

ETHIOPIA

BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

The situation in northern Ethiopia was again highly volatile over the course of 2022. As is the case in times of conflict, the civilian population has suffered the most from the direct consequences of the hostilities. I must emphasize here that the ICRC remained present and operational in the Tigray region throughout the conflict; our colleagues in Mekelle and Shire continued to dedicate themselves to the affected communities in a difficult period of isolation and stress. Fortunately, after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreements, the situation eased and we were able to organise the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance, particularly medical supplies, by air and land, as we did during the humanitarian truce.

However, the needs remain enormous, also in the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara. The suffering of all these communities affected by the conflict is sadly combined with climate shocks and the general increase in food prices. The overall humanitarian situation remains also of great concern in the Wollegas and Guji in the Oromia region. For several years, the ICRC has continued its activities in this region, at the heart of a conflict that has been largely forgotten and neglected. Through our sub-delegation in Nekemte, we have been able to strengthen our proximity to the affected communities.

We are committed to continuing our support to all these populations during 2023, notably by restoring water supply networks, assisting displaced people, supporting health structures, organising animal vaccination campaigns, distributing seeds, among other. We will also continue our dialogue with the civilian, military and security authorities on issues related to the protection of people (civilians, detainees, missing persons, victims of sexual violence, reestablishment of family links), as well as the respect of international humanitarian law.

In this newsletter you will find some short stories that illustrate some of our activities in the country. You will learn how health workers in Tigray made it through two years of conflict, meet Tabote, a young woman with a disability who has rebuilt her life, discover how we contribute to improve the conditions in a place of detention, understand our livestock insurance programme and learn how two children were reunited with their families.

Enjoy your reading !

Nicolas Von Arx
Head of Delegation



Jude FUHNWI/ICRC

Saving lives from the ruins of conflict

Peace efforts brought hope and relief in northern Ethiopia, but a health crisis persists. The priority for the health authorities is to save lives urgently and prevent the collapse of the health system. As it is doing in other parts of Ethiopia, such as in Afar, Oromia and Amhara, the ICRC is stepping up its support for the medical facilities in Tigray.

Living through a war can be hard on the well-being of healthcare workers. For months, nurse Gebremedhin Berhe at the Sheraro primary health center has bottled up feelings of frustration and sadness seeing people die every day.

“Starting from laboratory equipment to medicines, nothing was left. And this happened because of the conflict,” says Gebremedhin. “Children under five years are malnourished. We couldn’t save some of these children just with medicine. They needed food. And we hadn’t received food for long. We gave the children medicine and they came back the second day in a worse condition. We knew what was happening to them, but we couldn’t do anything about it.”

The long months of war have caused immense harm. Medical infrastructures are damaged or destroyed. Water, electricity and medicines are in short supply. Hunger, even among healthcare staff themselves, is still present especially in remote areas. The scale of the destruction has made re-opening these health facilities virtually impossible.

“We can’t find anything in these burned-out buildings,” says Selamit Gebremeskel Tesfay, a clinical nurse at the primary health center in Adi Daero.

The needs in Tigray are immense. The health system has been torn apart by fighting. Urgent cases cannot be evacuated as there is still no ambulance service. Often working without pay, healthcare staff face unbearable choices as hundreds of thousands of people risk dying. “We have gone without pay for 18 months,” says Gebremedhin.

As hospital staff are no longer paid and the wider banking system is not yet fully functioning, the ICRC is distributing food to medical personnel as an incentive to go to work. “This plays a key role in preventing the health system from collapsing,” says Pierluigi Testa, ICRC’s Health Delegate in Shire.

The ICRC is delivering medicines and medical equipment as well as bedding and other items to health facilities. We also assess and support 27 health centers in Tigray with emergency medical supplies for first aid and surgery, food, water and hygiene and sanitation items. Our response also includes support to health staff (and their families) in functioning health services. Fortunately, the signing of the Pretoria and Nairobi agreements have largely eased humanitarian access and are leading to a restoration of services thereby contributing to restoring a sense of normalcy in Tigray.



Dawit Tesfa/ICRC

Reviving a fading dream

“My name is Tabote, I live in the town of Gute in the Wollega East area. I have been disabled since I was 3 years old”. Tabote is a resident of this small town in East Wollega, which has been affected by conflict since 2019.

Tabote explains that she became paralysed due to several unfortunate circumstances. After being sick for a long time, her parents had taken her to the hospital for treatment, which unfortunately led to an incident that in turn led to her paralysis.

By the time she was ready to go to school, her parents took the necessary steps and enrolled her. Life became difficult for Tabote. She wanted to stand, play, run and walk like the girls and boys in her school, but she couldn't. She goes to school, even if it's only for a few hours. She went to school, although it was a difficult task, because her home is a bit far away and her parents had to carry her. Her family were farmers, and it was a 30-minute walk to school from the farm. Her parents took turns carrying her to school until she reached the third grade.

After that, life became a little easier because Tabote received a wheelchair from the local church. She believes that the hardships she has faced have made her a stronger person. After a difficult life as a disabled person, Tabote heard about the Nekempte Physical Rehabilitation Centre and went there for help.

The medical assistance she received from the centre helped her to walk again, especially with

the help of crutches. “I was crying because I was happy. I never thought I would be able to stand again in my life, let alone walk. That day I found hope again,” Tabote remembers with emotion.

Tabote is now preparing to take the national exam for Grade 12 students. She has faced many uncertainties in the past, including how she would be able to go to university.

“I was worried, I didn't know what to do, but then I heard the good news that I was selected for a business training organised by the ICRC through the Nekempte PRC. After the training, I opened a shop with the financial support of the ICRC. I am happy, I am not much bothering about my future anymore. Not only am I self-sufficient, I am also helping my family”.

Tabote describes the situation she finds herself in as a dream, recalling the problems she encountered, thanking God that her life has changed. “I am very grateful to the ICRC for the support, I will never forget the help,” she says. I want to continue my education without any stress in the future, I have ambition, and I want to continue my business career too, my life has changed dramatically since I got this help and started working”.



Jude FURNIVAL/ICRC

Improving conditions to preserve the dignity of detainees

Some detainees in Ethiopia have lived through daunting times that could jeopardize the progress made in advancing their well-being and dignity. But the ICRC is helping to secure humane conditions for all detainees in the country, especially in areas affected by conflict.

Kebede, a detainee, was displaced by conflict. He says returning to Dessie prison to a new and harsh reality disturbs him. Prison authorities had transferred detainees – including Kebede – to other correctional facilities in Amhara region just before Dessie town became a battlefield for the war in northern Ethiopia.

“We came back to this prison after the war and everything was empty,” he says.

Detainees had to live in improvised conditions – often without access to health services, enough food, water and proper shelter. The prison faced an acute crisis since then,” explains Commissioner Mulu Tadesse, the Prison Administrator.

Detainees struggle to start their lives all over again. They lost private property. Those serving long sentences are the most affected. Income from their livelihood activities was no longer available, leaving only a narrow path to cover basic individual needs such as food and clothing.

It also threatened family visits. Kebede’s family was displaced during the war. “Nobody has visited me since. I don’t know where they are,” he says, heartbroken.

The ICRC is helping to improve conditions of detention and to restore communication between detainees and their relatives. “ICRC has been with us step by step. They offered hygiene and sanitary items, generator, mats, pots, mattresses, medicines and medical equipment. The clinic was restored to its previous reality. Now, we have very few detainees going to the hospital,” elucidates Ms Tadesse. ICRC also provided fuel efficient stoves for the kitchen, recreational items, material needed to maintain personal and environmental hygiene and a training on hygiene promotion for detainees.

The aim being to ensure detainees’ well-being is respected and that the conditions of detention are in line with laws and internationally recognized standards. This remains ICRC’s main objective of its detention work in line with its mandate and operational capacities throughout Ethiopia and in more than 80 countries worldwide.

“We no longer sleep on chip wood. We received mattresses from the ICRC. They fixed the water and now it flows. The generator gives us electricity,” concludes Kebede.

*Name of detainee changed for protection and privacy reasons



ICRC insurance program prepares pastoralists for drought

Communities east of the Oromia region and in Somali region face desperate choices to survive as conflicts and ethnic violence, various armed groups incursions, drought and economic hardship leave them extremely vulnerable. Our livestock insurance program helps them to recover from the devastating impact of the drought and be better prepared to cope with it in future.

Halima Harun, a mother of eight, fled the Somali region with her family during an ethnic clash and settled in Roggee, Oromia region. This village was safe and had enough pasture to feed the livestock on which her family's livelihood depended. But climate change dried up everything.

"We had four cows. All died during the drought. Six of our 10 goats also died," says Halima. The livestock were a source of income and food through sales, meat and milk. The current drought means a loss of livelihood and poverty for Halima's household.

"I lost everything. Now, I gather and sell firewood and rely on food aid to feed my family," she says. In her community, rivers and springs have dried up. And the green fields that represented life for livestock are now a desert.

"The Index-based Livestock Insurance (IBLI), a long-term resiliency initiative by the ICRC, protects pastoralists against drought-related livestock losses in semi-arid pastoral lowlands in the Oromia and Somali regions. The goal is

to keep their animals alive during the drought season," explains Charu Chandra, ICRC's Deputy Economic Security Coordinator for resilience programs in Ethiopia.

In Meyumuluke, 771 pastoralists received 2.87 million Birr through the program for resilience against drought. The insurance policy measures available pasture or forage recorded per area via regular satellite images, and tracks any anomalies based on historic data on availability of pasture in the area. Persons registered on the insurance policy then receive payouts when forecasts show severe seasonal forage scarcity – and the money is used to buy feed, water, veterinary medicines and other inputs or services needed to sustain their insured animals over a season in a year of severe drought.

"I insured six of my remaining cows because my livestock died due to lack of pasture and water," says Bedel Abdullahi, a 65-year-old cattle herder. The ICRC pilots this program with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and Oromia Insurance Company (OIC).



Children reunite with families after perilous journey

When families live apart during a humanitarian crisis, there is fear and uncertainty of not knowing where their loved ones are or how they are doing. This can have long-term psychological, health and social consequences. Children, especially those who find themselves alone, face unimaginable suffering and remain without the care they need.

When the war in northern Ethiopia started, families scattered into the safety of nowhere. Little Mikyas and Kibrom joined them in the run. They left their village in Kola-Temben on foot, leaving behind their home. And walked over 100km, before getting help to Tigray's main city, Mekelle. There they were homeless. The two minors endured hunger and risked violence and abuse.

"They were living on the street. They had no one and nowhere to go," explains Halid Mustafa, head of the ICRC protection team in Mekelle. After several days of rather dramatic experiences, they came under the responsibility of the El-Shadai Relief and Development association in Mekelle. The association provided food, shelter and education to the children for two years. When parties to the conflict reached an agreement and ended hostilities, the ICRC acted quickly to trace the families and reunite them with their children.

"Movements were limited during the war and our teams could not facilitate the reunification earlier. We travelled more than five hours

to locate the families of both children in a remote deserted area of Kola-Temben woreda. About half of that journey was on foot," says Halid. Despite the hardships of the journey, their tireless effort was never for nothing. The families welcomed the news of the whereabouts of their children with colorful smiles. All their worries disappeared. And on 28 December 2022, their children returned home.

"I never imagined I would see my child again," says Mikya's mother. ICRC teams search for as long as it takes to locate and reunite families. It helps them to overcome their worst fears. "I feel relieved to see my child back home," says Kibrom's mother.

The ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) reconnect separated families in Ethiopia, including with those living abroad. And when family reunification is possible, desired and safe, our teams facilitate it to nurture their well-being.

Our Humanitarian Response



Emergency Needs

- **404,586** persons provided with essential households
- **156,500** persons benefited with food assistance



Rebuilding Lives and Livelihoods

- **178,293** persons provided with multi-purpose cash assistance to help rebuild their livelihoods
- **1.6** million domestic animals vaccinated
- **15,108** persons received index-based livestock insurance
- **420,870** persons provided with seeds or cash for agro activities
- **119,448** pastoral households received livestock feed



Supporting Health Services

- **94** medical facilities supported with supplies
- **59,870** war wounded supported
- **408,186** consultations held at the primary health level
- **11,463** persons provided with physiotherapy and mobility services



Improving Access to Water

- **10,000** persons serviced by water-trucking and storage tanks
- **353.39** tons of chemicals donated to water plants
- **4,094,671** individuals in urban and rural areas as well as places of detention benefited from improved/rehabilitated water facilities
- **921** handpumps installed and regularly maintained
- **8** health care facility or IDP camps supported with generators and batteries
- **17,825** persons provided with access to sanitation facilities, including in detention



Ensuring Respect and Dignity of Detainees

- **55** places of detention visited
- **36,410** detainees provided with assistance



Reconnecting and Reuniting Families

- **805** persons sought by their family members were located
- **259,856** phone calls and oral messages facilitated between family members separated by conflict and violence



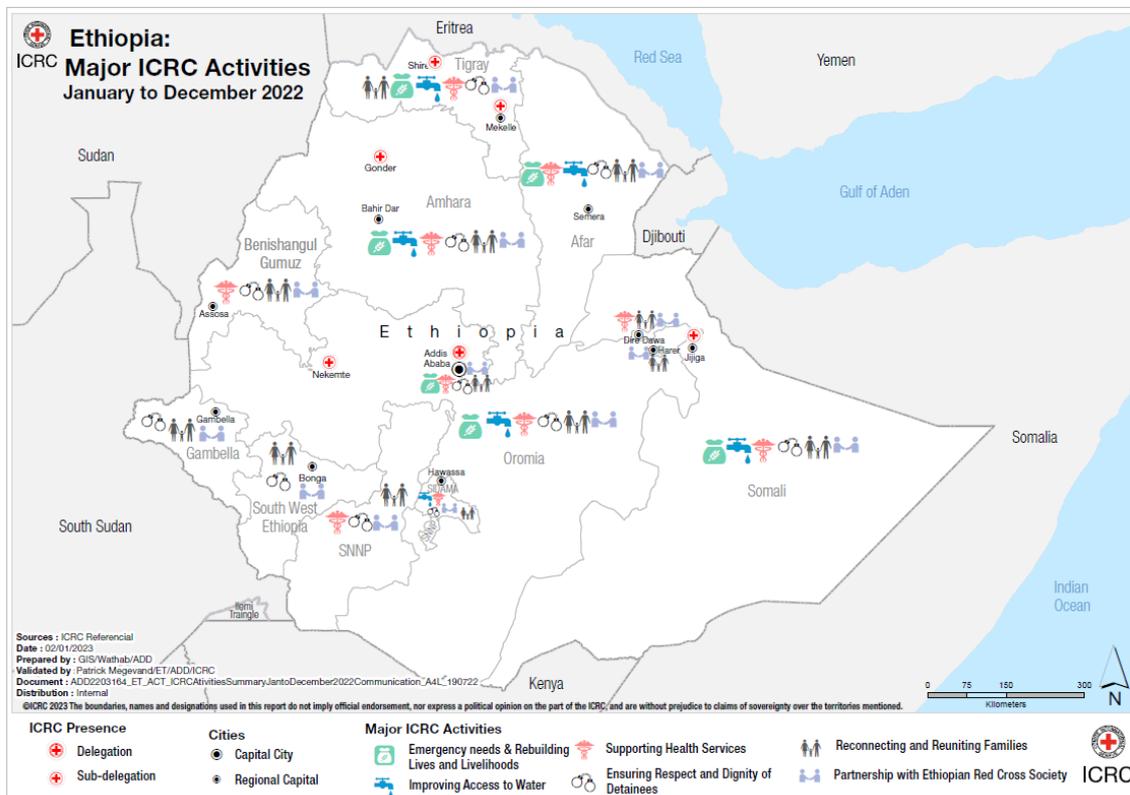
Partnership with Ethiopian Red Cross Society

- **39** ERCS branches supported with ambulance services that have serviced **135,160** individuals
- **45** ERCS branches provided with different supports, including refilling of First-Aid kits



Improving Knowledge and Respect for Humanitarian Law

- **1,700** people from local and regional authorities, community and religious leaders, journalists sensitised to IHL and the mandate and activities of the ICRC/ERCS.
- Trained and engaged **1,549** officers, senior ranks of armed, police and security forces, on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Right Law



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add_addisabeba_Mailbox@icrc.org

Addis Ababa delegation
 International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC)
 Bole Sub-City, K. 12/13 H.No 498
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 T +251 (0)11 647 83 00
www.icrc.org
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