



DISCOVER THE ICRC



ICRC



ICRC

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Cover photo: Olav Saltbones/Norwegian Red Cross



Marho Kokic/Federation

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ABOUT THE ICRC

The ICRC in a nutshell

Despite efforts to achieve world peace in the wake of two world wars, armed conflict remains a prominent feature of our human landscape. 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 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded nearly a century and a half ago in recognition of this sad reality. It seeks to preserve a measure of humanity in the midst of war. Its guiding principle is that even in war there are limits: limits on how warfare is conducted and limits on how combatants behave. The set of rules that were established with this in mind and endorsed by nearly every nation in the world is known as international humanitarian law, of which the Geneva Conventions are the bedrock.

The ICRC's special role was assigned to it by States through the various instruments of humanitarian law. However, while it maintains a constant dialogue with States, it insists at all times on its independence. For, only if it is free to act independently of any government or other authority, can the ICRC serve the true interests of the victims of conflict, which lie at the heart of its humanitarian mission.

The following pages provide an insight into this unique organization, its origins, aims and ideals, how it works, why it works in a certain way and who, ultimately, are the beneficiaries of its actions.

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

Its tasks include:

- visits to prisoners of war and civilian detainees;

- searching for missing persons;
- transmission of messages 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;

- spreading knowledge of humanitarian law;
- monitoring compliance with that law;
- drawing attention to violations, and contributing to the development of humanitarian law.

The ICRC around the world

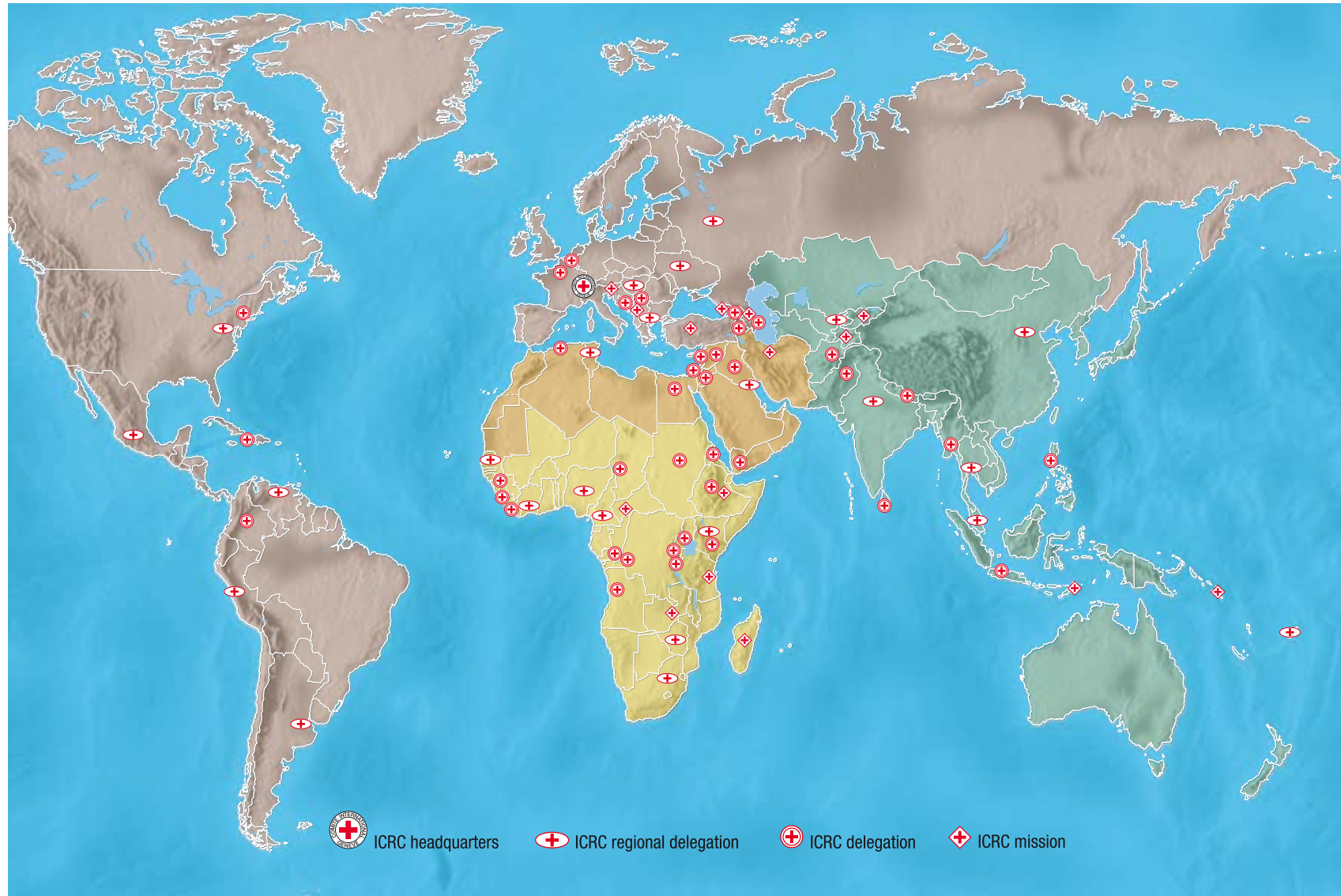
Although the ICRC is the product of a private Swiss initiative, its work and scope are international. The organization has delegations and missions in some 80 countries around the world and employs a staff of over 11,000 people, most of them nationals of the countries in which it works. About 800 people work at the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, providing vital support to and supervision of field operations, and determining and implementing institutional policies and strategies.

ICRC field delegations may cover one country or, in the case of regional delegations, several countries. They carry out a range of activities, depending on the situation and the needs in a particular country. Activities may include:

- protecting and assisting the victims of existing or emerging armed conflict or violence (civilians, people deprived of their freedom, dispersed families, the wounded and sick);
- preventive action, cooperation with National Societies and humanitarian coordination and diplomacy.

(For details of these activities, see relevant chapter.)

Delegations also act as important early warning systems. This enables the ICRC to respond to needs quickly and effectively when armed violence or conflict erupts.



Legal status

The ICRC is a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization. Its mandate to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict has been conferred on it by States through the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, worthy successors to the First Geneva Convention of 1864.

The ICRC's mandate and legal status set it apart both from intergovernmental agencies, such as United Nations organizations, and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In most of the countries in which it works, the ICRC has concluded headquarters agreements with the authorities. Through these agreements, which are subject to international law, the ICRC enjoys the privileges and immunities usually only granted to intergovernmental organizations, such as immunity from legal process, which protects it from administrative and judicial proceedings, and inviolability of its premises, archives and other documents. Such privileges and immunities are indispensable for the ICRC because they guarantee two conditions essential to its action, namely neutrality and independence. The organization has concluded such an agreement with Switzerland, thus guaranteeing its independence and freedom of action from the Swiss government.

Origins and history

The ICRC owes its origins to the vision and determination of one man: Henry Dunant. The date: 24 June 1859. The place: Solferino, a town in northern Italy. The Austrian and French armies were locked in bitter battle and, after 16 hours of fighting, the ground was strewn with 40,000 dead and wounded. That same evening, Dunant, a Swiss citizen, passed through the area on business. He was horrified by the sight of thousands of soldiers from both armies left to suffer for want of medical care. He appealed to the local people to help him tend the wounded, insisting that soldiers on both sides should be treated equally.

On his return to Switzerland, Dunant published *A Memory of Solferino*, in which he made two solemn appeals:

- for relief societies to be formed in peacetime, with nurses who would be ready to care for the wounded in wartime;
- for these volunteers, who would be called upon to assist the army medical services, to be recognized and protected through an international agreement.

In 1863, a charitable association known as the Geneva Society for Public Welfare set up a five-member commission to consider how Dunant's ideas could be made a reality. This commission – made up of Gustave Moynier, Guillaume-Henri Dufour, Louis Appia, Théodore Maunoir and Dunant himself – founded the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, which later became the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).



Olav Saltnes/Norwegian Red Cross

Camp for Sudanese refugees, Chad. Since 1863, the red cross has been a symbol of hope for countless people affected by armed conflict throughout the world.

The five founders then set about ensuring that the ideas put forward in Dunant's book would become a reality. In response to their invitation, 16 States and four philanthropic institutions sent representatives to the International Conference which opened in Geneva on 26 October 1863. It was at that Conference that the distinctive emblem – a red cross on a white background, the reverse of the Swiss national flag – was adopted and the Red Cross came into being.

To formalize protection of medical services on the battlefield and to gain international recognition of the Red Cross and its ideals, the Swiss government convened a Diplomatic Conference in Geneva in 1864.

Representatives of 12 governments took part and adopted a treaty entitled the "Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field", which became the first treaty of humanitarian law. Subsequently, further conferences were held, extending the basic law to other categories of victims, such as prisoners of war. In the aftermath of the Second World War, a Diplomatic Conference deliberated for four months before adopting the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which reinforced the protection of civilians in wartime. These Conventions were supplemented by three Additional Protocols, adopted in 1977 and in 2005.



CICR



Valeurs Humanitaires Universelles
et
et Traditions Casamançaises
la Dignité Humaine

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

A global movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present and active in almost every country and comprises around 100 million members and volunteers. It is united and guided by the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – which provide a universal standard of reference for all its members. Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose: to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without discrimination, and to protect human dignity.

The ICRC, the International Federation and each country's National Society are independent organizations. Each has its own status and exercises no authority over the others. They meet every two years in the Council of Delegates and gather every four years, in principle, with representatives of the States party to the Geneva Conventions for an International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The Movement is made up of:

- the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- National Societies;
- the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation).

Fundamental Principles

The seven Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which it is the ICRC's duty to uphold, were officially proclaimed at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross, held in Vienna in 1965.

They are:

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering

wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Roles and responsibilities

The **Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** define the relationship between the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions. The responsibilities of each of the Movement's components were further clarified and refined by the **Seville Agreement** adopted by the Council of Delegates in 1997. The Seville Agreement confers on the ICRC the role of lead agency for international operations conducted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in situations of armed conflict and internal strife, including activities for displaced people.

The ICRC is responsible for verifying that future National Societies meet the criteria for membership of the Movement and that they are in a position to conduct their activities in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. If so, the ICRC grants them official recognition. The National Society concerned may then apply to join the International Federation. In practice, however, applications are reviewed jointly by the ICRC and the International Federation.

Who's who in the Movement

The **International Committee of the Red Cross** is the Movement's founding body. In addition to carrying out operational activities to protect and assist victims of armed conflict, it is the promoter and custodian of international humanitarian law. It is also the guardian of the Fundamental Principles. In cooperation with the International Federation, it organizes the Movement's statutory meetings.

National Societies embody the work and principles of the Movement in more than 180 countries. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief and health and social programmes. In wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and, where appropriate, support the army medical services.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** works on the basis of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to inspire, facilitate and promote all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. Founded in 1919, the International Federation directs and coordinates international assistance of the Movement to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and in health emergencies. It acts as the official representative of its member societies in the international field. It promotes cooperation between National Societies and strengthens their capacity to prepare effectively for disasters and to carry out health and social programmes.



Boris Heger/ICRC

Doctor treating Colombian refugees in the Darien region of Panama. Voluntary service is one of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.



Thierry Gassmann/ICRC

The Sudanese Red Crescent is a crucial partner for the ICRC in delivering assistance to displaced people in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

Emblems of humanity

From the very beginning, the ICRC's founders recognized the need for a single, universal and easily recognizable emblem familiar to all. To their mind, the emblem had to protect not only people wounded in battle but also those bringing them aid. It was also to protect all medical units, including those of the enemy. The idea was that the mere sight of it would prompt combatants to show restraint and respect. The red cross on a white background (the reverse of the Swiss national flag) was adopted by the International Conference of 1863 (see p. 7) as the distinctive sign of societies bringing relief to wounded soldiers (the future National Societies). A year later it was recognized by a Diplomatic Conference as the distinctive sign of army medical services and sanctioned by humanitarian law with the adoption of the Geneva Convention of 1864. However, in 1876, the Ottoman Empire decided to use a red crescent instead of the red cross. Several States followed suit and in 1929 the red crescent in turn was granted official recognition, along with the Iranian red lion and sun (not currently in use).

Over the years, the Movement has been considering the possibility of introducing changes relating to the use of the emblem in order to tackle specific problems. Some Societies that wished to join the Movement

were not comfortable with either of the existing emblems. The Magen David Adom, the Israeli Society, wanted to use its own symbol – the red shield of David – whereas other Societies preferred to use both the red cross and the red crescent. Neither were possible under the Geneva Conventions rules. In addition, in some conflicts, the use of the red cross or the red crescent could have created problems if misinterpreted by either party.

To solve these problems, the Diplomatic Conference of December 2005 brought together the States party to the Geneva Conventions and adopted Additional Protocol III, creating a new emblem, the red crystal. This emblem, free from any religious, cultural or political connotations, gives States and National Societies greater flexibility in the use of the emblems and puts an end to the question of proliferation of emblems.

The National Societies already using the red cross or the red crescent can continue to do so.

Today, all of the 186 National Societies use the same emblem as the medical services of the military forces in their country during conflict – the so-called protective use.



Use and misuse of the emblem

Use of the emblem as a **protective device** is the visible manifestation of the protection accorded by the Geneva Conventions to persons (members of army medical services, National Society volunteers, ICRC delegates, etc.), medical units (hospitals, first-aid posts, etc.) and means of transport.

Use of the emblem as an **indicative device** shows that a person or object has a connection with the Movement. To avoid confusion with the emblem used as a protective device, the red cross, red crescent and red crystal used for indicative purposes are smaller in size.

Misuse of the emblem as a protective device in time of war jeopardizes the entire protective system established by humanitarian law.

Misuse of the emblem as an indicative device undermines its significance in the eyes of the public and thus diminishes its protective power in wartime.

In cases of misuse of the emblem as a protective device, the ICRC's role is to remind the belligerents of their duty to respect the emblem and of the steps to be taken against those making improper use of it, since primary responsibility for respecting the emblem lies with States. Where the emblem has been misused as an indicative device, the ICRC requests the National Society concerned to take the necessary action to stop such practices.

Under the Geneva Conventions, persons, vehicles and buildings protected by the red cross, red crescent and red crystal emblems must be respected and protected.



Sudanese Red Crescent



Marko Kokić/ICRC



INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The rules of war

International humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict or the law of war, is the body of rules that, in wartime, protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities. It limits the methods and means of warfare. Its central purpose is to limit and prevent human suffering in times of armed conflict. The rules are to be observed not only by governments and their armed forces, but also by armed opposition groups and any other parties to a conflict.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their three Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005 are the principal instruments of humanitarian law. Other texts include the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of gas, the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are applicable to international armed conflicts. They stipulate that civilians and people who are no longer taking an active part in the hostilities, such as wounded or captured combatants, must be spared and treated humanely. They also set out the role the ICRC plays in alleviating human suffering. In addition, Article 3 common to all four Conventions authorizes the ICRC to offer its services in the event of non-international armed conflict and accords minimum protection to the victims of such situations. Since August 2006, 194 States are party to the Geneva Conventions.

The three Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005 supplement the Conventions. Those of 1977 aim to limit the use of violence and protect the civilian population, by strengthening the rules governing the conduct of hostilities. At the beginning of 2005, 162 States were party to Protocol I and 157 were party to Protocol II. Protocol III establishes an additional emblem, the red crystal.

How do you define a conflict?

An international armed conflict involves the armed forces of at least two States.

A non-international armed conflict is an armed confrontation within the territory of one State between the State armed forces and organized armed groups, or between such armed groups.

What is the difference between international humanitarian law and human rights law?

International humanitarian law is very close to human rights law, in that both are concerned with the protection of every human being's physical and moral integrity and dignity. However, given the nature of humanitarian

law – to minimize suffering in armed conflict – this body of law contains rules that are much more specific than those contained in human rights treaties, such as rules pertaining to the means and methods of combat. Although distinct, human rights law and humanitarian law are complementary.

Development of the law

As the nature of warfare changes, new areas of humanitarian law need to be explored and developed. Beginning with the first Geneva Convention in 1864, the ICRC has worked to improve the protection of victims by promoting the development and adoption by States of new legal standards. Its legal experts organize and participate in meetings and conferences on humanitarian themes. Through its Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, the ICRC also encourages States to adopt legislation to apply humanitarian law at the national level. ICRC legal experts at Geneva headquarters and in the field give technical assistance to States, for example, on legislation to prosecute war criminals and to protect the red cross, red crescent and red crystal emblems.

The ICRC also seeks ways to improve implementation of the law. In 2002, it launched a project on the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian law. As part of the project, the ICRC is reflecting internally on a range of current and emerging issues relating to that law, as well as consulting externally on these topics.

At the request of the international community, the ICRC has recently undertaken a worldwide study on customary international humanitarian law rules. The study, completed in 2004, identifies where current recognized practice can complete written law and treaties, particularly those applicable to non-international armed conflicts.

In addition, the ICRC promotes awareness of and compliance with the law (see also Preventive action, p. 41).

The ICRC's operational activities are complementary to its legal work. Apart from providing help to populations in need, the ICRC, through its presence in the field, is in a privileged position to monitor respect for humanitarian law, to observe at close hand the problems that victims of armed conflict face in their daily lives and to initiate the development of new law.

Whom does international humanitarian law protect?

First Geneva Convention (1949) protects the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field.
Second Geneva Convention (1949) protects the wounded, sick and shipwrecked among armed forces at sea.

Third Geneva Convention (1949) protects prisoners of war.
Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) protects civilians.
Additional Protocol I (1977) strengthens the protection of victims of international armed conflicts.

Additional Protocol II (1977) strengthens the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts.
Additional Protocol III (2005) establishes a new emblem, the red crystal.

When violations occur...

If the ICRC observes a violation of the rules of war, it makes a confidential approach to the authorities responsible for the incident. Where violations are serious, repeated and established with certainty, and when confidential representations to the authorities have failed to improve the situation, it reserves the right to take a public stance by denouncing such failure to respect humanitarian law, provided that it deems such publicity to be in the interests of those affected or threatened by the violations. Such a step is exceptional.

It is not the ICRC's task to investigate or prosecute offences. States party to the Geneva Conventions are duty bound to introduce into their national legislation provisions for the repression of violations of humanitarian law, including the prosecution or extradition of war criminals. Offenders may be arraigned either before the national courts of the different States or before an international tribunal. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which entered into force in July 2002, paved the way for the creation of an internationally recognized body to try perpetrators of war crimes who for one reason or another have escaped trial by their national judicial systems. In the Court's rules of procedure, ICRC staff are uniquely exempt from giving evidence, for, if its staff could be called upon as witnesses in judicial procedures, the organization's neutrality would be jeopardized, putting at risk impartial access to the victims of armed conflict.

Guard outside the presidential palace, Lima, Peru. All soldiers are bound to respect the limits set by international humanitarian law.



Weapons – preventing the worst

The ICRC is closely involved in ensuring that weapons in use and under development conform to existing rules of humanitarian law.

Limits on means and methods of warfare

Two aspects of the weapons issue are of humanitarian concern. First, is a weapon indiscriminate and therefore more likely to cause civilian death and injury? And second, does it inflict more suffering than required for a given military purpose? These concerns were central to the recent worldwide campaign to ban landmines which culminated in the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, more commonly known as the Ottawa Convention.

In 2000, following the Kosovo conflict, the ICRC called for a new international agreement on other explosive remnants of war (ERW). The cause rapidly gained the support of NGOs and many governments. After formal negotiations between States party to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, an international agreement was concluded which requires parties to an armed conflict to take a number of specific steps to reduce the dangers posed by ERW. The new treaty, Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War, is an essential tool in efforts to minimize civilian deaths, injury and suffering arising from modern warfare. More work is needed, however, to raise awareness of the Protocol and to ensure that it is widely ratified and implemented by governments and armed forces.

The unregulated proliferation of weapons and their easy availability fuel armed violence and put the civilian population at risk.



The ICRC also concerns itself with weapons under development, whose effects have not yet been seen on the battlefield. The 1990s saw a brief but intense campaign to bring about the prohibition of blinding laser weapons, a goal achieved in 1995. Equally alarming are the voices in the scientific community that warn that the current advances in life sciences and biotechnology could be put to hostile use. The ICRC has learnt that such advances, meant to benefit humanity, could be used perversely to make more effective biological or chemical weapons. As a result, in 2002 the ICRC launched a rare public appeal to governments, military bodies and the scientific community, reminding these institutions of their legal and moral obligations to do everything possible to prevent poisoning and the deliberate spread of infectious disease as methods of warfare.

Unregulated availability of arms

Another growing concern in humanitarian circles is the unregulated proliferation of small military-style weapons. In most of the conflicts in the last decade, death and injury have resulted less from the major conventional weapons, such as missiles, tanks, aircraft and warships, than from small arms and light weapons. Anyone, even children, can operate them, as they are light and easy to carry, simple to handle and require little or no training. Unlike major weapon systems, their availability is subject to few internationally accepted norms. Even after fighting has ended on the battlefield, armed violence often persists, fuelled by the easy access to weapons. In some conflict and post-conflict situations, rapid-fire assault rifles are easier and cheaper to obtain than food.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the widespread availability of military-style weapons is having a detrimental impact on respect for humanitarian law and on the delivery of assistance to the victims of war, whom that law seeks to protect. The ICRC has contributed its expertise to the growing international discussion on this problem, highlighting the cost to civilians of the free flow of weapons and ammunition, and has urged governments to take into account the recipient's likely respect for humanitarian law when making decisions on arms transfers.



Teun Anthony Voeten/ICRC



PROTECTION IN WAR

In its activities to protect people in situations of armed conflict or violence, the ICRC's mission is to obtain full respect for the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law. It seeks to:

- minimize the dangers to which these people are exposed;
- prevent and put a stop to the abuses to which they are subjected;
- draw attention to their rights and make their voices heard;
- bring them assistance.

The ICRC does this by remaining close to the victims of conflict and violence and by maintaining a confidential dialogue with both State and non-State actors.

A diversified strategy

The first formal step taken by the ICRC when a conflict breaks out is to remind the authorities of their responsibilities and obligations towards the civilian population, prisoners, and wounded and sick combatants, giving priority to respect for their physical integrity and dignity. After carrying out independent surveys, the ICRC puts forward recommendations to the authorities for tangible measures – preventive and corrective – to improve the situation of the affected population.

At the same time, the ICRC takes action of its own accord to respond to the most urgent needs, notably by:

- providing food and other basic necessities;
- evacuating and/or transferring people at risk;
- restoring and preserving contact between dispersed family members and tracing missing persons.

Where places of detention are concerned, the ICRC also undertakes programmes with a longer-term, structural perspective, providing technical and material assistance to the detaining authorities.



An ICRC and Sri Lankan Red Cross team registers requests to trace people who went missing during the tsunami in December 2004.

Protection of civilians

Civilians often endure horrific ordeals in today's conflicts, sometimes as direct targets. Massacres, hostage-taking, sexual violence, harassment, expulsion, forced transfer and looting, and the deliberate denial of access to water, food and health care, are some of the practices which spread terror and suffering among civilians.

Humanitarian law is founded on the principle of the immunity of the civilian population. People who are not, or no longer, taking part in the hostilities may under no circumstances be attacked: they must be spared and protected. In international armed conflicts, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and Additional Protocol I of 1977 contain specific provisions that protect civilians and civilian property. In non-international armed conflicts, the civilian population has the right to protection by virtue of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions.

Protection is the mainstay of ICRC activities, at the heart of its mandate and of international humanitarian law. The ICRC maintains a constant presence in areas where civilians are particularly at risk. Its delegates keep up a regular dialogue with all weapon bearers, whether they are members of the armed forces, rebel groups, police forces, paramilitary forces or other groups taking part in the fighting.



Red Cross messages are a lifeline for families who have lost contact with each other as a result of armed conflict.



In Chechnya, the ICRC distributes mattresses and household goods to displaced people who had to leave behind all their belongings.

Displaced by conflict

Armed conflict often results in large-scale displacements of civilians, both across international borders and within the frontiers of affected countries. In most cases, these people have had to leave behind all but a few of their worldly possessions. They are obliged to travel long distances, often on foot, to seek safe refuge away from the fighting. Families are dispersed, children lose contact with their parents, and elderly relatives too weak to undertake such an arduous journey are left behind to fend for themselves. Refugees and internally displaced people lose their means of generating their own income. They are therefore dependent, at least in the first instance, on the goodwill of their hosts and on humanitarian agencies for their survival.

When people are displaced within their country's borders as a result of an armed conflict, they form part of the affected civilian population. As such, they are protected by humanitarian law and benefit from ICRC protection and assistance programmes.

Indeed, given the extremely precarious situation in which many internally displaced people find themselves, they form a large percentage of the beneficiaries of ICRC activities. Where the national authorities are unable to do so, the ICRC steps in to provide for the most urgent needs of displaced people. In doing so, however, it keeps in mind that the resources of host communities may have been stretched to the limit to accommodate the new arrivals, thereby rendering them vulnerable too, and that those who are left behind may also face extreme hardship and danger. It is with reference to this, the bigger picture, that the ICRC determines the beneficiaries of its assistance programmes. Vulnerability, rather than belonging to a particular category, is the deciding factor.

People who have fled across international borders are considered refugees and benefit from protection and assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In such cases, the ICRC acts only at a subsidiary level, particularly where refugees are protected by humanitarian law or when its presence is required as a specifically neutral and independent intermediary (during attacks on refugee camps, for example). It also provides Red Cross message services to enable refugees to re-establish contact with family members from whom they have become separated as a result of an armed conflict (see *Restoring family links*, p. 28).



Boris Heger/ICRC

The ICRC believes that it is often violations of humanitarian law that cause displacement in the first place. In addition to its operational work on behalf of refugees and displaced people, therefore, the ICRC strives to disseminate and to promote respect for humanitarian law so as to prevent displacements (see Preventive action, p. 41).

Women and war

The ICRC assists women victims of conflict as part of its broader mandate to protect and assist all victims of conflict. However, since women do have specific protection, health and assistance needs, the ICRC focuses attention on ensuring that these needs are adequately and appropriately addressed in all its activities. In particular, it puts emphasis on the protection which must be accorded to women and girls, and to spread awareness among weapon bearers that sexual violence in all its forms is prohibited by humanitarian law and should be vigorously prevented.

Women and girls predominantly experience armed conflict as civilians and as such are often exposed to acts of violence, including:

- death and injury from indiscriminate military attacks and the prevalence of mines;
- lack of the basic means of survival and health care;
- limitations on their means to support themselves and their families.

Disappearances, hostage-taking, torture, imprisonment, forced recruitment into the armed forces, displacement – these all happen to women and girls, as well as men and boys.

More specific – but not exclusive – to women and girls is the crime of sexual violence. Since wars began, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as a means of warfare, to humiliate and subjugate the enemy. Violations such as rape, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery and enforced impregnation or enforced termination of pregnancy are heinous attacks against the life and the physical and psychological integrity of the person, and are recognized as such under humanitarian law.

Although women are frequently portrayed solely as victims, this does not reflect reality. Women throughout the world are showing not only that they can be extremely resilient, but also that they can put their ingenuity and coping skills to full use in their daily roles as heads of household, breadwinners and care providers within their families and communities. Such capacities are helping to sustain and rebuild communities torn apart by conflict.

Women also take an active part in war, in direct combat as part of a military force, and may support their menfolk who are fighting. As combatants captured by the enemy, women are afforded protection equal to that of men under humanitarian law. The law recognizes women's need for special protection according to their specific needs. Women fighters, like their male counterparts, must also be instructed in the law of war, so that they can act in accordance with the rules.

Children and war

Although the ICRC acts impartially to assist all the victims of war and internal violence according to their needs, it cannot be denied that the needs of children are radically different from those of women, men and the elderly. All too often children are helpless, first-hand witnesses of atrocities committed against their parents or other family members. They are killed, mutilated, recruited to fight, imprisoned or otherwise separated from their families. Cut off from the environment familiar to them, even those who manage to escape lack any certainty as to their future and that of their loved ones. They are often forced to flee, abandoned to their own devices and rejected without an identity.

The ICRC registers children who have been separated from their parents as a result of armed conflict and searches for their next-of-kin in order to restore contact; the children are reunited with their families wherever possible. If the children are too young or traumatized to give details about their identity, the ICRC takes a photograph, which is then circulated widely or displayed in public in the hope that their relatives will recognize them.

The ICRC gives children, along with other civilians, food aid and other material assistance, both in emergencies and over the long term. It also improves their access to safe water and medical care (see Assistance for conflict victims p. 31).

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols give prominence to the protection of children, both by means of provisions protecting the civilian population as a whole and provisions that focus specifically on children. The ICRC has been involved in the negotiation of other treaties that provide similar protection, especially the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and its 2000 Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8 of which considers it a war crime to recruit children under the age of 15 years or to use them to participate actively in hostilities.



Children in Kabul have grown up among the debris of war.

Protection of detainees

In international armed conflicts, the Geneva Conventions recognize the right of ICRC delegates to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees. Preventing them from carrying out their mission would amount to a violation of humanitarian law.

In non-international armed conflicts and situations of internal violence, Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and the Statutes of the Movement authorize the ICRC to offer its services to visit detainees, and many governments accept its proposal to do so.

Deprived of freedom: severe vulnerability

Being deprived of their freedom puts people in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the detaining authority and within the prison environment. This vulnerability is particularly acute in times of armed conflict and internal violence, when the excessive and illegal use of force is commonplace and structural deficiencies are exacerbated.

The ICRC works to:

- prevent or put an end to disappearances and summary executions, torture and ill-treatment;
- restore contact between detainees and their families;
- improve conditions of detention when necessary and in accordance with the applicable law.

It does so by carrying out visits to places of detention. On the basis of its findings, it makes confidential approaches to the authorities and, if necessary, provides material or medical assistance to the detainees.

During visits, ICRC delegates conduct private interviews with each detainee. They note down the detainees' details, so that their cases can be followed right up to the time of their release; the detainees describe any problems of a humanitarian nature they may face.

While refraining from taking a position as to the reasons for their arrest or capture, the ICRC tries to ensure that detainees benefit from the judicial guarantees to which they are entitled under humanitarian law.



Boris Heger/ICRC

Conditions for ICRC visits

Before beginning visits to places of detention, the ICRC first submits to the authorities a set of standard conditions. Delegates must be allowed to:

- see all detainees falling within the ICRC's mandate and have access to all places where they are held;
- interview detainees of their choice without witnesses;
- draw up, during the visits, lists of detainees within the ICRC's mandate or receive from the authorities such lists which the delegates may verify and, if necessary, complete;
- repeat visits to detainees of their choice as frequently as they may feel necessary;
- restore contact between detainees and family members;
- provide urgent material and medical assistance as required.



*Anayancy prison, Quibdo, Colombia.
The ICRC interviews all detainees
falling within its mandate in a given
place of detention to check on their
treatment and living conditions.*

Restoring family links

The ICRC's Central Tracing Agency works to restore contact between dispersed family members in all situations of armed conflict or internal violence. Each year, hundreds of thousands of new cases of people being sought by their relatives are opened, whether they concern displaced people, refugees, detainees or missing persons. Those who are located are given the opportunity to send and receive Red Cross messages and/or are put in contact with their families thanks to the worldwide network supported by the ICRC and comprising 186 National Societies.

Link to the outside

In international armed conflicts, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency fulfils the task assigned to it under humanitarian law of gathering, processing and passing on information on protected persons, notably prisoners of war and civilian internees.

For detainees and their families, receiving news of their loved ones is always of huge importance. In a wide range of contexts, the ICRC has given prisoners of war, civilian internees, security detainees and sometimes even ordinary detainees the opportunity to communicate with their relatives.



Canete, Cocache, Peru. After 23 years, first as a forced recruit of the rebels and then as a prisoner of the military, Evita is reunited with her brother under ICRC auspices.

Dispersed families

Preservation of the family unit is a universal right guaranteed by law. The ICRC does everything possible to reunite people separated by conflict, by establishing their whereabouts and putting them back in touch with their families. Special attention is given to particularly vulnerable groups, such as children separated from their parents or elderly people.

Sometimes, a travel document provided by the ICRC is the only means for a destitute person without identity papers to join his or her family settled in a third country or to return to his or her country of origin. The growing number of refugees and asylum seekers has meant that the ICRC is called upon more and more often to issue travel documents for people who have received authorization to settle in a host country.

Brcko District, Bosnia and Herzegovina. More than 13 years after he went missing during the conflict, the family of this young man still do not know whether he is alive or dead.



Missing persons: the right to know

Even after the guns have fallen silent, the families of missing persons continue to be haunted by the unknown fate of their loved ones. Are they still alive? Are they injured or imprisoned? Humanitarian law obliges all parties to a conflict to provide answers to these questions and recognizes the right of the families to know what happened. The ICRC assists in this process by collecting information on missing persons or by putting mechanisms in place together with the authorities with the aim of clarifying the fate or whereabouts of persons unaccounted for and informing their families.

At the end of 2001, the ICRC launched a project on “The Missing” which aimed to heighten awareness – among governments, the military and international and national organizations – of the tragedy of people unaccounted for as a result of armed conflict or internal violence, and of the anguish suffered by their families. A process of consultation, drawing on the knowledge of experts from all corners of the globe, culminated in an international conference on missing persons and their families, convened by the ICRC in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2003. The conference brought together 350 participants from 86 countries, and its recommendations form a strong basis for future work. The ultimate goals are to ensure that the authorities and leaders responsible for solving the problem of missing persons are held accountable, to enhance assistance to families and to prevent further disappearances.

The ICRC is strongly committed to its project on “The Missing”. Operational guidelines are currently being implemented on the ground by all the ICRC delegations concerned.



ASSISTANCE FOR CONFLICT VICTIMS

Modern-day humanitarian emergencies are characterized by outbreaks of extreme violence frequently directed against civilians. These often coincide with or are the indirect cause of other crises such as famines, epidemics and economic upheaval. The combined effects may put the civilian population in extreme peril, their coping mechanisms stretched to the limit, and in dire need of assistance.

The primary aim of ICRC assistance is, therefore, to protect conflict victims' lives and health, to ease their plight and to ensure that the consequences of conflict – disease, injury, hunger or exposure to the elements – do not jeopardize their future. While emergency assistance saves lives and mitigates the worst effects of conflict, the ICRC tries always to keep sight of the ultimate aim of restoring people's ability to provide for themselves.

Assistance may take a variety of forms, depending on the region and the nature of the crisis. It may include the provision of food and/or medicine, but usually builds on the capacity to deliver essential services, such as the construction or repair of water-supply systems or medical facilities and the training of primary-health-care staff, surgeons and prosthetic/orthotic technicians.



Carina Appel/ICRC

Hebron, West Bank. Parcels containing food and basic necessities enable destitute families to survive during prolonged periods of fighting.

In certain conflicts, unlawful tactics may be used by either side, such as blockades on food and other essential goods, obstruction of water supplies, and deliberate destruction of crops and infrastructure. In such cases, before providing assistance, the ICRC attempts to prevent or bring an end to violations by drawing the parties' attention to their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

Before beginning any assistance programme, the ICRC makes a careful assessment of what each group needs in the context of its own environment, so that the aid is appropriate. In addition, the ICRC makes sure that supplies are distributed in compliance with the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality (see pp. 9–11).

In its constant quest to improve the quality of its action, the ICRC monitors each programme throughout, adapts it as the situation evolves and, when it is over, evaluates the lessons learned and ways to do better next time. The ICRC's evaluation policy applies to every sphere of its activity, not just relief operations, so that it can provide the best response possible to the multifaceted needs of conflict victims.

An ICRC convoy brings desperately needed supplies to the people of Aceh suffering the dual effects of conflict and natural disaster.

Thierry Gassmann/ICRC



Economic security

Economic security means that a household is self-sufficient and can meet its own basic economic needs. In a conflict or crisis, in which displacement, theft, looting and the destruction of property and infrastructure are commonplace, households may no longer be able to provide for themselves, thereby becoming dependent on outside aid.

In its approach to assistance in the context of an armed conflict, the ICRC focuses on the dynamics of household economics and is concerned with both the means of production to cover all the basic economic needs of a household and the provision of resources to meet those needs. Although some needs are more important than others – food and water, for instance, are vital – there is too often a tendency to forget, in crisis situations, that human beings need more than just food to live on. The ICRC therefore takes into account all of a household's basic economic needs, such as housing, clothing, cooking utensils and fuel.

Depending on the degree of loss of economic security, the ICRC provides one of three types of assistance:

- **economic support:** to protect victims' vital means of production, so that they can maintain their productive capacity and economic self-sufficiency at the household level as far as possible;
- **survival relief:** to protect the lives of conflict victims by providing them with the economic goods essential to their survival when they can no longer obtain these by their own means;
- **economic rehabilitation:** to support conflict victims in restoring their means of production and, where possible, regaining their self-sufficiency.

Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sewing workshops are just one way of helping people who have no means of livelihood to regain a measure of self-sufficiency.



Halting the downward spiral...

The ICRC takes action the moment the early signs of a crisis are detected, by reminding the authorities of the protection due to civilians under humanitarian law, including respect for their persons and property. If the population suffers economic problems through obvious impoverishment and its means of production are deficient or likely to become inadequate, the ICRC intervenes by providing **economic support**.

This could include food distributions to support the economy, aid designed to diversify and intensify production, or the protection of livestock by veterinary services. Where possible, it gives priority to economic support activities. Other types of assistance, however, are often also essential, because the ICRC is powerless to prevent the process of impoverishment and decapitalization generated by a conflict. When this happens, the ICRC provides **survival relief**, by delivering essential goods which can no longer be obtained by the victims' own means of production.

... and turning it upwards again

When things start to improve, the population requires help to recover and regain its self-sufficiency so that survival relief operations and assistance can eventually be phased out. ICRC **economic rehabilitation** programmes aim to restore and reinforce means of production through a range of activities, including the distribution of seeds, agricultural tools and fishing tackle, the provision of veterinary medicine or the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, to help both resident and displaced populations meet their own needs.

Over and out

In the past, emergency aid and development programmes were regarded as distinct and separate spheres, requiring a different kind of response. There is now increasing acceptance of the interrelation between the two, leading to a broader approach to humanitarian assistance. Thus, when economic rehabilitation activities are undertaken, a link is created with development programmes allowing for a smooth transition from the emergency to the development phases. Development agencies must then take up the baton, investing resources and manpower so as to reduce the structural vulnerabilities that can encourage the outbreak of crises.



Boris Heger/ICRC

*Darien province, Panama.
Distributions of seeds and agricultural
tools enable refugees to provide for
their own basic needs in the longer
term.*

Water and habitat

The ICRC's water and habitat programmes aim to:

- ensure that victims of armed conflict have water for drinking and domestic use;
- to protect the population from environmental hazards caused by the collapse of water and habitat systems.

Even in peacetime, millions of people throughout the world have difficulty gaining access to clean drinking water, proper housing and decent sanitation. The problem is further compounded in wartime, when destruction of infrastructure and mass displacement can expose millions more to death and disease. In the heat of battle, water sources may be deliberately targeted; people may have to leave their homes and seek water in hostile environments; or the infrastructure that provided water may be damaged by the fighting.

A dramatic increase in waterborne and water-related diseases, such as diarrhoeal

diseases, typhoid and cholera, are the immediate signs of the breakdown of these life-sustaining systems. Further down the road, water shortages reduce food production, aggravate poverty and disease, spur large migrations and undermine a State's moral authority. As water and shelter are so essential to survival, ensuring access to them is a priority for humanitarian organizations.

In order to provide access to water, improve hygiene levels and protect the environment, the ICRC carries out a range of activities:

- rehabilitation of water-treatment plants, distribution networks or gravity water systems linked to pumping stations;
- construction of wells, harnessing and protection of water sources and drainage systems, construction of water-storage containers;
- purification and distribution of drinking water;



Eastern Hararghe, Ethiopia. An ICRC water point provides clean water for drinking and household needs.

What is meant by habitat?

Habitat is a term which designates not merely the boundaries of the home, but its relationship with the wider environment and the people who live in it.

Health services

- construction and rehabilitation of latrines and sewage-treatment systems; collection and treatment of waste, including hospital waste;
- renovation and reconstruction of health facilities and schools;
- work on infrastructure in places of detention to provide inmates with at least the minimum water requirements and ensure decent sanitation and living conditions;
- setting up and organization of camps for displaced people;
- introduction of vector-control programmes, protection of foodstuffs, decontamination of living spaces, reduction of energy consumption, use of alternative energy.

The aim of ICRC health programmes is to ensure that the victims of conflict have access to essential preventive and curative health care of a universally accepted standard.

As a direct effect of conflict, people can be killed, injured or displaced, medical structures destroyed and supply lines disrupted. At the height of a conflict, the number of people who are wounded, fall prey to infectious disease or are affected by malnutrition can reach epidemic proportions and quickly outstrip the capacities of existing local health services. Meanwhile, as an indirect consequence of conflict, the destruction of health facilities, shortages of qualified staff and lack of medical supplies can mean that the more common health problems go unattended and basic health services such as antenatal care, vaccination programmes and elective surgery fall by the wayside. Therefore, while rapid assistance is needed to attend to the most urgent needs, support for the existing health system is essential to ensure that normal health services are restored or maintained.

Children are vaccinated against polio in a camp for displaced people, Darfur, Sudan. During conflict, regular immunization programmes are disrupted, leaving the population vulnerable to communicable diseases.



Leigh Daynes/British Red Cross



Baghdad (Iraq). A badly injured 12-year-old boy is comforted by his aunt after the rest of his family were killed in a bombing raid.

The full spectrum of health care

ICRC health-related activities range from reconstruction or rehabilitation of buildings to management support, training of medical staff, epidemiological surveillance, revitalization of immunization services, supply of essential medicines and medical equipment, and the loan of expatriate surgical/medical teams. To counter the disruption of primary-health-care services caused by conflict, the ICRC provides direct assistance to existing health centres and district hospitals, as far as possible with the active participation of the communities concerned. In cases in which hunger or even famine have taken root, intensive feeding centres supervised by medical staff are set up for children suffering from malnutrition. Undernourished children, besides facing death from starvation, are extremely vulnerable to disease and infection.

War surgery

The ICRC's long experience in treating war casualties has given it considerable expertise in this field. ICRC surgeons train expatriate medical staff who have volunteered to work for the organization and are new to the specific skills and techniques required in the field. They also teach local doctors these skills to enable them to take over and continue to treat the wounded once the ICRC teams have left. At international level, courses and workshops are organized each year, such as the H.E.L.P. courses (Health Emergencies in Large Populations), which enable the ICRC to share its knowledge and experience. ICRC doctors publish manuals on war surgery and contribute to professional periodicals.

In an unsafe environment, gaining access to the wounded and transporting them to hospital can present considerable difficulties. The ICRC, in partnership with the local National Society, develops programmes for pre-hospital first aid and the evacuation and transportation of injured patients.

The ICRC also builds National Societies' capacities to respond to emergency situations by, for instance, running first-aid courses for volunteers, which cover organization as well as life-saving techniques. The ICRC may provide National Societies with communications equipment and ambulances to assist them in preparing for emergencies.

Health in prisons

ICRC medical staff accompany delegates on their visits to places of detention in order to assess the inmates' health and detect any consequences of ill-treatment, whether physical or psychological. The doctors and nurses who conduct these visits are well versed in the specific problems of prison health, such as hygiene, epidemiology, nutritional needs and vitamin deficiencies. They identify priority public health problems in prisons that need to be controlled. When the risk of a health problem in prison is so great that the response capacity of the penitentiary health service is overwhelmed, the ICRC implements vector-control programmes to address such problems as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and vitamin deficiencies.

Addressing the health problems of prison inmates also requires the training and knowledge necessary to make proper medical assessments as to whether detainees have been the victims of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.



Darfur, Sudan. Surgery for conflict-related injuries requires specialized training.

To walk and work again

During armed conflict, many people become disabled either from direct causes such as anti-personnel mines or ERW or from indirect causes linked to the collapse of health systems. Injuries inflicted by anti-personnel mines or ERW can lead to amputation, severe disability and psychological trauma. Such war casualties require specialist surgery and post-operative care in the first instance and rehabilitation and psychological support in the longer term. In many cases, the authorities do not have the means to provide such care.

In 1979, the ICRC established a service for the physical rehabilitation of war victims. Since then, it has implemented and/or assisted more than 85 projects in 36 countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have received prostheses, orthoses, crutches or wheelchairs, accompanied by physiotherapy, helping them to regain some measure of mobility and, in many cases, economic independence. By providing financial, educational and technical assistance, the ICRC aims to improve the accessibility of rehabilitation services, to enhance the quality of such services and to ensure their long-term functioning, since people with conflict-related disabilities will need to have their appliances replaced and repaired for the rest of their lives.

Not all governments have the means to sustain these services, as rehabilitation is still not considered a priority. The lack of guaranteed long-term support by local organizations has led to the creation of the ICRC Special Fund for the Disabled. It ensures the continuity of programmes after the ICRC's withdrawal from a country and supports physical rehabilitation centres in developing countries.



Kuito, Angola. At a limb-fitting centre run jointly by the ICRC and the Ministry of Health, a patient tries out his new-found mobility.



EMB A/P&I

HUMANITY

CALLING CARD

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 armed conflict and to provide them with assistance in such situations. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal principles of humanitarianism. Established in 1864, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

THE ICRC AND THE MOVEMENT

The ICRC is a Swiss-based organization that operates closely with each of the 191 member States of the United Nations. It is also a member of the United Nations system. The ICRC is the only international humanitarian organization that is not a part of the United Nations system. It is the only international humanitarian organization that is not a part of the United Nations system. It is the only international humanitarian organization that is not a part of the United Nations system.

- Humanity
- Impartiality
- Neutrality
- Independence
- Voluntary
- Unity



PREVENTIVE ACTION

Making the rules known

The ICRC's preventive work is designed to contain the harmful effects of conflict and keep them to a minimum. The very spirit of international humanitarian law is to use force with restraint and in proportion to the objectives. The ICRC therefore seeks to promote the whole range of humanitarian principles so as to prevent – or at the very least to limit – the worst excesses of war.

Prevention through communication

In its prevention programmes, the ICRC targets in particular those people and groups who determine the fate of victims of armed conflict or who can obstruct or facilitate ICRC action. These groups include armed forces, police, security forces and other weapon bearers, decision-makers and opinion-leaders at local and international levels and, with an eye to the future, teenagers, students and their teachers.

The strategy behind these activities comprises three levels:

- awareness-building;
- promotion of humanitarian law through teaching and training;
- integration of humanitarian law into official legal, educational and operational curricula.

The ultimate aim is to influence people's attitudes and behaviour so as to improve the protection of civilians and other victims in times of armed conflict, facilitate access to the victims and improve security for humanitarian action.

Sevastopol, Ukraine. Adolescents from Red Cross branches throughout the country take part in an Exploring Humanitarian Law competition.



Respect and ensure respect

States have a legal obligation to ensure that their armed forces are fully versed in the law of armed conflict and universal humanitarian principles at all levels in the chain of command and that they apply them in all situations. The ICRC promotes the systematic integration of humanitarian law and principles into military doctrine, education and training and assists States in this process.

Since the forces of law and order are often called upon to intervene in situations of internal disturbances and violence, the ICRC works to ensure that police and security forces receive systematic training in human rights and universal humanitarian principles.

In many of today's armed conflicts – which are mostly non-international – weapon bearers who may have little or no training are directly involved in the fighting. Recent examples around the world have shown how the proliferation of armed groups has led to appalling abuses of the civilian population and jeopardized the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The ICRC endeavours to establish relations and build contacts with all the protagonists in a conflict. In this way, it can make the activities and working methods of the ICRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent better known and thus make it easier to reach the victims and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

Making a difference

Humanitarian action has become the domain of many organizations, groups and individuals. As more entities respond to ever-pressing needs for humanitarian assistance around the world, dialogue is necessary to prevent duplication and complication of efforts on the ground.

The ICRC therefore strives to make decision-makers and opinion-leaders, such as parliamentarians, members of NGOs and specialized agencies, aware of its activities in order to gain their support in ensuring the implementation of international humanitarian law. To this end, it engages in humanitarian diplomacy, which includes creating and maintaining a network of contacts with a variety of humanitarian actors and coordinating activities with other actors in the field.

Securing the future

To reach tomorrow's decision-makers and opinion-leaders, the ICRC targets leading universities to encourage the inclusion of humanitarian law in courses offered in particular by the faculties of law, political science and journalism. As with the military, the ICRC's approach is to work with the authorities concerned, train trainers, produce resource materials and maintain a network of contacts within the academic world.



Ralf Maro/ICRC

In an attempt to reach all segments of society and to include humanitarian law as part of basic education, the ICRC helps ministries of education, National Societies and other educational bodies to introduce humanitarian law and related topics into secondary-school programmes. The ICRC has developed an education programme for young people aged between 13 and 18 years to help them embrace humanitarian principles in their daily lives and to apply the principles when assessing events at home and abroad. The programme, entitled “Exploring Humanitarian Law”, consists of a resource pack, with 30 hours of learning activities, translated into 25 languages. Since its launch in 2001, the programme has been adopted or is being considered for adoption in secondary-school curricula by the authorities of about 90 countries.

Yemeni schoolgirls learn about basic humanitarian principles.



Safer steps

The lethal pollution from mines and ERW is a legacy of conflict that continues to kill and maim civilians, block access to basic necessities and hinder reconciliation, often for decades after the last shot has been fired.

In affected countries, the ICRC's preventive mine-action programmes seek to reduce the suffering of people living in mine/ERW-contaminated areas. Its programmes are flexible and designed to meet the requirements of each situation. They may include providing safe access to water and firewood or to safe play areas for children. It is also important to raise awareness of the problem in order to prevent accidents. This may involve giving information about contaminated local areas or alerting people at risk to the danger of mines and ERW and promoting safe behaviour.

Social research on war

To develop new prevention strategies, in 1999 the ICRC launched a programme of research in collaboration with academic institutions. The aim of the programme was to gauge the views of civilians and combatants on the many facets of war and build greater respect for the rules that regulate war. By promoting the results of this research – see “Roots of behaviour in war” on the ICRC website – the ICRC seeks to build local and international momentum and expertise regarding preventive strategies, and strengthen research into international humanitarian law by major research and academic establishments, international and non-governmental organizations and prevention specialists.



COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Why cooperation?

The purpose of ICRC cooperation activities is to enhance the capacity of National Societies to fulfil their own responsibilities as Red Cross or Red Crescent institutions in providing humanitarian services in their own countries. In particular, the ICRC assists and supports National Societies in their activities to:

- provide assistance to victims of armed conflict and internal strife (preparedness and response);
- promote international humanitarian law and spread knowledge of the Fundamental Principles, ideals and activities of the Movement;
- restore contact between dispersed family members as part of the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing network.

Mutual support

In countries affected by conflict, the National Societies and the ICRC work together to mitigate human suffering by mounting joint assistance operations for the victims. Where there is armed conflict or internal strife, the ICRC coordinates all input by the various components of the Movement, and supports the local National Societies through various capacity-building measures, mainly in the fields of operational management and the development of human resources.

Because National Societies and the ICRC share a responsibility to provide assistance to victims of conflict, they need each other to accomplish this common mission. The ICRC has developed substantial expertise in the development and promotion of humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles (see pp. 9–12), as well as a solid experience of action in conflicts, including tracing which is a primary responsibility of any National Society. This specific know-how is valuable to National Societies, which can count on the ICRC's support to enhance their performance in these areas.



Boris Heger/ICRC

Russian Red Cross volunteers help distribute mattresses to displaced Chechens in Ingushetia.

Conversely, the wide network and intimate knowledge of local conditions which are provided by the members of National Societies are essential assets to the ICRC in the planning and conduct of its operations.

The main areas of ICRC cooperation with National Societies involve:

- providing technical expertise and material and financial assistance to National Societies to help them develop their skills, structures and working relationships so that they may carry out their tasks and responsibilities effectively and efficiently;
- advising and supporting National Societies on compliance with the conditions for recognition as a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, on the adoption and revision of their statutes and on other legal matters, especially for the implementation of or compliance with humanitarian law;
- promoting the exchange of operational information and coordination of activities among the Movement's components so as to make the best use of available resources and contribute to mutually supportive action for the victims of armed conflicts and internal strife, and the beneficiaries of assistance, in accordance with the Seville Agreement (see p. 10).

Cooperation activities are carried out in close consultation and coordination with the International Federation, which has the lead role in assisting National Societies in their overall development endeavours.



Palestinian Red Crescent volunteers distribute vouchers provided by the ICRC to needy families, which they can exchange for food or other essential items.

WORKING WITH OTHERS

Relations with other organizations

Over the years, the number of agencies and organizations working in the humanitarian sphere has proliferated. While improving the overall capacity to respond to crises, this can also lead to confusion, duplication, competition and misunderstanding.

In order to contribute to a more efficient functioning of the humanitarian endeavour, the ICRC consults and coordinates with many international and non-governmental organizations operating in the same contexts, while maintaining its independence. In its humanitarian activities it attaches a great deal of importance to ensuring that all such organizations understand its approach and role so as to foster harmonious cooperation and complementarity in the field.

Efforts have recently been undertaken to establish a standardized approach and a code of conduct for humanitarian work. The ICRC is one of the parties behind the "Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief", and supports all efforts aimed at ensuring quality assurance in the field.

Representing the victims

The ICRC attends the periodic meetings of international and regional organizations, either as an observer or as a guest, and participates in debates on issues of humanitarian concern in order to draw attention to the plight of victims and seek diplomatic support for its humanitarian activities. For instance, the ICRC has

observer status at the United Nations General Assembly, cooperates with the UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and, as a Standing Invitee, attends the meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a coordinating body which includes the main UN humanitarian agencies, the International Federation and NGOs. The ICRC also coordinates its activities with those of other organizations, as appropriate, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In addition, the ICRC maintains regular relations with:

- the European Union (EU);
- the Council of Europe;
- the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
- the African Union (AU);
- the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC);
- the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM);
- the Organization of American States (OAS);
- the League of Arab States;
- the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Relations with the military

Recent years have seen a closer connection being forged between military and humanitarian action, even to the point where it is no longer clear where one ends and the other begins. The ICRC has raised its concerns about these developments in international forums, for it maintains that the neutral and independent nature of humanitarian action and the necessity of providing protection and assistance to all victims without discrimination make it imperative that humanitarian activities be conducted independently of political and military considerations and objectives. At the same time, the ICRC believes there is much scope for constructive interaction and cooperation between humanitarian organizations and the military, which can be enhanced by mutual consultation. It continues to advocate nonetheless for a clear distinction to be maintained – in substance and in appearance – between military and humanitarian operations (see also Preventive action, p. 41).

Relations with the private sector

With the advent of globalization, the private sector is playing an increasingly prominent role in international relations. Companies operating in conflict zones or unstable environments often make their own security arrangements to protect their investments, which can in turn affect the dynamics of the conflict itself. The ICRC has therefore adopted a comprehensive strategy aimed at developing relations with the corporate world in a coherent fashion. The first objective of this strategy is to establish a substantive dialogue with the private sector based on the promotion of humanitarian principles. The second is to enhance the ICRC's efficiency and professionalism through exchanges with the private sector, i.e. to draw on specific skills and competencies, improve purchasing policy and step up fundraising efforts.



The ICRC maintains that a clear separation of military and humanitarian action is necessary to ensure neutral and independent access to conflict victims.

RESOURCES

Who works for the ICRC?

The ICRC hires doctors and truck drivers, agricultural engineers and accountants, nutritionists and secretaries, nurses and carpenters, lawyers and mechanics. At some time or other, just about every profession is called upon to lend its expertise and goodwill to the humanitarian cause.

Expatriates

There are roughly 1,400 ICRC expatriates on mission throughout the world. Because of their origins and their expatriate status, they have no personal involvement in the conflict situations in which they work. Their position as outsiders enables them to assume responsibility for ICRC activities, without encountering the difficulties – and in some cases the risks – inherent in the position of delegation employees, who have local roots. Half of all expatriates are delegates, men and women, who carry out visits to people deprived of their freedom, organize and implement assistance programmes and spread knowledge and awareness of international humanitarian law. People aged between 25 and 35 can train to become ICRC delegates, provided they are available to travel, have a university degree or equivalent diploma and speak English and French. They must show resourcefulness and diplomacy, independence and ability to work in a team. They must be prepared to live in very trying situations where even their lives may be in danger.

Delegates are by no means the only ones to offer their skills. The other 50 percent of expatriates are specialized in a technical field. They include doctors, secretaries, engineers, IT specialists, agronomists, interpreters and administrators. They carry

out missions for the ICRC, usually lasting from 6 to 12 months. In general, these “specialists” are expected to have three years of professional experience when they begin working for the ICRC. Recruitment criteria are more flexible than those for delegates with regard to age, civil status and language skills.

Delegates can progress to positions of greater responsibility in the field, such as head of office, head of delegation or regional delegate, or specialize as coordinators for specific activities in areas such as protection, communication, assistance or tracing. For experienced delegates, there are also possibilities for career advancement at Geneva headquarters. These include responsibility for an operational sector or positions of authority in other fields, for example, human resources management, fundraising and communication. Specialists can also advance their careers by taking on greater responsibility, either in the field or at headquarters, in their respective areas of expertise.

Drawing on local resources

The ICRC's expatriate staff work in close cooperation with national staff who are hired on the spot. Numbering about 10,000 worldwide, national staff provide support for ICRC activities. They bring to the operation their knowledge of and skills acquired in the local context. They work as field officers, logistics officers, interpreters, secretaries, drivers or accountants. They assist in the ICRC's health activities, distribute relief supplies and collect Red Cross messages. Growing numbers of locally recruited staff are sent on mission to work in ICRC delegations in other countries.

How the ICRC is financed

In the countries where the ICRC operates, local Red Cross and Red Crescent staff work alongside the delegates, lending their professional skills and first-hand knowledge of the terrain and its people.

The Committee

The Committee is the supreme policy-making body of the ICRC. It is composed of between 15 and 25 people of Swiss nationality acting in their private capacity. Its members are co-opted; in other words, potential members are invited to join. The Committee meets regularly to establish the ICRC's doctrine and general policy and to supervise the organization's activities.

The Committee's single Swiss nationality, a peculiarity of the ICRC – the origin of which lies in its foundation in Geneva by nationals of a traditionally neutral country – guarantees that the ICRC's action on an international level will be exclusively humanitarian, independent, impartial and neutral.

Because the Committee's members are all of the same nationality, it does not mean that the ICRC's staff is exclusively Swiss. Indeed, the ICRC has embarked on a policy of "internationalization". Today, half of expatriates employed by the ICRC do not hold Swiss passports.

The ICRC is funded by contributions from:

- the States party to the Geneva Conventions (governments);
- National Societies;
- supranational organizations (such as the European Union);
- public and private sources.

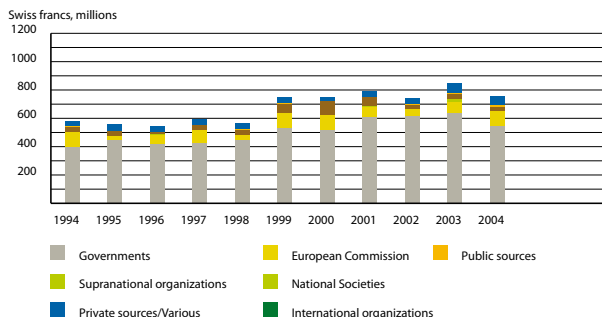
All contributions are voluntary and may be in the form of:

- cash;
- kind, that is, goods such as food (rice, beans, oil, etc.) and/or non-food items (such as vehicles, blankets, plastic sheeting, kitchenware and tents);
- services, such as specialist staff.

Appeals for funds

To obtain the necessary funding, the ICRC launches appeals, generally once a year. The appeals explain the issues and needs that the ICRC has decided to address and the objectives it has set for a given year. The appeals cover the ICRC's activities at its headquarters, on the one hand, and its operations in the field, on the other hand.

Contributions in cash, kind and services, by category of donor 1994–2004



The number and intensity of the situations covered by the ICRC vary from year to year, as do its budgets. The general trend over the last decade, however, is towards an increase in the number of conflict situations and in the ICRC's budget.

Immediate action

Unlike many other organizations, the ICRC does not wait to receive the funds before it acts. On the contrary: once it has decided to respond to urgent needs in the field, it acts immediately.

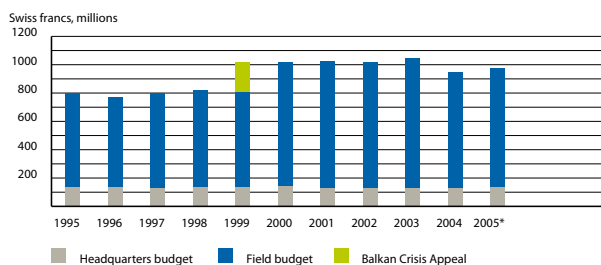
However, at any given time, the ICRC may have only very limited reserves to cover its operations. It thus takes financial risks and counts on its contributors to come forward with the required funding as soon as possible. Since funds are not without limits, the ICRC seeks to ensure not only that its operations and activities answer essential needs and have a realistic dimension, but also that the budgets it wants to see financed are in tune with what can reasonably be expected from its contributors.

While the ICRC seeks to keep this balance, the institution's existence and ability to operate ultimately depend at all times on the goodwill of the international community to meet its financial needs.

Contributions must also be made available in time, so that they can be used with sufficient flexibility, where, when and for whom they are most needed.

Donor requirements versus ICRC operational flexibility

The bulk of cash financing for the ICRC's field operations comes from a group of governmental and supranational donors calling themselves the Donor Support Group. All of the members of the group donate at least 10 million Swiss francs to the ICRC in a given year. However, major efforts are constantly being made to broaden the number of regular donors. Budgetary difficulties or internal control structures within the different donor States sometimes lead them to " earmark " their contributions to the ICRC by attaching particular conditions and requirements. The ICRC accepts this, provided the balance and independence of its operations is not jeopardized. Otherwise, the conditions attached to the contribution are re-examined with the donor. Where no agreement is reached as to an acceptable allocation of a proposed funding, the contribution may have to be refused. Fortunately, this occurs very rarely.



Evolution of ICRC headquarters and field budgets (cash/kind/services) 1995–2005



If you would like to find out more about the ICRC or to explore in greater detail some of the subjects covered in this brochure, visit the ICRC's web site at: **www.icrc.org**.

Here you will find:

- the latest news
- spotlight on issues and topics of particular concern to the ICRC
- the ICRC's appeals for the current year
- the family news network
- photos
- publications
- links to the International Federation and National Societies sites
- job opportunities with the ICRC
- and lots more...

Mission

The International Committee of the Red Cross 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.

Discover the ICRC

Armed conflict is a prominent feature of our human landscape. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded nearly a century and a half ago to preserve a measure of humanity in the midst of war. Even in war there are limits: limits on how warfare is conducted and limits on how combatants behave.

The set of rules established with this in mind – and endorsed by 194 nations throughout the world – is known as international humanitarian law, of which the Geneva Conventions are the bedrock.

Discover the ICRC explains what the ICRC is, how it came into being and how it works today.



ICRC