



ICRC

NEWS L E T T E R

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The ICRC: mission

The ICRC's mission is to protect and assist the civilian and military victims of armed conflict and internal disturbances on a strictly neutral and impartial basis.

Since 1986, the ICRC has had a permanent presence in Afghanistan. Among its many humanitarian activities the organization is visiting detainees, re-establishing family ties between loved ones separated by conflict, providing medical and other assistance to the civilian population, conducting mine action programmes, raising awareness about international humanitarian law, and helping to build the capacity of the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) to respond to people's needs.



Kunar province: Participants in a workshop for the local police (Dec. 2002)

Teaching International Humanitarian Law

Following more than 20 years of conflict, the population of Afghanistan knows better than anyone the consequences of war. Conflicts always bring death, injury and the loss of loved ones.

But even wars must have limits. And the more people who know about and respect these limits the better, for then the suffering will be lessened. Disseminating these limits, which are set out under international humanitarian law (IHL) is crucial for the improvement of attitudes and behaviour in conflict.

Making these rules known to the army, police, security forces and other weapons bearers is part of the preventive work carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) throughout the world.

It is the warring parties who, during armed conflict, determine the fate of their victims and can facilitate - or obstruct - the ICRC's access to people in need. The better the knowledge - and respect - these people have for IHL, the better the chance that

civilian lives will be spared, and suffering alleviated.

As Afghanistan moves towards reconstruction, the dissemination of IHL is more important than ever. The Afghan national army (ANA), is being re-established and this makes it extremely important that ANA soldiers are made aware of humanitarian law, and the limits it puts on the behaviour of combatants.

Police forces under the Ministry of Interior and other military units coming within the framework of the Ministry of Defence are also being targeted for the dissemination of IHL.

If the rules of IHL are followed much suffering can be avoided and lives saved.

But for a soldier to follow the rules, he needs to know them. This is why dissemination is a key activity of the ICRC.

Pierre Wettach
Head of the International Committee
of the Red Cross in Afghanistan

Strategy / Who is protected by International Humanitarian Law (IHL)?

The strategy behind ICRC dissemination activities comprises three levels:

- **Awareness-building**
The aim is to spread and increase the ideal and principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and international humanitarian law (IHL), through dissemination programmes to a wide range of different target groups
- **Promotion of humanitarian law through teaching**
People must understand international humanitarian law if they are to respect it. Therefore the ICRC promotes knowledge of IHL through dissemination, emphasising that the rights of wounded combatants and those who have surrendered, as well as prisoners and civilians' rights must be safeguarded at all times
- **Integration of humanitarian law into official legal, educational and operational curricula**
Since the ICRC humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and prevent suffering, it endeavours to encourage the concerned military and

civilian authorities to integrate humanitarian law into the educational and operational curricula of both military and non-military educational institutions

The Afghan National Army (ANA), with ICRC support, has started an IHL training programme for their junior officers, thus making respect for IHL part of their conduct during military operations

To implement the above-mentioned strategy the dissemination department of the ICRC Communications unit, organized around 200 dissemination sessions during 2003 from its delegation in Kabul and sub-delegations in Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Afghan-Centre and Kandahar. The different programmes included seminars, training courses, workshops, discussion groups and other more informal gatherings, and reached over 6,000 people including arms carriers, detention authorities, mid-level government officials, journalists, teachers and academics, as well as Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) staff, medics and volunteers. ICRC national staff and programme beneficiaries were also included.

The Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977

The First Geneva Convention protects the wounded and sick among armed forces in the field.

The Second Geneva Convention protects the wounded, sick and shipwrecked among armed forces at sea.

The Third Geneva Convention protects prisoners of war

The Fourth Geneva Convention protects civilians

Additional Protocol I strengthens the protection of victims of international armed conflicts.

Additional Protocol II strengthens the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts.



Dissemination session with local journalists in Jalalabad (2003)

Making the rules known

No coach would put a football player on his team without him knowing the basic rules of football. Unfortunately this logic does not always apply when it comes to warfare even though the consequences of not knowing the rules of war are much more serious. Throughout the world commanders and warlords send combatants to the battlefield without knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL), or the laws of war.

The rules of war limit the means and methods in warfare and aim to protect those who are not or no longer taking part in hostilities, such as civilians, those who have surrendered, and the sick and wounded. By making the rules known to armed forces and other arms carriers the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) aims to prevent and reduce suffering among the victims of armed conflicts. The ultimate aim is to influence people's attitude and behaviour so as to improve the protection of civilians and other victims during conflicts. This includes the warring parties being obliged to grant access to victims for their protection and for the provision of humanitarian aid.

The bedrock of international humanitarian law is the Geneva Conventions signed by 192 countries worldwide, including Afghanistan. States who have signed the Geneva Conventions have a legal obligation to ensure that their armed forces are fully aware of IHL. The ICRC promotes the systematic inclusion of humanitarian law as part of military training. This is also the case in Afghanistan where dissemination sessions are carried out with the Afghan National Army (ANA).

The basis of these training sessions is the "training of trainers". This means that the ICRC as a neutral organisation trains a number of officers and army-instructors who, in turn, train soldiers in the different field units. The ICRC launched this training programme in July 2002 and today it carries out

sessions on a regular basis.

The ICRC has been present in Afghanistan since 1986 to assist victims of war. Though it was on a more basic level than it is today the organisation carried out some dissemination to arms carriers during these years, including to those under the Taliban command. Many of the soldiers of the ANA today

have previous fighting experience during more than 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan. Some of them already have knowledge of IHL - others haven't. The ICRC remains committed to conduct dissemination to the ANA in the future, including providing scholarships for army officers at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy.



Working group of a 'Training the Trainers' workshop on IHL for ANA (Oct. 2003)

In addition to this the ICRC also carries out dissemination to other arms carriers in Afghanistan within the Ministry of Defence framework. The organisation also has contact with the police force through the Ministry of Interior. Spreading knowledge of humanitarian law among the police is important for several reasons - one of them being that a large number of police officers deal with prisoners, including security detainees.

In its prevention programmes the ICRC not only targets the armed forces, but everyone who determines the fate of victims. This includes both local and international leaders and opinion-makers. With an eye to the future, it also targets students and their teachers.

In Afghanistan the ICRC plans to improve its contacts with universities, especially at the faculties of law and journalism, and to provide them with information about international humanitarian law. These contacts will be important over the long term, since today's students are tomorrow's decision makers.

A young army must learn



Major General Ali Jan Sarwari

More than twenty years of conflict in Afghanistan has made many men experienced fighters. This includes some of those currently employed in the Afghan National Army (ANA). But not all of them have much knowledge about international humanitarian law (IHL).

Today, soldiers from the ANA are receiving training in these laws, which set limits to behaviour in armed conflict. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), conducts training sessions with them on a regular basis -

an initiative that the deputy commander of the military central corps in ANA, Major General Ali Jan Sarwari, describes as essential.

"We are a very young army in the process of becoming established. Many of the soldiers we recruit do not know about humanitarian law and it is important that they learn about it, so as to avoid violations on the ground," he says.

The deputy commander states that since the ANA can be exposed to fighting it makes it even more urgent that its men know, for example, about the rights of the civilian population - and that soldiers, as combatants, have an obligation to protect those who are not part of the conflict, and to assist those in need.

The ANA, as any other army, is committed to fight those whom it sees as enemies. But General Sarwari wants his soldiers to fight according to the rules, and to respect the limits they impose. "From the moment somebody is wounded or no longer fighting, he is no longer to be considered as the enemy, and the soldiers have to treat him as a human being. This is an example of what they are taught," says General Sarwari.

He is very appreciative that the ICRC, as a neutral organization, provides training in this field to soldiers, and claims that the feedback received from participants has been positive.

"Afghanistan is part of the international community and has signed the Geneva Conventions," he says. "Soldiers in a country's national army should know these rules, as they are obliged to follow them."



Mazar-i- Sharif: Dissemination to military forces (Dec. 2003)

Despite many efforts to achieve lasting peace in the wake of two world wars, armed conflict remains a prominent feature of many people's lives. The resort to arms continues to be a means of settling differences between nations, peoples and ethnic groups with the accompanying toll of death and suffering.

The guiding principle of the ICRC is that even in war there are limits on how warfare is conducted and how combatants behave. The body of customary and treaty laws that were established with this in mind is known as international humanitarian law (IHL). The bedrock of IHL is the Geneva Conventions signed by 192 countries worldwide, including Afghanistan.

The ICRC's special role has been assigned to it by these States. However, while it maintains a constant dialogue with them the organization insists at all times on its independence. Only if it is free to act independently of any government or other authority can the ICRC serve the interests of the victims of conflict effectively, this being the ultimate objective of its humanitarian work

The tasks of the ICRC include:

- visits to prisoners of war and civilian detainees
- transmission of news between family members separated by conflict
- reunification of dispersed families
- provision of food, water and medical assistance to civilians without access to these basic necessities
- collecting data on victims of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), and conducting mine awareness training
- spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) and monitoring its compliance
- drawing attention to violations of IHL, and contributing to its further development



Dissemination to civilians about the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Library Photo)

The ICRC operation in Afghanistan

The ICRC started working with Afghan communities in 1979 in Pakistan, providing surgical assistance to the war-wounded in Peshawar and Quetta. The organization has been present in Afghanistan itself since 1986.

Today, the ICRC has a staff of some 100 expatriates and 1,300 national staff based in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, as well as in offices in Kunduz, Faizabad, Gulbahar, Ghazni and Bamyan

In addition to dissemination, which is the focus of this issue of the ICRC Newsletter, the organization carries out the following activities:

Protection

During 2003, the ICRC visited over 450,000 detainees being held in 1,933 places of detention in 73 countries around the world. In Afghanistan, ICRC delegates are currently visiting persons deprived of freedom in some 60 places of detention including prisons, police stations and interrogation centres.

Visits are made for the purpose of monitoring the humanitarian conditions of detention, checking on detainees' physical and mental health, and facilitating contact between detainees and their families. ICRC delegates conduct individual interviews in private with detainees, and submit their findings and recommendations on a confidential basis to the detaining authorities. If needed, humanitarian assistance such as blankets, clothes, hygiene items, reading matter etc may be given to detainees, should the detaining authorities not be in a position to provide such items themselves. In addition, ICRC delegates facilitate contact between detainees and their families through the exchange of Red Cross Messages (RCMs).

Health

The ICRC is participating in the re-establishment of an effective health system, disrupted by over 20 years of conflict. It helps to improve health care by supporting and renovating hospitals in Kandahar, Ghazni, Mazari-Sharif, Shibergan, Samangan, Taloqan, Jalalabad, and Kabul.

Water and sanitation

So as to re-establish access to safe drinking water, the ICRC has been rehabilitating urban and rural water networks and develops various sanitation projects countrywide. In addition to major latrine construction, well drilling and the repair of water pumps, the ICRC has reconstructed the electrical supply network at the Logar well which supplies water to over 500,000 persons in southeast Kabul.

Orthopaedic centres

The ICRC runs six orthopaedic centres in Afghanistan, (Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Faizabad, Jalalabad and Gulbahar). Seventy-six per cent of the more than 28,000 amputees assisted in the centres since 1988 have been mine victims. More than 59,000 persons with disabilities have been helped overall.

Mine data collection and mine awareness programmes

The ICRC aims to help prevent accidents caused by mines and other explosive remnants of war. It does this by gathering and sharing information on the causes of accidents, and through mine awareness so as to promote safe behaviour amongst people living or travelling in high-risk areas. Working in collaboration with the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), skilled trainers held over 6,600 mine awareness sessions in Bamyan, Kabul, Parwan, Logar, Laghman, Nangarhar and the northern provinces during 2003.

Cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society

The ICRC, as the lead agency of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Afghanistan, helps the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), technically and financially. The ICRC supports vocational training programmes for the disadvantaged, and five homes for the destitute (marastoons) in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad. The ICRC also works with the ARCS to exchange Red Cross Messages between separated families, and to promote safe behaviour in mined areas.

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