

ICRC in the Philippines: From World War II to today

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization, has been helping victims of armed conflicts in the Philippines since World War II.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the Geneva Conventions – the core of international humanitarian law (IHL) which regulates the conduct of armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland, and it operates in more than 80 countries.

1940s



During the Second World War, the ICRC appoints a representative in Manila who purchases and distributes relief supplies to prisoners of war (PoW) and civilian internees.



After the war, ICRC appoints an official delegate who works with the American authorities in providing relief to refugees from the districts south of Manila. Marking the start of ICRC's detention-related activities in the Philippines which continues to date, the delegate also visits Japanese PoWs detained in camps to assess their living conditions, to distribute relief supplies, and to arrange for PoWs to correspond with their families.

1950s

In 1959, the ICRC conducts its first visit to detained members of the PKP-Hukbalahap movement at Fort McKinley.



In 1973, ICRC opens a regional delegation in Malaysia which oversees ICRC's activities in the Philippines until the end of 1981. In 1976, the ICRC starts supporting Philippine Red Cross (PRC) relief programs for people displaced by conflict through food supplies and financial support for medicines.

1970s

1980s



In 1984, with the agreement of the Philippine Minister of Education, Culture and Sports, a dissemination campaign is launched in 1,600 schools in Mindanao and Samar, promoting the Red Cross Movement, humanitarian principles, and the importance of IHL.

In 1982, an ICRC delegation is opened in Makati City, marking the start of its permanent presence in the Philippines. This was formalized in 1985, with the signing of a headquarters agreement between the Philippine Minister of Foreign Affairs and the ICRC.

In 1981, the 24th International Red Cross Conference is held in Manila. Several resolutions are adopted including a resolution on disarmament, weapons of mass destruction, and respect for non-combatants.



In 1980, the ICRC receives authorization from the Philippine Minister of Justice to visit sentenced detainees, aside from persons in preventive detention. In 1981, the ICRC also obtains permission to visit civilian prisons and detainees held by military security units.

1990s

In 1990, the ICRC is allowed to visit persons captured and held by the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. In 1997, the ICRC also covers the medical expenses of civilians wounded in skirmishes between the New People's Army and security forces in various parts of the country.



In 1994, ICRC and PRC provide relief to thousands of families displaced by clashes between government forces and Moro armed groups in Sulu, Basilan, and North Cotabato.



In 1997, ICRC organizes its first workshop on IHL for Philippine military instructors.

2000s

ICRC provides technical support to the development and enactment of R.A. 9851 in 2009 which penalizes crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity; and to that of R.A. 10530 in 2013 which sets out the rules for the use of the red cross, red crescent, and red crystal emblems and stipulates penalties for misuse.



In 2009, ICRC supports the relief efforts of the PRC in response to the flooding caused by Typhoon Ondoy. The ICRC assists nearly 2,000 detainees in flooded jails. The ICRC also provides relief assistance to flood victims in conflict-afflicted Northern Samar in 2010.

In 2008, fighting breaks out between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The ICRC, with the PRC, launches a major emergency relief operation—one of the largest in the world during this period—for 180,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs).



In 2007, ICRC shares the summary of its detention report on the humanitarian problems caused by severe overcrowding with concerned authorities which becomes the foundation of the "Call for Action", an initiative mobilizing multiple government units and local experts in addressing overcrowding. The ICRC continues its efforts on judicial guarantees, jail infrastructure rehabilitation, and tuberculosis management in jails and prisons.

2010s



In partnership with the PRC, the ICRC provides technical support, relief items, and shelter assistance in some cases to the survivors of the devastating typhoons: Sendong (2011), Pablo (2012), Yolanda (2013), Ruby (2014), Lando (2015) and Nona (2015).



In March 2013, hostilities in Lahad Datu, Sabah forces Filipino migrants to leave their homes and return to the Philippines. ICRC supports the local PRC chapters in responding to this sudden influx of returnees.

In September 2013, clashes between the government and a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front in Zamboanga resulted in large-scale displacement, and damage to houses. ICRC and PRC conduct relief operations, as well as long-term assistance activities, to support the affected civilians. ICRC visits people detained in relation to this conflict, and enabled these detainees to be visited by their families.



The ICRC's humanitarian work has evolved today to include relief and early recovery programs for people affected by the internal armed conflicts; medical assistance for wounded people; and systemic support to the national authorities to address jail congestion and its humanitarian consequences.

Today



ICRC