



The Zimbabwe Red Cross and ICRC surpass 11 000 internet connections at Tongogara Refugee Camp

Harare, 23 February 2022 – 11 110 internet connections have been made since the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS) launched its connectivity service.

The connectivity service is an extension to the existing Restoring Family Links (RFL) service which provides vulnerable communities, particularly refugees and asylum seekers at Tongogara Refugee Camp with free phone calls and other tools to reach relatives they had been separated from due to armed conflict, violence or migration. In 2019, this expanded to include free access to computers and Wi-Fi available in an internet café located within the camp and on the personal devices of individuals who wish to connect and request a voucher. To ensure the elderly and those with mobility challenges also have access to the RFL service, volunteers conduct weekly visits throughout the camp.

For the first time since the launch of the connectivity service, the number of internet connections (5744) made in 2021 alone, surpassed the number of phone calls (3245) made by those in the camp.

“The Red Cross understands that digital connectivity has changed the way people stay in touch with each other and has responded to the direct request for free internet services. Establishing these services also helps people access information and opportunities,” said ICRC Protection Coordinator, Marie-Astrid Blondiaux.

Access to internet is no longer a luxury but a humanitarian need. Adapting to the changing environment and needs of vulnerable communities is crucial in this digital age. Families need to have access to online tools, empowering them to connect and maintain contact with their loved ones beyond the traditional channels offered. It is as much a form of humanitarian assistance as other forms of aid.

To support the ZRCS, the ICRC also refurbished the internet café and recently upgraded the solar system and the connectivity at the camp. Through this energy efficient solution, communities are able access the services throughout the day.

"Today's humanitarian challenges are vast and intricate, hence the need for continuous and diverse engagements with the vulnerable communities, who remain at the heart of our work, as we navigate the ever-changing humanitarian landscape together. Our permanent presence within Tongogara Refugee Camp and proximity to the people, attests to our commitment as the Red Cross to be everywhere for everyone. Through the RFL program, we aim to prevent the separation of families, restore and maintain family links and clarify the fate of persons reported missing,” said ZRCS Secretary General Elias Hwenga.

In 2021, throughout the region and in cooperation with five national Red Cross societies (Angola, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) and other partners, 32'507 internet connections, 35'641 successful phone calls; and 6'617 phone charging services were offered in refugee camps, settlements, border points and other strategic locations with a high concentration of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers.

For more information and interview requests please contact:

*Stambuli Kim, Zimbabwe Red Cross Society, tel: +263 71 251 7264, kims@redcrosszim.org.zw
Khatija Nxedlana, ICRC Pretoria, whatsapp: +27 78 737 2209, knxedlana@icrc.org*