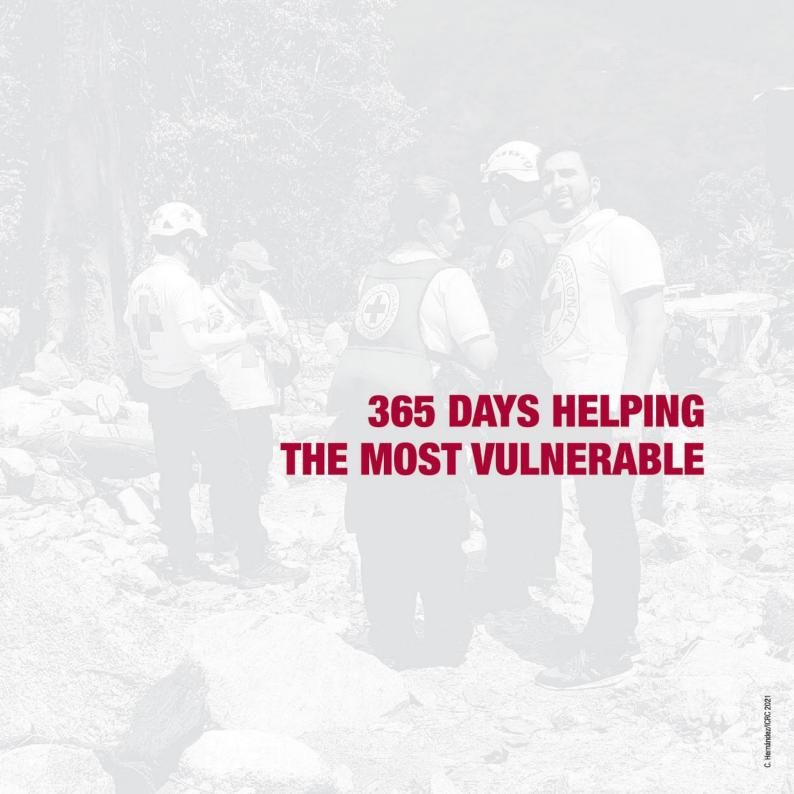


VENEZUELA FROM 2021 TO 2022

CHALLENGES OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN THE FACE OF ARMED VIOLENCE AND THE PANDEMIC





In 2021, we endeavoured to consolidate our humanitarian activities in Venezuela in the midst of a pandemic that continued its hold, with cases spiking as new variants emerged and the virus looking set to be with us for some time yet. In spite of COVID-19 and its dramatic consequences around the world, our priorities remained clear: to serve and help the most vulnerable communities affected by armed violence.

In the words of Colombian writer and Nobel literature prize winner Gabriel García Márquez: "Life is but a continual succession of opportunities for surviving." This blunt and realistic phrase resonates with the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which strives to give hope and opportunities to those most affected by armed violence in spite of the difficulties they face.

It is this comprehensive people-centred humanitarian response that we strived to deliver all year round, based on our open, ongoing dialogue with communities affected by armed violence and our confidential dialogue with the authorities and other groups, including weapon bearers. Our commitment remained firmly focused on activities carried out by a multidisciplinary team aimed at alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable, including people deprived of their liberty, the sick and injured and those affected by armed violence in their community.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continued to expand its operational footprint in Venezuela in 2021, as its components continued their work in spite of surges in COVID-19 cases. For example, the Venezuelan Red Cross (VRC) assisted with the vaccination roll-out in 13 of the country's states with the participation of its branches and volunteers. The ICRC provided support in the form of food, water and fuel to enable volunteers to be actively involved in the implementation of the Health Ministry's national vaccination plan. With technical and material support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and in coordination with the Health Ministry, a vaccination tent was set up in Miranda Park (Caracas), where VRC volunteers performed marshalling and reception duties and provided first aid, when necessary. In this way, the Movement continues its drive to boost efforts to enhance results and help those most in need.

Venezuela's most vulnerable communities will, in all likelihood, continue to suffer the effects of the violence, with seemingly no end in sight. The situation could conceivably get more complicated, but we are ready to rise to the challenge, by adapting and refocusing our activities and programmes to ensure we can continue to provide effective assistance to the people of Venezuela and fulfil our mission.

Arnaud de Baecque Head of Delegation

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# CHALLENGES FACED IN 2021 AND THE OUTLOOK FOR 2022:

SURVIVING IN A CLIMATE OF ARMED VIOLENCE

In 2021, the ICRC worked with vulnerable communities, other components of the Movement and the authorities to consolidate its operational footprint in Venezuela, maintaining its capacity to deliver assistance, including in emergencies, and continuing to put people affected by armed violence at the centre of its work.

The humanitarian assistance provided by the ICRC during the pandemic has been crucial in mitigating the consequences of a virus rendered far more lethal by the challenging social and economic conditions in the country, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities. The COVID-19 emergency will continue to command attention next year, and we will strive to deliver on our commitment to ramp up operations in Venezuela in order to reach more people.

The effects of the pandemic, coupled with the armed violence in areas near the border between Colombia and Venezuela, further heightened the growing humanitarian needs of the country's population in 2021. In La Victoria, one of the affected places on the border in the state of Apure, many families were used to the presence of armed groups constraining their social and economic activities, but they never imaged that their lives would suddenly be so drastically disrupted one day in March when violent clashes broke out between state security forces and armed groups.

Some months later, the residents of Cota 905 in Caracas would suffer the same fate. Plunged into uncertainty and gripped by fear, many grabbed a few belongings and fled their homes in search of a safer place away from the gunfire. The clashes between Cota 905 armed gangs and security forces in July 2021 not only disrupted the lives of people in this district, but also those of thousands of people living in the vicinity and in neighbouring areas to the west of Caracas.

The most vulnerable communities in Venezuela are very likely to continue suffering the direct and indirect consequences of the armed violence, which not only threatens people's physical safety, but also their access to basic services, such as education and health care. Throughout 2021, we therefore continued our efforts to mantain our dialogue with all the country's political forces, the authorities, members of affected communities and weapon bearers, highlighting facts and actions that reaffirm our Fundamental Principles and promoting a bilateral and confidential dialogue.

The effects of armed violence were further compounded by the emergency caused by heavy rainfall which affected thousands of people in the states of Mérida and Apure. In July, August and September, the ICRC joined in the response to this extreme weather event which resulted in landslides, mudslides, flooding, gully erosion, rivers breaking their banks, bridges and houses collapsing, people going missing and at least 20 deaths. The town of Santa Cruz de Mora in the state of Mérida was particularly hard hit. VRC teams were immediately deployed to the area to help mitigate the consequences of the emergency, with the support of the IFRC and the ICRC. Assistance was provided to over 500 people, including water and sanitation, Restoring Family Links services and first aid.

We hope that the resilience people have developed in recent years, now undoubtedly ingrained in the DNA of all Venezuelans, will mean greater stability for the country in 2022. However, many Venezuelans are still facing difficult situations, and we will endeavour to strengthen and boost our response capacity with a view to reaching an increasing number of people.

# **HEALTHCARE**

### FOR THOSE MOST AFFECTED BY ARMED VIOLENCE AND THE PANDEMIC

Higher demand for health care as a result of the surge in COVID-19 cases in the country has put a strain on the health system and directly affected the treatment of patients with other pathologies. To address this problem, the ICRC supported health-care facilities considered most in need of assistance, with the distribution of medical supplies, hygiene items and personal protective equipment. It also provided training for health workers on general preventive measures and COVID-19 protocols.

In 2021, the ICRC continued to work closely with the health authorities and health care workers to improve the quality of care and treatment for gunshot and trauma patients and for other hospital and primary care patients, providing medical supplies and equipment, training healthcare workers and improving infrastructure.

In 2022, the ICRC will continue strengthening the skills of healthcare workers and assessing the needs of patients affected by armed violence and the pandemic to improve the delivery of care and develop training tailored to specific needs in coordination with local health teams. The regional delegation will also implement mental health and psychosocial support programmes, with a view to reducing the suffering of people with psychological conditions and psychosocial problems associated with the armed violence. It will continue supporting the VRC and other pre-hospital care providers in the delivery of emergency care services.



18

### HEALTHCARE

facilities received support to improve infrastructure and basic services in priority areas.





### **TONNES**

of medical supplies were distributed to 11 hospitals and 11 outpatient facilities in Caracas, Bolívar, Táchira, Aragua, Apure, Delta Amacuro and Zulia.



415,086

### PEOPLE RECEIVED

primary health care, emergency medical treatment and pre-hospital care.



943

### HEALTHCARE

professionals received training in advanced trauma care, basic emergency care and first aid.



Some people ask me why I'm here, and sometimes I find it hard to answer that question. I feel in my heart that I am here at this health centre because it is my calling, and I can't imagine myself anywhere else, even though the opportunities are there. There are people who really need me, and that's what keeps me here; their gratitude is the best reward for me.

Claudia Ortega is a nurse at the Boca de Grita health centre, the only healthcare facility available to the residents of this small town in the state of Táchira in south-western Venezuela, just a stone's throw from the border with Colombia.

# ENSURING THE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

In Venezuela's most vulnerable communities, the essential services on which people rely are often unavailable. The failure to properly maintain water and sanitation infrastructure, coupled with the effects of armed violence, can result in serious cumulative damage to systems. The ensuing decline in capacity, performance and efficiency affects people's dignity, health and well-being.

In 2021, the ICRC carried out activities aimed at improving maintenance crews at hospitals, morgues, prisons and community amenities to enable them to restore and maintain the water, power and ventilation systems and sanitation services essential for dignified living conditions.

In 2022, the ICRC will continue to work closely with communities in priority areas and with the relevant authorities to provide support to maintain water networks and prevent damage to them and to improve public, hospital and forensic infrastructure in order to restore services.



# 47

### **HEALTHCARE**

forensic, prison and community facilities received support to improve their infrastructure and essential services in Miranda, Caracas, Aragua, Lara, Táchira, Zulia, Apure, Bolívar and Monagas.

# **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES**

TO BUILD SECURE LIVELIHOOD

Armed violence has adverse effects on everyday life and on people and their development in the long term because it undermines food and livelihood security, without which it is difficult to live a dignified life. The fear and anxiety caused by the threat of violence can affect people's ability to work so that they are unable to earn a living, plunging households into hardship. The ICRC focused efforts on responding most urgent humanitarian needs in communities in Caracas, Miranda, Bolívar, Apure, Zulia and Táchira. It also endeavoured to gain a better understanding of the impact of armed violence on people's lives and to help those affected through resilience-building activities to enable them to cope.

In 2022, the ICRC will strengthen its response to address the specific needs of people affected by armed violence. It will increase assistance for the most vulnerable groups, building their resilience, helping them to cope during emergencies and supporting them in recovering their livelihood, where necessary.



3,225

### PEOI

received 48,618 meals at 10 community kitchens.

88

### PEOF

in Venezuela and 44 people in Aruba received cash support to cover their basic needs.

32

### FAMILIES

in La Mulata in the state of Táchira received farming tools and chickens and fish to raise and breed.

What I've learnt on this course will stand me in good stead for the future. I'll be able to set up on my own or work at a bakery. I'd like to have my own business and be able to buy a house for myself and another for my sister who brought me up

Young people living in the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Venezuela know that they must overcome a host of obstacles to secure a steady future. The violence and the difficult socioeconomic situation in their communities makes it hard for them to avoid the bad influences in their environment and find a way to earn a living for themselves and their families. Ler Espinoza, a trainee on a baking course for young people in the El Cementerio district of Caracas, is one of these people, but he now has a chance of a better life because he has learnt a trade.

























# IN 2021, OUR ACTIVITIES REACHED

# 400,000 PEOPLE

This was possible thanks to joint efforts undertaken with the VCR and other Movement components

# 47 HEALTHCARE,

forensic, prison and community facilities received support to improve their infrastructure and essential services in Miranda, Caracas, Aragua, Lara, Táchira, Zulia, Apure, Bolívar and Monagas.

# **CONNECTIVITY SERVICES**

### FOR SEPARATED FAMILIES

Armed violence, natural disasters, migration and other exceptional developments, such as the deterioration of connectivity services in Venezuela and the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the world since 2020, can lead to people losing contact with their families. Being separated from their loved ones and having no news of them can cause great anxiety and distress. People in this harrowing situation need help to contact and keep in touch with their families and eventually be reunited with them. To deal with such cases, the ICRC works with the VRC to provide connectivity and tracing services so that people can contact their loved ones, receive information on their whereabouts and make sure they do not lose touch with them again. The ICRC will continue this work in 2022 in close collaboration with the VRC, the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society and the Aruba and Curação Red Cross branches and with the invaluable assistance of their volunteers.



### CONNECTIVITY

-related services (phone calls, Wi-Fi connections and battery charging) were provided, and 49,347 people on the move received advice at 25 points in different parts of Venezuela.



### PEOPLE

were assisted via the national hotline, and 133 via email familiares.vzla@icrc.org, and 109 people received Red Cross messages with news of their loved ones.



### **VENEZUELAN CHILDREN**

were reunited with their families in November and December 2021 under an agreement on family reunification signed by the ICRC, Venezuela's Foreign Ministry and ASONACOP, the association for the protection of children.

I prayed to God every night for news of my son; something in my heart told me he was still alive. My prayers were answered when you came with news of him. It fills my heart with joy.

Ramona Parra was able to get back in touch with her son, thanks to the help she received from the Restoring Family Links programme. It was Sofia from the ICRC who brought her the good news.



# **RESPECT AND DIGNITY**

FOR PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

The ICRC is known for the work it carries out to help people deprived of their liberty. It takes action, wherever it can, to improve the treatment they receive and the conditions they are held in. The aim of the ICRC is to ensure that all detainees are treated with respect and humanity, regardless of the reason for their detention. It also seeks to alleviate the suffering of their families, particularly by helping them to get back in contact with detained families members. The ICRC maintains a bilateral and confidential dialogue with the authorities of civilian and military prisons, with a view to encouraging them to adopt the measures necessary to ensure that detainees are treated humanely, in accordance with national standards and international law. It made visits to prisons and provided items for the personal hygiene and physical well-being of the detainees.

In 2022, the ICRC will continue visiting people deprived of their liberty and focus efforts on providing technical support to ensure that their judicial rights are upheld and improving their nutritional and health status and their living conditions.







**12,000** 

### PEOPLE

received micronutrient supplements as part of their daily diet, and 4,000 people were given a milk supplement (soya milk).



8,946

### PEOPLE

deprived of their liberty were visited in 10 prisons in Lara, Monagas, Bolívar, Táchira and Miranda.

# **FORENSIC SCIENCE**

FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD

Every human being, regardless of their status, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect after death. Different people are directly involved in the management of the dead, including first responders and forensic pathologists, odontologists and anthropologists, whose work helps families who have lost a loved one. They contribute to preventing disappearances by ensuring the proper management and identification of bodies. With its team of forensic specialists, the ICRC carries out activities aimed at ensuring the protection and dignified management of the dead. They include fitting out facilities to enable professionals to carry out their work effectively in a safe and hygienic setting that protects them from risks to their health. The ICRC has also facilitated the sharing of information for the identification of Venezuelans who died abroad so that families can know for certain what happened to their love one, which gives them closure and allows them to begin the mourning process.

Next year, the ICRC will continue its forensic strategy, with a focus on working jointly with specialized institutions to improve their capacities and on providing closer support to the families of the dead and missing.



# <u>8,890</u>

### **BODY BAGS**

ήX

and 196,000 items of personal protective equipment, medical supplies and hygiene products were distributed to 19 forensic institutions.

# 30

### THE FAMILIES OF



missing people provided the ante mortem information necessary for forensic identification and DNA samples to facilitate the search for their missing loved ones.

# 8



### NATIONAL

Forensic Medicine and Science Service (SENAMECF) facilities received support to make improvements to infrastructure to increase their operational capacity.

# 325



### FORENSIC

specialists and first responders received training on traceability, the dignified management of dead bodies, identification of the dead and services for families.

# PROMOTE RESPECT

### FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS

The ICRC maintains a dialogue with all weapon bearers, including both state forces and non-state armed groups, to ensure that they are familiar with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international rules on the use of force and to encourage them to implement them in their operations depending on specific situations of violence. The ICRC also works with academic communities to promote an environment conducive to respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian action.

As part of this strategy and in coordination with the relevant authorities, Venezuela's armed forces, national police and other national, state and municipal law enforcement and investigative bodies took part in activities aimed at raising awareness about international standards on the progressive use of force.



**4** 2,800

### OFFICERS

from the police and the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigation Unit (CICPC) attended seminars on national and international rules on the use of force in law enforcement operations.

**i** 12

### **WORKING SESSIONS**

were held with people in charge of training at the Experimental Security University (UNES), the Human Rights Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior, Justice and Peace, the National School of Public Defence and the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Directorate of the armed forces to plan training for judicial, police and military officers.

# **WORKING TOGETHER AS A MOVEMENT**

COOPERATION WITH THE VENEZUELAN RED CROSS AND COORDINATION WITH THE IFRC

The ICRC supports the activities carried out by the VRC for the delivery of a rapid and effective humanitarian response to help people most affected by violence and different types of emergencies. We also support the VRC and its volunteers in implementing activities relating to first aid, pre-hospital care, water and sanitation and Restoring Family Links, leveraging the complementarity of our actions and optimizing the use of available capacities and resources to help the most vulnerable communities.

Throughout the year, the ICRC and the VRC continued their efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which included the distribution of 11,000 kits with face masks and antibacterial handwash to the most vulnerable people in lower-income districts in Caracas and Miranda, such as Cota 905 and Petare, and in the busiest metro stations in Caracas. VRC volunteers also took part in the national vaccination plan being rolled out by Venezuela's health authorities, with logistics support from Movement components.



I feel very proud to form part of the world's largest humanitarian network and to be able to reach places where we can lend a helping and guiding hand and bring some relief to the many families who have lost hope.

Jhonatan Mendez, director, Emergency Response Unit, Caroní Subcommitte (Bolívar), VCR



### **VOLUNTEERS**

from 30 VRC branches and subcommittees received training in Safer Access, managing operational risks and safe driving.





### VACCINATION

centres assisted by the VRC received financial support (fuel, food and water for volunteers) for their participation in the Health Ministry's national vaccination plan.



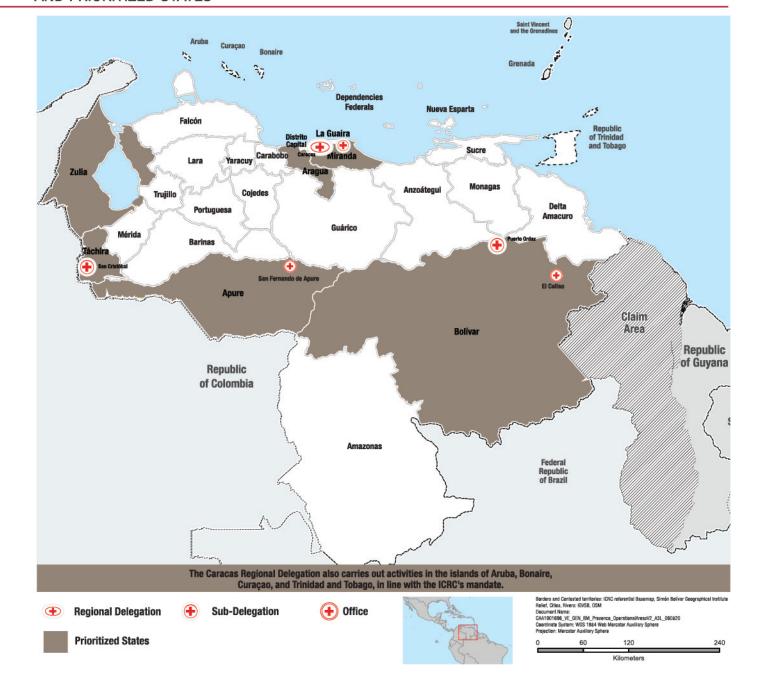
# COOPERATION WITH THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO RED CROSS SOCIETY AND THE NETHERLANDS RED CROSS OVERSEAS BRANCHES IN ARUBA, BONAIRE AND CURAÇÃO

On the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, the ICRC carries out work relating to its mandate and operations to meet immediate needs. This mainly involves activities relating to immigration detention and Restoring Family Links. In 2021, the organization worked with the National Societies and their branches on the islands to strengthen their capacities by providing training in Restoring Family Links and assistance for migrants.

· Two workshops were held on immigration detention for the Red Cross branch in Aruba.

# **ICRC PRESENCE IN VENEZUELA**

AND PRIORITIZED STATES





The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners.

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