



# **RESTORING LINKS**

## **BETWEEN DISPERSED FAMILY MEMBERS**

**ICRC Delegation in Bangladesh**



**ICRC**

**IN BRIEF**



## THE SITUATION

Armed conflict, other situations of violence and disasters leave more than physical wounds: in the turmoil, panic and terror, family members can be separated in minutes, and this can sometimes lead to long years of anguish and uncertainty about the fate of children, spouses or parents. Migration may also lead to separation and loss of contact between family members.

## A WORLDWIDE TRACING NETWORK

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has a global network which includes the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and 188 National Societies. This Family Links Network acts to restore and maintain contact between separated family members and seeks to identify the fate of persons reported missing. Individuals from any parts of the world can place inquiries to locate and hear from their missing relatives.

In Bangladesh, ICRC's main operational partner is the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS).



## THE NEEDS

- To get back in touch with family members, be it through telephone, the internet or written messages
- To be reunited with family members
- To receive clarification about the fate of a missing relative
- To receive support and understanding while coping with the disappearance of a relative



After the war of 1971, the ICRC and its partners from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement provided protection and assistance to around 700,000 displaced people in Bangladesh and repatriated 118,070 Bengalis from Pakistan. Through the tracing activities, some 2.8 million Red Cross Messages were distributed.



## THE METHODS

- Putting people in contact over telephone, through the Family Links Website ([www.familylinks.icrc.org](http://www.familylinks.icrc.org)), via radio broadcasts and hand-written messages
- Tracing individuals, including vulnerable groups such as children and detainees, in order to assist them and let their families know where they are
- Registering and keeping track of vulnerable individuals to prevent their disappearance and to inform their families of their whereabouts
- Reuniting and, sometimes, repatriating families
- Acting as a neutral intermediary between families and warring parties in order to find out what happened to persons reported missing
- Collecting, managing and forwarding information on the deceased
- Ensuring that the needs of missing persons' families are adequately met

## SUCCESS STORIES FROM BANGLADESH

### Family Reunification

When Alicia\* was 10 days old, her mother handed her over to an adoption center in the UK, from where she was adopted by a British family. When she grew up, Alicia started looking for her biological father, a Bangladeshi. The ICRC in Dhaka took up her enquiry and continued the search, as a result of which the father and the daughter were reunited after 36 years.

### Red Cross Messages

Shumon, now an eight-year old, had never seen his father who had gone abroad for work before he was born. His father was detained in a jail in India with no contact with his family. When the ICRC in Dhaka came to know of his whereabouts and offered Sumon to write a Red Cross Message (RCM) to his father, the little man was over the moon. RCM opened up a window of hope and connection for this family.

### Assisting / Repatriating Migrant Workers

Since the eruption of the conflict in Libya, the ICRC and the BDRCS assisted many of the 36,000 Bangladeshis who returned home. Between February and August 2011, 1,600 of the returnee workers received medical assistance, and 13,000 were able to call their family members.

### Travel Document

Shagor Ahmed went to Libya in 2009, where he was forced to do unpaid work for nine months. Misled by a broker who promised to send him to Egypt, Shagor ended up on the Israeli border, where he was arrested by the Israeli authorities. Shagor was at a detention center until the ICRC in Israel found him during one of their detention visits. Since Bangladesh and Israel do not have diplomatic relations, the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary between both States and issued a travel document which brought Shagor back to his home.

\*Pseudonym used to protect beneficiary's privacy

## THE RESPONSE

### Every year and in over 65 countries, the ICRC:

- forwards hundreds of thousands of Red Cross messages;
- ascertains the whereabouts of tens of thousand of prisoners and whenever needed, assists them in keeping in touch with their families;
- makes official enquiries on behalf of families trying to trace missing relatives;
- lets thousands of families know what has become of their relatives;
- reunites thousands of families, with particular focus on children; and
- issues thousands of ICRC travel documents to enable people without identity papers to reach host countries.



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