



# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN EGYPT



ICRC



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Front cover: ICRC  
Egypt, Cairo, 2009. The "Humanity in War" photo exhibition.

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## ABOUT THE ICRC

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 armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

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

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is active in almost every country and comprises around 100 million members and volunteers.

Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the ICRC employs some 12,000 people in almost 80 countries. The organization is financed mainly by voluntary donations from governments and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.

The mandate of the ICRC stems essentially from the Geneva Conventions and its



Additional Protocols. In particular, the ICRC has the right to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees in the event of international armed conflict.

In situations of violence other than armed conflicts, and in any other emergency that warrants humanitarian action, the ICRC enjoys a right of humanitarian initiative,



Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/CRC

which is recognized in the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Thus, wherever international humanitarian law does not apply, the ICRC may offer its services to governments without that offer constituting interference in the internal affairs of the State concerned.

## FIRST PRESENCE IN EGYPT

The ICRC has been working in Egypt, with some interruptions, for almost 100 years. During World Wars I and II, the Israeli-Arab wars and the 1956 conflict over the Suez canal, the ICRC visited and assisted thousands of prisoners of war and civilian internees under the specific mandate conferred upon the organization by the Geneva Conventions.

The organization also provided medical assistance and food to tens of thousands of

war victims, helped restore broken family links, helped authorities to transfer people across demarcation lines, and oversaw the repatriation of prisoners of war and mortal remains. In 1983, the ICRC formalized its legal presence in Egypt by signing a Headquarters Agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.





## REGIONAL SERVICES FROM CAIRO

In the 1990s, the ICRC delegation in Cairo established two regional centres. In cooperation with the League of Arab States and ICRC delegations from Arabic-speaking countries, the regional advisory service on international humanitarian law (IHL) promotes the national implementation of

IHL and its incorporation into military training and academic curricula in Egypt and other Arabic-speaking countries. The regional communication support centre runs the ICRC's Arabic website and publishes Arabic print and audiovisual material on the ICRC and IHL.



## RECENT ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING CIVIL UNREST

The civil unrest that shook several countries in the Arab world in 2011 posed new challenges to the ICRC delegation in Cairo. Following the events that began in Egypt on 25 January, the ICRC provided emergency medical supplies to the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) and to some 15 hospitals dealing with casualties from the demonstrations. It also supported the ERC in establishing, training and equipping emergency action teams that provided first aid to hundreds of people injured during further outbreaks of unrest in October 2011 and thereafter.

In addition to the emergency assistance, the ICRC engaged in dialogue with the Egyptian authorities about the legal provisions applicable to law enforcement. It has also expressed its willingness to contribute to the authorities' efforts to ensure that conditions of detention are consistent with internationally recognized standards.

Soon after the outbreak of the crisis in Libya, the ICRC in Egypt provided logistical support for the establishment of a new delegation in the neighbouring country. In





coordination with the Egyptian authorities and relevant United Nations agencies, the ICRC ran an office in the border town of Salloum until the end of 2011. This allowed the organization to respond to the needs of people who got stranded at the Libyan border with Egypt. Together with the Egyptian Red Crescent, the ICRC provided meals and water, in addition to services that enabled people to restore broken family links and contact their consulates in Cairo in order to expedite their return to their home countries.



## RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

Restoring family links is a long-standing ICRC service worldwide, arising from the fact that many families are separated during armed conflict and other emergencies.

Families of Egyptian nationals detained or interned abroad are able to send Red Cross messages containing family news or to make phone calls in order to maintain contact with their relatives. The ICRC is facilitating video calls between detainees

at the US facility in Guantanamo Bay and their family members in Egypt. It has also contributed to the re-integration of Egyptian nationals formerly held there.

For many years, the ICRC in Egypt has offered its services to asylum seekers and refugees in order to restore contact with their families in their home country. Unaccompanied children and teenagers are particularly vulnerable, and the ICRC does all it



**“I believed I would never see my daughter again. Thanks to the ICRC, I was able to find her and to be reunited with her, and I am so grateful for that”**

*Christine, whose daughter lived in a foreign country and returned safely to Egypt with the help of the ICRC.*

**“Without the ICRC, we would have never been able to know that he is still alive, we would have never been able to contact him.”**

*Mother of an Egyptian national held at the US Guantanamo Bay facility. The ICRC facilitated video calls between him and his family in Egypt.*

can to reunite them with their families, in coordination with other relevant organizations.

At the request of the embassies concerned, the ICRC issues travel documents for refugees or asylum seekers without identity papers who have been accepted for resettlement in a third country. In 2010 and 2011, around 1,800 travel documents were issued.

In the same period, the ICRC in Egypt handled some 250 tracing requests, and nearly 10,000 people contacted the delegation with problems concerning restoring family links. The organization will continue to provide these services in 2012/13, both through its office in Cairo and through cooperation with the Egyptian Red Crescent in Salloum.



## COOPERATION WITH THE EGYPTIAN RED CRESCENT

Since its foundation in 1912, the Egyptian Red Crescent (ERC) has established branches in all 26 governorates of the country. The ERC is a very active part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and ICRC's main partner in Egypt.

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC work together to strengthen the emergency preparedness and response capacity of the ERC, as well as the national society's capacity to restore family links, promote international humanitarian law, and strengthen internal and external communication.

Over the years, the ERC and the ICRC have worked together to assist Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the border with Gaza. The ICRC supported an ERC programme to supply relief material from Egypt to Gaza.

In 2011 and 2012, in response to the humanitarian needs arising from civil unrest in Egypt, the ICRC helped the ERC to establish, train and equip 30 emergency action teams, each composed of five volunteers. These teams provided first aid and medical evacuation to hundreds of casualties during outbreaks of unrest.



Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Libya and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of people in Egypt in 2011, the ICRC and the ERC handed out more than 340,000 meals and provided some 20,000 long-distance phone calls to people stranded at the Salloum border in order to restore or maintain family links.

**“Within the few months that followed the Egyptian revolution, our volunteers were trained to react as fast as possible during disasters and crises. This is the first time that Red Crescent volunteers have responded as a team, not just as individuals.”**

*Hossam El Sayed, a volunteer in the ERC Emergency Action Teams*

**“I recall a moment in Tahrir Square. A soldier suffering from suffocation as a result of tear gas inhalation came to us. We asked him to hand over his gun to one of his colleagues and then we helped him.”**

*Abdullah Emam, a volunteer in the ERC Emergency Action Teams*

**“It is an indispensable skill for every journalist. This is how journalists who received first aid training described it. Many success stories are circulating among journalists about how they use the skill in their work or even in their personal lives. The Egyptian Journalists’ Syndicate considers its cooperation with the ICRC and the Egyptian Red Crescent a real success story.”**

*Abeer Sa’ady, head of training at the Egyptian Journalists’ Syndicate*



## **ADDRESSING AUTHORITIES, STUDENTS AND JOURNALISTS**

The ICRC delegation in Cairo promotes the organisation’s humanitarian work, as well as international humanitarian law, in the media, to NGOs, syndicates and political parties and in religious circles. The Egyptian authorities, the League of Arab States and members of the diplomatic community in Cairo are regularly briefed about the organization’s operations, institutional positions and humanitarian concerns.

The ICRC has assisted higher education institutes to incorporate international humanitarian law (IHL) in their curricula. As a result, over 100 faculties are now teaching IHL in the Arab world, nine of them in Egypt. The ICRC provides relevant documentation to those universities, and encourages students, professors and researchers interested in IHL to consult its comprehensive IHL library at its delegation office in Cairo.



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The organization worked for ten years with the Egyptian Ministry of Education to integrate humanitarian principles into the standard curricula of primary and secondary schools in the Arabic, religion and social studies syllabuses. The programme was successfully concluded in 2012.

In 2010 and 2011, several hundred journalists from a wide range of media outlets were briefed on IHL and the work of

the ICRC, as well as on issues related to media coverage of war and other situations of violence. In 2012, the ICRC and the Egyptian Red Crescent, in cooperation with the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate, provided four-day first aid courses to hundreds of media professionals working in risky environments.

## REGIONAL ADVISORY SERVICE ON IHL

Since its inception, the regional advisory service on international humanitarian law (IHL) in Cairo has become an important base from which the ICRC promotes its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and fosters national implementation of IHL among the 22 member countries of the League of Arab States.

The League of Arab States and the ICRC co-organize regional seminars and training courses on IHL for government officials, diplomats, academics, judges and prosecutors. A cooperation programme with the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union is aimed at promoting the ratification and implementation of IHL treaties and provisions by national parliaments.

The regional advisory service also provides support to governments in Arabic-speaking countries to establish national IHL commissions, align domestic legislation with IHL provisions, and adopt procedures for the dissemination of the provisions of

IHL. The results of these efforts are documented in the biennial reports on implementation of IHL in the Arab States, the last edition of which was jointly published by the League of Arab States and the ICRC in 2012.

In 2010 and 2011, more than 50 academics and 100 civil servants from the region benefited from in-depth courses on IHL conducted by the ICRC and the League of Arab States in Beirut. Sixteen of the participants came from Egypt.

**“For a country like Egypt, it is of utmost importance to protect the common heritage of humanity. One way to do this is to have a national law that protects cultural property during armed conflict.”**

*General Abdel Ghaffar Helal, expert in International Humanitarian Law*



In 2010, the Arab Inter-parliamentary Union, the Egyptian People's Assembly and the ICRC brought together parliamentarians from various Arab countries to discuss IHL-related issues and adopt a set of recommendations on the implementation of IHL. In 2011, Arab government experts on IHL gathered to define a regional plan of action for 2012/2013.

In Egypt, the national IHL commission brings together representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Defence, Interior, Health, Communications and Education, General Intelligence, as well as the ERC and the ICRC. Since its establishment in 2001 it has facilitated the drafting and adoption of a number of IHL-related laws by parliament, as well as the incorporation of IHL in the training programmes of the army, the police, judges and diplomats.

## PROMOTING IHL IN THE ARMED FORCES

In cooperation with the Military Affairs Department of the League of Arab States, the ICRC conducts specialized training courses to raise awareness of IHL and to encourage its integration in the regular training of armed forces in the region.

The ICRC in Egypt conducts regular workshops for the Egyptian armed and security forces, including troops to be deployed in peace-keeping operations. In 2010 and 2011, more than 200 Egyptian army officers attended IHL training courses held by the ICRC in various military schools. 28 high-ranking officers from 14 Arab countries participated in a four-day IHL training course co-organized with the League of Arab States. In 2012 and 2013, the ICRC will expand its training programme to address both police and army officers, with a focus on issues related to law enforcement.



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## REGIONAL COMMUNICATION SUPPORT CENTRE

The Cairo-based regional communication support centre runs the ICRC Arabic website ([www.icrc.org/ara](http://www.icrc.org/ara)), as well as ICRC social media platforms in Arabic, such as Twitter and Facebook. The centre is ICRC's main producer of Arabic-language publications and films, including its quarterly magazine "Al Insani", which highlights contemporary humanitarian challenges in the Middle East.

The regional communication support centre promotes ICRC's activities and humanitarian concerns among pan-Arab media and regularly organizes workshops on humanitarian topics for senior editors and journalists from the region. The centre sup-

ports the communication efforts of ICRC delegations in Arabic-speaking countries, aiming at strengthening acceptance of the ICRC as an impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian organization, and facilitating access to people affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence.



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