

ICRC IN PAKISTAN

NEWSLETTER

JAN-DEC 2021



Dear Readers,

As we reel from a global pandemic, it is more important than ever to celebrate the power of humanity and the wonders we can do when we decide to work together.

Humanity lies at the heart of all our response. We at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Pakistan take pride in working with and supporting the humanitarian work of local authorities through a partnership approach that focuses on uplifting vulnerable communities through our work in health, physical rehabilitation, restoring family links, promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL), and humanitarian forensics.



In 2021, we continued to support, and where relevant, launched new initiatives to support national authorities, health-care facilities, and local communities. From establishing the emergency wing at DHQ Bajaur to advocating for a law on the protection of health care in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, our efforts, as always, were geared towards serving as a credible partner focused on local solutions. We continued our engagement with the police, military, religious circles, and policymakers to create a contextualized understanding of IHL.

This could not have been possible without the support of the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS), our main humanitarian partner in the country, and its brave volunteers working tirelessly across the country to provide help where it's most needed.

As an organization with over 150 years of experience in humanitarian action, we believe in a way of working that recognizes and values community members as equal partners.

On this note, I wish you and your loved ones a happy, healthy and prosperous 2022.

Sincerely,



Dragana Kojic
Head of Delegation

UMEED: A STORY OF HOPE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Interacting with our audiences on Facebook during the pandemic revealed some interesting insights about SOP literacy. Based on the results of a Facebook survey, the ICRC developed a storybook for children which chronicles the protagonist Noor's journey to hope during times of isolation and social distancing.

Over the course of the story, Noor discussed her apprehensions regarding the ongoing pandemic and the loss of interaction with her playmates. Noor's father puts her apprehensions to rest by encouraging her to practice social distancing and good hygiene. The story promotes a sense of community and a duty of care among young individuals in their daily interactions.

The books were distributed among shelter homes and other places frequented by children in KP that we work with as part of our Restoring Family Links programme.



STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN FORENSICS IN SINDH

Humanitarian crises, including pandemics, often result in large-scale fatalities with many deceased going unidentified because of improper or undignified management of the dead. But an individual has the right to dignity in both life and death. Through its management of the dead in emergencies programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) works to ensure that this right is upheld in accordance with various national and international laws.

Addressing a core component of the dignified management of the dead, the ICRC held an online workshop on genetic identification in mass fatalities for forensic scientists at Sindh Forensic DNA and Serology Laboratory (SFDL), Karachi, from 24 till 26 March.

National and international forensic experts shared best practices and techniques to efficiently carry out genetic identification in emergency situations. The training is expected to help up to 14 participating forensic experts at SFDL to manage large-scale DNA samples and have a tool for pairwise comparison of DNA profiles to accurately identify victims of mass fatality within lesser time.

"The training is particularly important for handling mass deaths as we experienced firsthand following a plane crash. We carried out manual pairwise matching but it was a laborious activity with high chances of errors. Through the genetic data management and comparison tool shared in the workshop, we will be able to quickly and accurately analyse all DNA profiles," said Saad Farooq, a forensic DNA expert at SFDL who participated in the workshop.

The ICRC's programme focusing on the dignified management of the dead supports local forensic science labs and practitioners through capacity-building in humanitarian forensics. This includes workshops on mass identification during emergencies, dignified management of the dead and dental forensics.



BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PHYSICAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

The ICRC's physical rehabilitation programme (PRP) in Pakistan began in 1984 with the setting up of a physical rehabilitation workshop at the ICRC's Surgical Hospital in Peshawar. Back then, the focus was on treating conflict-related injuries through surgical treatments and providing physical rehabilitation services, including assistive devices, to those who were permanently disabled. Since then, our approach to physical rehabilitation has evolved and expanded to reach all provinces of Pakistan to ensure that people with disabilities, especially those who are poor and live in rural or previously violence-affected areas, have access to sustainable and quality services.

We believe that investing in building the technical, clinical and managerial capacity of domestic service providers will ensure long-term accessibility to quality rehabilitation services. Therefore, in addition to four existing partnerships, this year, the ICRC renewed its partnership with five notable physical rehabilitation service providers, working to ensure that they are able to continue providing quality services with their own means by the end of our partnership.

The PRP also focuses on supporting social inclusion initiatives that help people with disabilities regain their status as active members in their community. In 2020 alone, 34,000 people with disabilities were provided with access to quality rehabilitation and social inclusion services in 19 physical rehabilitation centres and four Organizations for Persons with Disabilities.

We also celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities with a cricket tournament in partnership with the Pakistan Disabled Cricket Association (PDCA). The PDCA is a strong advocate for disability inclusion in sports and has a legacy of establishing good practice in inclusion through sports. The ICRC sees social inclusion and visibility as essential to dignified living for people with disabilities.

UPGRADED EMERGENCY WARD TO OFFER QUALITY HEALTH CARE IN BAJAUR

The ICRC supported the establishment of a newly upgraded emergency ward at the District Headquarters Hospital in Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The 26-bed facility, which includes an operation theatre, resuscitation room, triage clinics and pharmacy, was renovated and set up by the ICRC as part of its efforts to strengthen health-care facilities in the province. Dr. Ataullah Khan, Deputy Chief Health System Reforms Unit, inaugurated the ward on September 16 in a ceremony attended by officials of the health department and district headquarters hospital. Appreciating the ICRC's efforts, he said, "The upgraded facility will provide efficient health-care services to the people of Bajaur. Improving health care in the merged areas is a priority of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government and we are committed to providing the best facilities."



Focused on developing the emergency wards at secondary-level health facilities in the merged areas, the ICRC is currently supporting emergency departments of four hospitals in KP. We are also supporting emergency services at the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar, which is the largest health facility in the province.

Emphasizing the ICRC's efforts to help the most vulnerable populations in Pakistan, Farrukh Isomov, head of sub-delegation in Peshawar, said, "We are committed to sharing our expertise in a coordinated manner with the authorities and partner organizations in Pakistan. We look forward to a meaningful collaboration with the KP Health Department to improve services and deliver a timely response."

The ICRC's health programme in Pakistan promotes an integrated approach so that vulnerable communities have access to a proper continuum of care, from emergency care to rehabilitation after physical recovery. We facilitate this by building the capacity of health-care professionals in KP and the merged areas.

ONLINE TRAINING LAUNCHED TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE IN HEALTH-CARE SETTINGS

Health-care workers, now more than ever, have a right to a safe and secure workplace. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the threat of violence and harassment against health-care workers, causing significant stress on their physical and mental health.

To ensure a safe working environment for health-care workers in Pakistan by training them to de-escalate and manage violence in health facilities, the ICRC launched an online programme on 26 August at an event co-organized with the University of Lahore. Representatives of medical universities and health facilities, and health-care authorities from across the country attended the launch. "This training will go a long way as a useful tool that can be utilized by the health sector across Pakistan to ensure that services are provided in the best possible manner," said Dr Salman Shahid, additional secretary of Health Department, Government of Punjab, at the event.

Developed under the framework of the ICRC's Health Care in Danger (HCiD) initiative, the training programme is based on a 2015-study titled, 'Violence Against Health Care: Results from a Multi-Centre Study in Karachi' carried out in partnership with APPNA Institute of Public Health (Jinnah Sindh Medical University), Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and Indus Hospital. The study highlighted the need to train health-care workers in emergency communication skills to de-escalate violence and also teach them how to break bad news, manage stress and post-traumatic stress disorder, among other things.

Under the HCiD initiative, the ICRC has been working to promote evidence-based initiatives in collaboration with diverse stakeholders. In 2020, the committed efforts of the KP Health Department and the ICRC led to the passing of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Healthcare Service Providers and Facilities (Prevention of Violence and Damage to Property) Act, 2020.



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CREATES INTERFACE BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SEPARATED FAMILIES

The ICRC in collaboration with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) facilitated families from across Pakistan to attend the International Families Conference from 7-8 September organized by the ICRC Central Tracing Agency together with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world.

The local conference hub at the PRCS national headquarters hosted families with a relative separated or being sought as a result of international migration, mainly towards Europe.

In Pakistan, the ICRC and PRCS work closely with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies throughout the world under the Restoring Family Links (RFL) program to help people separated from their families or without news of them following natural disasters, international migration, emergencies as well as in other situations of humanitarian need.

The event provided families and practitioners the space to connect with a global support network, to share their experiences, and to inspire each other to take effective action for themselves, families and wider community. It also called to attention the coping strategies for the psychological distress these families experience.

For the participating families, the conference provided a space where their experience with grief was not uncommon. They reported leaving with a sense of comradery with one another, and a renewed hope to continue seeking their separated loved ones through the RFL platform.



STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN REPORTING

Access to factual, contextualized and locally relevant news, particularly before, during or after a humanitarian emergency, not only allows accountability through two-way communication between crisis responders and affected communities, but can also save lives.

Since the beginning of the ICRC's partnership with the Centre for Excellent in Journalism (CEJ) in 2017, we have strived to create a space for balanced, empathetic, and ethical reporting in Pakistan.

Keeping up with this tradition, we organized four humanitarian reporting workshops this year that brought together journalists from across Pakistan under the mentorship of industry veterans to explore different thematics including urban disaster reporting, digital journalism, misinformation and disinformation, and crisis reporting. The annual Humanitarian Reporting Awards were also held to recognize and celebrate accurate, ethical and responsible local reporting on humanitarian issues. Furthermore, two young journalists from our alumni network got a chance to work under seasoned reporters as part of our humanitarian reporting fellowship and improve their reporting skills.

"The ICRC believes that information is a form of aid in its own right, and that local media must be given the support they need to fulfil their vital public service function before, during and after a conflict, crisis or disaster," add Fizza Bangash, ICRC's head of communications in Pakistan. "Our initiative to strengthen humanitarian reporting in Pakistan is part of the same effort, and we are delighted to see the results it has produced in such a short span of time."



POLICE AND ARMED FORCES FIND COMMON GROUND DURING IHL TRAINING

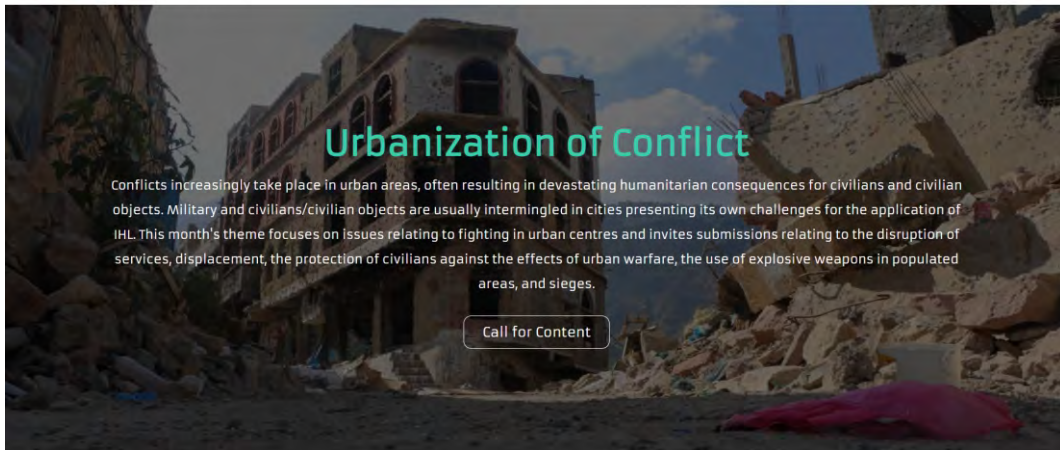
In partnership with the National Police Academy, Islamabad, the ICRC organized a pilot course entitled "Armed Conflict, Other Situations of Violence and International Law for Practitioners" from 14–16 July. The three-day course helped participants to explore the complementary and overlapping aspects of their respective operational work in relation to international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).

The course was designed to reflect international legal frameworks concerning the conduct of hostilities and law enforcement along with international best practices. The diverse group of participants included representatives of intelligence agencies, legal and operational officers of the armed forces and representatives of different departments within the police force.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (Investigations) in Islamabad Nida Bakht, who was one of the participants, said, "We are given extensive instruction on the operational aspects of our work at the training academy, but it is interesting to note the different ways in which these operations sometimes fall under the military's domain depending on the applicable legal paradigm."



This year, the ICRC's partnership with the National Police Academy culminated in a number of trainings on the use of force and international standards in restraint and policing methods. The trainings reached approximately 60 mid- to high-level officers, and trained them in topics ranging from investigation ethics, use of force during demonstrations or arrests, dealing with victims and survivors of sexual violence, and other topics relevant to police operations.



LAUNCH OF THE DLP FORUM MARKS 72 YEARS OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

Marking the 72nd anniversary of the Geneva Conventions on 12 August, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Research Society of International Law (RSIL) jointly launched the Diplomacy, Law and Policy (DLP) Forum.

This is a first-of-its-kind online platform in Pakistan that aims to shape contextualized debate and dialogue on issues related to international humanitarian law (IHL), diplomacy and policy. Opinions on contemporary discourse in IHL are also welcome for publication, in order to encourage academics, policymakers and the intelligentsia to contribute their thoughts on the forum, through a wide range of content, including articles, videos and podcasts.

The platform is purely academic in nature and covers diverse topics such as IHL, means and methods of warfare, customary IHL and states' best practices, and subjects such as urbanization, climate and conflict, humanitarian diplomacy, and technology and warfare.

"The prospect of a webspace that houses pertinent debate on topical themes of international law and policy will ensure a spike in the learning trajectory in Pakistan. Local voices on international law and policy now have a space that is unequivocally theirs," said Durkhanay Ijaz, legal adviser at the ICRC.

The ICRC works through partners to promote and uphold principles of IHL. The process seeks to invest in the capacity building of these partners as well as bringing together a community of local experts to generate discourse, to create and promote an indigenous understanding of IHL.





PROMOTING SAFER BEHAVIORS IN HANDLING EXPLOSIVES

Bomb disposal units around the country work tirelessly with limited resources, to ensure the safety of vulnerable people. The ICRC conducted Explosive Ordnance Reconnaissance workshops with the Civil Defence Bomb Disposal Unit, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, in Islamabad. The KP Police School of Explosive Handling in Nowshera also received training on the same subject.

A trainer at the Police School of Explosive Handlings in Nowshera, inspector Shafiq and his team have trained more than 5,000 police officers. The only institute of its kind in Pakistan, the school serves as a centre of excellence for bomb disposal units from across the country. "I always tell young officers that it's important to be brave but it's more important to be cautious," he says with a smile.

These trainings aim to help bomb disposal professionals in identifying different marking on unexploded ordinances which in turn, helps them identify the safest possible disposal mechanism. Bomb disposal teams often go into the field without adequate protection, which makes this knowledge all the more crucial for their safety.

ICRC AND SHARIAH ACADEMY ORGANIZE WORKSHOP ON RESTRAINT IN WAR

The Shariah Academy – a constituent of the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan – and the ICRC jointly organized a workshop entitled "The Islamic Perspective on the Roots of Restraint in War".

The workshop was inspired by the pathbreaking ICRC study "The Roots of Restraint in War" that investigates how formal and informal norms condition the behaviour of soldiers and fighters. The study emphasizes the need for harmony between laws and the values underpinning it, highlighting that internalizing the values proves to be a more sustainable way of promoting restraint.

Dr Muhammad Mushtaq Ahmed, Director General of the Shariah Academy, talked about the spirit of restraint in Islamic law, while Dr Muhammad Munir, professor of law at the university, summarized the code of conduct of war in Islamic law.

The workshop will help the project research team identify and recommend areas for further study. More such workshops with prominent Islamic scholars and opinion makers will be organized to achieve better socialization of the norms and values related to the law of armed conflict.

