

DISCOVER THE ICRC

ICRC

About the ICRC
Red Cross and Red Crescent
International humanitarian law
Protection in war
Assistance for conflict victims
Preventive action
Cooperation with National Societies
Working with others
Resources



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS





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Production, Marketing and Distribution

19, Avenue de la Paix CH-1202 Geneva
T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 730 27 68
E-mail: dc_com_pmd.gva@icrc.org Web: www.icrc.org

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The ICRC in a nutshell

Despite efforts to achieve world peace in the wake of two world wars, armed conflict remains a prominent feature of our human landscape. The resort to arms continues to be a means of settling differences between nations, peoples and ethnic groups, with the accompanying toll of death and suffering.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded nearly a century and a half ago in recognition of this sad reality. It seeks to preserve a measure of humanity in the midst of war. Its guiding principle is that even in war there are limits: limits on how warfare is conducted and limits on how combatants behave. The set

of rules that were established with this in mind and endorsed by nearly every nation in the world is known as international humanitarian law, of which the Geneva Conventions are the bedrock.



The ICRC's mission is to protect and assist the civilian and military victims of armed conflicts and internal disturbances on a strictly neutral and impartial basis.

Its tasks include:

- visits to prisoners of war and civilian detainees;
- search for missing persons;
- transmission of messages between family members separated by conflict;
- reunification of dispersed families;
- provision of food, water and medical assistance to civilians without access to these basic necessities;
- spreading knowledge of humanitarian law;
- monitoring compliance with that law;
- drawing attention to violations and contributing to the development of humanitarian law.

The ICRC at work:
getting through to those in need.

The ICRC's special role was assigned to it by States through the various instruments of humanitarian law. However, while it maintains a constant dialogue with States, it insists at all times on its independence. Only if it is free to act independently of any government or other authority can the ICRC serve the true interests of the victims of conflict, which lie at the heart of its humanitarian mission.

The following pages provide an insight into this unique organization, its origins, aims and ideals, how it works, why it works in a certain way and who, ultimately, are the beneficiaries of its actions.



B. Heger/ICRC

Although the ICRC is the product of a private Swiss initiative, its work and scope are international. The organization has delegations in some 60 countries around the world, has activities in more than 80, and employs a staff of around 12,000 people, most of them nationals of the countries in which it works. About 800 people provide the essential support and back-up to the ICRC's field operations from its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

Operational delegations mainly perform protection, assistance or preventive activities for the victims of an existing or emerging situation of armed conflict or violence. (For details of these activities, see the relevant chapter.)

Regional delegations cover almost every country not directly affected by armed conflict. These delegations have specific tasks which concern operational activities on the one hand and "humanitarian diplomacy" (see p. 37) on the other. Their presence in a region enables them to keep a close watch on potentially dangerous developments and to function as an early warning system, making it possible for the ICRC to prepare for any rapid humanitarian action.

Information on this map correct as at March 2001



Headquarters



Operational delegations



Regional delegations



The ICRC around the world



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Legal status

The ICRC is a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization. Its nature and membership are non-governmental. Its mandate to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict has been conferred on it by States through the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, worthy successors to the First Geneva Convention of 1864.

The ICRC's mandate and legal status set it apart both from intergovernmental agencies, such as United Nations organizations, and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In most of the countries in which it works, the ICRC has concluded headquarters agreements with the authorities. Through these agreements, which are subject to international law, the ICRC enjoys the privileges and immunities usually only granted to intergovernmental organizations, such as immunity from legal

process, which protects it from administrative and judicial proceedings, and inviolability of its premises, archives and other documents. Such privileges and immunities are indispensable for the ICRC because they guarantee two conditions essential to its action, namely neutrality and independence. The organization has concluded such an agreement with Switzerland, thus guaranteeing its independence and freedom of action from the Swiss government.



Origins and history

The ICRC owes its origins to the vision and determination of one man. The date: 24 June 1859. The place: Solferino, a town in northern Italy. The Austrian and French armies were locked in bitter battle and, after 16 hours of fighting, the ground was strewn with 40,000 dead and wounded. That same evening, Henry Dunant, a Swiss citizen, passed through the area on business. He was horrified by the sight of thousands of soldiers from both armies left to suffer for want of adequate medical services. He appealed to the local people to help him tend the wounded, insisting that soldiers on both sides should be cared for.

"...how many unfortunate men were left behind, lying helpless on the naked ground in their own blood!...Somehow or other a volunteer service had to be organized."
Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*
(Painting by Carlo Bossoli)

On his return to Switzerland, Dunant published *A Memory of Solferino*, in which he made two solemn appeals:

- for relief societies to be formed in peacetime, with nurses who would be ready to care for the wounded in wartime;
- for these volunteers, who would be called upon to assist the army medical services, to be recognized and protected through an international agreement.

In 1863, the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, a charitable association based in the Swiss city of the same name, set up a five-member commission to consider how Dunant's ideas might be implemented. This commission — made up of Gustave Moynier, Guillaume-Henri Dufour, Louis Appia, Théodore Maunoir and Dunant himself — founded the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, which later became the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The five founders then set about ensuring that the ideas put forward in Dunant's book would become a reality. In response to their invitation, 16 States and four philanthropic institutions sent representatives to the International Conference which opened in Geneva on 26 October 1863. It was at that Conference that the distinctive emblem — a red cross on a white ground — was adopted and the Red Cross came into being.

To formalize protection of medical services on the battlefield and to gain international recognition of the Red Cross and its ideals, the Swiss government convened a Diplomatic Conference in Geneva in 1864. Representatives of 12 governments took part and adopted a treaty entitled the "Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field", which became the first treaty of humanitarian law. Subsequently, further conferences were held, extending the basic law to other categories of victims, such as prisoners of war. In the aftermath of the Second World War, a Diplomatic Conference deliberated for four months before adopting the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which reinforced the protection of civilians in wartime. In 1977, the Conventions were supplemented by two Additional Protocols.



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A global movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present and active in almost every country and comprises around 100 million members and volunteers. It is united and guided by the seven Fundamental Principles — humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality — which provide a universal standard of reference for all its members.

Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose: to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without discrimination, and to protect human dignity.



Fundamental Principles

The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which it is the ICRC's duty to uphold, were officially proclaimed at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Vienna in 1965. They are:

1 Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

2 Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

J. Taylor/CMJ
J. Mohr/ICRC
E. Posthuma de Boer/Federation
H. J. Davies/Federation
J. Matthews/American Red Cross
J. Anselmo/ICRC
D. Barbour/UNICEF



3 Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

4 Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

5 Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

6 Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

7 Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The Movement is made up of:

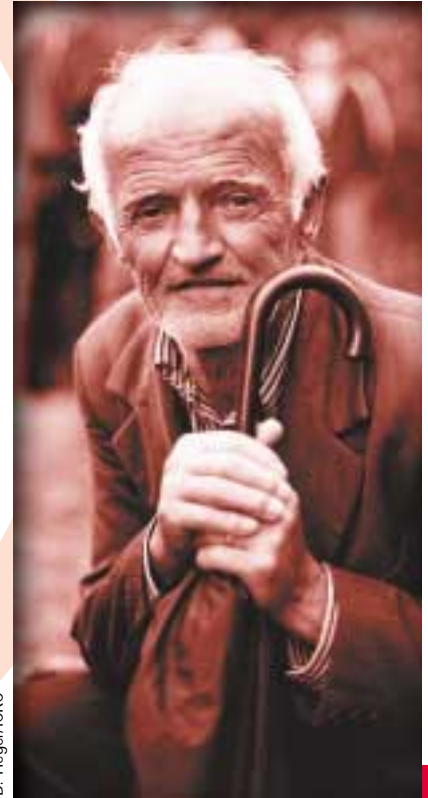
- the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies);
- the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation).

The ICRC, the Federation and the individual National Societies are independent bodies. Each has its own status and exercises no authority over the others. They meet every two years in the Council of Delegates. In addition, they gather with representatives of the States party to the Geneva Conventions every four years in principle for an International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Division of responsibilities

The **Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** define the relationship between the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions. The responsibilities of each of the Movement's components were further clarified and refined by the **Seville Agreement** adopted by the Council of Delegates in 1997. The Seville Agreement confers on the ICRC the role of lead agency for international operations conducted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in situations of armed conflict and internal strife, including activities in favour of displaced persons.

The ICRC is responsible for verifying that future National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies meet the criteria for membership of the Movement and that they are in a position to conduct their activities in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. If so, the ICRC grants them official recognition. The National Society concerned may then apply to join the Federation. In practice, applications are reviewed jointly by the ICRC and the Federation.



B. Heger/ICRC

Improving the living conditions of vulnerable people: the aim of a strategy drawn up in 1999 by the participants in the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Who's who in the Movement

The **International Committee of the Red Cross** is the Movement's founding body. In addition to carrying out operational activities to protect and assist victims of war, it is the promoter and custodian of international humanitarian law. It is also the guardian of the Fundamental Principles. In cooperation with the Federation it organizes the Movement's statutory meetings.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in about 180 countries. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief and health and social programmes. In wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and, where appropriate, support the army medical services.

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** works on the basis of the Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to inspire, facilitate and promote all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. Founded in 1919, the Federation directs and coordinates international assistance of the Movement to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and in health emergencies. It acts as the official representative of its member societies in the international field. It promotes cooperation between National Societies, and strengthens their capacity to prepare effectively for disasters and to carry out health and social programmes.

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J.-J. Kurzi/ICRC

This patient is being transferred to an ICRC hospital.



When violence broke out in East Timor, the Dili hospital was placed under the protection of the red cross emblem.

Emblems of humanity

From the very beginning, the ICRC's founders recognized the need for a single, universal and easily recognizable emblem familiar to all. To their mind, the emblem had to protect not only persons wounded in battle but also those bringing them aid. It was also to protect all medical units, including those of the enemy. The idea was that the mere sight of it would prompt combatants to show restraint and respect. The red cross on a white ground (the reverse of the Swiss national flag) was adopted by the International

Conference of 1863 (see p. 7) as the distinctive sign of societies bringing relief to wounded soldiers (the future National Societies). A year later it was recognized by a Diplomatic Conference as the distinctive sign of army medical services, and sanctioned by humanitarian law with the adoption of the Geneva Convention of 1864. However, in 1876, the Ottoman Empire decided to use a red crescent instead of the red cross. Several States followed suit and in 1929 the red crescent in turn was granted official recognition, along with the red lion and sun used by Iran at the time (not currently in use).

Today, all of the 176 National Societies use either the red cross or the red crescent to identify themselves — the so-called indicative use of the emblems. In each case they use the same emblem as the medical services of the military forces in their country during conflict, the so-called protective use.

In recent years the Movement has been considering possible changes to the use of the emblems to deal with two specific problems. Some societies which would like to become part of the Movement are not comfortable using either of the existing emblems. The Magen David Adom, the Israeli society, would like to use a symbol of its own — the red shield of David — and some societies would like to use both the red cross and red crescent. Neither is possible under the present Geneva Convention rules. There are also conflicts where the use of the red cross or red crescent might create problems if they are misinterpreted by either side. The Movement has suggested an additional emblem to solve these problems, to be adopted by a diplomatic conference of States. The additional emblem would be free of any possible political, religious or cultural connotations, and therefore provide a solution for current and any future problems. The existing National Societies will be free to continue using the red cross or red crescent as they do now.

Use and misuse of the emblem

Use of the emblem as a **protective device** is the visible manifestation of the protection accorded by the Geneva Conventions to persons (members of army medical services, National Society volunteers, ICRC delegates, etc.), medical units (hospitals, first-aid posts, etc.) and means of transport.

Use of the emblem as an **indicative device** shows that a person or object has a connection with the Movement. To avoid confusion with the emblem used as a protective device, the red cross and red crescent used for indicative purposes are smaller in size.

Misuse of the emblem as a protective device in time of war jeopardizes the entire protective system established by humanitarian law.

Misuse of the emblem as an indicative device undermines its significance in the eyes of the public and thus diminishes its protective power in wartime.

In cases of misuse of the emblem as a protective device, the ICRC's role is to remind the belligerents of their duty to respect the emblem and of the steps to be taken against those making improper use of it, since primary responsibility for respecting the emblem lies with States. Where the emblem has been misused as an indicative device, the ICRC requests

R. Stiller/ICRC



The emblem used as an indicative device...

the National Society concerned to take the necessary action to stop such practices.

...and as a protective one: in this case, for relief workers bringing food into a camp for the displaced.

F. McDougall/ICRC





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Rules of war

International humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict or the law of war, is the body of rules which, in wartime, protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities. It limits the methods and means of warfare. Its central purpose is to limit and prevent human suffering in times of armed conflict. The rules are to be observed not only by governments and their armed forces, but also by armed opposition groups and any other parties to a conflict.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977 are the principal instruments of humanitarian law. Other humanitarian texts include

the Geneva Protocol banning the use of gas, the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Ottawa Convention on landmines.



The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are applicable to international armed conflicts. They stipulate that civilians and people who are no longer taking an active part in the hostilities, such as wounded or captured combatants, must be spared and treated humanely. They also set out the role the ICRC plays in alleviating human suffering. In addition, Article 3 common to all four Conventions authorizes the ICRC to offer its services in the event of non-international armed conflict and accords minimum protection to the victims of such situations.

At the beginning of 2001, 189 countries were party to the Geneva Conventions.

The two Additional Protocols of 1977 supplement the Conventions. They aim to limit the use of violence and protect the civilian population, by strengthening the rules governing the conduct of hostilities.

How do you define a conflict?

An **international armed conflict** involves the armed forces of at least two States.

A **non-international armed conflict** is a confrontation within the territory of one State between the regular armed forces and identifiable armed groups, or between armed groups.

Internal disturbances occur when the State uses armed force to restore and maintain order, without there being a fully fledged armed conflict.

Internal tension occurs when, in the absence of internal disturbances, force is used as a preventive measure to maintain law and order.



M. Naamani/ICRC

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The purpose of humanitarian law: to limit and prevent suffering in times of armed conflict.

Development of the law

As the nature of warfare changes, new areas of humanitarian law need to be explored and developed. Beginning with the first Geneva Convention in 1864, the ICRC has worked to improve the protection of war victims through the adoption of new legal standards. Its legal experts organize and participate in meetings and conferences on humanitarian themes. Through its Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, the ICRC also encourages States to adopt legislation to apply humanitarian law at the national level. ICRC legal experts at Geneva headquarters and in the field give technical assistance to States, for example, on legislation to prosecute alleged war criminals and to protect the red cross and red crescent emblems.

The ICRC also seeks ways to improve implementation of the law. It has conducted a worldwide study on customary international rules, to identify where current recognized practices can complete written law and treaties. In addition, it promotes awareness and compliance with the law. (See also Preventive action, p.34.)

The ICRC's operational activities are complementary to its legal work. Apart from providing help to populations in need, the ICRC, through its presence in the field, is in a privileged position to monitor respect for humanitarian law, to observe at close hand the problems that victims of armed conflict face in their daily lives and to initiate the development of new law.

Parties to conflict may show scant respect for the rules of humanitarian law regarding civilians and their homes. (Drawing commissioned as part of the People on War project, see p.39.)

Whom does international humanitarian law protect?

First Geneva Convention (1949) protects the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field;

Second Geneva Convention (1949) protects the wounded, sick and shipwrecked among armed forces at sea;

Third Geneva Convention (1949) protects prisoners of war;

Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) protects civilians;

Additional Protocol I (1977) strengthens the protection of victims of international armed conflicts;

Additional Protocol II (1977) strengthens the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts.



A. Burgos/ICRC

When violations occur...

If the ICRC observes a violation of the rules of war, it makes a confidential approach to the authorities responsible for the incident. Where violations are serious, repeated, established with certainty and when confidential representations to the authorities have failed to improve the situation, it reserves the right to take a public stance by denouncing such failure to respect humanitarian law, provided that it deems such publicity to be in the interests of those affected or threatened by the violations. Such a step is exceptional.

It is not the ICRC's task to investigate or prosecute offences. States party to the Geneva Conventions are duty bound to introduce in their national legislation provisions for the repression of violations of humanitarian law, including the prosecution or extradition of war criminals. Offenders may be arraigned either before the national courts of the different States or before an international tribunal. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which was opened for signature in July 1998, paved the way for the creation of an internationally recognized body to try perpetrators of war crimes who for one reason or another have escaped trial by their national judicial systems. In the Court's rules of procedure, ICRC staff are uniquely exempt from giv-

ing evidence, for, if its staff could be called upon as witnesses in judicial procedures, the organization's neutrality would be jeopardized, putting at risk impartial access to the victims.



F. Clarke/ICRC

What is the difference between international humanitarian law and human rights law?

International humanitarian law is very close to human rights law, in that both are concerned with the right of every human being to his or her physical and moral integrity and dignity regardless of the circumstances. However, given the nature of humanitarian law — to minimize suffering in armed conflict — this body of law contains rules that are much more specific than those contained in human rights treaties, such as rules pertaining to the means and methods of combat. Although distinct, human rights law and humanitarian law are complementary.

Shot in the leg while playing football. Humanitarian law condemns attacks on civilians, but national legislation must have the means to enforce the law and to punish those who disregard it.

Weapons: preventing the worst

The ICRC is closely involved in ensuring that weapons in use and under development conform to existing rules of humanitarian law.

Limits on means and methods of warfare

Two aspects of the weapons issue are of humanitarian concern. First, is a weapon indiscriminate and therefore more likely to cause civilian death and injury? And, second, does it inflict more suffering than required for a given military purpose? These concerns were central to the recent worldwide campaign to ban landmines which culminated in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, more commonly known as the Ottawa treaty.

Other weapons, too, are regarded by most people, including in military circles, as abhorrent — and do not belong even on the battlefield. These include weapons specifically designed to blind, poison or cause infectious disease or inevitable death. The belief that some weapons are "beyond the pale" has led to international agreements banning the use of dum-dum bullets (1899), chemical weapons (1899, 1925 and

1993), biological weapons (1925 and 1972) and, most recently, blinding laser weapons (1995), the first time a weapon has been prohibited *before* its use on the battlefield.

The ICRC encourages States to establish national review mechanisms, as required by Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, to determine whether the weapons they intend to develop, acquire or employ would violate international humanitarian law. A number of factors must be taken into account in the conduct of these reviews, including whether a weapon falls into the category of those that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering. In this connection, the ICRC also encourages States to consider the effects of weapons on health and to weigh these against other factors such as military necessity. Particularly rigorous multi-disciplinary reviews are required for weapons which injure by means — and have effects — with which nobody is yet familiar.

Even if hostilities have officially ended, where weapons remain in circulation an alarming number of arms-related casualties continue to occur.



T. Mayer/ICRC



J. C. Page/ICRC



P. Grabhorn/ICRC

Unregulated arms availability

Another growing concern in humanitarian circles is the unregulated proliferation of small military-style weapons. In most of the conflicts in the last decade, death and injury have resulted less from the major conventional weapons, such as missiles, tanks, aircraft and warships, than from small arms and light weapons. These weapons are increasingly falling into the hands of private armies and militias, insurgent groups, criminal organizations and other non-State actors. Anyone, even children, can operate them, as they are light and easy to carry, simple to handle and require little or no training. Rapid fire assault rifles can often be obtained at a price well below the cost of manufacture.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the widespread availability of military-style weapons is having a detrimental impact on respect for humanitarian law and on the delivery of assistance to the victims of war, whom that law seeks to protect. The ICRC has contributed its expertise to the growing international discussion on this problem, highlighting the cost to civilians of the free flow of weapons and ammunition, and has urged governments to take likely respect for humanitarian law into account when making decisions on arms transfers.



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In its activities to protect people in situations of armed conflict or violence, the ICRC's mission is to obtain **full respect for the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law**. It seeks to:

- minimize the dangers to which people are exposed;
- prevent and put a stop to the abuses to which they are subjected;
- draw attention to their rights and make their voices heard;
- bring them assistance.

The ICRC does this by remaining close to the victims of conflict and violence and by maintaining a confidential dialogue with both State and non-State authorities.



A diversified strategy

The first formal step taken by the ICRC when a conflict breaks out is to remind the authorities of their responsibilities and obligations towards the civilian population, prisoners and wounded and sick combatants, giving priority to respect for their physical integrity and dignity. After carrying out independent surveys, the ICRC puts forward recommendations to the authorities for tangible measures — preventive and corrective — to improve their situation.

At the same time, the ICRC takes action of its own accord to respond to the most urgent needs, notably through:

- delivery of relief assistance;
- evacuation and/or transfer of endangered persons;
- restoring and preserving family links and tracing missing persons.

It also undertakes programmes with a longer-term, structural perspective, involving technical and material cooperation with prison authorities.

Immunity for civilians may be a basic tenet of humanitarian law, but it is all too often blatantly disregarded.
(Drawing commissioned as part of the People on War project, see p.39.)

Protection of civilians

Civilians often endure horrific ordeals in today's conflicts, sometimes as direct targets. Massacres, hostage-taking, sexual violence, harassment, expulsion, forced transfer and looting, and the deliberate denial of access to water, food and health care, are some of the practices which spread terror and suffering among civilians.

Humanitarian law is founded on the principle of the immunity of the civilian population. Persons not taking part in the hostilities may under no circumstances be attacked; they must be spared and protected. In international armed conflicts, the Fourth Geneva

Convention of 1949 and Additional Protocol I of 1977 contain specific provisions which protect civilians and civilian property. In non-international armed conflicts, the civilian population has the right to protection by virtue of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC maintains a constant presence in areas where civilians are particularly at risk. Its delegates keep up a regular dialogue with all arms bearers, whether they are members of the armed forces, rebel groups, police forces, paramilitary forces or other groups taking part in the fighting.



A. Burgos/ICRC

Displaced by conflict

Armed conflict often results in large-scale displacements of civilians, both across international borders and within the frontiers of affected countries. In most cases, these people have had to leave behind all but a few of their worldly possessions. They are obliged to travel long distances, often on foot, to seek safe refuge away from the fighting. Families are dispersed, children lose contact with their parents in the chaos of flight, elderly relatives too weak to undertake such an arduous journey are left behind to fend for themselves. Refugees and internally displaced people lose their livelihoods and means of generating their own income. They are therefore dependent, at least in the first instance, on the goodwill of their hosts and on humanitarian agencies for their survival.

When people are displaced within their country's borders as a result of an armed conflict, they form part of the affected civilian population. As such, they are protected by humanitarian law and benefit from ICRC protection and assistance programmes.

Indeed, given the extremely precarious situation in which many internally displaced people find themselves, they form a large percentage of the beneficiaries of ICRC activities. Where the national authorities are unable to do so, the ICRC steps in to provide for the most urgent needs of displaced people. In doing so, however, it keeps in mind that the resources of host communities may have been stretched to the limit to accommodate the new arrivals, thereby rendering them vulnerable too, and that those who are left behind may also face extreme hardship and

danger. It is with reference to this, the bigger picture, that the ICRC determines the beneficiaries of its assistance programmes. Vulnerability, rather than belonging to a particular category, is the deciding factor.

Insecurity and fear of attack may drive people to take their families and flee for their lives.



C. Aqvist/SRK

People who have fled across international borders are considered refugees and benefit from protection and assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In such cases, the ICRC acts only at a subsidiary level, particularly where refugees are protected by humanitarian law or when its presence is required as a specifically neutral and independent intermediary (during attacks on refugee camps, for example). It also provides Red Cross message services to enable refugees to re-establish contact with family members from whom they have become separated as a result of a conflict (see Restoring family links, p.26).

The ICRC believes that it is often violations of humanitarian law that cause displacement in the first place. In addition to its operational work on behalf of refugees and displaced persons, therefore, the ICRC strives to disseminate and to promote respect for humanitarian law so as to prevent displacements. (See Preventive action, p.34.)



U. Meissner/ICRC

Women and war

The ICRC assists women victims of conflict as part of its broader mandate to protect and assist all victims of conflict. However, since women do have specific protection, health and assistance needs, the ICRC focuses attention on ensuring that these needs are adequately and appropriately addressed in all its activities. In particular, it has formally pledged to put emphasis on the protection which must be accorded to women and girls, and to spread awareness among all who bear arms that sexual violence in all its forms is prohibited by humanitarian law and should be vigorously prevented.

In wartime women may show extraordinary resilience under extreme conditions.

Women and girls predominantly experience armed conflict as civilians and as such are often exposed to acts of violence, including:

- death and injury from indiscriminate military attacks and the prevalence of mines;
- lack of the basic means of survival and health care;
- limitations on their means to support themselves and their families.

Disappearances, hostage-taking, torture, imprisonment, forced recruitment into the armed forces, displacement — these all happen to women and girls, as well as men and boys.

More specific — but not exclusive — to women and girls is the crime of sexual violence. Since wars began, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as a means of warfare, to humiliate and subjugate the enemy. Violations such as rape, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery and enforced impregnation or enforced termination of pregnancy are heinous attacks against the life and the physical and psychological integrity of the person, and are recognized as such under humanitarian law.

Although women are frequently portrayed solely as victims, this does not reflect reality. Women throughout the world are showing not only that they can be extremely resilient, but also that they can put their ingenuity and coping skills to full use in their daily roles as heads of household, breadwinners and care providers within their families and communities. Such a capacity is helping to sustain and rebuild communities torn apart by conflict.

Women also take an active part in war, in direct combat as part of a military force or in supporting their menfolk who are fighting. As combatants captured by the enemy, women are afforded protection equal to that of men under humanitarian law. The law recognizes women's need for special protection according to their specific needs.



B. Heger/ICRC

Women fighters, like their male counterparts, must also be instructed in the law of war, so that they can act in accordance with these rules.

Protection of detainees

In international armed conflicts, the Geneva Conventions recognize the right of ICRC delegates to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees. Preventing them from carrying out their mission would amount to a violation of humanitarian law.

In non-international armed conflicts and situations of internal violence, Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and the Statutes of the Movement authorize the ICRC to offer its services to visit detainees, and many governments accept its proposal to do so.

The ICRC monitors the individual cases of people deprived of their freedom.



B. Heger/ICRC

Deprived of freedom: severe vulnerability

Being deprived of their freedom puts people in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the detaining authority and within the prison environment. This vulnerability is particularly acute in times of conflict and internal violence, when the excessive and illegal use of force is commonplace and structural deficiencies are exacerbated.

The ICRC works to:

- prevent or put an end to disappearances and summary executions, torture and ill-treatment;
- restore family links where they have been disrupted;
- improve conditions of detention when necessary and in accordance with the applicable law.

It does so by carrying out visits to places of detention. On the basis of its findings, it makes confidential approaches to the authorities and, if necessary, provides material or medical assistance to the detainees.

During visits, ICRC delegates conduct private interviews with each detainee. They note down the detainees' details, so that their cases can be followed right up to the time of their release; the detainees describe any humanitarian problems they may face.

While refraining from taking a position as to the reasons for their arrest or capture, the ICRC tries to ensure that detainees benefit from the judicial guarantees to which they are entitled under humanitarian law.

Conditions for ICRC visits

Before beginning visits to places of detention, the ICRC first submits to the authorities a set of standard conditions. Delegates must be allowed to:

- see all detainees falling within the ICRC's mandate and have access to all places where they are held;
- interview detainees of their choice without witnesses;
- draw up, during the visits, lists of detainees within the ICRC's mandate or receive from the authorities such lists which the delegates may verify and, if necessary, complete;
- repeat visits to detainees of their choice as frequently as they may feel necessary;
- restore family links;
- provide urgent material and medical assistance as required.

Restoring family links

The ICRC's Central Tracing Agency works to re-establish family links in all situations of armed conflict or internal violence. Each year, hundreds of thousands of new cases of people being sought by their relatives are opened, whether they concern displaced people, refugees, detainees or missing persons. Those who are located are given the opportunity to send and receive Red Cross messages and/or are put in contact with their families thanks to the worldwide network supported by the ICRC and comprising the more than 180 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.



B. Heger/ICRC

Link to the outside

In international armed conflicts, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency fulfils the task assigned to it under humanitarian law of gathering, processing and passing on information on protected persons, notably prisoners of war and civilian internees.

For detainees and their families, receiving news of their loved ones is always of huge importance. In a wide range of contexts, the ICRC has given prisoners of war, civilian internees, security detainees and sometimes even common-law detainees the opportunity to communicate with their relatives.

By satellite telephone...

...or by the age-old methods, Red Cross messages may be the only way for families to keep in touch...



P. Spoerli/ICRC

Dispersed families

Preservation of the family unit is a universal right guaranteed by law. The ICRC does everything possible to reunite people separated by conflict, by establishing their whereabouts and reuniting them with their families. Special attention is given to particularly vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children or elderly people.

Sometimes, a travel document provided by the ICRC is the only means for a destitute person without identity papers to join his or her family settled in a third country or to return to his or her country of origin. The growing number of refugees and asylum seekers has meant that the ICRC is called upon more and more often to issue travel documents for people who have received authorization to settle in a host country.

Missing persons

Even after the guns have fallen silent, war continues to haunt the families of missing persons. Are they still alive? Are they injured or imprisoned? Families have the right to know. Humanitarian law obliges all parties to a conflict to provide answers to these questions. The ICRC assists in this process, by collecting information on missing persons or by putting mechanisms in place together with the authorities with the aim of clarifying the fate of missing persons and informing their families.

...until they are together again.

Just knowing what happened to those who did not survive may assist the grieving process.



W. Torres/ICRC



C. Shirley/ICRC



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Modern-day humanitarian emergencies are characterized by outbreaks of extreme violence frequently directed against civilians. These often coincide with or are the indirect cause of other crises such as famines, epidemics and economic upheaval. The combined effects may put the civilian population in extreme peril, their coping mechanisms stretched to the limit, and in dire need of assistance.

The primary aim of ICRC assistance is, therefore, to protect victims' lives and health, to ease their plight and to ensure that the consequences of conflict — disease, injury, hunger or exposure to the elements — do not jeopardize their future. While emergency assis-

tance saves lives and mitigates the worst effects of conflict, the ICRC tries always to keep sight of the ultimate aim of restoring people's ability to provide for themselves.

Assistance may take a variety of forms, depending on the region and the nature of the crisis. It may



include the provision of food and/or medicine, but usually builds on the capacity to deliver essential services, such as the construction or repair of water-supply systems or medical facilities and the training of primary health care staff, surgeons and orthopaedic technicians.

In certain conflicts, unlawful tactics may be used by either side, such as blockades on food and other essential goods, obstruction of water supplies and deliberate destruction of crops and infrastructure. In such cases, before providing assistance, the ICRC attempts to prevent or bring an end to the violations by drawing the parties' attention to their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

Before beginning any assistance programme, the ICRC makes a careful assessment of what each group needs in the context of its own environment, so that the aid is appropriate. In addition, the ICRC makes sure that supplies are distributed in compliance with the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality (see p.9).

In its constant quest to improve the quality of its action, the ICRC monitors each programme throughout, adapts it as the situation evolves and, when it is over, evaluates the lessons learned and ways to do better next time. The ICRC's evaluation policy applies to every sphere of its activity, not just relief operations, so that it can provide the best response possible to the multifaceted needs of conflict victims.

Economic security

Economic security means that a household is self-sufficient and can meet its own basic economic needs. In a conflict or crisis, in which displacement, theft, looting and the destruction of property and infrastructure are commonplace, households may no longer be able to provide for themselves, thereby becoming dependent on outside aid.

In its approach to assistance in the context of an armed conflict, the ICRC focuses on the dynamics of household economics and is concerned with both the means of production to cover all the basic economic needs of a household and the provision of resources to meet those needs. Although some needs are more important than others — food and water, for instance, are vital — there is too often a tendency to forget, in crisis situations, that human beings need more than just food to live on. The ICRC therefore takes into account all of a household's basic economic needs, such as housing, clothing, cooking utensils and fuel.

Saving lives: although the ICRC's policy is to help people regain self-sufficiency, emergencies such as famine require instant, good-quality "fast food".



U. Meissner/ICRC

Depending on the degree of loss of economic security, the ICRC uses one of three types of assistance:

- **economic support:** to protect victims' vital means of production, so that they can maintain their productive capacity and economic self-sufficiency at the household level as far as possible;
- **survival relief:** to protect the lives of conflict victims by giving them access to the economic goods essential to their survival when they can no longer obtain these by their own means;
- **economic rehabilitation:** to support conflict victims in restoring their means of production and, where possible, regaining their self-sufficiency.

Halting the downward spiral...

The ICRC takes action the moment the early signs of a crisis are detected, by reminding the authorities of the protection due to civilians under humanitarian law, including respect for their persons and property. If the population suffers economic problems through obvious impoverishment and its means of production are deficient or likely to become inadequate, the ICRC intervenes by providing **economic support**. This could include food distributions to support the economy, aid designed to diversify

and intensify production, or the protection of livestock by veterinary services. Where possible, it gives priority to economic support activities. Other types of assistance, however, are often also essential, because the ICRC is powerless to prevent the process of impoverishment and decapitalization generated by a conflict. When this happens, the ICRC provides **survival relief**, by delivering essential goods which can no longer be obtained by the victims' own means of production.

...And turning it upwards again

When things start to improve, the population requires help to recover and regain its self-sufficiency so that survival relief operations and assistance can eventually be phased out. ICRC rehabilitation programmes aim to restore and reinforce means of production through a range of activities, including the distribution of seeds, agricultural tools and fishing tackle, the provision of veterinary medicine or the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, to help both resident and displaced populations meet their own needs.

Over and out

In the past, emergency aid and development programmes were regarded as distinct and separate spheres, requiring a different kind of response. There is now increasing acceptance of the interrelation between the two, leading to a broader approach to humanitarian assistance. Thus, when economic rehabilitation activities are undertaken, a link is created with development programmes allowing for a smooth transition from the emergency to the development phases. Development agencies must then take up the baton, investing resources and manpower so as to reduce the structural vulnerabilities that can encourage the outbreak of crises.

Following up on a programme to restore self-sufficiency.



B. Heger/ICRC

Water and habitat

The ICRC's water and habitat programmes aim to:

- ensure that victims of armed conflict have water for drinking and domestic use;
- protect the population from environmental hazards caused by the collapse of water and habitat systems.

Habitat is a term which designates not merely the boundaries of the home, but its relationship with the wider environment and the people who live in it.

Even in peacetime, millions of people throughout the world have difficulties gaining access to clean drinking water, proper housing and decent sanitation. The problem is further compounded in wartime, when destruction of infrastructure and mass displacement can expose millions more to death and disease. In the heat of battle, water sources may be deliberately targeted; people may have to leave their homes and seek water in hostile environments; or the infrastructure that provided water may be damaged by the fighting.

A dramatic increase in waterborne and water-related diseases, such as diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid and cholera, are the immediate signs of the breakdown of these life-sustaining systems. Further

down the road, water shortages reduce food production, aggravate poverty and disease, spur large migrations and undermine a State's moral authority. As water and habitat are so essential to survival, ensuring access to them is a priority for humanitarian organizations.

In order to provide access to water, improve hygiene levels and protect the environment, the ICRC carries out a range of activities, as follows:

- rehabilitation of water-treatment plants, distribution networks or gravity water systems linked to pumping stations;
- construction of wells, harnessing and protection of water sources and drainage systems, construction of water-storage containers;
- purification and distribution of drinking water;
- construction and rehabilitation of latrines and sewage treatment systems; collection and treatment of waste, including hospital waste;
- renovation and reconstruction of health facilities and schools;
- work on infrastructure in places of detention to provide inmates with at least the minimum water requirements and ensure decent sanitation and living conditions;
- setting up and organization of camps for displaced people;
- introduction of vector-control programmes, protection of foodstuffs, decontamination

of living spaces, reduction of energy consumption, use of alternative energy.

Fighting malaria by spraying insecticide on stagnant water in a camp for the displaced. The ICRC finances many pest eradication and disinfection operations to combat the spread of disease.

ICRC teams provide materials and expertise to set up and ensure the maintenance of water supply systems ranging from basic artesian wells to sophisticated modern pumping stations.

Access to safe drinking water does much to prevent the spread of waterborne diseases. When local supply systems are destroyed by conflict, ICRC technicians can set up emergency systems until repair work has been completed.



B. Heger/ICRC
T. Gassmann/ICRC
R. Sidler/ICRC

Health services

The aim of ICRC health programmes is to ensure that the victims of conflict have access to essential preventive and curative health care of a universally accepted standard.

As a direct effect of conflict, people can be killed, injured or displaced, medical structures destroyed and supply lines disrupted. At the height of a conflict, the number of people who are wounded, fall prey to infectious disease or are affected by malnutrition can reach epidemic proportions and quickly outstrip the capacities of existing local health services.

Meanwhile, as an indirect consequence of conflict, the destruction of health facilities, shortages of qualified staff and lack of medical supplies can mean that the more common health problems go unattended and basic health services such as antenatal care, vaccination programmes and elective surgery fall by the wayside. Therefore, while rapid assistance is needed to attend to the most urgent needs, support for the existing health system is essential to ensure that normal health services are restored or maintained.

The ICRC aims to keep local medical facilities running by providing medicines and other supplies.

The full spectrum of health care

ICRC health-related activities include:

- reconstruction or rehabilitation of buildings;
- management support;
- training of medical staff;
- epidemiological surveillance;
- revitalization of immunization services;
- supply of essential medicines and medical equipment;
- loan of expatriate surgical/medical teams.

To counter the disruption of primary health care services caused by conflict, the ICRC provides direct assistance to existing health centres and district hospitals, as far as possible with the active participation of the communities concerned. In cases in which hunger or even famine have taken root, intensive feeding centres supervised by medical staff are set up for children suffering from malnutrition.



U. Meissner/ICRC

Undernourished children, besides facing death from starvation, are extremely vulnerable to disease and infection.

War surgery

The ICRC's long experience in treating war casualties has given it considerable expertise in this field. ICRC surgeons train expatriate medical staff who have volunteered to work for the organization and are new to the specific skills and techniques required in the field. They also teach local doctors these skills to enable them to take over and continue to treat the wounded once the ICRC teams have left. At the international level, courses and workshops are organized each year, such as the HELP courses (Health Emergencies in Large Populations), which enable the ICRC to share its knowledge and experience. ICRC doctors publish manuals on war surgery and contribute to professional periodicals.

In an unsafe environment, gaining access to the wounded and transporting them to hospital can present considerable difficulties. The ICRC, in partnership with the local Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, develops programmes for pre-hospital first aid and the evacuation and transportation of injured patients.

The ICRC also builds National Societies' capacity to respond to emergency situations by, for instance, running first-aid courses for volunteers, which cover organization as well as life-saving techniques. The ICRC may provide National Societies with communications equipment and ambulances to assist them in preparing for emergencies.

Health in prisons

ICRC medical staff always accompany delegates on their visits to places of detention in order to assess the inmates' health and detect any consequences of ill-treatment, whether physical or psychological. The doctors and nurses who conduct these visits are well versed in the specific problems of prison health, such as hygiene, epidemiology, nutritional needs and vitamin deficiencies. They identify priority public health problems in prisons that need to be controlled. When the risk of a health problem in prison is so great that the response capacity of

the penitentiary health service is overwhelmed, the ICRC implements vector-control programmes to address such problems as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and vitamin deficiencies.

Addressing health problems of prison inmates also requires the training and knowledge necessary to make proper medical assessments as to whether detainees have been the victims of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

To walk and work again

Injuries inflicted by anti-personnel mines or other explosive weapons can lead to amputation, severe disability and psychological trauma. Such war casualties require specialist surgery and post-operative care in the first instance and rehabilitation and psychological support in the longer term.

Not all countries have the means to provide the specialized care and social benefits required by the war-disabled. The ICRC has set up some 30 prosthetic/orthotic workshops around the world which produce artificial limbs, crutches and wheelchairs to help amputees regain some measure of mobility and, in many cases, economic independence as well. Care is taken to use appropriate materials and to train local staff to produce spare parts and new appliances.

When peace returns, fully equipped and staffed workshops can be handed over to local health authorities.

The ICRC offers jobs to amputees in its prosthetic/orthotic centres, helping them to regain some economic independence.



R. Sementiuk Photography



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Making the rules known

The ICRC's preventive work is designed to contain the harmful effects of conflict and keep them to a minimum. The very spirit of international humanitarian law is to use force with restraint and in proportion to the objectives. The organization therefore seeks to promote the whole range of humanitarian principles so as to prevent — or at the very least to limit — the worst excesses of war.

Prevention through communication

In its prevention programmes, the ICRC targets in particular those people and groups who determine the fate of victims of armed conflict or who can obstruct or facilitate

ICRC action. These groups include armed forces, police, security forces and other weapons bearers, decision-makers and opinion-leaders at local and international level and, with an eye to the future, teenagers, students and their teachers.





The strategy behind these activities comprises three levels:

- awareness-building;
- promotion of humanitarian law through teaching and training;
- integration of humanitarian law into official legal, educational and operational curricula.

The ultimate aim is to influence people's attitudes and behaviour so as to improve the protection of civilians and other victims in times of armed conflict, facilitate access to the victims and improve the security of humanitarian action.

Respect and ensure respect

States have a legal obligation to ensure that their **armed forces** are fully versed in the law of armed conflict and universal humanitarian principles at all levels in the chain of command and that they apply them in all situations. The ICRC promotes the systematic inclusion of humanitarian law and principles into military training (command and training procedures) and assists States in this process.

Since the forces of law and order are often called upon to intervene in situations of internal disturbances and violence, the ICRC also works to ensure that **police and security forces** receive systematic training in humanitarian law, human rights and universal humanitarian principles.

In many of today's armed conflicts — which are mostly non-international — **irregular arms bearers**, who have little or no training, are directly involved in the fighting. Recent examples around the world have shown how the proliferation of armed groups has led to appalling abuses of the civilian population and jeopardized the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The ICRC endeavours to establish relations and build contacts with all the protagonists in a conflict. In this way, it can make the activities and working methods of the ICRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent better known and thus make it easier to reach the victims and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

National Society staff play an active part in disseminating humanitarian principles to bearers of weapons. The ICRC organizes courses worldwide to improve their communication skills.



M. Keating/ICRC

Making a difference

The ICRC strives to make **decision-makers and opinion-leaders**, such as parliamentarians, members of non-governmental organizations, journalists and other influential people, aware of humanitarian law and to gain their support in ensuring its implementation. To this end, it engages in "**humanitarian diplomacy**".

This includes:

- creating and maintaining networks of contacts;
- making governments, authorities and civil society aware of their responsibility with regard to humanitarian law;
- identifying and training different local partners;
- setting up or helping to organize early warning systems.

No opportunity lost: humanitarian principles are printed on relief parcels distributed by the ICRC.

Securing the future

To reach **tomorrow's decision-makers and opinion-leaders**, the ICRC targets leading universities to encourage the inclusion of humanitarian law in courses offered in particular by the faculties of law, political science and journalism. As with the military, the ICRC's approach is to work with the authorities concerned, train trainers, produce resource materials and maintain a network of contacts within the academic world.

In an attempt to reach all segments of society and to include humanitarian law as part of basic education, the ICRC helps ministries of education and other educational bodies to introduce humanitarian law and related topics into secondary school programmes. After successfully implementing such programmes in several countries of the former USSR, the ICRC in early 2001 launched a 20-hour educational resource kit, "Exploring Humanitarian Law", designed for use by educators worldwide.



B. Heger/ICRC



Safer steps

Mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to take a terrible toll in many countries afflicted by or emerging from an armed conflict. The Ottawa treaty banning landmines has now come into force, but clearing the existing mines is a slow process, and in some cases mines are still being laid despite the ban. This means that there will be casualties among the civilian population caused by

mine and UXO incidents for many years to come. The ICRC's aim is to reduce these numbers over the long term.

Until land sown with mines is completely cleared, mine awareness will remain an important element of mine-related activities. In affected countries, the ICRC conducts needs assessments and collects data on mine incidents. Knowing how and why someone was killed or injured enables the ICRC to judge the

How does it feel to have only one leg?
Children learn about the dangers of landmines.

extent of people's awareness of the risks posed by mines and UXOs. It then works with the affected community to find appropriate solutions, technical, economic or informative, to help them avoid the dangers of living in a mine-infested environment.

People on War

In 1999, the year marking the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC commissioned an independent worldwide consultation on the rules of armed conflict. The consultation was carried out in 12 countries ravaged by conflict in recent decades — Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia/Abkhazia, Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, Lebanon, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia and South Africa.

In each case, the ICRC, in cooperation with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, conducted a public opinion survey with a representative sample of the country's population and organized in-depth interviews and focus groups with those involved in or directly affected by the conflict. For comparative purposes, people's views were also sought in France, Russia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The idea was that civilians and combatants alike would be able to share their experiences and opinions on the many facets of war, on what basic rules should apply and why those rules often break down. In all, 20,680 questionnaires were collected and processed and 105 focus groups and 324 private interviews recorded, yielding one of the most innovative bodies of empirical social research ever carried out on war.

This material has been archived with all personal references erased in order to preserve the privacy of the survey participants. It is undergoing further analysis by the ICRC in conjunction with academic institutions so as to try to explain perceived gaps between people's beliefs and behaviour in situations of armed violence, and to determine the implications of the research for humanitarian law and action.

The country reports can be ordered in print or electronic format from the ICRC or downloaded from the organization's website www.icrc.org; the raw data is available for research or analysis at SIDOS, the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences, in Neuchâtel, Switzerland (www.sidos.ch).

Given a voice.
The People on War consultation yielded a mass of data collected from people involved in or affected by conflict.



F. Clarke/ICRC



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The purpose of ICRC cooperation activities is to enhance the capacity of National Societies to fulfil their own responsibilities as Red Cross or Red Crescent institutions in providing humanitarian services in their own countries. In particular, the ICRC assists and supports National Societies in their activities to:

- provide assistance to victims of conflict and internal strife (preparedness and response);
- promote international humanitarian law and spread knowledge of the principles, ideals and activities of the Movement;
- restore family links as part of the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing network.

Mutual support

In countries affected by conflict, the National Societies and the ICRC work together to mitigate human suffering by mounting joint assistance operations for the victims. Where there is conflict or internal



strife, the ICRC coordinates all inputs by the various components of the Movement, and supports the local National Societies through various capacity-building measures, mainly in the fields of operational management and the development of human resources.

Because National Societies and the ICRC share a responsibility to provide assistance to victims of conflict, they need each other to accomplish this common mission. The ICRC has developed a substantial expertise in the development and promotion of humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles, as well as a solid experience of action in conflicts, including tracing which is a primary responsibility of any National Society. This specific know-how is valuable to National Societies, which can count on the ICRC's support to enhance their performance in these areas.

Conversely, the wide network and intimate knowledge of local conditions which are provided by the members of National Societies are essential assets to the ICRC in the planning and conduct of its operations.

With support from the ICRC, the Afghan Red Crescent has been running bakeries in Kabul to provide destitute families with nutritious loaves of bread.

The main areas of ICRC cooperation with National Societies involve:

- providing technical expertise and material and financial assistance to National Societies to help them develop their skills, structures and working relationships so that they may carry out their tasks and responsibilities effectively and efficiently;
- advising and supporting National Societies on compliance with the conditions for recognition as a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, on the adoption and revision of their Statutes and on other legal matters, especially for the implementation of or compliance with humanitarian law;

- promoting the exchange of operational information and coordination of activities among the Movement's components so as to make the best use of available resources and contribute to mutually supportive action for the victims of armed conflicts and internal strife, and the beneficiaries of assistance, in accordance with the Seville Agreement (see p.10).

Cooperation activities are carried out in close consultation and coordination with the International Federation, which has the lead role in assisting National Societies in their overall development endeavours.



F. Pagetti/ICRC



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Relations with other organizations

Over the years, the number of agencies and organizations working in the humanitarian sphere has proliferated. While improving the overall capacity to respond to crises, this can also lead to confusion, duplication, competition and misunderstanding.

In order to contribute to a more efficient functioning of the humanitarian endeavour, the ICRC consults and coordinates with many international and non-governmental organizations operating in the same contexts, while maintaining its independence. In its humanitarian activities it attaches a great deal of importance to ensuring that all such organizations understand its approach and role so as to foster

harmonious cooperation and complementarity in the field.

Efforts have been undertaken to establish a standardized approach and a code of conduct for humanitarian work. The ICRC is one of the parties behind the "Code of Conduct for the



International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief", and supports all efforts aimed at ensuring quality assurance in the field.

Representing the victims

The ICRC attends the periodic meetings of international and regional organizations, either as an observer or as a guest, and participates in debates on issues of humanitarian concern in order to draw attention to the plight of victims and seek diplomatic support for its humanitarian activities.

For instance, the ICRC has observer status at the United Nations General Assembly, cooperates with the UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and, as a Standing Invitee, attends the meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a coordinating body which includes the main UN humanitarian agencies, the International Federation and NGOs. The ICRC also coordinates its activities with those of other organizations, as appropriate, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In addition, the ICRC maintains regular relations with:

- the Council of Europe;
- the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
- the Organization of African Unity (OAU);
- the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC);
- the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM);
- the Organization of American States (OAS);
- the League of Arab States;
- the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

Relations with the military

Recent years have seen a closer connection being forged between military and humanitarian action, even to the point where it is no longer clear where one ends and the other begins. The ICRC has raised its concerns about these developments in international fora, for it maintains that the independent and impartial nature of humanitarian action and the necessity of providing protection and assistance to all victims without discrimination makes it imperative that humanitarian activities be conducted independently of political and military considerations and objectives. At the same time, the ICRC believes there is much scope for constructive interaction and cooperation between humanitarian

organizations and the military, which can be enhanced by mutual consultation. It continues to advocate nonetheless for a clear distinction to be maintained — in substance and in appearance — between military and humanitarian operations. (See also Preventive action, p.34.)

Relations with the private sector

With the advent of globalization, the private sector is playing an increasingly prominent role in international relations. Some multinational corporations bear more and more influence on war situations and on the parties to the conflict.

Accordingly, the ICRC has recently adopted a comprehensive strategy aimed at developing its relations with the corporate world in a coherent fashion. The first objective of this strategy is to establish a substantive dialogue with the private sector based on the promotion of humanitarian principles. The second is to enhance the ICRC's efficiency and professionalism through exchanges with the private sector, i.e. to draw on specific skills and competencies, improve purchasing policy and step up fundraising efforts.



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How is the ICRC financed?

Who works for the ICRC?

The ICRC hires doctors and truck drivers, agricultural engineers and accountants, nutritionists and secretaries, nurses and carpenters, lawyers and mechanics. At some time or other, just about every profession is called upon to lend its expertise and goodwill to the humanitarian cause.

Delegates and specialists

There are two types of expatriate field staff: delegates and specialists. Young men and women, aged between 25 and 35, can train to become ICRC delegates, provided they are available to travel, have a university degree or equivalent diploma and speak English and

French. They must show resourcefulness and diplomacy, independence and ability to work in a team. They must be prepared to live in very trying situations where even their lives may be in danger. Delegates carry out visits to persons deprived of their freedom,



organize and implement assistance programmes and spread knowledge and awareness of international humanitarian law.

Delegates are by no means the only ones to offer their skills. People from a wide range of professions carry out missions for the ICRC, usually lasting from 6 to 12 months. In general, these "specialists" are expected to have three years of professional experience when they begin working for the ICRC. Recruitment criteria are more flexible than those for delegates with regard to age, civil status and language skills.

Recruitment channels and career opportunities

Swiss nationals and residents are recruited directly by the ICRC's headquarters in Geneva, whereas non-Swiss candidates apply to their respective National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. Recruitment procedures for non-Swiss nationals are governed by agreements between the ICRC and the respective National Societies.

Delegates can progress to positions of greater responsibility in the field, such as head of office, head of delegation or regional delegate, or specialize as coordinators for specific activities in areas such as protection, assistance or tracing. For experienced delegates there are also possibilities for career

advancement at Geneva headquarters. These include responsibility for an operational sector or positions of authority in other fields, for example human resources management, fundraising and communication. Specialists can advance their careers by taking on greater responsibility, either in the field or at headquarters, in their respective areas of expertise.

Drawing on local resources

The ICRC also hires national staff on the spot to act as interpreters, field officers or accountants, for instance, to assist in its health activities, to distribute relief supplies and collect Red Cross messages. Growing numbers of locally recruited staff are sent on mission to work in ICRC delegations in other countries.

In the countries where the ICRC operates, local Red Cross and Red Crescent staff work hand in hand with the delegates, lending their professional skills and first-hand knowledge of the terrain and its people.

The Committee

The Committee is the supreme policy-making body of the ICRC. It is composed of between 15 and 25 persons of Swiss nationality acting in their private capacity. Its members are co-opted; in other words, potential members are invited to join. The Committee meets regularly to establish the ICRC's doctrine and general policy and supervise the organization's activities.

The Committee's single Swiss nationality, a peculiarity of the ICRC — the origin of which lies in its foundation in Geneva by nationals of a traditionally neutral country — guarantees that the ICRC's action on an international level will be exclusively humanitarian, independent, impartial and neutral.

Because the Committee's members are all of the same nationality it does not mean that the ICRC's staff is exclusively Swiss. Indeed, the ICRC has embarked on a policy of "internationalization". Today, both at headquarters and in the field, the ICRC employs increasing numbers of people who do not hold Swiss passports.

B. Heger/ICRC



L. Luzemo/ICRC



T. Gassmann/ICRC

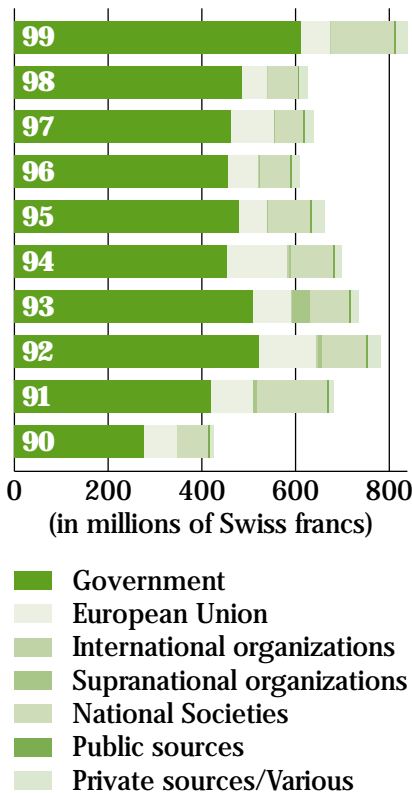


How is the ICRC financed?

The ICRC is funded by contributions from:

- the States party to the Geneva Conventions (governments);
- National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies;
- supranational organizations (such as the European Union);
- public and private sources.

Contributions in cash, kind and services, by category of donor 1990-1999



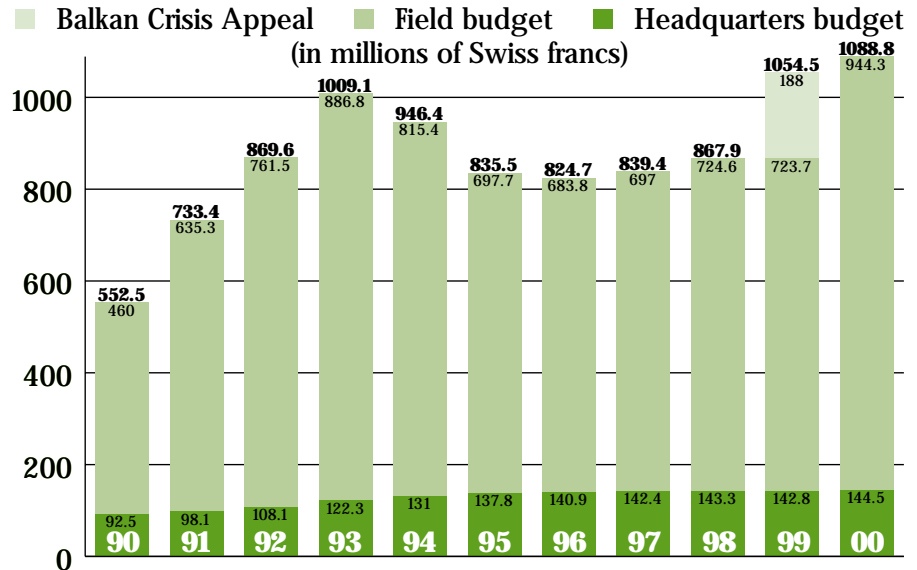
All contributions are voluntary and may be in the form of:

- cash;
- kind, that is, goods such as food (rice, beans, oil, etc.) and/or non-food items (such as vehicles, blankets, plastic sheeting, kitchenware and tents);
- services, such as specialist staff.

Appeals for funds

To obtain the necessary funding, the ICRC launches appeals, generally once a year. The appeals explain the issues and needs that the ICRC has decided to address and the objectives it has set for a given year. The appeals cover the ICRC's activities at its headquarters, on the one hand, and its operations in the field, on the other hand. The number and intensity of the situations covered by the ICRC vary from year to year, as do its budgets. The general trend over the last decade, however, is towards an increase in the number of conflict situations and in the ICRC's budget.

Evolution of ICRC headquarters and field budget (cash/kind/services) 1990-2000



Immediate action

Unlike many other organizations, the ICRC does not wait to receive the funds before it acts. On the contrary: once it has decided to respond to urgent needs in the field, it acts immediately.

However, at any given time, the ICRC may have only very limited reserves to cover its operations. It thus takes financial risks and counts on its contributors to come forward with the required funding as soon as possible. Since funds are not without limits, the ICRC seeks to ensure not only that its operations and activities answer essential needs and have a realistic dimension, but also that the budgets it wants to see financed are in tune with what can reasonably be expected from its contributors.

While the ICRC seeks to keep this balance, the institution's existence and ability to operate ultimately depend at all times on the goodwill of the international community to meet its financial needs. Contributions must also be made available in time, so that they can be used with sufficient flexibility, where, when and for whom they are most needed.

Donor requirements versus ICRC operational flexibility

The bulk of cash financing for the ICRC's field operations comes from some 20 governmental and supra-national donors. However, major efforts are constantly being made to broaden the number of regular donors. Budgetary difficulties or internal control structures within the different donor States sometimes lead them to "earmark" their contributions to the ICRC by attaching particular conditions and requirements. The ICRC accepts this, provided the balance and independence of its operations is not jeopardized. Otherwise, the conditions attached to the contribution are re-examined with the donor. Where no agreement is reached as to an acceptable allocation of a proposed funding, the contribution may have to be refused. Fortunately, this occurs very rarely.

Emergency response:
the ICRC acts swiftly in times of crisis.



M. Kleiner/ICRC



If you would like to find out more about the ICRC or to explore in greater detail some of the subjects covered in this brochure, visit the ICRC's web site at: www.icrc.org

Here you will find:

- the latest news
- spotlight on current issues and topics
- the ICRC's appeals for the current year
- the family news network
- photos
- publications
- links to the Federation and Red Cross/Red Crescent sites
- job opportunities with the ICRC
- and lots more...

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance.

It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict.

It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Armed conflict is a prominent feature of our human landscape. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded nearly a century and a half ago to preserve a measure of humanity in the midst of war. Even in war there are limits: limits on how warfare is conducted and limits on how combatants behave.

The set of rules established with this in mind — and endorsed by 189 nations throughout the world — is known as international humanitarian law, of which the Geneva Conventions are the bedrock.

"Discover the ICRC" explains what the ICRC is, how it came into being and how it works today.