

ANNUAL REVIEW 2022

ICRC Activities in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries



In May 2022, the ICRC facilitated the repatriation of 117 detainees from Saudi Arabia to Yemen.

Background

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has an exclusively humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of people affected by armed conflict and other violence, often working closely with other members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The organization also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

The ICRC in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries works to promote and ensure respect for the rules of war and facilitates the ICRC's operations worldwide through dialogue with government, civil society, and military and diplomatic officials. It works in places of detention, helps determine what happened to missing people, reunites families separated by armed conflict and migration, and works closely with the National Red Crescent Societies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and with other partner organizations. The ICRC's presence in the GCC countries was established in Kuwait during the 1990 –1991 Gulf War with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In July 2022 and March 2023, the ICRC signed a country host agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the UAE and Qatar respectively. The ICRC also maintains a presence in Oman since 2015 and Saudi Arabia since 2017, with activities across all six GCC countries. This document provides an overview of the ICRC's activities in the region during 2022 and its key achievements.

Humanitarian Diplomacy and Public Outreach

The ICRC uses humanitarian diplomacy to facilitate its operations and raises awareness of the needs of people affected by conflict and other violence. The ICRC informs and influences policy debate on important humanitarian issues, including international humanitarian law (IHL), using diplomatic channels and public communication and by taking part in forums and events on policy issues. The ICRC's position on humanitarian issues is based on its operational experience and, in 2022, the ICRC participated in forums and high-level meetings and events to address the most pressing humanitarian issues.



More than **60** events, workshops or training sessions involved the ICRC (either participation or hosting) and its partners with the aim of strengthening humanitarian action in the GCC countries.



10 invitations received to contribute as a guest speaker or provide expertise on humanitarian issues.

RAISING AWARENESS OF HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

There are more than a hundred ongoing armed conflicts in the world today. The suffering they cause, combined with climate shocks and rising food and energy prices, will make 2023 a year in which people's humanitarian needs grow and become more acute. Against this backdrop, the ICRC must leverage the power of the media and ensure humanitarian issues are brought to the world's attention.

Throughout 2022, the ICRC worked closely with media outlets in the GCC countries,



A media round table with the ICRC's head of regional delegation, in June 2022.

broadening awareness of some of the most pressing humanitarian crises, such as those in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and Ethiopia. The ICRC worked with leading Gulf newspapers, giving more than 45 interviews to prominent local and pan-Arab media outlets. As the war in Ukraine continued to dominate headlines around the world, it was also important to raise awareness of humanitarian issues in the Middle East and North Africa.



The symposium for journalists, held in cooperation with Al Jazeera, on how IHL protects journalists and humanitarian access.



Al Jazeera interview on Gaza and forgotten conflicts with Fabrizio Carboni, the ICRC's regional director for the Near and Middle East.

In Qatar, for example, the ICRC worked with media network Al Jazeera to discuss humanitarian access and how journalists are protected under IHL. The ICRC took part in panel discussions and 32 media interviews, sharing its legal expertise and drawing attention to the suffering of vulnerable people, ensuring its concerns about their plight were heard. By working with other media outlets in the GCC countries, the ICRC demonstrated the potential and powerful impact of partnerships and collective action.

The law of war and reporting in conflict



The IHL event for media and journalists in Oman.



The IHL event for media and journalists in Kuwait. The ICRC's spokesperson in Syria and Afghanistan speaks about operations and humanitarian communication.

The ICRC held media trainings for journalists in Kuwait and Oman. The training covered the technical aspects of IHL and how it protects journalists in conflict situations, the ICRC's mandate as the guardian of IHL, and the connection between humanitarianism and journalism. The initiative strengthened relations between Gulf journalists and the ICRC, and it promoted the sharing of information. As a result of this training, media professionals better understand the laws that protect them and their ability to provide accurate information during conflict and violence.

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR IHL AND DIALOGUE WITH ARMED FORCES

As part of its mission to protect and assist the victims of war and other violence, the ICRC seeks to ensure respect for their rights, which includes reminding authorities and others of their legal obligations under IHL and international human rights law.

Over the past year, the ICRC continued its dialogue with the Joint Forces Command of the Saudi-led international military coalition. This dialogue focused on respect for IHL during

the conduct of hostilities in Yemen and it also helped advance efforts to integrate IHL provisions into military training and operations.

Engaging with the NATO-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Centre in Kuwait

For the first time, the ICRC and the NATO-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (NATO-ICI) Regional Centre in Kuwait held a joint seminar on “The Applicability of International Humanitarian Law in Cyber Operations”. The event was attended by 42 senior military officers, ambassadors and diplomats from the Gulf and NATO countries. The seminar increased awareness of the use of cyber operations during armed conflict as a means of warfare, highlighted how cyber operations can have the same impact as traditional weapons, and covered the challenges pertinent to IHL applicability during cyber operations.



Participants at the Civil-Military Cooperation Course organized by the NATO-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Centre in Kuwait.

The ICRC also took part in the Civil-Military Cooperation Course organized by the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait. The course was led by a team from the NATO Allied Joint Force Command in Naples, Italy, and involved more than 25 participants from different sectors in the GCC countries, including participants from the defence, interior and foreign affairs ministries, the Kuwait National Guard and Kuwait Civil Aviation, and from the GCC Secretariat General. Participants from different sectors provided varied perspectives and the discussions were wide-ranging.

Regional IHL moot court competition

In cooperation with Sultan Qaboos University and the Omani National Committee for IHL, the ICRC organized the third regional Arabic moot court competition on IHL in Muscat, Oman. The ICRC introduced the competition as a way of further developing the relationship between the ICRC and academic circles in Arabic-speaking countries. The competition aims to develop the interest of law students and professors in IHL, international human rights law and international criminal law. It also gives law students the chance to interact with theorists, academics and practitioners, and to learn about the practical application and enforcement of these areas of the law. Students and academics from ten Arab countries took part in the competition.



The Third Regional Arabic Moot Court Competition on IHL was held in Muscat, Oman.

HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY: ORGANIZING REGIONAL IHL TRAINING FOR ARAB DIPLOMATS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

In 2022, the UAE's National Committee on IHL (NCIHL), in collaboration with the ICRC, organized the ninth edition of the Regional IHL Course for Arab Diplomats at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) in Abu Dhabi. Over 35



Regional IHL Training for Arab diplomats at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Arab diplomats from 14 Arab countries participated in the biennial event. The course aims to promote IHL and its understanding among Arab decision-makers, namely diplomats, who, at the same time, play a significant role in its respect and implementation. It provided an overview of the International Red Cross, Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC's mandate, IHL status in Arab countries, and several other aspects of IHL implementation. The Course was facilitated by a group of experts from the ICRC and other entities, including the UAE NCIHL, the Emirates Red Crescent, and Honorable Judge Theodor Meron, former President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). This course is the result of a memorandum of understanding signed in 2005 between the ICRC & the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs that established a specialized regional center at the Diplomatic Academy to train Arab diplomats in the field of IHL.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT: WORKING WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Globally, the ICRC works with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to ensure a concerted, efficient and rapid response to conflict and violence.



40 participants from National Societies took part in IHL-related activities.



170 new National Society volunteers in the GCC countries received training.



32 National Society participants jointly implemented RFL activities with the ICRC.



30 National Society participants completed a training course on regional humanitarian negotiation.

Throughout 2022, the ICRC and National Societies in the GCC countries expanded their cooperation through exchanges on humanitarian diplomacy and a series of technical training sessions on humanitarian-related programmes. These initiatives were undertaken to support conflict-affected people in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon, and Afghan refugees in Qatar. The ICRC and the National Societies in the GCC countries remain focused on complementary action, from a local to international level, in order to achieve effective humanitarian action. This was exemplified through a regional meeting on the Restoring Family Links (RFL) programme, which took place in Dubai after a two-year hiatus because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the meeting, National Societies evaluated coordination mechanisms and discussed how to strengthen RFL services in the region. Similarly, the ICRC and the Qatar Red Crescent signed an unprecedented partnership framework agreement, reflecting a commitment to continue an intentional and results-driven approach for humanitarian operations and diplomacy.

TRACING MISSING PEOPLE AND RESTORING CONTACT BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS

Every year, countless families are torn apart by armed conflict and violence, natural disasters and migration. When people remain unaccounted for, they are considered missing, and this uncertainty has a devastating effect on their families. People suffer terribly when they lose contact with their loved ones, not knowing where they are or if they are safe. Families must learn to cope with this uncertainty, but they often have pressing humanitarian needs too.

For more than 150 years, the ICRC has carried out a wide range of activities to help reconnect separated relatives and address the issue of missing people. In 2022, the ICRC worked

closely with the National Societies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to help reconnect separated family members through phone calls, written messages and oral greetings (salamats), and it opened tracing requests for missing people.



664 messages exchanged.



98 phone and video calls facilitated between detainees in the US Guantanamo Bay detention facility and their family members in the GCC countries.



21 travel documents issued.

The Kuwait and Qatar Red Crescent Societies successfully incorporated RFL services in their national emergency response plans. In Saudi Arabia, the ICRC and the Saudi Red Crescent Authority continued to facilitate video calls between persons deprived of their liberty at the US detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and their families in Saudi Arabia. Find out more about the [ICRC's RFL services](#).

MISSING PEOPLE

Following the end of the 1990–1991 Gulf War, the ICRC, Iraq, Kuwait and coalition members – Saudi Arabia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States – established the Tripartite Commission to search for missing people. The ICRC chairs both the commission and its technical subcommittee, with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) attending as an observer. This mechanism aims to ascertain the fate of people missing in connection with the war and provide answers to their families. In 2022, the ICRC and the Tripartite Commission achieved the following:



People suffer terribly when they lose contact with their loved ones, not knowing where they are or if they are safe.



1,549 active tracing cases.



11 tracing cases solved.



5 technical subcommittee meetings.



2 Tripartite Commission meetings.

In December 2022, the ICRC organized the first regional round table for forensic practitioners and academics from the GCC countries in coordination with Kuwait's General Department of Criminal Evidence, the Ministry of Interior and the Kuwait Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The round table addressed the region's need for Arabic-language academic curricula on identifying human remains. It also served to gauge the interest of academic organizations in potentially partnering with the ICRC and the General Department of Criminal Evidence to develop a first holistic course for all Arabic-speaking forensic practitioners.



VISITING PLACES OF DETENTION

Through its confidential dialogue with detaining authorities, the ICRC aims to secure humane treatment and living conditions for all detainees, regardless of the reason for their arrest and detention. It also seeks to alleviate the distress caused by detention by re-establishing contact between detainees and their loved ones.



9 detention visits to 4 places of detention in 3 GCC countries holding 7,426 detainees in total.

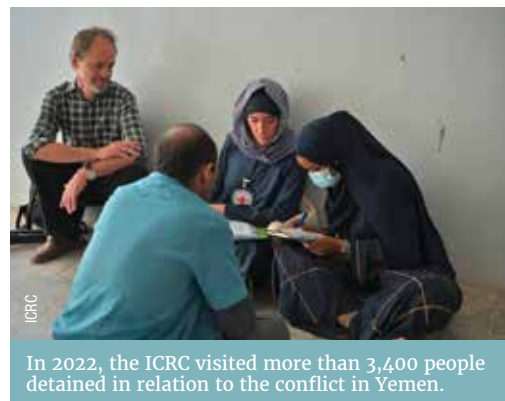


468 detainees visited individually.



134 detainees released in 2022.

ICRC teams visited places of detention in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in accordance with its standard working procedures. The teams monitored the treatment and living conditions of detainees, and communicated confidentially the findings and recommendations from these visits to the relevant authorities. This work ensures that detainees are treated with dignity and that their living conditions, including access to health care, are of an acceptable standard.



The ICRC conducted a ten-day visit to the Khamis Mushait detention facility in Saudi Arabia where conflict-related detainees are held under the authority of the Joint Forces Command. A similar visit was conducted in Sana'a, Yemen. In total, more than 3,400 people detained in relation to the conflict in Yemen were visited by the ICRC. This work is an important step in helping people find out what happened to their loved ones.



In May 2022, the ICRC facilitated the repatriation of 117 detainees from Saudi Arabia to Yemen.

In May 2022, the ICRC facilitated the repatriation of 117 detainees from Saudi Arabia to Yemen following a request from the Joint Forces Command of the international military coalition. Read more about the successful repatriation of the detainees on our website: [ICRC: 117 detainees repatriated to Yemen from Saudi Arabia](#)

THE SALALAH LOGISTICS HUB IN OMAN

The ICRC's logistics hub in Salalah, Oman, was established in May 2015 to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The location of Oman at the centre of global shipping routes makes Salalah a natural logistics hub for moving goods between east and west. From late 2017 onwards, and owing to the unprecedented surge in humanitarian emergencies in Yemen, the Salalah logistics hub became more than just a transit point; humanitarian supplies were mobilized from the hub to Yemen's Aden and Sana'a governorates by road.

The Salalah logistics hub is now considered to be one of the most reliable trans-shipping pipelines in the region, with expanded joint logistics operations supporting Yemen, the Horn of Africa and beyond. The operational activities carried out and facilitated by the ICRC at the Salalah logistics hub help mitigate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen and its reverberating consequences on millions of Yemenis.



371 tonnes of humanitarian items valued at more than 629,000 Swiss Francs were sent by the ICRC from the Salalah logistics hub to Yemen in 2022.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE ICRC

The humanitarian needs of thousands of people in dozens of countries from Yemen to Somalia, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are rising, a pattern the ICRC expects to continue in 2023. For the millions of people in these countries who are reliant on humanitarian assistance, greater support is desperately needed to save lives and prevent further suffering. The civilian suffering caused by these conflicts, combined with a worsening climate emergency and rising food and energy prices, will make 2023 a year of vast humanitarian need.

The global community must ensure that no one is left behind and that no conflict be forgotten; many crises are at risk of fading into obscurity at great cost to human life.




The ICRC offers hope to those whose lives have been shattered by war. If you would like to support our work, the regional delegation has a dedicated team who would be very happy to hear from you.

You can support the ICRC through a one-off or regular donation or by becoming a friend of the ICRC. Friends of the ICRC is a committed group of people working together to help the ICRC help victims of armed conflict and violence.

Alternatively, you may wish to partner with us. The ICRC works with businesses, governments and philanthropic organizations to support the needs of people affected by armed conflict and other violence.

To learn more about how you can support the ICRC please visit us online at <https://www.icrc.org/en/support-us>

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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Regional Delegation for the GCC Countries
(Covering activities in: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates)
Jabriya – Block 8, Street 17 – House 4
P.O.Box: 28078 Safat – 13141
Kuwait
Tel.: +965 25322061/2
Fax: +965 25324598
E-mail: kow_koweitcity@icrc.org

ICRC Delegation in the United Arab Emirates
Office Number 103, Abu Dhabi Mall,
West Building Abu Dhabi Trade Centre, Abu Dhabi,
Tel.: +971 42432488.
E-mail: icrc_uae@icrc.org
International Humanitarian City (IHC) Building No. 1,
Offices 316, 318 & 319 P.O.Box: 506012 Dubai,
Tel.: +971 42432488. E-mail: icrc_uae@icrc.org

Qatar Delegation
Palm Tower B, 28th Floor, office no 2804,
Majlis Al Taawon Street, West Bay.
Doha – Qatar

Sultanate of Oman
Al-Sarooj Area, Al-Kharijia Street, Str. No. 59, Way 2834
Building No. 2567, Plot No. 204, Block 228
Post Code: 115
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: +968 24956443 / 97197689
E-mail: must_muscat_mailbox@icrc.org

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center
King Abdullah Road, King Saud University near 4119,
Riyadh 12371-7046 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
E-mail: ria_riyad_mailbox@icrc.org
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