

SRI LANKA

# WAITING FOR ANSWERS

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2017



How would you feel if someone you love went missing?

“It’s a wound that doesn’t heal.”

“It’s an endless pain.”

“It’s an unending search.”

This is how relatives of missing people describe the feeling. This feeling of loss without finality or resolution has been defined as “ambiguous loss”. Research by Dr Pauline Boss, a US-based professor of Family Social Sciences, led to defining of this theory as it is known today.

There is no beginning, middle or end in the experience of ambiguous loss – a loved one goes missing and a seemingly endless wait follows. It also puts families in a state of powerlessness. Their situation as a family of a missing person dictates their day-to-day life and decisions. They cannot grieve and they cannot move on.

This year, we started conducting lectures on ambiguous loss for students and professionals in the fields of psychology and counselling to raise awareness of it, with the aim of having it added to psychology and counselling curricula. We have conducted these lectures at the University of Colombo, University of Jaffna, Eastern University, and Shanthiham Association for Health and Counselling. It is important that professionals, governments and communities understand ambiguous loss to help these families cope as they wait for answers.

While this sense of uncertainty can only be resolved by clarifying the fate of missing persons, this process of clarification can be a long one. Around the world, the ICRC helps families of missing people address the consequences of the uncertainty they live with. In Sri Lanka, we help them deal with their emotional, economic, legal and administrative struggles through our peer-to-peer support accompaniment programme. As families of missing people help each other, they are better able to understand each other’s day-to-day struggles and the difficulties of living in the wake of this sudden absence.

## THE ICRC HAS TAKEN MANY MEASURES TO HELP THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PEOPLE IN JULY-SEPTEMBER 2017:

Met over **1,500** families to follow up on their tracing enquiries;

Provided (through the accompaniment programme) weekly psychosocial support sessions to over **490** relatives of missing persons and referred more than **70** to the resources required for assistance with economic, legal and administrative, educational and health needs;

Given **205** families cash assistance to develop their livelihoods.

## COLOMBO DEFENCE SEMINAR

The ICRC's regional director for Asia and the Pacific, Mr Boris Michel, represented the ICRC at the 7th annual defence seminar organized by the Ministry of Defence in Colombo this August. It was the first time that the ICRC participated in this prestigious global event, which brought together members of the armed and security forces, political authorities, and the diplomatic community from over 83 countries to discuss this year's theme – "Countering Violent Extremism: Global Trends".

Speaking about the legal implications for the armed forces when countering violent extremism, Mr Michel pointed out the complexities of putting in place legislation that applies to acts of terror during both peace time and conflict. Using torture as an example, he described how violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law aggravate radical sentiment and fuel violent extremism. He also explained the significance of the ICRC's approach in speaking to all parties involved in a conflict situation to reach all victims, neutrally and impartially. "The ICRC's work is determined by the facts on the ground, not by how the parties to the conflict are labelled. Our first and foremost concern is maintaining humanity in armed conflict and minimizing unnecessary suffering of victims of all forms of collective violence," he said.

The Colombo Defence Seminar was first held in 2011 to discuss matters relating to national, regional and international security. It has been an annual feature since, drawing participants from all parts of the world to not only discuss military-related experiences but also network and establish strategic and intellectual connectivity in preserving security.

"I am proud we were offered the opportunity to make our voice heard at such a high-profile gathering. As Sri Lanka becomes more prosperous, setting a good example in relation to humanitarian law is important. We want to support the authorities not only in their response to the existing humanitarian needs but also to show how humanitarian law can be teamed with the needs of an evolving geopolitical environment," Mr Michel concluded.

ICRC's Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Mr Boris Michel at the Colombo Defence Seminar.





The ICRC and the Sri Lanka Judges' Institute organized the first-ever training in international humanitarian law for high court judges at the Sri Lanka Judges' Institute in Colombo. The one-day teaching session focused on the basic concepts of humanitarian law and international criminal law. Around 60 judges from across Sri Lanka participated in the training.

Director of the Sri Lanka Judges' Institute Hon. Ruwan Fernando inaugurated the event while Hon. Chief Justice Priyasath Dep (right) delivered the keynote address. The judges interacted with the resource persons about their role in implementing humanitarian law in Sri Lanka's post-conflict context. Local academics from the legal field and ICRC experts in humanitarian law led the sessions, which included panel discussions.



Judicial medical officers and police officers from the crime scene investigation unit took part in an ICRC sensitization course on the recovery of human remains at the Sri Lanka Police College in Kalutara in July. Nearly 40 participants learnt about best practices in forensic archaeological theory and practice over four days of training.

The event highlighted the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to forensic human identification, recognizing the role forensic archaeology plays in the discovery of unmarked graves and subsequent proper recovery, documentation and identification of skeletal remains. Putting this into practice, participants engaged in a full-scale simulated excavation of a grave site.



# FACTS & FIGURES

## JULY-SEPTEMBER 2017



### DETAINEE WELFARE

Visited over **100** detainees throughout the country and shared findings and recommendations confidentially with prison authorities.

Travel allowance given to more than **160** families, enabling them to visit their relatives in detention.

Constructed water and sanitation facilities and improved maintenance services for nearly **3,300** detainees.



### PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Hosted the 29th South Asia Teaching Session on international humanitarian law for more than **40** participants from the government, the armed forces, police services, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the academia.

Conducted training in IHL for **30** tri-service personnel, who are IHL instructors at the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University.

Held a lecture on IHL-teaching methodologies for eight IHL instructors in the Sri Lanka Army.

Organized the national round of the Henry Dunant Memorial Moot Court Competition for undergraduate law students to learn about humanitarian law by practically applying it in a simulated international criminal court. The team from the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, won the competition, while the University of Peradeniya were runners-up.



### SUPPORT TO THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY

**252** first-aid volunteers developed their skills by attending an island-wide basic first aid exam, and **22** instructors participated in a refresher course on evolving first-aid techniques.

**165** volunteers from Ampara, Mullaitivu, Puttlam, Mannar, Trincomalee and Kandy qualified in branch and divisional disaster response.

**121** staff and volunteers learnt about the measures that the National Society must take when responding to emergency situations. These would also ensure their own safety.

**22** Red Cross Society branches provided first-aid services at district-level events.

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