



Jelmir Duraku Photographer

NEWSLETTER

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports the families in their quest to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives. It promotes International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and its mandate, history and activities to various interested audiences. The ICRC supports the development of the Red Cross structures in Kosovo with training, funding and technical assistance.

MISSING PERSONS

In efforts to resolve the issue of missing persons, the ICRC maintains a dialogue with both national and international stakeholders in Kosovo. It continues to chair the Working Group on Missing Persons in relation to the 1998-1999 events in Kosovo (hereafter the Working Group), urging the authorities in Pristina and Belgrade to act in line with their commitments and obligations to provide the families with answers on the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives. This mechanism aims at facilitating, on purely humanitarian grounds, the exchange of information between Pristina and Belgrade authorities on missing persons, in particular on potential gravesite locations. As of December 2018, 1'653 persons from all ethnic backgrounds remain unaccounted for in relation to the armed conflict in Kosovo and its aftermath.

The elucidation of the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and an appropriate response to the needs of their families is the main ICRC concern. Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Kosovo, the ICRC has been collecting information directly from family members.

In 2018, the ICRC chaired three sessions of this Working Group, held in Belgrade and Pristina respectively. The discussions focused on the ongoing gravesite assessments, the search into archived documents, reporting on activities carried out, progress made and plans for 2019. Following lengthy discussions and liaison with both delegations to the Working Group, the *Agreement on the Procedures of Repatriation of Human Remains between Pristina and Belgrade* was reached.

The ICRC chaired three Sub-Working Group (SWG) sessions in Pristina, with the aim of providing a platform for discussions on forensic issues related to missing persons. The topics

initiated at the sessions included the *Procedures of Repatriation and Handover of Human remains* as well as the *Terms of Reference* which govern the SWG work. New identifications and more concrete actions were possible thanks to exchanges in the frame of the Analysis Team meetings, which functions within the SWG forum.

The ICRC renewed its efforts on obtaining access to various international and national archives potentially containing information on gravesite locations and exhumations related to the armed conflict in Kosovo and its aftermath. In this regard, 7 sets of documents obtained (around 13'000 pages and 36 videos, which contain autopsy reports, sketches, pictures from exhumations), as well as one Analytical Report were transmitted to the EULEX/Institute of Forensic Medicine (IFM) for further processing.

In close coordination and cooperation with the Government Commission on Missing Persons (GCMP) and the IFM, the 2nd phase of the project on conservation and proper management of clothing of the victims was successfully carried out between August and November 2018. The clothing was washed, labelled, placed in new boxes and moved to an appropriate storage location secured by the GCMP.

In June 2018, in further efforts to increase local forensic capacity, the ICRC supported IFM doctors to attend a *short tailor-made Forensic Anthropology course* in Durham University, UK, as well as, the *International Workshop in Human Identification Resulting from Armed Conflict* in Milan, Italy, in November 2018.

Aiming to address the long-lasting distress of the families of missing persons, over 430 family members received psycho-social and peer-to-peer support through 11 projects

implemented by the Family Associations (FAs) of missing persons and local Red Cross (RC) branches, with ICRC funding.

Aimed at increasing the understanding of the needs of the families of missing persons today, focusing on the psychological and psychosocial aspects, a stocktaking exercise was carried out through May - June 2018. The exercise included meetings with local actors involved in the file, such as FAs, RC structures, government institutions, mental health professionals and civil society actors.

To support the FAs and RCs in Kosovo in terms of capacity-building and self-sustainability, two outsourced professional workshops were organized for their staff. The first two-day workshop, *Negotiation/Preparation of External Meetings*, took place in May 2018, in participation of 15 Serb FAs and RC representatives. The second two-day workshop, *The information techniques during exchange of information with the families of missing persons*, took place in October 2018, for a group of 24 Albanian FAs and RC representatives.

The ICRC continued to financially support the activities of the *Regional Coordination of Associations of Families of Missing Persons from the territories of former Yugoslavia*, aimed at advocating for the rights of families and reminding the authorities of their responsibilities in tracing missing persons.



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PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM

In line with its mandate, and based on the agreement with the Kosovo's Interior and Justice Ministries, on cooperation and humanitarian activities to benefit persons deprived of their liberty, the ICRC conducts visits in all places of detention in Kosovo.

In July and November 2018, the ICRC visited the facilities of four places of detention, conducted private interviews and followed up the cases of 42 detainees. In addition to its usual activities on monitoring the conditions of imprisonment, the ICRC donated to the Kosovo Correctional Service books and other related items for the juvenile professional school, as well as recreational material and toys for the children corner in the visiting rooms.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The ICRC continues promoting International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and its specific humanitarian mandate in protecting and assisting the victims of armed conflict amongst different target audiences.

Universities

In efforts to learn and share experiences on IHL related themes, financed by the ICRC, a coach and three students representing Pristina Law Faculty participated to the *European Moot-Court Competition* in Ljubljana in November 2018.

Additionally, in 2018, three different groups of students from abroad visited Kosovo to gain an insight into various dimensions of the post-conflict recovery process. They visited the ICRC and were briefed on its mandate, history and activities in Kosovo, with particular emphasis on the issue of missing persons. The first group consisted of master students from the European Master's Degree on Human Rights and Democratization from the Vienna University (January 2018), the second consisted of IHL and Human Rights master students from the Geneva Academy (April 2018), while the third group consisted of master students from the University of Essex - Human Rights Centre (June 2018).

Religious circles

In coordination with the Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK), in March 2018, the ICRC conducted a presentation session on its mandate, history and activities for imams and other ICK representatives, which, in total gathered about 40 participants. The ICRC also seized the opportunity to request ICK's support in resolving the current caseload of missing persons in Kosovo. In the framework of promoting awareness about the principles of



Red Cross volunteers compete on First Aid

COOPERATION WITH THE RED CROSS STRUCTURES IN KOSOVO

The ICRC cooperates with the Red Cross of Kosova (RCK) and the Red Cross of Kosovo and Metohija (RCKM), supporting their operational capacities with emphasis on the tracing services and communication programs.

General

The RCK developed tools and guidelines aiming to strengthen its capacities as per the Plan of Action of Safer Access Framework (SAF). They standardized tools for risk and emergency needs assessment, which were disseminated to RCK branches during a number of workshops. The ICRC organized a three-day workshop for the RCKM representatives on SAF and Contingency Planning (CP) aiming to support them in assessing capacities to respond to emergencies. To further boost the response capacities of both RC structures, the ICRC supported simulation exercises, training for emergency response teams, as well as the purchase of equipment and uniforms. The skills of RCK branch representatives were enhanced through an outsourced expert training on resource mobilization/fundraising.

Tracing Services

The representatives of the two RC structures attended the *ICRC Annual Conference on Restoring Family Links (RFL) and Data Protection*, held in Zagreb in March 2018, benefiting from experiences and peer-to-peer exchanges.

The RC branches remained the focal points for distribution of ICRC attestations to the families of missing persons. The RC structures also organized four workshops for their staff/volunteers on RFL in emergencies, needs, practices, tools and Family Links Answers database. In efforts to boost their operational capacities on tracing and data management, the ICRC donated IT equipment to both RC structures.

Communication program

The RCK developed a Communication Strategy, including its Plan of Action, and drafted its social media and emblem guidelines. Eight (8) RCK branches organized events with stakeholders to promote the RC work. The RCK organized First Aid competitions, which continue to resonate positively and attract the young generation. Following a three-day youth camp, several fundraising initiatives were undertaken by RCK youth volunteers to promote the RCK work among the general public. The ICRC also supported the activities carried out by the two RC structures in lieu of the *International Day of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the Battle of Solferino*, in addition to production of promotional materials. A four-day workshop was organized by the RCKM for youth volunteers to enhance their knowledge on the RC work and its Fundamental Principles.

IHL, a senior advisor to ICK was invited to attend the *Certificate Course on IHL and Islamic Law Related to Arm Conflict* in Sarajevo in September 2018 and the *Expert Workshop on IHL and Islamic Law* in Geneva in October 2018.

Legal framework on missing persons

Seven (7) Kosovo Government, Parliament and Civil Society representatives participated

to the two-day *Regional workshop on the legal framework related to missing persons and the protection of rights of their families* which took place in Sarajevo in November 2018. The workshop discussions focused on regional achievements, main challenges and peer-to-peer exchange on legislative measures relating to missing persons.



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
10 000 Pristina, Kosovo
41, Pashko Vasa
T. + 383 – 38 – 220 – 384 - 101
F. + 383 – 38 – 220 – 384 - 117
E-mail: pristina@icrc.org
www.icrc.org