the ICRC/SLRCS between May and August in order to help them rebuild their settlements, produce food and generate income.

The package consisted of tarpaulins, sleeping mats, blankets, kitchen sets, drinking buckets, soap, used clothes, and farming inputs like rice, groundnut and vegetable seeds and agricultural tools.

### **from May to August, the ICRC:**

- together with the SLRCS, distributed a resettlement package to 5,350 families (29,800 beneficiaries) in Songo, Masiaka, Port Loko, Petifu Junction, Kenema, Pujehun, and Potoru. The same package was also rendered to about 89,600 resident families and displaced persons in Lower Maforki, Tane, Kholifa Mabang and Malal chiefdoms in the Port Loko and Tonkolili districts;
- together with the SLRCS, assisted a total caseload of 176,470 displaced persons with non-food items and used clothes;



## Medical activities

ICRC's medical assistance provides affordable health care to war affected persons in life threatening situations. Owing to the fact that the majority of displaced persons are now returning to their places of origin, it is foreseen that medical activities will eventually shift to areas where the need is greatest.

### **from May to August, the ICRC:**

- together with government medical staff, carried out 924 operations at Kenema Hospital;
- provided and monitored use of basic drugs and medicines at Segbwema mobile clinic and Koidu Government Hospital (Kono district);
- cared for 140 pregnant women in life threatening condition at PCMH in Freetown;
- provided drugs and incentives for 2 health clinics in Freetown and one in Mile 91, which saw a total of 43,337 patients.
- together with the SLRCS and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment facilitated a training course in vegetable production for 80 women associations in the Kenema district. The women's groups were provided with imported and local vegetable seeds, cutlasses, hoes, shovels, plastic buckets, watering cans and wheelbarrows after the training;
- implemented an agricultural programme centred on both resident farm families and internally displaced persons in Tonkolili, Kenema, Pujehun and Port Loko districts targeting 22,570 families (135,380 beneficiaries).





*Delivering the goods: Medical assistance to PCMH*

## Persons detained during a conflict

People arrested or captured and then detained for reasons linked to a conflict are vulnerable. There is an international consensus as regards the minimal level of respect to be granted to detainees. All people held in connection with a conflict have the right to humane conditions of detention. The task of ICRC delegates aims at working towards the respect of such principles.

### **from May to August, the ICRC:**

- had access to all persons detained in places of detention in Sierra Leone, and provided material and medical support for the most needy inmates.

## Restoring and maintaining family links

The ICRC helps to trace unaccompanied children in the sub-region and facilitates cross border reunification of such children with their families. Together with the SLRCS, the ICRC also runs the Red Cross Family Message network which enables thousands of Sierra Leoneans to keep in touch with their relatives in Sierra Leone as well as abroad.

### **from May to August, the ICRC:**

- reunited 30 unaccompanied Sierra Leonean children with their families;
- dealt with 429 other cases of unaccompanied children in Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria, wanting to rejoin their families in Sierra Leone;
- together with the SLRCS, distributed 6,756 Red Cross Family Messages;
- together with the SLRCS, collected 8,317 Red Cross Family Messages.

## Impartiality and Neutrality

**Impartiality and Neutrality: two of the seven leading principles of the Red Cross Movement, which provide a universal standard of reference for all its members (the ICRC, the International Federation and the National Societies).**

**The ICRC, the International Federation and the SLRC, with their respective mandates, work together as a family, to provide assistance and protection, without adverse distinction, for people who have suffered directly as a result of the conflict.**

It's Wednesday 4 July. An ICRC/SLRCS team set out for Tane chiefdom (Tonkolili district). The mission: to carry out the distribution of blankets, mats, tarpaulins, kitchen sets, jerry cans, soap, rice, groundnut and vegetable seeds, as well as hoes for 28,570 beneficiaries from the six sections in the chiefdom. This same package had previously been provided to tens of thousands of internally displaced persons in areas controlled by the government.

The convoy was composed of 15 trucks. When it stopped to rest in Makeni, the question most onlookers asked was: "why is the Red Cross bypassing us to assist the people of Tane when we are also in need?" The answer is given by one of the principles of the Red Cross: **Impartiality.**

Red Cross assistance is carried out according to needs and the organisation always gives priority to the most urgent cases of distress. Tane chiefdom was therefore not a choice but a rule: "providing the greatest help for those most in need without discrimination." This is what impartiality means.

A commander of the RUF unit on the spot was curious to know why his men were not registered. It was explained that "combatants and political groups do not qualify for registration. Indeed they are regarded as parties to the conflict and such a gesture would be equal to support for one of the parties. Moreover the registration is done by family-heads, so if a combatant or political official is the head of any of the unregistered families then it means that they too cannot not qualify for Red Cross assistance."

This encapsulates the principle of **neutrality** which states that "In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature."

Creating awareness of the principles of the Red Cross is one of the main tasks of the ICRC. Despite the fact that many people in Sierra Leone have now come to terms with these ideas, a lot of controversy still surrounds the principles of **impartiality** and **neutrality.**

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**Tears of Joy:** Hamidu, 14 years old, was reunited by the ICRC with his mother Rakie Barrie in Gbinti (Port Loko District) on 13.6.01

This attitude stems from the traditional belief common in many internal conflicts that "if you are the friend of my enemy then you cannot be my friend". This kind of attitude ignores the difference between combatants and victims, treating them all as one. The Red Cross, however, is concerned with the victims, whoever and wherever they may be.

It was almost 18h30 when the joint relief team completed the distribution for the first day. Pa Abu Bangura, a beneficiary, overwhelmed with joy, had this to say: "Red Cross oona tenki... aaaaay! oona tenki yah ! God bless Red Cross ! ah go use dis tapolin now for make me roof... me pikin dem bin day suffer too much".

Pa Abu will surely fix the leaking roof of his house with the tarpaulin and the Red Cross is happy that it has contributed to reduce his suffering.



*From May to August, the ICRC transported 2,700 tonnes of humanitarian goods for its beneficiaries*

## Who we are and how we work

The ICRC has some 30 expatriates and over 200 Sierra Leonean employees throughout Sierra Leone. A fleet of 30 vehicles and a Beechcraft plane is available to facilitate ICRC operations in the country and for the transportation of medical and relief supplies. The ICRC also rents trucks from indigenous transport owners for the delivery of its goods to the beneficiaries in the field. The procurement of these goods is done in a transparent way ensuring that suppliers are selected based on the prices they offer, the delivery time and the quality of their goods.

Bids are submitted and placed in a sealed tender box to be opened by a team of ICRC relief, logistics and administrative co-ordinators. A justification table is made after the selection and copies sent to ICRC Geneva for approval. Purchases are only made after this careful selection procedure.

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