



150 years  
of humanitarian action

# COLOMBIA: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

ACTIVITIES 2013 AND OUTLOOK 2014  
International Committee of the Red Cross



ICRC

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### 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 war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It 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 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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Cover photo: Hernán Vanegas/El Colombiano



Viki Sánchez

## Editorial Colombia, as it was and as it will be

Colombia has made significant progress on the path to ending the internal armed conflict between guerrilla groups and the government, and the question millions of Colombians are asking today is not whether there will be peace, whether the half century of conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the government will ever end; the question now echoing through the forests, mountains, towns and villages of Colombia is whether peace will finally come in 2014 or whether they will have to wait until 2015. It is a bitter sweet question which raises a multitude of hopes and concerns.

There are long-nurtured hopes of a better life for today’s and tomorrow’s generations, a peaceful life without war and with dignity and opportunities, in which the Colombia characterized by innovation, investment, 5 per cent growth and just 9 per cent unemployment extends to the remotest villages and the poorest city slums.

There are also concerns that linger on, because the wait for the end of the conflict is not a time of peace but a time of war, as the conflict continues unabated and the disappearances, displacements, murders, threats and sexual assaults continue to mount up day by day. Official figures put this tragic inventory of victims at over six million since 1984.

Because hopes for peace are tempered by the reality of war, the ICRC continues to remind the parties to the conflict of their obligation to strictly comply with the principles and rules of international humanitarian law (IHL). It also urges them to consider establishing humanitarian agreements, which the ICRC can help to draft and implement. This would have an immediate impact on the living conditions of the civilian population, giving a sense of reality and imminence to the peace talks, which for many people are little more than vague and distant promises.

There are concerns because the peace agreement that is eventually made is sure to be just the end of the beginning. It will be followed by the beginning of the end, a long and complex process, as with any peace agreement anywhere in the world, to repair and reconcile a society fragmented and traumatized by decades of war. It will be crucial to ensure that all processes and agreements are inclusive and creative, establish mechanisms truly capable of bringing the conflict to an end

and adopt measures to provide material and moral reparation and guarantees of non-repetition. It will also be important for the international community to stand by Colombia and the Colombian people as they negotiate this difficult path. The ICRC is willing, at the request of the parties involved, to contribute to this process, as a neutral intermediary and expert in IHL with extensive experience in the implementation of peace agreements in other countries, by tracing missing persons, promoting reintegration, clearing areas contaminated by explosive devices and helping displaced persons return home.

There are concerns because a successful peace agreement with the guerrilla groups would not mean an end to the armed violence caused by other groups, the so-called criminal gangs whose activity has a humanitarian impact comparable to that of the armed conflict. The cruel paradox facing Colombia is that the most immediate consequence of a peace agreement with the FARC-EP and the ELN is likely to be an increase in the area of activity and acts of violence of such gangs. The inclusion in the State assistance system of displaced people driven from their homes by these groups was an important achievement in 2013, a long-awaited first step in ending the discrimination suffered by these victims. However, assistance is never the solution, and a comprehensive approach is required to put an end to the serious consequences of this type of armed violence and protect the achievements and commitments arising from the peace talks.

This report presents the Colombia in which millions of Colombians live, the Colombia in which the women and men of the ICRC work. It is not an easy place to live or work; it is a Colombia facing a multitude of challenges and inhabited by people struggling with courage and determination to pull through. We invite you to read these pages with consideration, humility and hope.

On paper, 2014 might seem to be just another year in which concerns outweigh hopes, but human emotions, made of sensitive stuff, defy consultancy reports, graphs and percentages. Adversity teaches us to measure happiness and sadness in moments, to adapt to what life brings as water to a recipient and to cling on to the hope of a better life however slight and remote it may seem. It is clear to all that 2014 will be a year of crucial importance for Colombia in many respects. It will be a year of transition towards something better, something that everyone is hoping for, but is also concerned about because it has yet to take shape.

Jordi Raich  
Head of the ICRC delegation in Colombia

# 2013: HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS

The hope of being able to turn the page and leave behind a conflict spanning five decades contrasted with the reality facing the victims of armed violence. The departments experiencing most difficulties were those in the south and west of the country and Antioquia and Norte de Santander.

## LACK OF BASIC SERVICES

"There used to be a health post here, but it's gone now. It's the same in the next village. If you get ill, you have to go to the town, and the only way to get there is by motorbike. If you haven't got a motorbike, it's difficult to get out of here. When a woman is due to give birth, she has to be sent to the town ten days before to make sure that she gets the attention she needs."

Arauca

## WEAPON CONTAMINATION

"When I stepped on the explosive device, I got right up and tried to walk, because I didn't feel any pain. I said to myself, 'Thank God, I'm alright'. But when I tried to take a step, I realized that my foot had been practically destroyed. It was a very traumatic experience."

Caquetá

## DISAPPEARANCE

"My daughter disappeared nine years ago, and my son three years ago. Both left me their small children, and I am bringing them up. You live with the uncertainty of not knowing what has happened to them, whether they are dead or alive, and imagining that they could turn up at any time. Sometimes you lose hope, and at other times your hopes are raised by all the things you hear."

Guaviare



El Colombiano



Christoph von Toegenburg/ICRC



Carlos Rios/ICRC

## VIOLENCE IN URBAN AREAS

"I came to the city fleeing from the violence in another part of the country in the south. My husband died, and I came here with my three small children. I live in a neighbourhood with a very sad history, made worse by what has been happening recently. One of my sons has been threatened because he would rather study than join one of those gangs we have in the neighbourhood. I am frightened to let him go out. Up until recently, he couldn't go out to school."

Medellín

## DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIAN PROPERTY

"We had to sleep outside the house, because it was very dangerous at night on account of the raids. One night, a device fell nearby and exploded. The next day when we returned to the house, we saw that it had been destroyed. I lived there with my step father, my mother and two brothers. My stepfather had devoted his life's work to the house. I return here every day, come rain or shine, to see my house and look after what is left."

Norte de Santander

## DISPLACEMENT

"All we had to eat was cassava paste. What nutrition does cassava have? It's just starch, with no vitamins or anything. We would sit down to eat it with panela (sugar cane) water. Sometimes, I would go to the butcher shops to see if they would give me a bone. That was how I brought up my children, with hand-me-down clothes and whatever food we were given, but they have survived, thank God, and here we are."

Putumayo



ON VIDEO

2013: A year of supporting victims

## 2013: Departments where the ICRC registered the highest number of humanitarian problems



## 2013: Places where the ICRC concentrated its humanitarian action



Cartographic source:  
Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi

## 2013: ICRC ACTION

In addition to assisting victims in emergency situations, the ICRC also focused efforts on preventing the humanitarian consequences of armed violence and offering lasting solutions.

### DISPLACED PERSONS AND OTHER VICTIMS

**26,000** people received assistance  
**6,300** victims filed applications for State assistance with the support of the ICRC

### INCOME-GENERATING ACTIVITIES

**12,000** beneficiaries of income-generating agricultural projects  
**4,500** beneficiaries of training, employment and micro-finance schemes  
**1,600** people received food or cash in exchange for work

### REPAIRING CIVILIAN PROPERTY

**500** people received assistance in the form of construction materials



Many women in the Tumaco port area bringing their children up on their own deal with the problem of high unemployment by earning a living collecting shellfish and peeling shrimps. However, in order to sell these products to companies, they need the right tools. The ICRC provided 168 of them with support to acquire them.

### WEAPON CONTAMINATION

**14,000** beneficiaries of rehabilitation centres  
**12,000** people trained in accident prevention

### ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

**5** humanitarian convoys delivering medical supplies  
**2,200** sick and injured persons treated  
**6,900** people seen at mobile clinics

### DETENTION

**97,000** detainees visited  
**1,000** family visits supported  
**64** detention facilities visited



At nightfall, the residents of a rural area in Arauca would gather at a community centre to enjoy the cocoa cinema, a community cinema showing documentaries on seeds, crop management practices and food safety. This idea, which complemented a cocoa growing initiative implemented by the ICRC, is being extended to other areas.

### WATER AND SANITATION

**20,500** beneficiaries

### PROTECTING THE POPULATION

**609** people moved to safer places  
**61** families of missing persons supported in their search  
**83** separated families re-established contact

### PEOPLE HELD BY ARMED GROUPS

**25** released in humanitarian operations



When Juliana, a little girl from southern Cauca, was just two years old, a stray bullet destroyed her foot and changed her life forever. From the very next day and for the following five years, the ICRC helped her with transport, accommodation and medical expenses. Although she is still in rehabilitation, Juliana can now ride a bike.

## LIVING IN THE MIDST OF ARMED VIOLENCE

### Situation of the population

In their everyday lives, thousands of Colombians suffer the consequences of the fighting which often makes no distinction between armed actors and the civilian population. Over 235,000 people in remote rural areas and also in some urban areas received assistance from the ICRC.



Mauricio Morales/El País

Twenty-five urban and rural areas, such as this place in Chocó, were particularly hard hit by the violence in 2013. The ICRC prioritized these communities, providing comprehensive assistance to meet the needs of victims. For example, in areas where emergency aid was provided for displaced persons, the ICRC also installed water and sanitation systems and led income-generating projects. In its ongoing dialogue with weapon bearers, it emphasized the importance of respecting the civilian population.



Juan Arredondo/Getty/ICRC



Juan Arredondo/Getty/ICRC

## MURDER AND THREATS

The lives of those not taking part in the armed conflict must be respected at all times. The ICRC helped over 600 people to move to a safer place, so that they could carry on with their lives far from the threats and fear.

Being caught in crossfire or killed on suspicion of helping the other side are serious problems that continue to threaten the civilian population. In 2013, many people who had nothing to do with the fighting between the parties to the conflict or other armed actors suffered attacks on their life, integrity and dignity.

In the areas most seriously affected by the armed violence, the ICRC documented 56 cases of civilians being killed and assisted 609 people who had been threatened. Such murders and threats are violations of IHL and international human rights law (IHRL). These figures refer only to cases in which the ICRC was able to speak directly to the victims or their families, provided humanitarian assistance and raised their cases with the alleged perpetrators, with a view to influencing their behaviour.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

**Rule 1.** The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks must not be directed against civilians.

**Rule 2.** Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

The ICRC provides humanitarian assistance to civilians who have been subjected to threats or attacks on their lives, including their fare to travel to a safer part of the country and payment of funeral costs when a loved one has died. It also provides victims with guidance on how to claim State assistance. In its dialogue with the parties to the conflict and other armed actors, the ICRC reminds them of their obligation to respect IHL and IHRL.

#### Moving people to a safer place

In 2013, 609 people who were in danger after receiving death threats were given financial assistance and support to move to a safer part of the country.

#### Payment of funeral costs

The ICRC provides financial support to the families of people killed in connection with the armed conflict and other situations of armed violence, so that they can pay the funeral expenses or the cost of transporting the remains. In 2013, 107 families received such assistance.

## DISPLACEMENT

Leaving everything behind to flee the violence and protect themselves was the option faced by communities in the departments of Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Putumayo and Norte de Santander. Restrictions on movement and displacement within urban areas are another face of the same problem.

Displacement is not something that just happens. It is the result of fear and threats against communities in areas affected by the conflict and armed violence. Sometimes, people have no choice but to flee. It is a humanitarian tragedy of proportions rarely seen: as at 21 January 2014, almost 5.4 million Colombians were officially registered as internally displaced persons with the integrated victim assistance and reparation unit (UARIV). In 2013, many were victims of intra-urban displacement, forced to seek refuge in another part of the city where they live. Such people face the risk of losing their homes, their jobs and ties with their family and community.

The ICRC was concerned about the difficult situation caused by massive displacements (involving more than 50 people) in the departments of Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Nariño and Norte de Santander. Although the ICRC provided assistance in 18 cases in 2013 compared to 43 in 2012, this does not mean that there were fewer displacements. The lower figure is due to the fact that most of the emergencies of this kind were dealt with directly by the relevant authorities. Individual displacements occurred mainly in Cauca, Caquetá, Guaviare, Nariño, Putumayo and Valle. In the case of both individual and mass displacement, the places most seriously affected were the same as in 2012.

People being driven from their homes was not the only problem, as the ICRC was able to observe in communities in southern Bolívar, Bajo Cauca Antioqueño and Chocó, among others. In some cases, restrictions imposed by armed actors on people's movements bar access to their means of livelihood. Problems such as food shortages, the lack of medical supplies and paralysed local economies also have serious humanitarian consequences for the population.

### Tip of the iceberg

In 2013, displacement was caused by other humanitarian consequences of the conflict and armed violence, including murders, death threats, sexual violence, weapon contamination, theft and threats of forced recruitment.



Abraham Doblado/ICRC

## The ICRC's humanitarian response

Most of the cases of massive displacement occurring in 2013 in Colombia were dealt with by official institutions, and this contributed to strengthening their emergency response capacity. The ICRC assisted victims directly, although always in coordination with the authorities, in areas that could not be reached by anyone else on account of the security situation. The organization also continued to assist people displaced individually. In total, 26,080 people received assistance.

### Emergency assistance

When the authorities were unable to reach places where massive or individual displacements were occurring or entire communities were being subjected to movement restrictions, the ICRC carried out large-scale assistance operations. With the support of the Colombian Red Cross Society (CRC), the ICRC delivered food supplies, personal hygiene products and essential household items to almost 18,000 people in 18 locations.

### Individual displacements

The ICRC provided assistance in the form of cash to buy food and personal hygiene products to some 8,400 people who had fled from their homes on their own or with their families.

### Shelters

When communities are displaced, they usually meet up at a particular place where they take refuge. Sometimes they lack even the most basic living facilities. The ICRC built and fitted out shelters to accommodate around 5,800 people at 22 different sites, ensuring access to water, basic sanitation and hygiene.

### Support for institutional strengthening

Over 25,000 people who had been unable to register as victims with Ministry of Public Affairs offices did so at drives supported by the ICRC in five departments. People must file a statement for registration before their claim for State assistance and reparation can be considered. The ICRC donated computer equipment in nine departments, so that statements could be filed online.

### Income-generating activities in urban areas

Another way of contributing to improving the precarious situation of displaced people is to help them earn a living. In collaboration with the Colombian Red Cross Society, the ICRC helped more than 3,800 displaced persons in 11 cities by providing training and facilitating access to temporary employment through partnerships with private enterprises. Although it was not the main objective of the initiative, 30 per cent of the beneficiaries were taken on as permanent employees.

### Economic security in rural areas

With a view to preventing displacement and improving conditions in communities exposed to violence, the ICRC supported 28 income-generating initiatives benefitting 12,000 people, which included growing crops such as cocoa and raising livestock. The activities were identified in a participatory manner with the communities, taking into account their farming background and their knowledge, experience and environment (see story on page 18). A further 1,600 inhabitants in Cauca and Norte de Santander worked in exchange for food or cash on community projects to build rural water supply systems, construct community centres and improve land. Such initiatives helped communities by strengthening their economy and also improving their organizational capacities.



### Awá: the resistance of an indigenous village

After being displaced and dispersed by the violence, the indigenous people of the Awá community from the Magüí reservation in Nariño decided to face up to the problem and re-establish their culture. They returned to their mountains in spite of the murders, fighting, bombings, child recruitment and accidents caused by explosive devices that continue to pose a threat to them. The past few years have not been easy; every now and again they have to flee to shelters for protection.

Some of the best land is strewn with hidden explosive devices and explosive remnants of war. It is impossible to farm these lands and dangerous to hunt on them. The alternative is to raise livestock in pens. "If you keep your animals in pens, you don't need to go up into the mountains so much, which is dangerous," explained one woman. "It also means that you can take the animals with you if you have to flee suddenly. That way, you can survive at least a few weeks."

Over two days in November, thousands of hens, fish and guinea pigs, along with food supplies and materials to make pens and ponds, arrived in Magüí to alleviate the situation of 371 families. ICRC and Colombian Red Cross Society personnel delivered these items after making six visits over the course of the year to provide technical assistance on how to breed and raise the livestock. When this assistance was delivered, one of the Council of Elders leaders stressed how important it was to them: "This is the seed we need to repair the damage, restore our economy and continue to stand our ground in our own territory."

Edgar Alfonso/ICRC



Faruk Samán-González/ICRC

### When the man of the house is seven years old

They all began to gather in one corner of the neighbourhood where they had been told to wait to receive the assistance that the ICRC, in cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross Society, had been handing out for two days to the 14,000 inhabitants of Puerto Claver, a mining town 12 hours from Medellín, affected by food shortages and displacement caused by the armed conflict. The sun was blazing down, but nobody had any intention of moving; the food shortages had been going on for a month.

When the trucks and other vehicles loaded with food supplies arrived in the afternoon on 22 November 2013, an ICRC worker began to call out people's names. When they called Mariela, a seven-year-old boy came forward. He was Stevenson, one of her children. "My mum is not well, and I am the man of the house," he said. The surprise of the onlookers grew when he was asked who was going to help him carry the heavy load and he replied: "My little brother. He's strong. Can't you see how sturdy he is?"

The inhabitants of Puerto Claver have survived by searching for nuggets of gold in the streams or in the ground. The armed conflict has led to such a dire economic situation that nothing is bought or sold in the town anymore. The aid provided by the ICRC lasted almost a month, but it will take much longer for this town to regain its prosperity and vitality.

### From displacement victim to hotel employee

"Anyone in this situation needs a helping hand". This is how a young displaced man begins his story of how he trailed around four departments before settling in Cali. "They called me from the Red Cross to ask if I was interested in receiving training to get a new job," he said. "I used to work in construction, but it was poorly paid and I was out of work for a long time."

After receiving training for hotel work, he went to an interview for a temporary job at a five-star hotel, which was part of the ICRC's employability programme. They took him on and after two months received the good news that they were going to give him a permanent contract.

"Companies can help a lot of people. We have a responsibility to these people who need an opportunity. I intend to extend this project to other cities where we are building more hotels," commented the hotel manager.

For this man and another 17 employees taken on by the hotel through the ICRC programme, this work opportunity has enabled them to give their children an education and to have better working hours, health insurance and decent living conditions. "We don't need people to give us things for free; we just want an opportunity," he explained.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

**Rule 131.** *In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.*

**Rule 132.** *Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety to their homes or places of habitual residence as soon as the reasons for their displacement cease to exist.*



### ON VIDEO

**A job opportunity helped Jesús turn his life around**



Edgar Alfonso/ICRC

## DISAPPEARANCE

An ICRC evaluation has given voice to the special and urgent needs of the families of missing persons, with a view to finding ways of alleviating the desperate situation of those who are tortured by uncertainty as they search for their loved ones.

Year after year, thousands of Colombian families suffer the anguish of searching for a missing loved one and coping with the difficulties caused by the loss of a family member, in many cases, the family's main breadwinner. The torment of not knowing the fate of a missing family member is compounded by the seeming inability of the institutions responsible to understand the needs of these families.

Answers are not forthcoming, and the authorities struggle to deal with the many requests, as their workload increases year after year. People continued to disappear in 2013. Almost 7,500 people were officially reported missing in the course of the year, and a total of around 67,000 people remained missing at the end of December (see graph).

In view of this enormous humanitarian challenge that Colombia will have to address in the years ahead, in mid-2013, the ICRC conducted an in-depth evaluation of the needs of families with one or more missing family members (see page 22). The findings confirmed that their most pressing need was "to know what has happened to my loved one and to have him back dead or alive," as one family member put it during the working sessions with the ICRC. They also need to know that they are not alone and that their material and psychosocial needs will be covered.

### IN 2013, 7,464 PEOPLE WERE REPORTED TO HAVE GONE MISSING IN THE COURSE OF THE YEAR



Number of people who disappeared in the course of the year



Number of people still missing at the end of the year

Source: SIRDEC (online information database used to identify missing persons and human remains), National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science, Colombia, as at 15 January 2014.

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

The ICRC's response to the problem of disappearances extends to all the parties involved, including the alleged perpetrators and the government institutions responsible for missing persons. It also supports the families of missing persons. The aim of its work is to prevent the disappearance of people and human remains by promoting respect for persons protected under humanitarian rules and to support efforts to trace missing persons and strengthen the response of government institutions.

### Documenting cases

The ICRC's access to areas affected by conflict and other forms of violence enabled its delegates to document 157 cases of missing persons, 44 of which involved children and 14 women. In the course of its confidential dialogue with weapon bearers, the organization broached the subject of the cases of 128 people, to inquire about their fate, with those allegedly responsible for their disappearance.

### Supporting families in their search

The ICRC guided 61 families through the process of tracing their missing loved ones or recovering, identifying and collecting their remains. In some cases, it also provided financial support. Twenty-four of these missing persons were found alive, and the remains of another nine were returned to their families. A further 57 families of missing persons participated in a process led by the Colombian Red Cross Society in Buenaventura to determine their needs, provide guidance for them and strengthen mutual support to help alleviate their grief.

### Restoring family links

ICRC teams, in collaboration with the Colombian Red Cross Society, enabled 83 people who had been separated from their families by the conflict or armed violence to re-establish contact with their loved ones; 48 of them were minors.

### Recovering human remains

ICRC experts recovered the human remains of 12 people killed in connection with the armed conflict. Most were victims buried in places to which the legal authorities did not have access.



Santiago Giraldo Vargas/ICRC

### Supporting government institutions

A total of 463 people, mainly officials from the institutions that deal with missing persons, took part in seminars and workshops held by the ICRC in several regions on subjects such as the legal framework and procedures applicable in missing person cases, the attentive treatment of family members and good practices for the identification of people and remains. The construction of a morgue and vaults for human remains in Satinga (Nariño) will facilitate efforts to identify bodies buried in the local cemetery.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

**Rule 115.** The dead must be disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves respected and properly maintained.

**Rule 116.** With a view to the identification of the dead, each party to the conflict must record all available information prior to disposal and mark the location of the graves.

**Rule 117.** Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate.

## 2014, a year to hear what families need

Around 230 people – 80 per cent of them relatives of missing persons – talked to ICRC experts in seven areas of the country in the course of 2013. The aim was to make a thorough assessment of the needs of the families of missing persons. The findings will be compiled in a report to be published in the second half of 2014 and used to guide the institutional response to this problem.

The preliminary findings of the ICRC's assessment indicate that families require both material and psychosocial support. Their first concern is to know what has happened to their loved ones, followed by attentive treatment from the officials dealing with their requests and employment and educational opportunities to help them overcome the precarious situation they face as a result of the loss of a family member.

The ICRC will also launch a public campaign with the involvement of twelve well-known urban artists (see photos), inviting Colombians to reflect on the special and urgent needs of the families of missing persons. People in all walks of life can, in their own way, help to ease the grief of the families of missing persons. Taking the time to think about it is the first step.



**ON VIDEO**  
Two women search for their missing loved one



**ON VIDEO**  
The song "Missing"

### RIGHT TO KNOW

*"I am afraid to know what has happened, but I want closure, because confronting your weaknesses makes you stronger. He may still be alive and have been recruited or he may be dead; I just want to know the truth before I die. Before, I wanted to die; I felt that I was dying and couldn't carry on. But now, I don't want to. I have an interest in my life and I look after myself. I didn't think that it would be possible to love again, but it is."*



### SOLIDARITY

*"It is very important for us to know that our pain and suffering matters to others, that there are people listening to us and doing what they can to help us."*



### GETTING ANSWERS

*"It is not easy to find information about what we should do, and the big question we ask is: Where should we go? The emotional support we need isn't there. We are left to suffer the blows of society."*



### TRACING

*"What I want most in the world is for the remains of my daughter to be returned to me in whatever way, in whatever state. That is all I want; I don't want to take reprisals against anyone."*



### SUPPORT

*"I asked the doctor if she could get me some food supplies, because I didn't have a job. She said that I had to be a displaced person. I said that I wasn't, but that one of my family members was missing and I needed help, but she said 'No, you have to be a displaced person.'"*



Eduardo Anzelli/Folha de Sao Paulo

## WEAPON CONTAMINATION

The dangers of improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel mines will persist in Colombia for many years to come. The main challenges are helping victims and preventing further accidents.

As has been the case in other countries emerging from an armed conflict, weapon contamination will be one of the main problems Colombia will have to deal with when the conflict finally comes to an end. Improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel mines remain a danger to the population for decades after the armed conflict is over.

The accidents that occur on land returned to victims of the conflict and in areas with a large floating population highlight the extent of the challenge ahead and have prompted the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society to step up their accident prevention efforts. It has also been necessary to extend prevention activities to urban areas, where people are exposed to the dangers of small and light weapons and explosive devices. In addition to the physical injuries caused by accidents, weapon contamination also has other humanitarian consequences. Communities either move away from contaminated areas or remain hemmed in, afraid to move outside certain boundaries. The problem causes children to drop out of school, hinders access to health care services and prevents farmers from tending their crops, reducing their income.

**24,000 people**  
 – half of them in 2013 – have benefited from training provided by the ICRC over the past six years, aimed at preventing accidents caused by weapon contamination.



Carlos Mario Vélez / ICRC

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

The ICRC works to prevent accidents caused by weapon contamination and improve the care received by victims. This involves teaching school children and teachers how to keep safe when there is shooting (see photo above) and showing farmers how to detect dangers on their farmland. The many activities carried out to provide solutions include constructing household rainwater harvesting systems and supplying poultry, so that people do not have to move around contaminated areas. When accidents do happen, the ICRC provides support in the form of guidance and financial aid for the victims and training for the specialists who treat them.

#### Risk reduction

In the most severely contaminated zones, in both rural and urban areas, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society taught around 12,000 people, 4,000 more than in 2012, to identify dangerous situations and reduce the risk of accidents occurring. A significant proportion of the income-generating and basic infrastructure initiatives also sought to prevent accidents and address the difficulties caused by weapon contamination.

#### Supporting specialists and institutions

In addition to supporting victims and the centres that treat them, the ICRC also trained 112 orthopaedic technicians, physiotherapists and physiatrists from Colombia and other Latin American countries to improve the standard of care. It also provided technical support to the Presidential programme for comprehensive action against anti-personnel

landmines (PAICMA) to strengthen its response and services for victims and to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection for the implementation of resolution 1319 on good practices in the delivery of physical rehabilitation services.

#### Supporting victims

The ICRC paid the funeral costs of 13 weapon contamination victims. It also advised 400 survivors about getting medical attention and claiming financial compensation from the government, guiding them through the process.

#### Rehabilitation centres

Over 14,000 patients, including weapon contamination victims, received care at four physical rehabilitation centres sponsored by the ICRC. Two of these centres, located in Cali and Cúcuta, received support to improve the quality of their services.

## Holmes: the courage to start from scratch

In 2010, the life of Holmes Fabián Ordoñez and his family in San Vicente del Caguán (Caquetá) took an unexpected turn. The enthusiasm of this 17 year old boy for his work with the community and his zest for life were dealt a blow when an explosive device blew up and destroyed his right foot.

Because of the accident, his family had to leave the rural area where they had always lived. "We had to move and adapt to a new way of life in a very different world," explained Holmes.

Since the day of the accident, Holmes has been receiving support from the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society. He has shown great determination in the face of adversity; a few months ago, he started studying financial administration. He says that it has not been easy, but time and perseverance heal both physical and psychological wounds.



Fotos: Andrés Cardona/ICRC

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### **ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law**

**Rule 70.** *The use of means and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering is prohibited.*



#### **ON VIDEO**

**The bravery of Holmes,  
victim of an explosive device**

*"The ICRC has meant everything; it was the first institution that approached me to give me advice. Its support has been very important; thanks to the ICRC, I can walk again."*

Holmes Fabián Ordoñez,  
weapon contamination victim





Eduardo Anizelli/Folha de São Paulo

## DESTRUCTION AND OCCUPATION OF CIVILIAN PROPERTY

The civilian population and its property must be respected at all times by the parties to the conflict and other armed actors. In 2013, the ICRC learned of 100 cases in which this basic rule was not observed.

One of the principles of IHL is the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants and also between civilian objects and military objects. The civilian population must never be attacked, and its property must not be occupied, looted or destroyed.

In 2013, the ICRC documented 100 cases in which this precaution was not taken into account. There were cases of houses being destroyed in attacks on facilities considered to be military targets and damage to health posts and schools occupied by one of the parties. Although this figure was higher in 2012, when 193 such incidents were recorded, the number of cases documented in 2013 is still alarmingly high.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### *ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law*

**Rule 10.** *Civilian objects are protected against attack, unless and for such time as they are military objectives.*

**Norma 22.** *The parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks.*

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

In 2013, the ICRC assisted people who had lost their homes and other property as a result of explosions or attacks and urged armed actors to stop such practices.

#### Repairing homes

The ICRC supplied 500 people with construction materials to repair their homes in the departments of Caquetá, Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo and Valle.

#### Dialogue

Respect for civilian property is one of the subjects that ICRC personnel discuss with parties to the conflict and other armed actors in the course of their confidential dialogue with them. Specific cases are raised with the alleged perpetrators, with a view to persuading them not to commit acts of this kind in the future.



### Las Mercedes: part ghost town

A wedding cake bride and groom, tucked away in a cupboard next to some old shoes that nobody has moved in two years, are the only residents still "living" in this house. Frequent armed attacks left the house half in ruins, and the occupants had to move across town to a safer place. Along with another ten or so families, they return to the other side of town to look after what they have left behind there. When night falls, they leave again, afraid that they might get caught up in more trouble. And so these trips back and forth continue day after day in Las Mercedes, a village with 2,110 inhabitants in the region of Catatumbo.

Laura Gómez/ICRC



Javier Suárez

## LACK OF BASIC SERVICES

In Colombia, whole communities are left to their own devices, without a piped water supply or properly functioning health posts and schools. In 2013, the ICRC stepped up assistance to the areas in greatest need, which tend to be those most severely affected by the violence.

### Access to health care: a decade-long wait for the arrival of a doctor

In the course of its work over the year, the ICRC noted that the lack of access to health care continued to be a serious problem for thousands of Colombians living in areas affected by the conflict and armed violence. It can take hours to get an injured or sick person to health facilities, and that distance can mean the difference between life and death. Sometimes, getting to a doctor or nurse is not enough, because they do not have the medicines or equipment required to treat people.



#### ON VIDEO

Doctors and nurses are trained to treat war wounds

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

Ensuring access to health care remained a priority for the ICRC in 2013. Working in partnership with the Colombian Red Cross Society, the ICRC improved the health situation of almost one million people, either by transporting the injured and sick or by supporting medical personnel working in areas affected by the conflict and armed violence.

### Treating the injured and sick

Fifty-three health facilities, which treated some 960,000 patients, received medical supplies and equipment to treat weapon-wounded patients. Almost 2,200 injured and sick people received medical attention thanks to guidance and financial support provided by the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society, around one thousand more than the previous year; 769 of them received support in the form of cash to pay for travel fares, accommodation, food and medicines while they were receiving treatment.

### Mobile health units

The ICRC worked to ensure safe access by State health care personnel to remote areas where armed groups were operating and which had not been visited by a doctor for years. Over 6,900 people benefitted from the services provided by the mobile health units. A particularly significant example was the visit to El Dorado in southern Bolívar (see photographic report on pages 32 and 33).

### Training

In order to improve the response to medical emergencies in the areas most seriously affected by the violence, training was provided for around 2,100 people, including doctors and nurses who treat weapon-wounded people in conflict areas and members of the community who provide first aid. Under an agreement with the ICRC, Cauca University and the Military University created Chairs of War Surgery.

Daniel Littlejohn-Carrillo/ICRC



*"When we get ill, we have to go to the town and it's very expensive. I really appreciate the training, because I have to deal with my family's health problems myself whenever anything is wrong with them."*

Inhabitant of Arauquita, Arauca.

## The village tavern turned into a hospital

For nine days in September, the ICRC and State health care personnel carried out over 1,600 medical services and consultations in the village of El Dorado in southern Bolívar. Isolated by the armed conflict and poor roads, this community had been waiting five years to receive health care services. Some of the villagers had not seen a doctor in ten years.



Donaldo Zuluaga/El Colombiano

It took two days on the road from Bucaramanga. When the villagers saw that the convoy was having difficulty negotiating the rough dirt tracks, they came to help. "When we got here, we found that part of the population was suffering from malaria," said Gerardo Moloeznik, ICRC delegate for the area.



Donaldo Zuluaga/El Colombiano

An improvised health post was set up in the village tavern. People came from twelve rural communities, walking for days on end to get there.



Laura Gómez/ICRC

There were so many patients that some had to wait until the next day to be seen.



Donaldo Zuluaga/El Colombiano

In spite of interruptions in the consultations when the portable equipment overheated, the dentist saw 224 people.



Donaldo Zuluaga/El Colombiano

In the vaccination section, a girl receives a dose of the five-in-one vaccine.



Hernán Vanegas/El Colombiano

*“When we came to live in this village, the main thing was to survive however we could and build up a little farm on our own plot of land. We had nowhere to get water, dump our rubbish or relieve ourselves.”*

Displaced woman  
Tierralta, Córdoba.

## Water, sanitation and habitat: reaching the forgotten areas of Colombia

In many communities suffering the devastation of armed violence in both remote rural areas and the neighbourhoods of urban centres, the lack of basic services, such as water, sanitation, education and health care is a serious concern. In spite of government efforts, infrastructure and public services still do not reach the thousands of Colombians most in need. When they do, coverage is limited owing to the presence of armed actors, which restricts access to these services, the lack of resources available to local authorities and the stigma experienced by some communities.

It is a circle that is difficult to break. The isolation of these communities because of the violence and the lack of government response means that there is little awareness about their needs. These deficiencies therefore remain invisible, and some of those most in need continue to be overlooked in the policies and plans that are formulated.

### The ICRC’s humanitarian response

The ICRC’s water and habitat programme alleviated the hardships endured by some 20,500 people in 50 communities, almost 5,400 more people than the previous year. The organization constructed or improved community infrastructure in the areas most seriously affected by the conflict and armed violence in 2013, including Cauca, Catatumbo and Chocó.

#### Infrastructure

In order to address the serious problem of the lack of community infrastructure, a further 821 people benefitted from new or renovated buildings, including health posts, community centres, rice mills, grinders, school canteens, community halls, school hostels and even a morgue in the municipality of Satinga, Nariño.

#### Displaced persons

The ICRC built and fitted out shelters for around 4,000 displaced people in 15 different parts of the country, ensuring their access to water and basic sanitation and hygiene.

#### Access to water

Of these beneficiaries, 15,675 gained access to basic services, thanks to initiatives to construct water supply systems, including water pipelines and wells, install sanitation facilities and carry out activities to promote hygiene with the support of the Colombian Red Cross Society.

The largest project completed in 2013, a water and sanitation initiative mainly led by women, benefited around 10,000 people in Tierralta (Córdoba).



Oscar Iván Ordóñez/ICRC

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

This is one of the most serious humanitarian consequences of the conflict and armed violence and the one most often shrouded in silence. Victims of this violation of IHL often face stigma and discrimination.

Violating a person’s sexual integrity is one of the most serious transgressions that continues to be committed in the conflict and in other situations of violence. However, under-reporting means that this problem is virtually invisible, and this limits the response that institutions can provide to help victims.

Fear of reprisals or feelings of shame often prevent victims from seeking help. It is crucial, however, that they are seen within 72 hours of the incident in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies, in the case of women, and sexually transmitted diseases, in all cases.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

**ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law**

**Rule 93.** Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited.

### The ICRC’s humanitarian response

In 2013, the ICRC provided medical, psychological and financial support and guidance on access to State assistance to a total of 147 victims of sexual violence. Sixty-one of the victims of incidents that occurred in 2013 received medical attention and psychological care under an agreement with the organization Profamilia. Follow-up care was provided to 24 people who had been victims of sexual violence in previous years, with a view to monitoring their health situation, and a further 62 received guidance on getting State assistance.



### ON VIDEO

**A victim of sexual violence suffers in silence**



Boris Heger/ICRC

## HEALTH CARE IN DANGER

Any interruption in health care services puts the lives of many people in danger. Incidents restricting access to health care became more frequent in the context of the armed conflict and other situations of violence.

There was an alarming increase in threats and attacks against the medical services (medical personnel, facilities and transport) in 2013. The ICRC documented a total of 255 incidents that obstructed health care activities. The most seriously affected departments were Antioquia, Cauca, Caquetá, Chocó, Nariño and Norte de Santander. In 2012, 88 cases had been recorded.

This increase was largely due to the action of armed actors and road blocks in a dozen or so departments over a period of seven months (see next page). The most frequent type of incidents were threats against health care personnel, the stopping of medical vehicles, the theft of medical supplies and physical attacks.

Regardless of the cause or context of such constraints, for the ICRC, the important thing is to ensure that access to health care is respected at all times and in all places. It is a matter of life and death.

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

In response to the increase in attacks and road blocks, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society – at the request of the authorities – carried out humanitarian operations in various areas. They also carried out preventive activities, such as training medical personnel and marking facilities with the emblem of the medical services.

### Providing support in emergencies

Five humanitarian convoys carrying medical supplies responded to emergencies in Cundinamarca, Boyacá and Nariño during the farmers' strike. At this and other demonstrations, the ICRC engaged in dialogue with the demonstrators and delivered aid to relevant institutions to facilitate the population's access to health care services.

### Marking buildings

The emblem of the medical services helps to protect civilian medical facilities and vehicles. One hundred medical facilities, serving over a million people, were marked with the emblem.

### Training

Through the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society, over 5,000 health care workers, together with a number of legal advisers, were briefed on rights, duties and protective measures in situations of conflict and violence.

### Supporting working groups

The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society also participated in eight department working groups to coordinate medical services.



Enrique Contreras/ICRC

*"They placed an explosive device right in front of the health post. At the time, I was there with another auxiliary nurse, the clerk and the head nurse. We had to close the health post without notice and flee for our lives."*

Account given by a health care worker in a conflict area.

## WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

### Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions

#### Article 10. General protection of medical duties

*Under no circumstances shall any person be punished for having carried out medical activities compatible with medical ethics, regardless of the person benefiting therefrom. (...)*

#### Article 11. Protection of medical units and transports

1. *Medical units and transports shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack. (...)*



**LA MISIÓN MÉDICA SALVA VIDAS, PODRÍA SER LA TUYA. ¡RESPÉTALA! ES UNA CUESTIÓN DE VIDA O MUERTE**

**THE MEDICAL SERVICES SAVE LIVES, IT COULD BE YOURS. ¡RESPECT THEM! IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH**

## A year of intense social protests

From February to September, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society mobilized their teams in the field to respond to this humanitarian crisis.

**25 FEBRUARY**

Coffee producers and carriers went on strike in 13 of Colombia's departments.

**28 FEBRUARY**



A shortage of oxygen put the lives of over 100 patients in danger in Popayán. ICRC personnel accompanied a lorry carrying oxygen supplies to the city.

**5 MARCH**



"In order to reduce the humanitarian impact of social protests of this kind, it must be ensured that everyone has access to health care services." The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society made their first public appeal calling for respect for the medical services.

**8 MARCH**

The government and the demonstrators reached an agreement that brought the strike to an end.

**10 JUNE**

The longest strike of the year began in Catatumbo. The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society provided support to the Tibú and Ocaña hospitals in the form of medical supplies and backup personnel. They also donated first aid kits to a health post for the demonstrators.

**17 JULY**

Artisanal miners began a strike, with Bajo Cauca Antioqueño and Chocó as the epicentre. The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society had already delivered supplies to hospitals as a precautionary measure.

**31 JULY**

LA MISIÓN MÉDICA SALVA VIDAS, PODRÍA SER LA TUYA, ¡RESPÉTALA! ES UNA CUESTIÓN DE VIDA O MUERTE

THE MEDICAL SERVICES SAVE LIVES; IT COULD BE YOURS. RESPECT THEM. IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society launched a campaign to promote respect for the medical services, as part of the worldwide initiative Health Care in Danger. It included an animated television commercial.

**3 AUGUST**

The 53 days of protests in Catatumbo ended with four dead and around a hundred injured.

**19 AUGUST**

The fourth and largest social mobilization of the year began: the farmers' strike. The media reported that up to 200,000 people took part in the demonstrations and more than 30 roads were blocked.

**24 AUGUST**

"Hospital shortages are reaching alarming levels. A number of hospitals are on the verge of running out of supplies." Jordi Raich, Head of the ICRC delegation.

**25 AUGUST**



A humanitarian convoy formed by nine trucks with oxygen and medical supplies, two ambulances and six ICRC and CRC vehicles left Bogotá (location 1) for Tunja (2), Duitama (3) and Sogamoso (4) in Boyacá.

**28 AUGUST**



A further four convoys brought assistance to places in the south-western part of the country: from Pasto to Túquerres (1), Tumaco (2) and Ipiales (3) and from Cali to Pasto (4).

**31 AUGUST**

An agreement was reached bringing the miners' strike to an end, after 47 days of protests.

**12 SEPTEMBER**

The farmers' strike ended. In the course of the protests, there were 101 cases of threats and attacks against the medical services, 852 people injured and 15 killed.





## VIOLENCE IN URBAN AREAS

Like people in rural areas, urban dwellers also suffer the consequences of the conflict and armed violence. Being confined to their neighbourhood, hindering access to health care and education, and getting caught in crossfire are part of the reality of everyday life for people living in cities.

In the cities and main towns, there are pressing humanitarian problems. Displacement within urban areas owing to threats and violence has become a scourge of urban life. The families of missing persons continue to be tortured by uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. Invisible boundaries make inhabitants outsiders in their own neighbourhoods. In schools, teachers and students are caught in the crossfire between armed gangs.

In cities such as Medellín, Buenaventura and Tumaco, where the level of armed violence has led to severe humanitarian consequences, the ICRC still faces challenges in the dialogue that it maintains with weapon bearers to urge them to respect humanitarian rules and principles.

In 2013, the ICRC documented 207 alleged violations of IHL and IHRL and other transgressions against the population in 39 urban centres in 14 departments, including the three cities mentioned above and other municipalities where urban violence is not necessarily a systematic phenomenon.

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

#### Improving living conditions and financial security

In 12 cities and other urban centres, 3,840 people affected by displacement benefited from ICRC initiatives providing training and employability support. In Medellín, 416 residents improved their financial situation through access to micro-finance, training and job opportunities. All the businesses set up in this way were still operating a year later, with micro-finance recipients seeing a 35 per cent increase in their income.

#### Access to health care

In Medellín, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society promoted the establishment of neighbourhood emergency committees to give first aid to people injured as a result of the armed violence until they get to a medical facility. This is important because transfers can be delayed by the invisible boundaries separating the city's neighbourhoods. Through youth and women's

networks, in cooperation with Profamilia, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society provided information on how to gain access to health care services and on emergency attention for victims of sexual violence.

#### Safe behaviour

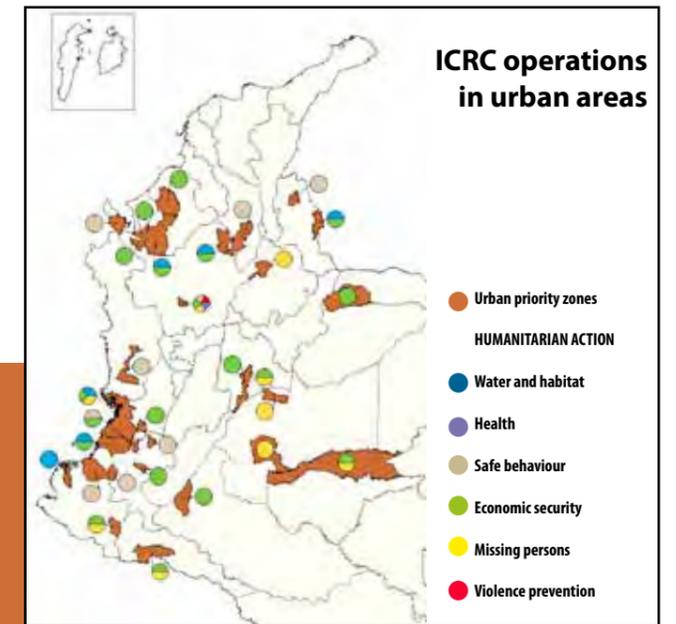
The ICRC, in collaboration with the Colombian Red Cross Society, distributed information on safe behaviour, explaining how to avoid accidents caused by improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and small arms, in nine urban centres in Antioquia, Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó and Norte de Santander. In Medellín, activities were carried out with the staff of 14 schools aimed at keeping teachers and students safe from armed violence.

#### Mitigating violence

Through the project "More humanitarian spaces, more alternatives" implemented in Medellín, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society seek to mitigate the impact of urban violence on communities, in conjunction with other public and private bodies. The initiative has three main strands: preventing violence in the school environment, protecting local people and assisting communities. In 2013, as part of the project, the **Déjalo latir** (let it beat) campaign was launched in 14 schools around the city (see box at right).

#### Access to essential basic services

The ICRC provided assistance to over a thousand displaced people in Cúcuta, El Bagre, López de Micay and Tierralta, enabling them to improve their living conditions and access to water and sanitation. In Buenaventura, the ICRC built a shelter to accommodate 60 pregnant women who had been victims of sexual violence, providing them with decent living conditions and prenatal and perinatal care.



### "If it's different, let it beat"

In a city that has suffered the humanitarian consequences of armed violence, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society sing a song to life. The "Let it beat" campaign promotes respect for human life and dignity in 14 schools in the city of Medellín. It was launched in October with concerts given by the Afro-Colombian group Son Batá, who composed the song specifically for the occasion. The campaign is part of the project "More humanitarian spaces, more alternatives," which aims to mitigate the impact of urban violence on people living in Medellín.



#### ON VIDEO

A campaign with a musical beat promotes respect for human life

## DIFFERENTIATED IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT AND ARMED VIOLENCE Women and children

In situations of conflict and violence, no one victim is more important than another. However, women and children are particularly hard hit by the humanitarian consequences of such situations, as the direct victims of attacks or as survivors when loved ones go missing or are killed.



Pascal Jequier/ICRC

The ICRC's humanitarian response takes into account the special needs of women and children. A large proportion of the humanitarian aid provided by the organization goes to these two groups. In 2013, ICRC teams carried out initiatives to address problems such as displacement, disappearance, weapon contamination, sexual violence and detention, with a view to alleviating the impact of violence on women and children.

# IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT AND ARMED VIOLENCE ON WOMEN

As leaders, mothers and wives, women have been affected by physical violence, threats, the disappearance of loved ones and displacement. They do not, however, resign themselves to being a victim. In the face of adversity, they summon their strength to continue providing for their families.



The ICRC documented 617 cases of alleged violations of IHL and other basic rules against civilians in 2013. In 91 of these cases, the victims were women.



## Disappearance

For many women, the worst consequence of the conflict and armed violence is the absence of their loved ones (sons, daughters and husbands), the anguish of waiting to hear from them and the uncertainty of not knowing where they are. The ICRC also documented 14 cases of women who had disappeared over the course of the year.

In 2013, the ICRC evaluated the needs of the families of missing persons and gave voice to the concerns of the women affected, who account for 80 per cent of people in this situation. One of the main needs they expressed was attentive treatment from the officials in charge of their case during the search for their loved one.

## Displacement

The different forms of violence against women are interlinked, as often happens with other victims. Forced displacement is often caused by threats or sexual violence. When they arrive in their new place of residence, they find no protection there and are subjected to discrimination. In 2013, the ICRC assisted 6,781 displaced women throughout the country. In the programme to

promote income-generating opportunities in urban areas, 74 per cent of those who received training and 42 per cent of those who were given temporary employment were women. Thirty of these displaced women were given part-time jobs in nurseries, thanks to an agreement with non-profit organizations. For many of them, it was the first time that they had had a steady monthly wage, and those with small children were able to take them with them to the nursery and look after them while they worked.

## Weapon contamination

Although most of those injured by explosive devices and remnants of war are men and children, weapon contamination has an indirect impact on women, as their work load is doubled and they have to look after injured family members. Those injured do not always benefit from the orthopaedic and rehabilitation services

they need, for lack of information. In 2013, more than 3,400 women were informed about victims' rights and taught about safe behaviour to avoid accidents. In the cases of 14 women affected by weapon contamination, of the 19 cases officially reported in 2013, financial support and help with funeral and travel expenses was provided.

## Detention

In detention facilities, women may be exposed to abuse and exploitation if they are not held separately from men. Access to gynaecological and obstetric care is not guaranteed even in the case of women who are pregnant. The ICRC visits women's prisons throughout the country to monitor their situation and ensure that the authorities provide for their special needs.

## Sexual violence

There are still no accurate figures on women subjected to sexual violence in connection with the conflict and armed violence. The silence surrounding this issue makes it impossible to objectively gauge the extent of the problem. The ICRC accompanies women who are victims of sexual violence, providing them with the support they need. In Buenaventura,

the extension of a shelter by the ICRC changed the lives of 60 pregnant women who had been subjected to sexual violence. They received the care they needed during this critical time and after the birth.

# IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT AND ARMED VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

Half the displaced persons assisted by the ICRC and one in four of the victims of violations of basic humanitarian rules are children. Recruitment is just one of the risks they face.



Mauricio Morales/El País

*"They were just starting up and needed young people with potential. It's like in football: young players are always going to be more skilful than older players. So, sometimes, to avoid making an enemy of them, you became kind of friendly with them, if you see what I mean?"*

Minor from Buenaventura, with a missing family member



Christoph von Toggenburg/ICRC

Recruitment, the threat of recruitment, displacement, weapon contamination, sexual violence and disappearance were the main dangers faced by girls, boys and adolescents in the context of the armed conflict and other situations of violence.

Almost a fourth (144) of the 617 cases of alleged violations of IHL and other basic rules for the protection of the population documented by the ICRC involved minors. In cities and towns, one out of three victims was a girl, boy or adolescent, that is, 66 of the 207 cases recorded.

## Recruitment or the threat of recruitment

Although it is prohibited by IHL, minors continue to be forced to participate in the armed conflict and other situations of violence. They are either recruited or used as helpers or information gatherers. Last year, the ICRC recorded 37 cases of recruitment of minors and 11 threats of recruitment. Thanks to action taken by the ICRC, a total of 48 boys and girls leaving armed groups were reunited with their families.

## Displacement

Displaced children are especially affected by unhealthy living conditions and the lack of services such as education and basic sanitation. Almost 26,000 displaced people received emergency humanitarian assistance from the ICRC, including 14,000 minors.

## Disappearance

In 2013, the ICRC documented the disappearance of 44 girls, boys and adolescents, over a quarter of the total number of people reported missing in the course of the year. Minors also become victims when a family member disappears, as it has an adverse effect on their development and the opportunities open to them. The support provided by the ICRC to the families of missing persons took into account the needs of minors.

## Weapon contamination

The presence of improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war restricts access to schools and recreational facilities and exposes children to the risk of accidents. In order to protect them, the ICRC constructed and renovated school classroom facilities, hostels and canteens for 330 minors in four municipalities. These children were also taught what precautionary measures they should take to avoid accidents.

## Sexual violence

Sexual violence against minors is not confined to forced sexual relations or violent sexual assault; any sexual relationship with a child under fourteen is an offence in Colombia. In 2013, the ICRC provided emergency assistance to 18 girls and two boys who had been victims of sexual abuse.

## Detention

Minors in youth detention centres face many difficulties, because they have no opportunities and are at risk of being drawn further into the world of crime. In Medellín, as part of initiatives to mitigate urban violence, the ICRC and the

Colombian Red Cross Society closely monitored the situation of 1,117 young offenders in six centres and provided them with an insight into basic humanitarian principles, guidelines for conflict resolution and the importance of respect, communication and peaceful coexistence.

## WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

### ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

**Rule 135.** Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection.

**Rule 136.** Children must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups.

**Rule 137.** Children must not be allowed to take part in hostilities.

## PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

The ICRC works to alleviate the suffering of people deprived of their liberty, advocating for improvements in prison conditions, helping them to contact their loved ones and promoting access to health care services.

Christoph von Toggenburg / ICRC



Since 1969, when it first started implementing humanitarian activities in Colombia, the ICRC has been monitoring the conditions of people deprived of their liberty in connection with the armed conflict. In that year, the government authorized the ICRC to visit detainees in State detention facilities and, in 1994, it gave it permission to establish contact with armed groups in order to offer its good offices for the release of people being held by these groups, among other things.



El Colombiano

## PEOPLE HELD BY ARMED GROUPS

In its role as a neutral intermediary, in 2013 the ICRC facilitated the release of 25 people held by armed groups. These humanitarian operations put an end to the desperation and uncertainty of the people being held and their families.

The hardships suffered by people being held by armed groups – uncertainty as to whether they will ever see their loved ones again, lack of access to health care and the loss of their freedom – continued in 2013. The ICRC focused efforts on providing such people, whether civilians or members of the police or armed forces, with the support they needed to alleviate their suffering and that of their families, for example, by keeping them in touch through Red Cross messages. This assistance was possible thanks to the ongoing confidential dialogue that the ICRC maintains with the parties to the conflict.

### WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

#### ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

**Rule 124 B.** In non-international armed conflicts, the ICRC may offer its services to the parties to the conflict with a view to visiting all persons deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the conflict in order to verify the conditions of their detention and to restore contacts between those persons and their families.

### The role of the ICRC as a neutral intermediary

*“Our role as a neutral intermediary means that, in practice, as a humanitarian organization, we are solely concerned with alleviating the suffering of victims of the armed conflict and other situations of violence. To this end, we engage in direct and confidential dialogue with all the parties that have placed their trust in us. This is the key to our action.”*

Jordi Raich  
Head of the ICRC  
delegation in Colombia



**ON VIDEO**  
Release of people held by  
armed groups

### The ICRC's humanitarian response

In 2013, the ICRC facilitated the release of 25 people being held by armed groups in 16 humanitarian operations. Some of them had been held captive for months. One of the objectives of the ICRC's humanitarian work is to facilitate the reunion of the people released with their families. It is permanently in contact with the families, providing them with psychosocial support whenever necessary and helping them to prepare for the moment when they will be reunited.

Some of the release operations, which involved 16 civilians and nine members of the police or armed forces, were coordinated with the church, the Colombians For Peace organization, the Colombian Red Cross Society and State institutions, such as the Ombudsman's Office and the Ministry of Defence. In the case of six foreign nationals being held by armed groups in 2013, the ICRC worked in coordination with the respective embassies to facilitate their release.

### RELEASES FACILITATED BY THE ICRC IN 2013

**25 people released**  
**16 civilians and**  
**9 members of the police**  
**or armed forces**



Anne Sylvie Linder/ICRC



Juan Sebastián Uribe / ICRC

# PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY IN STATE DETENTION FACILITIES

Feelings of loneliness and isolation add to other problems faced by detainees in Colombian prisons, including overcrowding and poor access to health care.

In 2013, the ICRC continued its work in State detention facilities, where overcrowding is one of the most pressing humanitarian problems and the direct cause of deteriorating living conditions inside prisons. Problems of access to health care and other essential services, such as water, basic sanitation and hygiene, are hardships suffered daily by men and women deprived of their liberty. The anguish of being separated from their families and loved ones adds to their suffering.

The almost 9,000 women in prison face even worse conditions, with limited access to specialized health care, including

gynaecological care for those who are pregnant and paediatric care for children living with their mothers in prison. Some of these children grow up in detention facilities with their detained mothers in conditions prejudicial to their development.

In the case of minors, being deprived of their liberty can ruin their lives. It is crucial to ensure their right to the due process of law, including presumption of innocence and a proper defence.

## WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

*ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law*

**Rule 118.** Persons deprived of their liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical attention.



### ON VIDEO

**Sebastián, a delegate who visits detainees**



### ON VIDEO

**Mother and son reunited after 15 years**

## The ICRC's humanitarian response

With a view to contributing to improving the humanitarian situation in detention facilities, the ICRC continued to visit persons deprived of their liberty in order to closely monitor their situation. It also supported the efforts of the authorities to reduce overcrowding, ensure access to health care and improve living conditions.

### ICRC visits

The ICRC visited almost 97,000 detainees at 64 detention facilities in 2013. It monitored around 1,800 of them individually, keeping a close check on their living conditions and how they are treated.

### Visits by family members

Over a thousand people deprived of their liberty were able to see their loved ones again (see story on page 52), thanks to support provided by the ICRC to cover the travel expenses of family members to the detention facilities, and the collaboration of the Colombian Red Cross Society. The ICRC also reminded the authorities of the importance of holding detainees in detention facilities as near as possible to their homes.

### Supporting the authorities

The ICRC submitted some 23 written representations and 78 verbal representations to the relevant authorities, with recommendations on improving general conditions in prisons, the treatment of inmates and the use of solitary confinement. It also submitted a representation on the government's plan to design and build new prisons. With technical support from the ICRC, the health authorities finalized guidelines for controlling tuberculosis in detention facilities.

### Minors

Minors in juvenile detention facilities in Medellín benefited from alternative education sessions organized by the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society, in which they were given an insight into basic humanitarian principles, guidelines for conflict resolution and the importance of respect, communication and peaceful coexistence.

## Tracing the family of a detainee

It might have been 11 or 15 years; the protagonists of this story cannot agree on how long they were apart without receiving any news of each other. They each suffered this absence in their own way: the son ended up in prison accused of rebellion after going off into the forests to fight, while the mother resigned herself to the fact that her son had disappeared.

More than a decade later, the detainee told his story to an ICRC delegate visiting the prison and asked him to help him find his family, without much hope, but with nothing to lose.

For months, ICRC personnel visited the places where his family had last been seen, until one day a former neighbour told them where they were. A telephone call between them was almost enough to convince the mother that her missing son was still alive, that he was well and that he wanted to see her. But she needed to see him with her own eyes. "When I went to visit him, I unbuttoned his shirt to see his moles. I had a good look and said "Yes, it's him!"



Juan Sebastián Uribe / ICRC

## DIALOGUE WITH THE ARMED FORCES, THE POLICE, ARMED GROUPS, THE AUTHORITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The ICRC maintains an ongoing dialogue with the authorities, the armed forces, the police and armed groups to promote respect for IHL and human rights. It also puts the spotlight on humanitarian problems arising from the conflict and armed violence in order to raise the awareness of civil society.



Boris Heger/ICRC

The President of the ICRC, Peter Maurer (seated, right), visited Colombia in February 2013. He met with top authorities in the country, including President Juan Manuel Santos, and visited communities along the river Piñuña Negro, in Putumayo, to gain a first-hand impression of the situation facing victims of the conflict and armed violence. The visit served to highlight the solid relationship that the ICRC maintains with all the parties to the conflict.

## Dialogue with the police and armed forces

In 2013, the ICRC supported the integration of IHL, human rights and international standards on the use of force into military and law enforcement doctrine, education, training and equipment and their systems of sanctions.

Through operational self-assessment exercises, based on real-life cases documented by the ICRC, over 500 members of armed and police forces discussed the causes of alleged violations of humanitarian rules and applied appropriate corrective measures.

In collaboration with the Presidential human rights programme, the ICRC held eight workshops on respect for medical services, which were attended by 510 members of the armed forces.

### Human rights and law enforcement

In situations of violence not reaching the armed conflict threshold, the ICRC worked with police forces to promote respect for human rights and compliance with international standards on the use of force.



The ICRC provided the national police force with technical support for the First international course for instructors in human rights as applied to policing, which was held in Medellín. It was attended by representatives from various Latin American countries. The ICRC also supported the International symposium on the use of force and policing organized by the National Police Force in Bogotá, with 250 participants.



Eduardo Anizelli/Folha de São Paulo

Colombia hosted the first Senior workshop on international rules governing military operations (SWIRMO) to be held in the Americas. It was attended by representatives from 54 countries with direct responsibilities in the area of IHL and human rights training.



Lucero Rodriguez G./ICRC



Juan Arredondo/Getty/ICRC

## Dialogue with organized armed groups

ICRC delegates in the field engage in confidential dialogue with armed groups to remind them of the importance of respecting the rules of IHL in the conduct of hostilities and to discuss alleged violations of humanitarian rules documented by the ICRC, with a view to putting an end to such transgressions. Through this dialogue, the ICRC also seeks to guarantee safe access to 25 priority areas in the country, where it carries out its work to assist and protect the civilian population.

Recognition of the ICRC's role as a neutral intermediary enabled the ICRC to play a key role in facilitating the release, in 2013, of 25 people held by armed groups. It also facilitated the transfer of FARC-EP members to Havana for the peace talks between this guerrilla group and the Government of Colombia.

## Dialogue with the public authorities

The ICRC works with Colombian government institutions to promote the implementation of measures adopted to give domestic effect to IHL. The aim is to assist them in fulfilling their international obligation to respect and ensure respect for this body of law.

To this end, it assisted in strengthening the Technical group on IHL and armed conflict within the national human rights and IHL system. As part of this support, the ICRC organized the second Augusto Ramírez Ocampo course on IHL, promoted Colombia's participation in the Conference of national IHL committees of the Americas and organized IHL dissemination and training sessions for national and local authorities.

It also promoted Colombia's ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, disseminated information on mechanisms dealing with matters relating to missing persons and emphasized the need to deal with all victims of armed violence in accordance with the Law on victim's rights.

The first meeting on missing persons was attended by around a hundred representatives of the public authorities from different parts of Colombia. At this meeting, the ICRC advocated a coordinated response by institutions to the needs of the families of missing persons.



Edgar Alfonso/ICRC

During her visit to Colombia for the SWIRMO workshop, the Vice-President of the ICRC, Christine Beerli, met with the Vice-President of Colombia, Angelino Garzón.



Vicepresidencia de la República



ICRC

On 8 May 2013, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society celebrated 150 years of humanitarian action by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. A photographic exhibition entitled *Different wars, countless victims, a historical presence* toured the country to commemorate the anniversary.



Laura Gómez/ICRC

## Dialogue with civil society

It is part of the ICRC's mandate to disseminate IHL and human rights and draw public attention to the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and armed violence.

On the occasion of Missing Persons Day, the ICRC carried out activities to raise the awareness of academic staff and students at universities about the needs of the families of missing persons, using music and graffiti to convey messages on this subject.

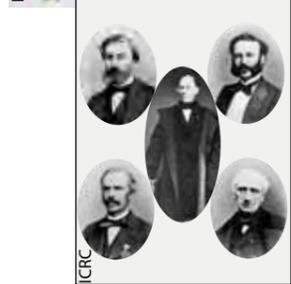
The ICRC promoted responsible media coverage of the armed conflict by holding courses on IHL and journalism for 190 people working in this profession.

The ICRC also organized field visits with three national and nine international media outlets to give voice to the victims of the conflict and other violence and provide an insight into the humanitarian situation facing them.

# Geneva Conventions

# 150 years

## of humanitarian action



The original Geneva Convention was signed in 1864. To date, four Geneva Conventions and three Additional Protocols have been adopted and updated, which today form the core of international humanitarian law. Above, the first page of the Convention. Below, the founders of the ICRC.

**GENEVA CONVENTION**  
1864

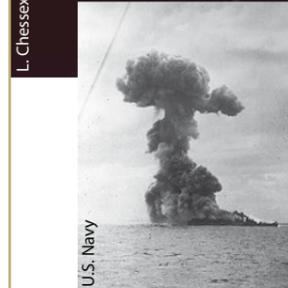
First multilateral IHL instrument



In 1949, after the Second World War, it became clear that the existing rules would need to be improved and new ones established. The updated instruments included the First Geneva Convention to protect wounded and sick combatants in the field. Above, the Russo-Japanese War (1904). Below, Vietnam (1974).

**FIRST GENEVA CONVENTION**

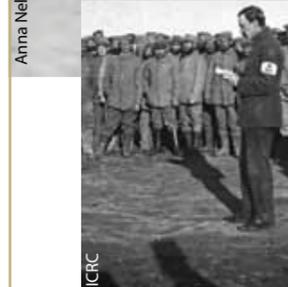
Wounded and sick in armed forces in the field



Conflicts waged at sea pose specific humanitarian challenges, hence the Second Geneva Convention, which protects wounded, sick and shipwrecked combatants at sea. Above, Falkland Islands (1982). Below, Leyte Gulf, Philippine Sea (1944).

**SECOND GENEVA CONVENTION**

Wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces



People who fall into the hands of a party to the conflict must be respected and treated with dignity. This principle is enshrined in the Third Geneva Convention on prisoners of war in international armed conflicts. Above, Guantanamo (2014). Below, Morocco (1916).

**THIRD GENEVA CONVENTION**

Prisoners of war



The large number of civilian victims in the Second World War showed that it was a mistake to confine protection to combatants. Today, respect for civilians is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Above, Japan (1945). Below, Colombia (2004).

**FOURTH GENEVA CONVENTION**

Civilian population



The protection of the civilian population in international conflicts was strengthened in 1977 with the adoption of Additional Protocol I, which places special emphasis on limiting the effects of hostilities on those not taking part in them. Above, Germany (1948). Below, southern Lebanon (1998).

**PROTOCOL I**

Victims of international conflicts



Most of today's conflicts are non-international, and humanitarian rules are required to govern them. Additional Protocol II of 1977 supplemented the rules that had governed such conflicts up to then. Above, Colombia (2002). Below, Uganda (1984).

**PROTOCOL II**

Victims of non-international conflicts



The red cross and red crescent are universal emblems of humanitarian action, but in certain contexts, they might be regarded as religious or political symbols. Since 2005, thanks to Additional Protocol III, there has been another emblem – the red crystal. Above, Yemen (1965). Below, Switzerland (2005).

**PROTOCOL III**  
2005

Adoption of the red crystal emblem

**FOUR GENEVA CONVENTIONS**

**OF 1949**

**ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS OF 1977**

## THE ICRC IN COLOMBIA

Agreements with the Colombian government enabling the ICRC to pursue its humanitarian work

**March 1969.** The Colombian government authorizes the ICRC to visit people detained in connection with the internal armed conflict.

**May 1980.** The Colombian government and the ICRC sign a headquarters agreement, which is approved by Law 42 of 1981.

**November 1990.** The Colombian authorities agree to let the ICRC facilitate the release of members of the police and armed forces held by armed groups.

**August 1991.** The Colombian police undertake to provide the ICRC with the details of people detained in connection with the internal armed conflict.

**November 1994.** The Colombian government authorizes the ICRC to make contact with armed groups.

**February 1996.** Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions enters into force in Colombia. The government and the ICRC sign a memorandum of understanding enabling the ICRC to carry out visits to all those deprived of their liberty, to move freely around the country, to maintain contact with all the parties to the conflict, and to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the armed conflict.

**February 1996.** The Colombian Ministry of Defence undertakes to provide the ICRC with the details of all the people detained by the police and armed forces in connection with the armed conflict, and to grant it access to temporary and permanent detention facilities.

**September 2001.** The ICRC and the Social Solidarity Network, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign a document of understanding for the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance for displaced people.

**January 2006.** The ICRC and the Social Action Agency, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign a new agreement on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance activities for families displaced by the violence in Colombia. This replaces the 2001 document of understanding.

**June 2009.** The ICRC and the Social Action Agency, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign an appendix to the agreement, which amends aspects related to mass displacement and sets up coordination bodies.



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**For more information about the ICRC in Colombia and worldwide, visit the ICRC website, [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) for:**

- the latest news
- information about issues and events of particular interest to the ICRC
- specialized resources on international humanitarian law
- activity reports and summaries
- personal accounts
- interviews
- features
- photo galleries, audio clips, videos and films
- maps
- publications
- the Family Links network
- articles from the International Review of the Red Cross
- a link to the website of the Colombian Red Cross ([www.cruzrojacolombiana.org](http://www.cruzrojacolombiana.org)).

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