150 years of humanitarian action

REGIONAL DELEGATION FOR MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CUBA

ICRC

IN BRIEF

Alejandro Vidal/ICRC

WHO WE ARE

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), established in 1863, is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of the victims of armed conflict and armed violence, and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavors to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening law and universal humanitarian principles.

The ICRC's Regional Delegation for Mexico, Central America and Cuba, based in Mexico City, covers the ICRC's activities in Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and El Salvador.

In this region, as elsewhere, the ICRC works to ensure that vulnerable populations and high-risk groups are protected and assisted and that their fundamental rights and dignity are respected.

The ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. As such, it maintains a close operational partnership with other components of the Movement in the framework of activities such as: mitigation of the humanitarian consequences of armed violence in the region; assistance in the domains of primary health care, water, sanitation and habitat; psychosocial support and strengthening of communities particularly affected by violence; assistance for vulnerable, high-risk migrant populations; and the Restoration of Family Links (RFL).

Furthermore, the ICRC provides continuous support in the strengthening of the institutional framework of Red Cross National Societies throughout the region.

ICRC

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW APPLICABLE TO THE PROTECTION OF PERSONS

POLITICAL AUTHORITIES

Around the world, the ICRC promotes respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and other rules and fundamental principles relating to the protection of persons.

By providing technical and legal assistance to relevant authorities (executive, legislative and judicial), the ICRC contributes to building the political will of States to respect IHL and supports their respective national IHL commissions, responsible for the national implementation of IHL. The ICRC also promotes the adoption of legal frameworks for the protection of persons affected by armed violence, deriving from international human rights law (IHRL).

The ICRC keeps States informed about challenges and progress in these matters, providing expert advice on the content of treaties and other international laws, in order to facilitate their ratification or accession. The ICRC also provides information and documentation on national implementation measures (legislation, regulations, practical measures, etc.), in addition to facilitating exchange platforms among government experts through regional meetings and conferences.

MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

The ICRC promotes various humanitarian issues (missing persons, weapons, protection of cultural property, education in humanitarian values, etc.) in regional fora organized by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA). The ICRC also engages in dialogue and cooperation with the Inter-American System of Human Rights, the Inter-American Juridical Committee, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights.

Sebastian Silva/ICRC

ACADEMIA

For the ICRC, cooperation with universities is crucial to its efforts to train tomorrow's leaders and experts, promote respect for international law applicable to the protection of persons, and encourage reflection and analysis of the humanitarian consequences of the armed violence prevailing in the region. To this end, the ICRC encourages study, research and publications on humanitarian issues; promotes the involvement of teachers and academics in activities that contribute to the development, teaching and implementation of IHL; and raises awareness about the rules and principles of IHRL governing the Use of Force.

PROMOTION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW INTO ARMED AND SECURITY FORCES

The ICRC maintains a humanitarian-based dialogue with armed and security forces in the region in order to promote the protection and respect for individuals and their physical integrity and dignity, emphasizing the rights of persons in particularly vulnerable situations.

Through dissemination and training courses, the ICRC promotes IHL and its integration as part of its activities with armed forces. It supports the integration of standards and principles of IHRL –governing the Use of Force, the use of firearms, arrest and detention– into the doctrine, education, training and disciplinary systems of the armed, police and security forces. The ICRC also promotes the adoption of unified and comprehensive legal frameworks on the Use of Force in law enforcement, in line with relevant international rules and standards. It advises the authorities on the development of processes to integrate these standards into the education, training, doctrine and control and supervision systems of the armed, police and security forces.

Sandra Guillot/ICRC

ACTIVITIES TO ASSIST MISSING PERSONS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Many people go missing as a result of armed violence, past conflicts, migration processes and natural disasters. The uncertainty surrounding what has happened to a loved one and where they may be, causes great anguish to many families in the region.

The right to know the fate and whereabouts of a missing family member remains a critical concern in international law. For this reason and through its exclusively humanitarian action, the ICRC:

- raises the awareness of the authorities and provides them with technical assistance regarding the proper treatment of the family members of missing persons;
- fosters regional cooperation for the development of mechanisms to facilitate the coordination of efforts between governmental institutions and other stakeholders involved in processes to search for, recover, exhume, identify and return human remains and in the institutional response to family members;
- seeks to strengthen regional capacities for the management and identification of human remains through specific technical training;
- encourages regional standardization and implementation of unified missing persons protocols and information management systems;
- promotes the adoption of legal instruments that enable family members to cope with the disappearance of a loved one.

PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE FOR MIGRANTS

The ICRC seeks to meet the basic needs of migrants and provide protection to those who are at risk and vulnerable. In close collaboration with other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the region and local organizations, the ICRC provides:

- basic medical care and drinking water;

Keisdo Shimabukuro/ICRC

- assistance to injured, amputated or seriously ill migrants (in transit or repatriated) by supplying prosthetic limbs and orthopaedic devices, transportation within the country or region and psychosocial support;

- contact with relatives through the Restoring Family Links (RFL) programme via telephone calls and the exchange of Red Cross Messages;

- improvements to water sources, sanitation and habitat at migrant shelters, depending on specific needs;

- comprehensive support to migrant amputees repatriated to Honduras through the promotion of micro-economic initiatives.

The ICRC also coordinates its assistance and protection activities with governmental and non-governmental actors across Mexico and Central America, and maintains a dialogue with the authorities on topics relevant to the protection of migrants, both bilaterally with governments, and in regional and multilateral fora.

VISITS TO PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

The ICRC carries out visits to people deprived of their freedom in a number of countries, with a view to improving conditions of detention and engaging in bilateral, confidential and constructive dialogue with penitentiary authorities to address the measures needed to guarantee that conditions of detention meet international standards.

The ICRC visits people deprived of their freedom in Honduras, Mexico, Panama and El Salvador. During such visits, the ICRC evaluates the conditions of detention of the prison population, provides detainees with humanitarian assistance, if necessary, and facilitates the restoration of family links with relatives through phone calls, Red Cross Messages and visitation programmes.

Through the water and habitat programme, the ICRC improves hygiene, sanitation and access to water in various prisons in the region. These infrastructural improvements ensure better conditions for both prison staff and inmates.

Olivier Moeckli/ICRC

ACTIVITIES FOR COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY ARMED VIOLENCE

Armed violence can hinder access to and the delivery of basic services, such as education and health.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

The ICRC promotes reflection on humanitarian values by secondary school students and the educational community in general and trains teachers to handle these topics in a safe manner. Activities are undertaken through the *Abriendo Espacios Humanitarios* (AEH – or Creating Humanitarian Spaces) programme, a joint effort involving the Mexican Red Cross, the Education Departments of the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Guerrero and the Honduran Ministry of Education.

Through the Opportunities for Social Inclusion (OIS) programme in El Salvador, the Creating Opportunities Programme (PAO) in Honduras and the Santa Isabel Project in Guatemala, the ICRC and the region's National Red Cross Societies, as well as the National Societies of Spain, Italy, Norway and Switzerland facilitate the creation of community spaces, provide technical vocational training and promote recreational and educational activities for members of communities affected by armed violence, both in urban and rural areas.

COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE PROJECTS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE

In order to mitigate the humanitarian consequences of armed violence in the Bajo Aguán region (Honduras), and in the province of Darién (Panama), the ICRC works closely with the Honduran Red Cross, the Honduran Ministry of Health, the Red Cross Society of Panama and the Panamanian Ministry of Health to develop comprehensive projects through which support is provided to improve access to primary health care, water, sanitation and habitat. The ICRC also promotes activities aimed at strengthening the resilience of communities as well as to reducing their exposure to risk and vulnerability.

Health brigades visit the province of Darién and medical consultations are provided regularly in the Bajo Aguán region. The ICRC provides training for community health

Julio Torres/ICRC

workers, improves access to clean water and assists communities in the domains of solid waste management and sanitation. In addition, health and hygiene campaigns are carried out to promote healthy lifestyles and thereby improve the quality of life in these communities.

STRENGTHENING HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND IMPROVING ACCESS

In close cooperation with universities, National Red Cross Societies and medical and academic institutions in the region, the ICRC holds specialized seminars to strengthen the skills of emergency medical service personnel, surgeons and other medical personnel, in their handling of individuals wounded by firearms and explosives in pre-hospital and hospital settings.

Through the Respect for Health Services program, the ICRC promotes the protection of, and respect for, health care personnel, patients, medical supplies, vehicles and health care infrastructure; and raises awareness among authorities, relevant institutions and the general public about the difficulties that medical personnel face when providing assistance in armed violence and high-risk situations. It also provides training for medical and other health care personnel to promote awareness about security issues and self-care in the context of their work.

PREVENTIVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The ICRC strengthens the capacities of the services that provide assistance in emergency and crisis situations, by training psychologists, doctors, and teachers to detect psychological disorders and to provide early treatment for those affected or refer them to specialists.

Activities are carried out to promote awareness, and specific psychosocial support is provided to personnel of entities exposed to the effects of armed violence, such as National Red Cross Society staff members, social workers and members of security forces.

In AEH-affiliated schools, the ICRC trains teachers in psychological first aid and self-care.

Olivier Moeckli/ICRC

In Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the ICRC and the Mexican Red Cross help train volunteer therapists to provide short-term therapy for secondary school students suffering from post-traumatic stress. The ICRC also conducts psychosocial interventions in schools in communities particularly affected by armed violence, using artistic activities to strengthen students' interpersonal and social skills.

PHYSICAL REHABILITATION

The ICRC provides structural support for rehabilitation centres in Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. In other countries, it cooperates closely with the ICRC's Special Fund for the Disabled.

Through activities to strengthen national physical rehabilitation services, the ICRC's Special Fund for the Disabled seeks to improve the quality of patient services, ensure their long-term availability and facilitate the access of people with disabilities to those rehabilitation services.

The ICRC also provides individual monitoring for individuals who lost limbs in the armed conflict in Guatemala, detainees with physical disabilities in El Salvador and migrants who have been seriously injured or suffered amputations as a result of accidents along the migratory route in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and El Salvador.

*For more information on Restoring Family Links:
familylinks.icrc.org

*For more information on AEH:
www.cicr.org/spa/aeh

*For more information on the Special Fund for the Disabled:
www. icrc.org/fund-disabled

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