

SRI LANKA

TOWARDS BETTER DETENTION CONDITIONS

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For more than 140 years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been visiting detainees worldwide with the aim of improving humane treatment and conditions of detention for all detainees.

In Sri Lanka, we have been visiting detainees since 1989. Visits were then carried out to detainees held in connection with the uprising of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the armed conflict. Nowadays, we visit all detainees in places of detention.

Any findings and recommendations of the visits are shared only with detaining authorities with the aim of supporting their efforts to improve treatment of detainees and conditions of detention.

In 2016, the ICRC launched two pilot projects to bring about sustainable changes in the prison system, namely, a health-care project with the Ministry of Health and Department of Prisons and a project to improve the Kalutara prison's maintenance system with the University of Moratuwa. The health-care project aims to introduce best practices when providing healthcare and managing health-related information in prisons. As a part of this project, a laboratory and three new consultation rooms were built in the Mahara prison hospital and two in the Colombo remand prison. This allows detainees to benefit from health screening and consultation services, just like any regular hospital. The new facilities have been in use since March this year.

TO HELP IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR DETAINEES THE ICRC HAS:

- Visited **171** detainees throughout the country;
- Given **115** families a travel allowance to visit their relatives in detention;
- Supported **6** representatives of the Department of Prisons and the Bureau of Rehabilitation to share best practices and challenges relating to prison design and planning, classification of prisoners and internal monitoring mechanisms at international conferences in Indonesia and Bangladesh;
- Contributed to a pilot health project in **2** prisons by providing consultation rooms, medical assistance and training to doctors in **13** prisons;
- Constructed water and sanitation facilities and improved maintenance services for over **2,000** detainees in the country.

To improve the Kalutara prison’s maintenance system, experts from the University of Moratuwa analysed processes and developed a computerised system to improve the maintenance and cleaning of its premises. Both the ICRC and the Department of Prisons have allocated staff, material and tools to test this system. Working with the Department of Prisons’ engineering unit, projects such as roof repairs, and building a ward for young offenders and outdoor sanitary blocks have been carried out. Prison infrastructure has a significant effect on conditions of detention, and therefore on the well-being of detainees. Designing prisons in a way that balances security and humanitarian needs has become a key concern for the Sri Lankan authorities. This is where the ICRC’s expertise has been much appreciated.

FLOOD-AFFECTED PEOPLE RECEIVE RELIEF ASSISTANCE

The onset of the southwest monsoon in Sri Lanka caused flooding and landslides, leaving 200 people dead and thousands displaced. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has been on the ground working hard to help everyone, everywhere. The ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have supported the SLRCS’ response with financial and technical assistance.

Volunteers from SLRCS branches in the affected areas rescued people, packed and delivered relief items to them, set up and manned medical camps, cleaned wells and houses and helped people find or communicate with their missing or displaced loved ones.

For more information on the response of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society and how their relief and rescue operations continue, please visit www.facebook.com/srilankaredcross and www.redcross.lk.



A rescue operation underway in Galle, where volunteers rescued and transported people to safety. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society used boats to transport food, aid and even a generator and medical supplies to the Nagoda Hospital in Galle.

First-aid volunteers treat wounds and other ailments at a first-aid camp in Padukka. They also educated people on precautions to be taken during the disaster.





In the Galle district, where more than 100,000 people were affected by the floods, volunteers distributed relief items and provided first aid, food and other essential services.

Volunteers from the Matara branch delivered much-needed kerosene lamps to those affected by floods after the power supply was disrupted in the area.



Volunteers from the Colombo branch clean wells in Hanwella. Until 1 June, they had cleaned 68 wells. Cleaning wells is necessary to avoid water-borne illnesses from contaminated water. Volunteers disinfect the well after cleaning it and get it certified by a government medical officer, who confirms that the water is fit for drinking.

DESIGNING PRISONS: BALANCING SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

In March, Commissioner of Prisons (Administration) Mr Thushara Upuldeniya participated in the 6th Asian Conference for Correctional Facilities Architects and Planners (ACCFA) in Jakarta, Indonesia. This conference provides professionals and public officials a space to exchange best practices between architectural design and the operation and maintenance of correctional facilities. The ICRC has been part of ACCFA's board of strategic partners since 2015, along with the Ministries of Justice of Japan, Thailand and Malaysia.

Mr Upuldeniya shares his experience from this event.

WHAT EXPERIENCES DID YOU AND THE TEAM FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PRISONS SHARE AT ACCFA?

We talked about the collaboration between architects, planners and other stakeholders to address prison overcrowding. Participants asked questions about relocating prisons, as this is an expensive exercise involving many stages. Just the design stage takes about one year. Negotiations with the local community where the prison is to be relocated is a challenge because invariably they don't want a prison in the neighbourhood. They have to be convinced that the relocation will inject money into the community's economy, such as through grocery stores and eateries for families visiting their relatives in prison. The construction of the prison takes about one-and-a-half years. The process also involves coordination between a prison's consultation team to identify our requirements, and an external technical team. The participants saw all this as a major undertaking and we were able to answer their questions convincingly. The open prison concept in Sri Lanka, which allows a low-security prisoner who has demonstrated good conduct to spend up to four years in this type of prison, was also appreciated by participants.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THE DEPARTMENT OF PRISONS FACES VIS-À-VIS INFRASTRUCTURE AND DESIGN?

Most prisons in Sri Lanka are overcrowded and the buildings are old. We have addressed these challenges. To reduce overcrowding, the government opened a Department of Community Based Correction in 2009 and a Drug Rehabilitation Centre in Kandakadu in 2015, as major alternatives to prison. Over the years, these measures have reduced the prison population by 10,000 and it continues to decrease. We have identified eight prisons that have old structures for relocation because they cannot be expanded due to space limitations. Three of these prisons, built to international standards, have already been relocated. The Tangalle prison has been relocated to Angunakolapalassa, the Bogambara prison to Pallakale and the Jaffna prison was rebuilt after the war.

WHAT IDEAS/EXPERIENCES DID YOU TAKE HOME TO IMPROVE PRISON INFRASTRUCTURE IN SRI LANKA?

These ideas relate to waste management and use of technology such as body scanners and sensors in high-security prisons.

Commissioner of Prisons (Administration) Mr Upuldeniya in a discussion with members of the ICRC's detention team.



HOW ARE YOU PREPARING FOR ACCFA 2018 SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE IN SRI LANKA?

We look forward to hosting ACCFA in Colombo in March 2018. We plan to take participants on a visit to Angunakolapalassa prison. The ACCFA governing board has shared some ideas regarding the conference and we will certainly keep these in mind. We are mindful about balancing the laws, regulations and cultural practices of a developing country when providing prison conditions that are of an international standard. Both regionally and globally, Sri Lanka has contributed to improving the welfare of detainees. In 2016, we co-hosted the Regional Correctional Managers' Conference with the ICRC, where there was a lot of experience sharing. When the Mandela rules were drafted, Sri Lanka's observations were taken into consideration.

WARFARE AT SEA AND THE LAW

In May this year, naval officers from the Asia Pacific region convened in Kuala Lumpur to talk about a range of operational issues related to naval warfare and current issues about humanitarian action at sea. Commander JPKP Kumara of the Sri Lanka Navy, who participated in the 4th Regional Workshop on the Law of Armed Conflict at Sea, shared his experience with us.

HOW WILL THE KNOWLEDGE YOU GATHERED DURING THE WORKSHOP IMPACT YOUR WORK?

This workshop enhanced my knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) applicable to armed conflict at sea. I was able to clarify the basic considerations in using methods and means of warfare at sea, for e.g., a blockade. I believe this learning experience will help me, as an officer serving at sea, to make correct decisions and exercise proper command and control in the maritime operations I am involved in.

WHAT WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THIS CONFERENCE FOR YOU?

The interaction with fellow naval officers and the panel of experts was phenomenal. Sharing experiences and building a relationship will help us understand each other better, and improve partnerships and interoperability in future endeavours.

Commander Kumara (left) talking to naval officers from Timor Leste (centre) and Bangladesh (right).



FACTS & FIGURES

JANUARY-MAY 2017



TO HELP ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS THE ICRC HAS:

Met **1,073** families to follow up on their tracing enquiries, and registered **214** new cases of missing persons; Provided (through the Accompaniment Programme) weekly psychosocial support sessions to **634** relatives of missing persons, and referred **39** people to the resources required for assistance with economic needs, **13** for assistance with legal and administrative concerns, **46** for assistance with educational needs, and **33** with health needs; Given **142** families cash grants to develop their livelihoods.



TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE AND RESPECT FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL), THE ICRC HAS:

Conducted pre-deployment briefings on its role and mandate and the applicability of IHL for **234** army personnel going on peace keeping missions abroad;
Trained **47** military personnel on IHL;
Organized a workshop on the Law of Armed Conflict at Sea for **19** Navy commanding officers.



TO SUPPORT THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY (SLRCS), THE ICRC PROVIDED FINANCIAL, TECHNICAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR:

6 SLRCS branches to provide first-aid services at a range of district-level events;
160 first aid volunteers (island-wide) to develop their first-aid skills by attending a basic first-aid exam;
55 staff and volunteers from the Badulla and Kalutara branches to be trained in camp management, and
23 volunteers from the Jaffna branch in contingency planning to strengthen SLRCS' response capacity during emergencies;
66 staff and volunteers to learn actions and measures the National Society must take when responding to emergency situations. These would also ensure their own safety.

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