



COLOMBIA: HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

ACTIVITIES 2014 AND OUTLOOK 2015
International Committee of the Red Cross



ICRC

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EDITORIAL

Colombia, beyond the peace process

With the question of when peace will come now behind it, Colombia is looking beyond the peace process, with hope and expectation, to what the future may have in store. Uncertainty about whether the war will end – and when – has given way to the urgency of envisaging the post-conflict Colombia, giving it form, shape and meaning.

This milestone, the long-awaited signing of a peace agreement, is therefore really a starting point. It is an opportunity to build a society in which people can once again live together in peace, after five decades of war. It is, however, also a path that will be forged with a multiplicity of meanings.

For the families of the one hundred thousand or so people who have disappeared in the country, there will be no peace until they receive an answer to the question that has marked their lives: “Where is my loved one?” For those who live in areas contaminated by explosive devices, peace will only come when they can farm their land, go to school or simply take a walk without fear of losing a limb or even their life. For children who have been separated from their loved ones as a result of the armed conflict, peace will not come until they can hold them close again and carry on with their lives.

For more than four decades, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been at the side of the victims of the conflict and armed violence in Colombia. Today, more than ever, it is firm in its commitment to continue accompanying the country on its journey and to bring humanitarian meaning to the Colombia that emerges from the peace process.

A number of humanitarian issues that concern the ICRC will remain outstanding after the peace agreement has been signed. The missing, weapon contamination and the separation of children from their families are just some of them. It is important to remember, too, that international humanitarian law (IHL) will still apply after the war is over, regulating aspects such as the detention of people deprived of their liberty as a result of the conflict and the obligation of the parties to establish the facts in missing persons cases.

The ICRC looks forward, with cautious optimism, to the new reality that the peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army) in Havana (Cuba) could bring to Colombia and the lives of millions of women and men who have only known Colombia in the grip of conflict. We appreciate the trust that the parties have placed in our organization and hope that our humanitarian efforts will continue to contribute to strengthening this important process.

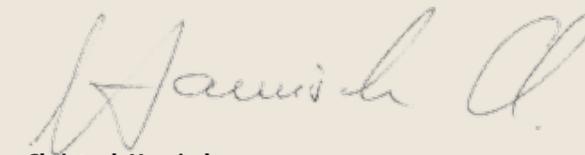
Alleviating the suffering that the conflict has caused among the civilian population for decades must be a priority in the peace talks. Establishing humanitarian agreements between the parties as soon as possible would be an effective way of achieving this.

With a view to improving living conditions for the Colombian people, the ICRC hopes that a dialogue can soon be consolidated between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN). To this end, the ICRC reaffirms its commitment as a neutral intermediary and its constant availability to carry out its humanitarian work.

A necessary part of shaping peace is providing answers not only to the victims of the conflict but also to those who are still suffering the violence of armed gangs. Sadly, the end of the conflict is unlikely to mean the end of this form of violence. While the country is envisaging life after the restoration of peace, a large part of the population is still being terrorized by gang violence day after day, with continuing tragic consequences. The ICRC’s commitment remains firm: to continue protecting and assisting these victims, as we have been doing in recent years.

A daring glimpse through the window to the future, to what lies beyond the peace process, will reveal that there is still a long way to go. For the ICRC, shaping that new Colombia means being at the side of those whose lives have been ruined by half a century of armed conflict. In giving meaning to a post-conflict Colombia, it is important to recall the relevance and continued applicability of international humanitarian law and ensure respect for the protection of people.

The task ahead is far from easy, but this is a unique opportunity and a historical crossroads. In envisaging Colombia beyond the peace process, the ICRC undertakes to be, before and after the signing of the peace agreement, on the side of those who are still suffering. That is our continuing commitment.



Christoph Harnisch
Head of the ICRC Delegation in Colombia



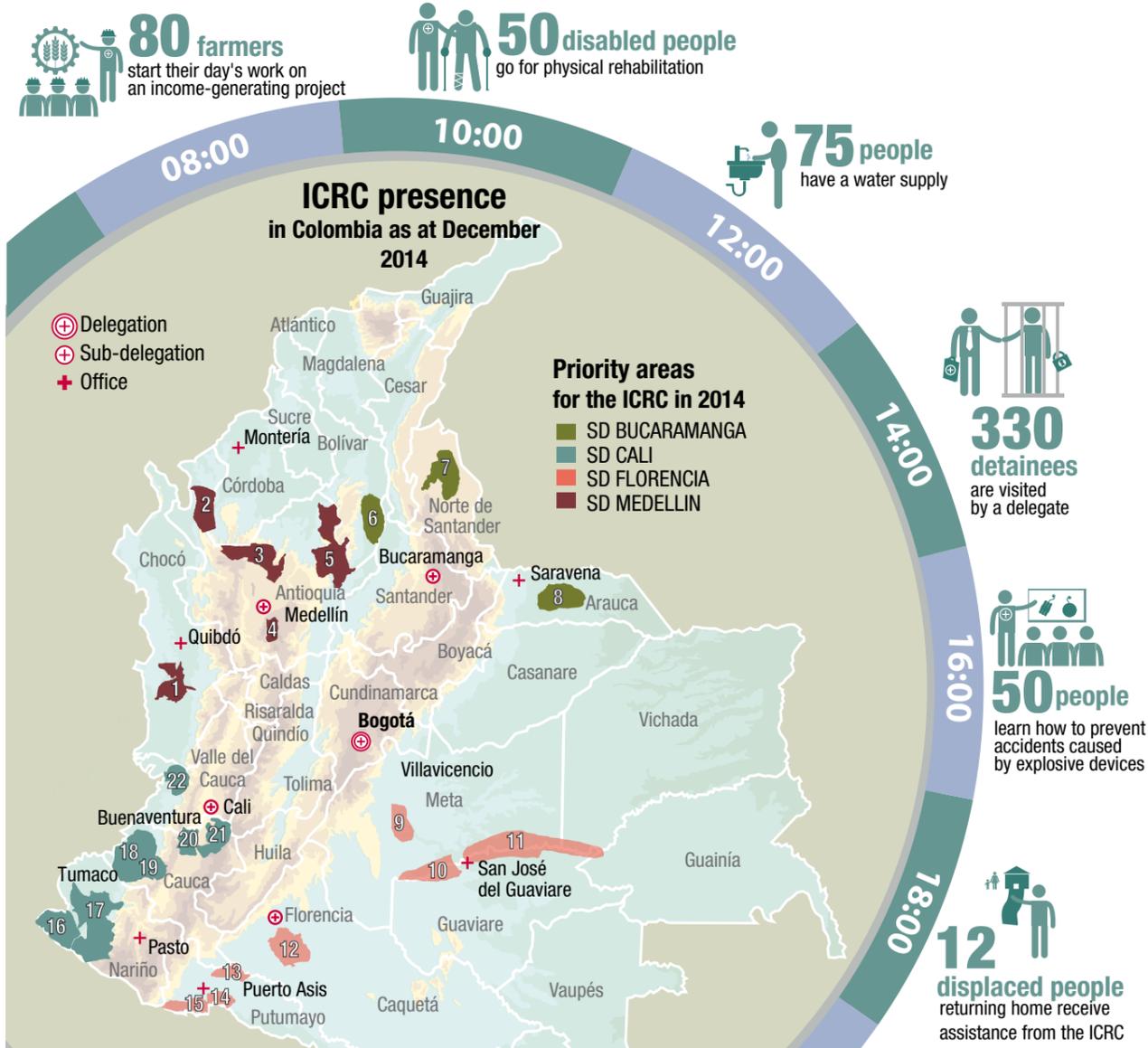
2014 AT A GLANCE

For the ICRC, every day counts. Helping those suffering the effects of violence means giving them real solutions: a job, an income-generating project, access to water, psychosocial care, to mention but a few. Last year, this assistance was more diverse than ever.

875 alleged violations of IHL and other incidents affecting the population were recorded in 2014, 258 more than the previous year.

230,000 people benefitted from ICRC action, a number similar to the 2013 figure.

A day with the ICRC



1964 was when the armed conflict officially began in Colombia



1969

The ICRC began working in Colombia. Its first task: visit detainees.

33.3 million Swiss francs

was the ICRC delegation's budget in 2014 – one of the ICRC's biggest operations in the world.



360 ICRC staff

– local and international – are based in Colombia

What we're doing in Colombia



The ICRC helps the victims of the armed violence and strives to prevent and alleviate people's suffering.

Before an emergency:

Confidential dialogue with armed forces and groups

Promoting IHL and other humanitarian norms

Building community infrastructure, such as aqueducts, school dormitories and bridges

Community workshops to improve emergency response

During an emergency:

Distributing food and hygiene items to displaced people

Guiding victims through the application for State assistance

Relocating people whose lives are in danger

Taking the wounded and sick to hospital

Paying funeral expenses

After an emergency:

Helping victims claim State compensation

Psychosocial support for victims of sexual violence and relatives of missing persons

Temporary work and training schemes for the victims

Reuniting children formerly associated with armed groups with their families

Giving hope to people deprived of their freedom:



80,000 detainees were visited by ICRC delegates



19 people held by armed groups secured their freedom

LIVING IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT AND ARMED VIOLENCE: SITUATION OF THE POPULATION

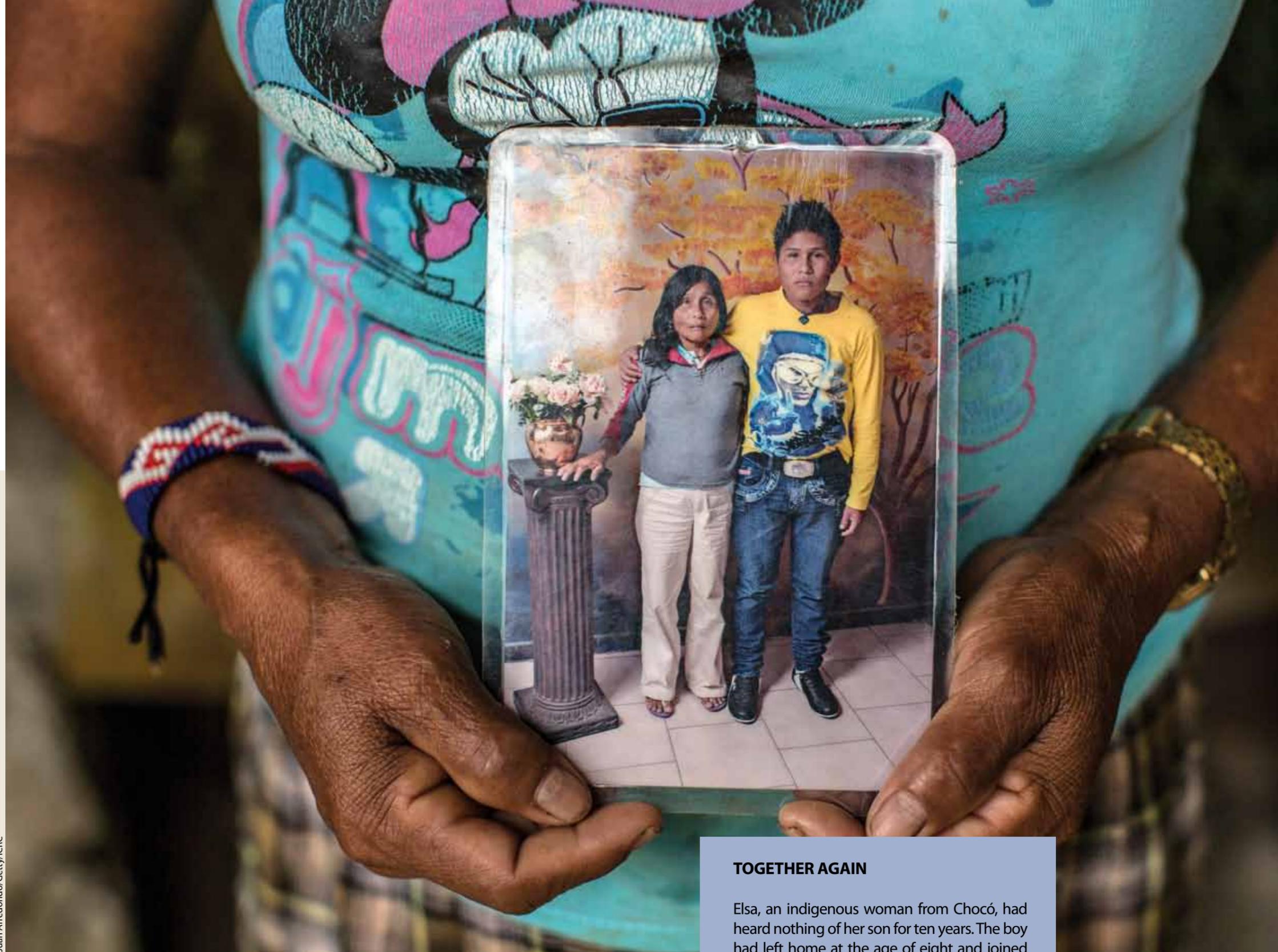
The armed conflict and other forms of violence continued to put strains on Colombian people. The ICRC helped 230,000 people to carry on with their lives.

For people living in areas affected by the conflict and armed violence, 2014 was a year in which their staying power was put to the test, a duel between a long conflict spanning fifty years, which now seems to be nearing its end as the peace talks progress, and the communities who are suffering its effects and searching for ways to get through it.

The ICRC was witness to their resistance and provided support to help them carry on. In the remotest villages and the toughest city neighbourhoods, it came across people like Carmelina, who learned to walk again after losing both legs in a blast, so that she could walk her daughter down the aisle when she got married (see p. 40); people like Marisol who overcame the suffering caused by the disappearance of her husband to offer emotional support to other victims (see p. 14); and people like Steven, forced to flee from his home town because of threats, who managed to get a job in just a couple of months to provide for his family (see p. 29).

The pages of this report contain the stories of some of the people whom the ICRC was able to help last year. They are stories of pain and grief, but also of hope, proof that although the Colombian people's resilience is still under strain, their will to carry on is stronger than the violence.

Juan Arredondo/Getty/ICRC



TOGETHER AGAIN

Elsa, an indigenous woman from Chocó, had heard nothing of her son for ten years. The boy had left home at the age of eight and joined an armed group. They were reunited with the help of the ICRC in Cali, where he received psychosocial support. In the photo, Elsa shows the picture they had taken during their reunion. In 2014, the ICRC helped thousands of people like them, victims of the conflict and armed violence, to carry on with their lives.



SEXUAL VIOLENCE

“I felt bad, I was ashamed.”

When she was just thirteen, Diana’s life was shattered. After the abuse came the most difficult part: stigma and displacement.

“It happened thirteen years ago. I lived with my mother and brothers and sisters. One night, around midnight, some men came and rounded us up in the school yard. They took our names and told us not to be afraid, that they had come to protect us. Back home, one of them came and asked me to help him with the chickens, so that they could eat, but it was a trick. When I got there, they grabbed me, beat me and cut my face. I can still remember how they tore my clothes off. I began to scream and kick and then one of the men pushed me against the big post supporting the house and I passed out.

“I was unconscious in the hospital for six days. When I eventually woke up, my mother began to cry and she couldn’t speak. In the end, she told me everything: that there had been four men and they had raped me. I think that the only reason that they didn’t kill me was because they thought I was already dead.

“Then they told me that I would have to go back and identify them. That was when we decided to leave. My mother, my five brothers and sisters and I all went to live in another municipality with an uncle.

“After what happened, I couldn’t sleep and had nightmares. Whenever a man came near, I started trembling. It is very traumatic. I still wear my hair like this to hide the scars on my face. I could never tell my friends about my first time with a man; it made me sad. I felt bad, I was ashamed. It isn’t your fault, but people don’t see it like that. You can’t talk about it with other people for fear of them pointing a finger at you.

“The sessions with the ICRC psychologist helped me a lot. We worked on my self-esteem and I learned to release my pent-up anger towards that man. She has helped me get it out of my system, to start again.”

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Many victims remain silent

Fear, mistrust of the authorities and threats against them and their families deter victims of sexual violence from speaking out. As a result of this, official figures do not accurately reflect the real scale of the problem. The cases recorded by the ICRC in 2014 were more atrocious and vicious than in previous years.

Sexual violence continued to be a cause of displacement. When victims are not able to move away, they have to carry on living in the same area as the perpetrators, often in the same neighbourhood. In many cases, when they decide to seek help, they are discriminated against and receive inadequate assistance from the personnel responsible for helping them.

Although it is not necessary to report the incident in order to receive medical care, on many occasions, victims of sexual violence who go to health facilities are forced to comply with this supposed requirement.

The vast majority of victims are women, but some men are also affected. For them, talking about what happened is not even an option.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 93. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited.

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions

Article 4.2.e.: [T]he following acts [...] shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever: [...] outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault.

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

Guidance from the start

Sexual violence must be treated as a medical emergency and dealt with within 72 hours of it occurring. The ICRC accompanies victims of sexual violence from the very start, providing them with advice and emergency assistance. In the long term, they provide psychological support, so that they can regain their confidence, put their fear behind them and put their lives back together again.

- ✓ Last year, more than 80 victims of sexual violence received medical, psychological and financial assistance from the ICRC. It also advised 91 people about how to get government assistance.
- ✓ In areas affected by the conflict and armed violence, 800 people took part in 50 workshops on sexual violence organized by the ICRC. They were informed about their rights and the channels and procedures for obtaining government assistance and proper medical attention. In cities such as Medellín, support was provided for the creation of self-help networks for women who had been victims of sexual violence.
- ✓ More than 900 health care workers received training through the ICRC on the proper channels for victims to receive assistance and care and on the delivery of appropriate, quality emergency care.

Ben Houdijk/3FM

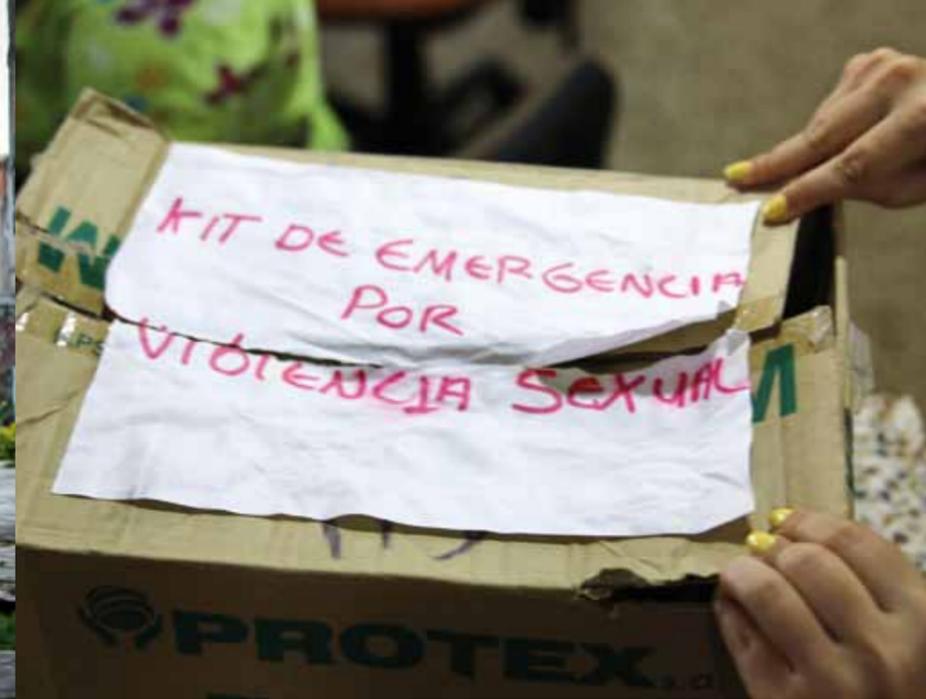


An ICRC nurse leads a workshop on sexual violence in a remote community on the banks of the river San Juan (Chocó).



Above: María Eduvina's daughter (in the photo) went out for a walk with her friends and never returned. They found her dead. She had been raped and then stabbed to death.

Right: After suffering years of sexual abuse at the hands of an armed group, a mother embraces her daughter, born as a result of rape.



Left: This kit, at a hospital in the Pacifico region, contains the only medicines that victims of sexual violence receive when they seek medical attention.

Above: An average of 15 victims of sexual violence come to Melania's office, in Quibdó, each month, seeking medical attention and psychological support.

VOICES: BREAKING THE SILENCE

Victims of sexual violence often decide not to speak out. They prefer to keep quiet out of fear or shame or because they just want to forget about it. In 2014, the ICRC supported many of them in their brave efforts to move on and continue with their lives.

"I found her battered and beaten; she had fought back with all her strength."

"That day, there had been a sudden downpour and the power was out. She had gone out with her friends. I often woke up when she came home and would open the door for her. I got up several times during the night; I couldn't sleep. After a while, a man came and said: 'Come on out, they've killed the girl!' I was in my pyjamas and the river was rising, but I leaped right into the water and carried on running. When I got to the health centre, they had her sitting with her head up. I tried to revive her, but she didn't react. Then I got up and tried to walk, but I fainted and don't remember anything else.

"They were after that man for something bad he had done before. He had been bothering my daughter for months. That night, he raped her and stabbed her to death. I found her battered and beaten; she had fought back with all her strength. She was very plucky even though she was only small.

"When we went to the Prosecutor's Office, he had a lawyer and we had nothing. I didn't want to know the details. My daughters know all about it. Every time I go past the place where it happened, sorrow overwhelms me. I don't want to see it; I always look the other way."

"When she was born, I didn't look into her eyes."

"It all began because of a friend of mine. She told me there was a job on the outskirts of town, but when we got there, they started to assault us, to hurt us physically. The most difficult part was the rape.

"I did a lot of things to get rid of her (my daughter), to stop her from being born. When she was born, I didn't look into her eyes. They brought her to me, and she cried for me to feed her, but I didn't look at her. I turned my back on her and let her cry for a while. That is a painful memory. When I got home, my other daughter took the baby and told me she was beautiful. She taught me to love her.

"I don't want to tell her anything about it. She is a very imaginative girl; she believes in princesses and dreams of being a dancer and singer. No, she shouldn't know because it would destroy her. I don't want her to be destroyed like I am."

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY: THE REALITY OF THE RESPONSE

Two health care workers who see victims of sexual violence recount the difficulties they face in helping them. "The most difficult part is treating their wounded souls," says one of them.

"What little we do do is down to our own efforts."

Cases of sexual violence are medical emergencies, and victims must receive assistance within 72 hours of the incident. On many occasions, however, this does not happen.

"It is not very often that victims of sexual violence come to the hospital, but some do. The truth is that we don't have the means or the resources to treat victims. We know that they need certain medicines to avoid consequences such as unwanted pregnancies. We know that, but in practice...

"What little we do do is down to our own efforts to try to understand the process. The support that we are providing is not very effective, and that doesn't inspire confidence. Imagine them coming here, sharing something as personal as this... they can get some help, but the proper care isn't available, there is something missing. This means that, in the end, people don't bother coming here."

"Sometimes, I think I would like to quit this job. Sometimes, I just feel like giving it all up."

In Quibdó, Melania's door is always open to victims of sexual violence. In the maternity unit that she coordinates, they receive medical assistance and psychological support to cure their 'wounded souls'.

"Each month we get about fifteen cases. The ages range from new born, sometimes just a few days old, to one, two, three or five years... In fact, 84% are under 14 and most of them are girls.

"They come here with what we refer to as 'wounded souls'. It's not so much the physical harm; the most difficult thing to treat is the wounds that you can't see.

"When I am with these girls and boys, when I see them come through the door, I feel terrible. It's a mixture of feelings. I want to do something, but I don't know what to do. Sometimes, you feel that you want justice to be done, you want to support these children and help them, but you don't really know how. Sometimes, I think I would like to quit this job. Sometimes, I just feel like giving it all up. But if we leave, if we close this down, where will they go?"



DISAPPEARANCE

“I decided not to lose myself in my grief.”

Marisol’s brother was killed and her husband went missing. She decided to become a leader in her neighbourhood in Buenaventura and help other victims.

“My brother was killed ten years ago, and my husband has been missing for four years now. He was a boat mechanic. A friend told him that they needed someone in Cali, and off he went. We were in touch at first, but then we heard nothing more from him.

“If I lose myself in my grief, I will neglect my children and they will go out looking for other things in the neighbourhood. That could end up causing me even greater sorrow. That is why I decided not to lose myself in my grief. The pain is always there, because we haven’t been able to bury him. We still harbour the hope that he’s alive. So, in our organization, we hold symbolic wakes. We make a small coffin and put up a photo of the absent person. It helps; seeing the symbolic coffin and the photograph gives me some peace of mind.

“The ICRC helped us because we had problems getting water. They installed some water storage tanks for us. We didn’t have a place to meet, and the ICRC helped us with the community hall. I also had a job in a company for a time, which was arranged through the ICRC. Now my

job is to provide emotional support to other victims. This helps me a lot, as it stops me from thinking about what has happened”.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 98. Enforced disappearance is prohibited.

Rule 116. With a view to the identification of the dead, each party to the conflict must record all available information prior to disposal and mark the location of the graves.

Rule 117. Each party to the conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information it has on their fate.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Thousands of families in a permanent state of anguish

The number of missing persons in Colombia has risen to alarming levels. As at December 2014, the government had recorded 100,000 cases, a 12% increase in just one year. Almost 73,000 of these people remain missing (see chart).

This problem does not just affect the people who have disappeared, people who, in addition to being deprived of their liberty, are also often victims of crimes such as torture, murder and concealment of human remains; it also affects those who are left behind, who suffer the anguish of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones.

In 2013 and 2014, the ICRC conducted a study on the needs of such families in seven places affected by the problem of disappearance: Bogotá, Buenaventura, Medellín, Villavicencio, Pasto, Puerto Asís and San José del Guaviare. A total of 235 people, including family members, members of victims’ networks and government officials talked about what needs families have when a loved one has disappeared, what problems they have encountered in their search and what coping strategies they have developed or adopted.

The right to know

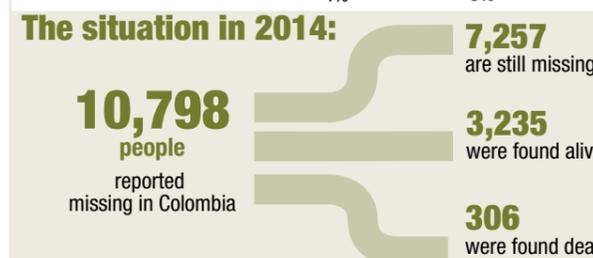
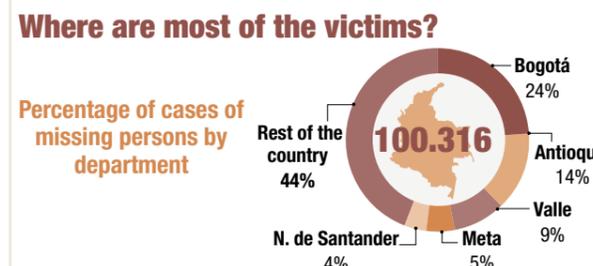
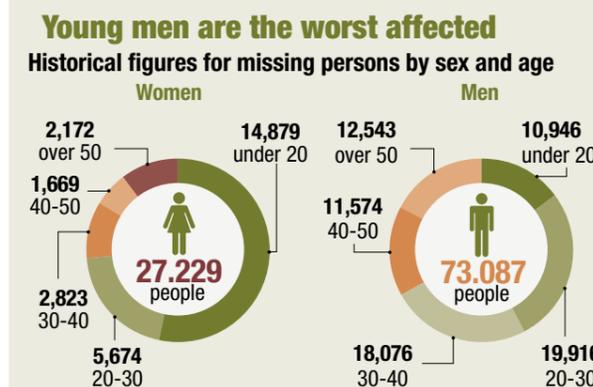
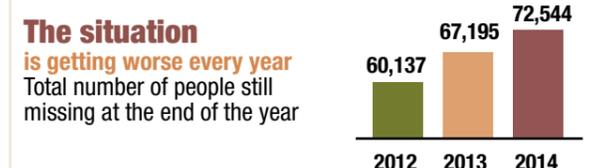
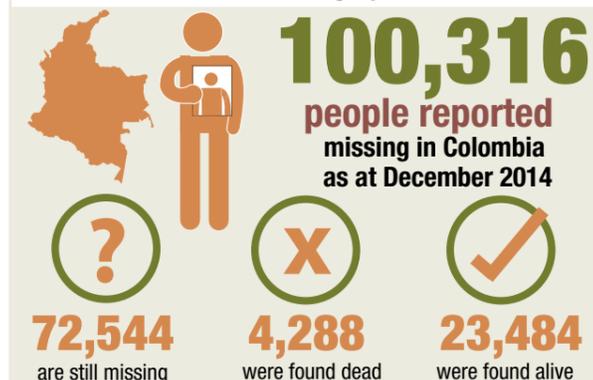
The findings are revealing. The common factor is that families need to know the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. The torment of not knowing is compounded by society’s lack of support and sensitivity towards family members. In addition, the strain of the disappearance of a family member often takes a toll on the physical and mental health of those left behind.

Disappearances also lead to financial difficulties, particularly for women when the person who goes missing is the man, the head of the household and generally the breadwinner, as occurred in 80 per cent of the cases examined. The search for a missing person also entails considerable costs.

Families feel the need for protection and security, as the armed conflict and threats continue. There is a risk that other members of the family could disappear or that they could be subjected to other abuses, such as the recruitment of children or sexual violence as a reprisal for talking. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that they find it difficult to trust the government.

Based on these findings, the ICRC calls on government institutions and society in general to help alleviate the suffering of the families of missing people. Being aware of this reality of their situation is the first step.

Missing
The right to know
In 2014 the number of people reported missing in Colombia rose. Thousands of families are affected by this tragedy.



Sources: Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses, specifically the Sistema de Información Red de Desaparecidos y Cadáveres (SIRDEC) (data from 01.01.2007 to 31.12.2014) and the Localización de Información Forense Estadística (LIFE) platform. Date consulted: 3 February 2015.



Anne Sylwke Linder/ICRC

A SEARCH THAT TOOK FIVE YEARS

María* lost four of her brothers on the same day six years ago. Two were killed, and the other two disappeared coming home from work. “They sent us a note that said: ‘Stop looking for them’.”

In May, in a rural area of Arauca, after four hours of excavations by ICRC forensic experts, the remains of two people were found. When they saw the clothes, María and her mother knew that these were the remains of their loved ones. The discovery is captured in this photo.

*Name changed



Faruk González/ICRC

Juan Sebastián Uribe/ICRC



Above: Medellín. An event held by the organization of victims' mothers, Madres de la Candelaria, in the city centre.

Left: Buenaventura. A family members group displays a patchwork quilt in honour of their loved ones in front of a mural painted for the missing by urban artist Guache.

THE ICRC'S RESPONSE

We give guidance to families and to those whose job it is to provide them with answers

The missing is one of the humanitarian problems of greatest concern to the ICRC. In 2014, the organization took action on two fronts: the first involved raising the awareness of public officials and employees and the general public about the urgent need to find missing persons, and the second focused on supporting families in their search for missing family members and providing guidance to institutions responsible for locating the remains of missing persons and identifying and returning them.

Supporting families

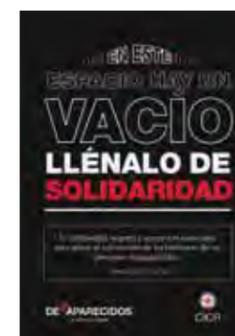
- ✓ In an attempt to ascertain the fate of missing persons to end the torment of uncertainty plaguing their families, the ICRC approached those allegedly responsible for their disappearance, inquiring about 220 cases.
- ✓ It assisted 220 families of missing persons, either guiding them through government procedures or providing financial support to enable them to search for their loved ones, for example, to travel to places where exhumations were being conducted or to collect remains. As a result of these efforts, 36 people were found either dead or alive.
- ✓ The ICRC made arrangements for 140 people with missing family members to receive psychosocial support. Over 90 percent of them were children, adolescents or women.
- ✓ Guidance was provided to 37 people with missing family members on how to exercise their rights and improve their chances of receiving government assistance. This work was carried out in conjunction with the Interinstitutional committee on support for victims of enforced disappearance.
- ✓ The ICRC also distributed information packs to families, clearly explaining the essential facts about searches for missing people and their rights.

Forensic services and working with the authorities

- ✓ In exceptional circumstances, when the legal authorities do not have access to places where the bodies of missing people are thought to be located, ICRC forensic experts recover the remains. Psychosocial support is also provided to the families. In 2014, the ICRC recovered the remains of 11 people in Arauca, Chocó and Córdoba.
- ✓ In order to improve the services provided by the authorities for the families of missing persons, the ICRC provided some 120 prosecutors and investigators concerned with missing persons cases with training in good practices for locating, recording and identifying missing persons and for dealing with the families.
- ✓ It also trained 142 Colombian Red Cross Society volunteers, civil defence personnel and fire fighters in handling human remains in armed violence and disaster situations.

Calling attention to the problem

- ✓ In 2013 and 2014, the ICRC conducted an evaluation of the situation of over 200 families of missing persons. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess their needs, determine what problems they had encountered and ascertain how they were coping, with a view to formulating recommendations for those responsible for dealing with this problem. The final report and regional findings will be published in 2015.
- ✓ A campaign called *The missing, the right to know*, spread its message in 40 Colombian towns and cities, making an appeal to “fill the void” left by the disappearance of loved ones (see next page).
- ✓ As part of its ongoing dialogue with the parties to the conflict and other armed groups, the ICRC reminded them of the rules that prohibit enforced disappearance and the concealment of information about missing persons.



A CAMPAIGN TO FILL THE VOID LEFT BY THE MISSING

An ICRC campaign promoting solidarity with the families of missing people toured the country in 2014. Over three months, the messages of the campaign *The missing, the right to know* were displayed on buses, at bus stops, in squares, lifts, parks, university cafes and dozens of other places in 40 different towns and cities.



- 1 Bogotá. The lifts at the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science. Photo: Andrés Cortés/ICRC
- 2 Florencia. The artist Benjamin Betsalel painted 13 portraits accompanied by tokens of remembrance and stories from the families of the missing. His project was called *Absence in presence*. Photo: Andrés Monroy/ICRC
- 3 Bogotá. The Transmilenio buses displayed the message “We'll never forget them”. Photo: Andrés Cortés/ICRC



WEAPON CONTAMINATION

“How can we leave, when we have nowhere to go?”

Édinson picked up an explosive device by mistake. The explosion not only blew off his hand, it also led to the displacement of his whole family.

“My name is Édinson and I’m 27 years old. I was born in Chocó. At the time, I was working on a farm, and my wife stayed at home looking after the children. One day, I was going to clear some land and saw a can on the ground. I picked it up and it was then that I realized it had a mechanism. Just as I was going to throw it, it exploded in my hand and I passed out.

“A cousin came and fetched me. He borrowed a vehicle and took me to Puerto Meluk, but there was no hospital there where I could get medical attention. He took me to Istmina, but they didn’t do anything there either. They sent me to Quibdó, and I spent three days there in hospital. The ICRC arranged for me to be sent to Bogotá. They took me to see a doctor and paid my expenses. Then I was moved me to Medellín because my hand became infected and I lost it. With their help, we returned to Chocó.

“A month after we got back, they started putting leaflets under our door. My wife said that we should go, but I said: ‘How can we leave, when we have nowhere to go?’ I had 150,000 pesos and we managed to get to another city. We called a friend and she helped us with the fare to get to her house in another area. Now we are living with her in her house.

“Here, the ICRC is still helping us. For example, we were able to buy some clothes for the children, and my wife is training to work in a hotel. I earn some money when a friend who works at a fishery calls me to help unload crates when boats come in. Sometimes it’s difficult for me, because I have shrapnel in my body and only one hand, but I have faith that my wife and I will eventually get a job”.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The presence of explosive devices disrupts daily life

Many communities have to give up their everyday activities and often lose their livelihoods due to the presence of improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel mines on their land. Even when the devices do not explode, causing injury and death, their mere presence prevents children from attending school and farmers from grazing their livestock. In 2014, the ICRC heard many more stories than in previous years about this problem in various regions.

The ICRC is also concerned about the increased effects of weapon contamination in urban areas, caused by clashes, attacks and harassment. These effects include damage to civilian property, restrictions on movement and a reduction in income. In short, this problem jeopardizes people’s health, access to water, education and economic and food security.

Although the number of people injured and killed as a result of weapon contamination has fallen in recent times, this does not mean that the problem and its effects are going away. Of great concern is the hidden drama of those who, in urban and rural areas, suffer as a result of the indiscriminate use of different types of weapons, including small arms and light weapons, which are so readily available. The abandonment of weapons and munitions and their use by non-experts also causes problems for communities.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 70. *The use of means and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering is prohibited.*

Rule 71. *The use of weapons which are by nature indiscriminate is prohibited.*

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

We are strengthening prevention and assisting victims

In addition to providing guidance for communities on how to prevent accidents resulting from weapon contamination, the ICRC also helps victims to get the care they need.

- ✓ With a view to reducing risks, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society trained 11,500 people, including 1,700 people living in urban areas, in safe practices that can help prevent accidents caused by improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and small arms.
- ✓ The ICRC provided around 200 people who survived accidents caused by weapon contamination and the families of people who were killed with guidance on their rights and their entitlement to reparation, providing information on the channels and procedures for claiming financial compensation from the government.
- ✓ Some 1,800 survivors received medical care, thanks to the assistance and financial support provided by the ICRC.
- ✓ Some 130 victims of weapon contamination benefitted from physical rehabilitation. In addition to receiving physiotherapy, they were provided with orthopaedic and prosthetic devices, wheelchairs, food and transport. Some of them received care at one of the four rehabilitation centres supported by the ICRC.
- ✓ At least eight infrastructure projects, including school facilities, water supply systems and a bridge, helped to prevent accidents.

Andrés Monroy/ICRC



For children from the village of Balsora, in Puerto Leguizamo (Putumayo), their walk to school was a hazardous journey due to the presence of explosive devices and remnants of war. This bridge over the river Piñuña Negra, built by the ICRC, has helped to lessen the risks.



DISRUPTION OF LIVELIHOODS

“No help came for six months.”

Not only was Wilson injured and unable to afford the trip to hospital, no longer able to work, he also lost the means of providing for his family.

“I am 24 and was a truck driver in Catatumbo, Norte de Santander. One day, I was driving to another village and there was a car bomb in the middle of the road. I stopped and then when I started the vehicle again, the bomb exploded. I was injured in the stomach and had to have a colostomy.

“A friend of mine came to my aid. He took me to hospital and they gave me some pain killers. Then I was moved to Ocaña. There, the doctor put his finger in my stomach and I went into a coma. When I woke up, I was in intensive care. My brother said: ‘What I am going to do without any money or anything else’. He had no money for my transport or for my medical expenses. He went to the Red Cross, and they helped with everything.

“If I don’t work, I don’t eat. I have two little girls and my wife and I provide for them working with my truck, but my truck has been damaged. I applied to the government for assistance, but six months have passed and I haven’t received anything. I have had various doctor’s appointments. I have to go to Ocaña for an operation. They hadn’t been able to operate so far, because the wound hadn’t healed, but I am going to have the operation soon now.

“Those with weapons know why they are fighting, but me, all I am used to is working all the time; everybody knows that. Why would they want to hurt me like this? I wasn’t doing anything wrong.”



Edgar Alfonso/ICRC
At the hospital in Ocaña, an ICRC worker helps Wilson with the paperwork for his operation.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The challenge of earning a living when one’s life is at risk

The armed conflict spanning five decades, together with other forms of armed violence, has taken its toll on the living conditions of hundreds of rural and urban communities in Colombia. In addition to causing death, injury and the destruction of property, the fighting also disrupts livelihoods, leaving people without the minimum resources required to earn a living.

Access to health care

The armed violence continued contributing to the serious situation facing injured, sick and disabled people. A gap persists between patient needs and the services health care workers can provide. People often have difficulty getting to a place where they can receive the care they need, and the health care that is available is limited owing to personnel shortages and inadequate equipment. An additional problem is that it is often impossible for medical personnel to enter neighbourhoods and rural areas controlled by armed groups.

The access of disabled people to the care they so desperately need is restricted by physical and communication barriers, the deterioration of their environment and the lack of adequate services. These barriers increase the burden of their disability.

In 2014, the ICRC recorded a high number of attacks on civilian medical services and attempts to obstruct their work. The organization received reports of 52 incidents, including the killing of three patients while they were receiving medical attention in Antioquia and Norte de Santander and one health worker in Antioquia.

Economic security

Living in the midst of violence means that many communities have no steady livelihood, because the presence of explosive devices restricts access to the more fertile land, for example, or because their isolation prevents the delivery of inputs and access to agricultural programmes and technical extension services. The situation becomes more critical during peaks in armed violence when there are clashes or armed strikes. The main consequences are a decrease in food and economic security for families and an increase in diseases.

Water and basic sanitation

Lack of access to essential services such as water, basic sanitation, electricity and education further exacerbated the vulnerable situation of communities affected by the violence. In some cases, they do not use existing water supply and sanitation systems, either because the parties to the conflict or other groups are using them or because they are surrounded by explosive devices to prevent the other side from using them. It is paradoxical that those without access to these services are no nearer to getting them because the safety of service providers is not guaranteed, while a part of the population that does have such services cannot use them because it is too dangerous.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 25. Medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties must be respected and protected in all circumstances. They lose their protection if they commit, outside their humanitarian function, acts harmful to the enemy.

Rule 54. Attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population is prohibited.

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, articles 7, 9.1 and 14



Juan Arredondo/Guerty/ICRC
Previous page, top: A young man feeding fish at a shelter supported by the ICRC in Catatumbo.

Right: A health post in Chocó.

THE ICRC'S RESPONSE

A comprehensive solution to restore livelihoods

In order to mitigate the vulnerability of people living in the midst of violence and to help restore their basic rights, the ICRC carried out activities in the areas of health, economic security and water and sanitation.

Access to health care

- ✓ 3,000 sick or injured people received medical attention, thanks to guidance and financial support provided by the ICRC, in coordination with the State (see p. 20).
- ✓ Over 2,400 people – including doctors, nurses and people from the community – received training on how to treat sick and injured people.
- ✓ Over 12,000 people received care at four physical rehabilitation centres which receive support from the ICRC in the form of training, materials to make orthopaedic devices and technical assistance. Around 400 disabled people also received direct assistance from the ICRC for physical rehabilitation.
- ✓ In order to help protect health care personnel, buildings and vehicles, 150 facilities were marked with the emblem indicating medical services. In addition, 3,000 people received self-defence training.

Economic security

- ✓ More than 19,000 people living in areas affected by violence were able to earn some income and recover their livelihoods thanks to 32 income-generating

initiatives, such as crop growing, fish farming, poultry and livestock farming, sugar mills, rice mills and a bakery using ingredients produced from traditional indigenous crops (see p. 24).

- ✓ A further 1,400 people received support to recover their economic independence and cope with the effects of the violence. For example, a group of indigenous women is producing and selling their community's typical garments, and a community shop was strengthened after it was left without stocks during the fighting.
- ✓ 6,300 people living in villages affected by the violence are now better prepared and better organized to cope with situations such as armed attacks, displacement and confinement, thanks to community workshops held by the ICRC.

Water and basic sanitation

- ✓ Living conditions improved for around 18,000 people, thanks to initiatives to increase access to water and basic sanitation and infrastructure.
- ✓ These initiatives included the construction and improvement of small aqueducts, water harvesting and storage systems, school canteens and hostels and a bridge, which helped to prevent accidents caused by explosive devices and remnants of war. They also make it possible for people from these communities to avoid going near combat zones (see story on next page).

A farmer taking part in a cocoa growing initiative tends his plantation.

Mathias Kempf/ICRC

A SAFE HAVEN FOR CHILDREN IN AN ADULTS' WAR

To cross the river that separates the village of San Pablo (Norte de Santander) from the rural children's home is to leave behind the violence and enter another world where children play, grow cocoa and sleep in comfort. There are around 55 children here who have grown up seeing their loved ones die as a result of the conflict.

The home provides a place to sleep for students from villages situated several hours away. The roads to and from these villages are made hazardous by fighting and explosive devices. "It is dangerous to live in a village where there is a lot of fighting and armed people," says Lady, who for this reason prefers to live here at the home and dreams of becoming a nurse. The ICRC has built a dormitory, a school canteen and bathroom facilities and is currently building a new girls' dormitory. There are plans to set up an integrated farm model and support the raising of pigs and laying hens.

"Without this place, life would be very hard for these children," says the headmistress, as the sound of an explosion is heard in the background and a noisy military plane begins to circle overhead. This is the noise of war, which reminds us that, in spite of the tranquillity here at the children's home, we are still in Catatumbo.

1 *Adrián lost his mother when he was just five and has little contact with his father. He has been at the children's home for four years. As he tends the cocoa plants, he says: "If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't have had the chance to study".*

2 *Gregorio Salazar, the village's parish priest, expresses his concern for the future of the children of San Pablo. "They are used to hearing shots fired and seeing violence. That affects them psychologically," he explains. "The situation in the region is very worrying. The conflict has been very intense here".*

3 *Most of the home, which belongs to the Church, has already been renovated, and the girls' dormitory will be built by the ICRC in 2015. Here, one of the girls is finishing the cleaning.*

4 *The day starts at five in the morning at the home. With efficiency and speed, some of the children prepare breakfast, while others clean. They are so organized that there is a clean-plate supervisor who stands at the canteen door. At about six o'clock, they file out to the school.*

Andrés Cortés/ICRC





Indigenous students from Granadillo school peeling basul beans, which are used to make bread, cakes and biscuits.

A BAKERY TO FEED GRANADILLO

“Many children come to school without having breakfast, which means that they can’t concentrate in class,” explains William Cayapu, a teacher at the school in Granadillo, a small village in northern Cauca. “We started making homemade bread in the school kitchens”.

The initiative really took off when the ICRC donated baking equipment to the school, which has 270 students. It gave them ovens, mixers, a refrigerator and glass cases, among other things. The ICRC arranged for the National Training Service (SENA) to provide training for 21 students as bakers, using ingredients produced from traditional indigenous crops.

“Instead of sleeping, I use the time to do something useful. I would like to carry on working here when I leave school,” remarks student Eulalio Campo Ulcue. Eulalio not only helps to ensure that his schoolmates have a good breakfast every day, he also makes bread, cakes and biscuits to sell, earning some extra income for the school.

Teacher William plans to include bread-making in the school curriculum, linking it up with lessons on accounting, administration and culinary arts. “In this way, we create linkages between our students’ dietary needs and the establishment of new spaces for education and learning to live together,” he explains.



Eulalio, who is a student, is one of those in charge of the production of goods sold at the bakery.

MULES KEEP A WHOLE VILLAGE GOING

Las Negritas, a village in Bajo Cauca Antioqueño, is the last stop on the road into the forest. These roads were opened up decades ago by muleteers and, in more recent times, by powerful machines that forge paths to the remotest places to mine gold. It is a passing-through place, with more bars than houses.

For many years, the village’s economy has depended on a group of muleteers who bring timber from remote areas, over twelve hours away by mule. Some were unaware that their animals were suffering as a result of the loads they had to carry and a poor diet. Las Negritas presented a sad sight: there was not a mule without its skin rubbed raw by the timber it carried.

The ICRC decided to help an association of muleteers. It provided training in veterinary care and supplied medicines, load support devices and animal feed. In this way, it improved the situation of around 500 animals and their owners, who together help to maintain a region bowed under the burden of war and necessity.



Faruk Saman González/ICRC

Above: A group of mules laden with timber brought from remote areas enter the village of Las Negritas.

Bottom: Buenaventura. The water tanks installed by the ICRC in this neighbourhood affected by the violence have improved access to water.

Juan Arredondo/ICRC





DISPLACEMENT

“I am not going back if I don’t feel safe.”

The fighting forced a whole community to move to Guapi, Cauca. On their return, they had to start from scratch. This is a story that was repeated in many other places.

“We live on the river Guapi, in Cauca. In September, almost a thousand of us were forced to move away because of the fighting. We were away for four weeks and lost our fishing nets and our animals. Peccaries destroyed our crops and we ended up with no food and unable to go out fishing.

“We headed for Guapi’s urban centre and ended up in a place where conditions were difficult. Those who had family or friends there stayed with them: imagine a little wooden house with 30 or 40 people sleeping in it. The rest of us stayed in the Community Centre, but it was very damp. It rained every day and the roof leaked. We received some food, but it wasn’t enough to go round.

“Sometimes the men and some women went looking for a day’s work, anything that would earn them a little money. We didn’t want to stay there. There was no privacy; there were just two bathrooms for so many people. We slept on the floor on mats, and many of us got sick. Sometimes, there were disputes between us and there was always a lapse of a few days between supplies running out and aid

arriving. Who wants to live like that? But we couldn’t go back until we felt safe.

“When we went back to our community, the ICRC assisted us with fishing kits and taro and banana seeds. That helped us to recover what we had lost.”

6.2
million internally displaced persons were registered with the Integrated Victim Assistance and Reparation Unit (UARIV) as at December 2014.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Individual displacements, a silent drama

The suffering of people displaced individually was a cause for concern in 2014. Although the stories did not make the headlines, thousands of people fled the violence individually, often to municipalities without the capacity to help them. In some cases, they had to survive for three months before receiving any assistance.

The persistence of mass displacement, which refers to cases involving more than 50 people, was a matter of concern to the ICRC. The humanitarian organization provided assistance in twenty such emergency cases, two more than in 2013. Most cases of this kind were dealt with by the authorities responsible for providing assistance and reparation to victims of the violence.

A common factor in all these cases is that the communities concerned are plunged into a situation of vulnerability. Even when the displacements were only temporary and people were able to return home in a matter of weeks or months, the economic and social damage caused was difficult to repair.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 129B. Parties to a non-international armed conflict may not order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand.

Rule 131. In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken in order that the civilians concerned are received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition and that members of the same family are not separated.

Rule 132. Displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety to their homes or places of habitual residence as soon as the reasons for their displacement cease to exist.

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, article 17

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

Support for those who flee and those who manage to return home

The ICRC not only deals with emergencies caused by displacement, it also endeavours to ensure that communities are able to recover their livelihoods.

- ✓ 13,000 displaced people received food supplies, household items, hygiene products and cash to cover their basic necessities, which helped to improve their situation (see p. 28).
- ✓ Five communities – around 3,000 people – returning home after being displaced benefited from income-generating initiatives, including livestock raising, crop growing and fishing kits.
- ✓ Some 54,000 victims of the violence (some 14,000 families), most of them displaced persons, filed their application for registration as victims, so that they can, if considered eligible, receive assistance and reparation from the government. The ICRC provided support for the officials who processed the statements required for registration and covered the cost of their accommodation, food, transport and other logistics expenses (see p. 28).
- ✓ In 28 municipalities, the ICRC donated computer equipment and office furniture to institutions responsible for processing the statements of victims of the violence (Municipal Ombudsman’s Offices and Municipal Victim Liaison Offices), so that they could process them online and improve the services they provide to victims.
- ✓ 4,300 displaced persons were able to stay at shelters with a water supply and basic sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- ✓ Through an employment programme for victims of the violence, 500 people – mainly displaced persons – obtained temporary contracts of work with private companies, giving them a steady income that enabled them to provide for their families (almost 1,900 people). The ICRC acted as an intermediary, sending candidates to the companies involved. It paid part of the salaries and, in some cases, provided industrial safety garments and equipment (see p. 29).
- ✓ A further 350 people received training to improve their work skills and employability. On completion of the training, half of them found work, enabling them to provide for their families (2,000 people).

Ismael Sánchez/ICRC



A displaced indigenous community receives food and hygiene products in a rural area of Buenaventura.



Above: A special drive to enable victims of the violence to file their statements at the La Grama stadium in Villavicencio

Right: Delivery of humanitarian aid for the Embera people in Chocó



Abraham Doblado/ICRC



Andrés Cortés/ICRC



Left: Duvan Steven at work in a factory in Soacha.

Above: Claudia Sofia working at a gas company in Pasto.

VITAL SUPPORT IN AN EMERGENCY

Displacement undermines the capacity of communities to cope, and they are often left to survive on their own for weeks, as in these two stories from Chocó and Meta.

Displacement of the Embera people in Chocó causes great hardship.

“The situation is critical. There are shortages of food and medicines”. This is how an ICRC delegate described the situation of 22 indigenous Embera communities from the Cattrú reservation in Chocó in May. Around 1,500 people arrived in a town in the area, fleeing the fighting between armed groups.

These indigenous people were taken into the homes of families there, where they had to survive in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions for a week without any kind of assistance. In view of the difficulties faced by government institutions in entering the area, the ICRC deployed its biggest humanitarian operation of 2014 in response to this emergency. It distributed one month’s food supplies, hygiene products and blankets to 2,800 people, including the displaced people themselves and the families who had taken them in and shared what little they had with them.

Action was also taken to improve the water supply and water storage capacity to cater for increased needs in this emergency.

In the following months, government institutions were able to reach these communities and provide assistance themselves. The ICRC covered the travel and food expenses of officials from the Ministry of Public Affairs who travelled to the town to take statements from these people, so that they could be included in the official register of victims and receive assistance and reparation from the government.

A ‘marathon drive’ for victims to be recognized.

María arrived at the La Grama stadium in Villavicencio with the hope that: “they can help solve the problems my husband and I have, particularly with regard to health care, so that we can give our two children a decent life”. She was seen by officials from the Victim’s Service Unit at a special drive carried out to take statements and came out satisfied: “They interviewed me and listened to what I had to say”.

On 24 and 25 November, over ten people like her were seen every hour during special twelve-hour sessions. In total, 267 people had the chance to file their statements. Filing this statement is very important, because it is the first step to being included in the Unified Register of Victims (RUV). If they are considered eligible, they will then receive assistance and reparation from the Colombian Government.

Ten government institutions were involved in this marathon drive, supported by the ICRC, which covered accommodation, food, transport and other logistics expenses of the officials who travelled to the town for the drive. “We managed to clear a two-month backlog of appointments for victims wishing to file their statements,” observed Javier Rivillas, the coordinator of the Victim’s Service Unit. “This is the first time that we have been up to date since 2011, when the Law on victims’ rights came into force”.

IN THE CITY, A CHANCE TO GET ON

Claudia, who had to flee to Pasto, and Steven, who ended up in Soacha, tell how they have made good, thanks to an ICRC employment programme for victims of the violence.

“They opened doors for me even though I had no experience.”

In a year and a half, Claudia Sofía Jaramillo turned her life around, from scraping a living looking after children by the hour and fixing appliances to holding a job as a transport assistant at Supergas de Nariño, a company located in Pasto.

She got the job through the ICRC, who sponsored the position by paying her salary for several months, as an incentive to the company to hire her. After that, it was all down to her, as her boss, Fernando Gómez, the manager of the company, explained.

“I used to live with my parents and my three children,” recounts this young woman during a coffee break in her busy day organizing gas truck dispatches.

“My father was killed and, nine months later, there was some harassment in the village and we were left a letter saying that we had to leave. In Pasto, I spent a year doing whatever I could to get by. I have my children to care for and I couldn’t just sit around waiting for something to turn up.”

The ICRC contacted her one day and asked her to send them a CV for Supergas, as part of their employment programme for victims of the violence. “Even if I leave this job, I will be happy, because they opened this door for me, when I had no work experience, and now I could find work in another company”.

“I feel great peace of mind, free from the all the worries I used to have.”

Duvan Steven Naranjo laughs as he reveals how long he lasted in his first position at Sygla Colombia, a chemical company based in Soacha, in the southern part of Bogotá: “one day,” he says, laughing with pride. “I started in general services and, as I worked well, they transferred me to the warehouse. I have been here for four months now and am very happy”.

For a young displaced person like him, who had just arrived in the city in mid-2014, fleeing the threats made against him at home in Antioquia, the chance to demonstrate his passion to work and get promoted “spurred my motivation and desire to succeed in life”. He says that having a proper job and a steady income has completely changed his life: “I feel great peace of mind, free from all the worries I used to have”.



MURDER AND THREATS

“We couldn’t save my daughter.”

Seventeen-year-old Vicky’s life was tragically cut short by a shot to the head when she was caught in the crossfire during fighting in a rural area in Cauca where she lived.

“My name is Nereida. I live in La Susana, a village in the rural district of Tacueyó, which is situated in the municipality of Toribío (northern Cauca). My daughter Vicky was just seventeen when she was shot to death by stray bullets during an armed clash. Although the medical personnel tried to save her, she didn’t pull through, because she had been shot in the head. She was shot from behind.

“She had hoped to study medicine, but those deadly bullets cut her life short. Now and again I am my old self; I am able to put my sorrow behind me and I feel better. But there are days when these thoughts come flooding back to me. I have to keep my mind occupied to stop me thinking about it.

“We used to live in peace here, and people were happy. We didn’t have to put up with these shootings and clashes. This war has nothing to do with us, and we don’t even know why it is they are fighting.”

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 2. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions

Article 4, paragraphs 2.a and 2.h. [T]he following acts [...] are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever: (a) violence to the life [...] of persons, in particular murder; [...] h) threats to commit [attacks on human beings and violations of their rights].

Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions, 1.a.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The failure to respect humanitarian rules puts civilians in danger

Among the many forms of violence faced by people in both rural and urban areas of the country, attacks on their lives and threats against them are particularly serious, because they violate a basic human right. In 2014, the ICRC documented the killing of 56 civilians and other people protected under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It learned of 655 cases of people who had been threatened and provided them with assistance. It also assisted around 3,000 people who were injured or sick.

These figures attest to the fact that, in Colombia, it is not unusual for civilians to be caught up in the fighting, and the precautions required to avoid civilian casualties are often not taken. To make matters worse, civilians are also frequently the target of direct persecution by the parties to the conflict and other armed groups, who issue death threats against civilians and, in many cases, kill them.

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

We engage in dialogue with the parties to persuade them not to involve the civilian population

The protection of civilians in situations of conflict and armed violence is a fundamental part of the ICRC’s work. Therefore, in addition to helping those who have received threats and the families of those killed, it also talks to those allegedly responsible in an attempt to change their behaviour.

- ✓ In 2014, 655 people whose lives were in danger received support from the ICRC to move to a safer area.
- ✓ The families of around 80 people killed received financial support, so that they could afford to pay for a decent funeral. They also received advice on how to apply for government assistance.
- ✓ In coordination with the authorities, 3,000 sick or injured people received medical care, thanks to guidance or financial support provided by the ICRC. Some of these people had been injured in armed clashes and attacks (see p. 20).
- ✓ In its ongoing dialogue with all the parties to the conflict and other groups, the ICRC highlighted the importance of respecting civilian lives.



Andrés Cortés/ICRC

During a visit to a rural area in Guaviare, ICRC personnel chat with people to find out about their concerns and, where necessary, remind all the parties to the conflict of their duty to protect civilians.



During clashes in Cauca, the ICRC makes its voice heard, calling for civilians to be protected.



DESTRUCTION OF CIVILIAN PROPERTY

“My house was left in ruins.”

For a family from Catatumbo, living next to a military target has meant losing not only their home, but also their livelihood.

“I am now living on illegally occupied land, with all my family, because my house and my parents’ house were both destroyed in an attack. We have been living in a house made of wooden boards. We haven’t been able to build another house yet, because we don’t know if we’ll be able to stay here.

“My house was near an area where there was continuous fighting. I built it next to my parents’ house, so that I would have someone to leave my son with. After building my house, I only lived in it for three months.

“One day, there was an attack and their aim was off. Stray bombs fell all over the place. Both my house and my parents’ house were left in ruins. Thank God it wasn’t any worse and we all survived. We decided to move, because we couldn’t stay there with the children.

“That was terrible for me. My life savings went into that house. My parents had ponds with tambaqui fish near their house. It provided a livelihood for us all, including several small children. We left it all and it was lost. Now we have come back and have to rebuild our lives.”

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 7. *The parties to the conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may only be directed against military objectives. Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects.*

Rule 10. *Civilian objects are protected against attack, unless and for such time as they are military objectives.*

Rule 22. *The parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks.*

Rule 23. *Each party to the conflict must, to the extent feasible, avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas.*

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, article 13

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Civilian property must not be attacked

Fighting and attacks by the parties to the conflict often occur near or actually in protected property, such as houses, farms, schools and health facilities. In many cases, they are looted or deliberately destroyed.

It was observed with great concern that, in dozens of communities, the parties failed in their duty to distinguish between weapon bearers and the civilian population and between military objectives and civilian property. Civilians and civilian property are protected under IHL and must not be put in danger.

Risks arise when weapon bearers set up camp on farms, stay in houses or schools or attack the enemy when they are in the proximity of such places. In addition to putting civilian property at risk from attacks, it can result in the stigmatization of the population by the other side and limit their access to essential services such as health and education.

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

Rebuilding what has been lost is the first step

- ✓ The ICRC distributed construction materials to 800 people, so that they could repair their homes, which had been damaged during armed attacks in the departments of Arauca, Cauca, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo.
- ✓ In the course of its confidential dialogue with all the parties to the conflict, the ICRC met with those allegedly responsible for attacks or actions putting the civilian population at risk. It reminded them of their duty to protect civilians.



Oscar Iván Ordóñez/ICRC

Returning and starting over

Armed clashes in Las Piedras, a rural community in Nariño, left in their wake abandoned explosive devices and a school in ruins and caused the month-long displacement of 25 families.

The ICRC helped these people to recover their livelihoods, by providing them with food, hygiene products, laying hens, material to make pens and farm implements. It also provided training on how to avoid accidents caused by explosive devices. The school has not yet been rebuilt.



The filing cabinet was the only thing left standing after hours of fighting. The community has already managed to obtain a new lot and hopes to have its school up and running again soon.



VIOLENCE IN URBAN AREAS

“We lock ourselves in until the shooting stops.”

Three children recount what it is like to live in a part of Medellín in the grip of armed violence. They don't even feel safe in their own schools.

María: “I am sixteen and have always been in this environment, where we are exposed to violence, armed groups, war and shooting. I have always lived here and it is very rough, because you want to convey the idea of doing good and helping others, but people are not always receptive to that”.

Simón: “Nothing has ever happened to me on the street, but there has been shooting nearby when we were at home. When that happens, we go inside and lock ourselves in until the shooting stops. That way we won't get killed or anything like that. I have learned that I mustn't be out late at night, because I could get myself killed”.

Julián: “At school, there have been many problems with drugs and threats. Those involved in the conflict bring their issues here to school to spread their reach. The best solution is communication; you have to talk to people more, because it's not right to solve everything with violence. Am I going to hit you just because I don't agree with you? No, everything should be done with dialogue”.

María: “I come to school each day and I see my schoolmates in low spirits. I say to them: ‘Come on, cheer up. I feel down too, but tomorrow I will wake up smiling. Don't worry, everything will be alright”.

ON VIDEO

In Medellín, a group of children and teachers promote respect for life in the midst of armed violence.



HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Violence continues to affect life in some neighbourhoods

In some neighbourhoods in Colombia's main cities, both residents and victims of the violence who move there from other areas suffer multiple attacks.

In 2014, all the humanitarian consequences recorded by the ICRC in remote rural areas were also observed in urban centres, including displacement, disappearance, killings and threats, weapon contamination, sexual violence and the disruption of livelihoods.

Buenaventura, Tumaco and Medellín continued to be the three most seriously affected cities and the focus of the ICRC's humanitarian action. The organization documented 61 alleged violations of humanitarian rules in these and other urban areas.

The ICRC continued to record displacements from one neighbourhood to another within the same city. Restrictions on access to certain areas in the city and tacit curfews preventing people from moving around after a certain time have become a fact of everyday life. These constraints have a direct impact on access to essential services, such as water, health care and education.

An additional problem is that humanitarian action is more complicated in urban areas. In some cities, the ICRC has difficulty establishing the dialogue it maintains with armed groups to encourage them to respect the civilian population, because they tend to lack clear command chains and stable structures. In spite of this, the ICRC highlights the need to respect the lives and human dignity of all those who do not participate in the fighting.

THE ICRC'S RESPONSE

We promote respect for life and human dignity

The ICRC carried out its humanitarian work to address needs in urban areas in coordination with the Colombian Red Cross Society.

- ✓ In Medellín, 800 victims of armed violence were found work or received training in order to improve their employability or help them set up a business. Through temporary contracts with private companies or microcredit, these people were able to earn a steady income and provide for their families.
- ✓ In Medellín, under the programme More humanitarian spaces, more alternatives, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society trained teachers at 16 schools to promote, as part of the curriculum, respect for life and human dignity among 25,000 students.
- ✓ In addition, 1,700 people living in 19 urban areas received training in safe practices that can help prevent accidents caused by improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and small arms.
- ✓ In Buenaventura, the ICRC improved access to water, benefitting 2,500 people, and built a community centre in a neighbourhood affected by armed violence. Work also started on constructing vaults in a local cemetery for unidentified bodies, as part of efforts to deal with the problem of missing persons.
- ✓ In 40 of Colombia's urban centres, including the main cities, the ICRC promoted solidarity with the missing and their families, with a campaign called *The missing, the right to know*.
- ✓ In Buenaventura, 60 families of missing persons received psychosocial support, and three community-based groups which work with people affected by this problem were strengthened.

THE FIGURES

1,700

people living in urban areas learned how to prevent accidents caused by improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and small arms in 2014.

61

cases of alleged violations of international humanitarian law and other humanitarian rules were documented by the ICRC in urban areas in the course of 2014.



“The outcome we are pursuing is for the children to say: ‘We don’t want violence; we have other ways and means of resolving problems. Drug abuse, weapons and violence are not for me’. We want to steer them towards things that are different from what they see around them.”

Volunteer from the Colombian Red Cross Society

The programme *More humanitarian spaces, more alternatives*, run by the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society, reaches 25,000 students in Medellín.

SCHOOL BRIGADES: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

In the middle of the schoolyard, laughs and shouts can be heard from a group of young people who are recreating an emergency situation, with painted wounds, stretchers and bandages. Suddenly, the other half of the group leaps into action to help the ‘wounded’ and put their first-aid knowledge into practice. They are wearing red T-shirts emblazoned with the red cross emblem on their chests. They are part of the School Brigade programme.

There are fifteen School Brigades operating in Medellín, involving 300 students. The aim of these brigades is to prevent violence in the school environment. They are part of the *More humanitarian spaces, more alternatives*

programme, which the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society have been running for three years. Self-care, first aid, peaceful coexistence and leadership are some of the topics addressed by young people with a teacher and a Red Cross volunteer who visits the school once a week.

“The outcome we are pursuing is for the children to say: ‘We don’t want violence; we have other ways and means of resolving problems. Drug abuse, weapons and violence are not for me’. We want to steer them towards things that are different from what they see around them,” explains one of the programme volunteers.

Didier Revol/ICRC



IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT AND ARMED VIOLENCE ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In situations of conflict and armed violence, children, young people and women bear the brunt of the consequences. Part of the ICRC's humanitarian work is to prevent violations of their rights and provide a response adapted to their particular needs.

Ben Houdijk/3FM



A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

All the programmes implemented by the ICRC in Colombia to assist victims of the armed conflict take into account the particular needs of women, children and adolescents.

Initiatives such as employability training, jobs in private companies and microcredit schemes to help people set up small businesses involve a high percentage of women. The ICRC also helps to prevent children from suffering the impact of violence with initiatives promoting self-protection in the school environment, for example.



WOMEN

“I summoned all my strength and managed to walk again.”

Fifteen minutes after entering the place, Carmelina was hit by a tremendous blast. An explosive device had been thrown in from the street. Abandoned by her husband, her biggest challenge was to walk again.

“My name is Carmelina. I live in Barrancabermeja and am a street vendor.

“It was a Saturday night. Fifteen minutes after I went into the place, it happened. There was an explosion which left me in a coma for several days. When I woke up, I had no legs. From that moment, my life changed completely.

“A year later, my husband left me and my daughters. He has another home now. I just cried all the time. I didn’t go out of the house for two months, because I was afraid. I spent all my time in bed. Just thinking about the wheelchair made me angry. But I started selling fish again. When people asked me, I would say: ‘Those legs are gone now. What can I do?’ And that’s how I got over it.

“I didn’t get any psychological support or therapy for a year and eight months. One day, I was put in touch with the ICRC. Thanks to them, I can walk now, thank God. It

took me three months of rehabilitation. It was quite an adventure, but a good one.

“When I began the treatment, I found out that my daughter was going to get married. I wanted to walk her down the aisle. So, I summoned all my strength, because I knew I had to begin to use those prosthetic limbs and start walking again. It was very exciting.

“Twenty days ago, I returned to my fish stall. I saw myself behind my stall as I should be: standing up, not sitting in the wheelchair with no legs as I was when I first returned. Now I can stand up and, when I am tired, I just sit down.”

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Women tend to be invisible victims.

Women are particularly hard hit by the consequences of conflict and armed violence, but are almost always invisible victims. Their courage and their ability to pick themselves up and carry on often makes them the target of threats, sexual violence and assaults which can result in displacement and death.

In over a third of cases of alleged violations of international humanitarian law and other basic rules documented by the ICRC in 2014, the victims were women (322 of 875 cases). The victims of sexual violence are mainly women, who are often too afraid to seek help on account of the intimidation tactics used by the perpetrators of these terrible abuses.

Young women are used by armed groups as “secret-keepers” and “look-outs”, among other roles. If they do not do as they are told, they are made an example of and subjected to punishments ranging from being stripped naked in public to being tied to an ant-infested tree for days.

The lack of access to information which systematically affects women makes them more vulnerable, because they are unaware of their rights and their entitlement to assistance.

When their husbands are killed as a result of the conflict or armed violence, when they disappear or leave of their own accord, women are left to raise their families almost always without any kind of support. As community leaders, they are often stigmatized and threatened and are sometimes forced to move away from their home.

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

Differentiated support to dispel this invisibility

In 2014, the ICRC continued to provide a differentiated response, taking into account the specific needs of women affected by the conflict and armed violence. Some examples of the action taken as part of this response include the following.

- ✓ Over 520 displaced women and women living in areas affected by armed violence improved their quality of life as a result of ICRC efforts to find them jobs in private-sector companies and provide them with training to increase their work skills and employability.
- ✓ In Antioquia, Nariño, Norte de Santander and Putumayo, some 370 women became involved in income-generating initiatives designed especially for them. For example, in Tumaco (Nariño), 200 women received implements to collect mangrove cockles and peel shrimp, which enabled them to increase their income. In Chigorodó (Antioquia), 25 indigenous women were able to improve their economic situation by making their community’s typical garments. In Yarumal (Antioquia), another 42 women learned how to make cakes and rolls.
- ✓ Those who benefited from the psychosocial care provided by the ICRC to the families of missing persons, through agreements with specialized NGOs, were mainly women. In six cities, over 100 women attended these sessions, which were part of the follow-up to a national survey to assess the needs of people searching for missing loved ones.
- ✓ In Medellín, activities were undertaken to strengthen the knowledge of women and young people about sexual and reproductive rights and the entitlements of victims of sexual violence. More than 80 victims received appropriate medical and psychological care, with the help of Profamilia and the Colombian Red Cross Society.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

Geneva Conventions

Common Article 3. *Conflicts not of an international character. In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:*

(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed ‘hors de combat’ by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on [...] sex [...] or any other similar criteria.

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 134. *The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected.*



Katerina Ismene Kappos/ICRC

A group of 42 women from La Loma, in Yarumal (Antioquia), received training to process and sell produce from their farms. Coffee production, the mainstay of their livelihood, did not make enough.



CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

“I had to study standing up.”

Stripping coca leaves, crossing areas where fighting is taking place, walking several hours to school and studying without a desk is a reality experienced by many children in rural communities in Guaviare.

“I am fourteen and live in a little village in Guaviare. I come from Cauca, but my family moved away when I was five because of the problems they were having there.

“Last year I had to change to a school a long way from home, because there is no higher secondary education in my village. I went to live at a school hostel, and it is great because, before, I used to have to walk an hour and a half to school, which was three hours every day, whereas the new school is just five minutes from the hostel and it is a better place to study. Now, the ICRC has built a new hostel, which I think is just great.

“Sometimes, there were a lot of troops moving around near my village, and they wouldn’t let us pass to go to school. The teacher would tell me off for being late and make me miss two classes. I missed school last year too, because my parents split up and my mother took me to live somewhere else.

“At the school there are not enough chairs, and sometimes I have to study standing up. On my days off, I go and strip coca leaves. I collect five arrobos of leaves a day, which earns me 25,000 pesos. That helps a lot with my expenses. I buy clothes and my school materials, because I like having my own things.

“I have never been asked to go (with an armed group). I have heard of girls who want to go, but I don’t know. I would say no; it’s not my thing. What I want is to study science and speak English. I am also keen on football.

“What I would really like is for there to be an Internet connection. Sometimes they give us complicated work to do, and it would be better if we could use other research tools. I don’t know what it’s like; I’ve never used the Internet.”

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Children’s development is at risk

Throughout the country, the ICRC continued to hear about cases of children and adolescents who live in such precarious conditions that their future seems very bleak. Apart from lacking access to water, schools, adequate recreation facilities and health care, they are also exposed to multiple violations in the context of the conflict and armed violence.

In one out of four alleged violations documented by the ICRC in 2014, the victim was a minor (231 out of 875 cases). The school environment, where their rights should be protected, is not respected by the parties to the conflict and other armed actors. Threats against teachers, fighting near schools and explosive devices laid on the roads leading to schools are some examples.

When the protective environment is not respected, multiple violations are committed against children. Violence affects them more, because they are not fully grown. Each incident affects their development. They are also harmed when those who are attacked are the people who care for them – their parents or teachers, for example.

While the ICRC acknowledges that the government has made progress in protecting children and adolescents who leave armed groups that are parties to the conflict, it is concerned that those leaving armed groups do not enjoy the same protection. Rather than prosecuting them and depriving them of their liberty, the authorities should analyse the possibility of providing comprehensive support for them, as a more successful way of reintegrating these minors into society.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, article 4. 3.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

Article 1. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

Article 4.1. Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 135. Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection.

Rule 136. Children must not be recruited into armed forces or armed groups.

Rule 137. Children must not be allowed to take part in hostilities.

THE ICRC’S RESPONSE

Efforts to protect the most vulnerable victims

An essential part of the ICRC’s work is to protect children and provide them with specialized assistance when they need it. In 2014, in addition to assisting children in emergencies, it also helped to prevent violations of their rights.

- ✓ The ICRC visited minors held in youth detention centres in Medellín, Cali and Buenaventura in order to monitor their living conditions, their treatment and compliance with judicial guarantees.
- ✓ In Medellín, over 400 children deprived of their liberty attended sessions on humanitarian principles, conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence led by the Colombian Red Cross Society.
- ✓ The ICRC arranged for 21 children and adolescents who had left armed groups to be reunited with their families and join the government protection programme.
- ✓ Work sessions were held with public defenders to improve public defence services for adolescents deprived of their liberty and strengthen alternatives for minors leaving armed gangs, for example.
- ✓ With a view to protecting children in the school environment, the ICRC built and renovated school hostels, classrooms, canteens and other facilities for over 660 children. It also supported government institutions in formulating risk management policies for schools and guidelines for boarding schools.
- ✓ Of the more than 80 victims of sexual violence who received emergency assistance and psychosocial support from the ICRC, 15 were children.
- ✓ Almost half the displaced people who received humanitarian aid from the ICRC were children and adolescents. A total of 6,400 benefitted from such assistance.
- ✓ Thanks to the ICRC, psychological care was provided by specialized NGOs to 49 children and adolescents with missing family members.

Buenaventura

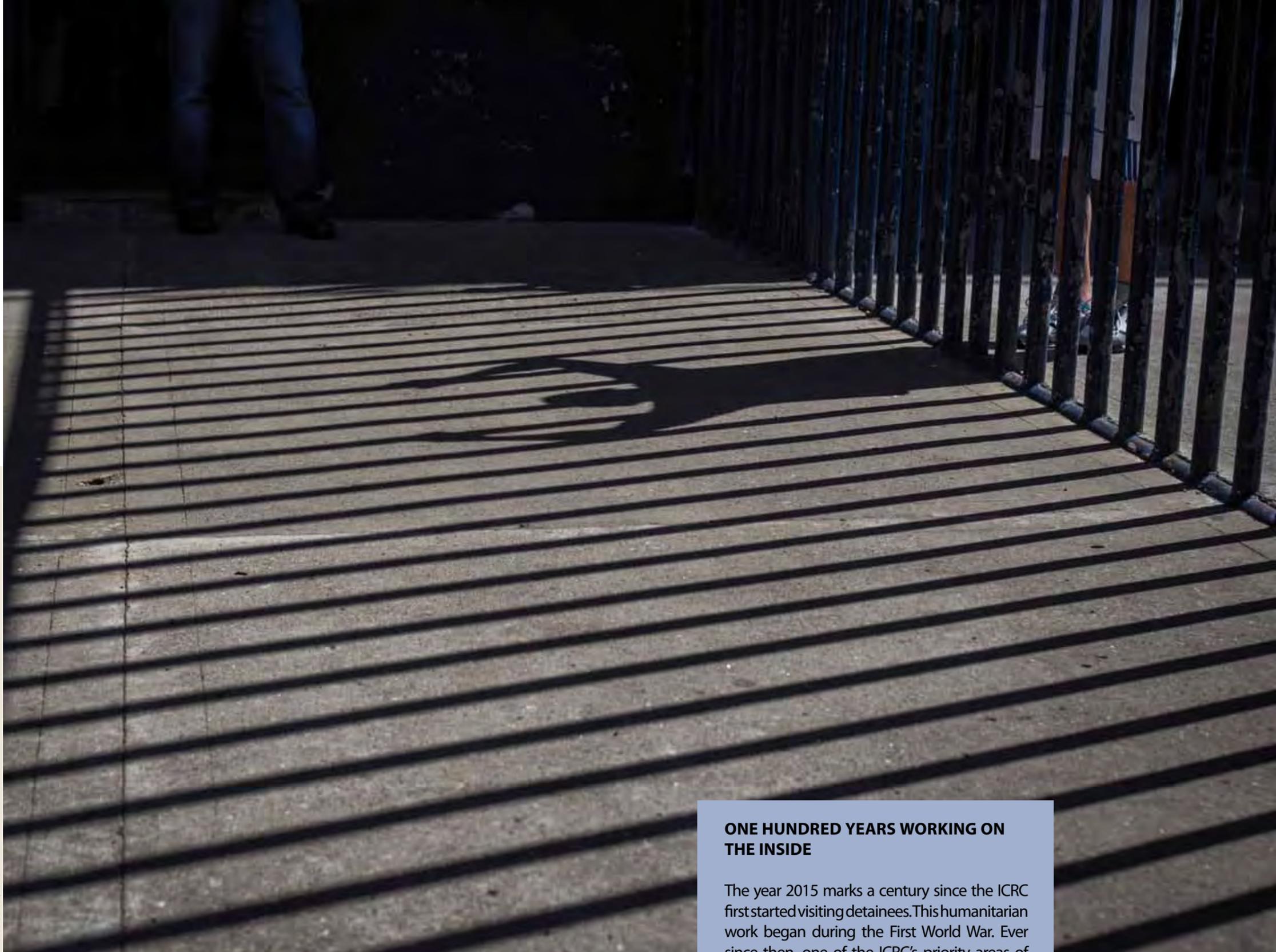
Juan Arredondo/ICRC



PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

The ICRC takes part in operations to release civilians and members of the police and armed forces being held by armed groups. It also visits thousands of people in detention facilities to ensure that the conditions in which they are being held are adequate.

Andrés Cortés/ICRC



ONE HUNDRED YEARS WORKING ON THE INSIDE

The year 2015 marks a century since the ICRC first started visiting detainees. This humanitarian work began during the First World War. Ever since then, one of the ICRC's priority areas of work has been to meet with people deprived of their liberty, pass on messages to their families, draw up lists to prevent disappearances, monitor conditions in detention facilities and make confidential recommendations to the authorities. The ICRC began visiting prisons in Colombia in 1969.



PEOPLE HELD BY ARMED GROUPS

Those held captive suffer great hardship.

In its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC facilitated the release of people held by armed groups. Thanks to the logistics support it provided, 19 people were released from captivity.

In 2014, dozens of people were deprived of their liberty by armed groups operating in Colombia and held captive for weeks or months. Some were civilians, who had played no part in the armed conflict, and others were members of the police and armed forces captured by the adversary.

These people suffer great hardship, as they have no access to health care and are kept in permanent isolation and precarious conditions. Their loved ones are also tormented by the uncertainty of not knowing what has happened to them and when they will be set free again.

As it has been doing since 1994, the ICRC took action to improve the situation of these people and facilitate their release when invited to do so by the parties involved. Some of these cases, such as the capture of an army general and two people accompanying him in the department of Chocó (see next page) aroused media interest nationally and internationally because of the possible repercussions for the peace process currently in progress between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP).

However, most of the release operations, including some involving company employees and children, all of which were highly complex, occurred far from the media spotlight.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 99. *Arbitrary deprivation of liberty is prohibited.*

THE ICRC'S RESPONSE

Dozens of families were reunited with their loved ones

At the request of the parties concerned, the ICRC offers its good offices to facilitate the release of people being held by armed groups. Additionally, in its confidential dialogue with these groups, it highlights the importance of ensuring the dignified treatment of people held captive.

- ✓ 19 people being held by armed groups, including civilians and members of the police and armed forces, were released, thanks to the humanitarian efforts of the ICRC.
- ✓ The ICRC was permanently in touch with the families of people being held captive and provided psychosocial support when required, for example, when they were preparing for the moment when they would be reunited.
- ✓ Some of the operations were carried out in coordination with Cuba and Norway – the two countries brokering the peace process with the FARC – the Church, the Colombian Red Cross Society, social organizations and government institutions, such as the Ombudsman's Office and the Ministry of Defence.

THE FIGURES

19 people were freed in Colombia with the help of the ICRC in 2014.

“I had seen footage of release operations and the role played by the ICRC on television. I never imagined that I would actually be part of one. When I saw the white vehicle marked with the emblem, my legs began to shake. I relaxed and took a deep breath; I was going to be freed.”

Andrés Felipe Calle
Engineer freed in release operation

CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE PROCESS

“We hope that this will help to strengthen the peace process currently underway.” These were the words of Christoph Harnisch, head of the ICRC's delegation in Colombia, upon completion of one of the organization's most high-profile operations in 2014: the release of three people being held by the FARC-EP.

The people being held captive were an army general, a corporal and a lawyer. Their capture on 16 November had led to the suspension of the peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP.

Fourteen days later, after long hours spent preparing the operation and coordinating with the parties concerned, the ICRC facilitated the release, with the presence of delegates from Cuba and Norway, the two countries brokering the peace process.

A helicopter with the organization's emblem set out from Rionegro (Antioquia) for a rural area in Chocó. At the site of the handover, a doctor who was part of the humanitarian mission examined the three people who had been freed. They were then flown to a military base and handed over to representatives of the Colombian army.

Just five days earlier, the ICRC had carried out another humanitarian operation to facilitate the release of two soldiers held captive by the FARC-EP in Arauca.

On 10 December, the parties returned to the negotiating table to resume the peace talks in Havana.



ENGINEER SET FREE

Andrés Felipe Calle, a geologist from Manizales, was held captive by the National Liberation Army (ELN) for 58 days. On 27 August 2014, his captivity came to an end when he was handed over to an ICRC humanitarian commission. Calle was one of the civilians in the hands of armed groups who was released with the help of the ICRC.

“I had seen footage of release operations and the role played by the ICRC on television. I never imagined that I would actually be part of one. When I saw the white vehicle marked with the emblem, my legs began to shake. I relaxed and took a deep breath; I was going to be freed.”



DETAINEES

Behind bars, a grim humanitarian situation.

Overcrowding, which is a serious problem in the prison system, also affected temporary detention centres. Many detainees had to live for months in facilities designed for stays of just a few hours.

The dire situation of the Colombian prison system saw no improvement in 2014. The ICRC confirmed that, in spite of efforts by the government, the crisis had acquired new dimensions. The severe overcrowding already affecting prisons was exacerbated by certain events, such as a strike by employees of the courts and the National Prisons and Corrections Institute (INPEC) in the second half of the year.

In 2014, the reform of the Prisons and Corrections Code (law 1709) gave judges greater flexibility in enforcing sentences. This change meant that more detainees were able to complete their sentence outside prison, as a means of alleviating overcrowding in detention facilities. However, as the ICRC observed during its regular visits, overcrowding remains at a critical level in many prisons.

In addition to this problem, living conditions worsened for many people in temporary detention centres, such as the immediate response units (URI). Detainees can end up staying months in facilities that were designed for stays of no more than 36 hours and have no adequate shower or kitchen facilities. ICRC delegates therefore visited some of these facilities in 2014 and made recommendations to the authorities.

Based on a whole century's experience working in detention facilities in many countries around the world, the ICRC believes that the problems affecting the Colombian prison system call for a comprehensive, joint response by the government as a whole, rather than measures proposed solely by the authorities involved in the day-to-day running of detention facilities.

THE ICRC'S RESPONSE

We visit detainees and try to improve conditions for them

In view of the dire situation in prisons and temporary detention facilities, the ICRC is advising the authorities on how to reduce overcrowding and improve conditions. In the meantime, it continues to visit detainees, providing humanitarian assistance to alleviate their suffering.

Helping detainees

- ✓ In order to conduct a first-hand assessment of the living conditions and treatment of detainees, the ICRC visited more than 81,000 inmates and approached the authorities to recommend improvements on around 80 occasions.
- ✓ Seventeen detainees were able to communicate with their families again, thanks to Red Cross messages, a correspondence system run by the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross Society.
- ✓ The ICRC visited minors held in youth detention centres in Medellín, Cali and Buenaventura in order to monitor their living conditions, their treatment and compliance with judicial guarantees.
- ✓ In Medellín, over 400 children deprived of their liberty attended sessions on humanitarian principles, conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence led by the Colombian Red Cross Society and the ICRC.

Advising the authorities

- ✓ A third of judges responsible for enforcing sentences in the country, who decide how detainees will serve their sentence, received training on criteria that can be applied when granting benefits such as parole and house arrest. This work was carried out in conjunction with the Rodrigo Lara Bonilla Judicial College.
- ✓ Based on conclusions reached by the judges, the ICRC provided support to produce a booklet with recommendations for the authorities to facilitate the work of judges.
- ✓ The humanitarian problems observed in temporary detention facilities prompted the ICRC to carry out five visits to immediate response units in Bogotá. The authorities received recommendations on how to improve the situation.
- ✓ For the first time, 50 INPEC prison officers attended ICRC courses on the use of force.
- ✓ In coordination with the Technological University of Pereira, the ICRC organized a forum on health in prisons to draw attention to the importance of adequately meeting the health needs of persons deprived of their liberty.

THE FIGURES

72%

of detainees held in State detention facilities in Colombia were monitored by the ICRC in 2014.

76

verbal and written representations were made to the authorities by the ICRC in 2014, with a view to securing improvements in detention facilities.



An ICRC visit to La Picota prison in Bogotá.

WHAT IHL HAS TO SAY

Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions

Article 5. Persons whose liberty has been restricted. 1. [...] the following provisions shall be respected as a minimum with regard to persons deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict, whether they are interned or detained: (a) the wounded and the sick shall be treated in accordance with Article 7 [duty to treat them with humanity and respect and without discrimination and to protect them]; (b) [they] shall, to the same extent as the local civilian population, be provided with food and drinking water and be afforded safeguards as regards health and hygiene and protection against the rigours of the climate and the dangers of the armed conflict;

ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law

Rule 118. Persons deprived of their liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical attention.



VOICES FROM INSIDE

In 2015, the ICRC will present a public campaign to mark 100 years working inside prisons. The idea behind it is to remind people that detainees are also a part of society. One hundred detainees in four detention centres responded to the invitation to describe their situation in their own words.

Jamundí Prison, Valle. "I miss getting together with my family and enjoying a meal fit for a human being. The most important activity I have here by far is my painting, because it is something I enjoy. It helps relieve my stress and, at the same time, I get the resources I need to survive. I want to continue painting when I get out."

Andrés Cortés/ICRC



La Picota Prison, Bogotá. "I spend my time here doing craftwork. What I miss most is my family, because I am missing my little girl's childhood. My dream is first to get out of prison and then spend a week with my loved ones somewhere warm. After that, I want to set up my own business."



El Buen Pastor Women's Prison, Bogotá. "The first person I want to see and hug when I get out is my daughter. When they detained me, she was only four years old. She was sleeping; I kissed her and have not been back since. I want to get back, find her asleep, kiss her and stay with her all night."



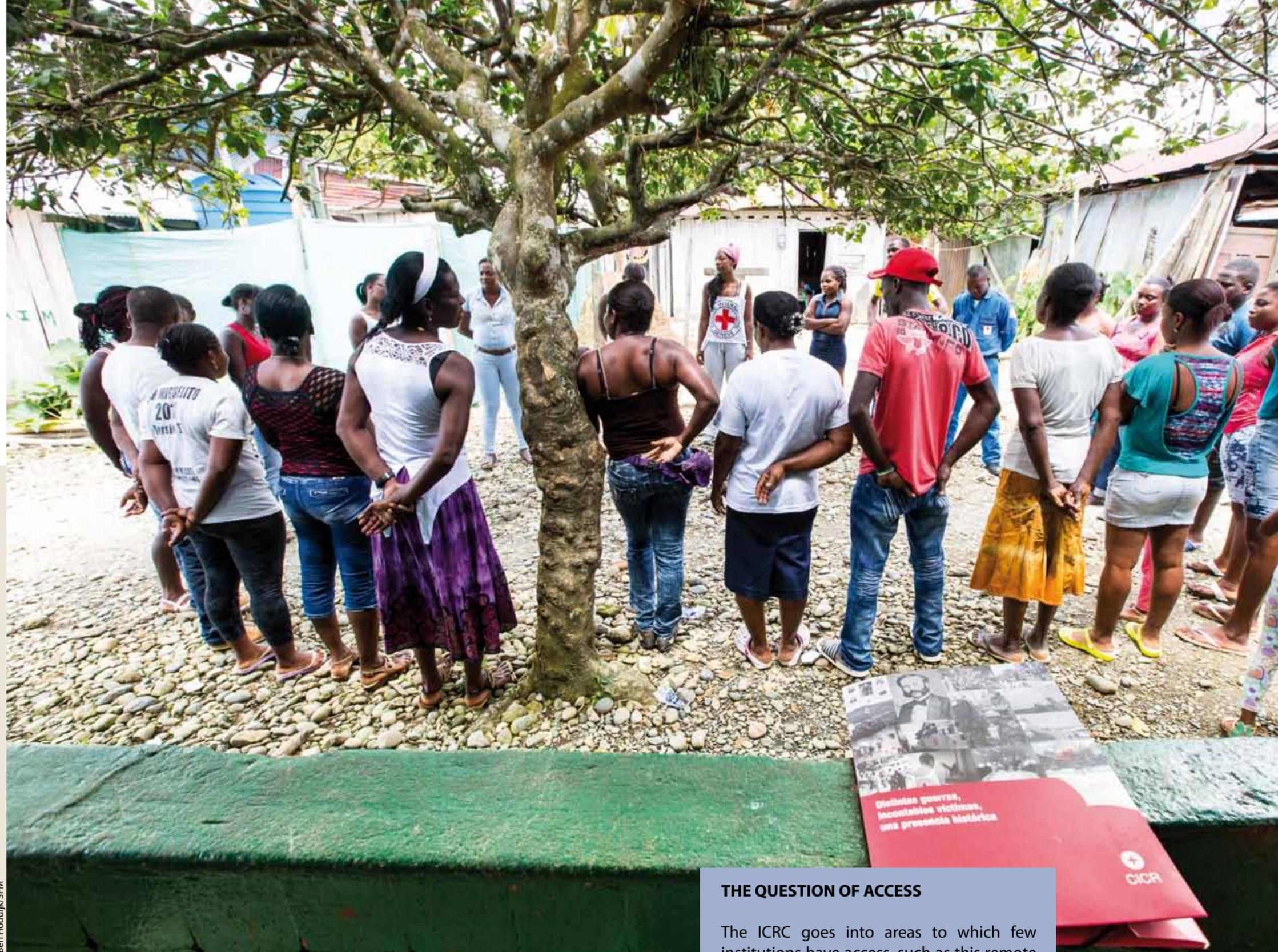
Bellavista Prison, Medellín. "The most important thing for me in prison is to finish my studies, because it is important to me to get on in life. I would like to complete my baccalaureate studies and be able to teach other people. I haven't seen my mother for four years."



El Buen Pastor Women's Prison, Bogotá. "I spend my time reading, because it takes your mind to other places and other times. It makes it seem like time flies by. Books also improve your mind and teach you new things."

DIALOGUE WITH THE ARMED FORCES, THE POLICE, ARMED GROUPS, THE AUTHORITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The ICRC promotes respect for humanitarian rules and seeks to raise awareness about the suffering of victims of armed violence. To this end, it maintains an ongoing dialogue with different sectors of Colombian society, with the aim of reducing the impact of violence on the population.



Ben Houdijk/3FM

THE QUESTION OF ACCESS

The ICRC goes into areas to which few institutions have access, such as this remote community in Chocó. However, it is much more than a physical presence that is needed; it also entails engaging in dialogue with all the parties involved, including armed groups, the police, the armed forces and the authorities, to improve the situation for the people living there.

DIALOGUE WITH THE POLICE AND ARMED FORCES

The ICRC supports the police and armed forces in integrating humanitarian rules and use-of-force standards into their doctrine, training and operations. In 2014, around 2,000 police officers and soldiers took part in courses organized by the ICRC.

The training sessions included operational self-assessment exercises for identifying the causes of alleged violations of humanitarian rules and adopting corrective and preventive measures. Discussion groups on specific subjects also addressed humanitarian issues and explored possible solutions.

Workshops on international humanitarian law, human rights and international standards on the use of force in law enforcement contributed to these rules being more effectively integrated into operations. Prison officers also took part in these courses to improve their knowledge of rules concerning the treatment of detainees.

The ICRC also maintains an ongoing confidential dialogue with the police and armed forces on the conduct of hostilities.



Andrés Cortés/ICRC

Left: An ICRC delegate during a visit to a military facility in Meta.

Right: ICRC presentation for military personnel in Guapi, Cauca.



Patricia Rey/ICRC



Wanda Toso/ICRC



Above and right: A talk on humanitarian principles and first aid for members of an armed group.

DIALOGUE WITH ORGANIZED ARMED GROUPS

Another priority area of the ICRC's work in the field is promoting respect for humanitarian rules among armed groups. Through its confidential dialogue with groups involved in the conflict and other armed organizations, the ICRC is able to gain access to areas where there are people who have been victims of the violence. It also talks to these weapon bearers about their obligations in the conduct of hostilities.

The relationship of trust that the ICRC established with parties to the conflict enabled it to organize humanitarian operations, such as those that resulted in the release of 19 people being held by armed groups, to recover the remains of 11 missing people in combat areas and to discuss dozens of cases of alleged attacks on the civilian population to prevent such incidents from occurring again in the future. The ICRC continued to transport FARC-EP leaders to Havana, where peace talks between this guerrilla group and the Government of Colombia are in progress.

DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

The guidance provided by the ICRC to local and national authorities responsible for assisting victims of the violence was extended in 2014. The dialogue it maintained with public institutions enabled it to improve their delivery of services and assistance to victims of the conflict and armed violence.

- ✓ Through its Advisory Service on IHL, the ICRC helped to shape public policy on humanitarian issues. The government's Technical Group on IHL and Armed Conflict, which is tasked with implementing IHL at the national level, incorporated the recommendations made by the ICRC into its guidelines. The group organized a number of IHL dissemination and training activities for central and local government officials, with the support of the ICRC.
- ✓ With a view to improving the authorities' knowledge of humanitarian issues, it co-organized workshops for officials and employees from executive, judicial, military and police bodies. For example, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health focused on the protection of medical services and schoolchildren in areas affected by violence.

The missing

- ✓ With a view to improving the delivery of services and assistance to the families of missing persons, the ICRC provided guidance to the Office of the Attorney General and the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science. It promoted the creation of a national register of unidentified human remains and presented a victim-oriented model for forensic investigation and the identification of missing persons to more than 120 public prosecutors and forensic experts.
- ✓ Over 1,000 civil servants were involved in the campaign *The missing, the right to know*, carried out in 2014 to promote solidarity with the families of missing persons and better treatment of them by government institutions.

Guidance on health

- ✓ In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Vice-President of the Republic and the Colombian Red Cross Society, the ICRC co-organized the first international seminar for Latin America on the humanitarian consequences of the failure to respect and protect medical services. The event enabled the region's governments to begin working more closely together to improve protection for medical services.
- ✓ With a view to improving the situation of people with disabilities, including victims of the armed conflict, the ICRC contributed to establishing the occupation of orthopaedic technician as a recognized profession in Colombia for the first time. The first to qualify in this field, through the National Training Service (SENA), with the support of the ICRC, came onto the labour market in 2014.
- ✓ It also advised the Ministry of Health on revising regulations concerning the manufacture of prosthetic and orthotic devices and led nine courses on the subject, attended by representatives from universities and service providers.



Fotos: Andrés Cortés/ICRC

Left: A message from the campaign *The missing, the right to know* at the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Science.

Below: In coordination with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior and National Defence and the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, the ICRC organized the third Augusto Ramírez Ocampo course on IHL for senior civil servants.



Ben Houdijk/3FM



DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Raising the visibility of the situation of the victims of conflict and armed violence and disseminating IHL and human rights form part of the ICRC's mandate.

With a view to training the spotlight on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and violence, the ICRC gave seven face-to-face training courses for around 150 journalists on covering the armed conflict and the peace process underway between the FARC and the Government of Colombia.

For the first time, editors from 20 influential regional media organizations took part in a session on humanitarian issues and the peace process. As a result, the participating media organizations reported more and better stories on these subjects.

The campaign *The missing, the right to know* conveyed messages of solidarity with the families of the missing on the streets of 40 towns and cities and boosted the level of engagement of the public authorities, civil society organizations and the public at large with this issue. The report *Colombia: humanitarian situation 2013* was presented to more than 500 key people from Colombia's public authorities, the international community, the media and civil society.

Eric Corton, from the Dutch radio station 3FM, during a day's recording in a rural area of Chocó.

THE ICRC IN COLOMBIA

Agreements with the Colombian government enabling the ICRC to pursue its humanitarian work

- March 1969** The Colombian government authorizes the ICRC to visit people detained in connection with the internal armed conflict.
- May 1980** The Colombian government and the ICRC sign a headquarters agreement, which is approved by Law 42 of 1981.
- November 1990** The Colombian authorities agree to let the ICRC facilitate the release of members of the police and armed forces held by armed groups.
- August 1991** The Colombian police undertake to provide the ICRC with the details of people detained in connection with the internal armed conflict.
- November 1994** The Colombian government authorizes the ICRC to make contact with armed groups.
- February 1996** Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions enters into force in Colombia. The government and the ICRC sign a memorandum of understanding enabling the ICRC to carry out visits to all those deprived of their liberty, to move freely around the country, to maintain contact with all the parties to the conflict, and to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the armed conflict.
- February 1996** The Colombian Ministry of Defence undertakes to provide the ICRC with the details of all the people detained by the police and armed forces in connection with the armed conflict, and to grant it access to temporary and permanent detention facilities.
- March 1996** The Office of the Attorney General and the ICRC sign an agreement to implement humanitarian activities for persons deprived of their liberty. This document authorizes the ICRC to monitor the situation of persons deprived of their liberty in connection with the internal violence from the time they are detained until they are released.
- September 1998** The Colombian Family Welfare Institute and the ICRC sign a cooperation agreement on visiting and assisting children and adolescents in custody.
- September 2001** The ICRC and the Social Solidarity Network, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign a document of understanding for the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance for displaced people.
- January 2006** The ICRC and the Social Action Agency, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign a new agreement on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance activities for families displaced by the violence in Colombia. This replaces the 2001 document of understanding.
- June 2009** The ICRC and the Social Action Agency, now the Department for Social Prosperity, sign an appendix to the agreement, which amends aspects related to mass displacement and sets up coordination bodies.



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For more information about the ICRC in Colombia and worldwide, visit the ICRC website, (www.icrc.org/spa) for:

- the latest news
- information about issues and events of particular interest to the ICRC
- specialized resources on international humanitarian law
- activity reports and summaries
- personal accounts
- interviews
- features
- photo galleries, audio clips, videos and films
- maps
- publications
- the Family Links network
- articles from the International Review of the Red Cross
- a link to the website of the Colombian Red Cross (www.cruzrojacolombiana.org).

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