

ICRC RESPONSE TO COVID-19

NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

SEPTEMBER 2020



WEAKENED BY CONFLICT, HEALTH SYSTEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST STRUGGLE TO COPE WITH COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has further destabilized public health systems already weakened by war and natural disasters in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Occupied Palestinian Territories and other countries in the region, which sorely lack adequate facilities, equipment and sufficient human resources.

When health structures cannot cope, mobile clinics can provide a solution. By being able to relocate based on need, mobile clinics can offer life-saving and standard treatment even in places where hospital structures are not available or damaged.



ICRC Syria

In Syria, two mobile clinics continue to provide services to patients in rural Hama. 20,000 people benefited from these services offered by the ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the first half of 2020.



Hospitals in Gaza are striving to care for COVID-19 patients with only four hours of electricity per day. The ICRC has provided vital ICU equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE) and hospital supplies, and improved the infrastructure in the hospital assigned to treat COVID-19 patients in Gaza.



In Egypt, the ICRC, through the Egyptian Red Crescent, donated vital protective equipment to health facilities in North Sinai in response to the COVID-19 crisis. [\[READ MORE\]](#)



Despite all the fear, Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) [ambulance officer Bassam](#), [Dr. Ahmed](#) and Magen David Adom (MDA) [volunteer Yehudit](#) still had the courage to save lives and do everything in their power to fulfill their humanitarian duty to the fullest.



Our Logistic Supply Centre in Jordan shipped 15 tons of personal protective equipment and other medical supplies to Yemen to be distributed to ICRC-supported medical facilities around the country.



Many Yemenis struggle to access basic health services while almost half of health structures are not functional. We have been providing medical equipment and personal protective equipment to hospitals and health centres in Sanaa, Al-Hazem, Al-Wazaija, Marib, Mount Abyssinia, Taiz, Bajil and Hidda. We also supplied a solar power system to Awmara Hospital in Sanaa, which provides its services to thousands of people in the area.

IT IS TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL FOR SOME...

While children are returning to school amid COVID-19 restrictions or resuming their lessons online, many children in war-torn countries are struggling to continue their education. We did our part to help children continue their studies in Syria.

SCHOOLS REHABILITATION IN RURAL HAMA AND HOMS

The ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) rehabilitated Sheikh Hadeed school in Rural Hama, fixing school premises and providing desks for students. About 600 students will be [starting their classes](#) at the beginning of the school year in safety.

We also rehabilitated four primary schools in Jawalek and Snaisel villages in rural Homs, as well as rehabilitated the electrical power network and the water pumping stations that will benefit 2,000 returnees.



MAKING SCHOOLS SAFE IN ALEPPO

About 1,000 students arrived in Aleppo this summer to take their baccalaureate exams. To help with their stay, the ICRC and SARC rehabilitated sanitation facilities at a school, and provided water and some basic food items. [\[EN, AR\]](#)

HEALTH CARE IN DANGER

Health staff across Iraq are working tirelessly and selflessly to try and stem the tide of COVID-19 infections and treat those affected. In many cases, it is at a considerable personal sacrifice, including exposure to infection and spending many weeks away from loved ones. Unfortunately, Iraqi medical staff has already experienced high levels of violence over the past years, and the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated an already difficult situation.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement deplores violence and acts of intimidation against health workers. Our delegation in Iraq conducted a 10-day campaign to raise awareness on the issue of the ongoing attacks against health workers. [\[READ MORE\]](#)

HUMANITARIAN WORK GOES ON

While COVID-19 has made our work more complex, we continue working to address pressing issues across the region.

The compounded adverse impact of conflict, climate risks and the pandemic disrupts livelihoods, leaves families looking for answers, amplifies diseases, and weakens health-care services. We continue striving to provide adequate support to the affected people in the region.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT

In a report, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), which is based on research in southern Iraq, northern Mali and the Central African Republic, the ICRC explores people's experience with conflict and climate risks, their ways of coping and adapting and how, in the absence of adequate support, they may be forced to drastically change their way of life or move away from their homes.



MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD

Responding to requests for advice in several countries, the ICRC has prepared guidance on the planning, preparation and management of the cemeteries in case of mass fatalities, as is happening with COVID-19. In recognition of the ICRC's forensic experience gained worldwide through the management of the dead in emergencies, including epidemics, Forensic Science International – one of the most prominent forensic science journals – [published the guidance online](#).

MISSING

Thousands of families of missing persons still seek answers on the fate of their loved ones who went missing in Iraq as a result of four decades of conflict and violence. In a 10-day campaign, [we told the stories of these families to drive the attention of the authorities to the issue](#).



HUMANITARIAN WORK GOES ON (cont.)



MAINTAINING FAMILY CONTACT

Despite the pandemic, the ICRC, in collaboration with Saudi Red Crescent Authority [facilitated more than 13 phone calls](#) between families in Saudi Arabia and their loved ones detained in Guantanamo.

VACCINATING LIVESTOCK ACROSS YEMEN

The ICRC and local authorities initiated the vaccination of around two million livestock across Yemen. The livestock are a main source of income for many Yemenis.



SUPPORTING FARMERS WITH CASH TO BUY SEEDS

In response to the deteriorating economic situation across Yemen, the ICRC provided cash support for around 5,000 families in Hajjah and Sada'a governorates.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DISAPPEARED

ICRC Lebanon marked the International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August by publishing a [statement](#) as well as a [video message](#) by the Head of the Committee for the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon, raising awareness about the missing due to the civil war and the recent Beirut blast.





BEIRUT BLAST

More than 190 people have been killed and 6,500 wounded in a massive explosion in the Beirut seaport on 4 August, 2020. The blast also left three major hospitals out of function.

To help the affected people of Beirut deal with the aftermath, the ICRC opened hotlines to provide support with [mental health](#), [physical rehabilitation and physiotherapy services](#), and [missing persons](#).

The continuous prevalence of the pandemic, made us continue to [raise awareness on COVID-19](#) in addition to providing medical supplies to Rafik Hariri University Hospital, with which the ICRC has partnered since 2016 to support access to quality healthcare for the most vulnerable.



Lebanon. Photo of a hospital. The damage can be seen through the window.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER RESULTS

We have worked with a number of partners in the region to better counter the impact of the pandemic and find sustainable ways to assist people affected by the conflict.

BAHRAIN: PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The ICRC carried out a virtual panel discussion “How IHL provides safeguards during pandemics” in collaboration with Bahrain’s National Committee of IHL, Judicial Institute and Red Crescent Society. Over 80 people attended.

[\[READ MORE\]](#)

KUWAIT: HIGH LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE EXPLORES COVID-19 HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

The ICRC co-chaired the Third High Level Policy Dialogue with our strategic partners, Kuwait’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait Red Crescent Society and Kuwait Fund for Arabic and Economic Development. The meeting discussed COVID-19 long term impact, exploring avenues of cooperation on sustainable responses to help affected persons. The event concluded with a [joint statement](#) and a [press release](#).

OMAN: ICRC EXPLORES AVENUES OF COOPERATION WITH HUMANITARIAN PARTNERS

A constructive exchange between Oman Charitable Organization, Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation and ICRC Oman mission took place to explore avenues of cooperation and strengthen negotiation skills of humanitarian practitioners in times of crisis. [\[READ MORE\]](#)



HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY: PRESIDENT MAURER'S E-VISIT TO QATAR

ICRC’s President Peter Maurer discussed challenges to humanitarian work during the pandemic with H.E. Mohamed Bin Abdelrahman, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar and the Qatar Red Crescent Society.

#INAWORD: CAMPAIGN FOR SOLIDARITY WITH MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Acts of solidarity are critical to maintaining our humanity during the pandemic and ensuring the most vulnerable communities are not left out of health and economic response.



**LISTEN.
TELL.
SHARE.**

Watch the full videos online and discover more testimonies from people all around the world.



**73%
OF MILLENNIALS
BELIEVE SUPPORTING
MENTAL
HEALTH
NEEDS OF VICTIMS OF
ARMED VIOLENCE IS AS
IMPORTANT
AS WATER, FOOD AND
SHELTER.**

Source: ICRC, 2020

Beirut, Lebanon 2020.
"Just-in-time" measures like lockdowns and curfews hit people's traditional coping mechanisms, such as gathering socially and seeing friends, sharing their worries and frustrations. Now, the explosion is one more crushing blow." Isabel Rivera Hernandez, psychologist.

Photo by ICRC



United Arab Emirates. Dubai (together with Paris, Mexico City and Johannesburg) hosted the installations #InAWord

We launched a global **street art and social media** campaign *In A Word* bringing into focus the specific pandemic vulnerability of communities affected by war and violence. The [ICRC](#), French artist [Combo](#) and [Dysturb](#) launched a series of large-format street art installations to point to the new world realities of restricted movement, disrupted jobs and education, and the ongoing threat to people's lives.

The installations are a community-to-community conversation via the artwork. Viewers in situ and on social media are invited to contribute their own experiences of COVID-19, discuss values they commit to and their suggestion for "what's Next". In this way, we aim to engage the youth across the world in a global reflection and conversation on the values we commonly could/should commit to, in order to uphold key humanitarian areas, and our shared humanity for the future.

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.