

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) IN CAMBODIA



Timeline

1965

The ICRC starts humanitarian work in Cambodia helping those affected by the Viet Nam War and outbreaks of internal conflict.

1979

The ICRC opens first permanent office in Phnom Penh to deal with emergency relief operations.

1991

Physical Rehabilitation Programme begins in collaboration with Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.

2000

Office in Cambodia closes but visits to detainees and prisons continue, covered by the ICRC Regional Delegation in Bangkok. Activities under the Physical Rehabilitation Programme continue in the country.

2007

Office re-established in Phnom Penh to expand the work with prison authorities in improving conditions of detention for inmates as well as promoting international humanitarian law.

2016

A support office opens in Battambang, focusing on physical rehabilitation and social inclusion of those living with disabilities.

Country context

In the 50 years of the ICRC's presence in Cambodia, the organisation has been carrying out a wide range of activities in accordance with its mandate under the Geneva Conventions. It has supported the construction of medical facilities, developed an orthopaedic project, worked for the re-establishment of family links, visited prisoners and promoted international humanitarian law.

Up until 1970, the ICRC's activities concentrated on the impact of the war in neighbouring Viet Nam and outbreaks of sporadic violence in the country. After the Khmer Rouge regime was removed from power in 1979, the ICRC worked to reconstruct and rehabilitate the country. But the legacy of war continues to impact people's lives. Many of the 150,000 disabled people in Cambodia have lost limbs to landmines and face difficulties reintegrating into society. Over 90 per cent of Cambodia's population live in rural areas in need of development and lack of adequate basic public services still impede inclusive development. In prisons, minimal access to basic requirements such as water, sanitation, exercise in outside areas, as well as family visits all contribute to an environment where both physical and psychological health problems are common. These issues are further exacerbated by overcrowding in prisons.

Assistance to people with disabilities

Since 1991, the ICRC's Physical Rehabilitation Programme has been helping thousands of disabled regain mobility and re-integrate into society. In collaboration with all parties, the ICRC's goal is to contribute to sector reform and to create a self-sustaining future for physical rehabilitation in Cambodia.

Under this programme, financial and technical support has been provided to Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation to run the first prosthetic-orthotic component factory in Phnom Penh as well as the physical rehabilitation centres in Battambang and Kampong Speu which provide free prostheses and therapy. The ICRC's experts help Cambodian healthcare workers provide treatment for patients by repairing prosthetic limbs not only in the centres, but also in remote areas through outreach services.

The factory supplies necessary parts and walking aids to 28,000 patients a year nationwide. The ICRC is currently supporting a transition project with the aim to transform the factory into a self-sustainable enterprise,

able to supply the market with components at competitive prices.

Recently, the outreach service has been extended to Siem Reap Province. Rehabilitation centres also refer patients to educational and vocational trainings. Thanks to the ICRC grants, 23 patients have begun successful businesses, ranging from mushroom cultivation to mobile coffee shops.

Since 1991, the ICRC has assisted more than 100,000 people living with disabilities.

In 2012, the ICRC set up the all-women's wheelchair basketball team to promote social inclusion of the disabled. In 2016, the ICRC signed a five-year co-operation agreement with Cambodian Physical Therapy Association to boost the quality of services and raise awareness of physiotherapy nationwide. It will also work with partners to improve the physiotherapy teaching at University of Health Sciences by integrating physiotherapy quality standards on systemic level and in the teaching curriculum.

Supporting welfare of detainees

Since 1993, the ICRC has been working closely with General Department of Prisons (GDP)

in providing an independent external assessment of the conditions of detention and assistance to improve living conditions of detainees. Based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed in the 1998, ICRC teams regularly visit prisons to ensure detainees are treated humanely. The results of these assessments are shared in a confidential dialogue with prison managers and GDP to help them identify ways so they can improve conditions for detainees with the resources available to them.

Together with GDP engineers, the ICRC supports the renovation of facilities, and with GDP Health team, supports health-care projects. In Correctional Centre 2, the ICRC started a pilot project in May 2015 with the Cambodian prison and Ministry of Health authorities with the aim of creating a sustainable primary healthcare system that can be replicated nationwide. The ICRC also supports prison health posts with drugs and medical equipment on ad hoc basis. Detainees receive hygiene kits and occasionally recreational items.



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In addition, the ICRC looks at supporting prison authorities in specific health-related issues and, to that extent, has carried out a health education program in Kampong Cham and hygiene awareness campaigns in CC2. Occasionally, the ICRC supports the authorities in organizing scabies disinfection campaigns. Through this joint activity, staff and detainees learn how to carry out a campaign, but most importantly, how to manage and prevent further outbreaks.

In an effort to strengthen the capacity of the authorities to deliver services, technical trainings are provided to prison staff to enable them to maintain proper conditions of detention. Furthermore, the ICRC facilitates cooperation between different ministries to address specific concerns of detainees with regards to their due process. It supports as well the cooperation between ministries to increase the number of educational opportunities provided to inmates.

The ICRC is also engaged in a dialogue with police and gendarmerie officials to ensure adequate treatment and conditions at all stages of the detention process.

In close collaboration with Cambodian Red Cross, the ICRC helps re-establish links between detainees and their families through the Restoring Family Links service. Some vulnerable detainees, held far from their homes, are able to receive the ICRC-facilitated family visits. In the case of foreign detainees, the ICRC notifies embassies of their nationals held in Cambodian prisons.

Promoting recognition of international humanitarian law

The ICRC regularly holds seminars with the authorities, civil society, and the armed and security forces to promote adherence to international humanitarian law.

Several workshops have been held with police officers and gendarmerie to improve awareness of international rules and standards for the exercise of police powers, particularly in their response to public order situations and major public gatherings. Workshops have been held with the Royal Gendarmerie of Cambodia and the National Counter-Terrorism Committee to impress upon participants that even in the most challenging situations, the existing rules for the use of force and firearms remain valid and applicable. Preventing and countering violent extremism are also topics that have been addressed.

The ICRC also sponsors workshops with academic institutions to simulate interest in international humanitarian law among students. Royal University of Law and Economics now has a fully integrated compulsory course in the curriculum. Pannasastra University in Phnom Penh is offering international humanitarian law modules in its Master of Laws in Human Rights.

The ICRC also works with authorities on the promotion, ratification and implementation of treaties related to international humanitarian law, in particular, weapon-related treaties such as Convention of Cluster Munitions and protection of cultural properties in times of armed conflict.

Working with Cambodian Red Cross

Since 1955, Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) has been an operational partner with the ICRC, providing assistance to civilians affected by outbreaks of violence as well as carrying out many other humanitarian actions. In 2016, a three-year Partnership Framework Agreement was signed between the ICRC and CRC.

The ICRC works with CRC to:

- Support the response to emergencies (conflict and natural disasters) in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement;
- Support their efforts in communications and organizational development;
- Promote the understanding of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as well as the basic rules of international humanitarian law.

What we do:

- Support security and armed forces with specialised awareness training related to law enforcement and armed conflict operations in adherence to international standards and laws.
- Support Ministry of Social Affairs to provide quality services at two physical rehabilitation centres and contribute to comprehensive sector reform.
- Provide people with disabilities with micro-credit loans or grants for income-generating projects.
- Help authorities identify low-cost managerial initiatives that can be taken to improve detainees' living conditions.
- Work with the authorities to improve healthcare of detainees in Correctional Centre 2 and create a national model of sustainable primary healthcare.
- Provide technical training to the prison staff in order to strengthen their capacity to maintain detention facility.
- Facilitate inter-ministerial gatherings on topics of importance (i.e. overcrowding, education in prisons) to ensure all relevant stake holders are part of the process.
- Build capacity of Cambodian Red Cross in its response to emergencies in accordance with fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- Promote international humanitarian law (IHL) at academic level and provide implementation expertise at authority level.



Detainees are educated on how to treat and prevent scabies during an ICRC campaign at Kampong Cham prison (2016).



Engineers from General Department of Prisons and staff from 27 prisons are trained to improve their technical skills in maintaining electrical systems in prisons (2016).



Cambodian security forces meet with the ICRC delegates for a briefing on the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and the use of force and firearms (2014).



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