

## **War in Iraq: the ICRC President calls for respect for international humanitarian law**

**Declaration by the ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger to the media on 20 March 2003**

I note with sadness that it has not been possible to find a peaceful solution to the Iraq crisis.

The impact of war is always dramatic, in particular on civilians. The ICRC is very concerned.

The priority now must be given to protect the lives and dignity of the victims of this war, wherever they may be.

The ICRC has reminded the governments of Iraq, the United Kingdom and the United States of their obligations under the Geneva Conventions which they have all signed, to protect lives and preserve human dignity at a time when it is at greatest risk. To this end, formal representations have been made last week.

The ICRC is present in Iraq and intends to stay and to continue providing its humanitarian services. It will do so as an independent organisation that does not take sides. The belligerents must do everything possible to facilitate the work of the ICRC and other humanitarian organisations.

The ICRC is leading the efforts of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Iraq, including the Iraqi Red Crescent Society. Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and those working under them must be protected.

The ICRC is committed to pursuing its humanitarian activities elsewhere in the world.

The ICRC solemnly and strongly appeals to all belligerents to fully respect international humanitarian law. There are limits to warfare. The civilian population must be respected and protected. It is prohibited to direct attacks against the civilian population and belligerents must take every precaution in their military operations to spare the civilian population.

Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited, as are threats or acts of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population.

The wounded and sick must be protected and cared for. Combatants who fall into the power of the adverse party must be respected and protected and treated as prisoners of war.

The right to choose methods or means of warfare is not unlimited. Weapons having indiscriminate effects and/or are causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering are forbidden by international humanitarian law, as are chemical and biological weapons. The ICRC also calls upon the warring parties not to use nuclear weapons.

The ICRC has decided to remain in Iraq with two core teams in Baghdad and the north of Iraq. 10 expatriates will work alongside with Iraqi national ICRC staff for immediate interventions.

The team's main tasks include:

- to immediately support Iraqi hospitals with surgical supplies to care for seriously injured, hospitalised and operated war wounded;
- to carry out emergency interventions on water and sanitation installations;
- if needed, to provide food for particularly vulnerable persons such as hospital patients;
- to visit possible prisoners of war.

The ICRC has established, during the last months, logistic centres around Iraq. Additional expatriate staff has been transferred to the region over the recent weeks such as drivers, logisticians, medical and relief delegates. More staff will be transferred. Teams of ICRC delegates and interpreters have been trained and are on standby for rapid deployment to register and interview prisoners of war and other persons deprived of their freedom.

Present capacities include:

- medical material to cover basic health needs of 180,000 people and surgical supplies for war wounded;
- food and non-food items for up to 150,000 displaced persons. Within a brief period capacity can be increased up to 500,000 persons;
- support to existing water and sanitation structure for up to 6 million persons.

To conclude, again: the ICRC solemnly and strongly appeals to all concerned to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law, which sets limits to violence. There are limits to warfare. Even in wars, people have rights that must be protected.