

# SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC



The ICRC has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It works with the National Society to help people affected by armed conflict receive emergency relief and access safe water and medical care. It aims to visit all people held in relation to the conflict. It fosters respect for IHL by all parties, notably in relation to sick and wounded patients and medical services. It acts as a neutral intermediary for issues of humanitarian concern between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic. It helps separated relatives maintain contact.

## KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS

### In 2013:

- ▶ dialogue with the Syrian government, armed groups and key actors of influence, and public communication repeatedly emphasized all parties' obligations under IHL, including the respect due to medical/humanitarian workers
- ▶ Syrian government restrictions and insecurity, including in areas held by armed groups, regularly impeded Syrian Arab Red Crescent/ICRC activities for conflict-affected people, particularly in besieged areas
- ▶ wounded and sick people obtained medical care with the help of surgical/first-aid materials given to hospitals and National Society facilities, although only to a very limited extent in areas controlled by armed groups
- ▶ more than 20 million people accessed clean water, over 3.5 million people received food, and over 1 million received household essentials including hygiene kits, through joint National Society/ICRC action
- ▶ lack of authorization precluded ICRC detention visits and dialogue with Syrian military/security forces, while insecurity on the ground and divisions among armed groups stymied the IHL briefings planned for their members
- ▶ the Syrian authorities responded partially to 271 inquiries about people allegedly arrested/detained, but had not replied to over 1,500 similar requests for information submitted to them on behalf of the families concerned

EXPENDITURE (in KCHF)	
Protection	1,788
Assistance	71,611
Prevention	2,043
Cooperation with National Societies	5,841
General	-

**81,283**

of which: Overheads **4,948**

IMPLEMENTATION RATE	
Expenditure/yearly budget	<b>80%</b>

PERSONNEL	
Mobile staff	31
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	105

## YEARLY RESULT

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action

**MEDIUM**

PROTECTION	Total
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)	
Red Cross messages (RCMs)	
RCMs collected	8
RCMs distributed	6
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	239

ASSISTANCE	Targets	Achieved
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)		
Economic security, water and habitat (in some cases provided within a protection or cooperation programme)		
Food commodities	Beneficiaries 4,050,000	3,567,485
Essential household items	Beneficiaries 1,350,000	1,066,212
Cash	Beneficiaries 25,000	
Work, services and training	Beneficiaries 25,000	
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries 12,500,000	20,000,000

Health		Targets	Achieved
Health centres supported	Structures	9	6

WOUNDED AND SICK		Targets	Achieved
Hospitals			
Hospitals supported	Structures		18

### Comments

Owing to operational and management constraints, figures presented in this table may not reflect all activities carried out during the reporting period.

## CONTEXT

The armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter Syria) opposing government forces and various armed groups continued; since March 2011, over 100,000 people had reportedly been killed and millions displaced.

Fears of the conflict spreading throughout the region persisted. With no political solution imminent, the international community failed to reach a consensus on a response to the situation.

Reports of IHL violations and other abuses were rife: indiscriminate attacks; direct attacks against civilians, including patients and health staff; torture; hostage-taking; extrajudicial killings; sexual violence; child recruitment; disregard for human remains; and restrictions on access to basic services and on the passage of humanitarian relief.

Industrial paralysis, loss of jobs and inaccessibility of agricultural fields severely disrupted livelihoods and made millions of people completely dependent on aid. Hospitals/clinics were looted or targeted; those that still functioned risked being targeted, staff and patients included. Sectarian violence and the rate of crime grew.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

In partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the ICRC scaled up its humanitarian operations to keep up with the needs of conflict-affected people – to the extent permitted by the prevailing insecurity and Syrian government restrictions, and in coordination with Movement partners and other organizations. It launched a budget extension appeal in May that enabled it to double the volume of its food assistance as of July, and help twice as many beneficiaries as in the January–June period. It established a logistics centre in Tartus and a permanent presence in Aleppo, and provided the Syrian Red Crescent with extensive support to help it develop its operational capacities at headquarters and branch levels.

Contact with the Syrian authorities and representatives of armed groups in Syria and abroad, and coordination with local authorities and community leaders helped facilitate the National Society/ICRC's humanitarian activities. All dialogue, including confidential representations based on documented allegations of abuses against civilians and civilian objects, as well as public communication, emphasized all parties' obligations under IHL. However, dialogue with the direct participants in the hostilities was not possible: the Syrian authorities prohibited direct interaction with the Syrian military/security forces, while insecurity on the ground and internal divisions among armed groups prevented structured dialogue with their members.

Syrian government restrictions and insecurity did not allow the impartial delivery of humanitarian aid, including surgical/first-aid supplies. Undeterred, National Society/ICRC teams focused on ensuring that the most vulnerable conflict-affected IDPs/residents met their emergency needs for food, water and other daily essentials. Vulnerable people were not, however, always accessible, particularly across front lines.

Over 3.5 million IDPs/residents received food, and over 1 million received essential household items through National Society/ICRC distributions, with the ICRC facilitating access into affected areas. Over 20 million people benefited from clean water and sanitation through the ICRC's countrywide, multi-pronged support for

local water boards, facilitated by the Ministry of Water Resources and the National Society. This support included: providing consumable chemicals and spare parts for water treatment facilities; rehabilitating water installations and essential facilities in IDP hosting centres (e.g. schools, public buildings); water-trucking; and distributing bottled water.

Health Ministry hospitals and other health facilities, particularly the National Society-run mobile health units, administered pre-hospital emergency care, inpatient treatment and primary health care to wounded/sick people using ICRC-donated medical supplies. Unfortunately, support for casualty care reached areas under the control of armed groups on only four occasions because of Syrian government restrictions and the constant insecurity on the ground.

Since the visit to detainees held at the Aleppo central prison in 2012, dialogue with the Syrian authorities, confined to the Interior Ministry, on further ICRC visits to detainees did not move forward. The ICRC, acting on behalf of the families concerned, continued to submit requests for information on people allegedly arrested/detained by government forces; it forwarded to the families the very few replies it received, confirming the arrest/detention of some of their relatives. The ICRC continued to remind the authorities of their obligation to notify families of the whereabouts of their detained relatives and to facilitate family links. It started submitting similar requests to armed groups. During its dialogue with these groups, the ICRC communicated key humanitarian messages on the treatment of detainees; it was not possible to visit people held by any of them.

Movement family-links services facilitated some contact between dispersed family members, including for people with relatives living/detained abroad. The ICRC maintained its neutral intermediary role to facilitate humanitarian travel between the Israeli-occupied Golan and Syria proper. The National Society received support to enhance its family-links services and human remains management.

Domestic and international media used ICRC news releases and operational updates to increase awareness of the Movement's neutral, impartial and independent approach to humanitarian action in Syria and elsewhere.

## CIVILIANS

### Insecurity and government restrictions jeopardize aid delivery

Government restrictions, for example on the delivery of certain medical materials (see *Wounded and sick*), and the prevailing insecurity, including in areas held by armed groups, prevented humanitarian assistance from reaching all those in need, most notably in areas besieged by governmental forces or held by armed groups. The ICRC's monthly assistance targets – as of July, food parcels for 90,000 households and household essentials for 30,000 – were not always met. In August, the National Society/ICRC suspended aid distribution in Aleppo and Idlib because the government systematically blocked the impartial provision of assistance. In Al Raqqa, aid distribution, having resumed in October following a six-month suspension, had been suspended by year-end. However, whenever security conditions allowed wider access or increased mobility, the National Society/ICRC exceeded their monthly targets, resulting in a monthly average, from July to December, of 80,000 households receiving food and 22,000 households receiving essential items.

A logistics centre in Tartus and a permanent presence in Aleppo, established after lengthy administrative procedures, also helped increase the frequency/volume of assistance distribution.

### **Millions survive with the help of emergency relief**

Over 3.5 million vulnerable IDPs and residents (715,297 households) enhanced their daily diet with ICRC food parcels; over 1 million (213,242 households) received household essentials like mattresses/blankets, kitchen sets, buckets, candles and hygiene items, easing their living conditions. The National Society carried out most distributions, with the ICRC facilitating access into affected areas.

Income-support projects in Lattakia, through cash grants and cash-for-work, were still being discussed with the authorities. Elsewhere, the situation remained unfavourable for cash-based relief and livelihood-recovery activities.

### **IDPs/residents access clean water despite widespread destruction**

In total, over 20 million people – almost 80% of Syria's pre-conflict population – benefited from large-scale ICRC emergency support – facilitated by the Ministry of Water Resources and the National Society – to local water boards, which improved drinking water supply and sanitation countrywide.

Some 10 million people regained access to water following repairs to damaged infrastructure. Activities carried out with National Society staff/volunteers benefited over 810,000 IDPs: 108,250 IDPs were supplied with water by trucks in Deir Ez Zor, Homs and rural Damascus; 80,500 IDPs in 452 hosting centres had housing and water/sanitation facilities rehabilitated/upgraded; and some 621,250 IDPs received bottled water, distributed in 10-litre containers as an emergency measure.

In cities/towns where water distribution systems were functioning, millions more – residents and IDPs – accessed potable water after the ICRC supplied the spare parts and chemicals required to operate water treatment plants, such as 500 tonnes of aluminium sulphate and 1 million litres of sodium hypochlorite.

In Aleppo and Idlib, where rubbish had accumulated, over 3.1 million residents/IDPs benefited from waste-management and pest-control programmes that were implemented in addition to water projects.

### **Parties to the conflict urged to respect IHL**

Efforts to engage the parties to the conflict in regular and substantive discussions were undermined by the inaccessibility of the Syrian military/security forces and by the multiplicity of armed groups in Syria (see *Authorities, armed forces and other bearers of weapons, and civil society*). In the limited dialogue possible, the ICRC highlighted the abuses reported by people in Syria and abroad or that it had observed itself, and encouraged the parties to stop/prevent such abuses. Issues emphasized included all parties' obligations under IHL to take constant care to spare people not/no longer participating in hostilities and protect them from abuse, including sexual violence; to respect the prohibition against indiscriminate attacks on civilians/civilian objects, including the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas; to ensure civilians' safe access to goods essential for their survival, including medical care and humanitarian aid; and to respect and protect medical/humanitarian workers and the red cross/red crescent emblems (see *Wounded and sick*).

### **Some people restore contact with relatives**

A few people, including those who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, contacted relatives through the Movement's family-links network. Some maintained contact with relatives detained/interned abroad, including in Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya and the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba. About 50 people, mainly Palestinians, resettled abroad with ICRC travel documents issued in cooperation with IOM and UNHCR. Families of Syrians presumed missing in the Mediterranean Sea received help in requesting news through the National Societies concerned. The whereabouts of thousands of people, including people allegedly arrested/detained, remained unknown to their families in Syria and elsewhere, as the parties to the conflict were not ready to address their cases (see *People deprived of their freedom*).

The prevailing situation hindered the resolution of cases of people missing in connection with past conflicts in the region.

### **Volunteers develop family-links and other capacities**

The National Society/ICRC regularly reviewed their working processes to maximize safety and efficiency. The National Society also developed its volunteers' response capacities in several areas, with ICRC support.

During joint workshops, volunteers from National Society branches exchanged best practices in needs assessment and relief distribution, within the Safer Access Framework. Some 30 volunteers, representing 12 National Society branches, learnt the basics of family-links services and human remains management; they also received donations of equipment (e.g. body bags, protective kits) for the management of remains.

No training was carried out with local NGOs owing to the security climate.

### **Golan apple-growers increase their incomes**

Travel between the Israeli-occupied Golan and Syria proper remained restricted, preventing people living on either side of the demarcation line from visiting their relatives. Nevertheless, with the ICRC acting as a neutral intermediary between the Israeli and Syrian authorities, 56 people, mostly students, crossed the demarcation line from Golan to Syria proper; 32 crossed it in the opposite direction. Golan residents also exchanged official documents with their relatives across Kuneitra. Golan apple-growers increased their incomes by selling their harvest (over 14,000 tonnes) in Syrian markets, after the ICRC facilitated the transport of their apples across the demarcation line.

## **PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM**

### **Detainees, including those held in relation to the current conflict, remain without ICRC visits**

Despite repeated requests, the ICRC was unable to visit people deprived of their freedom. The Syrian authorities did not permit further ICRC visits to detainees following those conducted in Adra and Aleppo central prisons in 2011 and 2012, respectively. They also did not respond to a plan of action, submitted following meetings in May 2013, to visit detainees in Interior Ministry-run prisons by year-end. In December, the ICRC renewed its request to visit all people detained by the Syrian authorities and facilitate family contact, regardless of the specific ministry or security forces holding them.

During discussions with representatives of some armed groups, the ICRC asked to visit people held by them; it also communicated key humanitarian messages on the treatment of detainees, including their right to family contact. The security situation did not allow delegates to access areas where detainees could, in principle, have been visited.

### **Detainees trapped by fighting receive help**

Exceptionally, the ICRC helped broker an agreement between government forces and armed groups fighting for control of Aleppo central prison. During agreed pauses in the fighting, detainees received hot meals, clothing and medical items from the National Society. Detainees who had completed their sentences were released.

### **Families await information on detained relatives**

Requests for information about some 1,300 people were submitted to the Syrian authorities on behalf of the families concerned, including from families abroad. A total of 271 partial replies were received from the authorities and forwarded to the families, while awaiting further information. The ICRC reminded the authorities of their obligation to notify families of the whereabouts of their arrested/detained relatives and to facilitate contact between them. Over 1,500 inquiries regarding alleged cases of arrest/detention remained unanswered despite reminders to the authorities.

The ICRC began forwarding similar requests for information to some armed groups regarding people allegedly held by them.

## **WOUNDED AND SICK**

Widespread insecurity and government restrictions (see *Civilians*) thwarted the provision of health care, including the delivery of certain medical supplies, particularly in areas held by armed groups. The Syrian authorities permitted the delivery of medical supplies to National Society branches situated in areas held by armed groups on four occasions only; all other attempts to provide medical aid, particularly surgical supplies, to non-Health Ministry facilities were blocked or rendered impossible by the constant insecurity on the ground.

Permission was also denied for the deployment of a mobile surgical team or the organization of war-surgery seminars, although a number of Syrian doctors participated in such seminars abroad.

### **Disregard for medical services persists**

Attacks on health facilities and abuses against patients and medical staff continued unabated. Thirty-three Syrian Arab Red Crescent workers, several of them first-aiders, had been killed since March 2011, and many others injured. Dozens were arrested while carrying out their humanitarian duties. Humanitarian supplies and ambulances were confiscated/looted, diverted or blocked and volunteers threatened or shot at, and weapon bearers routinely entered hospitals to forcibly remove weapon-wounded patients. On 13 October, unidentified armed men abducted a team of six ICRC staff members and one National Society volunteer. Four team members were released the following day, but three ICRC staff members were still in the abductors' custody by year-end.

### **All actors encouraged to respect right to safe and unhindered access to health care**

Although the ICRC documented the abuses mentioned above, possibilities for discussing them with weapon bearers remained limited. Nevertheless, the ICRC persisted in working with actors

from all sides and at various levels to widen National Society/ICRC outreach across front lines and to obtain their cooperation in protecting the basic right of wounded and sick people to receive timely and unhindered treatment without any conditions. ICRC news releases, while seeking support for the goals of the Health Care in Danger project, conveyed reminders of these obligations to all weapon bearers.

### **Owing to severe restrictions, mainly people in government-held areas benefit from ICRC support for health services**

National Society volunteers, with ICRC support, administered first aid to the wounded, evacuating them to referral facilities when necessary. People's chances of obtaining medical care increased – almost exclusively in government-held areas – as a result of surgical/first-aid supplies and drugs for chronic diseases provided by the ICRC to public/private hospitals and medical facilities run by the National Society. Nineteen hospitals (in Damascus, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus and Kuneitra) received drugs and surgical supplies, for treating weapon-wounded patients in particular, while the Health Ministry received intravenous fluids. On four occasions only, medical/surgical materials reached health teams across front lines in areas of Aleppo, Al Houleh and rural Idlib. Altogether, these medical supplies allowed for the full surgical treatment of over 800 wounded people; the infusion sets were sufficient for treating over 9,000 wounded.

Vulnerable IDPs/residents benefited from services provided by six ICRC-supported mobile health units (average catchment population: 6.7 million people) operated by National Society volunteers in Hama, Homs, Idlib, Tartus and Rural Damascus. Outbreaks of infectious diseases were prevented through action taken by the health teams, who also improved the collection of data on diseases and child malnutrition. People also received services at a polyclinic (1,000 consultations monthly) in Hama, which began receiving ICRC support in June. To contend with increased needs, additional health units were equipped for immediate deployment to three other governorates.

## **AUTHORITIES, ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

### **Parties to the conflict maintain limited dialogue with the ICRC**

Contacts with the Syrian authorities and representatives of armed groups in Syria and abroad, and coordination with the local authorities and community leaders, helped facilitate the National Society/ICRC's humanitarian activities. The ICRC took every possible opportunity to share its humanitarian concerns with the parties to the conflict, emphasizing their obligations under IHL with regard to protecting all wounded and sick people, be they civilians or combatants, in detention or not, and to humanitarian aid and Movement emblems. It explained its exclusively humanitarian mission and working procedures.

Lack of authorization prevented direct ICRC contact and dialogue with the armed/security forces from taking place. No progress was made regarding the ICRC's offer of IHL training for government forces.

Interaction with segments of armed groups, mainly through electronic means but also during meetings abroad, enabled the ICRC to increase their understanding of the Movement and IHL principles. Encounters with armed groups in the field, although frequent, did not offer opportunities to develop structured discussions in this regard but permitted the sharing of key humanitarian messages on

the treatment of detainees (see *People deprived of their freedom*). An offer of IHL training/dissemination sessions, based on those conducted by the ICRC in Jordan, was discussed with one major alliance of armed groups. However, the constant reorganization among these groups precluded such sessions from taking place.

### Humanitarian issues communicated in a complex environment

Seminars/workshops could not be organized and contact with specific sections of civil society could not be established owing to insecurity and limited human resources. Nevertheless, people and organizations in Syria and abroad were kept abreast of key humanitarian developments in Syria by ICRC operational updates, press releases, news articles, videos and social media updates. The ICRC's positions on IHL/humanitarian issues were widely covered, by local and international media, thereby increasing people's awareness of the Movement's neutral, impartial and independent approach to humanitarian action in Syria and abroad. The Syrian Red Crescent, with ICRC support, also increased its capacity with regard to effective public communication.

### RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

With the material, financial and technical support of and in partnership with the ICRC, the Syrian Red Crescent sustained and expanded its capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance in

response to growing needs. ICRC support covered the National Society's operating costs at headquarters and branch levels, for additional personnel, armoured vehicles, trucks, ambulances, wheelchairs and office/warehouse space.

The National Society built its response centre at its Suwayda branch, and was building additional centres at its Aleppo, Homs, Rural Damascus and Raqqa branches. It expanded its radio system and established a joint channel with the ICRC to enhance field communication and security. It created additional communication, administration and safety and risk management positions.

Training activities, including for first aid and mine action, did not take place owing to logistical and security constraints. The work on emblem legislation and the National Society statutes was set aside in favour of emergency/operational priorities.

Movement components continued to coordinate their activities through regular meetings and Movement-wide conferences at field, regional and international levels. This coordination enhanced the Movement's external communication, mainstreamed complementary capacities and maximized its overall action and positioning. The National Society also received support to maintain its neutrality, independence and accountability, particularly in relation to organizations outside the Movement.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: PROTECTION		Total		
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
Red Cross messages (RCMs)			UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs collected		8		
RCMs distributed		6		
<b>Reunifications, transfers and repatriations</b>				
People transferred/repatriated		32		
Human remains transferred/repatriated		1		
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons			Women	Minors
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		747	126	127
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		239		
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	97		
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		873	113	125
<b>Documents</b>				
People to whom travel documents were issued		49		
Official documents relayed between family members across border/front lines		24		
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>				
Restoring family links				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		22		

\* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: ASSISTANCE		Total	Women	Children
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
<b>Economic security, water and habitat (in some cases provided within a protection or cooperation programme)</b>				
Food commodities	Beneficiaries	3,567,485	30%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	1,066,212	30%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	20,000,000	30%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
<b>Health<sup>1</sup></b>				
Health centres supported	Structures	6		
Average catchment population		6,692,750		
Consultations	Patients	31,020		
	<i>of which curative</i>	Patients	8,672	13,676
Immunizations	Doses	704		
	<i>of which for children aged five or under</i>	Doses		
		704		
<b>WOUNDED AND SICK<sup>1</sup></b>				
<b>Hospitals</b>				
Hospitals supported	Structures	18		

1. Owing to operational and management constraints, figures presented in this table may not reflect all activities carried out during the reporting period.