



ACTIVITY REPORT

IRAQ 2023



OPERATIONAL CONTEXT IN 2023

Present in Iraq since the Iran–Iraq war in 1980, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) focuses on addressing the consequences of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. Although large-scale military operations are over, and more attention has been given to recovery and reconstruction efforts; millions of people across Iraq remain in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.

As part of its operations in country, the ICRC Delegation in Iraq seeks to ensure that:

- People deprived of freedom benefit from adequate living conditions, access to services, and protection against ill-treatment. Their whereabouts are ascertained.
- Missing persons are searched for, their fate and whereabouts are clarified, and the most vulnerable families of missing persons improve their capacity to cope with difficulties related to the disappearance.
- The rights of the victims of potential episodes of violence in terms of protection and access to essential services are preserved as a result of the efforts of the ICRC and the Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC/RC) Movement partners.
- Persons with physical disabilities have access to services and programmes that help them reach their full potential in society.
- The Iraqi red Crescent's institutional and operational capacities to respond to emerging needs are strengthened as a result of the coordinated support of the ICRC and RC/RC Movement partners.

To achieve these objectives, the delegation sustains dialogue with relevant authorities and concerned parties as well as affected populations and aims to work in partnership within and outside of the (RC/RC) Movement to increase its impact and relevance. It also promotes an inclusive, diverse, and positive workforce environment.

In 2023, the ICRC continued its activities to ensure humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence in Iraq. It also endeavoured to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Many of our activities were carried out in close coordination and collaboration with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

The ICRC scaled down its operational set up in Iraq for 2024, maintaining its delegation in Baghdad, four sub-delegations, in Mosul, Erbil, Baghdad and Nassiriyah, as well as one permanent office in Ramadi.

The ICRC, as an impartial and independent organization, acts according to its mandate and mission, derived from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, its Statutes – and those of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – and the resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. As an independent, neutral organization it ensures humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. It takes action in response to emergencies and at the same time promotes respect for international humanitarian law and its implementation in national law.



PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM

The ICRC remains steadfast in its commitment in upholding the rights and dignity of detainees in Iraq, guided by the principles of international humanitarian law. Through our regular visits conducted with the utmost confidentiality, we strive to create a space for open dialogue with authorities, aiming to identify and address any humanitarian concerns that may arise. By engaging in interviews with detainees, we endeavour to ensure that their fundamental rights are upheld, including access to fair judicial processes and adequate living conditions.

Additionally, we work closely with all stakeholders involved in the detaining process, contributing to the development of policies and legal frameworks aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of detainees.

We also seek to alleviate the suffering of their families, particularly by restoring communication between detainees and their relatives through red cross messages.

Detention Visits

- A total of 96 detention visits were conducted in 39 places of detention, for a detained population of over 55,000 individuals.
- Nearly 4 out of every 5 detainees in these places of detention received assistance from the ICRC, including hygiene items, clothing, blankets, and infrastructure support for water, sanitation, and health-related activities.
- Over 2,400 detainees were followed up individually by the ICRC delegates.
- More than 4,700 red cross messages were collected from detainees and over 1,900 were distributed to them. More than 500 salamats (oral messages to family members) were also exchanged in favour of visited detainees.
- Furthermore, 1,860 documents were provided in partnership with the IRCS, attesting to the detention of former prisoners of war of individuals detained during past conflicts and met by the ICRC while in detention.

Advocacy and engagement

- Proactive dialogue with Iraqi authorities and embassies regarding the situation of foreign fighters and their families was maintained.
- The ICRC also engaged with the National Security Advisory for the development of a comprehensive National Policy on the Management of the Correctional File in Iraq.
- Enhanced engagement with stakeholders on access to health services in detention, including for communicable diseases like tuberculosis.



MISSING PERSONS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Many people go missing in war, causing anguish and uncertainty for their families and their friends. As part of the global efforts of the Central Tracing Agency (CTA), one of ICRC's oldest institutions enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC seeks to protect and restore contact between separated families, search and identify missing persons, protect the dignity of the dead, and ensure that the needs of their families are provided for in Iraq.

The delegation does so through direct engagement with and accompaniment of families of missing persons, as well as support to medico-legal actors and other authorities and concerned parties. From support to daily operations to policy and legal development, the ICRC seeks to ensure that obligations under international humanitarian law are met, including the right of families to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing loved ones.

In this endeavour, the delegation in Iraq coordinates closely with other delegations and RC/RC Movement partners in and out of Iraq, to provide a comprehensive response to the significant number of missing cases resulting from decades of conflicts and violence in Iraq. This also includes the chairmanship of the Tripartite Commissions to clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons who went missing during the two Gulf wars, Iran-Iraq and Iraq-Kuwait.

Clarifying the fate of the missing

- Over 1,500 new cases were collected and reported as missing to the ICRC in Iraq by their families. Over the same period, the fate of 361 missing persons registered by ICRC was clarified, including through the identification of 61 human remains from the two Gulf Wars by medico-legal authorities, bringing much needed closure to missing persons' relatives.

Promoting dignified treatment of the dead

- The ICRC has provided vital support to the Al-Zubair Martyrs' Centre in Basrah. This centre holds a significant repository of over 30,000 records of human remains, predominantly associated with the two Gulf Wars. More than 45,000 forms have been digitalized, personal belongings have been photographed and documented and over 1,660 tombs marked. A dedicated area to welcome families coming for the identification of their loved ones has also been renovated with the support of the ICRC.
- The Medico-Legal Unit of Mosul also benefited from the installation of a cold chamber room to ensure the protection and dignified treatment of the dead.
- A cemetery in Al Borjisia was fenced with the support of the ICRC to protect and preserve the buried as well as undiscovered human remains.
- The ICRC provided regular technical advice to medico-legal institutions and organized several training sessions on best practices in forensic services. It contributed to the obtention of certification in quality management for four laboratories.

Support to families of missing persons

- To respond to the psychological, psychosocial, economic, legal and administrative needs of the families of missing, the ICRC sustained and extended its multi-disciplinary accompaniment program to reach to 224 families across several regions including Saqlawiya, Kirkuk, Khuder/Hamiya, Shariya, Sinjar, and Tal Afar/Abu Maria.
- A rehabilitated community space in Saqlawiya further helped facilitate such accompaniment program activities.
- Additionally, a total of 34 accompaniers, as well as families of missing persons, were trained in various fields like Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programmes, Protection, Legal, and Forensic processes to better assist the families in their respective areas.
- Over 4,400 persons benefited from mental health or psychosocial activities within the framework of the Accompaniment Program.
- Beyond emotional and legal guidance, the ICRC also helps families meet their immediate needs and build sustainable income. 150 households were supported through cash assistance for the development of a small business.

Advocacy and engagement

- In 2023, the ICRC also sustained its engagement at the legal and policy levels, notably to advise in the development of a draft law on missing persons as well as data management systems.





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VICTIMS OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

Protecting civilians during armed conflict, including vulnerable groups such as women, children, and displaced persons, is a cornerstone of international humanitarian law. Similarly, healthcare personnel, medico-legal staff, first responders and humanitarian workers must be protected and able to carry out their work unimpeded, included during mass casualty incidents. As promoter and guardian of international humanitarian law, the ICRC seeks to ensure that States Parties to the Geneva Conventions undertake to respect and ensure respect of the Geneva Conventions in all circumstances.

Over 2023, the ICRC sustained its engagement with various stakeholders and actors of influence to promote respect of international humanitarian law. It also continued to support vulnerable groups, including displaced persons and returnees, and sustained its support to authorities to address the consequences of war in urban contexts. Collaborating with Movement partners and authorities, it also promoted emergency preparedness and response, particularly focusing on managing mass casualty incidents.

Healthcare Support

- Support provided to 7 hospitals with material assistance, especially for mass casualty response or preparation.
- Support provided to 13 primary healthcare centres (including 5 Mobile Health Clinics), consumables and financial support related to running costs.
- Nearly 740 people trained in first aid assistance and pre-hospital emergency care.
- Development of 2 dedicated areas for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services.

Emergency Assistance and Livelihood Support

- Over 6,600 households (39,600 individuals) supported with emergency assistance to cover their immediate basic needs.
- In addition, 4,650 families (27,800 individuals) managed to stabilize and sustain their household economy thanks to better access to income opportunities through cash assistance for a small business or livestock and agriculture related activity.

Water Supply and Infrastructure Development

- 27,640 people benefited from improved water supply systems.
- Development of a Water Services Development Plan for the city of Tal Afar with Ninawa Directorate of Water.

Mass Casualty Management

- The mass casualty management pilot project was completed in Nassiriyah, including the development of a mass casualty management plan and the execution of a full-scale multi-agency simulation exercise in December 2023, involving over 100 participants.

Supporting Returnees and Helping Rebuild Lives

- Support for repair or reconstruction of houses for 283 returnees' households in Qaraghoul as part of ICRC Durable Returns Program.
- 360 students improved access to educational facilities in Basma following the reconstruction of the school.

Advocacy and Engagement

- Daily engagement with duty bearers and actors of influence on the treatment of civilians, conduct of hostilities, protection and safe access of medical personnel, law enforcement, return and durable solutions, among others.



PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

In 2023, the ICRC sustained its engagement to make sure that people with physical disabilities have effective access to quality and sustainable physical rehabilitation services and assistive devices. Beyond physical rehabilitation services, the ICRC also supported civil society organizations to promote the social and economic inclusion of people with physical disabilities in their communities, including through adaptive sports, education and (self-) employment initiatives. Finally, it sought to prevent and mitigate risks related to explosive remnants of war and mines, including through awareness raising sessions in communities at risk. In 2023 alone, 18% of the beneficiaries in three ICRC supported centers in Iraq, were recorded to be ERW or mine and weapon wounded victims.

Support to Operations of Physical Rehabilitation Centres

- In 2023, the ICRC supported a total of 4 governmental physical rehabilitation centres (PRC) and one ICRC physical rehabilitation centre at Erbil. Sadr Al Qanat PRC in Baghdad benefited from rehabilitation and expansion works, while designs have been developed for similar works at Nassiriyah PRC.
- It also continued direct provision of physical rehabilitation services at ICRC-run PRC center in Erbil.
- The ICRC also sustained its engagement to support accessibility and quality of services, including support in the supply of imported materials and training of staff in governmental PRCs.
- Over 14,300 women, men, and children benefited from physical rehabilitation services in ICRC-supported governmental centres or at Erbil PRC.
- Additionally, a total of 308 families including persons with physical disabilities were referred for income generating activities to ensure they can cover their essential needs sustainably.

Trainings

- 30 technicians from various PRCs across the country continue to be trained in orthotics and prosthetics at the Erbil Polytechnic University, as part of the bachelor program developed in partnership with ICRC. Some have also benefited from clinical placements at Erbil PRC.

Financial Support

- 271 individuals supported with financial support to cover the cost of transportation from their respective destinations to the centres and back.

Disability and social inclusion

- In October 2023, an Iraqi amputee football tournament was organized in Baghdad, with the participation of five teams made up of 78 players from various governorates, as a part of the social inclusion program.

Reducing the impact of weapon contamination

- Nearly 6,000 individuals in at-risk or affected communities were supported with face-to-face risk awareness and safe behaviour sessions.
- Over 230 ICRC and RC/RC Movement Staff were trained in the field of weapon contamination hazards.



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THE IRCS, A STRONG PARTNER

In 2023, the ICRC continued to cooperate with and support its main partner in country, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, to provide principled, distinct, and effective humanitarian response that addresses key needs in Iraq. It also aimed to increase coordination with other Movement partners, including to prepare for emergency as well as to strengthen programmatic response, especially with regards to cash provision and disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Finally, it promoted national society development, including to strengthen IRCS capacity to effectively and safely deliver a principled humanitarian response; and to enhance the sustainability of its core capacities.

Partnering for humanitarian action

- In 2023, the ICRC renewed the Partnership Framework Agreement (2023–2025) with the IRCS.
- Engaged jointly in various strategic events, including the International Conference on Protecting Children in Armed Conflict.

Healthcare, Water, and habitat Services

- The ICRC supported the IRCS in the provision of health services through 5 mobile clinics, providing a total of over 45,120 consultations in 2023; as well as health promotion activities in 9 governorates, including to target the outbreak of Congo Crimean Haemorrhagic Fever.
- Two state-of-the-art solar-powered reverse osmosis units were also installed, providing drinking water for 3,000 residents in Diwaniya and Babel governorates.
- Two additional villages benefited from solar-powered water supply enhancement in Diwaniya and Muthanna governorates, benefiting 10,000 residents.

Infrastructure support

- The ICRC also supported the IRCS in the rehabilitation of 4 schools in Missan and Kerbala governorates.

Emergency Response:

- Coordinated joint response for Congo Crimean Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) in Thi Qar and Babil governorates with the Department of Veterinary, involving deployment of 60 IRCS volunteers.
- The ICRC also supported the IRCS with the provision of essential household items and cash assistance for food to provide assistance to 5,500 households to cover their immediate needs.

Capacity building:

- Solar energy system training for 20 IRCS staff enhanced expertise in design, implementation, operation, and maintenance, ensuring sustainability of improved reverse osmosis (RO) units.
- A training on emergency response and climate change also helped strengthen the capacity of 24 participants (volunteers and staff from the IRCS).

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

ACCESS AND ACCEPTANCE

In 2023, the ICRC maintained its engagement and dialogue with all actors and parties, directly or indirectly, in order to sustain unimpeded access to the most vulnerable populations in Iraq. In its fifth year of operation, the Community Contact Centre (CCC) continued to function as the first line of contact for ICRC beneficiaries in Iraq. Through the CCC, affected populations have been able to share inquiries, requests, or submit complaints. The CCC was also able to provide information about ICRC activities and eligibility criteria for our programmes, as well as to follow-up on specific individual cases.

Engagement and dialogue

- Outreach through social media, with over 360,000 fans or subscribers on ICRC main platforms.
- Over 50 high level meetings with military or security authorities.

Community Feedback

- Received over 24,100 calls – this includes inquiries from families of missing and detained persons, requests for inclusion in ICRC programmes and complaints against selection criteria.
- Processed and resolved around 17,460 inquiries and requests received from affected people.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIPS

Over 2023, the Delegation continued to develop and strengthen partnerships within and outside of the RC/RC Movement in support of its operational priorities – building on its long-standing presence in Iraq. It continued to engage in coordination fora at various levels, to ensure synergies of its intervention with other actors. It also sought to identify opportunities for knowledge exchange and for developing new operational collaborations for sustainable humanitarian impact for affected populations. This includes linking with a wide range of actors, from bilateral to multilateral cooperation and academia.

PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

Despite a complex environment in 2023, characterized by a reduced ICRC operational set-up in Iraq, the delegation has sustained its commitment to promote an inclusive, diverse, and positive working environment. It refocused its energies into the implementation of a social support plan for staff members impacted by the operational changes and staff reductions. This included providing guidance on preparing for external job applications and interviews, vocational and technical skills training. The delegation remains committed to encourage innovative ways of working, both internally and in partnerships with others, while identifying the best practices and lessons learned over the years to enhance department coordination and strengthen program integration for target populations, as well as to better engage within and outside of the RC/RC Movement.





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LOOKING TOWARDS 2024

In 2024, the ICRC's main priorities will be to:

- Visit detainees and give the authorities technical assistance and advice to improve detainees' treatment and living conditions at all stages of detention, by tackling systemic issues such as access to health care and other essential services, family contact and family notification of their detained relatives' fate and whereabouts.
- Reinforce the authorities' efforts to prevent disappearances and ascertain the fate of people missing in connection with conflicts in Iraq and the wider region and other circumstances; sustain a multidisciplinary response to the financial, psychosocial, and other needs of families of missing people and help them work towards self-sufficiency.
- Support the authorities and others in developing national emergency preparedness and response by enhancing local coordination and capacities in mass-casualty management; engage authorities, weapon bearers and others in dialogue on ensuring protection for violence-affected people and their access to essential services, in line with applicable law.
- Broaden the access of people with physical disabilities to good-quality rehabilitation services and social-inclusion projects; support efforts to ensure the sector's sustainability; strengthen people's resilience to the effects of violence, including the dangers of weapon contamination, and climate crisis.
- Strengthen its relationship with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society and bolster the latter's organizational and operational capacities, particularly in preparing for climate-related and other emergencies; whenever possible, work with Movement partners and others to ensure a coordinated response to humanitarian needs.

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on the ICRC to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. The organization's experience and expertise enables it to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.

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