ICRC DEPLORES MURDER OF EMPLOYEE IN CAMBODIA

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Mr Chin Chun, a local employee of the ICRC's tracing agency in Cambodia, who was murdered in the course of his duties last Wednesday. Mr Chin Chun was returning from a remote part of Ampil district in the north-west of the country when he was stopped by two armed men wearing military fatigues who wanted to steal the motorcycle he was riding. According to witnesses, Mr Chin Chun was shot dead during the incident. The two men involved have since been arrested by a local army unit.

Mr Chin Chun, 36, was married with five children. He had been working for the ICRC since 1992.

The rapid rise of crime in Cambodia is a source of much concern to the ICRC, and is forcing it to review its working procedures. The additional security measures now required are increasingly hampering its operations.

The ICRC has been working in Cambodia since 1979 to assist the victims of the protracted conflict that has ravaged the country. At present it is focusing its efforts on helping the victims of the many millions of landmines strewn in paddy fields and forests and on roads and paths. In 1996 alone, the ICRC's orthopaedic centre in Battambang produced and fitted prostheses for well over 1,000 amputees, including many children. The ICRC also runs the Cambodian national blood bank.

The ICRC expresses its heartfelt sympathy to the family of Mr Chin Chun.
Communication to the press No. 97/02
5 February 1997

TWO ICRC WORKERS TAKEN HOSTAGE IN TAJIKISTAN

Geneva (ICRC) - Late on Wednesday 5 February, the ICRC delegation in Dushanbe was informed that two of its staff, an expatriate and a local employee, had been taken hostage in the lower Garm Valley by a local commander. So far no ransom demands have been made and no explanation given.

The same commander had previously abducted five members of the United Nations Observer Mission in Tajikistan and five members of the Russian press. The ICRC team were returning to base from the town of Tavildara, where they had been conducting a survey to ascertain the needs of the many people severely affected by the brutal conflict in the country.

The ICRC, together with the UN Mission, deplores this abduction. It is yet another blatant violation of international humanitarian law and an act of direct aggression against those whose sole purpose is to aid victims of war. The ICRC joins the Observer Mission in calling upon all those with influence in the area to take every possible step to ensure the speedy release of all hostages.

Further information: Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 79 357 50 03

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Communication to the press No. 97/03
Geneva, 10 February 1997

FIRST MEETING TO DISCUSS A TREATY BANNING ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES OPENS IN VIENNA ON 12 FEBRUARY 1997

Geneva (ICRC) - Representatives of governments, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations will meet in Vienna next week to begin consultations on the text of an international agreement to ban the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel landmines. The meeting, to be hosted by Austria from 12-14 February, will consider a draft treaty prepared by the country's government. Discussions are expected to cover a number of issues, including the precise definition of an anti-personnel mine, the importance of an immediate and total prohibition on mines as against a phased approach and the need to establish a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with the treaty. The ICRC, which strongly supports a total ban on anti-personnel mines, will attend the meeting as an expert observer. The drafting process is intended to lead to the formal signature of a treaty in Ottawa in December 1997.

This initiative was taken in response to the disappointing results of the Review Conference of the 1980 United Nations Weapons Convention, which ended in Geneva in May 1996. Owing to the lack of a consensus, the Conference, which was convened specifically to address the problem of anti-personnel mines, was able to agree only on limited restrictions on the use of these weapons instead of an outright ban. The meeting next week in Vienna should build on the momentum created by the adoption in 1996 by the UN General Assembly of a resolution (51/45S) calling on States to complete "as soon as possible" negotiations for an effective, legally binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. This landmark resolution was supported by 155 States, with none opposing it.

The forthcoming meeting also reflects the efforts of the "Ottawa Group", which was set up in October 1996 and is composed of 50 pro-ban States. At the time, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs invited all governments to return to Ottawa in December 1997 to sign an international treaty banning anti-personnel mines. To date, 53 States have publicly expressed their support for a global ban. Of these, 28 have already put an end to the use of anti-personnel mines by their own armed forces and 15 are destroying their stocks.

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Further meetings to discuss the text of a new treaty are to be held in Vienna, Brussels and Oslo later this year. In parallel, the Geneva-based UN Conference on Disarmament is discussing proposals to put the negotiation of a ban on anti-personnel mines on its agenda. However, the consensus required to do so has not yet been achieved.

The ICRC will actively support the negotiation of an effective international agreement to outlaw the use of anti-personnel landmines, which each year kill or maim an estimated 24,000 people, mostly civilians in rural developing communities.

Further information:
Peter Herby or Stuart Maslen, ICRC Legal Division, Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2729/ 2533,
Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Communication Department, Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2319
Communication to the press No. 97/04
11 February 1997

AWARD OF THE PAUL REUTER PRIZE

Geneva (ICRC) - The 1997 Paul Reuter Prize for outstanding works in the field of international humanitarian law has, by unanimous decision, been awarded jointly to

Major General A.P.V. Rogers
Director of Army Legal Services in the United Kingdom,
for his work entitled Law on the Battlefield

and to

Professor Geoffrey Best
of St. Anthony's College, Oxford University,
for his work entitled War and Law since 1945.

The jury emphasized the excellent quality of these works, which make a significant contribution to international humanitarian law.

Law on the Battlefield approaches international humanitarian law from the angle of military operations. Aimed at military lawyers and students of public international law, it focuses on the legal rules that should be known and incorporated into the military decision-making process by all officers holding command responsibility. The work sheds light on some rather obscure aspects of the law of armed conflict, without being too technical for non-lawyers or civilian readers.

War and Law since 1945 offers new insight, from an historical point of view, into the phenomenon of war and the limits placed on it by humanitarian law. In so doing it highlights the relationship between civilization and war. The central question addressed is whether legal restrictions really have a moderating impact on the conduct of war, whether they render military operations less cruel, and whether they provide broad protection for those affected by violence.

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The jury of the Paul Reuter Prize, chaired by Mr Paolo Bernasconi, a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), also comprises Professors Giorgio Malinverni and Christian Dominicé of the University of Geneva, Professor Daniel Thürer of the University of Zürich, member of the ICRC, Françoise Krill, ICRC Legal Adviser, and Hans-Peter Gasser, Editor in Chief of the *International Review of the Red Cross*.

In 1982 the late Professor Reuter, former Professor Emeritus at the Paris University of Law, Economics and Social Sciences and former Chairman of the United Nations International Law Commission, made a donation enabling the ICRC to set up the Paul Reuter Fund, the income of which is used to support projects which promote knowledge and understanding of international humanitarian law.

The Fund also provides for the award every three years of the Paul Reuter Prize, worth 2,000 Swiss francs, in recognition of a particularly outstanding work in the field of international humanitarian law.

This is the fifth such award since the Fund was created. Professor Best and Major General Rogers will receive the prize at a ceremony in spring 1997.

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Communication to the press No. 97/05
14 March 1997

ALBANIA: THE ICRC APPEALS FOR RESPECT FOR THE RED CROSS EMBLEM AND HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is deeply concerned about the alarming situation of lawlessness in Albania and the plethora of weapons circulating among the population there. In the absence of law enforcement, the ICRC calls on all Albanians to exercise restraint, to respect the Red Cross emblem and basic humanitarian principles, and to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the population, and those caring for them, are spared the effects of the violence.

Most of the people killed or injured since the beginning of the unrest have reportedly been victims of stray bullets fired indiscriminately by civilians. Warehouses, hospitals and social-welfare institutions such as orphanages have been looted. As a result, hospitals and local humanitarian organizations are facing major shortages of food and medicines.

The ICRC has eight expatriate staff members in Tirana and is working closely with the Albanian Red Cross, which remains active throughout the country. It has provided the Albanian Red Cross with essential surgical material sufficient for the treatment of 400 wounded. Food and medical supplies have also been delivered to the hospital in the town of Vlore. Further surveys will be carried out to assess needs in the south of the country, where the ICRC plans to open an office.

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Communication to the press No. 97/06
18 March 1997

ALBANIA: ICRC LAUNCHES APPEAL FOR 15 MILLION SWISS FRANCS

Geneva (ICRC) - On 17 March 1997 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) launched an appeal for 15 million Swiss francs to cover the needs of victims of the crisis in Albania for an initial period of three months. This sum will also cover activities conducted by the Albanian Red Cross with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. As always in cases of internal disturbances, the ICRC is in charge of operations.

Albania is practically cut off from the outside world and is receiving no supplies of food or medicines. The situation is all the more alarming because reserves are running out and considerable numbers of armed men are roaming freely around the country. As a prompt and well-planned response is essential to bring aid to people in distress, the ICRC and the Federation have decided to coordinate their efforts and combine their activities. Nevertheless, to avoid a major crisis, the international community must mobilize to reactivated the country's supply systems.

In a first phase, following a survey carried out on the spot by ICRC teams, emergency food aid and medical assistance will be delivered as a matter of priority to hospitals and institutions housing some 10,000 people. Food parcels will be distributed to about 250,000 people considered to be particularly vulnerable (out of a total population of 3.4 million). The distributions will be carried out by the Albanian Red Cross, which will receive additional logistic means under an ongoing programme of support instituted by the Federation in 1992.

Continued looting and the general lack of security are exposing part of the population to the risk of harassment, arrest or acts of revenge. The ICRC is deeply concerned about these problems and is trying to make contact with all the relevant authorities as quickly as possible.

The ICRC has 10 delegates working in Tirana and in the south of the country, where it is planning to open an office within the next few days.

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Communication to the press No. 97/07
24 March 1997

PERU: ICRC'S POSITION REGARDING AD HOC COMMISSION

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has taken note of the establishment in Peru of an ad hoc commission to assess conditions in the country's prisons. The ICRC earnestly hopes that this will not only be a step forward in efforts to resolve the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, but that it will also lead to an early resumption of ICRC visits to Peruvian penitentiary establishments.

Such visits have been suspended by the Peruvian authorities since the hostage situation began on 17 December 1996. Despite repeated approaches, the ICRC has not yet been authorized to resume its activities for detainees.

Moreover, in spite of its knowledge of the situation in Peruvian prisons, the ICRC is not in a position to take part in the work of the new commission. In all countries where its delegates visit detainees, the ICRC follows certain working procedures. These include having access to all detainees without discrimination, being allowed to talk to them without witnesses, and being authorized to repeat the visits. Strict adherence to these procedures guarantees the credibility of the ICRC's work, and no exception is made in any circumstances.

The ICRC has maintained a permanent presence in Peru since 1984. Its activities focus on assisting the civilian victims of armed violence in the country and visiting persons detained for security reasons.

At 17 December 1996 the ICRC was visiting 4,247 detainees in Peru in order to assess their conditions of detention. On the basis of its observations, the ICRC submitted confidential reports to the Peruvian authorities drawing attention to matters that required improvement in light of the applicable provisions of international humanitarian law.

At the end of 1996 the ICRC was visiting almost 140,000 detainees in over 60 countries.
ZAIRE: ICRC DEMANDS ACCESS TO CONFLICT VICTIMS

Geneva (ICRC) - In spite of the aid which has been trickling in over the past few days to help feed refugees gathered along a few kilometres of railway line between the towns of Kisangani and Ubundu, the plight of Rwandan refugees in Zaire remains disastrous. Although the fighting is no longer driving the refugees - most of them women and children - further into the interior, countless people have already died or are on the point of dying of exhaustion, hunger and disease, despite the efforts deployed in particular by the volunteers of the Zairian Red Cross.

In view of the magnitude and urgency of the needs, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) requests the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) to grant its delegates unrestricted access to the victims. In limiting the distribution of humanitarian aid to the refugee assembly points along the railway line, and especially in forcing those having succeeded in reaching the outskirts of Kisangani - which is the logistics centre for the entire humanitarian operation - to move away from the town, the ICRC is concerned that any new forced population movement will lead to the death of thousands of people.

With the arrival of heavy rains in areas with dense vegetation, the scale of needs has become truly alarming. It is no longer merely a matter of feeding the hungry but of coping with serious medical emergencies (dysentery and malaria are already taking their toll, and there are fears of a cholera epidemic and outbreaks of other fatal diseases). The ICRC hereby appeals to all concerned to respect the victims' right to assistance and protection and demands immediate access to these people in desperate need of help.

The plight of the refugees gathered along the Kisangani-Ubundu railway line must not overshadow that of the tens of thousands of other conflict victims from Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi scattered all over southern Zaire, where every day ICRC delegates report having found people in a state of extreme exhaustion.

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Communication to the press No. 97/09
5 April 1997

NAGORNY-KARABAKH CONFLICT: 
10 DETAINES RELEASED UNDER THE ICRC AUSPICES

ICRC (Geneva) - Ten detainees were released today under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in an operation carried out by the ICRC delegations of Yerevan (Armenia) and Baku (Azerbaijan).

The four detainees from Azerbaijan, who had been regularly visited by ICRC delegates, were released unilaterally by the Armenian authorities and repatriated to Baku. Six other detainees from Armenia, who had also received ICRC visits, were freed by the Azeri authorities and returned to Yerevan.

The releases followed on a proposal made by the three co-chairmen of the "Minsk Group" of the OSCE, the United States, the Russian Federation and France. The authorities of Nagorny-Karabakh, for their part, have not yet followed up on the "Minsk Group's" proposal.

The ICRC encourages the Azerbaijani authorities to carry out further releases in the coming days, and invites the Nagorny-Karabakh authorities to give a favourable consideration to the "Minsk Group's" proposal.

The ICRC is pleased that these liberations have allowed ten people to return to freedom. Nevertheless, the ICRC has appealed to all the authorities concerned to release all those captured and still being held in relation with the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict.

The ICRC also reminds all the parties concerned that it was vital to set up a process to ascertain the whereabouts of missing persons and thus put an end to their families' anxiety. Any association between the issue of detainees and that of missing persons must, however, be avoided.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 79 202 3670

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Communication to the press No. 97/10
14 April 1997

ALBANIA: ICRC DELIVERS AID TO THE NORTH

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has just completed a round of distributions of food and medical supplies to social welfare institutions, hospitals and homes for the elderly and the disabled in the north of Albania. Extensive surveys throughout the country identified those institutions as housing the most needy among the Albanian population, since they used to rely on government support before the collapse of official supply channels.

To date, the ICRC and the Albanian Red Cross have distributed some 40 tonnes of food and 15 tonnes of medical supplies to social welfare institutions in the north, centre and south of the country.

Those receiving humanitarian aid say that the still highly volatile security situation makes it unsafe to stock large quantities of food, so it is essential for them to receive only small amounts at a time. The ICRC is consequently planning to carry out regular but limited relief distributions. At the same time, the organization reaffirms its resolve to remain independent of any military or political operation.

The ICRC emphasizes once more that the most urgent needs in Albania are not of a humanitarian nature. International military and political efforts should focus on restoring law and order and on re-establishing a national administration and properly functioning State and commercial distribution channels. As a result needs would diminish and the humanitarian situation would undergo an immediate improvement.

The ICRC has been present in Albania since early March. It currently has some 20 expatriates working in the country, including a delegate from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies attached to its delegation, and has opened offices in the capital Tirana and in Gjirokaster in the south.

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Communication to the press No. 97/11
18 April 1997

SOUTHERN AFRICA TAKES LEAD ON LANDMINES

Geneva (ICRC) - The future of anti-personnel landmines in the southern Africa region will be considered at a seminar for member States of the Southern African Development Community next week. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Cornelio Sommaruga says he hopes the Harare seminar will mark a turning point in efforts to free southern Africa from both the human suffering and the social and economic burdens that result from landmines.

The 21-23 April seminar in Harare, Zimbabwe, is being held in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the government of Zimbabwe. It will bring together representatives of Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs and is intended to promote a dialogue between military and humanitarian experts.

At the opening session on 21 April, which will be attended by the media, statements will be made by Zimbabwian Minister of Defence Moven Mahachi and William Nhara of the OAU Conflict Management Division. The three days of discussions will focus on the military utility of anti-personnel mines, alternatives to anti-personnel mines, and regional and international cooperation in mine clearance.

In a year that should see the conclusion of a new international treaty prohibiting anti-personnel landmines, this seminar offers an opportunity for the States of southern Africa to take a leading role in the international effort to eliminate one of the great scourges of the twentieth century. The Ottawa Conference, which in October 1996 brought together 50 States in favour of a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, specifically asked the ICRC in its Action Plan to organize the seminar.

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Communication to the press No. 97/12
Geneva, 19 April 1997

Nagorny-Karabakh conflict:
Five detainees released under ICRC auspices

Geneva (ICRC) - Azerbaijan unilaterally released five Armenian detainees on 19 April under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The five, all civilians, were then flown from Baku, Azerbaijan to Yerevan, Armenia aboard an aircraft chartered by the ICRC.

Before proceeding with the repatriation, delegates ascertained that the five - who had been regularly visited by the ICRC - were returning of their own free will.

This release followed the freeing on 5 April of 10 detainees (four Azerbaijani military personnel and six Armenian civilians). In addition, a detainee was released by the Azerbaijani authorities on 16 April and transferred to the Russian Federation. All three releases follow a joint appeal by France, the Russian Federation and the United States, which co-chair the "Minsk Group" of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The ICRC is encouraged by these developments and is confident that they are part of an accelerating process which will now lead to the freeing of the 10 military personnel currently being detained and regularly visited by the ICRC in Baku and Stepanakert / Khan Kendi. Indeed, the International Committee calls on the authorities concerned to release all those still being held in connection with the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict.

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Communication to the press No. 97/13
2 May 1997

NAGORNY-KARABAKH CONFLICT: TEN DETAINES RELEASED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

Geneva (ICRC) - Ten military personnel detained in connection with the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict were released on 2 May 1997 under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in an operation conducted with the help of the organization's delegations in Yerevan, Armenia, and Baku, Azerbaijan.

Four of the former detainees, of Azeri origin, were freed by the Nagorny-Karabakh authorities and transferred to Baku. The other six, of Armenian origin, were released by the Azerbaijani authorities and transferred to Yerevan. All ten had been regularly visited by ICRC delegates during their detention, and on their release delegates made sure that each one was going to the destination of his choice. The transfers were carried out simultaneously aboard two ICRC-chartered aircraft.

The ICRC welcomes these releases, which have enabled ten men to regain their freedom. It nevertheless calls on all the authorities concerned to ensure that all persons captured and still held in connection with the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict are freed.

The ICRC also reminds all parties involved of the need to establish procedures aimed at ascertaining the whereabouts of persons reported missing, so as to put an end to the anxiety suffered by their families. There should be no attempt, however, to link the issue of persons still detained with that of missing persons.

This operation, the fourth of its kind, brings the total number of people freed in this context since 5 April 1997 to 26.

The releases follow a proposal put forward by France, the Russian Federation and the United States, which co-chair the "Minsk Group" of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.
Joint communication to the press
Federation No. 97/07
ICRC No. 97/14

Geneva, 7 May 1997

WORLD RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT DAY

World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is being celebrated tomorrow, 8 May, by National Societies around the world, in honour of the birthday of Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross.

In Tajikistan, four teams representing the International Federation, the ICRC, the Tajik Red Crescent staff and volunteers will compete in a soccer tournament. Like many other Societies, the Kenyan Red Cross is broadcasting a series of radio spots to raise awareness of humanitarian work. In Europe, the Swiss Red Cross is launching a nation-wide campaign to encourage people to share their happiness with less fortunate people.

Born in Geneva on 8 May in 1828, Swiss businessman Henry Dunant was moved by the suffering he witnessed on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859. He subsequently devoted his life to campaigning for the creation of voluntary relief societies to care for the war-wounded and dying. Henry Dunant's ideals inspired the seven fundamental principles which guide the work of the Movement: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is made up of 171 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

For further information, please contact:
Doris Pfister, Deputy Head of ICRC Media Service (41 22) 730 2317
Jón Valfells, Head of the Federation's Media Service (41 22) 730 4374
ZAIRE: TEN VOLUNTEERS OF THE ZAIRIAN RED CROSS KILLED IN KENGE

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was deeply shocked to learn of the death of 10 first-aid workers of the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire, killed some hours ago in Kenge, a town 200 km east of Kinshasa. According to information received by the ICRC delegation in the Zairian capital, the tragedy occurred as the volunteers were assisting people wounded in the fighting which had been raging in Kenge. Some 200 civilians were reportedly killed in the clashes, and 126 wounded have been admitted to hospital, 25 of them in critical condition.

The ICRC calls on the belligerents to respect all persons not taking part in the fighting, in particular civilians, prisoners and the wounded, and also the staff and buildings placed under the protection of the Red Cross emblem. ICRC delegates and Zairian Red Cross personnel will attempt to reach Kenge in the coming hours to provide medical assistance to the hospital.

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Communication to the press No 97/16
Geneva, 6 June 1997

LANDMINE VICTIMS: ICRC APPEALS FOR 18 MILLION SWISS FRANCS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today launched a Special Appeal for 18 million Swiss francs (12.24 million US dollars) to donor governments, supranational organizations, and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The funds are to be used to provide greater assistance to the victims of anti-personnel landmines. They will be allocated to the ICRC's 19 prosthetic/orthotic projects in Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Georgia, Iraq and Rwanda, and to surgical programmes for mine victims in Afghanistan and Rwanda.

The appeal was launched today by Paul Grossrieder, ICRC Director of General Affairs, at a meeting in Geneva of Permanent Mission representatives. Mr Grossrieder stressed the urgent need to care for those who fall victim to the landmines epidemic and at the same time to strive for a total ban on this horrifying weapon.

In addition to raising funds for the ICRC's own programmes and activities, the Special Appeal is also intended to help mobilize financial support for the ICRC-administered Special Fund for the Disabled. Using the Special Fund, the ICRC regularly visits and assists many of the 26 projects it has handed over to local organizations, the ministries of health and social welfare, or specialized non-governmental organizations in 16 other countries, providing technical and material support where needed.

Landmines, recognized worldwide as having reached epidemic proportions, are responsible for the worst of all war wounds, usually causing survivors some form of permanent disability. Victims are left requiring a lifetime of rehabilitative care.

Child amputees outgrow their artificial limbs every six months; for adults, the replacement period is every three to five years. A 10-year-old amputee will need approximately 15 prostheses during his or her lifetime, each costing on average 180 Swiss francs. That amounts to 2,700 Swiss francs over the course of a lifetime -- an insurmountable cost in countries where the average per capita income may be only 15 to 25 Swiss francs per month. In such cases, crutches are the only alternative.

The four-page appeal can be faxed on request.
A HUMANITARIAN FORUM TO DISCUSS THREATS TO HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Humanitarian action is increasingly jeopardized by refusal of access to large groups of conflict victims, by methods of warfare that run counter to international law and by growing threats to the safety of aid workers themselves.

At the invitation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), some 70 representatives of donor governments and humanitarian organizations will therefore gather in Wolfsberg (Ermatingen, Switzerland) from 8 to 10 June 1997 for an open discussion on this and other issues. The main themes will be the growing obstacles to humanitarian action, and environmental degradation as a cause of armed conflicts. This forum is a follow-up to the "humanitarian summit" convened by European Commissioner Emma Bonino in Madrid on 14 December 1995.

Humanitarian organizations need the support of governments to create a "humanitarian space" in which protection and assistance can be provided in an impartial and independent manner. On the other hand, political action is needed to put an end to serious violations of international law. Governments sometimes respond by engaging in humanitarian action themselves rather than taking direct political action to change the situation on the ground. Regular dialogue between humanitarian agencies and political decision-makers is therefore essential for more effective protection of the victims of armed conflict.

Also, politicians must be aware today of their responsibility towards the inhabitants of tomorrow's world. If forests are cut down and disappear, if the soil is exhausted, if clean water becomes scarce and population growth continues at the present rate, future generations may well increasingly go to war to settle disputes over natural resources.

Representatives of 18 governments, six UN agencies and a number of other organizations including the World Bank, will attend this high-level meeting.

A video press conference relayed from Wolfsberg will be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 10 June at 1.30 p.m. Questions can be asked in English and French.

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Communication to the press No. 97/18
12 June 1997

CONGO BRAZZAVILLE: ICRC URGES RESPECT FOR HUMANITARIAN RULES

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is extremely concerned about the fighting that has been raging in Brazzaville for more than a week, undoubtedly claiming numerous civilian lives in this highly populated urban area, and the ICRC fears that further hostilities will have disastrous consequences in humanitarian terms.

The ICRC calls on all the parties involved to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law, and in particular to make a clear distinction between combatants and civilians and to respect persons who are not or are no longer taking part in the hostilities. It also emphasizes that it is prohibited to launch indiscriminate attacks endangering the civilian population, to use civilians as human shields, and to terrorize the population. Individuals no longer participating in the fighting, such as wounded or sick combatants, must be collected and given proper care, and those captured must be treated humanely.

The intensity of the hostilities has compelled the ICRC and the Congolese Red Cross to suspend their activities in the capital. If the Red Cross teams are to be able to resume their work, the parties must show respect for the red cross emblem and guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers.

The ICRC urges the warring parties to do everything possible to ensure compliance with these basic rules and principles.

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Geneva (ICRC), 20 June 1997 - More than 100 States, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are expected to attend the International Conference for a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines, meeting in Brussels from 24 to 27 June. The Conference is hosted by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and will be held at the Palais des Congrès.

The ICRC has been asked to take part in the capacity of expert-observer. Its President, Cornelio Sommaruga, is invited as special guest to the Conference and will address the issue of an integrated approach to victim assistance in Panel C, scheduled on 26 June. He will be available for interviews in Brussels on 26 and 27 June.

The ICRC delegation will be led by Mrs Louise Doswald-Beck, Deputy Head of the Legal Division. Legal Adviser Peter Herby will present the conclusions of a study commissioned by the ICRC on the military utility of anti-personnel mines in Panel A on 26 June. Dr Chris Giannou, a war surgeon with extensive experience in mine-infested countries, will discuss the ICRC medical viewpoint at the Royal Military Museum on 25 June. Representatives of the Austrian, Belgian, British, Danish and Finnish National Red Cross Societies will also be attending the Conference as special advisers to their respective government delegations.

The office of the ICRC delegation will be located in Room 14 of the Palais des Congrès. Background information, publications, films and photos on the mines problem will be available to the media.

The Brussels Conference, as the first official follow-up to the Ottawa Conference held last October, is to review progress towards a worldwide prohibition of anti-personnel mines and to agree on the action required to bring the negotiation of a treaty banning these weapons to a successful conclusion before the end of 1997.

In February 1994, the ICRC was among the first humanitarian organizations to issue a public call for global action against anti-personnel mines. Since then it has contributed its broad expertise in international humanitarian law, assistance to victims, advocacy and political aspects to the ongoing international process towards a total ban.
Communication to the press No 97/19
Geneva/Brussels, 27 June 1997

BRUSSELS CONFERENCE SETS 95 STATES ON PATH TO ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN

Geneva/Brussels (ICRC) - Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), hailed the success of the Brussels International Conference for a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Landmines, which this morning adopted a declaration in which 95 States committed themselves to conclude an anti-personnel landmine ban treaty by the end of 1997. "The Brussels Conference has demonstrated that the momentum towards a ban of this pernicious weapon is now irreversible," said the ICRC President.

In associating themselves with the Brussels Declaration, States affirm that the essential elements of the treaty should include: a comprehensive ban on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines; the destruction of stockpiled and removed anti-personnel landmines; and international co-operation and assistance in the field of mine clearance in affected countries.

Detailed negotiations on the wording of the new international humanitarian law treaty will take place at a Diplomatic Conference in Oslo in September. Only States which have signed the Brussels Declaration will be allowed to participate actively in these negotiations, although other States, the ICRC, UN agencies and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines will be able to attend as observers. It is expected that the final treaty will be signed in Ottawa in the first week of December.

In his address to the Conference, President Sommaruga described the Ottawa process as "an unequivocal expression of the revulsion of public and statesmen alike at the 'mass destruction in slow motion' that we have witnessed through the widespread use of anti-personnel mines." He urged the 155 States attending the Conference to commit themselves not only to a ban of anti-personnel mines in the short term but also to long-term programmes to meet the needs of mines victims and to clear existing mines.

For further information please contact Peter Herby, Legal Division, ICRC Geneva, Tel: ++ 41 22 730 2729
MISSING PERSONS IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: FAMILIES MORE CLOSELY INVOLVED

Geneva (ICRC) - The authorities, the families concerned, local Red Cross organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have all committed themselves to a new and closer partnership in the effort to trace persons reported missing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Almost 20,000 people remain unaccounted for, and their families are living in uncertainty or are waiting to mourn their dead and give them a decent reburial.

The Working Group set up to gather information on persons reported missing in connection with the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina met under the chairmanship of the ICRC in Geneva on 17 and 18 July. The heads of the country's three State Commissions on missing persons and representatives of family associations from all sides were present, and an official from the Office of the High Representative and government officials of the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia attended as observers.

At this week's meeting - the eleventh - the members of the Working Group decided to associate the families fully in the group's proceedings and to put their interests at the centre of discussions. Thousands of families whose loved ones are still missing not only endure mental and emotional anguish but are often struggling with social problems, administrative difficulties and the legal implications of their unclear status.

The group felt strongly that it was unacceptable to leave unidentified bodies in unguarded mass or individual graves, and that exhumations had to be given top priority. Remains must be identified and returned to their families. The identification process is complex and will take a long time, so the group decided to prepare temporary resting places for remains which could not be immediately identified, pending possible future identification. The funding of this vast project is a problem, and the Working Group urged the donor community to become more actively involved and to provide the necessary funds.

Dissatisfaction was expressed about the inadequacy of the replies and information on the missing supplied so far by the respective authorities. To date only 1,200 cases have been resolved. The ICRC now has a consolidated database with details on almost 20,000 missing persons whose files have been constituted at the request of their families. This makes it possible to analyse specific items of information such as the time and place of disappearance. The strong commitment of the parties and a close partnership with the families is essential to yield results.
Communication to the press No. 97/21
23 July 1997

ASIAN REGIONAL SEMINAR ON LANDMINES: A CALL FOR ACTION

Geneva (ICRC) - A regional seminar for Asian military and strategic analysts meeting in Manila ended today with a call for governments in Asia to take urgent action to address the disastrous humanitarian implications of the use of anti-personnel landmines.

The seminar concluded that the appalling consequences in humanitarian terms of the deployment of anti-personnel landmines far outweighed their military utility in most conflicts, and that the international community should work for their prohibition and elimination as a matter of urgency.

The seminar, attended by Asian defence analysts from 18 countries, was organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in cooperation with the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Philippine National Red Cross. The participants, who were invited in a personal capacity, included serving and retired military officers, defence officials and representatives of military and strategic institutes.

Key recommendations made to governments in the region include:
• participation in forthcoming negotiations aimed at the conclusion of a new treaty imposing a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel landmines by the end of 1997;
• the rapid adoption of a regional agreement to prohibit remotely delivered anti-personnel landmines (dispersed by helicopter, plane or artillery), so as to prevent an escalation of mine warfare and higher levels of civilian casualties;
• increased regional cooperation in mine clearance and assistance to mine victims.

To date, six States in the region (Cambodia, Fiji, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines) have signed the Brussels Declaration whereby they undertake to negotiate an international treaty prohibiting anti-personnel mines with the aim of signing it in Ottawa, Canada, by the end of the year. Worldwide, one hundred States are firmly committed to the "Ottawa process".

The Manila seminar and its recommendations are particularly significant as this is the first time that senior defence strategists from the region have gathered to examine the use of landmines in Asia. The ICRC believes that a greater degree of involvement by countries in Asia will be crucial in efforts to eliminate the global scourge of landmines and the terrible suffering they inflict.
Communication to the press No. 97/22
31 July 1997

ISRAEL - ICRC CONDEMNS KILLING OF CIVILIANS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) strongly condemns yesterday's bombings in Jerusalem, in which 15 people were killed and scores of others wounded.

The ICRC is deeply concerned by such intolerable acts and by the rise in tension over the past several months, both of which give reason to fear that the situation may escalate further. It appeals for compliance with the most elementary principles of humanity and stresses that indiscriminate attacks on civilians are a serious violation of the basic principles of international humanitarian law.

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Communication to the press No. 97/23
11 August 1997

AFGHANISTAN: ICRC DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT FAILURE TO RESPECT BASIC HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

The ongoing fighting between the Northern Coalition and the Taliban in northern Afghanistan has prompted a major humanitarian alert and a marked increase in the emergency response of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The ICRC wishes to remind all parties involved of their obligation to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population, the wounded, and persons captured and detained in connection with the conflict.

Since May 1997, in accordance with its mandate, the ICRC has had access to and registered some 3,400 detained combatants and civilians. However, despite repeated representations, the organization has been consistently refused access to an estimated 3,000 additional detainees held mainly in Faryab, Jowzian and Balkh provinces. The ICRC deplores this failure to comply with humanitarian principles and solemnly appeals to the relevant authorities in the north to respect their commitments and facilitate access to all places of detention under their control.

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Communication to the press No. 97/24
26 August 1997

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES: CRUCIAL DECISIONS FOR OSLO CONFERENCE

On behalf of landmine victims worldwide, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is renewing its appeal to States to conclude a treaty prohibiting anti-personnel landmines at the Oslo Diplomatic Conference due to open on 1 September. More than 100 pro-ban countries are expected to be represented at the Conference, which is scheduled to last three weeks. The ICRC urges these States to stand firm in their commitment to a total ban.

The ICRC maintains that a total and immediate prohibition on the use of all anti-personnel mines is essential for the effectiveness and credibility of the treaty. Such an unequivocal ban has been crucial to the success of similar controls on weapons imposed by humanitarian law, such as the Protocol on blinding laser weapons negotiated in September 1995 the Geneva Protocol on poison gas adopted in 1925 and the prohibition on expanding (dum-dum) bullets agreed in 1899.

The ICRC believes that the definition of an anti-personnel mine in the treaty should be clear and unambiguous, and should encompass all types of anti-personnel mines, whether used on their own or in conjunction with other weapons. In this regard, the ICRC supports the definition proposed by the government of Austria.

The ICRC has made a strong appeal for a "no reservations" clause to be maintained in the final version of the treaty, similar to the provision in the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. This will ensure that all States are subject to the same obligations and will thereby build confidence in the treaty's implementation.

Every year an estimated 24,000 people, mostly civilians, are killed or injured by anti-personnel mines and millions more lives are disrupted by the loss of fertile agricultural land and by problems of access to food and water. An unambiguous and legally binding treaty banning anti-personnel mines is central to efforts to put an end to this humanitarian emergency.

Further information: Stuart Maslen, ICRC Mines Unit, Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2533
or Louise Doswald-Beck, ICRC Legal Division, Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2664
Joint communication to the press No. 97/25
Geneva, 17 September 1997

OSLO CONFERENCE: LANDMINES BANNED

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies wholeheartedly welcome and endorse the new treaty of international humanitarian law forever banning anti-personnel mines, which was concluded earlier today at a Diplomatic Conference in Oslo. "This is a victory for humanity. It shows that it is possible, with determination and perseverance, to make significant improvements in international humanitarian law", said Louise Doswald-Beck, head of the ICRC delegation to the Conference.

The treaty contains an unambiguous prohibition on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines. It requires the destruction of stockpiled mines within four years and of mines in the ground within ten years.

Since the ICRC launched its appeal for a total ban on anti-personnel mines in February 1994, the entire International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has worked strenuously to raise public awareness of the problem and to encourage diplomatic and military circles to strive for this historic breakthrough. "The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will do its utmost to achieve universal ratification of the treaty and to ensure its earliest possible entry into force so as to end once and for all the horrendous suffering caused by anti-personnel mines," added Louise Doswald-Beck.

The treaty will be formally adopted by the Oslo Diplomatic Conference on Thursday and opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, on 3-4 December. The vast majority of the 106 States that officially launched the process in Brussels in June 1997 are expected to sign the treaty, which will enter into force once 40 signatory States have ratified it. In the meantime, States are nonetheless expected to respect the core obligations it lays down.

For further information please contact:
Louise Doswald-Beck, Peter Herby or Stuart Maslen, ICRC Delegation to the Oslo Diplomatic Conference (tel.: ++47 944 62 446 or ++47 22 05 4011 or ++41 22 730 2533), or Terje Lund, International Federation Delegation to the Oslo Diplomatic Conference (tel.: ++47 22 05 41 64 or ++47 942 49595).
Communication to the press No. 97/26
Geneva, 22 September 1997

THE RED CROSS EMBLEM

It has recently been reported in the press that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was about to give up its traditional emblem, a red cross on a white ground. This assertion is incorrect.

It is true that for a number of years the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been encountering problems arising from the plurality of the protective emblems. For this reason, a working group has drawn up a document containing a whole series of proposals, including the possibility of adopting a design such as a "red diamond" as a third emblem. The document will be discussed by all the components of the Movement in Seville, Spain, on 26 and 27 November 1997.

Eventually this third emblem might be used, together with the red cross and the red crescent, to designate persons and objects that must be protected in conflict situations, as stipulated in the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The use of such a sign would, however, have to be approved by all 188 States party to the Geneva Conventions.

It should be recalled that the red cross emblem has no religious connotation whatsoever, being a reversal of the colours of the Swiss flag. It was proposed in 1863 at the International Conference which gave birth to the Red Cross Movement.

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Communication to the press No. 97/27
2 October 1997

AFGHANISTAN: ICRC CALLS ON ALL PARTIES TO PROTECT CIVILIANS

Geneva (ICRC) - Following the renewed outbreak of fierce hostilities in and around Mazar-i-Sharif, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is extremely concerned about the plight of the civilian population, which has been trapped in continuous fighting, including aerial bombardments and heavy shelling, for the past 48 hours.

To keep further casualties to a minimum, the ICRC appeals to all warring parties to respect and protect civilians and to refrain from launching indiscriminate attacks. It urges them to protect hospitals, medical personnel and all humanitarian aid workers. It further enjoins them to ensure that persons captured and detained are treated humanely.

According to two ICRC delegates still present in the city, the main military hospital admitted 160 war-wounded between yesterday and today, 70 % of them civilians. The ICRC has been providing this hospital with daily assistance for over a month, thus enabling the facility to treat the ever growing number of wounded people. It is also supplying the population with drinking water as security conditions permit.

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Communication to the press No. 97/28
10 October 1997

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE SUPPORTS WORLDWIDE LANDMINES CAMPAIGN

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies offer their warmest congratulations to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the campaign’s coordinator Jody Williams on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work for the banning and clearing of anti-personnel mines. The Nobel Committee’s decision recognizes the campaign’s tremendous efforts since the early 1990s and honours in particular the victims of these appalling weapons, who can take courage from the fact that their suffering has not gone unnoticed.

The success of the campaign reflects a growing commitment on the part of civil society to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, a development that augurs well for the future of this body of law.

The recent conclusion of the treaty banning anti-personnel landmines at the Diplomatic Conference hosted by the government of Norway in Oslo is a crucial step towards bringing this scourge to an end, and shows that humanity is not powerless in the face of destructive technologies. Governments and civil society, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, have proved that by working together they can make a real difference.

The treaty must now be signed and implemented. In addition, the international community must devote far greater attention to the long-term effort required to bring assistance to all the victims of mines and to achieve global mine clearance.

The ICRC and the International Federation would also like to pay tribute to the many other organizations and individuals that have contributed to the worldwide drive to end the suffering caused by landmines and to those countries that were instrumental in ensuring the success of the Ottawa process.

The ICRC will continue its efforts, together with its partners, to convince governments to adhere to the ban treaty to be signed in December in Ottawa, and will actively pursue the work undertaken with the International Federation and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on behalf of landmine victims.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2317 or ++ 4179 202 3670
ICRC DEPLORES DEATH OF AFGHAN STAFF MEMBER

Geneva (ICRC) - An Afghan employee of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was killed late on the afternoon of Saturday, 18 October. Three ICRC vehicles were driving along the Anchoy-Shibirgan road 200 kilometres west of the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif when it was caught in the crossfire of an armed clash. The driver of one of the vehicles -- Mr Mohamed Bashir, a mechanic employed at the organization's Mazar-i-Sharif sub-delegation -- was hit by a stray bullet and killed instantly.

After stopping overnight in Shibirgan, the convoy continued on its way and arrived on Monday in Mazar-i-Sharif, where Mr Bashir's mortal remains were handed over to his family.

The ICRC is deeply saddened by this tragic incident. Flags have been placed at half-mast on its offices across Afghanistan and its entire staff convey heartfelt condolences to Mr Bashir's family and friends.

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COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS

Communication to the press 97/30
14 November 1997

SOMALIA: FLOODWATERS STILL RISING

Geneva (ICRC) - As the rains continue in Ethiopia and Somalia, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is launching an appeal for help in saving the lives of survivors of the catastrophe caused by the overflowing of the Juba and Shabelle rivers in Somalia.

At the moment, water levels are rising in the town of Bardera in the Gedo region. The water rose two metres overnight and early this afternoon was continuing to rise at the rate of 10 cm per hour.

This means that the water levels will be rising in the coming days further down the Juba valley, where the situation was already reported to be extremely critical this past week, after all food reserves and livestock were swept away.

In the course of its daily aerial surveys, the ICRC has observed thousands of people who have taken refuge on dykes or small portions of dry land and are stranded there without the most basic means of survival -- drinking water, food and shelter. Unless major logistic resources, such as boats and helicopters, are deployed immediately, hundreds of people will die in the very near future.

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ICRC DEPLORES DEATH OF RED CROSS VOLUNTEER IN BRAZZAVILLE

Geneva (ICRC) - A Congolese Red Cross volunteer, Mr Makoundou Landri Silvert, was killed and two others were wounded in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, on Saturday 22 November. They were travelling aboard an ICRC truck together with some 50 other volunteers who had been helping to unload humanitarian aid supplies dispatched from Kinshasa and intended for distribution to the returning inhabitants of the Congolese capital.

The truck was following another ICRC vehicle. Shots were fired as the two vehicles, both clearly marked with the protective red cross emblem and driven by ICRC staff, passed a group of armed men in the centre of the city. The convoy drove immediately to the Brazzaville University Hospital where the death of the volunteer was confirmed and the two wounded were admitted for treatment.

The ICRC is deeply saddened by this tragic incident and conveys its heartfelt condolences to Mr Silvert's family and friends and to the Congolese Red Cross.

The ICRC urges all those bearing weapons to respect the men and women displaying the protective emblem of the red cross and to allow them to carry out their humanitarian work.

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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
NEWS RELEASE

26 November 1997
ICRC 97/32

HENRY DUNANT MEDALS AWARDED

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement awarded its highest decoration to 24 people, 22 of them posthumously, on 25 November. The Henry Dunant medals are given to recognize and reward outstanding services and acts of great devotion to the cause of the Movement.

Among those honoured are:

- eight volunteers of the Democratic Republic of Congo Red Cross who died in the line of duty near the refugee camp of Kibumba, near Goma, in June and September 1996;
- six ICRC delegates murdered in Chechnya in December 1996;
- three ICRC delegates killed in Burundi in June 1996;
- two Uganda Red Cross workers killed in shooting incidents in a refugee camp in Koboko in June and October 1996;
- an Angolan Red Cross worker whose vehicle was ambushed in January 1996;
- a Cambodian ICRC worker who was killed by armed robbers in January 1997.

The medals were presented to the recipients and/or to their representatives by H.M. Queen Sofia of Spain and the certificates by H.R.H. Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. Of the 24 recipients, 21 volunteers and delegates were killed in the line of duty. Before asking the assembly to rise to observe a minute of silence to pay homage to their courage, H.R.H. Princess Margriet described the ceremony as "a celebration of the humanitarian spirit that has driven the medalists to devote themselves beyond the call of duty to the cause that we all serve."

The ceremony was held in Seville, Spain, at the opening of the Council of Delegates, which is composed of representatives from 175 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation.
The recipients are the following:

- Mrs. Véronique Ahouanmenou, former President of the Benin Red Cross, former member of the Federation's Executive Council and of the Standing Commission, received her award for nearly 40 years of service to the Movement and her dedication to the advancement of African women.

- Mr. Enzo Boletti, former Mayor of Castiglione delle Stiviere, the village where the wounded soldiers of Solferino were cared for, founded the International Red Cross Museum in his city in 1959, the centenary of the battle of Solferino and of the birth of the idea of the Movement.

Henry Dunant medals were awarded posthumously to:

- Dr. Ahmed A. Elsherif, former Secretary General of the Libyan Red Crescent from 1975 until his death in 1995, former member of the Federation's Executive Council, and former Federation Vice-President, was highly respected for his dedication, integrity and wisdom.

Six ICRC delegates were brutally murdered in their sleep by armed men in the ICRC hospital compound in Novy Atagi, Chechnya. They were:

- Ms. Fernanda Calado, from Seville, Spain
- Mr. Hans Elkerbout, from the Netherlands,
- Ms. Nancy Malloy, from Canada,
- Ms. Ingebjorg Foss, from Norway,
- Ms. Gunnhild Myklebust, from Norway,
- Ms. Sheryl Thayer, from New Zealand.

Three ICRC delegates were killed when their vehicle was ambushed in the province of Cibitoke, in Burundi.

- Mr. Cédric Martin, Swiss national,
- Mr. Reto Neuenschwander, Swiss national,
- Mr. Juan Ruffino, Italian national.

National Society workers and volunteers paid a heavy price in carrying out their humanitarian mission.

- Mr. Herculano Tchipindi was ambushed, with three other Angolan Red Cross workers, by armed men who shot at their vehicle, killing him. Mr. Tchipindi was an employee of the International Federation.
Two Ugandan Red Cross workers, employed by the International Federation, were both killed in armed incidents in Koboko.

- Mr. Luiji Apata, a watchman in the Afranga refugee camp, was killed in a night assault by armed men on the camp.
- Mr. Amin Booyi Andama, was shot, along with a number of refugees, during an armed attack.

Three Democratic Republic of Congo Red Cross (formerly Zairean Red Cross) volunteers were killed in an accident when their vehicle hit a mine on the road to Kibumba refugee camp, near Goma; 31 other volunteers were also injured in the incident. They were employed by the International Federation. They were:

- Mr. Aimé Amuli
- Mr. Dieudonné Budogo
- Mr. Djuma Sebasore

Three Democratic Republic of Congo Red Cross (formerly Zairean Red Cross) volunteers, employed by the Federation, were killed when the warehouse at Kibumba camp was attacked by armed men. They were:

- Mr. Bahozi Kabaka
- Mr. Ilunfa Sebastien
- Mr. Mafuta Nzangamya

Two Democratic Republic of Congo Red Cross (formerly Zairean Red Cross) were both killed in Uvira in October 1996.

- Mr. Déogratias Kitungano Bisahi was stabbed and shot while treating wounded in a health post.
- Mr. Bernard Umba Kanonge died during the looting of the town, when armed men broke into his house, presumably to obtain the keys to the ICRC sub-delegation, where he was employed as administrative staff.

A Cambodian employee of the ICRC died in the north-west of the country after armed men shot him to steal his motorbike.

- Mr. Chin Chun was a well-known figure in the area of Thmar-Pouc, delivering Red Cross messages from relatives which families had not heard from in decades. He was the father of five children.

For further information, please contact:

At the International Federation:
Jon Valfells - Marie-Françoise Borei (41-79) 358-3107 or (34-5) 476-9400 Room 1012

At the ICRC:
Doris Pfister (41-79) 202-3670
PRESS RELEASE

27 November 1997
ICRC 97/33

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT REAFFIRMS ATTACHMENT TO ITS EMBLEMS

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement expressed today a strong attachment to its emblems. Meeting in Seville, the Council of Delegates unanimously adopted a resolution emphasizing the value and widespread recognition of the red crescent and red cross.

While confirming the continued use of the two symbols, the Council decided to pursue consultations with Governments and National Societies to find a solution for those situations where the red cross and red crescent are not perceived as being neutral.

Addressing these sensitive situations is crucial for the Movement and, above all, for the protection of victims and of the humanitarian workers who assist them, stressed the Chairman of the Standing Commission, presenting a report on the emblem. The report excludes the abandoning of the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and presents feasible possibilities.

The Council of Delegates urged all States and the components of the Movement to take concrete action to ensure greater respect for the emblems and for all those who are victims of conflict and disaster.

In Geneva, in 1995, the Council of Delegates asked to prepare a report on the question of the emblem, which was presented today in Seville. The Council, which meets every two years, includes representatives from the National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation. The Standing Commission is the coordinating body of the Movement and a link with Governments.

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Communication to the press 97/34
Geneva/Ottawa, 3 December 1997

TREATY SIGNING CONFERENCE AND MINE ACTION FORUM:
CHALLENGE LIES AHEAD

Today in the Canadian capital Ottawa, representatives of more than 150 States heard Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), hail the opening for signature of the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel landmines as a "triumph for humanitarian values in the face of cruelty and indifference". Having demonstrated by the conclusion of the treaty that such decisive action for humanity is possible, the international community has "a solemn obligation to ask why it happens so seldom", he added.

While the ban on the use of mines will save lives and limbs, the world's governments must now prepare for the "long road ahead", as the daunting challenges of mine clearance and the provision of adequate assistance to all mine victims still have to be addressed, President Sommaruga reminded delegates.

The ICRC President also took the opportunity to call on States to tackle the issue of the ready availability of weapons as a matter of pressing international concern. "We have learned from the case of landmines that it is both easier and faster to distribute arms than to teach the principles of humanitarian law to those who possess them. If we fail to learn from our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them", said Mr Sommaruga.

Since February 1994 the ICRC and the entire International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have been actively involved in the drive to impose a total ban on anti-personnel mines, running public awareness campaigns and encouraging diplomatic and military circles to support their efforts. These efforts will continue, in order to achieve universal acceptance of the treaty, to coordinate and improve the care given to victims, and to extend preventive mine-awareness programmes.

Further information: Mary-Anne Andersen, Tel.: ++1 613 795 5501 or Catherine Mikton, Tel.: ++1 613 850 1871
RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT WELCOMES SIGNING OF OTTAWA TREATY BY 121 STATES

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies enthusiastically welcomed the signing by 121 States in Ottawa, Canada, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction. The President of the ICRC, Cornelio Sommaruga, declared that he was "absolutely delighted" by the outcome. "We can now be optimistic that, if the momentum is maintained, adherence to the Convention could soon be universal and an end to the scourge of landmines will be in sight. We will do all that we can to make this a reality."

The Convention will formally enter into force once 40 signatories have ratified it. States party to the treaty will then have four years to destroy existing stockpiles and ten years to clear all anti-personnel mines from the ground. Yet until the treaty is fully implemented, thousands of people will continue to be killed or maimed by these weapons. "We must put the spotlight back on the victims. Ensuring lifelong assistance to mine victims and their communities is going to be a major challenge facing the international community for decades to come", said Astrid Noklebye Heiberg, President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Ottawa treaty specifically encourages States to provide increased support for mine victims through bodies such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. A meeting involving the ICRC, the International Federation and interested National Societies will be held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in February 1998 with a view to planning future victim-assistance strategies.

The Ottawa conference also adopted an Agenda for Action for the coming months and years, which includes plans announced by the ICRC to convene international conferences on the coordination of assistance to mine victims and on mine-awareness activities in 1998, and to hold regional seminars in Central and Eastern Europe and East and South Asia to promote adherence to the treaty.

Further information: Mary-Anne Andersen, tel.: +1 613 795 5501 or Catherine Mikton, tel.: +1 613 850 1871
Communication to the press 97/36
16 December 1997

INITIAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE ICRC AVENIR PROJECT

Geneva (ICRC) - In July 1996, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) embarked on a project aimed at analysing and gaining a fresh perspective on the contemporary environment for humanitarian activity. What the ICRC has observed and the operational difficulties it has encountered, in connection with both the political world and the conduct of modern conflicts since the end of the Cold War, are at the root of this project, the urgent need for which was given extra emphasis by the tragic events which befell the institution in 1996 (in Burundi in June, and in Chechnya in December).

After more than a year of both internal and external consultations and deliberations, during which ICRC staff expressed their views, the project was submitted to the Assembly, the ICRC's supreme decision-making body, at its meeting in Geneva on 11 and 12 December 1997. The Assembly approved the Avenir project report and its guidelines, and adopted a number of strategic decisions. The report constitutes the reference framework for the project, which is now moving into the implementation phase. By the end of April 1998, an "implementation plan" will be drawn up and adopted, and then gradually executed.

In undertaking this project, the ICRC is re-stating its "exclusively humanitarian" mission, which is "to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to forestall the suffering engendered by such situations".

The first, important conclusion is the uncertainty which has been affecting humanitarian action since 1989. The ICRC is particularly concerned at the weakening of State structures, even if the States remain the "key players in the international system". The international environment is being influenced by a current of change which is affecting the very needs of victims and of humanitarian organizations. The ICRC is also concerned at the lack of respect for human dignity in a growing number of contexts, and at the recourse to humanitarian action as a means of seeking legitimacy when political solutions are not found.
Consequently, the strategic guidelines adopted by the ICRC consist of:

- "restoring independent humanitarian action, knowledge of and respect for humanitarian law and principles to their proper status;
- bringing humanitarian action close to the victims, looking to the long term;
- strengthening dialogue with all players;
- increasing the ICRC's efficiency".

Working in closer proximity to the victims is one of the key concepts of the Avenir project. This concept bears witness to the ICRC's determination, now and in the future, to rely more heavily on its staff of various nationalities employed in the field, and to strengthen relations with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the members of a Movement which is an "essential independent force for humanitarian action throughout the world". In addition, and taking account of the nature of contemporary conflicts, the ICRC believes that its activity must soon "overstep the strict limits of emergency action in favour of continuity" and form an improved link between immediate requirements and longer-term needs.

Faced with the growing complexity of situations in which humanitarian players have to operate, the ICRC will adopt the means required for better analysis and understanding thereof. This involves the need to "direct its energy to a systematic effort to maintain contact with all the entities concerned", whether they are conventional players (such as government armed forces) or more recent arrivals on the scene.

Towards this end, the ICRC is committed to adopting a more receptive attitude to the cultural diversity which surrounds it, in particular by establishing closer links with its Group of International Advisers, which it has been consulting since 1984, and with the leaders of the National Societies. The ICRC confirms, however, that to maintain its institutional independence it must retain the Swiss single-nationality membership of the Assembly.

To sum up, the conclusions reached in the report aim to remind the ICRC that, because of the shifting context in which the humanitarian work of the future will take place, it will have to reinforce the overall coherence of its activity and adapt to change, without, however, losing its identity.

(A copy of the report - about 10 pages in English or French - is available on request from the ICRC Press Division, fax no. +41 22 734 82 80).