



ICRC - 2017

# OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

## ASSISTING CIVILIANS ALONG THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER

We support the population of Tavush Region, helping to mitigate the consequences of hostilities felt by civilians living along the international border.

We help village population find **alternative income opportunities** to farming in insecure areas along the border. In 2017, we consulted with local authorities to prioritize the villages of Dovegh and Aygepar, where socio-economic situations are particularly challenging. Vulnerable households were identified through a detailed household survey with participation of local Red Cross volunteers, and 57 families received financial assistance to start small-scale businesses. Additionally, we provided multipurpose cash assistance to 19 extremely vulnerable families who were unable to start business activities because of their age, health condition or other circumstances. In such cases, we work to build multilateral support from within the community, local authorities and organizations to accompany our effort in finding sustainable solutions to their problems. We will continue to work in Aygepar and Dovegh in 2018, while identifying other priority villages for subsequent years.

For the last seven years, we have helped **improve the quality and quantity of water** available in border communities by improving the condition of infrastructure. In 2017, we supported Voskepar, Nerkin Karmiraghbyur and Sarigyugh through

rehabilitation of water supply pipelines, building of metal fencing for a water reservoir, and installation of water meters, public taps and other technical components. Since 2015, we have raised community awareness on safe behavior and danger of mines and unexploded devices with our partner, the Armenian Red Cross Society (ARCS). This year, we held seminars for over 500 schoolchildren in 10 border communities. Also, we organized 19 first-aid courses with instructors of the ARCS, providing life-saving skills and first aid boxes to 205 members of civil protection rescue teams, in the scope of the two-year cooperation program between the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Armenia, the ARCS and the ICRC.

With the increased security risks in Tavush region, we supported 14 communities to set up **passive protective measures**, which reduced direct exposure of civilians to shooting and shrapnel, enabling the community to live, work and move outdoors in relative safety. In 2017, we continued to construct safer spaces, wall-in exposed windows, and build protective walls for kindergartens, schools and other public buildings, part of which were done thanks to a new partnership with the ARCS and the German Red Cross.

The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. Since 1992, the ICRC has been present in the region in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Through its delegations in Yerevan and Baku and the mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, the ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary between the parties to the conflict to address issues of primary humanitarian concern.

In Armenia, we focus on civilians living along the international border, missing persons and their families, mine victims and people deprived of their liberty. In addition, we promote the dissemination and implementation of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) among national authorities, academics and military personnel. Our key partner in Armenia is the Armenian Red Cross Society with whom we coordinate activities aimed at assisting people affected by the conflict.



ICRC

## CLARIFYING THE FATE OF THE MISSING

We support efforts of all the sides to the conflict to determine the fate of the missing and to bring answers to their families.

Since 1992, we have been working on the issue of missing people and the plight of their families. Under International Humanitarian Law, parties to a conflict must do all possible to clarify the fate and whereabouts of people who went missing. In line with its mandate, the ICRC offers its expertise acting as a neutral intermediary. Through our delegations in Yerevan and Baku and our mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, we work closely with Commissions on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing People and with families of missing persons.

Clarification of the fate is a complex process which comprises several components. We gathered detailed data on each registered missing person from the family and handed it over for further processing to the Commissions. In 2015,

the ICRC provided the parties to the conflict an updated list containing around 4,500 names of the missing people of all ethnic origin registered by its delegations in Baku and Yerevan and the mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. This list is a necessary tool to help consolidate information and intensify their efforts towards bringing answers to the families.

Since 2014, we have started collecting biological reference samples in the form of buccal swabs from blood relatives of the missing. In the future, this data can serve as a complementary tool in identification of human remains when they are discovered or exhumed. Until now we have collected samples from 778 blood relatives of 298 missing persons. In Armenia, we work on this in cooperation with the ARCS and jointly with the

Ministry of Defense and the Armenian Scientific-Practical Centre of Forensic Medicine.

We also encourage the parties to the conflict to map and protect burial sites believed to contain the remains of people who might have died during the conflict, with a view to their future possible recovery and identification. We advise members of the working group of the Armenian Commission on techniques and resources to gather and process information from witnesses, and to identify inhumation sites. We support the authorities concerned in terms of technical equipment and advice for fieldwork.

**THE MISSING**  
end the silence

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

We provide multidisciplinary support to families of the missing, by helping them become financially stable or navigate the legal system, and by offering psychosocial assistance.

In their daily lives, many of families of the missing face different economic, social, legal and other challenges. Most of all, they continue to search for answers, fight for recognition, and talk about their missing relative, not letting him or her disappear completely in ambiguity and silence.

Since 2011, we have been implementing a comprehensive Accompaniment program in collaboration with the Armenian Red Cross and other local partners. As part of it, regular group meetings were organized for the families to address their issues with specialists and to have a chance for peer interaction.



In our work accompanying families through long periods of uncertainty, as they wait for news about the fate of their missing relative, commemoration activities address families' strong desire for public acknowledgement of their plight, and their need for recognition and need to remember. They help them to find meaning in their loss, and reaffirm that the family has not abandoned their loved one, while keeping the memory alive. We helped the families organize 84 commemoration and cultural events, where they got together to share memories about their missing loved ones. These included tree planting and writing of memory books, exhibitions of tapestry made by wives of the missing and visits to cultural and historical sites around Armenia.

In addition, we organized 25 skill-building workshops which involved 202 relatives of the missing. These workshops were designed to help participants acquire new skills in a group of peers and cope better throughout the long process of waiting.



Economic support to families of the missing goes hand-in-hand with psychosocial assistance. Since 2011, we have carried out a housing assistance project for vulnerable households in cooperation with the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia. Through a revolving fund, selected families received interest-free loans aimed to improve their housing conditions. Other families of the missing received grants to start small businesses as well as multipurpose grants for urgent household needs. Since the program started in 2012, we have implemented 226 economic support projects for families of missing people, including 13 this year.

## **ASSISTING MINE VICTIMS**

We help mine victims in Armenia to deal with their wide-ranging challenges.

We provide support to mine victims and their families throughout Armenia, to help them deal with their multiple economic, legal, administrative and physical challenges. We address their issues working jointly with the Armenian Red

Cross and the Armenian Center for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise. In conjunction with the Fuller Center for Housing in Armenia, we provided 14 loans in 2017 for families of mine victims to renovate their houses.

Also this year, we provided grants to help 27 families of mine victims launch income-generating activities.

## **ACTING AS A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY**

We work to protect and assist people across the lines.

Being neutral and impartial, the ICRC is capable of offering its humanitarian assistance in conflict situations and to affected people, including prisoners of war and civilian internees. Based on its mandate enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC has special prerogatives to access and assist these persons in times of armed conflicts. At the same time, this role does not involve negotiating the release of detainees of all sides of conflicts and may only be enacted at the request of the concerned parties.

Since 1992, we have visited prisoners of war and civilians deprived of their liberty

in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We help to ensure that they are able to maintain contact with their families and we facilitate their transfer and repatriation on both sides of the international border and the Line of Contact.

The ICRC also monitors and documents alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). These violations include incidents such as the killing or wounding of civilians, or significant property damages. To address such cases, the ICRC maintains its confidential dialogue with the parties to the conflict,

highlighting their IHL commitments to distinguish between military and civilian targets, and applying proportional use of force according to military necessity.



## **PROMOTING IHL LEARNING AND NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION**

We encourage efforts of state authorities to integrate IHL in the national legal framework and promote the knowledge among Armenian specialists and armed forces.

We continue to keep contemporary issues of IHL integration on the agenda and offer relevant authorities our expertise and technical assistance to promote national implementation.

In 2017, we continued the dialogue with the working group on the Criminal Code to align the new law with IHL standards and requirements.

To raise the level of awareness of IHL among decision-makers and the military, we organize training courses and run information sessions. In August, a group of Armenian military investigators learned of basics of IHL at a seminar co-organized with the Military Department of the Investigative Committee of Armenia. In November, we introduced the ICRC activities and mandate as well as basics of IHL and the international human rights law to staff of the Human Rights

Defender's office and the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Armenia.

We continued to introduce the rules of IHL among representatives of the Armenian Armed Forces, cooperating with the Ministry of Defense in the scope of the joint annual plan. We trained groups of military instructors, commanders and deputy commanders of border units and peacekeepers departing for missions abroad. In addition, we ran six sessions on ICRC and IHL basics to troops stationed along the international border in Tavush region. In October, we participated in the Collective Security Treaty Organization's military exercise of the joint rapid reaction forces.

We supported the participation of representatives of the Armenian Armed Forces in training and exchange on a regional and international level.

We also encourage learning of IHL among academia and young researchers. By partnering with several institutions in Armenia such as the American, French and Russian-Armenian universities, we organize conferences, summer courses, and moot court on IHL, thus engaging students and practitioners from Armenia and abroad.



## **VISITING PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY**

We visit detainees to monitor conditions of their detention and their treatment, and to help them maintain contact with their families.

Based on its mission, and its right to humanitarian initiative to protect and assist the victims of situations not amounting to armed conflict, established by the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC takes action whenever it can to improve the treatment and conditions of people deprived of their liberty. In Armenia, we work in internal detention to support people held in civilian places of detention, whose detention is not related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. ICRC work in Armenian detention places is

based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1996 with the ministries of Interior and National Security, and the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Armenia. The document authorized the ICRC to visit all persons held in all places of detention in the country. With time, as the penitentiary service was transferred to the Ministry of Justice, the Government of Armenia renewed the Memorandum in 2001.

We cooperate closely with the Ministry of Justice, the Criminal Executive Department, prisons' administration and other related structures in Armenia. Our internal detention activities focus on visits to and follow-up with vulnerable categories of detainees, including those

sentenced to life imprisonment, foreigners who lack family contact and support, and detainees with individual health needs.

In 2017, we made 20 visits to various detention places. In addition, this year we focused on improving the physical and mental well-being of the prison population. We donated sport equipment to Kentron and Abovyan prisons, and we currently assess other places of detention to implement similar projects. The process of setting up online video calls for foreign detainees who lack family contacts is underway in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice.

## **PARTNERING WITH THE ARMENIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY**

For more than 20 years, the ARCS has been our primary partner in Armenia.

The ARCS is our key partner in Armenia and an important member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Many long-term cooperation programs were jointly developed to support people and communities affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These programs have three dimensions aimed at working together, learning from each other and preparing jointly for emergencies.

In 2017, with our support, the ARCS organized activities in different regions of Armenia to assist families of missing people. These included commemoration and cultural events, and visits of Red Cross volunteers to vulnerable elderly relatives of the missing. The ICRC and the ARCS worked together to collect biological reference samples from blood relatives of missing people in Armenia.

We help the ARCS in strengthening its capacities in areas such as communica-

tion, tracing service, response to conflict, provision of first aid and psychosocial assistance. We work jointly to promote the image and reputation of the Red Cross in Armenia by means of regular dissemination sessions run by the ARCS in schools and educational institutions across the country.

Together with Danish Red Cross, we continued to support the ARCS in strengthening its Tavush regional branch. In October, this support project expanded to the branches in Syunik and Gegharkunik regions.

With funds provided by the German Red Cross, the ICRC and the ARCS launched a project in Tavush region aimed to increase safety of the border population, especially children. As part of this cooperation, safe playgrounds and other spaces are set up in local schools and kindergartens. The project also focuses on the establishment of a medical emergency response chain, which means that through training, local Red Cross volunteers will be capable of

administering first aid during emergencies.



This year, the ICRC and the ARCS signed a two-year cooperation program with the Ministry of Emergency Situations aimed at training of the Ministry's staff in various areas including IHL, first aid and dead body management.

Together with six other National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ARCS and the ICRC continued developing a joint response strategy in case Armenia faces the effects of a conflict or other situations of violence.

### **ICRC Mission Statement**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

The ICRC also endeavors to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.