



ICRC

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

COVID-19:

a global crisis requiring a global response.



©Aaref Watad/AFP

COVID-19 represents a dramatic threat to life in war-torn countries.

*“This is a pandemic with no discrimination across the layers of society, which should make us as a global population more humble about our collective vulnerabilities”, **Robert Mardini, ICRC’s incoming Director General.***

We fear that for the millions of people living in conflict zones around the world, COVID-19 is one additional dramatic menace to them. In many of these countries, health systems and other vital infrastructure have been ravaged by war. The idea of further strain on already frail systems is extremely worrying. Families will suffer as capacity to respond in the most remote and destitute places is overwhelmed.



ICRC

Considering this unprecedented situation, we have integrated actions in our existing work to ensure that we can adequately respond to the pandemic and to help prevent its spread, while ensuring the continuity of our life-saving operations.

One of the lessons we have learnt from the outbreak of Ebola in Liberia is that when all attention, finances and resources are diverted to one viral disease, you risk de-investing in other areas, like malaria treatment or primary health care. We know it's important to keep offering basic services to people affected by conflict and violence, because these services also save lives.

The ICRC and its Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners exist for emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic; we have the expertise and are ready to help, especially in places other actors are not present.

The ICRC's response to COVID-19 is centered on four primary axes:

Strengthening support to fragile systems and infrastructure: Since the COVID-19 outbreak, we have developed an emergency plan to ensure continuity in the most critical hospitals we support around the globe. This means increasing stocks of essential medical supplies and ensuring that health centers and hospitals are enabled to detect, prevent and control the spread of the virus. In addition, we support hospitals to expand their capacity, ensuring, for example, a stable water supply and proper waste management. Crucially, we are maintaining our work helping people with existing health needs who otherwise may be overshadowed by the vast spread of the virus.



©Pawel Krzysiek/ICRC



ICRC

“This virus has strained advanced health care systems. In Somalia, less than half of people living in urban areas have access to health care. In rural areas, it’s less than 15 percent. And social distancing is often impossible: people who are constantly uprooted from their homes by climate shocks and violence often seek refuge in displacement camps where people live shoulder to shoulder.

This makes measures like hand washing even more important, and we are working with our Somali Red Crescent colleagues to equip health care workers and facilities and to promote preventative measures to curb the spread of coronavirus”, Juerg Eglin, ICRC’s head of delegation in Somalia.

In Lebanon, the ICRC runs an emergency ward at the Rafik Hariri University Hospital – where COVID-19 cases are being treated – and is coordinating with the Lebanese Red Cross and the authorities to ensure that people can access health services.

Protecting and assisting in situations of armed conflict and violence: the ICRC’s unique value is our access to areas like prisons and areas outside of government control where others are not able to respond. This allows us to assist in responding to an outbreak in hard to reach war-torn areas. We are seriously concerned by the potential impact of the virus in prisons; these facilities are often overcrowded, with poor ventilation and hygiene and limited access to health care and sanitation facilities.

We continue to keep families together and connected as many people around the world are separated by travel restrictions and quarantine. As we face an onslaught of COVID-19 in conflict affected countries, the need for this vital service to connect families will become ever more valuable.

In Al Hol Camp in Syria our field hospital remains operational and our team has started to take all necessary and preventive measures to protect the patients (and also themselves) against the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile in Africa we are reinforcing our infection, prevention and control measures in the hospitals we support, putting in place contingency plans and ensuring supplies of essential medicines and materials are in place (*Mali, South Sudan, Nigeria, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo*).

Reaching vulnerable communities globally together with Red Cross and Red Crescent partners:

The ICRC operates in more than 90 countries - the most complex conflict settings; and together with 192 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies around the world, and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, we are the largest humanitarian network in the world. Together, as a Movement, we have the reach and unparalleled access to ensure vulnerable people receive the essential help and information they need to respond to and withstand this crisis. The ICRC is prioritizing operational support to the Movement to ensure a co-ordinated and complementary response to the pandemic.

In Somalia, the ICRC is working with the Somali Red Crescent to promote preventative measures within communities through radio spots, education sessions at clinics (of groups no more than 10) and providing soap. We are also working to equip health care workers and facilities in infection control.



ICRC

Advising on the prevention and management of the outbreak: the ICRC is helping to ensure that our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners, local authorities, and non-state armed groups have vital information about how to prevent and manage the outbreak and spread of COVID-19. Our advisory role is particularly focused in areas where ICRC has special expertise such as in prisons. We are also working to ensure that everyone is treated equally, that the medical missions are respected and that any community tensions are managed with impartiality. All of this to make sure that those affected by COVID-19 have access to the essential services they need, whoever they may be and wherever they are.

“Soon we might be confronted with the virus hitting hard in the most difficult places, the most vulnerable segments of population, such as people living in camps or in detention facilities. Should this scenario materialize, and I hope it won’t, this will put health systems under a huge pressure. Current ICRC water, hygiene and health programs won’t be enough. We will need to step up our response, working hand in hand with our Red Cross Red Crescent partners, relevant authorities and the private sector”,
Robert Mardini, ICRC’s incoming Director General.



In displacement camps, social distancing is not possible. Sanitation and shelter are often inadequate and there is little access to health care.

This pandemic is pushing us to think the unthinkable. **COVID-19 is a global threat, requiring a global response and global solidarity. We’re all in this together.** Our staff continue to deliver lifesaving assistance, despite the dangers and the uncertainty, to help those affected by conflict, and today, to help those at risk of the pandemic. We are there now and will continue to be there long after the media attention has waned.

In light of this exceptional crisis, the ICRC is urgently appealing for funding to mount our response to COVID-19 – to stem the rapid spread of this terrifying pandemic and help ensure that people already impacted by conflict and other situations of violence can withstand yet another attack.

We ask our most loyal and valued partners to stand with us by making an exceptional donation. Thank you.

International Committee of the Red Cross

19, avenue de la Paix 1202 Genève, Suisse T+41 22 730 21 71 F +41 22 730 28 99 Email: don@icrc.org