

ICRC School Programme in Tajikistan

*Offending a weak person is not a brave act,
It is not worthy of a strong man.
Show mercy, let your heart speak,
And you will deserve a blessing.*

From "Shahnoma" by A. Firdausi (c. 934-1020)

Start: 1995

ICRC staff: 1 national staff member; coordination by the regional programme coordinator based in Tashkent (Uzbekistan); support by other departments at the ICRC mission in Tajikistan

Course book: *Look at the world with wise eyes* (for 8th-grade pupils, 13-14 years, in tutorial hours)

Content: Course book based on Tajik and Persian literature and traditions, drawing parallels between the local culture and the basic humanitarian principles articulated in IHL. Materials for 16 out of 34 academic hours per year

Status: compulsory for the 8th grade in mandatory classes aimed at developing pupils' civic responsibility and cultural awareness

Estimated number of pupils reached
1999 - end of the 2002/03 school year:
434,000

Estimated number of class tutors reached: 12,000

Context

The population of the Republic of Tajikistan is estimated at around 6.7 million. 65% are Tajiks and 25% Uzbeks. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan became an independent State in 1991. It soon found itself facing an acute economic crisis as the previous central planning system fell apart and Soviet funding discontinued. Social tensions mounted and in 1992 a bitter civil war erupted with over 100,000 casualties, the majority of whom were civilians. A peace

agreement concluded in June 1997 was the starting point for a slow process of stabilization. While the overall security situation has steadily improved, irregular armed groups remain active especially across the mountainous regions.

Economically speaking, Tajikistan is the weakest of the CIS countries. Ailing infrastructure and high unemployment are problems common to the region, but in the case of Tajikistan, they have been exacerbated by the after-effects of the civil war. Lack of job prospects drive many Tajik citizens to seek employment abroad, mostly in the form of unskilled labour in Siberia, Russia. The general lack of resources badly affects the education system.

Achievements of the ICRC school programme

- The ICRC course book on norms and principles underlying international humanitarian law (IHL) is compulsory teaching material for tutorial classes in the 8th grade (13-14 years) in schools across the country and is, consequently, widely used.



Programme development

In order to support educators in teaching young people values aimed at helping them learn to act responsibly, the ICRC, together with locally recruited experts, developed a secondary school course book. After a test run in 1997, the Ministry of Education approved it and made the course book compulsory for tutorial classes in 1998. Tutorial classes are mandatory for all pupils in grades 4–11. The Tajik version of the course book has reached over 95,000 pupils in 3,000 schools across Tajikistan. An Uzbek version of the course book (25,000 copies) was published in 2001 for the country's linguistic minority.

Teacher training

In spring 1999, the course book was printed and distributed to all municipalities of the country. At the same time, the ICRC started a series of seminars for methodology specialists with the aim of creating a network of local experts in the school programme who would act as teacher trainers. A total of 85 methodologists were trained. These experts then went on to train some 3,000 8th-grade teachers at the beginning of each school year. Teacher training mainly focused on the content of the course book but also incorporated lectures on IHL, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and interactive methodology.

In 2002, the ICRC shifted its training efforts to advanced teacher training institutes and pedagogical universities in order to have the teaching of IHL and related issues integrated into the State's pre- and in-service teacher training institutes. This implied handing part of the responsibility for IHL teaching over to the government. A pilot course at the central institute for advanced teacher training in April 2002 was attended by some 70 class teachers and school directors. The course is now held regularly at the Central and the Dushanbe city institutes. In addition, in the first half of 2002 the ICRC held a first 12-hour course for 120 graduate students of history and civics at the Tajik State Pedagogical University. The course is being repeated in 2002 - 2003.

Cooperation with the education authorities

A first cooperation agreement between the ICRC and the Ministry of Education was signed in 1998, defining the tasks of each of the parties throughout the test phase. After the test phase, a new agreement was concluded in 2001 in order to:

- ensure official recognition of the course book as a compulsory teaching tool for tutorial hours
- ensure the integration of IHL teaching by means of the course book into pre-service and in-service teacher training.



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Promotional activities

- Yearly contests and quizzes on humanitarian issues among pupils, production of posters, calendars, and press releases
- Theatre performance on issues related to IHL and the Movement
- Distribution of ICRC publications on IHL and related issues to the main public libraries and to educational institutes.

Challenges and prospects

- Tajikistan has experienced, and is still weakened by the consequences of, civil war and intercommunal tension. It is therefore essential that young people learn to think about the consequences of their actions and the need to behave responsibly
- On 14 January 2003 the Central Advanced Training Institute approved the *Model plan for tutorial work in the 8th grade* drafted by the ICRC. The plan draws on humanitarian concepts underlying the themes dealt with in the ICRC course books and may be equated to a curriculum. The reviewers considered the plan "timely and adequate", and have recommended it for publication and distribution to Tajikistan's secondary schools.

In 2003 the ICRC is planning to:

- continue to train 8th-grade class tutors at the advanced teacher training institutes, and senior students of the humanities at the Tajik State Pedagogical University, before their first assignment as class tutors
- continue to monitor the programme's implementation all over the country
- work towards permanently anchoring the basics of IHL in the normative guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education for tutorial work in the 8th grade.