

Iraq: supporting families of missing persons

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) HAS BEEN WORKING IN IRAQ CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1980 RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARMED CONFLICTS

Overview

Three decades of conflict have left hundreds of thousands of families struggling to find out what happened to their missing loved ones. Abandoning the search is not an option. Since 1980, the ICRC has spared no effort to put an end to their anguish.

"Iraq is currently one of the countries with the highest number of missing persons and, as a result, with the highest number of families seeking information on their missing relatives," said Dika Dulic, the ICRC delegate in charge of issues relating to missing persons in Iraq. A lack of clear statistics, however, makes it difficult to accurately establish the true size of the problem.

In an effort to alleviate the agony of those still waiting for news, the ICRC, in its role as a neutral intermediary, facilitates dialogue between the parties involved in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War and in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, who have an obligation under international humanitarian law to account for those who went missing.

Baghdad resident Hayat has led a sad life since her husband disappeared on 8 April 2003. "I lost hope," she said. "In the past nine years I have searched every prison. I ended up convincing myself that my husband Abdallah must have died."

In April, the remains of 17 Iranian soldiers killed in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War were handed over from the Iraqi to the Iranian authorities under ICRC auspices at the Shalamja border crossing, near Basra.

As a neutral intermediary, the ICRC facilitates the dialogue between the parties who were involved in the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war and who carry the responsibility to clarify the fate of persons still unaccounted for. This includes:

- *supporting authorities in the collection of information*
- *facilitating transmission of information between the parties chairing meetings*
- *facilitating joint missions in the field and the handover of human remains*

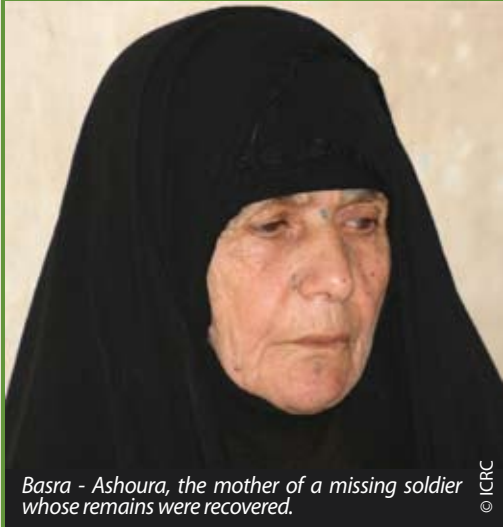
The ICRC continues to provide training and other support for the Ministry of Human Rights, Basra's Al-Zubair Centre of Iraq and Baghdad's Medical-Legal Institute.



Basra - Jabar Mehdi carrying a photo of his once missing brother. It was recently found out that his brother had been killed.

Operational Update

How do I report my relative as a missing person?



Basra - Ashoura, the mother of a missing soldier whose remains were recovered. © ICRC

The Ministry of Human Rights is responsible for collecting information about any person reported missing in connection with armed conflict or internal violence. The ministry has offices in each Iraqi governorate. In northern Iraq, the Ministry of Anfal is in charge of this issue.

The Department for missing persons, prisoners of war and human remains has two hotline numbers :

+964 781 375 7020

+964 781 375 7021

e-mail :

d.mom-mhr@humanrights.gov.iq

Information provided by Basra's Al-Zubair Centre on soldiers exhumed or otherwise known to be dead can be found on the Ministry of Human Rights website:

www.humanrights.gov.iq

You can also contact Al Zubair Centre directly.

If you believe that one of your relatives has been killed, you can contact Baghdad's Medico-Legal Institute by telephone :

+964 78 137 57 655

or by e-mail:

mli_bag41@yahoo.com

Visiting detainees

Between March and May, ICRC delegates visited detainees held by the Iraqi authorities and various branches of the Kurdish regional government in 44 places of detention in 15 governorates. They monitored the conditions in which detainees were being held and the treatment they received and shared their observations and recommendations with the detaining authorities. In some places of detention, the ICRC provided detainees with mattresses, blankets and recreational items such as books and games.

The ICRC helps restoring and maintaining ties between people held in detention facilities and their families. In March, April and May over 570 Red Cross messages were exchanged between them, in Iraq and abroad. The ICRC responded to over 1600 enquiries from families seeking information on detained or missing relatives.

The voluntary repatriation of three released detainees and one body of deceased detainee took place under the auspices of the ICRC. The organization also issued travel documents to 24 persons, mainly refugees, to enable them to resettle abroad.

Clearing unexploded munitions

Iraq is littered with more than 25 million mines and other explosive remnants of war, in particular along the borders with Iran and Turkey. As a result, the safety and livelihood of more than 1.6 million Iraqis are at risk. The ICRC started clearing unexploded munitions in June 2010 in Missan governorate. Over the last eight months, it has removed over 1,600 pieces of unexploded ordnance in 27 communities inhabited by more than 10,000 people.

Between March and May, ICRC mine clearance specialists destroyed 10 pieces of unexploded ordnance in four areas where 3,500 civilians had been directly exposed to danger.

Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law

Reminding parties to a conflict of their obligation to protect civilians is a fundamental part of the ICRC's work. The organization also endeavours to promote and strengthen knowledge of international humanitarian law by organizing presentations and training for military and police forces, prison staff, students and professors.

Between March and May, the ICRC organized 19 sessions on international humanitarian law for 914 Iraqi army and police personnel. A total of 160 students from Kufa University, in Najaf, also attended such sessions.

Operational Update

Bringing aid to people facing hardship

Many people in Iraq are still struggling to earn a living and support their families. Between March and May, the ICRC:

- Distributed over 8 million Iraqi Dinars through cash-for-work scheme, to 450 vulnerable displaced people and residents of Deralok in Dohuk governorate;
- Awarded 108 grants to disabled people and women-headed households in Ninawa, Kirkuk, Basra, Missan, Erbil, Baghdad and Sulaimaniya, enabling them to start small businesses and regain economic self-sufficiency.
- Distributed individual food and hygiene parcels, including essential household items, to 2475 internally displaced households, benefiting some 14850 people, in the group settlements of Ninawa, Kirkuk and Wasit;

Following heavy rainfalls and consequential flooding in Ninawa, Erbil and Salahedinne governorates in April, the ICRC assisted affected/displaced households, distributing: 4984 blankets, 634 towels, 1340 hygiene parcels, 1315 tarpaulins, 317 kitchen sets, 763 food parcels, and 11.1 metric tons of rice. The ICRC assistance also reached families affected by the floods in Rabea and Baaj districts.

Assisting health-care facilities

Health-care services in some rural and conflict-prone areas strive to meet the needs of the civilian population. The ICRC helps renovate premises and train staff. It provides limb-fitting and physical rehabilitation services to disabled people with a view to helping them reintegrate into the community.

Between March and May, the ICRC:

- Fitted 741 patients with prostheses and 3797 patients with orthoses at 10 ICRC-supported centres throughout Iraq;
- provided 16 doctors and 43 nurses with a course on strengthening emergency services in Najaf and Sulaimaniya. Since the beginning of the project, 705 health staff have been trained;
- supported occupational therapy projects in Al Rashad hospital, in Baghdad governorate, benefiting 190 patients;
- renovated Al-Zuhra primary health-care centre in Diyala governorate;
- renovated Al-Khadranayah primary health-care centre in Shirqat district, Salah Al-Din governorate;

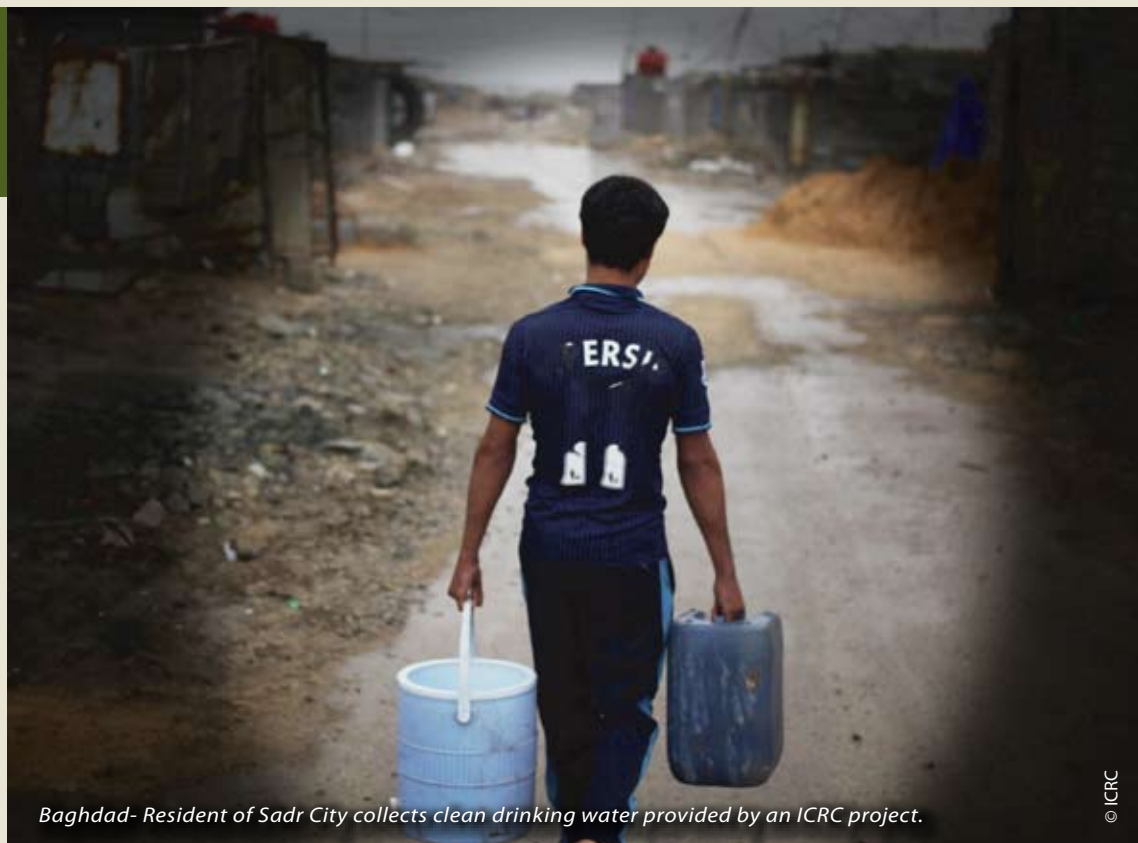


Ninawa- Talafar district- Distribution of relief items to flood affected families in Rabea sub-district

In 2010, the ICRC began providing on-site support for eight primary health-care centres in Diyala, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Babil and Diwaniya, focusing on improvements in the areas of hygiene, drug management, emergency services, mother-and-child care, and on such structural improvements as upgrades to water supply networks. Over 230,000 inhabitants, including internally displaced people (IDPs), now have better access to basic health care and emergency services.

Providing clean water and sanitation

Access to clean water remains a challenge in much of Iraq. ICRC engineers repair and upgrade water, electrical and sanitary facilities, especially in places where violence remains a concern and in rural areas, to improve the quality of services provided in communities and health-care facilities.



Baghdad- Resident of Sadr City collects clean drinking water provided by an ICRC project.

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Between March and May, these activities included:

- delivering daily water by truck in Al-Sadr City, Baghdad, to over 4840 displaced people every day
- delivering water by truck to Al-Zaidan primary health-care centre in Abu Ghraib district, Baghdad governorate;
- renovating Hay Tariq and Al-Urfali water complexes in Al-Sadr City serving some 100,000 people;
- laying sewage pipe in Al-Falahiyah village, in Al-Kut district, Wasit governorate, serving 7,500 people;
- installing a new compact water purification unit in Al-Nahrawan district, Baghdad governorate, serving about 240,000 people;
- restoring and extending the capacity of the water treatment plant in Dholo'ya village, in Balad district, Salah Al-Din governorate, serving some 32,000 people;
- supplying and installing systems for the treatment of saline water in the Himrin area serving about 3,400 people;
- upgrading Dhab'a boosting stations to improve water pressure in Al-Rutba district, Anbar governorate, serving about 37,000 people;

- installing 250 units of 1m³ water tanks in Al-Hawraa Village in Al-Kut district, Wasit governorate, benefiting 4,000 displaced persons;
- renovating Bait Hmood compact unit in Qal'at Salih district in Missan governorate, benefiting some 2,000 people;
- rehabilitating Graw village water supply in Kirkuk governorate, serving about 2,500 people;
- partially rehabilitating water treatment plant in Al-Kut district, Wasit governorate, benefiting about 6,000 people;
- rehabilitating sanitation blocks in al Rashad Psychiatric hospital in Baghdad;
- implementing Al-Qosh water projects in Ninawa governorate, benefiting about 45,000 people;
- rehabilitating the 7th PHCC in Al-Sadr City, Baghdad governorate;
- implementing Bakhtiari water supply project in Khanaqin district, serving about 6,000 people;
- installing Ba'shiqa boosting station pump in Ba'shiqa district, benefiting about 20,000 people;

The ICRC also completed the renovation of a sewage system in detention facility in Baghdad, thereby improving the living conditions of 400 detainees.

ICRC Mission 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 endeavours 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.

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