



Joanna Atkinson/ICRC

# NEWSLETTER LOOKING AHEAD

JANUARY-JUNE 2016

## ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES IN SRI LANKA

Dear Reader,

In January this year, the ICRC shared with government authorities a comprehensive report with the findings of an assessment on the needs of families of missing people, together with recommendations on how to address these needs. The ICRC intends to make available soon, a public version of the report. The assessment was carried out between October 2014 and November 2015 in all districts of Sri Lanka, and involved individual interviews and focus group discussions with 395 families, including those of missing soldiers and policemen.

The findings in the ICRC's report confirm that in addition to the primary need of families of missing persons to clarify the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, they also face emotional, legal, administrative and economic difficulties, which need to be addressed by ensuring that adequate services including psychological support and benefits are made available to them. The need for acknowledgment and commemoration is also present. A long-term political commitment is required to respond to the families' need to know, as well as strong inter-institutional coordination to ensure

that all available data on missing persons is centralized, processed and compared to find answers. For these purposes, the ICRC recommended to government authorities, amongst other issues, that a specific mechanism be established to address the multifaceted needs of families of missing people, including the need to know the fate of their missing relative.

Based on the findings of our assessment of the needs of families of the Missing, the ICRC designed and launched a specific programme to address some of these needs. The "accompaniment programme", implemented in partnership with local organisations, was launched in Anuradhapura in November 2015, in Mannar in December, and in Trincomalee in March 2016. The 'accompaniers' – those who work directly with the families, facilitating access to the different services the programme offers – have missing loved ones. Identifying with the pain of a loss that is ambiguous, and often sharing the same needs, the accompaniers work to overcome their struggles together with those they are helping.

The programme addresses in particular families' emotional needs through

psychosocial support in the form of peer support groups. It also helps them to address the legal, administrative and economic challenges they encounter in their day-to-day lives by referring them to the local resources which meet those needs. In addition to this, the ICRC provides livelihood support to the most vulnerable families of the Missing.

The families of the Missing are not the only legacy of Sri Lanka's three decades of armed conflict. The presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war in the former conflict areas have posed a humanitarian challenge, affecting the resettlement of civilians in these areas. The ICRC, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organised a national workshop in January this year, on the "Humanitarian and Legal Consequences of Anti-personnel Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War". The workshop facilitated a vibrant discussion among officials from

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ICRC

key ministries, government departments, the military, civil society organisations, and international donors, with a view to encourage Sri Lanka to accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), better known as the Ottawa Treaty. This Treaty was created in 1977 to ban the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of anti-personnel landmines, and to assist people falling victim to these weapons. For the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the work behind this Treaty was very much 'grass-

roots', as it involved playing a major role in combining its field experience with its legal analysis. In March 2016, the Cabinet of Sri Lanka approved the country's accession to the APMBC. (See page 4 for more details.)

Recognizing the importance of ensuring humane conditions in prisons, the Department of Prisons in Sri Lanka with the support of the ICRC, hosted the 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Correctional Managers Conference in Colombo in May. It was an

opportunity for senior prison managers to share experiences and best practices and brainstorm the way forward to improve conditions in prisons in their countries. Held under the theme "Balancing Security and Humanitarian Needs in Prisons", delegates from the region discussed topics relevant to the challenges of achieving this much needed balance in prisons. (See page 5 for more details.)

The delegation of the ICRC in Sri Lanka

## SHARED MEMORIES: LEARNING TO COPE TOGETHER



Ganeshamma teaching her Grade 5 students.

**The ICRC's findings show that in a similar accompaniment programme it launched in Nepal in 2010 (the Hateymalo accompaniment programme), support groups which were formed at the time, continue to meet today.**

Tuesday, 26 May, was no ordinary day for Ashoka. It began at 4:00am with the preparation of breakfast and lunch with the help of her mother and neighbours. Later, she, together with her mother and a group of others, would be commemorating their missing loved ones by donating lamp holders to their community temple and holding a poojah (prayers).

Ganeshamma too began her day at 4:00am on 27 May. After completing her chores, she whispered a prayer at the altar in her bedroom, touching the small crucifix her husband had given her just before he went missing. Ganeshamma then cycled to the primary school nearby, where she teaches children in Grade 5. That day, she too would

be commemorating her missing husband with other families of the Missing in her community by dedicating a recreational hut to the school.

Ashoka, an accompanier in the accompaniment programme (see page 1 for more details) and Ganeshamma, who has been receiving support through the programme, take heart by the fact that they are not alone on this day.

Commemoration activities such as religious ceremonies or building or planting something in memory of the Missing are a part of the accompaniment programme's peer support group sessions. The accompaniers form peer support groups of 6-8 people from the same geographical area, and conduct group meetings over a period of three months. The sessions provide participants a much-needed space to collectively share their grief and day-to-day struggles, and discuss ways to cope. They talk about their role in their respective households – as wives, mothers, fathers, sisters, or daughters – to realise their significance in their family unit and the wider community they live in. They share their emotional, psychological, physical and relational struggles resulting from the absence of their missing loved one, and then go on to remember him or her through positive memories. They talk about their support network through illustrations, which often enable them to realise that they are not alone. Tributes to the missing person, in the form of a poem, song, or even the missing person's favourite food are shared with the





Pascal Jequier/ICRC

Ashoka (left) in prayer with her support group, commemorating their missing loved ones.

group. The cycle of group sessions formally ends with a commemoration event, which the families themselves plan. These events are a significant experience for them, as it brings them some closure.

Ashoka and Ganeshamma believe they have formed lifelong bonds with their group members. "We speak to each other on the phone almost every evening," says Ganeshamma, "that's how close we have become." A member of Ashoka's support group says that though they are from the same community, their homes are quite far from each other. "But we will continue to meet," she says.



Pascal Jequier/ICRC

"We believe the lamps that light up the temple bestow blessings on our missing loved ones" – members of Ashoka's support group light lamps for their missing loved ones, placing them on the lamp holders they are donating to their community temple in memory of the Missing.

The ICRC's findings show that in a similar accompaniment programme it launched in Nepal in 2010 (the Hateymalo accompaniment programme), support groups which were formed at the time, continue to meet today.

Find out more about our accompaniment programme for families of missing people in our newsletter for [October-December 2015](#).



Pascal Jequier/ICRC

"The spirits of our missing loved ones dwell in this hut. We hope all the children will use the hut to its fullest" – Ganeshamma's peer support group look on as she gives a tribute to the Missing inside the recreational hut the group built for the school.



Joanna Atkinson/ICRC

Mannar, 2016. Accompaniers illustrate and talk about their missing family members and current 'circles' of support during peer support group training.



# WHAT WAR LEAVES BEHIND



Channa Jayawardene/ICRC

Head of Delegation, ICRC Colombo, Claire Meytraud, presents Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chithrangane Wagswara, the ICRC's manual on Weapon Contamination.

The ICRC plays a leading role in the promotion and development of international humanitarian law (IHL) including rules regulating the use of weapons. One such significant effort was the campaign to ban anti-personnel mines, which resulted in the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction" of 1997, also named the Ottawa Treaty. More than three-quarters of the world's countries have joined this Convention, which has had a positive impact in terms of destruction of stockpiles, mine clearance, reduction of casualties and assistance to victims. Twenty years ago, some 20,000 people were being killed and maimed by anti-personnel mines, but today the figure is down to 3,500.

For IHL treaties to be implemented at national level, States must adopt them through ratification or accession. Depending on the legal system applicable to States, they must also enact legislation and take other practical measures in order for the rules to be fully effective. The ICRC's Advisory Service can support States in this process by providing tools such as model legislation and specialized legal advice.

In Sri Lanka over the past years, the ICRC has engaged with authorities both at national and international level to encourage the country to accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), adding to the efforts of many other actors in this field.

The most recent engagement in this regard was a national workshop on the "Humanitarian and Legal Consequences of Anti-personnel Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War", organised by the ICRC in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 27-28 January in Colombo. The workshop brought together officials from key ministries and departments as well as the Sri Lanka Army Humanitarian Demining Unit. Additionally, selected civil society organizations and international donors, including the Australian and Canadian High Commissions, were invited to provide their perspectives.

The objective of this workshop was to facilitate a discussion among all these stakeholders, with a view to encourage Sri Lanka to accede to the relevant instruments of IHL, including the APMBC, and put in place the relevant national legal framework.

The forum provided dignitaries present the opportunity not only to reflect on Sri Lanka's achievements so far in relation to this issue, but also to realise the extent of the challenges that lie ahead for the country. ICRC experts in this subject presented their perspectives with a view to addressing these challenges through law reform. Avenues for international collaboration in this regard were also shared and discussed.

In March 2016, the Cabinet of Sri Lanka approved the country's accession to the APMBC. According to the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, 64 sq Km of land is yet to be cleared of mines in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The National Mine Action Centre, with the technical assistance of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, has prepared a strategic mine action programme spanning 2016-2020, with the aim of making Sri Lanka mine-free by 2020 (refer [Sri Lanka accedes and ratifies Ottawa Convention](#)).



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Additional Secretary, Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs and Director, National Mine Action Centre, M M Nayeemudeen, gives an overview of national mine action in Sri Lanka and the progress made so far.



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Second Secretary (Political) of the Australian High Commission in Colombo, Edwina Sinclair, explaining Australia's decision to join the Mine Ban Convention.

# EXPERTS PLAN FOR BETTER CONDITIONS IN PRISONS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION



R.Gallage/ICRC

Hon. Minister of Prison Reforms, Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Hindu Religious Affairs, D.M. Swaminathan, delivers the opening address.

Recognizing the importance of ensuring humane conditions in prisons, the Department of Prisons in Sri Lanka with the support of the ICRC, hosted the 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Correctional Managers Conference in Colombo in May. It was an opportunity for senior prison managers to share experiences and best practices and brainstorm the way forward to improve conditions in prisons in their countries.

"The Government of Sri Lanka is keen to undertake prison reforms to ensure improved humanitarian conditions, that there is no overcrowding in prisons and that the categorization of detainees is in line with offences so that prisons can be managed more efficiently and effectively," said Hon. Minister of Prison Reforms, Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Hindu Religious Affairs, D.M. Swaminathan.

The theme of the conference was "Balancing Security and Humanitarian Needs in Prisons". Nearly 50 participants from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand attended the event. Delegates discussed issues such as health in detention and medical ethics, the classification of offenders, alternatives to detention, the specific needs of women, and prison design – the realities of which impact both prisoners and prison authorities. They also visited the Pallekele Open Prison Camp in Kandy.

"Today, 9.6% of detainees in Malaysia benefit from a community sentence (open



Pascal Jequier/ICRC

Regional Prison Systems Advisor for the ICRC, Stephen Johnston, talks about alternatives to detention, a key topic during the conference.



R.Gallage/ICRC

Participants at the 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Correctional Managers Conference.

prison)," said Director General of Prisons, Malaysia, Dato'sri Haji Zulkifli Bin Omar, who participated in the conference. "Our objective is to reach 15% by 2020, and to have 2/3 of our prisoners benefit from this by 2030."

Director of the Health Division, Prison Administration, Ministry of Justice, China, Li Qiang, who was also a participant, pointed out the practical challenge of balancing

security and humanitarian needs in prisons such as in China, where health staff are also responsible for maintaining security in prison.

The first Asia Pacific conference was held in 2012 in Manila, Philippines, and the second in 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Both focused on the issue of overcrowding in prisons.



R.Gallage/ICRC

(Left) Director General of Prisons, Malaysia, Dato'sri Haji Zulkifli Bin Omar, and (right) Director of the Health Division, Prison Administration, Ministry of Justice, China, Li Qiang.



# SAFEGUARDING THE DIGNITY OF THE DEAD IN DISASTERS



President of the CFPSL, Dr Tennakoon, presents the *Management of the Dead in Disasters and Catastrophes* to the Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health, Dr P G Mahipala.

The mention of the Indian Ocean tsunami, which left a trail of destruction in its wake, still triggers horrific memories even 12 years later. Sri Lanka recorded the second highest death toll. Thousands were made homeless and were without food and water, and did not have access to hospital services or communication systems. Immediately following the onset of a disaster, it is essential for national, regional, or local authorities to concentrate their actions and resources on three basic activities: first, the rescue and treatment of survivors; second, the repair and maintenance of basic services; and, finally, the recovery and management of bodies.

*Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations, Pan American Health Organization & World Health Organization 2004*

The tsunami in 2004 was Sri Lanka's first encounter with a disaster of such magnitude. It highlighted the need for more developed systems of response to manage both survivors and the dead. While the Government of Sri Lanka worked on institutional and national disaster preparedness plans, the country's forensic community sought to develop guidelines to better manage the dead in disasters. The professional management of the dead is essential to safeguard the dignity of deceased victims, restore their identities and crucially, to return their remains to their families. It also contributes to reduce the number of missing people and the suffering of traumatized communities. The ICRC too, through its forensic programmes, promotes the professional management of the dead.

The work of the forensic community culminated in a manual titled *Management of the Dead in Disasters and Catastrophes*, which was launched officially on 5 March this year at the 14th Annual Academic Session of the

College of Forensic Pathologists of Sri Lanka (CFPSL). The President of the college, Dr A Tennakoon, in his welcome address, said the mission of the college had been to develop a protocol that would be effective and appropriate. "The protocol had to be able to legally regulate the management of the dead as a result of mass disasters," he said. "It had to be done in accordance with the best interests of Sri Lanka, justice, international standards and best practices applicable to scientific criteria, socio-cultural norms, humanitarian needs and the expectations of human civilization." Dr Tennakoon went on to explain that the manual was developed to be used as a tool in the management of the dead in disasters and emergencies by national professionals.

As a lesson learned from the tsunami crisis, the ICRC, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), WHO, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, produced a joint publication –

*Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders*, in 2006. These guidelines have been revised several times since first publication, with a new edition due out in 2016. The CFPSL/Ministry of Health guidelines, launched in March, are based on the ICRC/PAHO guidelines and are contextualized and enhanced for Sri Lanka. The ICRC supported the development of these guidelines since their inception in December 2011, providing content and editorial support, concluding with the printing of the final product.

The ICRC's Regional Forensic Coordinator for South Asia, Ms Shuala Drawdy, said Sri Lanka's guidelines represent a crucial first step in developing the required comprehensive system for the dignified management of the dead from disasters. "It provides a robust legal framework, clearly outlined and agreed procedures for all concerned actors, and technical capacity in all relevant fields of expertise," she added.

# WORKING TOGETHER TO RESTORE FAMILY LINKS



Nesan's wife shares a family photo with Ravi Kumar at their home in Mannar.

Tracing missing people is no easy task. But Ravi Kumar, a Volunteer Tracing Coordinator (VTC) in the Mannar branch of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS), understands the challenges well.

During the uprising of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna in 1983, Ravi Kumar, his mother and two older sisters were separated from his father, and younger and older brothers for six months. They found each other through an announcement on the Tracing Service of what was then the Radio Ceylon. After the family was reunited, they relocated to Mannar. Ravi Kumar was 13 years old at the time.

Ravi Kumar's desire to work as a volunteer and his personal experience led him to join

the SLRCS in Mannar as a VTC. As a teenager, he had been a volunteer in the SLRCS Mannar Youth Club. Since he joined the branch in December 2015, he has successfully resolved four of the ten cases that were brought to him.

Recently, Ravikumar successfully reunited Mariadaas Baskaran and Nesan, two brothers, who had been separated for 24 years. Together with their families, they had fled the conflict to India in 1990. In 1992, Nesan and his wife returned to Sri Lanka. Before long, the brothers had lost contact with each other.

Ravi Kumar received a tracing request from the Indian Red Cross on behalf of Mariadaas. He visited the address on the request form,

only to discover that Nesan and his wife no longer lived there. However, after speaking to the community's parish priest and a resident in the area who remembered Nesan, Ravi Kumar was able to trace him and restore contact between the brothers.

"Our families now speak at least once a week on the phone," says Nesan's wife, happy that their children can get to know their cousins.

"It's not always easy," says Ravi Kumar as he goes on to explain the challenges. "Often the home address on the tracing request is incorrect or the family has resettled. Sometimes the information provided is insufficient, and I'm not sure how to proceed."

Despite it all, he is determined to continue his work.



The ICRC explains its RFL activities to SLRCS volunteers at the Nuwara Eliya branch.

In keeping with its humanitarian mission to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to provide them with assistance, the ICRC works towards re-establishing contact between families separated due to these circumstances, as well as migration and situations of imprisonment or detention. The ICRC also seeks to clarify the fate and whereabouts of people reported missing by their relatives in these circumstances.

In Sri Lanka we work with our national partner, the SLRCS, to restore and maintain contact between family members separated as a result of migration, detention, or natural disaster, through our Restoring Family Links (RFL) programme.

The SLRCS receives more than one hundred migration-related tracing requests, every year. These cases include restoring contact between Sri Lankan nationals detained abroad and their family members in Sri Lanka, and between foreign nationals detained in Sri Lanka and their family members in their home countries.

For more information about the work we do to restore family links around the world, visit [www.familylinks.icrc.org](http://www.familylinks.icrc.org).

# FACTOID

## ICRC ACTIVITIES: JANUARY-MAY 2016

### SUPPORT TO THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY (SLRCS)



**7** SLRCS branches provided first aid services at a range of district-level events.

**564** first aid volunteers from 13 districts developed their first aid skills by attending an island-wide basic first aid exam, while 58 first aid instructors attended a refresher course.

**139** volunteers learnt about the fundamental principles and Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, while some of them received training to develop their capacity to become future disseminators.

Provided financial and logistical support to the SLRCS' emergency response in the districts most affected by the recent flood (Kegalle, Puttalam, Kurunegala, Gampaha and Colombo).

Supported the SLRCS to conduct awareness raising sessions on road safety near schools and public places in and around Colombo and in Jaffna to commemorate World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on 8 May.

### ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS



**410** families of the Missing were individually met with in Trincomalee, Badulla, and Monaragala to follow up on their tracing enquiries, and **146** new cases of missing persons were registered.

Over **266** families of missing people in Trincomalee had their needs assessed as part of the accompaniment programme that aims to address those needs.

**793** families of missing people in Anuradhapura, Trincomalee and Mannar benefitted from weekly psychosocial support sessions.

**63** families were referred to the resources required for assistance with economic needs, 15 families for assistance with legal and administrative concerns, 11 families for assistance with educational needs, and 3 families with health needs.

**327** families of missing people from Anuradhapura and Mannar attended interactive information sessions on our work with the Missing in the past and at present.



### SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS

**146** vulnerable households, including women headed households, people with disabilities resulting from the past conflict, released rehabilitees, and families of missing people, received cash grants to regenerate their livelihoods through the Micro Economic Initiatives programme.



### DETAINEE WELFARE

**32** detention visits took place in 16 places of detention.

**173** families of detainees received a travel allowance to visit their relatives in detention.

**291** families exchanged news via Red Cross Messages and oral messages over the phone.

**6,588** detainees received ad hoc assistance in the form of cleaning materials, hygiene and recreational items.

Over **3,500** detainees benefitted from the construction of water and sanitation facilities, and prison wards, in the Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Mahara and Pallekele prisons as well as in the Kandakadu Rehabilitation Center.

**3** officials from the Department of Prisons participated in the 5th Asian Conference of Correctional Facilities Architects and Planners in Seoul, South Korea.



### PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL)

More than **1,089** military personnel and trainees deepened their understanding of humanitarian principles and IHL through workshops, seminars, and dissemination sessions.

Over **1,069** Army personnel bound for peacekeeping missions abroad participated in pre-deployment briefings on the applicability of IHL to peace-support operations and the role and mandate of the ICRC.

**33** Army officers following the UN Potential Observer and Staff Officer Course at the Institute of Peace Support Operations Sri Lanka, Kukuleganga, received training on IHL.

**17** Navy Commanders deployed in operational and staff roles, 77 Under Officer Trainees and two representatives from the Ministry of Defence benefitted from the first Law of Naval Warfare workshop.

Two officers from the Sri Lankan Navy were able to share their experiences and enhance their knowledge of the Law of Naval Warfare at a seminar on the Law of Armed Conflict and Maritime Security in South Asia, held in New Delhi, India.



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