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Communication to the press No. 99/01
11 January 1999

SIERRA LEONE: GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT CIVILIANS IN FREETOWN

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is deeply concerned about the continuing plight of the civilian population in many parts of Freetown.

Incessant fire from both light and heavy weapons in the crowded capital and the destruction of civilian property and essential infrastructure are giving rise to serious fears for the safety of the inhabitants. In some areas of the city people are finding it difficult to leave their homes in order to gather food, assist the wounded or simply bury the dead. A continued power and communication blackout is further aggravating the situation.

The ICRC also deplores the misuse of the red cross emblem, as marked vehicles taken by force from both the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and the ICRC are currently being driven around the capital.

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 spare persons who are not or are no longer taking part in the hostilities. The ICRC urges all those bearing weapons to respect the men and women displaying the protective red cross emblem, to allow them to carry out the necessary surveys and to give unimpeded passage to urgently needed humanitarian assistance.

The ICRC has five expatriates and some 200 national staff in Freetown. More than 180 people have sought refuge within the delegation compound over the past few days, and 126 patients are receiving medical care at the Netland surgical hospital and rehabilitation centre. An office in Kenema manned by national personnel is continuing to provide medical assistance for the war-wounded and is building additional sanitary facilities for newly displaced persons in the area. National Society volunteers gave first aid to the wounded throughout the capital until 6 January, when fighting brought humanitarian activities in the city to a halt. Emergency assistance will resume as soon as the situation allows.

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Communication to the press No. 99/02
14 January 1999

SIERRA LEONE: ICRC PULLS OUT OF FREETOWN

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was asked yesterday by a member of the Sierra Leonean Government to leave Freetown for security reasons. Following this request, an ICRC-chartered helicopter was sent from Conakry to pick up the five remaining expatriate staff, who arrived in the Guinean capital yesterday evening.

The ICRC regrets this development because it obliges its delegates to leave Freetown at a time when the humanitarian situation is still giving cause for the gravest concern, most civilians being trapped in their homes by the incessant fighting. Although prevented by the security conditions from carrying out their humanitarian tasks, the delegates represented a reassuring presence for more than 180 civilians who had sought shelter and assistance in the ICRC compound and for the wounded being treated in the ICRC’s Netland surgical hospital.

The authorities concerned have been informed that the ICRC stands ready to resume its humanitarian activities for the victims of the conflict as soon as it is authorized to do so.

The ICRC continues to call 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.

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Communication to the press No. 99/03
15 January 1999

ANGOLA: ICRC PLANE REACHES KUITO

ICRC (Geneva) - An aircraft of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) landed on Friday 15 January in Kuito, capital of Bié province, on Angola's Planalto. The region is the scene of heavy fighting between government forces and UNITA.

After humanitarian flights began once more into Huambo early in the week, today's flight marks the resumption of the ICRC's work in Kuito. The plane brought in two ICRC staff members, including a medical delegate, to join the organization's nine Angolan employees in the town, with whom contact had been maintained since the intensity of the fighting forced withdrawal of the last delegate on 11 December.

The Kuito team's first task will be to assess needs and then bring aid to the victims of the conflict. To this end the plane also transported 200 kg of medical supplies.

While constantly monitoring security conditions, the ICRC plans to keep flying into both Huambo and Kuito in order to ensure continuity in its humanitarian work in the area.

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KOSOVO: ICRC TAKES ACTION IN AFTERMATH OF RACAK VIOLENCE

Geneva (ICRC) - Staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today returned to the Racak area to try to aid hundreds of people who fled the violence that erupted as Serbian forces entered the village last Friday.

A team of relief and medical delegates set out for the village of Dremnjak, south-east of Racak, to bring food and other items to several hundred people who had sought sanctuary there and to check reports that some were wounded and in need of treatment.

Delegates who initially went to Racak on Saturday in response to reports that civilians had been displaced, and some wounded, were profoundly shocked to find scores of bodies – apparently civilians – and a community badly traumatized by the violence.

The ICRC deplores what appears to be a deliberate attack against civilians in Racak. In light of the escalating violence involving both sides in recent weeks, the ICRC reiterates its condemnation of all attacks on civilians and calls on both sides to comply with international humanitarian law and spare those not, or no longer, involved in the fighting.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2678
Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++381 11 450 990

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SIERRA LEONE: ICRC REJECTS ACCUSATIONS

Geneva (ICRC) - The five remaining delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Freetown were asked by a member of the Sierra Leonean government to leave the country on 13 January last. Following their departure, the ICRC was accused of having used its own communication system to aid the rebels there. These allegations are without foundation and undermine the ICRC's reputation for strict neutrality.

The ICRC uses communication equipment in its humanitarian operations for the sole purpose of maintaining contact with its field staff, and thus ensuring their safety. As such it is an indispensable tool in aiding the victims of conflict. The delegates assigned to Sierra Leone in no way departed from this policy. If the ICRC's communication system was used for any other purpose, this can only have been after equipment was confiscated or stolen by armed groups.

In accordance with the mandate conferred upon it by the international community, the ICRC respects the recognized principles of neutrality and impartiality. In its capacity as a neutral intermediary, it has contacts with the various parties to conflict and does nothing whatever to conceal those contacts. In the case of Sierra Leone, they took place with the knowledge and consent — and even at the request — of all the parties involved, in particular the government and ECOMOG.

The ICRC deplores any consequences that such accusations may have for its Sierra Leonean staff, in particular the six employees arrested by ECOMOG, about whom the authorities have as yet provided no information.

The ICRC calls on all parties to respect the red cross emblem and those who display it while engaged in their work.

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Joint communication to the press

Federation n° 99/02
ICRC n° 99/06

Geneva, 28 January 1999

EARTHQUAKE IN COLOMBIA: RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT APPEALS FOR 11.7 MILLION SWISS FRANCS

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement today launched a preliminary appeal for 11.7 million Swiss francs to bring assistance to 100,000 people especially hard hit by Monday's earthquake in western Colombia.

The funds are urgently needed by the Colombian Red Cross to provide a range of services and items such as:

- shelter materials, including tents and plastic sheeting;
- first aid supplies, blood transfusion units and water purification tablets;
- clothing;
- food and kitchen utensils for 100,000 people;
- generators and lanterns.

All the items can be purchased locally and donations are requested in cash. A full appeal will be prepared over the coming week, following a detailed assessment of needs. This will also provide for longer term assistance, including reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The earthquake, which struck on 25 January at 1.19 p.m. local time, is one of the most devastating to have hit Colombia this century. It has already left hundreds dead and thousands injured, and the casualty figures continue to rise.
Within hours of the disaster, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies released 300,000 Swiss francs from its disaster relief emergency fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), through its delegation in Colombia, donated the same amount to the relief effort and also offered logistical support.

The Colombian Red Cross has been at the forefront of the rescue and relief effort from the very start. At present over 500 Red Cross volunteers and staff are working side by side with the local authorities, the Colombian army, civil defence personnel and the police in an attempt to rescue people from the rubble, give them first aid and evacuate the injured.

Further information
International Federation media service:
++41.22.730.4374/4214/4377/4480
++41.79.416.3881 or 358.3107 (mobile)

ICRC press office:
++41.22.730.2224
++41.79.202.36.80 (mobile)

Colombian Red Cross press office: ++57.1.428.9423
ICRC delegation, Bogota: ++57.1.636.7070 or 636.7094
ICRC delegate at the Colombian Red Cross: ++57.3.358.2869
Communication to the press No. 99/07
2 February 1999

AFTERMATH OF GULF WAR AND FUTURE OF TRIPARTITE COMMISSION

Geneva (ICRC) - Following Iraq's announcement that it will not take part, a meeting of the Tripartite Commission set by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for 3 February 1999 will not take place as planned. The ICRC is holding consultations with the other members (France, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States) on the Commission's future. Similar consultations will shortly be held with the Iraqi authorities.

The Tripartite Commission was set up in an effort to settle matters of humanitarian concern still unresolved following the Gulf War, in particular to ascertain the whereabouts and fate of persons unaccounted for following the hostilities. The Commission, which is composed of senior representatives of Iraq and the other members, has until recently met in Geneva about once every three months and been chaired by the ICRC, which acts as a neutral intermediary between the parties.

A technical sub-committee was created in 1994 to enable the Commission's members to work on a more practical case-by-case basis. Until 2 December 1998, the sub-committee met monthly in the demilitarized zone on the Iraq-Kuwait border. The meeting scheduled for 4 January 1999 failed to take place, however, after the Iraqi authorities informed the ICRC that they would not participate.

The ICRC will spare no effort in carrying out its mandate to gather information on persons unaccounted for, and thus to relieve the anguish of families who do not know what has happened to their loved ones.

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GUINEA-BISSAU: ICRC LAUNCHES FRESH APPEAL AS FIGHTING RESUMES

ICRC (Geneva) - On 31 January fighting resumed in Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau, between government troops and forces defending the self-proclaimed military junta. So far over 30 people have been killed as a result of this new outbreak of hostilities, the first to occur since a peace agreement was signed on 1 November 1998, and some 250 wounded have arrived at the capital's Simao Mendes hospital.

Violent exchanges of artillery fire have prevented the three delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies present in Bissau from moving about freely. However, on 1 February the ICRC delivered medical supplies to the national hospital, where five surgeons are working round the clock, and the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau has been able to evacuate the dead and take the wounded to hospitals.

Many of the civilians who had gradually returned to Bissau over the past few months of calm have been forced by the heavy shelling to flee the capital once again. A three-hour truce was declared on 1 February to enable the population to leave the city, and some 30,000 displaced people are now said to be sheltering in Cumura, west of the capital.

On 2 February an ICRC delegate and the representative of the International Federation left Bissau by boat for Bubaque, where one tonne of emergency medical supplies had arrived from Geneva via Dakar and was waiting to be brought across to Bissau.

The ICRC appeals to all the parties concerned to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, in particular to distinguish between civilians and combatants. It also urges the parties to respect the red cross emblem, red cross personnel and hospitals.

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Communication to the press No. 99/09
17 February 1999

ICRC REAFFIRMS "OPEN DOOR" POLICY ON ITS ROLE DURING AND AFTER WORLD WAR II

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has reaffirmed its "open door" policy towards researchers looking into the organization's role during the Second World War and its aftermath, following the resurfacing of reports in the media that Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele tricked the ICRC into issuing him a travel document.

The ICRC document, which Mengele obtained by using a false name in Genoa in 1949, enabled him to escape justice and flee to Argentina.

The ICRC had already brought similar cases to light several years ago, when it publicly announced that Adolf Eichmann and Klaus Barbie had also obtained documents by using false identities.

Writing in the *International Herald Tribune* on 10 March 1992, Yves Sandoz, Director of the ICRC's Department of Principles and Law, wrote: "These men [Barbie, Eichmann and Mengele] and their secret supporters took shameless advantage of a humanitarian service which benefitted half a million people, mostly survivors of concentration camps and refugees from Eastern Europe".

In the wake of the Second World War and the mass population movements it caused, hundreds of thousands of people found themselves without legal documents, and sometimes with no nationality. Many wanted to start a new life on another continent. The ICRC helped tens of thousands of these people by giving them travel documents in accordance with guidelines agreed with the governments concerned.

In a number of cases this system was abused.

"We are committed to dealing as openly as possible with painful and regrettable experiences from the past", said Yves Sandoz today. "We would not be human if we did not feel at least some of the anguish that survivors of Mengele's experiments and their relatives must have felt when they heard how this evil man managed to escape justice in the chaos of post-war Europe."
Just over three years ago, the ICRC opened its detailed and extensive collection of archives to researchers. Since then more than 150 academics, journalists and students have consulted documents released under the 50-year rule.

René Kosirnik, the head of ICRC's Working Group on the Second World War, said: "As an institution that seeks to learn from its past, the ICRC is keen to supplement its own research with independent, external scrutiny".

In recent years, after being supplied with a list of aliases used by war criminals and high-ranking Nazis who arrived in Argentina, ICRC researchers have discovered that at least ten of them received ICRC travel documents by deceitful means. They include Erich Priebke, Erich Müller and Gerhard Bohne.

"This is not an exact science", said René Kosirnik. "All we can do is check whether we issued travel documents that correspond to the aliases we have been given. Some correspond precisely, others less so. What is certain is that we will search our files as thoroughly as possible and address the issues that arise."
Joint communication to the press  
ICRC No. 99/10  
Federation No. 99/05  

1 March 1999

OTTAWA TREATY BECOMES LAW

Geneva (ICRC/Federation) - On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of mine victims and the millions who live each day in fear of those weapons, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies wholeheartedly welcome the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction (the Ottawa treaty).

The treaty, which has become law more quickly than any previous multilateral arms-related agreement, represents a comprehensive response to the landmine crisis on the part of the 134 States that have now signed or acceded to it. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement congratulates the 65 States that have become bound by the Ottawa treaty and appeals to the other 69 signatory States to do likewise as a matter of urgency. "The treaty represents the standard by which all efforts to deal with this humanitarian tragedy will be judged", said ICRC Vice-President Eric Roethlisberger at a ceremony held at the United Nations' Geneva headquarters to mark the event. Mr Roethlisberger drew attention to the daunting challenges that lie ahead for States, international agencies and non-governmental organizations in ensuring that the treaty becomes binding worldwide and fully implemented in mine-affected communities. He committed the ICRC to doing its share in this regard.

"The task before us – to ensure rapid universalization and implementation of the Ottawa treaty – is a matter of high priority for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies", said Ms Astrid N. Heiberg, President of the International Federation. "Those Societies continue to play a key role by advising their governments on national legislation needed to ensure swift implementation of the treaty's provisions and by keeping the plight of mine victims in the public eye."

The ICRC is currently running 25 limb-fitting and rehabilitation programmes in 13 countries (Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Iraq, Kenya, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan and Uganda). Twenty-four ICRC projects in 12 other countries have now been handed over to local or international NGO
control, though many continue to receive financial and technical support from the ICRC. In a number of countries, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, supported by their International Federation, care for mine-injured people through health, rehabilitation and social welfare programmes.

Between 1979 and the end of 1998, the ICRC manufactured over 130,000 artificial limbs, over 175,000 pairs of crutches and close to 9,000 wheelchairs. In 1998 alone, the ICRC manufactured over 11,500 prostheses; of these, more than 6,500 were for mine victims. During the same year it produced over 17,200 pairs of crutches and more than 700 wheelchairs.

In addition, the ICRC and National Societies are conducting mine-awareness programmes in several countries in order to reduce the number of incidents in mine-affected areas.

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Communications to the press No. 99/11
19 March 1999

ERITREA/ ETHIOPIA: ICRC URGES RESPECT FOR HUMANITARIAN RULES

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), extremely concerned about the humanitarian implications of the conflict on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, urgently calls on the parties to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law.

Thousands of soldiers are reported to have been wounded, killed or captured since violent clashes resumed in early February. After a temporary lull the fighting intensified in mid-March, again claiming numerous victims.

The ICRC earnestly requests that all the wounded and sick without distinction be evacuated from the battlefield and be given appropriate medical care. Combatants killed in the fighting must be identified and afforded a decent burial. Their places of burial must be duly marked.

The ICRC further reminds the parties that prisoners of war and civilian internees must be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions.

The belligerents are also duty bound to take all necessary steps to safeguard the civilian population from the dangers of military operations.

By virtue of the mandate entrusted to it by the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC stands ready to assist and protect the victims, in accordance with the criteria governing its neutral and independent humanitarian action.

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Communication to the press No. 99/12
22 March 1999

ERITREA/ETHIOPIA: ICRC DEPLORES PUBLIC USE OF ITS INFORMATION

Geneva (ICRC) - According to a communiqué issued on 18 March by the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an Eritrean citizen interned in a camp at Bilate, Ethiopia, was subjected to "physical and mental torture", which contributed to his death. In its capacity as a neutral and impartial intermediary, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had notified the Eritrean authorities of the man's death, as provided by the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians in time of war.

This is not the first time in the context of the border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia that the ICRC has been used publicly to denounce violations of international humanitarian law allegedly committed by one or other of the parties. The ICRC has stressed on several occasions that such a practice can only jeopardize a purely humanitarian operation in aid of the victims of the conflict.

The ICRC strongly deplores the public use of such information for propaganda purposes. It regularly visits prisoners of war and civilian internees in the Bilate camp and is therefore in a position to state that the allegations as to the death causes are unfounded.

Although Eritrea has not adhered to the Four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, it is bound to comply with the rules of customary law.

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COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS

Communication to the press No. 99/13
22 March 1999

SUDAN: ICRC PRESIDENT ASKS SPLM/A LEADER TO MAKE SPECIAL GESTURE

Geneva (ICRC) - On 22 March 1999 the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, met the leader of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), Dr John Garang, at ICRC headquarters in Geneva.

Their discussions focused on the ICRC's activities in Sudan and on the incident that occurred on 18 February in the Bentiu region. The ICRC President asked Dr Garang to make a special gesture by freeing the three Sudanese government officials who remain in captivity following the incident and to facilitate the return of a Sudanese Red Crescent employee whose release had previously been announced by the SPLM/A.

Two ICRC delegates and two Sudanese Red Crescent employees were conducting a survey to assess humanitarian needs north of Bentiu. They were accompanied by three government officials when they were captured by the SPLM/A. The two delegates were handed over to the ICRC on 12 March. However, one of the Red Crescent employees and the three government officials are still being held by the SPLM/A in southern Sudan.

The ICRC resumed its activities in Sudan in June 1998 after a 19-month interruption. Some 100 expatriates, working throughout the country, provide protection and assistance for the civilian population, evacuate and care for the wounded, visit detainees and develop programmes in cooperation with the Sudanese Red Crescent.
SOUTHERN CAUCASUS: CONTAINING THE THREAT OF TUBERCULOSIS IN PRISONS

Geneva (ICRC) - Tuberculosis is taking its toll among the prison population of several countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States, where its incidence in places of detention is on average 50 times higher than in a normal environment. Malnutrition, overcrowding and other problems relating to health and living conditions in prisons are largely to blame. Concerned about the scope of the problem and the threat it implies for the population at large, ICRC doctors, working together with the authorities in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, have been striving to bring the situation under control.

In Azerbaijan, the ICRC’s TB programme in prisons was launched in 1995. It made significant progress last year after the signing of a tripartite agreement with the Ministry of Justice and the National TB Coordinator (Ministry of Health) and the subsequent opening of Penal Colony 3, a prison compound where detainees infected with TB are treated in accordance with the World Health Organization’s recommended method (DOTS - Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course). This requires patients to take medicines daily and under supervision for at least six months. Since 1998 the total number of detained patients under treatment in Azerbaijan has risen from 514 to 976.

However, the application of the DOTS programme has apparently had little impact on the development of multi-drug-resistant TB. Cure rates vary between 50 and 55 per cent and mortality remains high (over 10 per cent). In the new colony, patients who do not respond to DOTS and who remain infected with multi-drug-resistant TB are isolated in a ward where their symptoms are alleviated until a better solution can be found. While the Azeri authorities are becoming aware of the seriousness of the problem, they still need to tackle it on a national level with all the ministries concerned.

In Georgia, the ICRC’s TB programme in prisons was launched in 1998 in cooperation with the authorities and it is now well under way. DOTS is being given to a total of 370 patients at the Ksani prison TB hospital.

It is hoped that the systematic early detection of TB cases among the entire prison population of Georgia will in time reduce the transmission and spread of multi-drug-resistant strains. The ICRC team has added a health education component to the programme, targeting suspected cases, patients, family members, guards and administrative staff in order to clear up misconceptions about the disease and explain the risks of incorrect self-treatment.
In Armenia, the ICRC started a prevalence study inside the prison system in December 1998 to assess the extent of the problem. The results should enable the authorities to draw up a plan of action and treat the disease effectively.

The experience which the ICRC has gained since 1995 shows that a strict DOTS strategy can be applied in a prison environment. However, results could be improved if patients were identified and treated as soon as possible so as to prevent the spread of multi-drug-resistant TB. The ICRC hopes that its long-term involvement (up to five years) in TB programmes and the national authorities' willingness to provide staff and conduct the necessary rehabilitation work will eventually reverse the situation.
Communication to the press No. 99/15
24 March 1999

NATO INTERVENTION IN YUGOSLAVIA: ICRC REMINDS STATES OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS

Geneva (ICRC) - In view of the announcement by Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), authorizing military action against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 24 March sent a diplomatic note to NATO and the respective member States, as well as to the Yugoslav authorities, reminding them of their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Under this body of law, those conducting hostilities must take all necessary precautions to spare civilians, to treat captured persons humanely, to ensure that the wounded and sick have access to medical care, to protect medical facilities and their staff and to respect the Red Cross and its emblem.

The ICRC intends to remain in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with delegates based in Belgrade, Podgorica and Pristina in order to continue to provide assistance and protection to all victims in accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the international community. Teams have been active in Kosovo this week delivering relief supplies, evacuating people to safety and providing treatment for the wounded.

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Communication to the press No. 99/16
29 March 1999

ICRC WITHDRAWS ITS STAFF FROM KOSOVO

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) withdrew its international staff from Kosovo this afternoon, 29 March. The decision was taken in view of the deteriorating security situation, which prevented the ICRC from pursuing its humanitarian work. The team of 19 expatriates has arrived safely in the Yugoslav capital Belgrade.

The ICRC deeply regrets having to make this move, especially in light of the humanitarian crisis now unfolding in Kosovo. It stands ready to return as soon as the situation permits.

Teams meanwhile continue to work in Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania to meet the emergency needs of the thousands of people arriving from Kosovo.

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YUGOSLAVIA CRISIS: STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The past decade has seen many tragedies, both individual and collective, occur in the Balkans, yet rarely has there been a phase as dramatic as the one currently unfolding in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is extremely alarmed by the widening crisis, which is taking on an increasingly regional dimension with seemingly enormous humanitarian consequences.

Acutely aware from the outset that such a dire scenario could become a reality, the ICRC opted to remain present and operational, with staff in Belgrade, Pristina and Podgorica. Regrettably, on 29 March 1999 the ICRC was compelled to withdraw its international staff from Pristina in view of the rapidly deteriorating security environment, in particular the mounting tension and reported violence in the town since 25 March which made movements virtually impossible and left staff in a highly precarious situation. The implications of this withdrawal, which leaves the province without any international humanitarian presence, are impossible to assess at this stage. However, the ICRC is gravely concerned about the plight of civilians in Kosovo.

The objective therefore remains to seek the highest degree of proximity possible with the victims of these events with the aim of providing them with assistance, and where possible protection. To achieve this objective, the ICRC has sought and will continue to seek a systematic dialogue with all parties involved and recognition of the necessity to preserve a space for an independent humanitarian response.

The number of displaced persons and refugees arriving in Albania, in the Republic of Montenegro, and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), is growing by the hour. These people are often in a state of profound shock, devastated at having had to abandon their homes and staring hopelessly into an uncertain future. Their immediate concern is for the fate of their relatives who remained behind.

Many other civilians in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are facing growing hardship, spending night after night in air-raid shelters, fearful of the intensity of the air operations and concerned about the safety of relatives and neighbours.
The immediate issue at stake throughout the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is the security of civilians, of the wounded, in other words of those not, or no longer, taking part in the conflict. Initiatives must be taken on all sides, particularly at this time when the very foundations of international humanitarian law appear to be shaken. The ICRC urgently calls on all parties to ensure full respect for the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC is strongly committed to pursuing its activities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and has also begun stepping up its operations in Albania and the FYROM. In order to support the National Red Cross Societies of the countries concerned, the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are together drawing up a regional Red Cross strategy and mobilizing additional resources within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement so as to be ready to respond to needs that will, in all likelihood, continue to grow in the days and weeks to come.
ICRC APPALLED BY DEATH OF FOUR DETAINED SUDANESE

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been informed that a Sudanese Red Crescent worker and three government officials who had accompanied an ICRC team in southern Sudan have been killed while detained by the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

On 18 February an ICRC/Sudanese Red Crescent team on a mission near the southern Sudanese town of Bentiu inadvertently strayed into territory held by the SPLM/A. The four Sudanese and two ICRC expatriates were captured. On 12 March, the two expatriates were released.

After more than one month and despite its immediate and sustained efforts, the ICRC was unable to secure the release of the four men. Furthermore, despite the public assurances of the SPLM/A that the Sudanese Red Crescent worker was free to leave, and indeed should have left together with the ICRC delegates, the SPLM/A kept him in custody.

During the visit to Geneva of SPLM/A Chairman, Doctor John Garang, on 22 March, ICRC President Comelio Sommaruga privately urged the SPLM/A to release the remaining persons without delay. He subsequently repeated this demand in public.

The ICRC is shocked and appalled at the news of the death of the four Sudanese nationals, and in particular that of a Red Crescent worker. It notes with dismay that its repeated calls for their safety were not taken into account. Whatever the exact circumstances, the SPLM/A cannot but be held accountable for their deaths. The ICRC demands a full inquiry to shed light on the events and the full cooperation of the SPLM/A in repatriating the four bodies to allow for a decent burial.
Joint communication to the press
Federation No. 99/10
ICRC No. 99/19

2 April 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT APPEALS FOR OVER 100 MILLION SWISS FRANCS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has launched a preliminary appeal for over 100 million Swiss francs needed to address the devastating humanitarian impact of the crisis unfolding in the Balkans.

An estimated 200,000 refugees and displaced persons fleeing Kosovo have already arrived in Albania, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with the figure growing by the hour. Often traumatized and in desperate need of help, these people are facing a deeply uncertain future. There has been virtually no international presence in Kosovo since the ICRC’s withdrawal, and concern for the plight of civilians remaining in the province is mounting.

From the beginning of the crisis, the Red Cross organizations in Montenegro and in neighbouring countries, supported by an increasing number of delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, have been working around the clock to provide basic relief and medical care for people as they arrive.

Meanwhile, as military operations continue elsewhere in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, civilians there are also facing growing hardship, enduring night after night in air raid shelters. The Yugoslav Red Cross has been since the beginning of the air strikes standing ready to assist victims and provide medical supplies.

The Movement's current priorities are:

* To undertake every step to help protect civilians inside Kosovo. ICRC teams will continue to gather information from refugees and displaced people about the fate of relatives remaining behind.
* To continue providing refugees and internally displaced people with emergency relief, including food, medical items, water supply, and sanitation materials, shelter and other essential items. In the long-term to supply school kits, social welfare and psychological aid, while providing ongoing support for the Red Cross organizations in Albania, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina.

* To provide medical and other supplies for the Yugoslav Red Cross, thereby enabling it to respond to needs arising from the conflict, and to support the National Society's ongoing programmes for refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With the events deteriorating by the hour, a full appeal will be launched next week reflecting the changing situation.

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Communication to the Press No. 99/20
17 April 1999

ICRC VISITS YUGOSLAV SERVICEMAN CAPTURED IN KOSOVO

This morning in Tirana two ICRC delegates carried out a visit to a member of the Yugoslav armed forces held by the United States army in Albania.

The visit was carried out at around 4am. The delegates held a private talk with him and registered his personal details in order to notify the Yugoslav authorities. The prisoner wrote a Red Cross Message which the ICRC will forward to his family.

Under the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC has the right to make further visits to the POW for as long as he is detained.

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CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: ICRC REGrets LACK OF ACCESS TO PRISONERS OF WAR

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regrets that despite repeated oral and written representations to the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it has still not been granted access to three United States servicemen captured more than three weeks ago.

The ICRC sent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade a written request for immediate access on 2 April, two days after the three were captured. Further oral and written requests have been made to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence by the ICRC delegation in Belgrade and during a visit there last week by the organization's head of operations for Europe.

The ICRC calls on the Yugoslav authorities to take immediate steps to comply with their obligations under the Third Geneva Convention by granting the ICRC access without delay to the three prisoners of war.
COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS

Communication to the press No. 99/22
26 April 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: FIRST ICRC CONTACT WITH THREE
US PRISONERS OF WAR

ICRC (Geneva) - During the visit to Belgrade of Cornelio Sommaruga, President of
the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the organization today had the
opportunity to make contact with the three United States servicemen held by the

The prisoners met the ICRC President and other representatives in the course of a
brief visit. The Yugoslav authorities assured the ICRC that a full visit could take
place in accordance with the organization's standard procedures tomorrow, 27 April,
during which delegates will be allowed to hold private talks with the prisoners and to
register their personal details. The POWs will also be able to reply to Red Cross
messages from their families that were handed over to them today.

This meeting follows numerous representations made by the ICRC to the Yugoslav
federal authorities. The ICRC appreciates this latest development, especially since it
will alleviate the anxiety of the prisoners' families. However, it expects to carry out a
comprehensive visit to the three POWs tomorrow, and to see them again during the
coming weeks and for as long as they are detained. It also expects to have access
to any other persons detained in connection with the hostilities, as stipulated by the
Geneva Conventions.

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Communication to the press No. 99/23
26 April 1999

YUGOSLAV AUTHORITIES GIVE ICRC PRESIDENT ASSURANCES FOR A RETURN TO KOSOVO

Geneva (ICRC) - The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, completed a two-day visit to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia today by meeting with President Slobodan Milosevic, who gave him his personal assurances that the ICRC would be able to move freely and safely in Kosovo so as to perform its humanitarian tasks in aid of the victims of the conflict.

During the meeting, President Sommaruga expressed the ICRC's serious concern over the plight of those still remaining in Kosovo and stressed the imperative need for the presence of an independent and impartial organization that could provide material relief and come to the assistance of the wounded, detainees and people searching for their families.

In the course of his visit, President Sommaruga also spoke of his concern about the humanitarian consequences of the NATO air operations. He visited the city of Novi Sad, where he spoke to civilians affected by the strikes and witnessed the efforts of the ICRC and the Yugoslav Red Cross to assist them.

The ICRC President was also able today to meet briefly for the first time with the three American prisoners of war held by the Yugoslav authorities and received official authorization for the ICRC to carry out a full visit tomorrow, in accordance with the provisions set forth in the Third Geneva Convention.

Summing up the visit, President Sommaruga called on all sides involved in the conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to respect international humanitarian law, in particular to take every precaution to spare civilians. He reiterated the ICRC's commitment to assisting the victims, saying he had been deeply moved by what he had seen and by the personal accounts of suffering relayed from people who fled Kosovo to Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro, and by people who have endured the NATO airstrikes.

The ICRC's priority now is to establish practical working procedures with the relevant authorities in Belgrade so as to develop and consolidate the commitments obtained by the ICRC President during his visit.

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Communication to the press No. 99/24
27 April 1999

AFGHAN ICRC EMPLOYEE KILLED IN AIR RAID

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan is saddened by the tragic death of Mr Abdul Rahim, one of its Afghan national staff, in an air raid close to an ICRC warehouse in Jabul Saraj, some 60 km north of Kabul. The incident occurred on the morning of 26 April. Mr Rahim and another civilian were killed on the spot, and two more people were injured in the raid.

Mr Rahim, who was 56 years old, worked for the ICRC as a security guard. He leaves a wife and eight children. The ICRC expresses its sincere condolences to his family and friends.

The ICRC deeply deplores this incident and calls on the authorities to protect and respect humanitarian work in all parts of Afghanistan.

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Communication to the press No. 99/25
27 April 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: ICRC VISITS THREE US PRISONERS OF WAR

Geneva (ICRC) - A team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), including a doctor, visited the three US servicemen held by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Belgrade this morning.

The visit was carried out in full accordance with the standard procedures set forth in the Third Geneva Convention, that is, the ICRC delegates held private talks with each prisoner and registered his personal details. The POWs were also given the opportunity to write Red Cross messages, which will be forwarded to their families.

The three POWs have been detained since 31 March 1999. ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga had an initial brief meeting with them yesterday, 26 April, and was given official authorization for the ICRC to carry out a full visit today. Under international humanitarian law, the ICRC is entitled to make further visits to the POWs for as long as they are detained.

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Communication to the press No. 99/26
6 May 1999

ICRC BEGINS VISITS TO DETAINEES AND PRISONERS IN MYANMAR

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today began visiting detainees and prisoners held at Insein Prison near Yangon, the capital of the Union of Myanmar.

Under the terms of a verbal agreement with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the ICRC has access to all places of detention in the country. The visits are to take place in accordance with the ICRC's standard procedures.

In October 1998 the SPDC invited the ICRC to open an office in Yangon and to set up a health promotion programme in Shan State.

The SPDC has also authorized the ICRC to maintain a permanent presence in various border States, and a first mission to Kayin (Karen) and Mon States will take place in the coming month.

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Communication to the press No. 99/27
14 May 1999

KOSOVO: ICRC ASSESSMENT MISSION

ICRC (Geneva) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today began its first exploratory mission to Kosovo since it was obliged to withdraw from the province on 29 March. The mission, which includes delivery of two truckloads of relief supplies (food, hygiene parcels and plastic sheeting) has now arrived in Pristina. It is being led by the Head of the ICRC Delegation in Belgrade. The Secretary-General of the Yugoslav Red Cross is accompanying the ICRC for the first day of the mission.

The visit, which is expected to last several days, is intended as a tentative first step towards re-establishing ICRC operations in Kosovo. The ICRC will make contact with the local authorities and the Red Cross, visit medical facilities and draw up a preliminary assessment of needs among the civilian population.

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Communication to the press No. 99/28
16 May 1999

ICRC DELEGATE ABDUCTED IN NALCHIK

Geneva (ICRC) - A delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was abducted by armed men on the 15th of May while carrying out his duties in Nalchik, capital of the republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in the Russian Federation. A local ICRC employee accompanying him in the vehicle was also abducted. However, she was released a short time later and gave the alert. The staff member still held is Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro, a New Zealander.

The ICRC has contacted the relevant authorities in both Nalchik and Moscow and has suspended its humanitarian activities in the northern Caucasus. It has no further information at this time.

The ICRC’s sub-delegation in Nalchik is staffed by nine expatriates and 80 locally recruited employees. Working in conjunction with local Red Cross committees it has provided humanitarian assistance throughout the region.

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Communication to the press No. 99/29
18 May 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: YUGOSLAV POWS RELEASED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

Geneva (ICRC) - Two Yugoslav prisoners of war (POWs) held by the United States military were today released and repatriated under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The prisoners were handed over to the ICRC at a border crossing point between Hungary and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia this afternoon after being transported by the US military authorities from Germany, where they had been held. They were then escorted by ICRC delegates across the border and received by the Yugoslav authorities. Earlier, an ICRC team in Germany had held private interviews with each of the prisoners to ensure that they were returning home of their own free will. Delegates also accompanied them on the trip to the Yugoslav border.

The two POWs had previously been visited by the ICRC in accordance with the standard procedures set forth in the Third Geneva Convention.

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COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS

Communication to the press No. 99/30
19 May 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: ICRC OPENS WEBSITE TO RESTORE FAMILY LINKS

Today the ICRC is opening a special Website to help restore contact between members of families split up by the crisis in the Balkans. People anxious to locate relatives can access the site from any computer linked to the Internet.

The aim of the move is to speed up traditional methods of putting relatives back in touch with each other. It is the first time the ICRC has used the Internet for this purpose.

Olga Villarrubia, who manages the site at ICRC headquarters, said: "The exodus of so many people in such a short time to countries where the Internet is available and the fact that a lot of the refugees and displaced are familiar with modern technology prompted us to take this step".

The ICRC has installed computers with modems for use by enquirers in its offices in Albania, Macedonia, Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The service is also available in the offices of the National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies in all countries which have received refugees. Skilled staff will be on hand to help with the process.

The site can be accessed from anywhere at http://www.familylinks.icrc.org, or through the ICRC’s usual Website: http://www.icrc.org

There are three possibilities for people wishing to contact their relatives, whether they be of Albanian, Serb or other ethnic origin:

- if they know the address of the person they want to contact, they can fill in an electronic version of the Red Cross message form, which will be transmitted automatically to the Red Cross or Red Crescent Society of the country concerned and delivered in person to the addressee;
- if they do not know the address, they may find it by consulting a list of persons registered on the site;
- if it proves impossible to find the name and address, the enquirer may register his or her own details on the site, in the hope that it will be consulted by the relatives themselves.

The usual Red Cross rules governing the protection of personal particulars will be respected. "It is entirely up to the individual concerned to decide whether or not to put his or her name on the site", said Ms Villarrubia. "It will be explained clearly to enquirers that if they do so, their names will be made public."

For people unable to use the electronic service, the traditional means of restoring family links (Red Cross messages or radio broadcasts) will still be available at all ICRC and National Society offices.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
Communication to the press No. 99/31
25 May 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS:
ICRC REOPENS OFFICE IN KOSOVO

Geneva (ICRC) - Following a five-day assessment mission in Kosovo completed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) last week, a team of six delegates travelled to Pristina yesterday to reopen the organization's office and resume humanitarian activities as part of a phased return to the province. A five-truck convoy of food and other supplies is due to arrive today. The ICRC was forced to withdraw from Kosovo on 29 March for security reasons.

Initial findings from last week's survey, which included visits to Pristina and Prizren, indicate that the immediate priority will be the distribution of basic relief supplies to the population and delivery of medical material to hospitals, as hospital staff seen by the team mentioned that stocks were running low. Other important humanitarian issues to be addressed will relate to detained persons and people searching for members of their families.

The visit also confirmed that carrying out humanitarian work in Kosovo is going to be a difficult task, particularly in the complex security environment prevailing in the province as the conflict continues.

Pierre Kraehenbuehl, head of the Balkans task force at ICRC headquarters in Geneva, said: "Operations are resuming as part of the process which began with the visit of ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga to Belgrade on April 26, when he drew the authorities' attention to the imperative need for the ICRC to return to Kosovo to respond to the escalating humanitarian crisis. We now have a responsibility towards those in need to overcome constraints and to reach as many people as possible".
Communication to the press No. 99/32
7 June 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS:
ICRC BRINGS AID TO DISPLACED PEOPLE IN KOSOVO

Geneva (ICRC) - Over the weekend the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was able to distribute relief supplies directly to displaced people in Kosovo for the first time since it returned to the province on 24 May.

Teams travelled to Podujevo and to the village of Godance, near Stimlje, and handed out more than 4,000 food parcels to the large crowds of displaced people who gathered to collect the aid which, they said, was urgently needed by their families.

In addition, over 300 parcels were delivered to the Stimlje psychiatric institute, where staff had also reported food shortages. This facility, which was previously supported by the ICRC, is home to around 350 patients.

As well as asking for food and a supply of clean water, many displaced people said they were extremely anxious to contact their relatives but could not get to telephones. The ICRC will now explore ways of restoring family links as a matter of urgency.

Pierre Kraehenbuehl, head of the Balkans operation at ICRC headquarters in Geneva, commented: "To distribute relief supplies directly to the displaced was an important first step and we plan to build on it, despite the security constraints which are still a very real factor in Kosovo. While this was just an initial assessment, the evident food needs of the displaced people we saw tend to confirm our concern about the scale of needs among the rest of the population".

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION: ICRC APPEALS FOR RELEASE OF GERALDO CRUZ RIBEIRO

Geneva, Moscow, Nalchik (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is still without news of its delegate, Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro, who was abducted on 15 May in Nalchik, capital of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria (Russian Federation). Today it is launching an urgent appeal for his immediate release.

Since it learned of the incident, the ICRC has remained in permanent contact with the responsible authorities in Moscow and with the authorities of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria so as to speed up Mr Cruz Ribeiro's release. It has also set up crisis units in Geneva, Moscow and Nalchik.

Four ICRC delegates have stayed on in Nalchik, where they are in close touch with the local authorities and can keep abreast of any new developments regarding the abduction of their colleague.

The authorities concerned have told the ICRC that they have taken appropriate measures to obtain the delegate's release.

Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro, a nurse, joined the Nalchik sub-delegation in September 1998. This sub-delegation has been the operational base for all ICRC activities in the Northern Caucasus since 1993.

Following the abduction of its delegate, the ICRC suspended all but its emergency humanitarian activities in the region. Through local Red Cross committees and its own local staff, it is ensuring that crucial programmes can continue, such as those providing for home visits by nurses throughout the Northern Caucasus, the distribution of bread to the most vulnerable groups and the maintenance of a pumping station that supplies drinking water to several thousand inhabitants of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

The ICRC solemnly requests that Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro be released and that the respect due at all times and in all circumstances to the humanitarian mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent be restored.
Communication to the press No. 99/34
10 June 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS:
OVER 40 TONNES OF RELIEF FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED

Geneva (ICRC) - Yesterday, 9 June, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) carried out a further distribution of relief supplies directly to internally displaced persons in Kosovo.

An ICRC team went first to Metehi, some 14 km from Podujevo, where about 8,000 people from 44 villages had gathered along a river. Delegates handed out 15 tonnes of flour and salt together with five tonnes of blankets, kitchen sets, baby parcels and plastic sheeting. They were joined by a team from the local Red Cross which distributed a truckload of milk powder, canned beans, clothing and hygiene products. The ICRC collected 450 Red Cross messages from people desperate to contact their relatives abroad.

The team then went to Glogovac, 25 km east of Pristina, where it handed out 16 tonnes of flour, oil, yeast and sugar and 2,000 blankets. It also collected Red Cross messages. This was the first ICRC visit to Glogovac; the delegates reported that the need for assistance in the town - as in the other areas visited - is enormous.

This was the second direct distribution of relief supplies to the internally displaced in Kosovo. The first took place last weekend, when more than 4,000 individual food parcels were handed out in three different locations. In addition, since the ICRC returned to Kosovo on 24 May more than 100 tonnes of food, surgical supplies, plastic sheeting and various items have been delivered to local Red Cross branches, hospitals and other institutions.

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Communication to the press No. 99/35
16 June 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS:
HUMANITARIAN AID FOR THE DISPLACED

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has distributed over 20,000 individual food parcels and around 100 tonnes of bulk food, together with blankets, baby parcels, kitchen sets, jerrycans and plastic sheeting, to thousands of internally displaced people all over Kosovo since the end of May. ICRC teams have also collected more than 2,500 Red Cross messages and phone numbers of relatives living abroad in order to restore contact between dispersed family members.

Over the last few days the Yugoslav Red Cross has given aid to thousands of internally displaced Serbs from Kosovo who have taken refuge in Serbia and Montenegro. Transit centres have been set up along the borders and the ICRC has supplied the local Red Cross with individual food parcels, hygiene sets, wheat flour, drinking water and fuel for the displaced. A mobile clinic donated by the German Red Cross is also providing medical treatment in the border area between Kosovo and Serbia.

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Communication to the press No. 99/36
22 June 1999

THIS YEAR'S BIGGEST CHARITY CONCERT

Geneva (ICRC) - Michael Jackson, Luciano Pavarotti, Zucchero, Nigel Kennedy, Vanessa-Mae, Scorpions - these are just some of the stars who will perform on 27 June at Munich's Olympic Stadium to support the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UNESCO and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. A similar concert will take place two days earlier in the South Korean capital Seoul. Swiss television's French-language channel (TSR 1) will broadcast excerpts from the Munich concert on Saturday 10 July at 9.55 p.m.

The initiative for this event was taken by Michael Jackson himself, in conjunction with the Mama Concert agency. It will enable the above-mentioned organizations to carry out protection, assistance and educational work in a number of countries around the world, with all proceeds going either to AIDS victims in Africa, members of families separated by conflict in that continent's Great Lakes region, mine victims in Afghanistan, famine victims in North Korea and people in Central America left destitute by Hurricane Mitch. At a recent press conference in Munich, Jackson said, "As time goes by we tend more and more to forget about the terrible things that happen in the world and about the men, women and children who suffer when they do. The artists who will be performing at the concert want to show their solidarity with the victims of natural disaster and war."

Television viewers in Switzerland will be invited to make a donation to these causes by means of a postal cheque made out to the account (CPP 12-190-5) of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

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COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS

Communication to the press No. 99/37
22 June 1999

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS: MOBILE UNITS FOR FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Geneva (ICRC) - Since the start of the Balkan crisis thousands of families have been split up and relatives have lost contact with each other. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is currently setting up structures to restore family links inside Kosovo, between Kosovo and the rest of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and between Kosovo and third countries. Lists of missing persons and of detainees to be visited by the ICRC will also be drawn up.

In order to undertake this enormous task the ICRC is establishing a whole new system in Kosovo, comprising ten Mobile Units for Family Communication. These units, which are equipped with satellite and/or mobile phones, will travel throughout the province. Their arrival in towns and villages will be announced over the local radio. People who know the phone numbers of their relatives will be able to call them; others will fill in traditional Red Cross message forms; and still others will be able to register their names on the ICRC’s “Familylinks” Website. The work will be carried out in cooperation with volunteers from all local communities.

In addition, six counselling centres will be opened where family members can report their relatives missing. The centres will also offer bereaved families psychological, legal and administrative support.

The ICRC hopes to visit all detainees held in connection with the conflicts in accordance with its standard procedures (i.e. visits to all places of detention, private interviews with the detainees, repeat visits, restoration of family contacts through Red Cross messages).

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ICRC LAUNCHES APPEAL FOR 105 MILLION SWISS FRANCS IN AID OF MINE VICTIMS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) today launched an appeal for 105 million Swiss francs (US$ 69 million) to cover its activities for mine victims over the next five years.

Although two important legal instruments concerning anti-personnel mines have recently become part of binding international humanitarian law, these weapons continue to maim and kill countless people every day. Recent developments in the Balkans have highlighted this tragic fact. Furthermore, in many parts of the world the presence of anti-personnel mines is still preventing farmers from tilling their fields, children from attending school and refugees or internally displaced people from returning to their homes.

Today's financial appeal covers all the ICRC's activities relating to mine victims. The aim is:

- to promote universal adherence to and full implementation of the Ottawa treaty and amended Protocol II to the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons;
- to reduce the risk of mine-related incidents through mine-awareness programmes currently being conducted by the ICRC in six countries;
- to provide mine victims with treatment and physical rehabilitation in 23 limb-fitting centres that the ICRC is running in 11 countries, and to continue its support for similar centres run by ministries of health, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and non-governmental organizations in many other countries;
- to collect and analyse, where possible, data for use in the development of appropriate mine-action programmes.

The ICRC and the entire Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is closely associated with all these activities, are well aware that only a total ban on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines will put an end to the pain and destruction they cause. For the foreseeable future, however, a large-scale programme to prevent and alleviate the suffering engendered by these deadly weapons will remain necessary.

Governments, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and private donors are asked to respond generously to this appeal, so that mine incidents can be kept to a minimum and victims can receive proper assistance.

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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
LEBANON AND NORTHERN ISRAEL: ICRC APPEALS FOR CIVILIANS TO BE SPARED

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) wishes to express its concern regarding the recent attacks on Lebanon and northern Israel which have affected civilians on both sides. The ICRC deplores the death of a dozen persons and the fact that dozens more have been wounded according to various reports. Considerable damage has been inflicted on the civilian infrastructure in Lebanon. Bridges and electrical power plants have been struck, which has caused blackouts in many parts of the country including the capital, Beirut. In Israel, civilian homes were damaged.

The ICRC reminds the warring parties of their duty under international humanitarian law, in particular the obligation for those engaged in hostilities to take all necessary precautions to spare civilians and objects essential to the civilian population's well-being.

The ICRC delegation in Lebanon continues to work closely with the Lebanese Red Cross Society, whose branches throughout the country immediately dispatched volunteers to assist the victims of the attacks. The ICRC delegation in Israel, meanwhile, will soon be sending some medical equipment to the affected area.

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Communication to the press No. 99/40
25 June 1999

KOSOVO CRISIS: ICRC TRANSFERS RELEASED DETAINEES

Geneva (ICRC) - The authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia today released 166 detainees who had been held in Serbia. The men were given into the care of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which transported them back to Kosovo.

The released detainees will have the opportunity to telephone their families and will be given food and shelter for the night in Pristina before being taken by the ICRC to their home districts in Kosovo.

The ICRC's role in the operation is to offer protection and assistance to these men, all of whom would have been at risk had they travelled unaccompanied.

A list of the detainees' names will be made available to the public at the ICRC office in Pristina for consultation by families seeking relatives.

The ICRC welcomes the release of the 166 men. It is still seeking access to all detainees held in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in connection with both the internal conflict in Kosovo and the international conflict involving NATO forces. The exact number of people detained is unknown, as are their precise whereabouts.

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ICRC REPORT CALLS ON STATES TO STRENGTHEN CONTROLS ON ARMS AVAILABILITY

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is calling on States to limit the uncontrolled proliferation of arms and ammunition, which it blames for increasing tension in the world's trouble spots, prolonging conflicts and undermining the laws that protect civilians in time of war.

In a report entitled "Arms Availability and the Situation of Civilians in Armed Conflict", issued today, 1 July, the ICRC warns of the disastrous effects on civilian populations of the uncontrolled transfer and misuse of weapons.

Launching the report, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga declared: "The current pattern of transfers of small arms, light weapons and related ammunition, because it is largely outside international control, should be a matter of urgent humanitarian concern. We call on States to review their policies concerning the production, availability and transfer of arms and ammunition in light of their responsibility to 'respect and ensure respect' for international humanitarian law".

Despite important breakthroughs in prohibiting or limiting the transfer of chemical, biological, nuclear and major conventional weapons, relatively little attention has been paid to those that cause most death and injury among civilians - small arms and light weapons.

The report notes that the number of manufacturers of small arms is estimated to have increased by 25% between 1985 and 1995. Furthermore, large quantities of weapons were sold or given away as the world's big military powers reduced their stocks after the end of the Cold War. In Uganda in 1996, the report notes, an assault rifle cost about the same as a chicken.

The international restrictions on arms transfers that do exist apply primarily to major weapons systems and weapons of mass destruction. The few restrictions relating to small arms and light weapons are often weak and subject to varying interpretations. "The international community has so far proven disturbingly unable or unwilling to enforce United Nations embargoes that seek to prevent arms flows into areas of conflict", the report points out. This is the case even when such embargoes are prompted by brutal violations of human rights and humanitarian law.
The ICRC is urging States to recognize that the extent to which recipients comply with international humanitarian law - the rules which seek to limit the effects of war on civilians - should be a major consideration before they are supplied with weapons.

ICRC research shows a strong link between high levels of arms availability and high levels of civilian casualties, both during and after periods of conflict. In Afghanistan, figures from ICRC hospitals show that the number of injuries caused by weapons did not fall significantly after fighting ceased in a given region. In an area of Cambodia served by an ICRC hospital, the incidence of weapon injuries increased after the departure of United Nations forces to a level slightly higher than before their arrival, in the absence of successful disarmament of the various factions.

"There is no doubt that the primary responsibility lies with weapons users", emphasized Peter Herby, the main author of the report, "but States and companies selling weapons should be asking themselves some important questions. Have the people who are going to use these weapons made a commitment to respect international humanitarian law? Have they trained their forces in the rules of warfare? Have people who have violated those rules been punished? Will the end user really be the end user?"

Addressing representatives of diplomatic missions in Geneva, President Sommaruga said: "We plead with you not to allow the transfer of arms and ammunition to be treated simply as another form of commerce".

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2061
Communication to the press No. 99/42
5 July 1999

SOLOMON ISLANDS: ICRC CROSSES FRONT LINE

Geneva (ICRC) - For the past month the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been working to protect and assist people affected by the recent disturbances in the Solomon Islands, in the South Pacific. On 5 July, the organization for the first time delivered relief supplies across the front lines in Guadalcanal province.

Three ICRC vehicles loaded with rice, canned tuna, plastic sheeting, soap and detergent left the country's capital Honiara and travelled to the rural area where fighters of the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army are located.

The supplies are intended for some 1,000 civilians who have had to flee Honiara because of their origins. With its four-member team, the ICRC is for the moment the sole organization allowed to carry out cross-line operations, having hitherto been authorized to deliver only medicines and bandages for medical facilities in the area concerned.

Since tension began to rise in early June, the ICRC and the Solomon Islands Red Cross have helped some 5,500 people from both Guadalcanal and Malaita to travel by boat either to their islands of origin or other parts of Guadalcanal accessible only by sea.

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION: ICRC DELEGATE RELEASED

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is very pleased to announce the release this morning, 20 July 1999, of its delegate Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro, a New Zealander who had been detained in the northern Caucasus region since 15 May last.

Mr Cruz Ribeiro arrived at Moscow Tchkalovski military airport at 12:30 p.m. local time and was handed over to the ICRC by the Interior Ministry of the Russian Federation. He appeared to be in good health and is expected to arrive in Geneva late this afternoon.

The delegate was carrying out his duties when he was abducted in Nalchik, capital of the republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. A local employee who was seized at the same time was freed within hours.

The ICRC expresses its deep gratitude to the authorities involved in securing Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro's safe release.

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THE BALKANS: THOUSANDS REMAIN IN URGENT NEED

Geneva - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies appealed today for a further 120 million Swiss francs (76.5 million US dollars) to meet the needs of thousands of people in the Balkans. Wrecked homes, landmines and unexploded bombs, severe economic hardship, the problem of missing persons and the lingering trauma of war are among the major difficulties affecting the region.

The situation in Kosovo remains extremely precarious for returning refugees and many others. A second exodus from the province is under way, this time involving Serbs, Montenegrins and Romany people who now face a difficult and uncertain future in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Civilians in Serbia and Montenegro, meanwhile, are still enduring the hardships resulting from NATO bombing.

In Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the repercussions from the huge refugee influx will continue to be felt for a long time. Thousands of people who did not have much to begin with are now left even more bereft, having shared the little they had with refugees from Kosovo. In addition, both the ethnic Albanians who do not return to Kosovo and their hosts will need assistance throughout the winter months.

The appeal lists the following priorities for Red Cross action:

- assisting internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees and other particularly vulnerable people throughout the region;
- visiting prisoners;
- helping to resolve the issue of missing persons and providing support for their families;
- protecting people at risk;
- rehabilitating medical facilities and social welfare institutions;
- strengthening local Red Cross organizations.

Further information:
International Federation media service,
Helge Kwam,
++41 22 730 42 14

ICRC press office:
Suzanne Berger,
++41 22 730 23 07

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Communication to the press No. 99/45
3 August 1999

IN AID OF SUDANESE WAR VICTIMS

CHARITY CONCERT BY VIOLINIST VANESSA-MAE

Geneva (ICRC) -- Vanessa-Mae, one of the world's most original violinists, is to give a charity concert in aid of war victims in Sudan on 12 August 1999 at 8.30 p.m. at the Forces Motrices building in Geneva. Accompanied by the Geneva Chamber Orchestra, she will be performing a highly personal interpretation of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. During a recent European tour, "The Original Four Seasons" was highly acclaimed. The Geneva public will now also have the opportunity to enjoy this exceptional interpretation. The concert is part of a series of events marking the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. On the same day, Vanessa-Mae will also be attending the official ceremony.

Vanessa-Mae has been involved in the project to commemorate the adoption of the Geneva Conventions on several occasions this year. As part of the People on War campaign launched under the slogan "Even Wars have Limits", she appears in a TV spot where she declares: "The Geneva Conventions are the only barrier between us and barbarism". In March, Vanessa-Mae accompanied the ICRC on a visit to the Lopiding Hospital in Lokichokio (in northern Kenya, close to the Sudanese border) to see for herself the effects of the Sudanese conflict. In giving this charity concert, she is showing her solidarity with the civilian victims of this war which is causing so much suffering.

Vanessa-Mae, a child prodigy, began her career at the age of three. Although she is a contemporary musician, she performs pop and classical music as well. She is the youngest violinist ever to have recorded the violin concertos of Beethoven and Tchaikowsky. Her classical album released in 1996 sold 500,000 copies in two weeks and, as a result, 1997 saw her awarded the accolade of "Best-Selling Classical Artist in the World". Vanessa-Mae has enchanted audiences with her performances at prestigious events such as the G8 Summit in Lyon and the ceremony to mark Hong Kong's return to China.

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For the printed media: photos are available of Vanessa-Mae playing the violin at the Lopiding Hospital.

For your newspaper's events diary, we would ask you to include the following announcement:

**Charity concert in aid of Sudanese war victims, 12 August 1999 at 8.30 p.m. at the Forces Motrices building in Geneva: violinist Vanessa-Mae and the Geneva Chamber Orchestra will play Vivaldi in a version entitled "The Original Four Seasons".**

*Ticket reservations: Billetel network (tel.: ++41 21 310 16 00). Tickets also on sale at the door on the evening of the concert. Price: 83 Swiss francs (students 43 Swiss francs).*

For radio stations: A CD entitled "The Four Seasons Tour" is available.

For your events diary, we would ask you to include the following item:

**Charity concert in aid of Sudanese war victims, 12 August 1999 at 8.30 p.m. at the Forces Motrices building in Geneva: violinist Vanessa-Mae and the Geneva Chamber Orchestra will play Vivaldi in a version entitled "The Original Four Seasons".**

*Ticket reservations: Billetel network (tel.: ++41 21 310 16 00). Tickets also on sale at the door on the evening of the concert. Price: 83 Swiss francs (students 43 Swiss francs).*

For TV: A rough cut is available with images of Vanessa-Mae at the Lopiding Hospital and also the campaign TV spot for the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Requests for interviews: Trittico, 34 Philimore Walk, London W8 7SA, United Kingdom

Fax: ++44 171 938 1983

Thank you supporting the ICRC by promoting this exceptional cultural event.

For further information, orders of publicity material and accreditation for the concert, please contact Tony Burgener, ICRC, tel.: ++41 22 730 23 84 or Ilona Pongracz, ICRC, tel. ++41 22 730 23 83, Fax: ++41 22 730 28 99; e-mail: aburgener@icrc.org — ipongracz@icrc.org
SOLEMN APPEAL MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF 1949 GENEVA CONVENTIONS

Geneva (ICRC) - Fourteen prominent world figures, responding to the invitation of Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), launched a Solemn Appeal to the peoples, nations and governments of the world at a ceremony held on 12 August 1999 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. In this appeal the fourteen, including United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, asked States to reiterate "their refusal to see the unprecedented horrors of the Second World War repeated".

In Mr Sommaruga's words, "The Geneva Conventions, which are today binding on 188 States, have prevented untold suffering, yet the past 50 years have seen massacres, deportation, looting, rape and countless other atrocities. Nevertheless, this anniversary should be seen as an opportunity to look to the future".

In August 1949, 58 countries signed the four Geneva Conventions with the hope of limiting the horrors of war. These instruments were aimed at increasing protection for the civilian population, prisoners of war, the shipwrecked and wounded combatants. In 1977, the Conventions were supplemented by two Additional Protocols affording greater protection to civilians in both international and non-international conflicts. Fifty years on, the Solemn Appeal launched in Geneva asks the world:

- "to reject the idea that war is inevitable and to work tirelessly to eradicate its underlying causes;"
- "to demand of all those involved in armed conflicts and all who are in a position to influence the course of such conflicts that they respect the essential humanitarian principles and the rules of international humanitarian law;"
- "to spare civilians the agony of war;"
- "to foster relations between individuals, peoples and nations on the basis of the principles that inspired the Geneva Conventions, namely respect for human dignity in all circumstances, compassion for those who suffer and solidarity".

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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
The Solemn Appeal was signed by:

His Highness Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan;
Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations;
Ms Shabana Azmi, India, actress;
Ms Geraldine Chaplin, United Kingdom, actress;
H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan;
Fayrouz, Lebanon, singer and poet;
Mr Serge Klarsfeld, France, President of Fils et Filles des Déportés Juifs de France;
Mr Chris Moon, United Kingdom, supporter of organizations for the disabled;
Mr Jean Pictet, Honorary Vice-President of the ICRC;
Mr Vladimir Pozner, Russian Federation, journalist;
H.E. Mr Mário Soares, former President of Portugal;
H.E. General Amadou Toumani Touré, former President of Mali;
Ms Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund;
Mr Zhang Yuan, China, stage and film director.

Mr Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Argentina, 1980 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was unable to attend for health reasons.

During this anniversary year the ICRC has been carrying out, as part of its People on War project, a vast survey of war victims and combatants in 11 countries and among the general population in five others. Additional information on this survey can be found at www.onwar.org and information on the Geneva Conventions themselves can be obtained at www.icrc.org.

For the next two months, the streets of Geneva will be decorated with thematic banners and symbolic banderoles. On the evening of 12 August, the violinist Vanessa-Mae will give a charity concert in aid of Sudanese war victims.

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People on War – Solemn Appeal

The universally recognized Geneva Conventions were adopted in this city 50 years ago today. The States Parties thereby declared their refusal to see the unprecedented horrors of the Second World War repeated.

Since then, these treaties have helped to alleviate much suffering but have not been able to prevent millions of innocent people from falling victim to the conflicts that have ravaged our planet.

Although they are often breached, the Geneva Conventions and the principles on which they are founded remain as valid and relevant as ever.

That is the opinion of thousands of individuals across the world who bear the physical and mental scars of war. Men, women and children have all talked about their experiences, their fears and their expectations. They are the voices of war, and we are convinced that these expectations can be met.

We have come together in Geneva to make a solemn appeal to all peoples, nations and governments. We call on the world:

- to reject the idea that war is inevitable and to work tirelessly to eradicate its underlying causes;
- to demand of all those involved in armed conflicts and all who are in a position to influence the course of such conflicts that they respect the essential humanitarian principles and the rules of international humanitarian law;
- to spare civilians the agony of war;
- to foster relations between individuals, peoples and nations on the basis of the principles that inspired the Geneva Conventions, namely,
  - respect for human dignity in all circumstances;
  - compassion for those who suffer;
  - solidarity.

We are convinced that disregard for these principles sets the stage for war and that respecting them during wartime facilitates the restoration of peace.

On the eve of a new millennium, let us all undertake to defend these principles and thus give hope to future generations.

Geneva, 12 August 1999
Communication to the press No. 99/47
27 August 1999

EAST TIMOR: ICRC URGES RESPECT FOR CIVILIANS AND AID WORKERS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is deeply concerned about the humanitarian implications of the outbreaks of violence occurring in the runup to the forthcoming consultation in East Timor.

The ICRC calls on all those bearing weapons to respect the civilian population, persons displaying the protective red cross emblem and the staff of other humanitarian organizations.

During clashes in Dili yesterday the ICRC took five casualties to hospital, one of whom died an hour later. The organization stands ready to assist and protect any further victims, in accordance with the criteria governing its neutral and independent humanitarian action.

The ICRC currently has 11 delegates in East Timor and another in West Timor as part of a joint ICRC/Indonesian Red Cross rapid response team. Stocks of food, medical material and other relief supplies have been built up on both sides of the island so that delegates can meet needs as they arise.

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Communication to the press No. 99/48
3 September 1999

MYANMAR: ICRC VISITS TO DETAINES -- INTERIM ASSESSMENT

Geneva (ICRC) -- For the first time in Myanmar teams of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have visited more than 18,000 detainees and registered over 600 security detainees. Since the ICRC visits began last May, delegates have been to nine places of detention, including Yangon's Insein Prison and the central prison in Mandalay, and to three places of administrative internment.

Each visit was conducted according to the ICRC's standard working procedures, and included an initial discussion with the authorities administering the facility, a complete inspection of the premises, access to all the detainees, and private interviews with security detainees, who were given the opportunity to write Red Cross messages to their families.

The delegates had a meeting after each visit with the authorities in charge, putting forward recommendations regarding the situation they had observed. Confidential written reports were then handed over to the relevant Myanmar authorities.

The ICRC and the country's authorities have agreed that delegates would be able to return on a regular basis to all the places visited. The programme will gradually be extended to all detention facilities in Myanmar.

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EAST TIMOR: ICRC ASSISTS PEOPLE DISPLACED BY VIOLENCE

Geneva (ICRC) — In a situation of mounting violence, random shooting and destruction, the ICRC in East Timor is trying to assist increasing numbers of displaced people in the capital Dili, after the announcement of the result of the consultation on the future of the island.

According to the first assessment done in Dili by ICRC teams today (Sunday), more than 25'000 civilians fled their homes and took shelter in seven main locations.

Of the displaced, up to two thousand people took shelter early this morning (Sunday) in the compound of the ICRC in Dili. Many more were staying in churches and in Catholic missions or fled to the surrounding hills.

During lulls in the violence in Dili, the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) were the only humanitarian organisations able to move in town. They distributed food and water to more than 5'000 people. The displaced people were also given bamboo mats, cooking sets, soap, water containers and other basic items.

Among the 25,000 displaced is a group of 10'000 people mainly of non-East Timorese origin who have been staying in the police headquarters close to the airport waiting to leave East Timor. Thousands of others have gathered in the harbour waiting to be evacuated by the navy. Several thousand have already left the island in this way.

Due to the security situation, the ICRC is only working in Dili. The ICRC has very limited information about the humanitarian situation outside the capital. It does not have comprehensive information about how many people have been killed or wounded.

The ICRC has delivered medical supplies to the only functioning clinic in Dili and fears there is a serious risk of a disruption of emergency medical services. The ICRC is ready to step up its activities especially in the medical field by sending in a surgical team from Geneva.

The ICRC is worried about the degrading humanitarian situation in Timor and appeals to all parties to respect the Red Cross emblem and to facilitate the activities of humanitarian workers.

In West Timor, in Atambua across the East Timor border, the Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia), supported by the ICRC, is monitoring the humanitarian consequences of the increasing exodus from East Timor. An emergency stock and a medical post are being made ready to assist people in need.

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Communication to the press No. 99/50
6 September 1999

EAST TIMOR: ICRC DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT PLIGHT OF CIVILIANS

Geneva (ICRC) - The ICRC strongly condemns the attack carried out by armed militiamen against its office in Dili this morning and is deeply concerned about the plight of the local Red Cross staff and some 2,000 displaced people who had sought refuge in its compound.

Despite the ICRC's prior appeals for police protection, an armed group attacked the compound at around 11 a.m. local time. More than 2,000 displaced people who were seeking protection on the premises were panic-stricken and feared for their lives as the militiamen opened fire. At present there is no information about their fate or about any casualties. Around the same time, a similar incident took place at the adjacent premises of Bishop Belo of Dili.

Following the attack, the 11 ICRC expatriate staff, along with several expatriates from other humanitarian agencies, were separated from the local people and taken at gunpoint to a police station.

The ICRC has been receiving distress calls from throughout the territory, leading it to believe that there is no safe haven either in the capital or outside, as law and order seem to have broken down completely.

In these circumstances the ICRC was obliged to evacuate its expatriate staff, who arrived in Darwin this afternoon and are being taken care of by the Australian Red Cross. This will prevent it from responding to the increasing humanitarian needs in East Timor. The organization will do its utmost to resume its activities in the territory at the earliest possible date.

The ICRC remains extremely concerned about the fate of the civilian population. As a neutral and impartial organization, it is shocked by this attack and strongly condemns the lack of respect shown for the red cross emblem, a universal symbol of protection in times of armed conflict.

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Communication to the press No. 99/51
9 September 1999

PRESIDENT OF PORTUGAL VISITS ICRC

Geneva (ICRC) - On 9 September the President of the Portuguese Republic, Mr Jorge Sampaio, visited the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) where he was received by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga and several other senior officials. Also present was Astrid Heiberg, President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

In his welcoming remarks, the ICRC President praised Portugal's rich cultural tradition and its important historical role in many regions of the world. He paid tribute to the Portuguese government's efforts to promote respect for humanitarian law worldwide, highlighting the fact that former President Mário Soares had signed the solemn appeal launched on 12 August 1999 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Focusing on more recent events, Mr Sommaruga expressed the ICRC's deep concern over the East Timor tragedy and the fate of thousands of helpless civilians exposed to indiscriminate violence following the referendum on 30 August. He voiced the hope that the ICRC would be able to return to the territory quickly in order to provide urgently needed assistance and protection for the population. He also mentioned the situation in Angola, where renewed hostilities during the past year have reversed the peace process and caused further suffering among tens of thousands of people already affected by more than 20 years of civil war.

Lastly Mr Sommaruga expressed the wish that, during its forthcoming presidency of the European Union, Portugal would continue to lend its active support to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement by helping to promote its humanitarian mandate and activities among the other member countries.

In reply, Mr Sampaio reiterated his government's support for the ICRC and underscored the unique nature of the organization's mandate to assist and protect conflict victims. He also expressed his deepest respect for the work of ICRC delegates, who at times risked their lives in the course of their duties.

The Portuguese President deplored the fact that, 50 years after the signing of the Geneva Conventions, humanitarian law continued to be flouted or simply ignored. As he spoke, the most basic principles of that law were being violated and human dignity trampled on a massive scale in East Timor.

In conclusion, Mr Sampaio urgently called for greater respect for humanitarian law and for human rights.

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Communication to the press No. 99/52
18 September 1999

ICRC LAUNCHES RELIEF OPERATION IN EAST TIMOR

Geneva (ICRC) – The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) began an operation on Friday to assist the victims of the violence in East Timor. Two aircraft flew into Dili with two tonnes of rice and 11 tonnes of high-protein food aboard. They arrived from Surabaya, on the island of Java, where the ICRC has in recent days set up a logistics base with stocks of food, medicine and other essential supplies.

The operation continued today with a third flight to Dili. The organization is encountering logistical difficulties in the East Timorese capital such as inadequate means of unloading the aircraft and a lack of vehicles.

Meanwhile, the two ICRC delegates who returned to East Timor on 14 September to assess the situation and possible ways of coming to the aid of the numerous victims went to Dare, about 10 kilometres outside Dili, where they found some 90,000 displaced people living in the open in extremely difficult conditions. Logistical problems prevented the delegates from providing them with more than a small amount of food.

Dili itself has been devastated, with many public and private buildings looted and burnt to the ground. The atmosphere remains very tense. The two delegates also went to the city’s civilian hospital, which they found had ceased to function because it had been emptied of supplies and equipment. Six volunteer nurses have remained to care for the 37 patients there.

Over the coming days the ICRC will do everything possible to develop the current operation, with emphasis on dispatching food, medical supplies and other essential items. To this end a ship is being loaded in the port of Surabaya and the Norwegian Red Cross is sending a field hospital. A team of 20 delegates, including medical, sanitation, logistics and construction experts, is standing by to go to the territory as soon as conditions permit.
SRI LANKA: ICRC ALARMED AT RISING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

Geneva (ICRC) – The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is deeply concerned at the recent outburst of violence in the conflict in Sri Lanka, which is resulting in an alarming increase in the number of civilian casualties.

On 15 September an attack by the Sri Lankan airforce killed 22 civilians and wounded a further 35 in Puthukkudiyruppu near Mullaittivu. Children were among the victims.

According to eyewitness accounts, in the early hours of this morning the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) massacred at least 50 civilians, again including children, in the villages of Gonagala, Borapola and Bedirekka, in the Amparai area.

The ICRC reminds both the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law and urges them in particular to desist from brutal and indiscriminate acts that spread terror amongst the civilian population.

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Communication to the press No. 99/54
4 October 1999

UNDER EMBARGO: 14.00 HRS GMT

BALKAN CRISIS: ICRC ASSISTS IN RELEASE OF PRISONERS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is today assisting in the release of 54 men arrested in Kosovo and held in Serbia. The men have been freed by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia.

The ICRC's role is to ensure their safe return to their homes. It will transfer them by bus to Kosovo, help them make contact with their relatives, and provide food and shelter for the night in Pristina before taking them to their home districts. The released detainees will also have the opportunity to talk to ICRC delegates and consult the organization's medical staff.

A list of the detainees' names will be made available to the public at the ICRC office in Pristina and other ICRC offices in Kosovo for consultation by families seeking relatives.

The ICRC welcomes this release. It is the second time that it has helped detainees released by the Serbian authorities to return to Kosovo. On 25 June 1999, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia released 166 men into the care of the ICRC.

The ICRC now has access to some 1,900 people arrested in Kosovo and held in places of detention elsewhere in Serbia. It also has access to people arrested in Kosovo by KFOR. ICRC delegates visit all these detainees, hold private interviews with them and help them to maintain family contact through the exchange of Red Cross messages.

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Lessons learned from listening to people on war

Enhancing protection of civilians

ICRC presents innovative body of research on war

Geneva (ICRC) - Listening to people express their views on war will help us discover how to better protect people in war. This statement neatly encapsulates the idea behind the People on War project, a worldwide consultation on the rules to limit violence in warfare, launched by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) one year ago. More than 20,000 people in 17 countries – civilians and combatants alike – were interviewed between October 1998 and September 1999 to find out what basic rules they think should be implemented in war and why those rules are so often violated. The results of this most extensive exercise in social research ever undertaken on war have been compiled in country reports (including initial findings and interpretations), the first of which were presented in Geneva today. The reports were written by Greenberg Research Inc., a Washington-based opinion-research firm, which developed the methods used in the consultation, combining representative opinion surveys and interpretative in-depth research.

The reports presented today cover four countries that have experienced war in recent years – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, Lebanon and Somalia – and four others – France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – that play an important role regarding international and regional peace and security policy in their capacity as permanent members of the UN Security Council.

"An overwhelming majority of the populations surveyed, between 87% and 98%, are of the opinion that in war civilians should be spared from attack", explains Christophe Girod, head of the People on War project. Nevertheless, this is often not done in practice. The People on War reports shed more light on the different reasons why. "Even at this early stage in our evaluation, we can see that the problem is not anything as simple as a breakdown in people's sense of morality", says Girod. "Rather, as conflict situations unfold, both civilians and combatants find their perceptions of their original beliefs changing. As a result of both this change and the particular nature of most of today's armed conflicts, it has grown less and less clear what the word 'civilian' actually means to people."
The reports explain the reasons for this shift in perceptions and how civilians easily pass a threshold beyond which they are viewed as taking part in the conflict. Being forced to provide food, shelter or information to combatants — or doing so voluntarily — leads to a blurring of the line between civilian and combatant. Unfortunately, this is much more likely to occur in modern-day conflicts, in which the population as a whole can easily be viewed by one side or the other as taking part. As a war victim put it in an interview, "Civil war is harder than international war, in which you can tell who your enemy is. In civil war you do not know who your enemy is." Moreover, in the growing number of identity-driven conflicts warfare is perceived by combatants as an act of self-defence on the part of the particular group to which they belong. This frequently erases the distinction between civilians and combatants as laid down in international humanitarian law. As one ex-soldier put it, "It is not a crime when you are defending your home and family."

Most of the interviews were carried out by means of extensive standardized questionnaires (more than 20,000 in all) which were later processed into quantitative data. In addition, over 250 individual and 100 focus-group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Most of the actual field work was carried out by Red Cross and Red Crescent staff all over the world and it was owing to this worldwide network, with its access to both the bearers of arms and the victims of war, that the research was possible at all.

"Many people were sceptical about opinion research, and so were we — before we started", says Christophe Girod about what was no average polling exercise. It reached people in places where few humanitarian organizations would dare to go and where opinion-research firms often would not even know how to make the initial approach. "We wanted to speak to ordinary people who had lost their homes, to soldiers, doctors and prisoners of war, to those who have loved ones missing, to guerillas and members of paramilitary groups, to non-governmental organizations and to international peace-keepers. And we did. We wanted to cover the entire world, all the different types of conflicts that have marked the past 50 years. Today we have concluded this research and possess one of the most important and innovative bodies of social research on war ever carried out."

The results of the People on War consultation are intended not only to invigorate the worldwide humanitarian debate as a new century dawns, but also to make more effective the ICRC's work to promote knowledge and acceptance of the rules of war. "Further research on the data gathered will help us better understand where the threshold lies beyond which people are no longer viewed as non-combatants, and thus where attacks on them are perceived as justified", says Girod. "In the voices of these people lies the potential key to enhancing recognition that there must be limits to war, and thus to ensuring better protection for civilians."

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Communication to the press No. 99/56
Geneva/Berlin, 11 October 1999

The ICRC and the IPU launch a handbook for parliamentarians entitled "Respect for International Humanitarian Law"

As the international community celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are jointly launching today a handbook for parliamentarians entitled "Respect for International Humanitarian Law".

The outcome of cooperation between the world organisation of parliaments and the organisation charged with promoting respect for the Geneva Conventions, the handbook was produced on the initiative of member parliamentarians of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law. As a symbolic gesture, the handbook is being launched in the capital of reunited Germany, where parliamentarians from all over the world, meeting for the 102nd Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, will discuss the "Contribution of parliaments to ensuring respect for and promoting international humanitarian law on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions" from 11 to 15 October.

According to the President of the ICRC, Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, "respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law requires extensive political mobilisation based on both knowledge and a certain know-how. Parliamentarians not only oversee the Executive's action in applying the law but also have the capability and authority to transmit the rules of international humanitarian law to the population and to ensure that the competent institutions, the army and security forces, receive adequate instruction in them".

The handbook is designed to help parliaments and their members to familiarise themselves with the general principles of international humanitarian law and to learn how they are implemented so that the people's elected representatives can fully discharge their responsibilities in that regard.

According to the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Anders B. Johnsson, "the handbook should make political leaders more aware of their key role in securing respect for international humanitarian law and help them to take effective action to that end. Ensuring respect for international humanitarian law is of vital importance. At stake are peace and the well-being of the population - two primary responsibilities of the State and the people's representatives."

Contacts for additional information:
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At the ICRC (Geneva): Mrs Françoise Derron, tel.: ++41 22 730 2915

CONSULT THE UNION'S JOURNAL ON THE WEB SITE - http://www.ipu.org
POWER OF HUMANITY CONFERENCE OPENS IN GENEVA

Geneva - The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is holding its Power of Humanity conference in Geneva from 31 October to 6 November. This unique gathering - the largest of its kind, brings to Geneva 176 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from around the world, government representatives from the 188 signatories to the Geneva Conventions and the leadership of the International Federation and ICRC.

It is an opportunity for people and governments from around the world, who share a common goal, to look at new ways of handling new challenges facing humanitarian actions today.

It is a conference with a difference. Held every four years, it gives the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement an important opportunity to discuss, debate and properly prepare itself for the challenges it will face in the new millennium. As a way of turning ideas into practice, and goodwill into humanitarian commitment, the conference will end with the adoption of a plan of action, a declaration and the publication of pledges by each of the National Societies and governments.

It is the most important event of the Millennium Year for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Some of the key issues include:

♦ How can the rapid decline in the number of volunteers, the lifeblood of the Movement, be stopped or reversed?
♦ How can civilians be better protected from the consequences of war?
♦ How does the Movement respond to the changing nature of war and to the dangers those pose to its people in the field?

The plenary sessions and the fourteen workshops on these and other issues will be open to the media.

Where - Centre International de Conférences de Gêneve (CICG)
When - Opening Ceremonies begin at 16:30 on Sunday 31 October

Please see accreditation form attached and submit by fax before your arrival (41 22 740 0275 or 41 22 734 8280)

For further information, please contact:
Jón Valfells, International Federation Tel: 41 22 730 4374
Urs Boegli, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Tel: 41 22 730 2389
Françoise Derron, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Tel: 41 22 730 2915
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The International Federation, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS: ICRC URGES RESPECT FOR CIVILIANS

Geneva (ICRC) - As hostilities intensify in and around Grozny and other cities in the Chechen republic, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is extremely concerned for the civilian population trapped in the violence.

The ICRC calls on all those taking part in the fighting to abide by the rules of international humanitarian law. It urges them to respect and protect civilians by enabling them to leave conflict areas and by refraining from launching indiscriminate attacks that spread terror among the population or from using civilians for military purposes. The ICRC also reminds all those involved in the hostilities that they should be clearly distinguishable from civilians. It further enjoins all those engaged in the fighting to ensure that persons captured and detained are treated humanely, to care for the wounded and the sick, to protect hospitals and medical personnel and to respect the red cross/red crescent emblem. Furthermore, the ICRC considers it imperative that humanitarian assistance for civilians and the wounded be allowed into Chechnya.

In spite of worsening security conditions, the ICRC's team of locally recruited staff in Grozny, together with the Russian Red Cross, has so far continued to provide assistance, mainly for medical facilities.
HENRY DUNANT MEDALS AWARDED

Four people have been awarded the Henry Dunant Medal for humanitarian service, two of them posthumously, at a ceremony held in Geneva on 28 October 1999.

The recipients of the Medal, which bears the name of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement’s founder, are:

- Ms Ute Stührwoldt, a paediatric nurse from the German Red Cross,
- Mr Donald Tansley, a former Executive Vice-President of the Canadian International Development Agency,
- Dr. Byron R.M. Hove, former Chairman of the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society and former Vice-Chairman of the Standing Commission (posthumously),
- Dr. Guillermo Rueda Montana, former President of the Colombian Red Cross (posthumously).

The Medals were awarded by the Council of Delegates, which is composed of representatives from the 176 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Medal is awarded every two years to acknowledge and reward outstanding service and acts of great devotion by a member of the Movement to the Red Cross and Red Crescent cause. The criteria for receiving the Medal include incurring risks on behalf of others which endanger life, health and personal freedom. The Medal may also be awarded for a long period of service devoted to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The Henry Dunant Medal is a red cross embossed with the profile of the Movement’s founder, attached to a green ribbon. It is the Movement’s highest distinction.
PROFILES OF THE RECIPIENTS

Ms Ute Stührwoldt, a registered paediatric nurse, joined the German Red Cross after graduation and has been active in the Movement ever since. From 1985 to 1998, Ms Stührwoldt worked as a health delegate with the ICRC and the International Federation on a number of missions in Africa and central Asia. During this period, she set up and supervised feeding centres in some the world’s most embattled areas, where she also showed extraordinary compassion in helping to care for and evacuate the war wounded. Ms Stührwoldt has also trained medical and health personnel.

Mr Donald Tansley was Executive Vice-President of the Canadian International Development Agency when he took a leave of absence to conduct a study for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on its future role. He became the study director of the Joint Committee for the reappraisal of the role of the Red Cross. His final report, An Agenda for the Red Cross, published in 1975, became a reference document for the entire Movement and facilitated the task of defining the missions and goals of the Movement’s components.

Dr. Byron R.M. Hove was a founding member of the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society. He held the post of National Chairman until shortly before his death in 1998. During his tenure, he set up a series of programmes to enhance his Society’s capacity to serve the community. As Vice-Chairman of the Standing Commission, Dr. Hove was committed to strengthening the relationships between the Movement’s different components.

Dr. Guillermo Rueda Montana served the Colombian health sector and taught medicine in several universities while working as a practising surgeon. During his 20-year tenure as President of the Colombian Red Cross, he made the National Society strong and independent, and played an increasingly active role in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Dr Rueda was committed to alleviating human suffering in his war-torn country and to promoting peace there.
Joint communication to the press  
ICRC No. 99/60  
Federation No. 31/99  
1 November 1999

Lessons learned from listening to people on war

Geneva - Listening to people express their views on war will help us discover how to better protect people in war. This statement neatly encapsulates the idea behind the People on War project, a worldwide consultation on the rules to limit violence in warfare, launched by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) one year ago. More than 20,000 people in 17 countries - civilians and combatants alike - were interviewed between October 1998 and September 1999 to find out what basic rules they think should be implemented in war and why those rules are so often violated.

The results of this most extensive exercise in social research ever undertaken on war have been compiled in country reports, which will be available at the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent as well as a final The People on War Report. The reports were written by Greenberg Research Inc., a Washington-based opinion-research firm, which developed the methodology used in the consultation, combining representative opinion surveys and interpretative in-depth research.

Although an overwhelming majority of the populations surveyed, between 87% and 98%, are of the opinion that in war civilians should be spared from attack, this is often not done in practice. The People on War reports shed more light on the different reasons why. Even at this early stage in the evaluation, one can see that the problem is not anything as simple as a breakdown in people's sense of morality, resulting almost inevitably from the state of war. Rather, as conflict situations unfold, both civilians and combatants find their perceptions of their original beliefs changing. As a result of both this change and the particular nature of most of today's armed conflicts, it has grown less and less clear what the word 'civilian' actually means to people. The reports explain the reasons for this shift in perceptions and how civilians easily pass a threshold beyond which they are viewed as taking part in the conflict.

The results of the People on War consultation are intended not only to invigorate the worldwide humanitarian debate as a new century dawns, but also to make more effective the ICRC's work to promote knowledge and acceptance of the rules of war. Further research on the data gathered will help us better understand where the threshold lies beyond which people are no longer viewed as non-combatants, and thus where attacks on them are perceived as justified. In the voices of these people lies the potential key to enhancing recognition that there must be limits to war, and thus to ensuring better protection for civilians.

For further information, please contact:
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The International Federation, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

COMITÉ D'ORGANISATION  
ORGANISING COMMITTEE  
Case postale 372, CH-1211 Genève 19, Suisse  
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RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT REPORTS MAJOR DROP IN GLOBAL VOLUNTEER FORCE

Geneva - In the last decade, the worldwide volunteer force of the Red Cross and Crescent has dropped by more than 50 per cent, according to a new study by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The "Learning in the Nineties" report indicates that the number of members and volunteers has dropped from 220 million to 105 million since 1990.

"It is difficult to gauge the exact numbers of volunteers worldwide, but there is a clear drop which we need to investigate," says Christoph Mueller, director of the volunteering review project. "We count on our volunteers to deliver core services in the field, so we need to look for new ways to recruit and keep our volunteers."

Dropping numbers of volunteers and members are not limited to the Red Cross, but are part of a global trend affecting churches, trade unions and humanitarian organizations. This trend is driven by changing social and political factors. The growth of individualism, the fall of communism with its system collective volunteering, and a shift of attitude away from volunteering as a civic duty to a leisure activity, have all contributed to a drop worldwide.

Despite the decline in numbers, the Red Cross and Crescent believes that the spirit of volunteering is still strong. "The world around us may have changed, but the mission of the Red Cross and Crescent remains the same," says Steve Davey, International Conference spokesperson. "Today, communities and governments know they need volunteers, and people still have the desire to help one another in times of need."

This critical issue is being discussed today at a workshop at the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The International Conference, held every four years, is a gathering of the entire Red Cross Movement including representatives of 176 National Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the 188 signatories of the Geneva Conventions.

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The International Federation, the ICRC and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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Communication to the press No. 99/62
30 October 1999

RUSSIAN FEDERATION: RED CROSS WORKERS KILLED IN CHECHNYA

Geneva (ICRC) - A convoy of vehicles, among them vehicles from the Chechen branch of the Russian Red Cross, came under fire yesterday afternoon near the village of Chami Yurt, 20 km west of Grozny, on the main road between Nazran and Grozny. Military operations were in progress in the area.

According to local Red Cross sources, the five vehicles, all of which were clearly marked with the red cross emblem (the truck displayed a red cross on its roof) were returning to Grozny from the Ingush border, which it had been unable to cross.

According to the same sources, a rocket fired from an aircraft hit the truck, killing two Red Cross workers and seriously wounding a third. A number of nearby vehicles also came under fire, resulting in the death of at least 25 persons and injuring 70 more.

Deeply shocked by this attack against the emblem and staff of the Red Cross and extremely concerned about the civilian casualties, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) strongly appeals to all those involved in the fighting to respect and protect civilians, not to use them for military purposes and to respect the emblem and staff of the Red Cross. The ICRC also urges all those involved in the conflict to allow civilians to safely leave combat zones.

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Communication to the press No. 99/63
1 November 1999

RED CROSS URGENTLY NEEDS FUNDS FOR EMERGENCY AID TO NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on behalf of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, today launched an appeal for more than 18 million Swiss francs to step up relief operations for thousands of people affected by the renewed fighting in Chechnya.

The appeal follows recent discussions in Moscow and Geneva during which the Russian Red Cross Society, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC together drew up a humanitarian plan of action. The plan provides for the distribution of aid to some 150,000 victims of the crisis in the northern Caucasus during the coming winter months (November 1999 through March 2000).

The ICRC, whose traditional task is to protect and assist victims of conflict, has been entrusted with the general coordination of Red Cross relief efforts in accordance with the Seville Agreement between the components of the Movement. The Russian Red Cross will assume an operational lead role in Russia outside the northern Caucasus region. It will provide social welfare and medical services in its reception centres in the framework of its Population Movement Programme. The International Federation will continue to play its key role in providing support for the activities of the Russian Red Cross.

The three components of the Movement will work in close cooperation to implement the plan of action. In the northern Caucasus, activities will be conducted with the Russian Red Cross and through ICRC staff stationed throughout the region. A team of five ICRC delegates will coordinate operations from the ICRC's logistics centre in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, and from the ICRC delegation in Moscow.

The plan of action lists the following priorities.

Assistance

In Chechnya, the ICRC and the local branch of the Russian Red Cross plan to provide food parcels and bulk food together with hygiene kits, kitchen sets, blankets and plastic sheeting for distribution to about 30,000 internally displaced people within the republic.
Ongoing programmes will be continued. These include the distribution of bread to some 12,000 vulnerable people in Grozny, maintenance of Pumping Station No. 1, which is now the sole source of clean water for the city, and the provision of emergency medical supplies to medical facilities that are accessible on Chechen territory.

In the neighbouring republics of Daghestan and Ingushetia, food aid and hygiene kits will be distributed on a monthly basis to 100,000 displaced Chechens. They will also receive blankets, kitchen sets, plastic sheeting and other essential items.

Water and sanitation equipment will be installed by the ICRC, especially where the concentration of displaced people is high.

The Russian Red Cross will distribute winter clothes to 50,000 beneficiaries.

The local branch of the Russian Red Cross in Ingushetia will increase its current bread production for the most vulnerable among the displaced people to 20,000 loaves per day, and will also provide 3,000 hot meals daily.

The local branches of the Russian Red Cross in Ingushetia and in Daghestan will set up two clinics and two additional mobile units where the displaced will be able to receive medical treatment.

In the Russian Federation outside the northern Caucasus region, the Russian Red Cross, with the support of the International Federation, will provide 20,000 people directly affected by the current crisis with food parcels, hygiene kits, clothes, shoes, blankets and bedding. This humanitarian aid will be distributed in Russian Red Cross reception centres where psycho-social counselling, legal advice and health services will also be available. The ICRC, together with the Russian Red Cross, will continue to support social welfare programmes for about 22,300 vulnerable people in the northern Caucasus, including Chechnya.

ICRC protection activities

In accordance with its traditional mandate in the area of protection, the ICRC will pursue its efforts to gain access to persons detained in connection with this latest crisis.

Finally, in close cooperation with the Russian Red Cross, it will help restore contact between relatives who have been separated by the events.

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SRI LANKA: ICRC URGES WARRING PARTIES TO SPARE WOUNDED AND PRISONERS

Geneva (ICRC) - The International Committee of the Red Cross is deeply concerned about the safety of wounded combatants and those captured during recent engagements in northern Sri Lanka. Past fighting in the country has unfortunately often left many dead and few prisoners.

The ICRC reminds both the Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law. It urgently calls on all those involved in the fighting to ensure that combatants who have laid down their arms should be spared. The captured must be treated humanely and the wounded collected and cared for without discrimination.

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Communication to the press No. 99/85
21 November 1999

SRI LANKA: ICRC CALLS ON PARTIES TO CONFLICT TO RESPECT CIVILIANS

Geneva (ICRC) - On 20 November fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam left 37 civilians dead and 60 others wounded. Thirteen children were among the dead. The victims had taken refuge in the compound of a Roman Catholic church in Madhu, between Mannar and Vavuniya in the north of the island. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), deeply shocked by this event, has once again called on the warring parties to spare civilians and places of worship.

The ICRC today visited the wounded at the hospital in Vavuniya and supplied the facility with medical assistance, including sufficient dressings for some 120 people.

Since the upsurge in fighting at the beginning of November the ICRC has repeatedly reminded the parties to the conflict of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law. It urgently appeals to the parties to take the necessary measures at all times to prevent casualties among the civilian population during military operations.

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PRESS RELEASE

Press release No. 99/66
25 November 1999

ICRC: NEW DIRECTOR FOR INTERNATIONAL LAW AND COMMUNICATION

Geneva (ICRC) - At its meeting on 25 November 1999 the Assembly of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) appointed Mr François Bugnion, B.A., D. Pol. Sci., to the post of Director and Head of the Department of International Law and Communication. He will take up his new duties on 1 January 2000.

Mr Bugnion, an ICRC staff member since 1970, will take over from Mr Yves Sandoz, LL.D., who is approaching the end of his second term as a Director of the organization.

The Assembly extended its warmest thanks to Mr Sandoz for his distinguished services to the ICRC and wished Mr Bugnion every success in his new activities within the organization's collegial Directorate.

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Communication to the press No. 99/67
23 December 1999

LEBANON: MORTAL REMAINS EVACUATED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

Geneva (ICRC) - On 22 and 23 December the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conducted an operation to evacuate the mortal remains of five Hezbollah fighters from southern Lebanon.

ICRC delegates and Lebanese Red Cross first-aid workers, assisted by a team of engineers from the United Nations Interim Force Lebanon (UNIFIL), removed the bodies from Wadi Slouki, Arnoun and Shamaa. The mortal remains were handed over by the ICRC to Hezbollah representatives so that they could be returned to the families of the deceased.

The operation, which the ICRC organized in its capacity as a neutral intermediary at the request of all the parties concerned, was conducted during a general cease-fire agreed upon for that purpose.

The ICRC stands ready to recover the remains of a sixth fighter.

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