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On the Road to Recovery

Liberia has come a long way since the end of the war more than two years ago. With security largely restored and a newly elected government in place, the country has turned its back on the dark past and is now walking towards a brighter future. However, much still remains to be done to restore basic services and improve the lives of the people.

*by Tobias Epprecht,
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As tens of thousands of Liberians gradually return home, the pressing need for humanitarian aid persists. Most of these people were receiving regular assistance and protection in camps within Liberia and its neighbouring countries. But today, back in their destroyed villages they are confronted by the enormous challenge of restarting their livelihoods

from scratch. These populations need a helping hand to rebuild their homes, cultivate their land and eventually earn a living. Through the voices of some returnees, we describe on page three their difficulties and how ICRC's assistance through agriculture, shelter, health, and water and sanitation is contributing to support the most vulnerable people as they return home.

Lack of basic needs and poor living conditions are not the only humanitarian concerns that persist after the war. Every conflict in the world witnesses separation of family members as people flee the fighting. Years after the war, hundreds of families still have no information on the whereabouts of their loved ones. News that a lost son is alive and will return home is a great psychological relief for parents who were filled with fear and uncertainty of losing their child forever. Read the story of Massa and her son Boakai on page six to understand how the ICRC in cooperation with the Liberian Red Cross (LNRCS) is working to locate the families of hundreds of children separated by the civil war.

Last December, a small ceremony took place to graduate the first 145 war-affected children from the LNRCS Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation Centre in Monrovia. Maybe it was a small event, but a great achievement for the children, the LNRCS and its supporting partners (the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC). We were delighted to see that children and adolescents, who had witnessed brutality during the war, are now changing their attitude and behaviour. Because of this and similar cases, it is of vital importance that the Red Cross family continue to work together in enhancing the effectiveness of the Liberian Red Cross to play its social and humanitarian role in the society.

Also in this issue, you will find an article explaining why last December, through the adoption of an Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, the Red Crystal has been added besides the existing Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems.

Enjoy the reading.

An Additional Emblem for the Movement

The Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems are used in more than 192 countries in the world to *protect* medical personnel, buildings and equipment in times of armed conflict, and to *identify* Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, ICRC, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

An additional emblem alongside the Red Cross and Red Crescent was created on 8 December 2005 by the member states of the Geneva Conventions by adopting the Third Additional Protocol to the Conventions. The additional emblem, known as the “red crystal”, appears as a red frame in the shape of a square on edge, on a white background. Below are answers to some frequently asked questions.

Why was there the need for an additional emblem?

Three emblems are recognized in the Geneva Conventions: the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Red Lion and Sun, which was used by Iran until 1980. For several decades the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has discussed the idea of creating an additional emblem, free of any religious, national, political or ethnic connotation. After many years of consultations, the Red Crystal has been created to overcome this problem and provide a comprehensive and lasting solution to the emblem question.

The additional emblem will end proliferation of protective emblems;



provide an additional indicative device for possible use by existing Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; enable national societies that do not want to use the existing emblems to join the Movement; and improve the protection of humanitarian action on behalf of war victims.

How was the additional emblem adopted?

Official recognition of the additional emblem under international law required the adoption of a third *Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions*. This Protocol was approved by the member states party to the Geneva Conventions. The first and second Additional Protocols provide further protection for the victims of armed conflict in international and non-international armed conflict respectively date back to 1977.

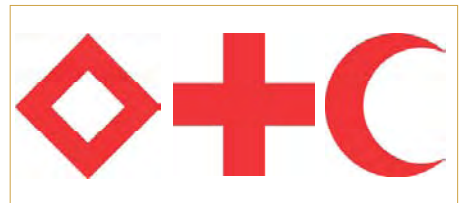
Who will decide whether the additional emblem can be used in a country?

The government of that country will decide. Any country can decide to adopt the use of the additional emblem as the exclusive emblem in its territory, but this would be its own decision.

What will happen to the emblem now in use in my country once there is an additional emblem?

There will be no change unless the country decides otherwise. Countries, and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which currently use and want to keep using the Red Cross or the Red Crescent will continue to do so.

Additionally, the international components of the Movement will retain their current names and emblems. However, the ICRC and the Federation may decide to use the Red Crystal emblem in complex situations where local circumstances dictate that it would provide additional protection and safety for victims, staff and operations.



(L-R) The Additional emblem also known as the Red Crystal, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent emblems.

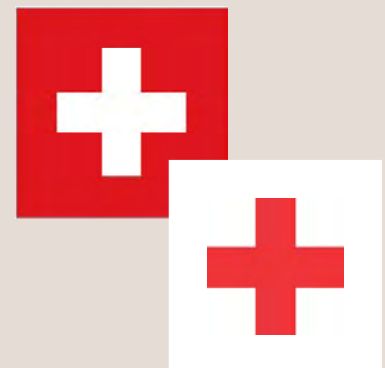
History of the Emblem

Henry Dunant founded the ICRC in 1863 after he witnessed the terrible catastrophe of the battle of Solferino in northern Italy fought between French and Austrian armies. In 1864, the Red Cross on white background was adopted as the distinctive sign for the ICRC and medical services helping the wounded on the battlefield. The Red Cross was derived from inverting the colours of the flag of Switzerland.

In 1876 the Red Crescent was used for the first time by the Ottoman Empire during the war with Russia. The Ottoman Empire used the Red Crescent to mark

its ambulances while still respecting the Red Cross sign that was identifying enemy ambulances. The Red Crescent was recognized by the ICRC and international community in 1929 during a diplomatic conference.

Proposal over the years to adopt new distinctive signs to replace the existing ones have not been accepted. This has been to avoid proliferation of distinctive signs in the Movement with religious, national, political or ethnic connotation. The Red Crystal was created to resolve the emblem question.



“... derived from inverting the colours of the flag of Switzerland.”

Lending a Helping Hand

With the assistance of the ICRC, four women in rural Liberia are recovering from the devastation of years of civil war. The women recount their experiences in coping with the challenges of their present situation in the war-ravaged nation.



Massa Sambola plasters her newly built two-bedroom shelter with white and brown clay to give it a facelift before the New Year. Her house was destroyed during the fighting in the village three years ago. Some months later, the dilapidated structure was rebuilt with the help of the community and the ICRC. Presently, she lives there with her three young children.

Massa says widows who returned after the war were homeless. "Before the Red Cross helped us build our house, we had to share with another family. There was very little space for my children to sleep and we had to wait for the family to eat then we wash the plates to use," the old-aged woman remarks.

The ICRC's shelter rehabilitation program assists widows to reconstruct their homes. The organization provides materials for roofing and gives food as an incentive for community members to work on the structures. The roofing material is locally made by villagers out of "papoo" leaves that grow within the village. The shelter project targets 10,000 households in 2006.

"...no food for my children and I did not know what to do."

As thousands of Liberians are gradually returning to their communities, the ICRC has launched large scale distributions of rice and vegetable seeds accompanied by food rations for 40,000 households. Farming tools are also handed out to make it possible for rural communities to begin growing their own crops again.

During the war in 2003, Jannah Kollie fled Kolahun with her four children. They lived in a refugee camp at the border of Guinea until last November when they returned. "When I came here there was no food for my children and I did not know what to do," she says. "Then I heard that the Red Cross was going to help us with seeds of rice and vegetable to plant, and a hoe to clear the land. Thank God, we got these things... when rain comes I will plant."

Last year more than 80,000 families received this kind of direct assistance throughout Liberia.

"waterborne diseases have reduced"

"It was not easy oh!" recalls Kumasa as she reflects on her experiences when she returned to Voinjama from Guinea where she was a refugee. Once she came back to her town, the lack of safe drinking water was a grave problem. "In the past, we got our water from open and dirty wells and creeks, and my children had diarrhoea and skin diseases," she says. The ICRC constructed a well in the Jah community where Kumasa lives. "The well is now near my home and we can now get good water for drinking".

"Access to safe water has led to significant benefits. Incidences of waterborne diseases have reduced. The distance people have to walk to get water has also been shortened," says Bjorn Torp, an ICRC Water and Sanitation expert based in Voinjama.

In 2005 alone, the ICRC had constructed or rehabilitated more than 460 wells throughout Liberia. However, there is presently a severe shortage of water in the county precipitated by the return of thousand of displaced people and refugees, and therefore more work needs to be done.

"...no payment for doctor and medicine"

Isatu Mohammed is a regular visitor to the Voinjama Health Centre, one of the few functional government health institutions that is supported by the ICRC. She walks five kilometers from Tenebu to Voinjama twice a week for medical checkups. "I am six months pregnant and need to see a doctor often." Isatu reveals that other expectant women like herself walk long distances to come to the clinic. "We do not pay any money for the doctor and medicine," she explains thankfully.

Joesph Sackie is the Officer-in-Charge of the health centre, responsible for screening and managing patients in the wards. "With many returnees, the hospital is treating more and more cases. We are working at the best of our possibilities and the health condition of the population has surely improved."

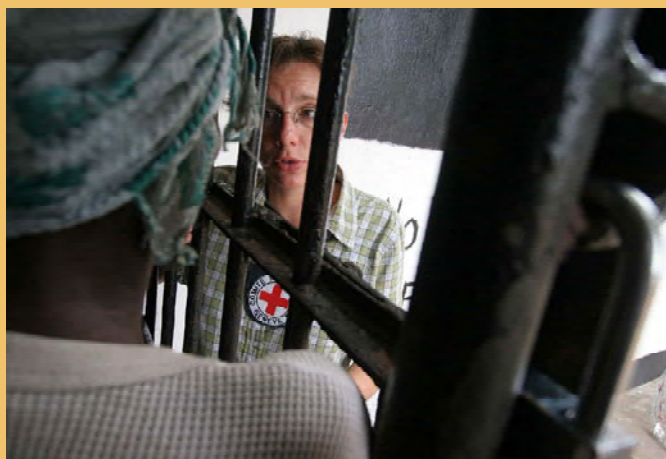
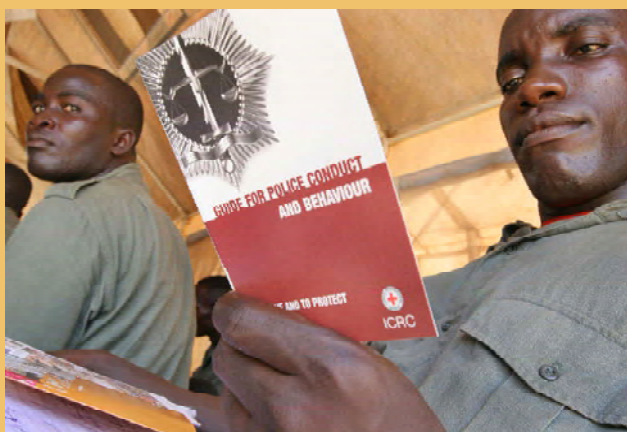
The ICRC completely reconstructed Voinjama Health Clinic and begun operations in March 2004. In addition, the organization is supporting 9 other health facilities in Lofa and Grand Kru Counties with steady supply of drugs, medical equipment, and training its personnel.

In line with its mission to support people affected by war, the ICRC in Liberia works with vulnerable rural communities. Through a comprehensive approach involving health care, building wells and latrines to help communities avert diseases. Supporting humanitarian law, collaboration with the Liberian Red Cross, the ICRC is still working to restore family links between children with their loved ones. Working toward protecting the life and dignity of civilians, promoting humanitarian law and values to the police, armed forces and children as well. (All photos by Boris Heger/ICRC)



in Pictures

Liberia continues to distribute household items, seed and agricultural tools to the most vulnerable. In addition to health education, the organization is improving access to safe water by rehabilitating and constructing health care facilities to provide essential medical services is of vital importance. In the context of the contact between families that were separated by the war, and reunites separated and detained persons, the organization is visiting prisons in Liberia and continues to teach. The pictures give a panoramic view of the ICRC humanitarian activities in the country.



Restoring Family Links

“Boakai my son alive”



Massa Kromah easily spots her son Boakai in the crowded marketplace and begins dancing. Tears of joy flow down her cheek as she is hugging, praising and thanking everyone. She embraces him and everyone in the ICRC team, she expresses appreciation to them and says, “I never dream I would see Boakai my son alive again. I did not know his location. I lack of words to say how I feel. It has taking so long.”

Three years ago, the town of Kolahun became a battlefield as it was attacked by fighting forces. Massa was out fetching water when the shooting started in the town. On her return home she discovered that her son was not in the house where she had left him. She looked around the house and the surrounding area in vain. Eventually with a sunken heart, she despaired and fled the town for her own safety.

“Children were recruited, given guns to fight...”

Massa feared that her son had been captured or killed by the fighters. “Children were recruited, given guns to fight or caught in cross-fire”, she says

191 children were reunited with their families and closest relatives by the ICRC in Liberia during 2005

recounting how he disappeared. “I was afraid that he would be killed or tortured, and I would never see him again.” she lamented.

Travelling on potholed, muddy and bumpy roads, Boakai and the ICRC team arrived in Massabolahun – a town situated two hours drive from Kolahun. The 11-year-old boy had been living in Guinea with a benevolent caretaker for the past two years now. Boakai says he was well looked after, “I went to school and passed in grade two.” His excitement and joy were expressed by the glitter in his eyes and he spoke, “I am very happy... soon I will see my ma.”

excitement is pronounced by the sound of beating drums and percussions

As the team arrive at the crowded marketplace, there is a group from the Liberian National Red Cross Society together with dozens of villagers waiting to meet the team in the market square. An atmosphere of excitement is pronounced by the sound of beating drums and percussions from a music group invited for the occasion. The rousing homecoming for Boakai explodes into songs and dancing as his mother appears from the crowd.

To bring Boakai home from Guinea was made possible by the coordination between the ICRC in N'zerekore and Monrovia. The young lad travelled to Conakry by ICRC's airplane via Monrovia then onward to Voinjama before his final journey by road to Massabolahun.

ICRC Launches its 6th Regional Campaign for Separated Children

Hundreds of children still remain separated from their loved ones after the war in Liberia. On 30 November 2005, the ICRC in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea together with their respective National Red Cross Societies launched a campaign in aid of separated children. Under the banner “*Looking for our families: Help the Red Cross find them*”, the concerted effort endeavours to restore contact between these children and their families.

The ICRC and National Red Cross Societies employed posters containing photographs of 371 children from all four countries in order to solicit the help of the public. The posters were distributed in public places like markets, hospitals, schools and camps for refugees and displaced people throughout the region.

Radio was also used together with the poster to raise public awareness and gain support from the public in Liberia.

Cooperation with the Liberian National Red Cross Society

The ICRC in Liberia is working closely with the Liberia National Red Cross Society (LNRCS). More than 200 LNRCS volunteers perform the important task of tracing the families of the separated children with the aid of 112 Red Cross booths located throughout the country even in the most remote villages. The volunteers often travel long distances on foot, by bicycle, motorbike, and sometimes by canoe to perform this important humanitarian task.



Reintegrating Children in Society



A beneficiary of the CAR center receives carpentry tools from Jimmy Diggs of the Liberian National Red Cross Society (LNRCS)

The Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation (CAR) Centre is a project of the Liberian Red Cross supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC to help rehabilitate children affected by war.

All the programs at the Centre are designed to create change in the attitudes and practices of children who witnessed atrocities. This is done through psychosocial and educative activities. The children also acquire skills training in pastry, masonry, tailoring, carpentry, welding, tie and dye and soap making.

The graduation ceremony of the first group of 145 children was marked with cultural dances and drama performed by some of the graduates. Guests included proud parents, community leaders, and representatives of the LNRCS, ICRC and Federation. Introductions and speeches were punctuated by lively songs.

children acquire skills training

The warm clapping announced the handing over of the certificates. Most of the children, embarrassed and shy, approached the stage visibly intimidated but nonetheless proud to receive their certificates from the guests. As the guests strongly shook their hands, smiles crept over their faces. For the more fortunate, their parents were waiting for them with gifts and flowers.

Unfortunately, not all the children could smile freely. One could see the hardness and the marks of a difficult past. Most had dark and gloomy experiences brought about by the effects of the war. Some of them had survived violence such as rape, abduction, forced recruitment by fighting forces, and other terrible experiences. Regretably, some were orphans or separated from their parents whose whereabouts remain unknown to date.

clapping announced the handing over of the certificates

Hopefully these children have found a way forward through the CAR program. Full of emotion was the closing remarks of Jimmy Diggs, Director of Humanitarian Values of the LNRCS stating "I remember when the children came here. They could not speak properly; and their body language was reflecting their trauma. But now, I am happy since all together we have accomplished something great."

The CAR Centre project was possible through the deep commitment of individuals, and all the

On Friday, 16 December 2005, 145 Liberian children received their Christmas presents early. After one year of hard work, intensive efforts, commitment, and frustration, their graduation was an achievement worth celebrating. Above all, it could mark the turning point in many of their lives.

components of the Red Cross Movement. Thanks to Mrs. Christine Tokar of the Canadian Red Cross who supported the idea from the very beginning till the achievement of the Center. The commitment and efforts of all the instructors deserve special recognition. Bravo also to MSF for giving free medical services to the kids all times. This accomplishment was the fruit of trust, partnership and friendship.

The graduation was the first since the CAR Centre began in operating in January 2005. In the coming years, the Centre will continue to rehabilitate children affected by war and help them to be reintegrated in the social life of the country.

Contributed by
Fabienne Garaud, ICRC Monrovia



(L-R): ICRC Head of Delegation, Tobias Epprecht, LNRCS President, Theresa Leigh-Sherman and Federation Head of Delegation, Sally Miller at the CAR graduation ceremony.

Helping Pakistan Earthquake Survivors

In the first chaotic days after the earthquake, villagers carried the injured for hours on their backs down the narrow goat paths leading to the valley. Army helicopters flew out the critically wounded to hospitals in Muzaffarabad and beyond.

According to one villager, more than 150 people, including his own father, died in Lari on the 8th October. "And in the surrounding area over 350 people were killed," he explained.



An ICRC doctor attends to victims of the earthquake

We were standing in front of what was left of his home. Silently, he led us to see his father's grave 100 yards away in a stubble field; "So many of my extended family were killed in the earthquake," he commented, "but they are buried in our summer graveyard, over the mountain." He pointed to a towering ridge. "But my father is here, with us."

"There were bodies everywhere at the beginning, and people just buried their loved ones where they lay, they were so busy," he continued.

The grave was simple and unadorned; just a mound of earth surrounded by stones and covered with a plastic sheet to keep off the coming rain. Even the dead need protecting.

"We don't want to move away from here, even if the winter is harsh," our companion continued. "We must stay close to our kin, and in any case, this land has been ours for generations. How can we leave? What would we do with our animals? We can't leave them behind."

The Guja migrate between summer and winter grazing grounds. Most had already left the high, summer pastures when the quake struck, making it marginally easier to reach them with aid, but once the weather turns bad it

will be hard even to get to these relatively low altitudes by helicopter, the only means of bringing in supplies until now.

Surprisingly, there were no babies to be seen in the village. Toddlers played in the dirt and older children stared from their hiding places behind the corn and the stables. But of babes-in-arms there was no sign. In contrast, a number of elderly men and women watched the unloading from a safe distance, squatting on the ground on the edge of the steep terraces, where the maize stalks poked up out of the dust like bristles.

The mountain dwellers in these parts are incredibly hardy and the nomadic tribes more so than most. However, these are not normal times, and the snow will be a killer for the old and vulnerable if they do not have shelter through the long months of winter darkness and cold.

Everyone we spoke to asked for corrugated iron sheets to make a refuge. "A tent won't keep out the wet," explained one villager, "but tin sheeting will."

Once the tarpaulins, blankets and food that the ICRC is distributing to 43,000 families all along the Neelum and

Jhelum valleys have been delivered, it will be the turn of the shelter kits that are now being prepared containing hammers, nails, wire cutters and other tools, together with the much-requested corrugated iron.

But it will truly be a race against the clock to get it all in place before the weather breaks. In addition, even on fine days there can be snags. Today, the operation had to be aborted before noon when the helipad, which was already a challenge to land on due to its extremely narrow width, began to crumble at the edge, making it too unstable for the chopper to touch down fully loaded without toppling over.

If the villagers can widen the landing site by tomorrow, the rotations will resume, but it may take more than one day to get the work done. A day no one can afford to lose.

And there was no chance, today, because of the early departure from Lari, to sit with the women and hear their stories. It always takes time to reach the women's protected corner. First the formalities of meeting village heads and other dignitaries must be attended to, and only then, as a woman, are you privileged enough to be allowed to sit with the mothers and their children.

So perhaps tomorrow or the next day. Nothing is ever guaranteed. And even this afternoon, looking out of my window back in Muzaffarabad, I can see dark clouds gathering over the mountains and a brisk wind tearing the leaves off the trees. Perhaps there will only be a few days of grace left. And there is still so much to do.

Story told by ICRC Relief Delegates working in Neelum and Jhelum valleys last October a few days after the earthquake.



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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



ICRC