RWANDA / CONGO-KINSHASA

ICRC REPATRIATES RWANDAN POWS

Eight members of the Rwandan Patriotic Army held in Kinshasa in connection with the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were repatriated by the International Committee of the Red Cross on 14 January for medical reasons. The decision to repatriate the prisoners was taken by the Congolese authorities in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions. The prisoners had been registered and regularly visited by the ICRC during their captivity.

On three other occasions over the past year (22 April, 14 July and 21 October) the ICRC repatriated, for medical reasons and at the request of the detaining authorities, a total of four Zimbabwean prisoners of war held in Kigali as well as a Rwandan POW held in Harare.

The ICRC stands ready to assist in the further implementation of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
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YUGOSLAVIA

PUTTING HOSPITALS BACK INTO ACTION

Work has started this week on rebuilding the Children's Tuberculosis and Lung Disease Centre at Belgrade's Dragisa Hospital, which was heavily damaged in the NATO air campaign last year. The Centre has 100 beds.

The $750,000 project, undertaken by the Finnish Red Cross, should be completed by May.

The Finnish Red Cross has completed similar work at medical facilities in Kosovo, mainly in the town of Gnjilan. It has also provided equipment and an administration team for the regional hospital there.
Their work has brought the Finns face to face with the effects of the conflicts in both areas. "For all the differences," says Marja-Leena Oraby, the medical coordinator, "the needs are much the same in Belgrade and Kosovo, both in medical terms – health-care facilities needing repair, etc. – and in psychological and material terms since the general population are still suffering trauma from the war while trying to cope with the hardships of everyday life. I am pleased to see the Red Cross family working together throughout the region to meet as many different needs as possible."

Further information: Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++381 11 450 590
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During the weekend of 22 - 23 January 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 37
EGYPT

IMPLEMENTING THE LAW

A committee has been formed to advise the Egyptian government on ways of implementing international humanitarian law and making its rules better known. The committee was created under a decree issued by the Prime Minister on 23 January 2000. It will comprise officials from the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Defence, the Interior, and Higher Education. The Egyptian Red Crescent Society and the ICRC's Cairo delegation will also be represented.

The Geneva Conventions, their two Additional Protocols and the other international treaties that make up humanitarian law focus on measures to prevent unnecessary suffering and to safeguard human dignity in wartime. The committee will look into ways of spreading knowledge of the treaties' provisions and enhancing their implementation. It will also suggest means of improving training for those whose task it is to promote the law and facilitating the exchange of information among organizations involved in that effort.

The Ministry of Justice will provide financial, technical and secretarial support to the committee and will follow up its recommendations. The ministry will also set up a documentation and information unit to compile legislation and regulations – both local and foreign – relating to this body of law.

The committee's creation represents a major step toward anchoring humanitarian law in Egyptian legislation and raising awareness of its provisions among both government officials and the general public. It is the fruit of close cooperation between the ICRC, the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Ministry of Justice which led to the holding of an Arab regional conference in November to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. The "Cairo Declaration" issued by that conference recommended that national committees be set up in Arab countries to promote awareness of and respect for international humanitarian law.

Further information: Roland Huguenin, ICRC Cairo, tel. ++202 337 92 82

New on the ICRC's public server (http://www.icrc.org):

- Fact sheets – all dated January 2000 – on the organization's activities in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Uganda.


During the weekend of
29 - 30 January 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
AT A CAMP FOR THE DISPLACED

"They came down the river to escape the fighting", said Moïse, a clergyman who also works for the government agency in charge of reintegrating displaced people into society. "They" – two women – had recently arrived at a camp for the displaced in Kinkole, on the outskirts of Kinshasa.

Moïse runs the camp, which shelters slightly more than 1,100 people (around 580 families), including 641 women (most of whom were separated from their husbands during the hostilities) and 470 children. The camp, which opened in November 1999, initially took in 400 of the 1,800 displaced persons repatriated from Bangui (Central African Republic) by UNHCR. Mostly women and children, these people had fled the fighting in Equateur province, in the north-western Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Stretched out above the river Congo, the camp, which is not fenced in, is surrounded by dense vegetation and rice fields cultivated by local farmers. The displaced people have moved into abandoned buildings, of which it can at least be said that they have roofs (repaired by the ICRC) and sturdy walls. The shelter afforded is especially welcome at the end of the rainy season, with its sudden, heavy downpours. A dozen policemen patrol the grounds, adding to the feeling of security.

On the day of the visit, a truck marked with a red cross pulled into the camp and the children immediately gathered around: it was distribution time. There was no mad scramble for the rice, red beans, salt and oil, only laughter and wide-open eyes.

The ICRC has been providing these people with food aid and basic medical supplies from the very start. It turns the medicine over to a specialized Congolese NGO, which comes to the camp once a week. In between visits, two women who live in the camp and have some medical knowledge act as nurses.

Two ICRC delegates, one of them a doctor, had come to talk with Moïse about daily problems in the camp. Now it was time for the Congolese authorities to find a way to reintegrate these people into society so that they could lead active lives again. The two delegates explained this to Moïse, who listened attentively. Assistance is important, but the authorities must also be made aware of the need to shoulder their responsibilities if this camp is not to go the way of so many other camps in Africa and become a permanent place of exile.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 45
SUDAN

VACCINATION PROGRAMME IN CHELKOU

Carrying out vaccination programmes in conflict areas has long been a priority for humanitarian organizations despite the logistic and security problems that are sometimes involved. So when ICRC delegates based in Chelkou, in the Bahr al-Ghazal region of southern Sudan, were approached by the population, the local authorities and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association on the subject, they responded immediately. As part of the ICRC’s ongoing primary health-care activities in the area, the delegates undertook to train nine health workers in vaccination procedures and to set up a far-reaching immunization programme.

The nine workers, who were trained by two ICRC health delegates from 17 to 31 January, have now passed their final exams and are ready to take up their tasks. When the programme starts up in March, its aims will be twofold. Regular immunization sessions will be organized at the ICRC’s primary health-care unit for people living in Chelkou and nearby villages. In addition, outreach sessions will be held for the inhabitants of remote villages. The goal is to cover 70% of the population in the Chelkou area.

The new programme will further heighten the impact of the health services which the ICRC has been providing in the area for many months. In the past, these have included training for health workers in disinfection procedures, dressing techniques and traditional midwifery. At present, the ICRC’s antenatal clinic is vaccinating pregnant women against tetanus. Such activities have helped improve the health of those living in the area, which is currently controlled by the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2045

YUGOSLAVIA / KOSOVO

HANDOVER AT MERDARE

It was a scene that could have come straight from a novel by John Le Carré: the icy roadway gleaming white under a canopy of stars in a cloudless sky, temperatures edging the wrong way past minus 10 degrees, soldiers in combat uniform carrying automatic rifles, a line of vehicles standing empty by the roadside while their occupants, huddled in small groups, peered anxiously towards the checkpoint, their breath condensing in the frosty air and mixing with the smoke of fast-burning cigarettes.

This was Merdare, a crossing point into Kosovo, at 5.30 p.m. on 28 January as another desperately cold winter night was falling. The groups of civilians, both children and adults, were waiting for their first, eagerly-anticipated glimpse of relatives coming from the other side of the boundary line: 22 men who had just been released from Serbian prisons.

The British soldiers manning the checkpoint were friendly, but vigilant: blocking the road were two busloads of Serb civilians leaving Kosovo to visit relatives in Serbia, or perhaps leaving for good as the province had become increasingly dangerous for them in the past half year.

At last the buses moved on, opening the way for incoming vehicles, first among them three ICRC Land Cruisers. A murmur of excitement arose from the waiting crowd, some of whom had been standing there for nearly eight hours. No longer able to restrain themselves, people surged forward as the vehicles pulled up.
Alexandra, head of the ICRC team, reassured the eager relatives that the necessary formalities – one last check of the lists and the signing of release forms – would be completed as quickly as possible so as not to delay further the moment of freedom that everyone gathered there had been dreaming of for months.

Soon the men began to pour from the vehicles and, for those whose families were present, received that first embrace.

The dozen or so men whose relatives were nowhere to be seen climbed back into the waiting vehicles and began the hour-long journey to Pristina. There, outside the ICRC office, another crowd of perhaps a hundred had gathered, scrutinizing each vehicle as it turned into the car park. After a quick coffee and a cigarette, and the chance to see a doctor if they wished, the men moved into the reception hall and began to search the throng for their relatives, some of whom were looking almost panic-stricken at the thought that their husband, brother or father might not, after all, be in the group.

The last man to emerge was the oldest, a grandfather: almost blind, a simple black cap on his head, his shabby jacket buttoned up against the cold. In a scene that moved everyone, even ICRC delegates used to witnessing such events, he was met by his small granddaughter who ran straight into his arms. While the men who had been claimed by their loved ones quickly dispersed, one forlorn family stood there facing bitter disappointment. All they had left was the hope that, one day soon, he too would come home.

This release brings to more than 400 the number of detainees who have been returned to their families by the ICRC since June 1999. About 1,600 detainees are currently still being visited by ICRC delegates in Serbia. The ICRC is trying to ensure that they are treated humanely, that their conditions of detention are decent and that they can keep in touch with their families through Red Cross messages.

Further Information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Pristina, tel.: ++381 38 590 074
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 26 78

INDIA

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT: CHALLENGES AHEAD

A one-day seminar aimed at focusing the attention of academic circles on the International Criminal Court (ICC) was held on 29 January by the ICRC in cooperation with the law department of Punjab University in Chandigarh, the joint capital of the northern Indian states of Punjab and Haryana.

A senior judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court opened the seminar, stressing the need to set up an internationally acceptable mechanism to punish heinous crimes against humanity committed in times of armed conflict. A number of eminent academics from universities in northern India, senior lawyers, students and journalists discussed various aspects of the ICC. In spite of differences of opinion on specific points, they concluded that the ICC marked an important step forward in strengthening the international judicial system, especially given the complexity of today's conflicts. Topics discussed by international law experts and ICRC representatives included the jurisdiction and structure of the ICC, the crimes that come under its purview and national implementation of international humanitarian law.

The seminar was a landmark event, not only because it brought to the fore a pressing issue of international law but also because it highlighted certain misconceptions about the ICC which could hamper its establishment. The issue of State sovereignty and national interests
versus the powers of the ICC, the difficulty of collecting evidence, the problem of finding impartial prosecutors acceptable to the entire international community and the definition of crimes that would come within the ICC's jurisdiction emerged as some of the challenges that needed to be addressed as quickly as possible. The seminar made it clear that broader dissemination of the ICC statute adopted in July 1998 in Rome was needed. Moreover, confidence-building measures between States and efforts at placing the ICC in the context of geopolitical realities would be crucial to its widespread acceptance.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel.: ++9111 462 23 38

JORDAN
REGIONAL SEMINAR ON JUVENILES IN DETENTION

Experts and officials from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Qatar and the Palestinian Authority met in Jordan on 24 and 25 January at a regional seminar held to discuss issues relating to juveniles in detention. The seminar was organized by the ICRC delegation in cooperation with the Public Security Directorate and the Ministry of Social Development. Participants formed three working groups that examined, respectively, policy on juvenile offenders, international standards for the treatment of juveniles deprived of their liberty, and the health and psychological, educational and social environment of such detainees. One of the groups also considered possible alternatives to the incarceration of juveniles. ICRC legal and medical experts outlined the rules of international humanitarian law applicable to detained juveniles and the role and duties of medical staff dealing with juveniles in non-specialized places of detention. The UNICEF representative in Jordan talked about the social environment of juvenile offenders in relation to the pertinent international instruments.

At the closing session participants summed up the two days of intensive discussions and adopted several recommendations that are to be conveyed to the relevant authorities in their countries. They also called on the ICRC to organize similar workshops in the future to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

The seminar, the first of its kind in the region, was held under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania, who was represented at the opening ceremony by Princess Aisha Bint El Hussein.

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During the weekend of 5 - 6 February 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
On 8 February 2000 the ICRC launched three appeals completing its annual Emergency Appeals issued in December 1999. These new appeals total nearly 70 million Swiss francs (US$ 42.2 million; Euro 43.6 million), needed to finance the organization's activities in East Asia (Jakarta regional delegation), East Timor and the Russian Federation (Moscow regional delegation) up to the end of the current year. Last December the rapidly changing situation in these three regions made any realistic forecast of objectives and budgets for the coming year impossible.

This additional sum brings the ICRC's field budget for 2000 to Sfr 907.6 million (US$ 547.1 million; Euro 564.7 million). With the Sfr 144.5 million (US$ 87.1 million; Euro 89.9 million) required for the operational support services provided by headquarters, the organization's overall budget has topped the 1 billion franc (US$ 602.8 million; Euro 622.2 million) mark.

The ICRC's regional delegation in Jakarta needs Sfr 12 million (US$ 7.2 million; Euro 7.5 million) to encourage ratification of the humanitarian treaties and promote respect for humanitarian principles, and to support the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei. In Aceh, Irian Jaya, Ambon, West Kalimantan and West Timor, it works with the Indonesian Red Cross (Palang Merah Indonesia – PMI) to protect and assist people affected by violence, especially detainees, displaced people and dispersed families.

Some Sfr 17 million (US$ 10.2 million; Euro 10.6 million) are required for East Timor, where the entire population has suffered the effects of the recent upheaval. Here the ICRC is focusing its efforts on aiding people living in remote areas, maintaining health services at Dili General Hospital, providing temporary shelter for the most vulnerable among those who have lost their homes, restoring and maintaining family links, and protecting detainees and civilians who may be at risk within their communities.

In the Russian Federation the ICRC needs over Sfr 41 million (US$ 24.7 million; Euro 25.5 million) to meet its objectives, which are twofold. On the one hand it will continue its aid programmes for people affected by the conflict in the northern Caucasus, and on the other it will pursue its efforts to promote respect for humanitarian law through nationwide dissemination programmes for the authorities, in the education system and among the armed forces, a crucial aspect of its mandate.
With regard to the vast humanitarian needs created by the ongoing Chechen crisis, the ICRC's main priority is to continue providing some 150,000 people in the region with basic necessities, in coordination with the authorities and other humanitarian agencies. Other programmes, conducted mainly in neighbouring Ingushetia, include assistance for medical facilities treating the displaced and the wounded and water-supply and sanitation projects. Together with the International Federation, the ICRC will continue to support the Russian Red Cross Society and its local branches in carrying out their programmes in aid of displaced Chechens. Furthermore, the ICRC stands ready to extend its activities in the Chechen republic once it has obtained the necessary security guarantees and assurances that its working procedures are accepted by all concerned.

The field budgets for 2000 are considerably higher than those presented a year ago. This can be explained by the fact that a number of budget extensions were required to cope with the various crises that occurred throughout 1999, a year which saw a record high in the number of conflicts and other situations of violence around the world. In order to respond to these crises the ICRC had to review its objectives 11 times, arriving at a final budget of Sfr 911.7 million (US$ 549.6 million; Euro 567.3 million) by the end of the year. All indicators suggest that this level of violence will persist in 2000 and that the situation may change even more abruptly and unpredictably.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224 (East Asia and East Timor)
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307 (Russian Federation)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
A HOSPITAL IN CRISIS

The Kinshasa General Hospital, more commonly known by its initials HGK, is far from being a bush dispensary. With its 2,000 beds and its 2,250 employees (doctors, nurses and administrative personnel), it is one of Africa's most impressive medical facilities. It offers a full range of services and is the undisputed referral centre for the Congolese capital. Its patients - the sick, accident victims and war casualties, both civilian and military - have one thing in common: their suffering, which the staff do their best to alleviate with the means available. But those means are often woefully inadequate.

For several years now the ICRC has been providing support for the hospital, which in 1997 even admitted victims of the fighting between rival militias that devastated Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo on the other side of the river. The wounded were transferred to the HGK and treated by Congolese surgeons using medicines and medical supplies provided by the ICRC.

Today it is wounded soldiers of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are occupying the beds in the surgical unit. "We have 80 patients a month on average", says Léandre, the nurse in charge of the unit. He took us into a ward and showed us a few young patients, some in bed, some standing. "Most of them have arm or leg wounds, none of them very serious", he explained. The youths looked curiously at the group of foreigners led by Dr Michel Thomas, the doctor at the ICRC delegation in Kinshasa, wondering what this unexpected visit might mean.

Outside the ward, the heat and pungent odours seemed even more stifling.
A short distance away from the other buildings is the cholera ward recently refurbished by the ICRC. This is a sturdy, spacious structure with enough room for 200 beds. It stands empty, waiting for furniture and equipment. A bed base made of wooden slats with a hole in the centre serves as a reminder of the ravages caused by this disease, which reappears every rainy season. Outside in the grassy yard stands a line of latrines and showers. With no one using them, they are not yet clogged and overflowing.

The HGK is like a vast ship that the crew are trying to keep afloat despite daily difficulties and lack of resources. Léandre comes to work every day. "I come in even on Sundays, because you never know when casualties will arrive", he said with a big smile, as if his commitment were the most natural thing in the world.

Further information: ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++234 12 34 191

AFGHANISTAN

ICRC REPATRIATES 10 PASSENGERS OF HIJACKED PLANE

On 7 February ICRC delegates brought back to Afghanistan 10 passengers of a hijacked Ariana plane who had been freed in Uzbekistan the day before. The hijackers who seized the Afghan jet then diverted it to London.

The passengers – five men, four women and a child – were met by the delegates at the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and were driven to Mazar-i-Sharif, where they were handed over to the local authorities.

At the request of the Afghan ambassador in Moscow, the ICRC regional delegation there arranged for a medical check-up to be given on 8 February to four Afghan passengers who had been allowed to leave the plane in the Russian capital.

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Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2678

CAMBODIA

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION ON OTTAWA TREATY

No one knows exactly how many Cambodian men, women and children have been killed or maimed by mines in recent decades. But for the survivors and their families every incident is a personal tragedy which we must not ignore.

During the month of February an exhibition showing the devastation caused by landmines will travel to three towns in Cambodia. The exhibition, to be mounted jointly by the ICRC and the Cambodian Red Cross Society in Kampong Chhnang, Battambang and Phnom Penh, focuses on the main obligations laid down by the Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel mines, namely assistance to victims, destruction of stockpiles and mine clearance.

To date, 133 States have signed the treaty and 90 of them have also ratified it. Cambodia's ratification in 1999 reiterated the country's pledge never to use, develop, produce, stockpile or transfer anti-personnel mines, or to help anyone else to do so. The treaty also requires States Parties to destroy all stockpiled anti-personnel mines within four years. Last year, on
the occasion of the Red Cross Marathon against Mines, Cambodia organized two symbolic events in Battambang and Kampong Chhnang during which stockpiles were destroyed.

Although the total number of deaths and injuries from mines and unexploded ordnance in Cambodia has continued to decrease, 1,005 casualties were reported in 1999. Provinces like Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey and Pailin seem to pay the heaviest toll.

The ICRC has been assisting Cambodian mine victims by setting up prosthetic workshops and training local technicians in the production of artificial limbs since 1979. Its physical rehabilitation programme in Battambang town is only one of 11 similar projects it runs all over the world. Last year, the ICRC fitted 703 new amputees and produced more than 1,500 artificial limbs, most of them for mine victims. It also manufactured over 9,000 prosthetic components and over 5,000 pairs of crutches. Some 80% of the items produced were distributed free of charge to five other organizations operating in 15 physical rehabilitation centres throughout Cambodia.

Further information: Aleksandra Matijevic, ICRC Phnom Penh, tel. ++855 23 720 938 or ++855 12 804 795

JORDAN

INCORPORATION OF LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT IN MILITARY TRAINING

In accordance with a plan agreed upon late last year to incorporate the basic principles of the law of armed conflict in military training programmes, the Jordanian Armed Forces and the ICRC delegation in Amman have held two more "train-the-trainers" courses. The first took place from 16 to 27 January and was attended by 23 majors and captains, who will be responsible for training in various units. The second, for 13 colonels and lieutenant colonels, began on 31 January and will continue until 9 February. Apart from receiving regular instruction on the basis of the ICRC's teaching file, the participants were asked to prepare presentations giving examples of how they would proceed. These officers will be among the first to take responsibility for preparing their colleagues for the integration of this body of law in military training programmes in the near future. The Cairo-based regional training delegate for the armed and security forces and other resource persons from the ICRC delegation in Amman took part into the two courses.

Further information: Mu'in Kassis, ICRC Amman, tel. ++962 6 568 645
Republic of the Congo

Assistance for Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Fleeing the ongoing fighting in Equateur province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, combatants and civilians have crossed the river Oubangui and sought refuge in the Republic of the Congo. Since the ICRC had heard from various sources that there were many wounded among the refugees, from 10 to 12 February two delegates based in Brazzaville visited Impfondo, 800 kilometres north of the Congolese capital.

The purpose of the trip was to assess the situation and, if necessary, to deliver medicines and medical equipment. Contrary to what the alarming reports had led them to expect, however, the delegates found only two war-wounded on the spot. They nonetheless decided to give the Impfondo hospital the supplies they had brought along since it was the only medical facility in the region and was facing severe shortages.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81 mobile phone: ++ 41 79 232 17 32

Award of the Paul Reuter Prize

The 2000 Paul Reuter Prize for outstanding work in the sphere of international humanitarian law was awarded on 12 February to Ilias Bantekas, lecturer in law at the University of Westminster, for his thesis entitled Principles of Individual Responsibility for Violations of International Humanitarian Law after the ICTY [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia].

Mr Bantekas' thesis was chosen because it examines virtually every case in which international humanitarian law has been applied and interpreted and deals with a subject of great topicality. The thesis will be a mine of information for legal experts concerned with the implementation of humanitarian law and with the responsibility of individuals under those rules.

The Reuter Fund was set up in 1983 through a donation made to the ICRC by the late Paul Reuter, Professor Emeritus at the University of Paris and member of the Institute of International Law. Its purpose is twofold: to encourage the publication of works on international humanitarian law or other initiatives in that field and to finance the Paul Reuter Prize, which is worth 2,000 Swiss francs and is awarded every three years.

This is the sixth time that the Reuter Prize has been awarded since the Fund was set up. It will be presented to Mr Bantekas by ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger at a ceremony in June.

Further information: Jean Perrenoud, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 26 69

During the weekend of 19 - 20 February 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
SRI LANKA

FAMILIES VISIT DETAINNEES ON HUNGER STRIKE

On 23 February, 28 close relatives of 15 servicemen (13 from the army, two from the navy) who are currently in the custody of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and have been on a hunger strike for two weeks were escorted by the ICRC to Puthukkudiyirippu, in northern Sri Lanka, where these men are being held. The visit, which was organized by the ICRC with the cooperation of the government and the LTTE, is scheduled to last for two days so that the detainees can spend some time with their families, whom they have not seen for over six years. ICRC delegates are visiting the detainees daily and are closely monitoring their health.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989. It has 48 expatriates and 300 local staff based at its delegation in Colombo and its 11 offices in the north and east of the country.

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ANGOLA

REDUCING INFANT MORTALITY

The ICRC is this week launching a water and sanitation programme in camps for displaced people in the Angolan city of Kuito. In response to an alarming rise in infant mortality in the second half of 1999 (according to information gathered in January, 2.6 children out of 10,000 were dying each day), the ICRC, Médecins sans frontières and other humanitarian organizations carried out nutritional, medical and sanitary surveys to identify the cause. They concluded that the main problems were the shortage and poor quality of water, poor hygiene and the under-use of existing health-care facilities.

The ICRC has therefore begun distributing 121,000 litres of water daily in the four biggest camps. This amounts to four litres per person per day. The supply will be continued until work has been completed by other organizations to sink wells.

The ICRC’s response to the hygiene problems combines drainage work, the building of 1,000 latrines (with the help of the displaced people themselves), a monthly distribution of soap to 20,000 families and a sanitary education programme carried out in conjunction with the Angola Red Cross. A study will also be carried out to determine why more use is not being made of health-care facilities.
Since December 1998, Kuito has faced a massive influx of displaced people — some 116,000 so far — who are living in 18 camps, for the most part situated on a hill that makes for particularly poor hygiene conditions during the rainy season.

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Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++24 42 364 454

BANGLADESH
SYMPOSIUM ON INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN DHAKA

On 12 February the ICRC and the faculty of law of the University of Dhaka jointly held a one-day symposium in Dhaka on international humanitarian law and various issues relating to its scope and implementation. The first such event to take place in the country, it was attended by academics, NGO representatives, officers of the armed forces and members of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and other humanitarian organizations. The symposium helped raise awareness of the provisions of humanitarian law and their relevance to the protection of civilians in modern conflicts. Since Bangladesh is one of the two South Asian countries to have ratified the 1977 Protocols additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (the other country being the Maldives), national implementation was a focal point of the discussions. The symposium also provided the National Society with an opportunity to present the structure of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the Movement's efforts to promote humanitarian law.

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NIGERIA

RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT AIDS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE IN KADUNA

Following the clashes between Christians and Moslems that erupted in Kaduna on 21 February, the Nigerian Red Cross Society, with the support of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has been mobilizing its resources to assist the victims of the violence.

Distribution of relief supplies began on 28 February after a survey of the damage and an assessment of needs. An estimated 80,000 people have taken refuge in 11 locations, including army camps and police barracks.

The Nigerian Red Cross National Officer for Training and Emergency Preparedness is in Kaduna to supervise the distribution of relief, which includes dressings and other medical material, mats, blankets, used clothing, jerrycans, cups, plates, cooking pots and rolls of plastic sheeting. Sixty tonnes of food consisting of rice, beans, garri, vegetable oil, salt and sugar are also on hand. It is planned to give out some 10,000 family rations per day.

The dressings and medical supplies are being delivered to hospitals in Kaduna which have admitted a total of 738 wounded, distributed as follows: 44 Army Reference Hospital (305 wounded), ABU Teaching Hospital (80), General Hospital (15), Specialist Hospital (30), Moslem Islamic Institute Hospital (38), and NAF Hospital (270).

The Kaduna branch of the Nigerian Red Cross was helped by teams from the Plateau, Katsina and Abuja branches in assessing the situation and determining the aid the National Society could bring to the victims. More than 60 volunteers, both Christian and Moslem, are already on the spot.

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Jean-Jacques Gacond, ICRC Lagos, tel. ++234 1 269 1881

ANGOLA

PAULA GOES HOME TO MALANJE

As the aircraft approached Malanje, east of Luanda, Paula exclaimed: "Malanje e bonito, Malanje e bonito!". It's true: Malanje and its lush green surroundings are beautiful seen from the air. Paula was going home at last after spending three weeks in Huambo.

She was thinking, perhaps, of Christmas 1997, the day that changed her life. Paula, aged 15 at the time, had been to her sister's for Christmas dinner. On her return, she tripped over an electric cable in front of her parents' house. Normally no harm would have been done - but the cable was attached to a landmine. Paula lost her left leg.
At the end of 1998 Paula's family was forced by the war to leave home and seek refuge in Luanda, staying there until it was safe to go back early this year. Scarcely a week after the family had returned to Malanje, Paula was boarding an ICRC plane with 10 other residents of the town on her way to the ICRC's Bomba Alta physical rehabilitation centre in Huambo to be fitted with - and to get used to - a replacement for her artificial limb.

Today Paula is making plans for the future. She wants to study medicine so that she can help amputees who, like herself, will have to return to a rehabilitation centre about every two years for the rest of their lives.

The transfer of amputees from provinces with no limb-fitting facilities to ICRC centres, run in cooperation with the Angolan Ministry of Health, resumed last month after being interrupted by the new upsurge in fighting at the end of 1998. In 1999 the ICRC treated 1,547 patients in its three centres located in Luanda, Huambo et Kuito. Of these, 1,237 were victims of anti-personnel mines.

Further information: Francoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 364 454
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281, or mobile ++4179 217 3217

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA
REPATRIATION OF 186 MOROCCAN PRISONERS

On 26 February the ICRC repatriated 186 Moroccan prisoners released by the Polisario Front on humanitarian grounds. Escorted by an ICRC team, the men left Tindouf, Algeria, aboard an aircraft chartered by the organization and were handed over to the Moroccan authorities on arrival at the Inezgane military base near Agadir. The ICRC, which had offered its services as a neutral intermediary, acted with the agreement of all the parties concerned.

Before the operation, ICRC delegates had interviewed the prisoners individually to check that they were being repatriated of their own free will. They were all allowed to take their personal effects with them.

The ICRC is pleased to have been able to repatriate these prisoners, most of them sick and elderly. It remains concerned, however, about the plight of the remaining 1,686 Moroccan prisoners, some of whom have been in captivity for 25 years, and trusts that a solution will be found so that they can return to their homes in the near future. ICRC delegates visit them every year and provide them with aid, mainly medical. The ICRC also enables the prisoners to exchange news regularly with their families by means of Red Cross messages.

The ICRC will spare no effort to ensure that the families of persons who remain unaccounted for since the end of the conflict are one day informed of the fate of their relatives.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2307

During the weekend of 4 - 5 March 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
YUGOSLAVIA / KOSOVO
EMERGENCY AID FOR DISPLACED FROM SERBIA

The situation in the northern Kosovo town of Mitrovica continues to make headlines. Meanwhile, recent tensions and security incidents in parts of southern Serbia have caused several hundred people to flee into eastern Kosovo.

The ICRC and the local Red Cross are helping to meet the immediate needs of these displaced people. In Gnjilane/Gjilan and Vitina/Viti the ICRC's public kitchens, run by the Netherlands Red Cross, have stepped up their operations so as to provide them with regular meals. The Finnish Red Cross team running the ICRC's health programmes in the two towns is also extending its services to the newcomers.

The local Red Cross has provided clothes and other non-food items, while the ICRC is distributing mattresses, blankets and hygiene sets.

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Pristina, tel.: ++381 38 590 074

NIGERIA
RELIEF FOR VICTIMS OF SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

On 28 and 29 February, following violent clashes between Christians and Muslims in the northern city of Kaduna, youths in four states of south-eastern Nigeria (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Enugu and Imo) launched retaliatory attacks on fellow countrymen from the north. The violence, which forced around 20,000 people to take shelter in army camps and police barracks, left scores dead and many more injured. It also resulted in large-scale material damage.

The Nigerian Red Cross branches in the affected states responded immediately to the crisis by providing emergency aid consisting of food, water and basic medical supplies. From 3 to 5 March, the National Society and the ICRC conducted a joint survey of the victims' needs.

In close cooperation with the local authorities, Nigerian Red Cross volunteers are continuing to monitor the situation of the 20,000 displaced persons, who are now housed in four military camps. The National Society, with the support of the ICRC, is providing further emergency relief, including medical supplies and items such as cooking pots, cups, mats, jerrycans, soap and clothing for women and children. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies stands ready to respond to any additional needs in the coming weeks.
In the northern state of Kaduna, the situation is gradually returning to normal. According to government estimates, only 35,000 of the initial 80,000 displaced persons remain in protected areas. The number of victims in hospitals has dropped from 738 to fewer than 300. The Nigerian Red Cross Society is continuing its humanitarian work in this part of the country, where it is striving to reach those who have not yet received any assistance.

Further information: Jean-Jacques Gacond, ICRC Lagos, tel.: ++234 1 269 18 81 or ++234 1 269 00 82

SIERRA LEONE
RED CROSS HELPS FARMERS RESETTLE

In early March the ICRC and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society will conduct a survey in four of the country's districts to assess the population's needs prior to a distribution of seed, tools and other items. Forty Red Cross employees and volunteers will travel to Kenema, Pujehun, Tonkolili and – security permitting – to Kailahun.

"We'll focus on people who are destitute", explained ICRC senior relief officer Morison Boima in Kenema. "Among the 40,000 families targeted are returning displaced persons and refugees, and resident farmers whose houses or crops were looted during the war and who are starting again from scratch. They all need our help."

Within weeks after the survey is completed the Red Cross will distribute aid packages to each family consisting of 40 kg of rice seed, 10 kg of groundnuts, local and imported vegetable seed, hoes, plastic sheeting, kitchen sets, blankets, sleeping mats and soap.

ICRC relief coordinator John Lapointe is responsible for the assistance programme: "This distribution, involving 1,600 tonnes of rice seed, may be the largest joint operation ever carried out by the ICRC and the National Society in Sierra Leone. Returning farmers who are trying to resettle will receive enough aid to make a serious impact on their lives. More than 200,000 people could be well on their way to food self-sufficiency thanks to this programme".

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2281

SRI LANKA
ICRC HANDS OVER FOUR PRISONERS FREED BY LTTE

A visit by family members to 13 soldiers and two navy personnel detained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Vanni region of northern Sri Lanka ended on 28 February. Organized by the ICRC, the visit lasted five days. On 25 February the prisoners suspended a hunger strike they had begun 15 days earlier in an effort to obtain their release.

On the day the visit ended, the LTTE freed four of the prisoners (three from the army and one from the navy), whom the ICRC escorted to Vavuniya and handed over to the military authorities there. The remaining 11 are still in detention. All 13 soldiers had been captured in 1993 and the two navy personnel in 1994.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2224
WAR, MONEY AND SURVIVAL – FORUM ISSUE ON WAR AND THE ECONOMY
Published on 13 March

To what extent do today's economic conditions cause war? Who profits and who loses out? Does business thrive on war? War, Money and Survival, the latest in the annual FORUM series (to be published by the ICRC on 13 March), focuses on the crucial relationship between war and the economy. Key decision-makers, journalists, academics and insiders from the worlds of business and humanitarian endeavour analyse the complex interactions between war and the economy. They set out the problems from their standpoint and discuss possible solutions.

"This issue aims to raise awareness and improve dialogue between people from outside who become involved in war-torn countries – be they from the private, public or non-governmental sectors", says Gilles Carbonnier, an economist with the ICRC's Health and Relief Division and one of the editors. "The ultimate objective is to better assist the people affected by armed conflict."

"The ICRC hopes that this issue of FORUM will contribute to a cruelly topical discussion", Mr Carbonnier goes on. "Understanding the complex interactions between war and the economy is vital, not only for companies operating in unstable areas but also for humanitarian organizations working in an ever more complex environment."

War, Money and Survival discusses these issues under four headings:

• **Globalization and war** looks at the overall relationship between globalization and the ever-changing pattern of warfare. It also studies the twin processes of economic and political liberalization, and assesses how making aid subject to certain conditions affects war-torn countries.

• **Money and war** sheds light on the economic dynamics of war. Focusing on the underlying economic causes, one author argues that economics constitutes a new analytical tool for understanding conflicts in the post-Cold-War era. Contributors also look at non-governmental entities involved in conflicts, beginning with mercenaries and security firms. A journalist, a businessman and an agency that rates corporate conduct discuss, from their own individual perspectives, the matter of doing business in war-prone regions. The development of the "relief industry" is also addressed.

• **Survival and war** looks at the variety of coping mechanisms used by people living in war zones and refugee camps.

• The concluding section, **International aid**, takes a critical look at the impact of humanitarian aid on local economies. One author suggests how to minimize potential negative side-effects while humanitarian and development organizations explain how they have adapted their strategies to cope with today's emergencies.

FORUM is available for 20 Swiss francs from the ICRC's Public Information Centre (postal address: 19 Avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland; e-mail address: pkammer.gva@icrc.org; copies may also be ordered through the ICRC's Website: www.icrc.org).

Further information:
Gilles Carbonnier, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2835; e-mail: gcarbonnier.gva@icrc.org
Sarah Fleming, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2747; e-mail: sfleming.gva@icrc.org
From 19 to 21 February the ICRC, in cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education, held a workshop for 26 university professors involved in developing a course on democracy, human rights and international humanitarian law.

The ICRC, which has been working with the Ministry for the past two years, helped design the humanitarian law component of the course. To be introduced first as a pilot project in selected institutions, the course will later become part of the compulsory curriculum in all Palestinian universities.

The workshop opened with keynote addresses by the Palestinian Deputy Minister of Higher Education, the ICRC head of delegation and a representative of the Swiss government, which is funding the project. It was conducted by Ameur Zemmali, ICRC legal adviser for the Middle East and North Africa, who talked about the contexts in which humanitarian law is taught, the methods used, prior experiences in Arab countries and implementation of the law worldwide.

At the closing session participants summed up the three days of intensive work and recommended that further training in humanitarian law be organized and that a committee be formed to follow up on the topics agreed on and discussed at the workshop.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2307

During the weekend of 11 - 12 March 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 31
INDONESIA / EAST TIMOR

FIRST FAMILY REUNIFICATION FROM EAST TO WEST TIMOR

After a wait of several weeks, the first family reunification organized by the ICRC from East to West Timor took place at the beginning of March when an East Timorese woman and her baby were reunited with their husband and father at Kefamenanu (West Timor). Three other requests for family reunification have been received by the ICRC from persons wishing to leave East Timor for West Timor.

Since 24 January the ICRC has already transported 26 people, including 14 unaccompanied children, by land in the other direction, from West to East Timor, as part of its family reunification programme. The crossings from the western to the eastern part of the island take place at Batugade.

The ICRC is also arranging for the reunification of families between East Timor and other islands of the Indonesian archipelago. By 6 March, a total of 270 families had been reunited by the ICRC.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 24

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

COMBATANTS LEARN THE LAW

A presentation on international humanitarian law was given by the ICRC on 9 March in Kalemie, in territory controlled by the armed opposition to President Kabila. The participants were officers and non-commissioned officers on the staff of the Goma branch of the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (RCD).

This was the first such presentation for RCD combatants in eastern Congo since July 1998, just before the outbreak of the country's current internal conflict. Subjects discussed included the conduct of combatants, the mandate, activities and working principles of the ICRC and the Red Cross in general, and the protective value of the red cross emblem.
The 62 participants — who included a dozen police officials — asked questions about a number of subjects such as preventing war, ICRC work in prisons, and armed forces medical services. Their keen interest demonstrated that there is a need for instruction in international humanitarian law, particularly in this unstable part of northern Katanga province.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

During the weekend of 18 - 19 March 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++41 22 779 33 22 or ++41 79 217 32 31
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

DISPLACED PERSONS RETURN TO THEIR VILLAGES FROM BRAZZAVILLE

On 19 March, a trainload of 2,300 displaced persons returned to their villages some 50 km from Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of the Congo. They were members of the rural population of the Pool district who had taken refuge in Brazzaville in late 1999 when fighting broke out around their homes.

The ICRC has arranged the return of more than 3,000 people since the beginning of the year, and provided them with food and other relief supplies. Lack of maintenance has left a number of roads in very poor condition and access to certain villages from Brazzaville is possible only by rail. The ICRC therefore asked the Ministry of Transport to make trains available free of charge to displaced persons who came from villages near the railway line.

This first journey by train, with ICRC delegates and first-aid workers from the Congolese Red Cross on board, lasted two and a half hours. There was jubilation among the returnees, who sang throughout the trip. A second train, scheduled for 26 March, is to take 1,800 displaced persons as far as Mindouli, 140 km from Brazzaville. This will enable two camps run by the ICRC to be closed, with only one – housing some 400 people – remaining in the capital.

Further information: Laurent Colassis, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++242 81 12 08
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

GEORGIA

ICRC-TRAINED PROSTHETIC TECHNICIANS GRADUATE

On 9 March the ICRC and representatives of the Georgian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs awarded international certificates of professional competence to eight Georgian prosthetic/orthotic technicians.

Their training course began in February 1998 and culminated on 25 February 2000 with an examination leading to the certificate of proficiency in lower-limb prosthetics and orthotic devices. François Bellon, head of the ICRC delegation in Tbilisi, explained: "The best students will continue their training for another year to obtain the final ISPO [International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics] diploma. The idea is to have the programme entirely run and staffed by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs by 2002".
In partnership with the Ministry, the ICRC has been conducting a physical rehabilitation project for the war-disabled in Georgia since November 1994. To date the project, located in the Tbilisi Institute of Orthopaedics and Traumatology, has registered 2,157 patients and assisted 1,582 disabled people, fitting 1,931 prostheses and 454 orthotic appliances and supplying 1,060 pairs of crutches and 118 wheelchairs. A similar project is being run in Gagra (Abkhazia) for people disabled as a result of the hostilities and also for diabetic patients who have had limbs amputated.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307

ANGOLA

COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW FOR POLICE INSTRUCTORS

Twenty instructors from the Angolan police academies were awarded certificates on 20 March for taking part in a course on human rights and international humanitarian law. This was the first such course organized by the ICRC in conjunction with the human resources department of the Angolan national police, which intends to include these topics in its training programme beginning this year.

The two-week course allowed the participants to explore the legal and humanitarian aspects of their main duties as police officers, such as maintaining public order, making arrests and using firearms. Other topics included the protection of victims of armed conflicts and the treatment of particularly vulnerable persons.

The course, which was organized with the assistance of a Portuguese-speaking expert from the ICRC's Brasilia delegation, marks a step forward in cooperation between the Angolan police and the ICRC. This collaboration began in 1999 when awareness-raising days were organized in nine provincial commands. The training of instructors will continue, at the request of the Angolan authorities, so as to enable them to promote knowledge of international humanitarian law within the police force.

Further information: Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++24 42 364 454
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

During the weekend of 25 - 26 March 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
ANGOLA

AID STEPPED UP FOR DISPLACED PERSONS IN CAALA

Following a recent ICRC survey of nutritional needs, aid for displaced persons housed in five centres at Caala, seven kilometres from Huambo, was increased last week. Some 2,800 displaced families (12,700 persons), to whom half rations had been distributed every month since July 1999, are now receiving whole rations consisting of maize, dried beans, oil and salt. Food aid for the displaced at Caala will be maintained until they are able to return home. However, the food and agricultural programme launched in July 1999 for 61,341 displaced and resident families on the outskirts of Huambo is currently under review.

Meanwhile, a programme to improve hygiene by constructing latrines in the centres was suspended when the local authorities announced plans to move the entire displaced population to a single new camp.

The ICRC will soon open a health-care centre at Caala in cooperation with the provincial section of the Angolan Red Cross. This will be the fifth such National Society facility to receive assistance from the ICRC (there are already two in Uige and two in Kuito). Four other health-care centres near Huambo have been receiving equipment and medical supplies from the ICRC since May 1999.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81

KOSOVO

EMERGENCY PHASE OF WINTER OPERATION ENDS

Tens of thousands of householders, schoolchildren and hospital patients and staff have survived the harsh Balkan winter thanks to the efforts of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Kosovo.

Over a dozen National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have worked alongside the ICRC, which coordinates the Movement's activities in Kosovo, to repair houses, community centres, schools and hospitals in order to help people survive the first winter since the end of a conflict that left large swathes of the province devastated by Serbian forces. The work is complementary to that being done by the international community, led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
With the emergency phase virtually completed, over 30 hospitals and health-care posts, 130 schools and some 6,000 houses have been repaired. Equipment has been donated to help rebuild a further 3,600 homes.

Geoff Allison, the ICRC's water and habitat coordinator, says that while some people have certainly found this first winter a struggle, the goals for the operation's emergency phase have largely been met. "It is a very good example of what can be achieved when we tap into the vast resources of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement."

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Pristina: tel.: ++ 381 38 590 074 or ++ 381 63 344 164

New on the ICRC's public server (http://www.icrc.org):

- Fact sheets – all dated March 2000 – on the organization's activities in Mexico and Peru.

During the weekend of 1 - 2 April 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC SURVEYS UNDER WAY IN CHECHNYA

On 29 March, a team of four ICRC local staff based in Nazran, Ingushetia carried out a one-day assessment of the situation in the town of Achkhoy-Martan and surrounding area west of Grozny and not far from the Ingush border. Contact with the local administration and the director of the main referral hospital provided a clearer picture of the needs of the civilian population.

While the area appears to be calm, most of its inhabitants are facing difficult living conditions owing to shortages of food, medicines and drinking water. Recent statistics indicate that of a local population of some 120,000, over a third are displaced people without any means of subsistence. In one village a number of typhoid cases have been diagnosed.

During this short mission, basic ICRC medical assistance was provided to the 250-bed Achkhoy-Martan hospital, which was damaged during the hostilities, though not hit directly. The hospital's staff is doing its best to continue working despite lack of water and electricity, which among other things makes it difficult to sterilize instruments and provide adequate, clean bedding. The ICRC will shortly be organizing further distributions of medicines and other medical supplies needed by the hospital.

In the light of last week's clear commitment by the Russian authorities at the highest level to facilitate development of Red Cross activities in Chechnya, the ICRC is working in conjunction with the local branch of the Russian Red Cross to expand its emergency assistance programmes in the republic. Another ICRC survey is currently under way in Gudermes, east of Grozny, with the aim of restoring contact with the local authorities and assessing the need for humanitarian aid.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 07

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC STARTS HUMANITARIAN FLIGHTS TO NORTHERN POOL

On 3 April, a civilian aircraft landed on the Kindamba airstrip in the remote northern Pool area of the Republic of the Congo for the first time in 12 years. This marked the beginning of an ICRC airlift to bring humanitarian aid to victims of the latest fighting in the country, which ended in December 1999. The ICRC plane, a DC-3(TP), is now making several flights a day. Since last year large parts of the northern Pool have been inaccessible by road. Tens of thousands of civilians spent months hiding from the fighting in the forest.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
The ICRC is setting up a feeding centre in Kindamba for severely malnourished people, while the moderately malnourished will receive special meals served in a public kitchen. In cooperation with volunteers of the Congolese Red Cross and the regional health authorities, it is also providing the civilian population with medical care. At the same time, the ICRC has started repairs on the Kindamba hospital, including the rehabilitation of wells and the construction of latrines.

In parallel with the assistance programme, information sessions on international humanitarian law are being held for those bearing weapons.

The airlift is the result of an initial ICRC visit to Kindamba on 8 March and is scheduled to last for a month. Before the operation could begin, the airstrip had to be made practicable by the ICRC, which is currently the only humanitarian agency working in the area.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

SRI LANKA
HELP FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE ON JAFFNA PENINSULA

Hundreds of civilians on northern Sri Lanka’s Jaffna Peninsula who fled the latest upsurge of fighting between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) eight days ago have sought refuge in churches, temples, schools and empty houses in Jaffna, Point Pedro, Mirusuvil, Velvettiturai and other towns. Hundreds more have taken refuge with relatives and friends.

In conjunction with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society and government authorities, the ICRC is monitoring the situation and assessing the needs of the population, in particular the wounded, sick and displaced.

Working in a volatile environment, the ICRC and the Sri Lankan Red Cross have distributed mats, bed sheets, towels, soap, jerrycans, buckets, cooking utensils and lanterns to 392 families (totalling 1,772 people), with the civilian authorities providing food aid. Ten civilians wounded by the fighting have been taken by the ICRC and National Society staff to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. The ICRC is continuing discussions with the warring parties to obtain security guarantees and access to civilians still in the conflict zone, in particular people who have reportedly fled their homes and are attempting to reach safer places.

The ICRC is reminding both the Sri Lankan security forces and the LTTE of their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the duty to spare combatants who have laid down their arms and to protect the civilian population from the effects of the fighting.

The ICRC sub-delegation in Jaffna has a staff of six expatriates and 35 Sri Lankans.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++ 941 503 346
AFGHANISTAN

ICRC REPAIRS IRRIGATION SYSTEM

The ICRC in Afghanistan has completed the cleaning of a five-kilometre-long irrigation canal, in a densely populated area of Parwan province, north of Kabul, that supplies tens of thousands of people.

The repair of the canal, which draws water from the Panjshir River, lasted three weeks and involved nearly 1,100 residents of surrounding villages, who were employed on a food-for-work basis and/or paid in cash by the ICRC.

The rehabilitation of Afghan irrigation systems such as canals and karezes (extensive traditional underground channels) is part of an ICRC five-point plan that targets areas to which refugees and internally displaced people have returned or are expected to return. The plan consists of a large-scale distribution of seed and seedlings for crops such as improved-quality wheat and potatoes and a range of fruit trees and vegetables; wide distribution of agricultural implements to complement the seed distribution; advice on caring for orchards and other crops; training for beneficiaries of the distribution in order to compensate for the steady drain of knowledge from these communities over the last 20 years; and the above-mentioned repair of canals, springs, wells, karezes and other means of irrigation.

In 1999, the ICRC worked with local communities to rehabilitate 166 canals and karezes, making it possible to irrigate over 60,000 hectares of land.

Further information: Jon-Hans Coetzer, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 761 242 260
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24

RWANDA

ICRC REPATRIATES ZIMBABWEAN PRISONER OF WAR

The ICRC repatriated a member of the Zimbabwean Defence Forces on 5 April who had been captured in connection with the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and was being held in Kigali, Rwanda. The decision to release the prisoner of war was taken by the Rwandan authorities on medical grounds, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. The prisoner had been registered and regularly visited by the ICRC during his captivity in Rwanda.

In 1999, the ICRC repatriated from Rwanda a member of the Zimbabwean Defence Forces in April and three others in October. In July, a member of the Rwandan Patriotic Army detained in Zimbabwe was returned to Rwanda. Those repatriations were also carried out on medical grounds.

The ICRC will continue offering its services to all parties in order to help them meet their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81; mobile phone ++ 41 79 217 32 17
BOLIVIA

PRESIDENT INAUGURATES TRAVELLING ICRC EXHIBITION

The ICRC travelling exhibition "Man in a War-torn World" was inaugurated on 30 March at the Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ceremony was attended by senior national authorities, the diplomatic corps and specially invited guests. The exhibition, consisting of 52 photographs illustrating the ICRC's work and the challenges of humanitarian action, is the final stop in a tour of more than 30 cities in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

Addressing the assembled guests, Bolivian President Hugo Banzer Suárez expressed his government's appreciation of the work carried out by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and his interest in the activities of the Bolivian Red Cross. The ICRC representative pointed out that though the photos on exhibit were painful reminders of the sufferings endured by victims of war, respect for the basic rules of humanitarian law and the protection and assistance work of humanitarian organizations in aid of the victims are powerful symbols of hope for the future. He also emphasized the worldwide solidarity needed to ensure universal respect for humanitarian rules and principles.

As the exhibition opened, a training course on the international law of armed conflict was under way in La Paz for officers of the Bolivian armed forces. Opened on 28 March by the Minister of Defence and the ICRC delegate responsible for the region in the presence of the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, the four-day course was given by the ICRC delegate in charge of relations with South American armed forces. It provided basic instruction in international humanitarian law to some 40 junior and senior officers of the army, navy and air force.

Further information: Maria Ines Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++ 5411 43 28 77 71

During the weekend of 8 - 9 April 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC SURVEYS CONTINUE IN CHECHNYA

A team comprising four local ICRC employees and one Russian Red Cross staff member carried out a further two-day assessment mission last week in Gudermes, the second largest town in Chechnya and the new base for the republic's authorities. Official sources estimate the town's population at 80,000, compared with 100,000 before the current crisis. The humanitarian situation appeared stable, with some 1,500 internally displaced persons registered and nearly 4,000 particularly vulnerable persons (such as invalids, handicapped children, and solitary elderly people) identified.

According to information gathered by the Red Cross team in its meetings with the local and regional administrations and with medical authorities, the most pressing needs in terms of food, water, other basic necessities and sanitation are in the south-west and south-east of the republic, the regions hardest hit by the conflict. The general health situation remains serious even though the main regional hospitals, with the exception of those in Grozny and Shatoy, have started working again.

Discussions took place on ways to reactivate the bread distribution and visiting nurses programmes run by the Chechen branch of the Russian Red Cross in the main towns in the republic.

Basic ICRC medical assistance was provided to the 300-bed main referral hospital in the Gudermes region. While this structure was not damaged during fighting, it is in need of rehabilitation since it has not been adequately maintained for several years.

This week, a follow-up mission took place in Achkhoy-Martan, west of Grozny, during which the ICRC delivered medical assistance to the main hospital, in particular to treat an increasing number of typhoid cases.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 07

ANGOLA

TRAINING IN WAR SURGERY AT HUAMBO HOSPITAL

Following an initial survey carried out by the ICRC in September 1999, a programme has been set up to train the staff of the main hospital in Huambo in war-surgery techniques. The first stage was completed last week and a decrease in the rate of wound infections has already been observed. This can be largely attributed to new treatment protocols and to an improvement in post-operative care. Management and follow-up of patients have also been improved, as has basic hygiene in the various wards.
In a six-week seminar led by an ICRC surgeon, hospital staff (surgeons, physicians and senior nurses working in the operating theatre, intensive care, the emergency room, the surgical ward and the orthopaedic unit) were given thorough training and also had the opportunity to examine 75 practical cases. A further mission is planned for August. Until then, technical support for the hospital will be reinforced by the presence of a health delegate who will be responsible for supervising and reorganizing emergency admissions.

Since January 1999, the hospital has been receiving medicines and medical supplies under the supervision of an ICRC medical delegate. This assistance, at first intended only for the war-wounded, has been extended since May 1999 to all cases requiring surgery. In addition, repair work on the hospital's sanitary facilities has been going on since January 2000.

Further information: Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++24 42 364 454

YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC DONATES PLASMA PURIFICATION SYSTEM

The ICRC recently delivered a chromatography plasma purification system, which is used to produce immunoglobulin and other plasma derivatives, to the Blood Transfusion Institute in Belgrade. The equipment and training in its use are worth 250,000 Swiss francs.

The ICRC and the Blood Transfusion Institute have a long history of fruitful cooperation. During the recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, for example, the ICRC supplied the Institute with disposable materials necessary for the handling of blood; and during last year's NATO air strikes, it provided a generator and repaired the Institute's cold chain.

Quite apart from this donation, the ICRC medical programme in Serbia continues according to plan. Surgical supplies for the first quarter of 2000 have been delivered to 35 hospitals and other medical facilities, and the monthly distribution of basic drugs for chronic diseases to humanitarian pharmacies is currently under way.

Further information: Gordona Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++381 11 450 590

MIDDLE EAST

REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE INCORPORATION OF LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT IN MILITARY TRAINING

For the first time in the Middle East, high-ranking military commanders from all over the region met recently to discuss the role of armed forces in disseminating the basic principles of the law of armed conflict. The two-day conference, held in Amman, was organized by the Jordanian Armed Forces on the initiative of the ICRC, as part of their longstanding cooperation on dissemination programmes in Jordan. It was opened by the Chairman of the Jordanian Joint Chiefs of Staff. Among those taking part were brigadier generals and colonels from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, together with a representative of the Palestinian Authority. Others attending the conference included the Jordanian Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, the ICRC regional training delegate for the armed and security forces, other resource persons from ICRC delegations in the region, and officers from Jordan and Sudan trained by the ICRC to give instruction in the law of armed conflict.
Following a presentation by representatives of the Jordanian and Egyptian armed forces on their experiences in spreading knowledge of the law of armed conflict, participants were divided into working groups that discussed and agreed upon methods of disseminating and integrating this body of law in training programmes of their various armed forces. They were unanimous in requesting that the ICRC hold annual follow-up conferences beginning next year. They also urged the ICRC to continue to provide training materials and to advise them on procedures for implementing the adopted recommendations.

Further Information: Mu'in Kassis, ICRC Amman, tel. ++962 6 5688645

MALI

INFORMATION DAY FOR MALIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

In cooperation with the Mali Red Cross, the ICRC organized an information day on Red Cross activities and respect for international humanitarian law in the Malian capital Bamako on 5 April. This event was intended for associations from civil society and mayors of communities in the Bamako district.

Forty representatives of the media and of women's and youth organizations, and the Bamako mayors, accepted the Red Cross invitation. The women and young people spontaneously offered to join their National Red Cross Society to give it new impetus. A dozen of the country's newspapers and private radio stations suggested that they help the Red Cross make its concerns known to the public and spread the message of humanitarian law.

This initiative is aimed at acquainting civil society with the activities of the Mali Red Cross and the ICRC, and at extending discussion of international humanitarian law beyond governmental circles to all sectors of the population. Similar events will be held in several other regions of the country.

Further information: Gilbert Deléchat, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 8 241 293

During the weekend of 15 - 16 April 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 79 217 32 31
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

NEW INFLUX OF DISPLACED PEOPLE NEAR GOMA

About 150 people – men, old people, women nursing babies – were huddled together on a stretch of road near Lake Kivu, on the outskirts of Goma. They had all walked for three or four days from Masisi or the Walikale area, west of Goma.

"They are arriving at a rate of about 50 a day", said a local official. All of them had been driven from their homes by terror: villages attacked by night, looting, houses set on fire. One man had only four of his eight children with him. He did not know whether the others were dead or had become lost in the rush to escape. Some of these IDPs had wanted to stop at Saké, 25 km to the east, "but there were already too many displaced there so we pushed on until we got here".

On 14 April the ICRC managed to carry out a survey in Saké, where 12,000 newly displaced people have arrived since the beginning of April. Kivu is no stranger to such events: in recent years this eastern region of the Congo has seen successive waves of civilians fleeing armed men. There are an estimated 200,000 IDPs in Kivu alone, and their numbers are growing every day.

In general the ICRC, which is the main humanitarian organization operating in eastern Congo, can only reach people who have sought refuge in towns, because of the poor security situation. Between 10 and 15 April the ICRC, working in cooperation with the National Red Cross Society, distributed cooking oil, maize flour, beans and salt to 43,355 especially vulnerable displaced people in Goma town.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281 or ++4179 217 3217

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

LAST IDPS RETURN HOME

Tuesday 11 April was a special day in Mafouta. Some 200 internally displaced people (IDPs) who had been living at the ICRC camp on the outskirts of Brazzaville left the Congolese capital for their home villages near Mayama and Kindamba, in northern Pool region. Transport was provided by the ICRC, as were food and other items to help them settle in.

Like thousands of others, the 200 who left on 11 April had fled to Brazzaville last year after armed conflict drove them from their homes. They are the last of 7,100 people whom the ICRC has helped to return home – by road, train and air – from its relief facilities in Brazzaville. After Tuesday’s departure, the organization closed the last of the four sites that it had set up for IDPs in the city.
The same day, a therapeutic feeding centre (for the severely malnourished) and a kitchen (to provide meals to those in better condition) were opened in Kindamba. Within five days, 138 people had been admitted to the feeding centre and 539 were being aided by the kitchen programme. The beneficiaries are mostly people from Kindamba.

Residents of the surrounding countryside and areas further afield started arriving in Kindamba on Friday. Over the weekend, community leaders in distant villages had gone out to tell people still hiding in the forests – most of whom are suffering from malnutrition – to go to Kindamba for assistance. From what its delegates have heard, the ICRC fears that there may still be many needy people in those areas.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 22 81; Adriano Kuepfer, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++242 81 12 08

ANGOLA

POOR HARVEST EXPECTED ON THE PLANALTO

Since the beginning of the year the ICRC has distributed food aid (maize flour, beans, oil and salt) to more than 300,000 local residents and displaced persons living on the outskirts of Huambo. During this period sporadic clashes on the Planalto have led to a significant increase in the number of beneficiaries.

The coming harvest is expected to be poor, owing mainly to a lack of fertilizer and to the fact that the area under cultivation has been reduced for security reasons and land cannot be left fallow.

From early April to late May the ICRC will only assist particular groups such as hospital patients, the disabled, people living in centres for the displaced and in high-risk areas, and those taking part in rehabilitation work (reforestation, seed multiplication, well-cleaning and composting programmes).

Every day, in the Kuito area, the ICRC distributes 85,000 litres of drinking water to 30,000 displaced persons living in three camps. These people are among the 114,000 villagers who have fled the combat zones and are now living in 23 camps around the city.

With each distribution of food or water, the ICRC holds information sessions meant to give the beneficiaries some basic notions of hygiene and thus reduce the danger of disease and epidemics.

The video footage broadcast by Eurovision on 18 and 19 April is available at the ICRC film library.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 22 81

BOLIVIA

STATE OF SIEGE

On 8 April the Bolivian government declared a state of siege for 90 days and mobilized the armed forces in response to the mass protests which have swept the country since early this month. The protests, which were sparked by the planned privatization of water networks, have resulted in numerous arrests.
The ICRC regional delegate in Buenos Aires immediately went to Bolivia to assess the situation together with the Bolivian Red Cross. The National Society had already taken measures to assist those in need, in particular people blocked in bus stations.

Following discussions with the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior, the ICRC received the necessary guarantees to visit persons detained for reasons of internal security. The visits will be conducted on the basis of the general agreement concluded in 1997 between the ICRC and the Bolivian government.

On 13 April the regional delegate and an ICRC doctor were able to charter a plane for San Joaquin, a remote village in the Bolivian Amazon region, where they visited 19 people detained by a military unit. Meanwhile, negotiations between the government and the opposition have made it possible to settle many of the conflicts currently affecting the country.

Further information: Maria Ines Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++ 54 11 43 28 77 71

LANDMINES

ICRC HELPS ORGANIZE FIRST ARAB SEMINAR ON MINES

A seminar on landmines and their impact on development in the Arab world was held on 9 April at the Cairo headquarters of the League of Arab States. The seminar, which brought together some 150 officials from a number of Arab countries, as well as international experts and representatives of leading local and international NGOs, was held under the League's auspices and organized by the ICRC's Cairo delegation in conjunction with local and regional groups, chief among them Egypt's National Centre for Middle East Studies.

For three days the participants reviewed the political, legal and historical aspects of the widespread presence of landmines in the Arab world; their effect on economic, social and urban development; their military and strategic dimensions; and the problems they pose from a humanitarian and medical standpoint.

Two ICRC representatives spoke about the organization's position on and activities in connection with landmines. They presented current international humanitarian law on the issue and explained what "mine awareness" work amounts to in practice.

The former commander of Canadian land forces spoke on military strategy and the alternatives to anti-personnel landmines, focusing on the outcome of the "Friend or Foe?" study commissioned by the ICRC in 1996.

The seminar ended with an appeal to Arab countries to take detailed action to cope with the problem of landmines. The participants urged the international community to provide assistance in this regard. The seminar also called for community-based awareness campaigns and greater help for landmine victims.

Further information: Nabil Shawkat, ICRC Cairo, tel. ++ 202 337 9282

During the days 21, 22, 23 and 24 April 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Chris Bowers, on (mobile) ++ 41 79 217 32 31
ETHIOPIA

FOOD RELIEF ARRIVES IN GUDIS

ICRC convoys with urgently needed food were due to arrive Thursday in the village of Gudis, whose population has been hard hit by the drought that has devastated south-eastern Ethiopia.

A recent ICRC survey of the village, in the Imi district about 200 kilometres west of Gode, revealed alarmingly high rates of malnutrition, particularly among women, children and the elderly, with a correspondingly high death rate. Arranging rapid aid for Gudis was therefore high on the organization's list of priorities.

As the district is virtually inaccessible from Gode by land transport, the ICRC has set up an airlift from Nairobi to Dire Dawa, from where the food is being transported by road. Though the route is long, it is the only effective and speedy way to ensure that the food reaches those who need it. A separate airlift is already under way into Gode airport.

The relief operation, being operated jointly by the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, aims to distribute food to a population of 188,000 people in four districts: Imi, Denan, Adaadle and Gode. In addition, surveys are being carried out in the district of Fik, an area also thought to be badly affected. The operation is planned to continue at least until late June. If the rains fail for the fifth season in a row, the risk is great that the area will suffer major famine. In that case, distributions might have to continue until the end of the year.

The first phase of the operation is intended to stabilize the situation, which is now critical, by providing the entire population of the districts concerned with regular food consisting of carefully balanced nutrients. This is an essential first step before therapeutic feeding centres are established because if sufficient food is not generally available, people treated at the centres and then released can find themselves relapsing into malnutrition and having to return for further treatment.

The relief provided by the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross consists of pre-cooked high-protein food — an essential supplement to the wheat being delivered by the government's Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission.

Plans for seed distributions are also being drawn up, and the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross are stockpiling shelter material and other emergency items that could quickly become necessary if the long-awaited rains do begin to fall.

Further information:
Helge Kvam, ICRC Gode, tel. ++873 761 845 835
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678
SIERRA LEONE

RED CROSS STARTS AGRICULTURAL AID

The ICRC and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society have begun distributing seed, tools and other relief to some 40,000 farm families averaging six members each. After a thorough survey of needs in four districts of Sierra Leone, the first convoys left Freetown and Kenema on 20 April.

The distributions, which will initially cover the Tonkolili and Kenema areas, will expand in early May to the districts around Kailahun and Pujehun. Focusing on the poorest people, the Red Cross has registered some 13,000 families in Tonkolili, 13,000 in Kenema, 8,700 in Kailahun and almost 5,300 in Pujehun. Among the beneficiaries are internally displaced people and refugees returning to their homes and farmers who never left but lost everything during the war. Each of the 40,000 families will receive 40 kg of swamp and upland seed-rice (a distribution requiring 1,600 tonnes in all), 10 kg of groundnuts, six varieties of imported vegetable seeds, three types of local seeds, and hoes. In addition, some 30,000 families will receive plastic sheeting, blankets, sleeping mats, buckets, kitchen sets and soap.

Barring obstacles such as bad weather and poor road conditions, the distribution will be completed by the beginning of June.

Further information: Priska Spoerri, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++ 232 22 230 954

SUDAN

NEW LIMB-FITTING CAPACITY

The ICRC signed a new agreement on 20 April covering orthopaedic work in Sudan. The accord, worked out with the ministries of Defence and Social Planning, extends for three years the organization's support to the National Centre for Prosthetics and Orthotics (NACPO) in Khartoum. The signing was followed by an inauguration ceremony to mark the completion of work that had been in progress since 1998 to upgrade the Centre's facilities.

The new agreement results from a decision by the three parties to step up and coordinate their activities to help mine victims and other war amputees. The aim is to enhance the quality of the prostheses and other orthopaedic appliances manufactured by the NACPO and to boost production to 900 units per year. To do this, the ICRC will strive to develop and modernize the local technology by providing standard-quality components made of polypropylene. It will also hold advanced training courses for technicians from Khartoum and other parts of the country.

The renovation of several parts of the NACPO, financed by the ICRC, will go a long way to attaining these objectives. One of the newly renovated buildings houses the production unit for prostheses and orthoses and the training room. The other now has improved facilities for the rehabilitation process and for physiotherapy. Separate premises for men and women have been set up and dormitories are available for those who come from other areas of the country. This is an important step towards ensuring access for amputees and other disabled people who travel to Khartoum from far away, both those who have made the journey at their own initiative – and often have very little money – and those brought there by the ICRC from the conflict zones.
Cooperation between the ICRC and the Sudanese authorities in the physical rehabilitation of war-wounded and other disabled people began in January 1990. The ICRC also operates a limb-fitting workshop for victims of the Sudanese conflict in Lokichokio, across the border in Kenya.

Further information: ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++ 249 11 476 464

**REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

**ICRC BRINGS TOGETHER FORMER FOES**

An unusual meeting took place in early April in Kindamba, in the Pool region north-west of Brazzaville. Coinciding with the launch of a food-aid programme in the area, the ICRC has been working to familiarize combatants with international humanitarian law. Seven courses have so far been organized for some 350 government soldiers. The last of those courses had a difference: along with the 68 government soldiers present were over a dozen "Ninjas", members of a militia opposed to Congolese President Sasso N'guesso.

The Pool region is the Ninjas' bastion. The militia's leader, the Reverend Ntoumi, who helped negotiate the cease-fire agreement in late December, has his base along with a strong force in the forests near Kindamba.

The Ninjas had never before been official participants in an ICRC event to promote knowledge of the law and the organization's activities. Including them in the event was possible thanks to an initiative taken by the local government military commander. As a result, the ICRC had to adapt the presentation to account for the fact that the audience was made up of mutually hostile forces — a rare event.

The Ninjas expressed complete satisfaction at the end of the session, which was held in a crowded classroom in which the attentive audience asked a steady stream of questions. The Ninjas — dressed in civilian clothes but recognizable by their beards and their "dreadlocks" — sat in front while the government soldiers — clean shaven and in uniform — sat behind them. Such a thing would have been unthinkable only a few months ago.

When the session was over and a Ninja was thanking the ICRC for inviting them, one could almost say that a certain fraternal spirit was palpable between the ex-adversaries. Encouraged by the results, the ICRC organized two further mixed sessions, which were held last week.

Further information: Laurent Colassis, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++ 242 81 12 08

**SENEGAL**

**HUMANITARIAN LAW COMPETITION IN DAKAR**

From 25 to 28 April the ICRC is organizing, in cooperation with the students' association of the Human Rights and Peace Institute at Sheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, a competition based on international humanitarian law.
Six teams from the universities of Saint Louis and Dakar, the Ecole nationale d'administration, journalism schools and the national police force will take part in this event, the first of its kind to be held in Africa. In addition to receiving 20 hours of instruction in international humanitarian law itself and the working methods of the main humanitarian agencies (the UNHCR, UNICEF and various non-governmental human rights organizations), the 24 participants will confront the problems of "East Bellitia", a subcontinent beset by a crisis with major political and humanitarian ramifications (civil war, indiscriminate bombing, ethnic cleansing, foreign mercenaries, etc.).

In the course of the competition, the future civil servants, journalists and policemen will play the role of ICRC delegates attempting to gain access to victims of war, or that of members of a reconciliation commission discussing the need to try war criminals at the end of a conflict. By simulating a real-life situation, the exercise will bring them into contact with the substance as well as the limits of humanitarian law. Opening the competition, the head of the ICRC delegation in Dakar wished the participants good luck and reminded them that the decisions they take, the words they write or perhaps even the way they use their weapons will either help make the world a more humane place or add to its misery.

Further information: Vincent Bernard, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 824 12 93

During the weekend of 29 - 30 April 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
COLOMBIA 

VIOLENCE AT PRISON

The violent clashes that broke out on 27 April at La Modelo prison in Bogotá, where more than 4,300 people are being held, killed 32 detainees and injured some 20 more. At the request of prisoners and authorities alike, ICRC delegates went to the scene to help arrange a cease-fire and evacuate the wounded, the dead, and four women who had been on the premises when the clashes occurred.

On 30 April, the ICRC's presence was again requested during a thorough search of the prison ordered by Colombia's National Security Council.

Fighting between detainees is frequent in Colombian prisons. The violence is a source of concern to the ICRC, which regularly visits more than 150 places of detention in the country. A similar incident in La Modelo prison on 8 December 1999 resulted in the death of 12 persons while 12 others were injured. In view of the seriousness of the situation, various groups of detainees signed a truce last March and committed themselves in particular to a process of "disarmament".

Further information:
Carlos Rios, ICRC Bogotá, tel. ++571 636 73 46
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224

During the weekend of 6 - 7 May 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
Please find hereafter an article on the last developments of the ICRC assistance action in Ethiopia as a complement to the previous ICRC News sent today.

ETHIOPIA

HOPE DRIVES PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

If the rain fails in south-eastern Ethiopia yet again, or if it is limited to a few showers, the risk looms large that major famine will hit the region. The ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society are only at the beginning of a huge relief operation, which might go on until the end of the year, aimed at improving the nutritional status of the entire population in the targeted areas.

News, and rumour, travel quickly through the barren, drought-stricken landscape and can prompt large numbers of people to leave their homes. Whenever there is a rumour of available food, people are soon under way in the hope of finding enough to feed their families. In the town of Janogaban, some 100 kilometres north of Gode, at least 10 new families arrived within the few days that followed the first ICRC visit. "They have heard that the Red Cross was here and hope to find food", said Hassan Sheikh Mohammed, a village elder.

Isolated in the desert terrain of Ethiopia's Somali National Regional State, Janogaban was not reached by any aid organization, Red Cross or other, until recently. On a mission to monitor the ongoing food distribution, the ICRC team was told about the severe needs of the village's population. The team immediately went to assess the situation and, finding a very high rate of malnutrition, decided to include Janogaban in the Red Cross food distributions. The poor nutritional status of Janogaban's 7,000 inhabitants is obvious. Walking through the town, one sees emaciated children, mothers who cannot feed their babies and old people who can hardly walk. In the centre some 20 people have gathered. Just arrived from a much smaller village, Waranle, they all have similar stories. Many have lost all their livestock. Only the lucky ones still have a few cows, goats or even a camel left. Some have watched their children and other loved ones die. "One family in our village lost a baby", says a woman holding her small son. "And another lost two - just this week". Diseases like diarrhoea, tuberculosis and measles are all too familiar to the people in the area - all can be deadly if the victim is already weakened by hunger.

In the hope that someone will be able to help them they have come to Janogaban, a town whose inhabitants have very little themselves. "This is all I have", says Siado Wli pointing to a box with some maize in it, which has to feed a family of four. When the box is empty she has no idea where she will obtain more food. Asked about the health of her three-year-old son, she just points at him. The boy, named Ahmed, sits quietly and stares. He doesn't play the way three-year-olds usually do.
Different people, same problems

In other parts of the area the Red Cross team meet other people, but the problems and the stories they tell are just the same. In a camp for displaced people just outside Denan, some 70 kilometres north of Gode, Mako Awbarakoow is living with her husband and seven children. They used to do quite well with their 50 goats and 20 cattle. Two months ago the last cow died and the family had nothing left to live on. They walked for eight days to reach Denan. On the way they had to bury two of their children who were too weak to survive the journey through the desert. For the time being they have given up their nomadic life and settled in a hut built of whatever was at hand: branches, bits of plastic and empty Red Cross relief sacks. For the moment they must survive on the aid.

Journalists and the Red Cross

In a race against time, the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross are carrying out a major relief operation to distribute food to some 188,000 people in the four districts where high malnutrition rates have been recorded: Gode, Imi, Denan and Adadle in the south-east of the country. The first phase of the operation is aimed at stabilizing the situation and arresting malnutrition by providing the whole population in the targeted areas with a regular and carefully balanced diet. "The children, the sick and the elderly are the first victims, but the rest will follow", says Raoul Bittel, head of the ICRC sub-delegation in Gode. The ICRC considers general food distributions to the entire population as an essential first step before setting up any therapeutic feeding centres. If enough food is not generally available in the immediate surroundings, the worse cases, who are treated in the centres, will have nothing to fall back on once released.

The urgency of getting the food distributed to the people is demonstrated by the rising death rates and high levels of malnutrition observed by the ICRC in its surveys. In Gudis, a village some 200 kilometres west of Gode, mortality rates as high as one per 1,000 per day were recorded in March. This is double what may normally be described as a major catastrophe. This rate was made even higher by a measles outbreak. People rarely die of hunger itself, but they become sick as a result and the diseases they contract in their weakened state kill them. "Most of the diseases are caused by poor nutrition", says Bittel. "To fight the cause of the problem we are at this moment focusing on distributing the food aid as quickly as possible".

If the rain fails yet another year, the ICRC fears that famine will spread to a wider area than the pockets already seriously affected and anticipates that it might have to step up the operation. "We are prepared to continue the operation until the end of the year, when the next rainy season hopefully will bring sufficient water to this region", Bittel says. He points out that the people in Janogaban might not be the last ones in dire need to be identified. In the town itself, meanwhile, Hassan Sheikh Mohammed finds it hard to express the gratitude he feels for the help his village is receiving. "We have seen nobody here – except journalists and the Red Cross", he says.

Since 30 April there has been substantial rain in Gode district and other areas. People nevertheless retain a pessimistic view regarding the rainy season as a whole because it has come so late – it should have started weeks ago. The rain showers have not so far seriously hampered the relief operation. However, continued heavy rain may bring increasing logistical challenges as the already difficult roads become extremely muddy. Normally they dry up quickly after a few days. If trucks are stranded for longer periods, it might be best to bring the aid as close to the needy as possible and have the strongest among them pick it up and take it further, for example on camel-back.

Further information: Helge Kvam, ICRC Gode, tel. ++ 873 761 845 835
SUDAN

HIGH NUMBER OF WAR-WOUNDED

Renewed fighting in various parts of southern Sudan has meant a heavy influx of wounded people at the ICRC's surgical hospital in Lokichokio, northern Kenya. By 2 May the hospital, whose normal capacity is 560, had 646 patients.

"This is the largest number of people we have ever had to care for in Lokichokio", said Pierre Gratzl, the organization's health and relief coordinator for Sudan. The hospital's two surgical teams were performing some 20 operations a day, he said, and they had carried out a total of 381 in April alone, a period in which 312 new patients were admitted. This compares with an average of less than 240.

In addition to the services provided by the Lokichokio hospital, the ICRC has recently set up a mobile surgical team. A surgeon, anaesthetist and surgical nurse are assisting hospitals in southern Sudan on both sides by training staff in war surgery. The team has so far worked in Wau, Billing and Marial Low, and further destinations are planned. Two other ICRC surgical teams are also continuing their work at Juba Teaching Hospital.

Further information: Loukas Petridis, ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++249 11 476 464

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC CONDUCTS THREE SURVEYS IN GROZNY

During the second half of April a team of four local ICRC staff conducted three consecutive surveys in Grozny to assess the scale of needs for both medical care and water and sanitation. Another mission is currently under way.

The situation for the population of Grozny appears to be very difficult owing to insufficient food and medical supplies. A considerable number of former inhabitants, especially women, who left Grozny during the fighting are nevertheless making short trips to the city to find out more about living conditions there. The severe shortage of drinking water due to the destruction of vital facilities seems to be the most serious problem. With the approaching summer and rise in temperatures, epidemics are feared. Pumping Station 1, which until last October was maintained with the support of the ICRC and supplied 20,000 inhabitants with clean water, is today practically inoperable since the system connecting it to the city's water-distribution network has been destroyed.

In the medical sphere, the ICRC team visited seven hospitals that have just recently started functioning again though with great difficulty owing to the lack of essential medicines and the absence of running water and electricity. The ICRC furnished them with basic supplies.
Meanwhile, on 1 May the ICRC bread programme resumed production and daily distribution to some 3,500 particularly vulnerable people in the main Chechen towns after a six-month suspension due to the fighting.

In addition, the home-visiting nurses programme, run by the local branch of the Russian Red Cross with ICRC support, has also started again with some 48 nurses caring for elderly, handicapped and other isolated people, most of whom are facing immense hardship.

Further information, Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 07

ALGERIA
SECOND SERIES OF VISITS TO DETAINEES COMPLETED

Following an agreement with the Algerian government in 1999 to enable the ICRC to visit detainees, delegates carried out a second round of visits between 20 March and 6 May. They went to places of detention run by the Ministry of Justice in Batna, Chlef, Tiaret, Blida and Medea for the first time, while Ministry-run prisons in Algiers, Annaba and Oran were visited for the second time.

The team consisted of five delegates including a doctor. They were given full access to all premises and all detainees they chose to visit. They went to 10 places of detention in all – holding a total of 10,900 persons – and conducted private interviews with 306 detainees.

The delegates' findings regarding the conditions of detention and the problems raised by the detainees were discussed with the detaining authorities. The ICRC will submit a report to the Algerian government in due course and the dates for the next round of visits will be set by mutual agreement.

Since the ICRC's detention activities started in Algeria late last year, it has visited a total of 17 places of detention, holding 763 private interviews with detainees.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 07

CAMBODIA
HUNDREDS OF ADDITIONAL AMPUTEES HELPED

In January 2000, delegates assessed the situation of amputees around Anlong Veng, in northern Cambodia near the Thai border, an area that was long under Khmer Rouge control. They identified 321 people in need of artificial limbs. The ICRC arranged for them to be taken to its prosthetic/orthotic centre in Battambang to be fitted with artificial limbs and receive rehabilitation therapy. Most have by now made the trip, in 10 separate groups.

The amputees are accompanied on their journey by expatriate and Khmer staff. Because of poor road conditions, the 300-km trip between Anlong Veng and Battambang takes two days. The amputees spend the night en route in a house rented by the ICRC in the village of Puork, between Sisophon and Siem Reap. Special safety rules have been adopted for these trips in view of the danger posed by mines.
The programme’s success has encouraged hitherto unregistered amputees to approach the authorities in their area. As a result, arrangements for transport and limb-fitting will now be made for some 100 further amputees.

While this programme has been going on, the Battambang centre has continued working for its several hundred regular patients.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 24

YUGOSLAVIA / KOSOVO
MINES AND UNEXPLODED BOMBS:
SONGS AND LAUGHTER TO PUT SAFETY FIRST

The timeless tale of Little Red Riding Hood, which has been used to warn generations of children that things are not always what they seem, has provided mine-awareness instructors in Kosovo with the perfect vehicle to warn against the silent menace of landmines.

A professional theatre company, specially commissioned by the ICRC, is currently touring primary schools in Kosovo with a cleverly-devised performance of the famous fable as a means of conveying a serious message to its young audience: in the fields and forests—irresistible playgrounds for naturally curious children—lurks the deadly danger of landmines and unexploded bombs.

Since refugees started returning to Kosovo last summer, almost 160 children have been killed or maimed by this silent menace, and as the spring days lengthen and people work and play more outside, the danger is mounting once again. This is especially so among children, whose attention is naturally attracted by the shiny, seemingly innocent objects lying in the ground and waiting to pounce on their victims.

The troupe’s open-air performance, aimed at schoolchildren in the seven-to-14-year age group considered the most at risk, is the latest project in the ICRC’s mine-awareness programme, an operation that has been under way in Kosovo for the past 10 months and has so far reached people in over 400 villages.

The ICRC is also chiefly responsible for gathering data on incidents. This information is passed on to the United Nations in order to make precise maps showing where the danger is greatest. And while the Red Cross is not involved in mine-clearing itself, it has made arrangements with a Swiss organization, which has three teams available in Kosovo, to conduct emergency clearance in urgent cases.

ICRC mine-awareness coordinator Johan Sohlberg points out that there is no easy solution regarding mines and unexploded ordnance. "This is a problem that the people here will have to live with for a long time", he says. "What we are trying to do is instil a safety reflex in the residents so that they can learn to live as normally as possible in the danger zone."

Further Information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++ 381 38 501 517/8/9/20

During the weekend of 13 - 14 May 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 31
SIERRA LEONE

AID CONTINUES DESPITE DIFFICULTIES

ICRC activities continue in Sierra Leone despite the fighting that resumed there on 5 May. As soon as hostilities broke out, the ICRC and the local Red Cross set up a first-aid post on the Hastings-Waterloo highway in the Freetown area, where violent clashes took place. The most seriously wounded were evacuated to Connaught Hospital in Freetown. Medical supplies sufficient for one month were distributed to four other treatment facilities and the capital's maternity hospital, which are supported by the ICRC.

There has been no suspension of the ICRC's medical programme at the provincial hospital in Kenema, a city located in the east of the country, which has remained calm. During the past week, despite reduced staffing, the ICRC surgical team carried out a dozen operations on patients wounded in earlier fighting. In addition, the ICRC continued to renovate hospitals and build new facilities.

Moreover, after 10 days' interruption, the ICRC has resumed its distribution of basic supplies (such as blankets, sleeping mats, soap, and buckets), tools, and seed to those most in need, who have been made especially vulnerable by the situation that has prevailed in the country for a decade.

Although the current lack of security places limits on its activities, the ICRC has met the vital needs of a group of 300 persons settled near a village some 20 km from Kenema. The entire programme to provide seed and supplies should benefit approximately 300,000 people, including internally displaced people, returnees, and particularly vulnerable groups.

Finally, the ICRC and the National Red Cross Society are working together to restore contact among relatives dispersed by recent events and especially to find the parents of children separated from their families.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC BEGINS VISITS TO DETAINEES

On Wednesday 17 May, ICRC delegates began visits to persons detained by the Russian authorities in connection with the conflict in Chechnya.

An agreement setting out procedures for these visits was recently reached with the Russian Foreign Ministry and the authorities responsible for detention-related matters. ICRC visits will thus be conducted in accordance with its usual practice. The first visits will take place at a detention centre in the northern Caucasus, then, in coming weeks, at other places of detention in the Russian Federation.

These visits are being conducted after Russian President Vladimir Putin gave assurances to ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger, during talks in Moscow on 30 March 2000, that ICRC delegates would be granted access to all persons detained in connection with the conflict, wherever they are being held.

Further information: Erik Reumann, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++70 95 926 54 26 or Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 07
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC AIDS HOSPITALS

On 14 May, an ICRC aircraft landed at Kisangani, in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 1,200 kg of medical supplies on board. This aid was intended for hospitals in the city, where clashes between Ugandan and Rwandan armed forces broke out on 5 May. An ICRC staff member is on the scene to supervise distribution of the supplies and direct other Red Cross activities.

When hostilities erupted, the ICRC began providing 11 of the city's hospitals with emergency medical aid, which has enabled them to care for 159 war-wounded, mostly civilians. The ICRC and volunteers from the Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also cleared away rubble and cleaned the premises of two hospitals and several buildings in the city centre damaged by bombs; meanwhile, repair work in the operating theatre and radiology unit of the city's general hospital is under way.

In addition, the ICRC launched an information campaign in the local press to warn the population of the dangers of unexploded shells and other munitions. Volunteers from the National Society marked various sites and made them secure, so that civilians — children in particular — would not fall victim to these deadly weapons.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC REUNITES CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES

It has been so long since Raphael Kyanga last saw his children, aged six, eight and 13, that he still can hardly believe his family will soon be reunited. Yet he says he always knew the ICRC would make his dream come true of seeing his children again. Raphael finds it hard to contain his joy, knowing that in a few hours they will finally join him and his wife in the eastern town of Goma. His children belong to the first group of unaccompanied minors ever brought by the ICRC from the government-controlled part of the Congo to the rebel-held east of the country to be reunited with their families.

Since 1998 Raphael's children have been stranded in the capital, Kinshasa, separated from their parents by the conflict that has effectively split the country in two. The Kyanga family is just one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, torn apart by the fighting that erupted there in August 1998. The break-up of these families is among the most tragic consequences of the hostilities. Faced with this challenge, the ICRC, supported by hundreds of volunteers from the country's Red Cross Society, has been working tirelessly to reunite unaccompanied children with their parents or other relatives who can take care of them. Since late 1998, the ICRC's presence in eastern Congo has made it possible to arrange for nearly 300 children to rejoin their families.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81, or mobile ++41 79 217 32 17

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

EFFORTS CONTINUE TO IMPROVE MEDICAL CARE IN GROZNY

During a follow-up visit conducted by ICRC staff in Grozny last week, three of the city's main hospitals were given additional medical supplies to help them continue to treat patients in the face of enormous difficulties. All three facilities have also received assistance from other humanitarian organizations and the government.
Courageous and determined hospital staff are doing their best to make things work. They are currently carrying out basic renovations, including plastering, whitewashing, window replacement and roof repairs, while also caring for patients. They provide outpatient treatment and, whenever possible, send inpatients home at night.

The most serious problem is still the lack of water, which often needs to be supplied in bottles; there is also no constant supply of electricity, because of lack of fuel.

ICRC staff have been assured, however, that emergency care is available around the clock in Hospital No 9, where traumatology, surgery, gynaecology and resuscitation services are available. Since the end of April, seven major and 45 minor operations have been performed there, and six mine victims have been admitted. At the time of the ICRC visit, this facility had 13 inpatients and the Republican paediatric hospital had 23, while Hospital No 1 was treating only outpatients.

Further information: Erik Reumann, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++70 95 926 54 26 or Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 07

CHILE

PARLIAMENT PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE RED CROSS

The Chilean parliament met in special session on 9 May at Valparaiso to pay tribute to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as part of observances of the 8 May World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. Members of parliament representing each of the six main national political parties took the floor to emphasize the importance of the Movement's activities nationally and internationally, and their commitment to the rules of international humanitarian law and to Red Cross principles. The session was attended by the entire Central Committee and many volunteers of the Chilean Red Cross, and by the ICRC regional delegate for southern Latin America.

A ceremony had been held the previous day in Santiago, during which new volunteers of the National Society promised to uphold the fundamental principles of the Movement. Representatives of the country's highest authorities, notably the President's wife and the Defence and Health Ministers, were in attendance. Following a report on the National Society's activities given by its President, the ICRC regional delegate outlined the main items on the agenda of the ICRC and the Movement, including proposals for solving the emblem issue.

TALKS WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT

The ICRC regional delegate also had several discussions in the Chilean capital with members of the government of President Ricardo Lagos, which was formed less than two months ago. In particular, he met with the Interior and Defence Ministers, the Foreign and Justice Vice Ministers, and the Director of Prison Services. With all of these, he raised issues of great importance to the ICRC, such as Chile's ratification of or accession to instruments of humanitarian law to which it is not yet a party (the Ottawa treaty banning landmines, the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the 1980 treaty on conventional weapons).

Further information: Maria Ines Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++54 11 43 28 77 71
When the war ended last year and Shaban Zeneli and his family returned to their farm north of Pristina, he was prepared for months of hard work to give his family a new start. Their house had been destroyed, leaving him and his wife, their seven children and other relatives with only an outbuilding in which to shelter through the harsh winter.

Despite the hardships, life started to improve: his son began studies in Pristina, and the 1.8 hectares of land that have been in the family for 200 years were prepared for planting.

By the end of April, the large field close to the house had been planted with potatoes. But disaster struck on 2 May when a torrential downpour — the region's worst in living memory — left half a metre of hail and water on the ground, flooded the housing and forced the family to sleep in their truck.

"It was like the war all over again", said Shaban. "We thought we'd have to flee to the hills again".

When the water subsided three days later, the crops had been ruined and the family's well — their only source of drinking water — fouled with mud. Water had to be fetched from a spring a kilometre away.

The ICRC, which last year carried out emergency cleaning of some 6,000 wells in Kosovo, has launched an urgent programme to clean 460 wells in this low-lying area, which will benefit more than 9,500 persons. The engineer in charge, Bajram Krasnici, himself lives in the affected village and is aware of the people's needs. And when he turned up with his team to clean Shaban's well — an operation lasting about an hour — the family was delighted.

"Although our main programme came to an end in February, we have the experience and expertise to deal quickly with problems like this", said Geoff Allison, head of water and habitation programmes in Kosovo. "And, clearly, we couldn't stand by and do nothing in this situation".

Further information: Caroline Douillez, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++381 38 590 074
ICRC STEPS UP ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL

For the last two days, ICRC teams have been actively responding to the immediate humanitarian needs of the civilian population resulting from the rapid withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.

On Tuesday the ICRC, with help from the Lebanese Red Cross Society, made arrangements for 105 detainees released from Khiam prison to be transported to Beirut, where they were met by their jubilant families. An ICRC team visited the prison and confirmed that it was empty. Other ICRC teams have been touring the main villages in the western and central sectors of the former occupied zone and in the western Bekaa valley to assess the population's immediate needs. Dressing material was subsequently delivered to Tbnine hospital.

The ICRC had already increased its presence in the field and brought in relief and medical supplies as part of its contingency plan for an Israeli troop withdrawal. This plan has had to be quickly updated in view of the swift evolution of events; the current priority is to continue to monitor the situation closely and be ready to tackle any humanitarian problems that may arise.

A major concern is the area's health-care system, which may suffer from lack of support until the Lebanese authorities are able to ensure the smooth running of hospitals and other facilities. The ICRC is stocking additional medical supplies for distribution, so that both sick and wounded civilians will continue to have access to adequate health care during the transition period. It will also continue to support the two referral hospitals in Bent Jbail and Marjayoun.

Ongoing medical programmes will continue in the former occupied zone, such as the ICRC's mobile clinics and the organization's support for the 19 Lebanese Red Cross dispensaries and their first-aid and ambulance services.

At this stage, the ICRC has five expatriate staff in Lebanon. They are assisted by 24 local personnel.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 2307

ICRC HELPS DISPLACED AMID CONCERNS OVER CHILD-SOLDIERS

Working in conjunction with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, the ICRC this week distributed non-food relief (blankets, sleeping mats, soap, canvas sheets and buckets) to 11,640 displaced people (1,354 families) — most of them women and children — gathered in Lunghi, north of the Freetown peninsula and near the capital's international airport.
These people had just arrived — mostly from Port Loko, Masiaka, and Makeni — after fleeing the fighting which has raged in the country for weeks. Like displaced people living in a number of other camps in western Sierra Leone, they were able to benefit from Red Cross Messages, distributed by a network of national volunteers, to enable people who have been separated by the fighting from other members of their family to find and get in touch with their loved ones.

An example is 10-year-old John and three-year-old Mariatu, who became separated from their family after fleeing their home in Waterloo. They were taken in by the ICRC and placed in a care centre for children while the organization worked to trace their parents. This was achieved on 15 May to the joy of all concerned.

But there are also other children of acute concern to the ICRC: demobilized child-soldiers and other children threatened with recruitment. Endeavouring to protect these vulnerable youngsters, the head of the ICRC's Freetown delegation has been meeting representatives of the various parties concerned in recent days in order to make them aware of the gravity of this ongoing problem in Sierra Leone.

Further information: Jette Soerensen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2834

COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES
ICRC HOLDS THREE HUMANITARIAN LAW COMPETITIONS

As part of its programme to promote interest in international humanitarian law in universities of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the ICRC organized the fourth De Martens moot-court competition on humanitarian law from 13 to 18 April 2000. To involve as many students as possible, this year's competition took place, for the first time, in three capitals simultaneously: Kyiv, Moscow and Tashkent. In all, nearly 100 students representing 31 law faculties from all CIS countries took part.

Using a case study prepared by the ICRC Moscow delegation, student teams strove to top each other's knowledge of humanitarian law in a series of role-playing exercises relating to an imaginary armed conflict. The three winning teams came from the International Institute of Linguistics and Law in Kyiv (Ukraine), Baku State University (Azerbaijan) and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

Alongside its work on behalf of conflict victims in this region, the ICRC has since 1992 launched a series of programmes to raise awareness of humanitarian law. These are aimed at a variety of target audiences — the army, National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, universities, schools and the media.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307

During the weekend of 27 - 28 May 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
SIERRA LEONE

SEED DISTRIBUTION RESUMES

The ICRC is beginning to distribute vital supplies of seed and tools once again to some 40,000 destitute farmers, most of whom have been displaced from their homes by the fighting over the last few years. The seed is urgently needed before the end, in mid-June, of the planting season for upland rice, a staple in Sierra Leone. If the programme goes to plan, more than 200,000 people in Pujehun, Kenema, Kailahun and Tonkolili districts should be able to feed themselves when the next harvest comes. (The World Food Programme has agreed to provide some food to tide the farmers over until then.)

The distributions had been interrupted by recent clashes near Masiaka along the main road from Freetown to Kenema and because of the general lack of security in the country. However, since the beginning of the week, the ICRC has begun distributions to 2,000 families in Kenema district from existing stocks in its warehouses in the area.

However, reaching tens of thousands more people depends on work to repair the Mabang bridge, which is situated on a safer, alternate route that passes south of the recent fighting between rebels of the Revolutionary United Front and allies of the government. The bridge has been impassable for trucks for several years but the ICRC hopes to have it rebuilt by the end of the week, thus opening up a new supply route for the ICRC and for civilian and commercial traffic between Freetown and the southern provinces. The ICRC's operation to provide seed, tools and other items essential for survival is the largest of its kind in Sierra Leone.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 61

SRI LANKA

HELP FOR THE DISPLACED

The current upsurge in the fighting between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan security forces on the Jaffna peninsula has caused large numbers of civilians to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere in public buildings and with friends and relatives.

Whenever the security situation permits, ICRC staff go in to assess the needs of the displaced population. With the help of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, the ICRC has registered 3,250 families (some 12,000 persons) and distributed non-food relief at centres in Walikamam West and Point Pedro on the Jaffna peninsula. In the Wanni area, to the south of the peninsula, 241 families (1,035 people) have received similar aid.

In order to ensure their uninterrupted operation, ICRC delegates constantly monitor the situation in the hospitals. So far, the Jaffna Teaching Hospital has admitted 29 civilian wounded, while 52 have been taken to the hospital in Point Pedro. Thirty-four civilian victims...
have been transferred from Mallavi hospital to the hospital in Vavuniya, which has greater resources with which to treat them.

ICRC staff have collected over 290 Red Cross Messages from the displaced centres in Walikamam West and will distribute them to loved ones from whom they have been separated.

The weekly voyages of the ICRC-chartered ship Java Gulf resumed on 30 May when it left Trincomalee for Point Pedro with additional delegates to reinforce the ICRC team in Jaffna, relief supplies for the displaced and mail (it provides a key postal link between north and south Sri Lanka). It is scheduled to leave Point Pedro on 31 May with 13 medical patients on board. The vessel, which evacuates seriously ill people from the Jaffna peninsula to hospitals in Colombo and transports government medical supplies to health-care facilities in Jaffna, had been prevented from sailing last week because agreement could not be reached between both the security forces and LTTE regarding the port to be used at the northern end of the island.

Seven expatriate ICRC delegates and 36 Sri Lankan staff are working out of the organization's sub-delegation in Jaffna.

Further information, Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24

INDONESIA / NORTH MALUKU
RED CROSS AIDS DISPLACED PEOPLE

Last week, staff from the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross Society distributed non-food relief items to 8,000 people who had fled their homes owing to violence between Christian and Muslim communities in the southern part of North Maluku province.

Since its arrival in North Maluku's capital Ternate, where it opened an office in late March, an ICRC group of medical, relief and logistical experts has worked jointly with the Indonesian Red Cross to assess the situation of displaced people in Ternate itself, on the neighbouring islands of Tidore and Makian, in nearby Jailolo on the coast of Halmahera, and on the Kayoha, Bacan and Obi groups of islands. The survey results show that their own coping mechanisms and the limited food assistance provided by the government and a number of non-governmental organizations are enabling the displaced people in those areas to feed themselves adequately.

The joint Red Cross team is nevertheless providing non-food assistance in the form of family parcels (clothing, basic household utensils, hygiene articles, etc.) in response to specific needs. These distributions, which started in April and are being carried out by 40 staff and volunteers from the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross, bring the total of displaced people so far aided in this way to 34,000.

Further information: Philippe Guinand, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 62 21 720 72 52
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 41 79 202 36 80
PARAGUAY

ICRC VISITS PEOPLE DETAINED AFTER ABORTIVE COUP

In a measure ratified by congress following the attempted military coup d'Etat on 19 May, the government of Paraguay declared a 30-day state of emergency. It also arrested more than 100 people – both military and civilian – suspected of involvement in the coup. On 29 May, the regional delegate for southern South America and a medical delegate began visits to the detainees, who are being held at 12 military and police locations. The ICRC last visited places of detention in Paraguay in 1989.

The regional delegate had already travelled to Asunción on 25 May to assess the situation. While there, he held talks with the Interior, Defence and Justice Ministers and with senior officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Assurances were given to the ICRC that its visits to places of detention could be carried out in accordance with its standard procedures.

Further information: Maria Inex Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++54 11 4328 7771
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++44 22 730 2224

SOMALIA

LOCAL COMMUNITY TAKES UP NEW CHALLENGE

The Medina Hospital, once the largest in Somalia, reopened in southern Mogadishu on 28 May after standing idle for nearly eight years. It had been known as the Police Hospital before the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. Previous attempts to put the facility back into operation have failed. Last year, however, local doctors asked the ICRC to do a feasibility study on its future. As a result, the ICRC decided to repair the buildings and is now supporting the 55-bed surgical ward for the treatment of war-wounded people. But it is the local community that is responsible for actually running the hospital. The administrators are appointed by community leaders and draw up the budget and conduct fundraising. ICRC is merely one of the donors and advises on training and budget planning. Local leaders are also in charge of maintaining security around the buildings.

Some of the staff of the new hospital have been trained at the Keysane Hospital, in Mogadishu North, which was set up in the wake of heavy factional fighting in 1992 and is currently being run by the Somali Red Crescent Society and fully supported by the ICRC. It remains the main surgical referral facility in southern Somalia.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 61
YUGOSLAVIA / KOSOVO
THE MISSING – A LASTING WOUND

The ICRC in Pristina and Belgrade is holding a series of events to explain how it goes about finding out what happened to the thousands of people who went missing during the Kosovo conflict. Open-house days at ICRC offices and special meetings with representatives of the families from the various communities affected are being organized to explain a process in which the ICRC is recognized by all the authorities concerned as having a leading role.

The events will culminate in the publication of a book, in June, containing the names of 3,376 persons reported to the ICRC as having disappeared between January 1998 and mid-May 2000, most of them said by their families to have been detained or abducted.

On 21 and 22 February last, the ICRC officially informed the relevant authorities in Belgrade and Pristina of the names of missing people that it had so far gathered, urgently requesting that they provide any information they may have.

"The 'Book of the Missing' is another step – and an important one – in our work to find out what has happened to people who have disappeared," said Andreas Wigger, who heads ICRC operations in the Balkans at the organization's headquarters. There were families in all communities who had no way of knowing what happened to their loved ones, he went on. This was an open wound, and while much international attention was being focused on reconstruction, security and political issues, it was vital to reassure those families that their anguish had not been forgotten."

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 79 217 32 37
Nic Sommer, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++ 381 38 501 517

For any information you may need on Thursday 1 June (holiday) or on the weekend of 3 - 4 June, please call the press officer on duty
Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 37
SOLOMON ISLANDS

RED CROSS RESPONDS TO GUADALCANAL CRISIS

Two ICRC delegates who were already on the spot are working with the Solomon Islands Red Cross to address the humanitarian needs arising from the upsurge of violence between the Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) around Honiara airport on the island of Guadalcanal.

On 7 June the delegates visited the Honiara prison, where about a hundred people are currently being held. Detainees registered during the events of last year have been receiving regular visits. The ICRC is now in the process of registering the remaining inmates, including common-law detainees, because of the threat to their safety from unidentified armed men who gained access to the compound. Steps are also being taken to ensure that medical care is given to those who need it.

Armed men claiming to belong to the MEF have been going into the Honiara hospital to intimidate staff and look for patients of Gwale origin. The National Red Cross Society is therefore registering all patients and staff for their own protection. In discussions held on the subject with an MEF spokesman, the acting Commissioner of Police and commanders of armed groups, they all agreed to issue instructions that no armed men be allowed into the hospital.

Following discussions with both parties, Red Cross personnel were able to go on 8 June to the area where there had been fighting the previous day to assess humanitarian needs. People met on the spot could not confirm that there had been any casualties.

A New Zealand Red Cross nurse is standing by to join the team in Honiara as soon as travel is possible.

Since 5 June, the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation has been airing Red Cross radio spots urging combatants to respect the civilian population.

Further information: Thomas Gurtner, ICRC Manila, tel. ++632 892 8901
MALAWI

ICRC AIDING UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

It has been six years since 17-year-old Eric Mulinda (not his real name) last saw a member of his family. Eric fled the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, after seeing his father being killed and losing track of his brother. He has been searching for his brother ever since. Eric's story is one of tragedy and perseverance. He first sought refuge from the carnage in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He moved on in 1995 when he heard that his brother might be in Nairobi. On arrival in the Kenyan capital he was told that his brother had left. Eric spent the next five years in Kenya. Finally he learned that his brother had been seen in Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi. Eric travelled the 1,500 km on foot and by hitching lifts where he could. The journey took him three months, and he arrived in the camp only to discover that his brother had indeed been there but had left a few months earlier for either France or Belgium.

Eric's story is typical of the loss, isolation and break-up of families that are among the most devastating consequences of war. Faced with challenges such as these, the ICRC is pursuing its work to trace missing persons and reunite families. Last week, delegates went to the Dzaleka camp and, in conjunction with the Malawi Red Cross Society, registered 15 unaccompanied children, Eric among them. With Red Cross help, perhaps he will yet be reunited with his brother.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 20 61

MOZAMBIQUE

AFTER THE FLOODS – REUNITING FAMILIES

Thirty-two volunteers from the Mozambique Red Cross Society are starting to register unaccompanied children separated from their families when cyclone Eline hit the country in February. They were trained by the ICRC in the south-eastern Sofala province in techniques that they will use in an attempt to trace the children's parents. Travel in the battered province is still difficult, however, and with strong winds and rains continuing to pound the country there has been further widespread destruction of homes and livelihoods, and considerable loss of life. Diseases such as cholera and malaria now threaten the survivors.

One of the most tragic consequences of the floods has been the break-up of families. At least 200 children have become separated from their parents and are now unsure of the whereabouts of their families, or even whether they are still alive.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 20 61
NAGORNY KARABAKH

CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PUPPET SHOWS

During the month of May, the ICRC's mine-awareness team in Nagorny Karabakh toured the territory's towns and villages with a puppet show designed to alert children to the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Children living in areas infested by mines and UXO usually know where these deadly weapons are lying and have been told what to do if they come across one. The idea of the show is to teach them how to react in their everyday lives. According to Laurence Desvignes, head of the mine-awareness unit at ICRC headquarters in Geneva, "the real challenge is to deliver the right message to children without arousing their curiosity to such an extent that they will go looking for mines or UXO, and without laying down prohibitions that they may be tempted to disobey".

All over the world, puppets appeal to children and have proved quite effective in conveying serious messages to young audiences. "Rather than imposing rules, the actors and puppets have succeeded in focusing the children's attention on the risks involved", added Laurence Desvignes. Indeed, the audiences are quickly drawn into the play and take an active part, identifying with the scenario and absorbing essential information while having fun. As they shout out to the characters what not to do and how to behave, they are actually demonstrating that they are learning.

The performances, organized by the ICRC with the cooperation of the Nagorny Karabakh Ministry of Education, have been attended by over 7,200 children and some 700 teachers in the region. Follow-up activities include discussions with teachers on the information that needs to be given to pupils and how this should be done. Furthermore, 75 teachers have been selected for training in carrying out mine-awareness programmes in schools.

One thing is clear: a sustained effort is needed to maintain a high level of awareness among children of the dangers of mines and UXO. Together with farmers, children are among the groups most at risk in affected areas – and what better way is there of learning than to watch a puppet show?

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2307
Laurence Desvignes, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2172

For any information you may need on the weekend of 10-11 June or on Monday 12 June (holiday) please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez: 41 79 217 32 17
SIERRA LEONE
REACHING OUT TO THE DISPLACED

Thousands of people from various parts of Sierra Leone have fled to safer areas since hostilities resumed in May. The first major movements were recorded on the Lungi peninsula, just north of Freetown. The ICRC and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society have carried out two surveys so far to assess the assistance required. Tarpaulins, sleeping mats, blankets, buckets and soap are now being distributed to over 5,700 families (some 42,000 people) according to need.

People fleeing from the northern towns of Makeni and Magburaka started arriving in the town of Mile 91, a strategic crossroads east of Freetown, in early June. Red Cross staff have found displaced people in 11 different villages. So far, 1,376 families have been registered along the road between Masiaka and Mile 91 itself. When added to the 1,933 families registered in Mile 91, this brings to 3,309 the number of families (or some 21,000 people) currently receiving urgently needed shelter and non-food assistance in the sector. (In the Lungi and Mile 91 areas, other agencies are distributing food.) While providing relief, ICRC and Sierra Leone Red Cross staff continue to monitor the influx of new displaced people and to plan for future assistance.

To facilitate the tracing of their loved ones, the ICRC and Sierra Leone Red Cross have also handed out Red Cross message forms to people separated from their families by the renewed fighting.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81
ANGOLA

AGRICULTURAL AID ON CENTRAL PLANALTO

The ICRC has begun distributing seed and agricultural implements to over 60,000 families in Huambo, on Angola’s Planalto. Some of the families are local to the area, others have been displaced by the fighting. The aid will go both to families already assisted in 1999 and newly arrived people who have access to arable land.

The distributions will continue until the end of July, when seed intended for dry season crops will be provided. In addition to one hoe per family, the beneficiaries will receive packages of garden-vegetable seed plus a total of 305 tonnes of maize seed, 305 tonnes of bean seed and 50 tonnes of seed potatoes.

The ICRC will also furnish 305 tonnes of fertilizer to improve yields from the area’s exhausted land. Delegates have organized a project to encourage people to produce their own fertilizer in the form of compost, as they once did traditionally.

Beneficiary families living from crops harvested last April will receive half food rations (flour, beans, cooking oil and salt) to make it unnecessary for them to consume the seeds that they receive. Meanwhile, monthly food rations are continuing to be distributed to the 21,260 displaced people housed in centres at Caala, Cuando and Cruzeiro.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81

BURKINA FASO

INFORMATION DAY

The ICRC joined with the Burkinabé Red Cross Society on 16 June to hold a Red Cross information day in the capital Ouagadougou. It was attended by 36 representatives of organizations from civil society, the independent and official press, and municipal authorities.

Burkina Faso has regularly been the scene of violent demonstrations since journalist Norbert Zongo was murdered in December 1998. The aim of the day’s organizers was to familiarize members of the country’s civil society (from which the protests have largely sprung) with the working procedures of the Red Cross and the basic rules of international humanitarian law, though it should be pointed out that during previous demonstrations organized by Collectif contre l’impunité, Red Cross volunteers have been able to work unhindered and take the injured to hospital.
Similar meetings are now being planned in Bobo Dioulasso and Ouahigouya, two of Burkina Faso's other major centres. Both the independent and official press have covered the Ouagadougou meeting thoroughly, in particular with interviews of leading officials of the Burkinabé Red Cross and the ICRC delegate based in Bamako.

Further information: Jean-Jacques Tshamala, ICRC Bamako, tel. ++223 211 591
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO CONFLICT

REPATRIATION OF 177 PRISONERS OF WAR BY THE ICRC

On 16 and 17 June, following agreements between the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Namibia, the ICRC repatriated 177 former prisoners of war (POWs) of Rwandan, Zimbabwean and Namibian nationality who had been detained by the various belligerents in the Congo. The ICRC acted at the request of the parties to the conflict in its capacity as a neutral intermediary, and carried out the operation in accordance with its mandate. The POWs had all been registered and regularly visited by the ICRC during the period of their captivity.

An ICRC aircraft was used to bring 35 Zimbabwean and 11 Namibian former POWs from Kigali, in Rwanda, to the Congolese capital Kinshasa on Friday before returning to Kigali with 88 Rwandan ex-POWs on board. The next day, another plane took the 35 Zimbabweans from Kinshasa onward to Harare and an additional 43 Rwandan ex-POWs from Harare to Kigali. ICRC delegates were on board all flights.

The ICRC will continue to make its services available to all parties to the conflict in order to promote compliance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81

During the weekend of 24 - 25 June 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 37
ERITREA/Ethiopia
MORE ETHIOPIANS REPATRIATED FROM ERITREA

1,135 Ethiopian civilians interned in a camp near Asmara (Eritrea) were voluntarily repatriated yesterday under the auspices of the ICRC. They had previously been visited by ICRC delegates, who provided them with material assistance. The operation, which was conducted by teams from the ICRC Asmara and Addis Ababa delegations, was carried out with the agreement and cooperation of the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments.

Meanwhile, the ICRC is continuing to visit other places where Ethiopian civilians are interned in Eritrea. Civilian internees are protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Two other groups of interned Ethiopian civilians are to be repatriated in the coming days. Repatriation operations will then continue for a number of months, enabling several thousand Ethiopians to return to their country of origin if they wish. All these operations should take place at the same crossing point, on the front line between the villages of Adi Quala and Rama.

On 20, 22 and 24 June, similar operations had already been carried out to repatriate 3,500 Ethiopians who had had to flee their homes on the Eritrean side of the border after the upsurge in fighting in mid-May.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++41 22 730 22 81
mobile phone: ++41 79 217 32 17

RWANDA/UGANDA
ICRC REPATRIATES 28 PRISONERS OF WAR

On 26 June, at the request of the Rwandan and Ugandan authorities, the ICRC repatriated 28 Ugandan prisoners of war detained in Gitarama, Rwanda. In so doing, it acted in its capacity as a neutral intermediary in accordance with its mandate. The prisoners, who had been taken to Rwanda on 16 June after being captured by Rwandan forces in Kisangani, Democratic Republic of the Congo, had been visited by ICRC delegates on 21 June.

An ICRC aircraft made two trips to fly the 28 Ugandans from Kigali to the military airport in Entebbe. On each outward flight there were 14 prisoners and one ICRC delegate aboard.

The ICRC will continue to make its services available to all the parties to the conflict in order to promote compliance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++41 22 730 22 81;
mobile phone: ++41 79 217 32 17

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
INDONESIA/MOLUCCAS

ICRC PROVIDES MEDICAL SUPPLIES AS VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN NORTH MALUKU

Urgently requested medical supplies were flown by an ICRC-chartered helicopter to various health facilities as violence flared up last week in the northern part of Halmahera island in North Maluku province - one flashpoint in the troubled Moluccas, where mounting inter-religious tension has had serious consequences for the population in recent months.

According to recent estimates, the escalating violence between Christian and Muslim communities in North and South Maluku, the two provinces which make up the Moluccas, has already caused many people to flee their homes. Tens of thousands are now living in camps that have been set up on the nearby island of Sulawesi and many more are believed to be displaced within the Moluccas themselves.

As part of an ongoing humanitarian relief programme run from the Indonesian Red Cross Society’s office in Ternate, the capital of North Maluku, joint ICRC/National Society teams have already delivered family parcels, clothing, hygiene articles and other emergency supplies to more than 30,000 people in the southern part of the province and distributed family parcels and rice to around 6,000 people in the north.

Previous surveys conducted in North Maluku had already indicated that, with the exception of those living on the island of Morotai, people could still rely on existing coping mechanisms to obtain food but that there was an urgent need for medical and other supplies.

Further information: Arista Idris, ICRC Jakarta, tel: ++ 6221 720 7252
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 2678 or ++ 41 79 217 3216

YUGOSLAVIA

GROWING HARDSHIP IN SERBIA GIVES CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Hardship is frequently worse among the resident population of Serbia proper than among the internally displaced, and poverty is spiralling out of control, forcing many people to ask the displaced families they are hosting to leave and seek shelter in often harsh and degrading "collective centres".

These are some of the findings from a recent independent "vulnerability assessment" study commissioned jointly by the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Yugoslav Red Cross in order to establish the scale of needs among various target groups and devise the most efficient response.

The study, which is based on a representative sample of 1,200 refugees, 800 internally displaced persons and 500 resident socially vulnerable cases, shows that the overall quality of life is worse among people in the latter group, most of whom have little or no income and no savings, than among those in the other two groups, who are receiving more humanitarian aid. It also indicates that increasingly widespread poverty is making it impossible for families to continue to host internally displaced persons. For instance, 47 per cent of the people currently living in collective centres (a term used to describe temporary places of shelter for displaced persons and refugees, often schools or sports halls) were originally housed with
families - in most cases relatives - and in some municipalities as many as 400 applications for accommodation in collective centres are submitted every week.

"This is the trend that strikes me most", said Edward Tonchew, who manages the ICRC soup kitchen programme. "Bearing in mind the conditions in some collective centres, like sports halls for instance, it is sheer desperation that drives people to make such a decision. They have no choice because accommodation in collective centres at least means they get free meals, water and electricity."

The ICRC, the International Federation and the Yugoslav Red Cross are still providing hundreds of thousands of resident socially vulnerable cases, refugees and internally displaced persons with food and other kinds of assistance.

Further information: Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel: ++ 381 11 450 590
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 2678 or 00 41 79 217 3216

During the weekend of 1 - 2 July 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC EMERGENCY WORK CONTINUES FOLLOWING TRUCE
IN KISANGANI

Nearly one month after a truce put an end to the most recent fighting between Ugandan and Rwandan forces in Kisangani, the ICRC is continuing to provide urgently needed assistance for some 1,700 people, mostly civilians, who were wounded in the clashes. The organization has distributed medicine and food to the 50 hospitals and health centres where these people are being treated and an ICRC surgeon is operating in the general hospital.

Meanwhile, the ICRC and the local Red Cross have virtually completed one of the most difficult and urgent tasks of all - the collection and burial of hundreds of decomposing bodies. The ICRC believes that at least 619 civilians and 141 soldiers died in the week-long fighting. Up to 250 Red Cross volunteers and numerous ICRC staff were involved in removing the remains, which presented a major threat to public health.

Together with its local partner, the ICRC has also been active in protecting civilians, in particular children, against the risk posed by the thousands of unexploded shells, grenades and other ordnance littering the city. Red Cross teams have located about 2,500 danger sites, which have been secured and notified to the local military forces, and have disinfected and cleaned up 75 public buildings, including 11 schools.

To help those whose houses were destroyed or damaged in the fighting, the ICRC has distributed plastic sheeting, blankets and soap to more than 1,100 families in Kisangani. It has also taken special measures to speed up the exchange of Red Cross messages between the residents of Kisangani and their relatives living in other parts of the country.

The ICRC reopened its office in Kisangani in February 1999.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC PROVIDES 5,700 FAMILIES WITH SEED

The ICRC has started a programme that will enable families in Congo-Brazzaville to grow their own vegetables. Some 5,700 families in the Pool and Lekoumou regions – many of whom have recently returned to the homes they fled during the fighting – have been given tomato, cabbage and onion seed. Not only will the vegetables ensure a healthier diet, but it is hoped that the families will be able to sell any surplus produce.

As the situation slowly returns to normal, the ICRC has been doing its part to improve the nation's health. Having helped the national and regional health authorities to reopen 18 medical centres, many of which required extensive repairs, it is now supplying these centres with essential drugs. In addition, the ICRC has recently completed a programme in Kindamba to feed around 400 severely and 1,100 moderately malnourished people.


During the weekend of 8 - 9 July 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 37
SRI LANKA

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR THE DISPLACED

From April to June the ICRC assisted thousands of people displaced by the fighting between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on the Jaffna peninsula.

With the support of the Sri Lankan Red Cross, it distributed non-food relief items to over 9,000 internally displaced people in Jaffna town, Walikamam West and Point Pedro and to over 1,800 people in the Wanni area who had fled the fighting on the Jaffna peninsula. Mobile health clinics run jointly with the National Society treated 5,000 patients in 63 different locations and 850 red cross messages were collected from displaced people in Jaffna and distributed to relatives. An ICRC water and sanitation team was deployed with public health inspectors to clean up the crowded welfare centres on the peninsula.

To date all the efforts made to obtain access to the north of Tenmaradchi division (Jaffna peninsula), where fighting continues, have failed since no agreement could be reached with the parties to the conflict. The ICRC has therefore been unable to provide an undetermined number of civilians who are stranded in the area with protection and assistance.

In May and June, the ICRC-chartered vessel "Java Gulf" carried nearly 700 patients and relatives to and from government hospitals in Colombo, 271 NGO personnel including doctors from Trincomalee to the Jaffna peninsula and back, and 217 tonnes of cargo including non-food relief items for distribution in Jaffna, drugs for government hospitals and mail for the Sri Lanka Post Authority.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989. It has 49 expatriates and 300 local staff based at its delegation in Colombo and in its 11 offices in the north and east of the country.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel: ++ 941 503 346

SIERRA LEONE

ICRC COMPLETES MAJOR AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMME

The ICRC and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society have completed a major agricultural programme launched jointly in April 2000 to improve the ability of those most severely affected by the conflict to grow their own food. Seed-rice, groundnuts, vegetable seed and hoes were distributed to a total of 172,000 displaced persons and vulnerable resident farmers. Altogether, 30,765 families (12,948 families in Tonkolili district, 12,614 in Kenema district and 5,203 in Pujehun) benefited from this assistance. Some 200 families living along the Moa river also received freshwater fishing equipment.
In addition to the agricultural programme, the ICRC and the National Society have set up an emergency programme to meet the immediate needs of thousands of people displaced by the conflict. In May and June, on the basis of previous surveys, they distributed tarpaulins, blankets, sleeping mats, buckets and soap to 72,293 newly displaced people in the Lungi peninsula and Mile 91 area (Tonkolili district), mostly women and children who had arrived there after several days' journey on foot or by boat. All in all, 34 ICRC trucks were used during the last two months to carry out 382 trips throughout the country.

Further information: Priska Spoerri, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++ 232 22 230 954

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

COMMEMORATION OF THE SREBRENICA TRAGEDY

On 10 July the association "Srebrenica and Zepa Enclave Mothers" opened an exhibition of handicrafts on the premises of the ICRC delegation in Sarajevo to mark the fifth anniversary of the Srebrenica tragedy.

Many distinguished guests, including Alija Izetbegovic, the current Chairman of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, High Representative, and Jacques Paul Klein, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, were present at the opening ceremony to express their solidarity with the families who are still searching for their missing relatives. The president of the association, Mrs Munira Subasic, said that more than ever now the families needed to know: "We appeal to all of you to use your position and power to help us obtain information about our loved ones."

In his speech, ICRC head of delegation Balthasar Staehelin spoke of the ongoing suffering and anguish of thousands of families from Srebrenica who, five years after the tragedy, are still without news of their relatives. He appealed to all the parties to honour the commitment they had under the Dayton agreement to provide answers: "This commitment must be fulfilled towards each and every one. The ICRC, for its part, is determined to pursue its efforts to obtain information and support the families in their endeavour."

The 700 handmade items on display at this three-day exhibition are for sale. They provide a powerful and moving illustration of the struggle carried out by the women of Srebrenica to overcome their difficult situation.

The ICRC has so far received 7,439 tracing requests from the families of people reported missing in Srebrenica. The commemoration of this tragedy is also a reminder of the suffering endured by people throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, where relatives of some 17,300 missing people are still waiting for news.

Further information: Sanela Bajrambasic, ICRC Sarajevo, tel: ++ 387 71 652 407
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 2678

ICRC footage of the current humanitarian crisis in Kisangani will be made available to all national TV networks through Eurovision on 13 July at 12.05 GMT. National Societies that wish to obtain copies of the footage or encourage news programmers to broadcast it are requested to contact these networks.

During the weekend of 15 - 16 July 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
SENEGAL

RED CROSS DISTRIBUTES FOOD

Volunteers from the Senegalese Red Cross Society have provided food to 3,800 displaced people living in and around Kolda, in the Casamance region. Most fled their homes last April as a result of the dangerous conditions in the border area with Guinea-Bissau.

After being registered by Red Cross staff, each beneficiary received five kilograms of rice and three of millet from the volunteers, who were assisted by an ICRC delegate.

Last year the ICRC and the Senegalese Red Cross distributed 159 tonnes of food to displaced people living around Ziguinchor, also in Casamance.

Further information: Philippe Beauverd, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 824 12 97

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

CHILD AND MOTHER REUNITED

Alanga Cleves was back in her mother's arms on 5 July after three years of separation. In May 1997, the 11-year-old had fled the village of Mbomo, over 900 km north of Brazzaville, together with her aunt to escape the menacing situation in the area.

Wandering from village to village, the pair eventually crossed into the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In early 1988 misfortune struck again when Alanga was separated from her aunt. She lived for a while in a former refugee camp before making her way on foot for 400 km and arriving back in her native country, where she was finally taken in by villagers.

Informed of the girl's appearance, ICRC tracing staff brought her first to Kinkala then to Brazzaville, where she stayed until her mother could be found. Even then her difficulties were not over: the trip home took ICRC staff and Alanga three exhausting days of negotiating swampland and crossing some 40 rivers on makeshift bridges and a ferry that was barely afloat. But when she finally reached Mbomo, her mother was waiting along with a jubilant welcoming committee of 6,000 – the whole town!

Further information: Natalie Kohli, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++242 81 12 08
PHILIPPINES/MINDANAO

ICRC STEPS UP ASSISTANCE FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE

An upsurge in fighting between the Philippine armed forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the past few months on the island of Mindanao has caused tens of thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

The ICRC office in Davao, the largest city in Mindanao, has been working closely with the Philippine Red Cross to provide assistance for 10,450 families that have been displaced within the provinces of North Cotabato, Bukidnon, Maguindanao, Sarangani and North and South Lanao. Since January, nearly 63,000 people temporarily accommodated in 48 evacuation centres have thus received food and other items according to needs.

In addition, latrines have been built to prevent the outbreak of disease, water pumps and pipes have been rehabilitated in 14 centres sheltering a total of 17,000 people, and instruction in basic health care has been given by Red Cross volunteers to over 4,000 people living in three others. The ICRC and the National Society are also providing medicine for the makeshift hospital in Parang, Maguindanao, which treated up to 350 patients a day at the height of the exodus.

Some schools are being used as evacuation centres and the Red Cross has therefore built over 55 temporary classrooms to enable nearly 3,000 schoolchildren to resume classes. Some 20,000 pupils are also to receive notebooks printed with basic Red Cross information.

The ICRC reopened its office in Davao in June 1999. Two delegates and five local staff are currently addressing humanitarian needs on the island.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24

During the weekend of 29 - 30 July 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Roland Sidler, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 58

and

on Tuesday 1. August (national holiday) please call Françoise Derron, duty press officer, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03
"Minas não, Ottawa sim!" ("No to mines, yes to Ottawa!"): this was the slogan of a play and dance performed on 1 March 2000, the first anniversary of the Ottawa treaty's entry into force, before a host of local dignitaries and representatives of the international community in Angola.

Four months later, on 25 July, Angolan members of parliament found their own way of expressing this slogan: the National Assembly ratified the Ottawa treaty (which Angola had signed at the time of its adoption, in 1997).

The ratification of the Ottawa treaty offers a glimmer of hope, but the complete eradication of anti-personnel landmines in Angola is still a long way off. Indeed, the destruction of stocks, the marking and clearance of mined areas, and assistance to victims will require much more effort and resources than does a simple vote of ratification. Even so, last month's vote was a necessary step towards this goal.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 20 88

GUINEA-BISSAU

HUMANITARIAN LAW EXPLAINED TO THE ARMED FORCES

In late July, in cooperation with the general staff of the Guinea-Bissau armed forces, the ICRC launched a programme to promote international humanitarian law among Guinea-Bissau military personnel. Two sessions have already been attended by 370 soldiers and officers of the Buba and Quebo battalions in the south of the country. Nearly 5,000 soldiers will attend further sessions before the end of the year.

The aim is to familiarize military personnel with the history and humanitarian activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with the mandate of the ICRC, and with its activities throughout the world and in Guinea-Bissau in particular. The obligations of combatants in time of armed conflict are also presented by the ICRC, while the basic rules of international humanitarian law in the field are explained by a staff officer of Guinea-Bissau trained at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy.

A "soldier's handbook", which contains the essentials of humanitarian law and basic principles of first aid, is given to each participant; some 5,000 copies were printed by the ICRC especially for this programme.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 20 88

During the weekend of 5 - 6 August 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
INDONESIA
ICRC ASSISTS 16,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE

The security situation in Poso, on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, has temporarily improved, but the sectarian violence that broke out in May has claimed over 200 lives, left over 4,000 homes destroyed and caused thousands of people to seek shelter in safer areas. Approximately 30,000 internally displaced persons are now staying in various towns and villages in central Sulawesi, mostly in private homes or with relatives. An additional 16,000 are living in camps situated around Poso and are in urgent need of help.

This week, as part of an ongoing humanitarian relief programme for the camp dwellers, a joint ICRC / Indonesian Red Cross team completed the distribution of family parcels consisting of sleeping mats, sarongs, cooking pots, cups, plates, soap, detergent, candles, matches and jerrycans to 4,000 heads of families in 40 different locations. About 400 of the most severely affected families also received tarpaulins.

Surveys conducted earlier in the area indicate that while medical and water and sanitation services have been seriously disrupted, displaced persons can still rely on existing coping mechanism and assistance from the local authorities to obtain food.

Further information: Arista Vadya Idris, ICRC Jakarta, tel: ++ 6221 720 72 52

SRI LANKA
PASSENGER FERRY SAILS UNDER ICRC PROTECTION

On 7 August the passenger ferry "City of Trinco" carried 353 civilians from Trincomalee to the Jaffna Peninsula under the protection of the ICRC.

At the request of the Sri Lankan government, the ICRC agreed to let the ferry fly the ICRC flag on its twice weekly trips to and from the north provided only civilians were on board. The ICRC had previously obtained written guarantees for the safe passage of the vessel from both the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. According to the terms of the agreement, the transport of military personnel and arms and ammunition is strictly prohibited and the ship must not be accompanied by military escorts.

The ICRC has been working in Sri Lanka since 1989, carrying out its traditional humanitarian activities and acting as a neutral intermediary whenever required. Its daily tasks consist in protecting detainees, restoring family ties, providing the civilian population with material assistance and spreading knowledge of the basic rules of international humanitarian law.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++ 941 722 35 904
ANGOLA

SOWING EARLY FOR A GOOD HARVEST

Francisco is one of the 60,000 heads of families to have benefited from the distribution of agricultural supplies in Huambo during the month of July. Over 6,000 families living in the outlying districts of Kuito were also included in the programme.

With seed and fertilizer in hand, and a brand new hoe on his shoulder, Francisco lost no time in setting to work since he had to start sowing at once to ensure a good harvest at the end of the year. Up to 50 per cent of the annual food crop is grown during the dry season, the rest being made up of rainy season crops for which the ICRC will distribute seeds and fertilizer in September and October.

In all, 322 tonnes of maize seed, 335 tonnes of bean seed, 25 tonnes of seed potatoes, 65,029 packages of garden vegetable seed, 323 tonnes of fertilizer and 64,706 hoes were distributed on the central Planalto in June and July.

Fertilizer is crucial since without it the soil in Huambo and Kuito would be too poor to yield a good harvest. In addition to distributing supplies, the ICRC therefore provided 1,512 families in Huambo with the assistance and expertise needed to start producing their own fertilizer from organic waste.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 20 45

KIVU

SIX YEARS AFTER THE TRAGEDY IN RWANDA, CHILDREN STILL BEING REUNITED WITH THEIR FAMILIES

In early August, 27 Rwandan children crossed the border at Goma, in Kivu province (eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo), into Rwanda, where they were finally reunited with their families in the "land of a thousand hills". They had not set foot in their home country in six years.

The Rwandan genocide caused nearly two million people to flee to neighbouring countries, and in the course of this unprecedented exodus many children were separated from their families. Since 1994, the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations have registered nearly 75,000 unaccompanied Rwandan children who took refuge in Tanzania, Burundi and in the camps situated in Kivu. Today, thanks to the endeavours of humanitarian organizations, the Red Cross message network and the active efforts of their own relatives to find them, more than 67,000 children have been reunited with their families.
Six years after the tragic events in Rwanda, the tracing and family reunification programme is still under way. Although the number of cases has diminished, every day the ICRC and the National Society still find Rwandan children who have no one to care for them or are living with host families. Once they are identified, the children are sheltered in reception centres in Goma until the ICRC can locate their relatives.

The ICRC is currently monitoring the cases of nearly 500 unaccompanied children who are temporarily living in these centres. The repatriation of 27 Rwandan children in early August gives hope that, despite the time that has gone by, all these children will soon find their way back to their homes and families.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 20 45

A special ICRC report entitled "Do you know this child? Unaccompanied minors in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region (1994-2000)" is available from the ICRC.

During the weekend of 12 - 13 August 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 31
IRAQ

ICRC COMPLETES MATERNITY HOSPITAL RENOVATION IN MOSUL

After seven months of renovation work, the Al-Batool Maternity Hospital in Mosul, a city of 1.2 million inhabitants, can now offer suitable hygienic and working conditions for patients and medical staff.

This is the first hospital renovation to be completed as part of an ICRC programme which aims at mitigating hardships currently faced by the Iraqi population due to the serious deterioration in the country's health-care facilities.

In addition to renovating all the wards, the ICRC provided the hospital with equipment that was essential to meeting basic requirements for ventilation, heating and cooling systems (critical in the summer, when temperatures can easily reach 50°C), and carried out repairs on the water distribution and sewage system. Improvements were also made in operating theatres that raised standards of hygiene and thus also patient safety. Finally, a new wing was built for emergency services.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Iraqi Ministry of Health and ICRC specialists, nine hospitals, totalling over 3,400 beds, and 26 health centres throughout the country will be renovated in this programme which began last summer.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 23 07

ANGOLA

HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS ON NATIONAL POLICE CURRICULUM

A major step has just been taken in Angola: from now on, international humanitarian law and human rights law will be taught to all participants in the training programme for junior officers of the national police. Beginning in 2000-2001, the future majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels enrolled in the programme will receive twenty hours of instruction in these subjects, followed by an examination. The instructors have already been trained. The ICRC will support their efforts by supplying publications and other written materials.

The aim is not only to offer the new courses but also to include legal and humanitarian issues in other parts of the training programme more specifically related to police work, such as preventing and detecting crime, arresting and detaining suspects, using force and firearms, maintaining public order, and police treatment of particularly vulnerable groups (women, children, adolescents, refugees and displaced persons in particular).
Until now, cooperation between the ICRC and the Angolan national police has been limited to awareness-raising days in provincial commands. A similar project incorporating humanitarian law in the training received by military personnel, which has been under consideration by the Angolan armed forces, has just received the go-ahead from the deputy minister of defence.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 20 45

ECUADOR

SENIOR OFFICERS INSTRUCTED IN HUMANITARIAN LAW

At the beginning of August, 33 senior officers of the Ecuadorian armed forces and national police attended a two-day course on international humanitarian law and international law of armed conflict given by the ICRC regional delegate based in Caracas.

The course was part of a three-month programme for senior officers in national security policy and combat strategy for combined operations of the army, navy and air force organized at the National War Institute (INAGUE). The programme is mandatory for promotion to the rank of general. Eleven colonels and 13 lieutenant-colonels of the army, five captains of naval vessels, two colonels of the air force, and two lieutenant-colonels of the national police took part in the most recent session.

Ultimately, as groups of instructors are formed, the armed forces should themselves become directly involved in teaching humanitarian law, the rules of which will also be taken into account in decision and command procedures, and included in instruction guidelines and military handbooks.

Further information: Bruno Doppler, ICRC Caracas, tel. ++58 2 266 40 05

During the weekend of 19 -20 August 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
COSTA RICA
AGREEMENT SIGNED WITH INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

On 18 August, in San José, the capital of Costa Rica, the ICRC regional delegate for Central America and the Caribbean and the President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights signed a cooperation agreement providing for the exchange of documents between the two institutions. The ICRC and the Court will thus be able to assist each other in their efforts to ensure that people receive the protection that is due to them in all circumstances, in particular through the dissemination and implementation of human rights law and international humanitarian law. The agreement, which will serve as a frame of reference for the exchange of information and legal documents and for the training of judges and Court staff in international humanitarian law, is one of a series of measures designed to strengthen the inter-American system for the protection of human rights.

At the signing ceremony, which took place in the main courtroom in the presence of the president, the vice-president, the judges and the court clerk and staff, the Court and the ICRC carried out a symbolic exchange of documents. An initial meeting between ICRC legal experts and the lawyers who work at the Court is scheduled for mid-September.

Further information: Jaime Arroyo, ICRC Guatemala, tel. ++ 502 362 52 37

During the weekend of 26 - 27 August 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty
Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
AFGHANISTAN

BOOSTING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Most of western Afghanistan is being hit by a severe drought. Since the beginning of the year the ICRC sub-delegation in Herat, in the north-west of the country, has been helping over 10,000 farmers directly through food-for-work schemes.

Irrigation systems have been neglected or destroyed during the various conflicts that have ravaged the country. The ICRC is running a programme in the drought-stricken area to clear them and thus enable 7,000 families to cultivate an additional 1,500 hectares with the help of vegetables seeds, seedlings, agricultural tools, saplings and fertilizers distributed by the organization. Training has been offered in two districts of Herat province.

Over 67,000 kg of wheat have been distributed to those working on the schemes to rehabilitate crucial irrigation systems such as conventional canals and karezes (Afghanistan's extensive traditional network of underground channels). This and the seed distribution are part of a programme that targets areas where needy farmers are living and to which internally displaced people have returned or are expected to return. Similar projects have also been carried out this year in other parts of the country such as Parwan, Badaghan and Tahar provinces.

Further information: Hilaman Mohamad Qasem, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 682 280 131

ARMENIA

AGREEMENT SIGNED FOR TB-CONTROL PROGRAMME IN PRISONS

An agreement was signed last week between the Armenian government and the ICRC to launch a tuberculosis-control programme within the country's penitentiary system. The first phase will see the rebuilding of the prison system's central tuberculosis hospital and upgrading of the national reference laboratory in Abovian in order to help the authorities improve diagnosis and treatment of infected prisoners.
The project will then focus on enhancing the ability of local professionals to ensure early detection and prompt treatment of the disease in accordance with the World Health Organization's DOTS strategy ("Directly Observed Treatment, Short course"), which requires medical staff to supervise the daily intake of medicines by each patient over the full course of treatment.

Nearly two years ago, the ICRC conducted a TB-incidence study inside the Armenian prison system. About 4% of the inmates tested positive.

Containing TB in prisons has been an important aspect of the ICRC's work in the southern Caucasus. As elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States, this very serious disease has been taking a heavy toll among the prison population, where its incidence is about 100 times higher than the average for the region.

In Azerbaijan, more than 2,000 inmates have received treatment with ICRC support since the launch in 1995 of a TB-control programme in prisons there. In Georgia, full support from the authorities has ensured good performance from an ICRC programme which has benefited more than 600 prisoners since 1998.

Further information: Ann Aerts, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 27 25

During the weekend of 2 - 3 September 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty

Suzanne Berger, on (mobile)
41 79 217 32 37
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

RED CROSS STEPS UP MEDICAL PROGRAMME IN CHECHNYA

This week, the ICRC and the Chechen branch of the Russian Red Cross are launching a joint programme aimed at providing the population in the Chechen Republic with basic medical assistance. A health post in Grozny will offer consultations and treatment, as will three mobile medical units travelling within Chechnya as security conditions allow.

Three general practitioners, two paediatricians and four nurses, all local Red Cross staff, are working on this programme, which will be a valuable complement to the ICRC's ongoing support to hospitals in this devastated region. Three cars, medical equipment and medicines were provided by the ICRC for this project.

Similar programmes were set up at the end of last year in the neighbouring Republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia, where Russian Red Cross personnel have given over 25,000 consultations to Chechen displaced persons, including some 11,000 children, in need of medical treatment.

Further information: Erik Reuman, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++70 95 926 5426

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC ORGANIZES FAMILY VISITS TO DETAINEES

There were emotional scenes in Nis Prison in Serbia last week as wives and mothers were briefly reunited with their detained relatives as a result of an initiative taken by the ICRC. The group of 21 women from towns and villages throughout Kosovo were brought by the ICRC to the prison, where they had the chance to spend one hour with their loved ones and give each of them a package containing basic necessities. For most of the women, it was the first time they had seen their husbands and sons since they were arrested.

A similar event had taken place two days earlier when two persons from Serbia proper were taken by the ICRC to visit their relatives held in the Bondsteel detention facility in Kosovo.

The visits were arranged by the ICRC after obtaining the necessary authorizations from the competent authorities. Because contact with family members is vital to the welfare of detainees, the ICRC plans to organize more such visits in the future.
Meanwhile, on regular visits to 917 detainees held in 20 detention places in Serbia proper and to some 60 persons detained in Kosovo under KFOR and UNMIK authority, the ICRC monitors conditions of detention and forwards Red Cross messages between the detainees and their families. Around 22,000 such messages have been exchanged since June 1999.

Further information: Caroline Douillez, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++381 38 501 517

SOLOMON ISLANDS

RED CROSS RESPONDS TO GUADALCANAL CRISIS

In response to an upsurge in fighting between the Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), an ICRC operation to help an estimated 5,100 internally displaced people is currently under way in the Solomon Islands. By 31 August, some 2,400 displaced people made homeless by the events in several parts of Guadalcanal province had received urgently needed non-food supplies including blankets, cooking utensils, clothing and shelter material.

As part of the relief effort, four ICRC delegates working together with staff and volunteers from the Solomon Islands Red Cross have assisted displaced populations both east and west of the capital Honiara and are now bringing aid to displaced persons in remote settlements along Guadalcanal’s "Weather Coast", notorious for its rough seas. Access to these areas became possible only when the ICRC managed to charter a suitable oceangoing vessel, the "Princess 2", which has for the past two weeks been transporting the Red Cross teams and relief supplies.

An ICRC surgeon and a Red Cross nurse are on hand to treat the sick and wounded in the hospital in Honiara and also in rural clinics, both in MEF- and IFM-controlled areas. Patients who cannot be treated in the clinics or who require major surgery are taken to the Honiara hospital. The demands of the conflict have caused a shortage of qualified medical personnel: apart from the ICRC surgeon, only two trainee doctors are available for surgery at the hospital. Moreover, the rural clinics have been cut off from their usual sources of medical supplies since the beginning of the conflict and now depend entirely on the ICRC for basic medicines.

Further information: Thomas Gurtner, ICRC Manila, tel. ++632 892 89 01
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 24

For any information you may need on Thursday 7 September (holiday) please call Françoise Derron, duty press officer, on: 41 79 217 32 03 (mobile)
and
the weekend of 9-10 September please call Amanda Williamson, duty press officer, on: 41 79 217 32 16 (mobile)
SRI LANKA
MORTAL REMAINS RETURNED

On Wednesday 6 September, the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary in the transfer of the mortal remains of 36 combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed in the latest round of fighting between the LTTE and Sri Lankan government forces in the Jaffna peninsula. The bodies were handed over to the ICRC by the Sri Lankan Army at Neerveli in Jaffna, from where they were transferred to the LTTE in the peninsula.

As it does in other countries, the ICRC in Sri Lanka uses its neutral status to return the mortal remains of combatants and civilians whenever asked to do so by the parties concerned. In Sri Lanka this year it has so far transferred the remains of 203 Army personnel and 82 members of the LTTE.

The ICRC has been present since 1989 in Sri Lanka, where it currently has 48 expatriates and 300 Sri Lankan staff based at its delegation in Colombo and in its 11 offices in the north and east of the country.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++941 722 35 905
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 24
KENYA

PRIMARY SCHOOL HANDED OVER TO COMMUNITY

On 31 August a Red Cross team handed over a newly built primary school to the West Pokot community of Kapsang'ar. The six-classroom school, which is situated at an altitude of over 2,000 metres, was built together with the men, women and children of the village. It is equipped with a tank in which rainwater can be collected from the roof – an essential feature in drought-stricken Kenya, where water has become a precious commodity.

The old classrooms used until last week had been partly destroyed by the clashes that broke out in 1997 between the Pokot and Marakwet tribes. However, during the inauguration ceremony the pupils of the neighbouring Marakwet community, where the construction of a similar school was completed a few months ago, were singing side by side with their Pokot hosts, both groups calling for "an environment conducive to learning". The local member of parliament, who was present at the ceremony, stressed that the two communities must find ways to live together peacefully.

The ICRC is assisting victims of tribal violence in Kenya such as the traditional cattle rustling that occurs among nomadic herders, for whom cattle is the main source of livelihood. Such raids can cause the displacement of entire communities, including women and children. The ICRC programme was drawn up together with the American Red Cross, which is actually implementing it in cooperation with the Kenya Red Cross Society. Its aim is to restore access to water, education and markets so as to help the displaced regain a degree of self-sufficiency.

So far three schools have been handed over to communities directly involved in the construction work and food has been provided for the pupils of 15 other schools. In addition, gravity-fed water systems have been completed in three villages, over 50 wells have been hand dug according to traditional methods and a total of eight "rain tanks" have been built thanks to the engineering expertise and financial support provided by the Red Cross.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2 728 387
This year the ICRC delegation in Lima has produced a new show for schoolchildren aged between 11 and 13 and is putting it on in secondary schools with the help of the Peruvian Red Cross. The show for the year 2000 highlights ideas such as saying no to discrimination, violence and the use of weapons, observance of the rules of peaceful coexistence, and promotion of voluntary work for one's own community, especially through the branch of the National Society.

The production consists of short sketches in which the characters dress up, play musical instruments, dance and sing songs to put their message across. The words of the songs are simple and direct, and are designed to make the young audience think about these important and topical matters. One of the most striking features of the show is that the songs are sung to rhythms such as Argentine sambas, Peruvian waltzes and marineras, tunes from the Andes, and even a tango!

The performers identify closely with the message they are conveying and establish a warm and dynamic relationship with the youngsters, who end up singing along. At the end of the show, an ICRC delegate and members of the branch of the Peruvian Red Cross accompanying the production launch a discussion and answer the countless questions asked by this curious and enthusiastic audience.

Further information:
Graziella Leite Piccolo, ICRC Lima, tel. ++ 511 460 27 19
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2224

Brazil

Police instructors learn the law

Two years ago the ICRC launched a project in conjunction with the Brazilian Ministry of Justice to make observance of the basic rules of human rights law and international humanitarian law part of the daily work of the country's "military police". Despite its name, the military police is not part of the armed forces but rather constitutes Brazil's national police force. Its 500,000 officers are in charge of implementing the law and maintaining public order.

The ICRC project's strategy has been to train those who do the training in the police force itself. As a result, an initial group of 21 core instructors, ranging in rank from captain to lieutenant-colonel, followed a course in September 1998. That group in turn trained almost 340 other instructors over the following four months. A decision was then taken to increase the number of instructors, and a third wave of some 500 new officers from all regions of Brazil went through the process. In total, almost 900 instructors have been trained in less than two years under the auspices of the ICRC and the Ministry of Justice.
The courses for instructors have a theoretical section in which the participants study the basic rules and legal instruments of human rights and humanitarian law, both national and international. There is also a practical component taught by police experts from Equity International, an independent, non-profit foundation. This includes the use of force – including firearms – maintenance of public order, arrest and detention. It is intended to translate theoretical knowledge of the law into good police practice and conduct, and in so doing prompt police officers to respect human rights and avoid unnecessary use of force and other forms of victimization.

To ensure that the project is on the right track, a Brazilian university has been asked to carry out an independent and impartial evaluation. It will assess the project's effect to date and suggest adjustments to enable the ICRC to continue effective work in this area with the police. Police instructors who have taken the course say that the results so far are good and that this achievement is due directly to the ICRC's principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence, which help ensure the project's acceptance by the forces involved.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Jean-François Olivier, ICRC Brasilia, tel. ++ 5561 248 02 50
REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

THOUSANDS FLEE CLASHES

For the past two weeks, several Guinean towns near the borders with Liberia and Sierra Leone have been attacked by armed groups from those two countries. The clashes have claimed a great number of victims, including a UNHCR employee killed on 17 September. The prevailing insecurity has also caused thousands of local inhabitants to flee their homes and thousands of Liberian and Sierra Leonian refugees to return to their countries of origin.

In coordination with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Red Cross Society of Guinea, the ICRC has provided the displaced with medical and other assistance. On 8 September the ICRC already delivered emergency medical supplies to Forécariah hospital, which was admitting many of the wounded.

So as to increase its operational capacity, the ICRC, which currently has three expatriates working on the spot, will bolster its team by sending two more staff members to Conakry. The Red Cross Movement is following the situation closely and plans to step up its assistance activities in the days ahead.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81

SUDAN

RELEASE OF SEVEN DETAINES

On 17 September the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) handed over to the ICRC seven members of the Sudanese armed forces who had been detained in the town of Kurmuk. With the agreement of both the Sudanese government and the SPLA, the released detainees were then flown from the Blue Nile state to Khartoum aboard an ICRC plane.

The seven detainees had all been registered and regularly visited by the ICRC during their captivity. In accordance with the organization's usual procedures, ICRC delegates spoke to each of them in private to ensure that they were returning home of their own free will.

ICRC delegates regularly visit persons held by the SPLA in connection with the conflict and monitor their conditions of detention in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law. During these visits, the detainees are also given the opportunity to correspond with their families by means of Red Cross messages.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81
SIERRA LEONE

RED CROSS ASSISTS REFUGEES RETURNING FROM CONAKRY

Since last Friday, with the help of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, staff and volunteers of the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society have been assisting the returnees who are arriving in Freetown daily on ships from Conakry.

After disembarking, the returnees are given medical care, food and water according to their needs. "The majority – about 70 per cent – are women and children, and about half of them need medical attention," said ICRC senior relief officer Lawrence Golightly. The returnees are screened by two Red Cross nurses, who give them first aid and whatever drugs they need and refer those in extremely bad shape to hospitals for further treatment. Everyone receives a ration of bread and sardines.

By Wednesday the Red Cross had registered 2,862 returnees and it will continue to provide emergency assistance in the coming days. Some returnees are reunited with their relatives on the spot; the others are transferred to the Waterloo camp for the displaced.

Further information: Priska Spoerri, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++232 22 230 954

AFGHANISTAN

OVER 3,500 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE RECEIVE FOOD AID

On 17 September staff from the ICRC office in Mazar-i-Sharif distributed food aid to over 3,500 internally displaced people currently living in Amrach, approximately 100 km south of Mazar-i-Sharif, in a pocket controlled by the northern alliance and surrounded by Taliban forces. It was the first visit from a humanitarian organization in two years.

After obtaining the necessary permission from the Taliban and the northern alliance, the ICRC conducted a cross-line operation to assess the humanitarian situation in the area, which still shelters many people displaced by the past fighting in neighbouring Gosfandi and Sang-e-Charak districts. The ICRC later distributed food aid to the displaced (600 families registered in all), delivered supplies to a local first aid clinic and gave talks on international humanitarian law for those bearing weapons.

Further information: Mario Musa, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 131
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 24

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC STEPS UP ACTION AS NEEDS GROW

The ICRC has been compelled to step up its activities in Serbia as increasing economic difficulty and a deteriorating basic infrastructure, in particular the water-supply system, imposes increasing hardship on the most vulnerable members of society.
In August the number of hot meals prepared as part of the soup-kitchen programme run jointly by the ICRC, the Yugoslav Red Cross and several foreign National Red Cross Societies rose by 5,000 a day to meet growing needs among the population. This brings to 70,000 the number of people who come to the kitchens to collect what for most of them will be their only real meal of the day. A further 32,000 people in both Serbia and Montenegro who are unable to travel to the distribution points have dry food rations delivered to them.

According to the local Red Cross staff who recently attended a seminar organized by the ICRC and the Yugoslav Red Cross to assess the programme, it not only meets a vital material need but also offers important psychological reassurance to people extremely anxious about how they will survive the coming winter. More than 18 million meals have been prepared in 115 kitchens and served at more than 300 distribution points since the programme began about a year ago.

The ICRC has also responded to urgent calls from the water authorities to provide spare parts and chlorination supplies as the gradual deterioration of the country's water-supply systems - exacerbated by the summer drought - has brought many networks, especially in southern Serbia, to the brink of collapse. For the resident population and displaced people living in temporary collective accommodation, this means the constant threat of having no access to clean water. In the village of Rutevac in the Aleksinac municipality, for example, a school was able to start its new term only thanks to the donation of an ICRC chlorinator, which eliminated the risk of disease among the schoolchildren.

In its renewed appeal last week to donors, the ICRC highlighted its work in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as one of its 12 most underfunded operations.

Further information: Gordona Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++381 11 450 590
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678
LIBERIA

ICRC AND LIBERIAN RED CROSS AID THE DISPLACED

On 21 September the ICRC and the Liberia National Red Cross Society began distributing relief supplies to displaced people, most of them women and children, in the north-west of the country. There have been frequent clashes in this region and in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea in recent weeks. The displaced, who number some 7,700 (1,375 families), will receive food for one month thanks to a donation from the World Food Programme.

Last week the ICRC and the National Society distributed cooking pots, blankets and soap to an initial group of 600 individuals (102 families).

Further Information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

CHINA

COOPERATING TO PROMOTE THE LAW

The ICRC's regional delegation in Bangkok held the fourth regional seminar for promoters of international humanitarian law from 17 to 22 September. Organized in conjunction with the Red Cross Society of China, the seminar took place in Louyang, in Henan province. It was part of the "Dissemination China 2001" project launched in 1999. The project aims to train those who will spread knowledge of the law and people who will, in turn, teach others to do so. Over a period of three years, courses will be held at Chinese Red Cross headquarters and in each of the 31 provincial branches to ensure that the message is spread to civil society, academic circles and the civilian and military authorities.

All the subjects covered – the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its fundamental principles and humanitarian law itself – were presented by Chinese Red Cross staff. The ICRC nevertheless has an important role to play in providing additional information, replying to questions, illustrating the subjects covered with examples from its delegates' experience and providing continuous assessment of the project.

Further Information: Hao Ren, ICRC Bangkok, tel. ++66 2 251 04 24
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224
EAST TIMOR

DILI HOSPITAL: OVER 50,000 PATIENTS TREATED IN PAST YEAR

On 6 September 1999 ICRC delegates were forcibly expelled from East Timor by militiamen opposed to the territory's independence. The ICRC office was looted and then burnt to the ground.

An advance party of ICRC delegates and doctors who returned to Dili from Jakarta on 14 September 1999, six days before the arrival of the Interfet multinational force, found the town's General Hospital virtually empty. Its only occupants were 35 bedridden patients being cared for by six very courageous Timorese nurses. All the other staff had left, and looters had stripped the hospital of its equipment. The same day the ICRC decided to take over the hospital and restore vital medical services. Guarantees of protection were secured from Indonesian military officers to prevent the burning of the hospital buildings at a time when most other public facilities in the territory were being destroyed. A medical team was brought in from Geneva, and a fully-equipped field hospital donated by the Norwegian Red Cross was set up in the main hospital compound.

ICRC expatriates and Timorese staff returning from hiding or from exile were beginning to work together by the end of September 1999. This was the first public service in East Timor to return to normal after the destruction and violence of that tragic month.

During the past year, Dili hospital has admitted nearly 5,000 patients and treated more than 46,000 outpatients. Today the 210-bed facility, which is fully financed by the ICRC, is run by 26 ICRC medical expatriates and 311 Timorese staff. According to the medical strategy of the UN Transitional Administration, it will soon become the national referral hospital for the future State of Timor Lorosa'e, receiving special cases from four provincial hospitals.

This is the first time for many years that the ICRC has managed and funded all the services – surgery, intensive care, pediatrics, gynaecology/obstetrics, tuberculosis treatment and general medicine – of a central national hospital. More than 15 National Societies have seconded medical personnel to Dili during the past year to support the ICRC in this crucial and rather unusual operation.

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During the weekend of
30 September - 1 October 2000,
for all information please call the
press officer on duty
Corinne Adam, on (mobile)
41 79 202 36 80
AFGHANISTAN

HELP FOR THE DISPLACED

Since fighting flared between Taliban forces and the Northern Alliance around Taloqan in August, the ICRC has been providing non-food relief - distributed by the Afghan Red Crescent Society, ACTED and Shelter Now International - for over 11,000 displaced people in the area of Faizabad and Taloqan.

The ICRC maintains a regular presence in Faizabad, but additional staff from Kabul have been dispatched there over the recent weeks to assess and respond to the need for humanitarian assistance in the area.

Further information: Mario Musa, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 382 280 131
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24

SOLOMON ISLANDS

DIFFICULT RELIEF OPERATION UNDER WAY

Last week, ICRC staff based in Honiara went to the aid of some 300 people on the remote island of Sikaiana, in the most inaccessible part of the Solomon Islands, where they distributed seed, gardening tools, fishing gear, food and medicines. The inhabitants have no regular outside supplies for most of the year and have seen their island's population grow dramatically with the arrival of displaced people fleeing the fighting on Guadalcanal. These items will enable the Sikaianans to plant additional gardens and do more fishing.

There is no regular transport service between Sikaiana and the other islands. The delegates reached it aboard the ICRC vessel "Princess 2" after a 24-hour trip though heavy seas. The team included a doctor, who treated 25 patients - a significant percentage of the population - and was later told that he was the first doctor to go there in many years. A woman suffering complications as her pregnancy reached its term was taken to Honiara hospital on the vessel's return voyage. Labour started as the ship approached Honiara harbour and a baby girl, named Princess, was delivered shortly afterwards.

Despite the extreme difficulty of landing on the beaches in high swells, the delegates, working with staff and volunteers from the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society, have been able to carry on relief operations in the Marau Sounds and along the "Weather Coast" of Guadalcanal, where 3,000 displaced people have been registered. On several occasions, distributions had to be temporarily halted after the ICRC's landing craft was swamped by waves and conditions were judged too dangerous to continue.

Further information: René Suter, ICRC Honiara, tel. ++ 677 71 631
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
WAR SURGERY SEMINAR

The ICRC and the Congolese Ministries of Defence and Health held a joint war-surgery seminar in Kinshasa from 27 to 30 September. The event brought together 65 doctors from all over the country (50 military officers and 15 civilians) to share their experience and discuss how best to improve the treatment of war casualties.

The deputy Minister of Defence opened the proceedings in the presence of both the Minister of Health and the head of the ICRC's Kinshasa delegation.

Throughout 1999 the ICRC supported a dozen Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Health medical facilities, helping to treat over 3,000 wounded people. Over the same period, the orthopaedic centre run jointly by the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of the Congo fitted some 300 amputees – many of whom had lost limbs as a result of war – with ICRC-produced artificial limbs.

Further information: Antoine Tawamba, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 34 191/2

CÔTE D'IVOIRE
RED CROSS AID TO DISPLACED PERSONS

Since August, the ICRC and the Côte d'Ivoire Red Cross have been assisting almost 1,200 victims of ethnic violence which has once again flared up in the south-west of the country.

Displaced persons have congregated in the two bus stations of San Pedro (the region's main town), in Grand Béréby and in Quéoulo, a village close to the scene of the clashes.

The Red Cross aid consists mainly of rice, oil, toiletries and blankets. The National Society has a team of five working in the area, which the ICRC is providing with financial and logistical support as well as medical care.

Further information: Bernard Oberson, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 20 22 24 60 / 61

KENYA
SLOWLY RETURNING HOME

The Pokot and Marakwet people from the villages of Kolowa and Tot (north-west of Nairobi) are slowly returning to their homes. The trek down from the Cherangani escarpment, where both clans had sought refuge since fighting erupted between them in October 1999, began about two months ago after meetings were held between community leaders and a Red Cross operation was launched to supply villagers with food and drinking water.

"This is a conflict over access to resources", says Alfred Petters, an engineer for the American Red Cross. "It is exacerbated by the drought presently affecting large parts of Kenya, a country that hasn't received adequate rains for the last two years". The drought has had a particularly severe effect on pastoral communities such as the Pokot and the Marakwet, who desperately need to find grazing pastures for their cattle to replace the barren land they are sharing.
Clashes between the Marakwet and Pokot communities quickly grew more violent when the fighters stopped using traditional weapons, such as spears and arrows, in favour of modern automatic firearms. Several people, including women and children, were killed and large numbers of people fled their villages. In some cases they took their cattle with them, but the animals proved unable to adapt to the new environment on the escarpment and many died.

The ICRC project to help the victims, which is financed and implemented by the American Red Cross, aims to bring about the conditions necessary for these displaced people to return to their villages. The first step was to distribute maize seed to those living on the escarpment. The maize, which has now been harvested, is being consumed while a sorghum crop grows in the abandoned villages in the valley. In order for the sorghum to grow and for the population to have access to drinking water during the drought, several water projects (hand-dug wells, desilting of dams, etc.) have been carried out in the villagers' absence.

Schoolgrounds were used during the fighting as secure places for the cattle to graze. However, this resulted in damage to the schools. Work has now been carried out to repair and upgrade the facilities, including installation of functional latrines and fences to keep the cattle out. Several schools have also been equipped with rainwater catchment systems and pupils are being served a meal a day. Of the 780 children in the village of Tot, 300 have returned to school so far. And in Kolowa, the market is gradually returning to its colourful, busy routine.

Restoring access to food and water has served to attenuate the causes of conflict and enabled both communities to seek lasting solutions. They have agreed to improve control over their youths and, in the event of new tensions, meet before these have a chance to escalate.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2 728 387

ADDITIONAL EMBLEM

PAN AFRICAN CONFERENCE ENCOURAGES INITIATIVE

The 5th Pan African Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 21 to 25 September 2000, gave several presidents of African National Societies the opportunity to express their views on the question of an additional emblem.

During talks with Mr Jakob Kellenberger, ICRC President, Dr Abdel Kader Boukhrouf, President of the Algerian Red Crescent, pledged his support for efforts to achieve as wide a consensus as possible, saying he intended to take the matter up personally with the Algerian President.

The National Societies of Togo and Niger called on the Conference to give the process its full support. At the closing session, Ms Bana Maiga Ouandaogo, President of the Burkina Bé Red Cross Society, told the participants that the Conference had served as a reminder of the need to find a just and equitable solution to the emblem issue and encouraged the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which was truly universal, to work toward such a solution.

Further information: Darcy Christen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 47 50

During the weekend of 7 - 8 October 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
ISRAEL/OCCUPIED TERRITORIES/AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIES

RED CROSS / RED CRESCENT RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS

In view of the prevailing situation in the region after days of intense violence, some 20 ICRC delegates have been deployed in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Working closely with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), they are monitoring daily developments and approach the authorities when necessary to ensure the safe passage of PRCS ambulances through difficult areas. They are also keeping in close contact with the Magen David Adom.

In response to the appeal made by the PRCS last week, a 5.5 tonne shipment of ICRC medical assistance has been dispatched to the area with the support of the German Red Cross, and the Norwegian Red Cross has sent six ambulances.

Acting together with the International Federation, the ICRC is stepping up its support for the PRCS. Most urgent needs in terms of medical supplies have been covered, enabling clinics and health posts to cope with the great number of wounded.

Meanwhile, the ICRC delegation in Beirut has requested access to the three Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah last Saturday.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307

SOLOMON ISLANDS

RELIEF OPERATION SUSPENDED FOLLOWING ATTACK ON RED CROSS TEAM

The ICRC has decided to suspend its relief activities in the Solomon Islands following an attack on its staff on the island of Marapa, in the Marau Sounds off the Weathercoast of Guadalcanal, on 6 October, in which one delegate was seriously wounded.

A joint ICRC / Solomon Islands Red Cross team was distributing relief supplies to the displaced population on Marapa Island when it was attacked by partially uniformed armed men. An ICRC delegate was severely beaten and food and other relief items covering the needs of some 50 families were stolen at gunpoint. The delegate had to be evacuated to Australia, where he was treated for head wounds.

The ICRC started distributing relief supplies in the Marau Sounds on 3 October and was to continue its operation in the remaining easternmost part of the Weathercoast. A clinic for the displaced was also to be set up on Marapa and a Solomon Islands nurse brought in together with the necessary medical supplies.

Given the alarming events, Red Cross relief activities in the Solomon Islands will not resume until renewed and credible security guarantees are received from all parties to the conflict.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 79 202 36 80
Thomas Gurtner, ICRC Manila, tel. ++63 2 891 8902 ; Pauline Wall, ICRC Sydney, tel. ++61 2 9388 9039

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
IRAQ

REHABILITATION OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CENTRE

The ICRC has just completed the renovation of a primary health care centre in the town of al-Huwaider (Diyala district), 100 km north of Baghdad. The centre was selected with around two dozen others to benefit from a rehabilitation programme aimed at improving the health-care system in Iraq, which has seriously deteriorated in recent years. It is the first of these centres to have been rehabilitated so far.

The renovation of the centre, which started at the end of June, involved masonry work, the improvement of the water-distribution and electrical systems and the repair of doors and windows. Today, thanks to a sound and functional structure, the centre can again serve its purpose for the civilian population and will be able to provide up to 150 consultations a day.

By the end of October, the ICRC will start training the medical staff of two other primary health care centres in the same district so as to improve the quality of the treatment given there.

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Iraqi Ministry of Health and ICRC specialists, nine hospitals, totalling over 3,400 beds, and 26 health care centres throughout the country will benefit from this programme, which began last summer.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307

ANGOLA

THANKS TO RED CROSS MESSAGE, TWO SISTERS FIND EACH OTHER AFTER 25 YEARS

"Messages of hope" they may be, but for those who are anxious to receive one the wait can be agonizing. Searching for a missing relative is one of the cruellest ordeals of war.

Despite the difficulties of working in a country as vast as Angola (twice the size of France), where so many people have been displaced and some areas are off limits for security reasons, the ICRC has finally managed to reunite two sisters who lost touch with each other 25 years ago.

Maria da Graça Palanca threw her arms up in the air several times, speechless with emotion. She had just read a message from her sister Maria-Margarida, from whom she was separated when she was only 18. Today she learned that Maria-Margarida, fleeing the violence that broke out in the country in 1975, had been able to fly to Norway and was still living there.

The ICRC processes tracing requests and collects and delivers red cross messages both in Angola and abroad, especially in neighbouring countries where many Angolans have sought refuge and where ICRC tracing teams are working in close collaboration with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help them find their missing relatives. A great number of messages are currently being distributed by the ICRC in Huambo, Lobito, Kuito and Luanda and by the Angolan Red Cross in other parts of the country.

Further information: Gianni Volpin, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++24 42 36 4 4 54
BULGARIA

EASTERN EUROPEAN INITIATIVE ON SMALL ARMS

From 1 to 3 October, in Sofia, the Bulgarian Red Cross, in conjunction with the Norwegian Red Cross and the Norwegian Initiative on Small Arms Transfers (NISAT), held a regional seminar on small arms for the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of south-eastern Europe. The purpose was to discuss the problem of small arms proliferation both globally and in the region and to examine how National Societies could best implement a resolution on arms availability adopted by the 1999 Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

"Unregulated arms availability can facilitate violations of international humanitarian law, increase civilian suffering and impede assistance to victims," said ICRC Mines-Arms Unit coordinator Peter Herby at the seminar. Recently, regional efforts have been made to control the flow of arms from and within Europe. "But there is a need to focus much more on the human costs of small arms proliferation," said Herby.

The National Societies of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Yugoslavia took part in the seminar, which was also attended by the Norwegian Red Cross, NISAT, the International Federation and the ICRC. The participants expressed concern about the effects of small arms circulation on communities in the region and several National Societies showed an interest in developing national or regional activities, especially with a view to raising public awareness and promoting alternatives to a culture of violence.

Further information: Lena Eskeland, ICRC Mines-Arms Unit, tel. ++41 79 389 9932
Peter Herby, ICRC Mines-Arms Unit, tel. ++41 22 730 2729

During the weekend of 14 - 15 October 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
NIGERIA

RED CROSS AIDS CLASH VICTIMS

The Nigerian Red Cross Society and the ICRC have been aiding victims of fighting in the Ajegunle district of Lagos that started on 15 October. Initial estimates put the number of dead at over 100, with several hundred more injured in clashes between Hausa residents of the area and members of the Yoruba "Odua People's Congress". Some 2,500 Hausa families had to flee their homes, seeking refuge in army barracks.

As public services were unable to evacuate the wounded, Nigerian Red Cross volunteers and ICRC staff ferried 63 victims to four different Lagos hospitals. The ICRC provided medical supplies to Zolinga Hospital and the military hospital. The organization also supplied four 4,000-litre water tanks and 5,000 plastic cups to ensure that people who have fled their homes have sufficient drinking water. The Nigerian Red Cross contributed 4,000 buckets.

The ICRC, the Nigerian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are closely monitoring the situation, ready to adjust the aid as required to treat the injured and meet the basic needs of the evacuees.

Further information: Jean-Jacques Gacond, ICRC Lagos, tel. ++ 23 41 269 18 81
Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 45

ALGERIA

THIRD SERIES OF ICRC VISITS TO DETAINEES

The ICRC carried out a third series of visits between 24 September and 15 October under an agreement reached in 1999 between the Algerian government and the organization for visits to detainees in places of detention administered by the Ministry of Justice. Delegates went to 11 prisons run by the courts of Algiers, Batna, and Chlef, where a total of 7,689 persons were held. In the five places previously visited, delegates verified what action had been taken in response to their recommendations, while in the six visited for the first time they assessed the conditions of detention.

The four delegates had access to the entire premises of the prisons visited and were able to see the detainees of their choice. They talked individually and in private with 420 detainees – 159 of whom had been arrested since the beginning of the year – to assess their conditions of detention and the treatment they had received since their arrest. The delegates also spoke with over 200 other detainees in groups. The places visited comprised six remand centres, two rehabilitation centres (for detainees with sentences of under one year) and three adaptation centres (for detainees with sentences of a year or more).

The ICRC's observations regarding conditions of detention and treatment were discussed with the detaining authorities both locally and at the Ministry of Justice in Algiers. A report will shortly be sent to the Algerian authorities summarizing the ICRC's findings and recommendations arising from the three series of visits carried out so far.

Since the autumn of 1999, when the organization's detention-related work in Algeria began, delegates have visited 23 places of detention and talked privately with 1,183 detainees.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 26 78
ETHIOPIA / ERITREA

ETHIOPIANS REPATRIATED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

Some 880 Ethiopian nationals and persons of Ethiopian origin travelled from Eritrea to Ethiopia under ICRC auspices on Saturday 14 October.

Their transfer, which was facilitated by full cooperation from the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, was carried out between the Eritrean town of Adi Quala and Rama, in Ethiopia. Prior discussions between the ICRC and both governments made it possible to agree on conditions to ensure that the process provided adequate guarantees of safety and dignity, as required by international humanitarian law.

ICRC delegates based in Asmara registered the persons involved, who had been living in Eritrea before the outbreak of the war between the two countries, and conducted individual interviews to confirm that they indeed wished to go to Ethiopia. Afterwards, with assistance from the Red Cross Society of Eritrea, the ICRC accompanied them to the border, where they were taken charge of by another ICRC team, this time based in Ethiopia, who helped them cross the river dividing the two countries. Finally, the returnees were taken by the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, with ICRC support, to Adwa, where they were placed in the care of the Ethiopian authorities.

The ICRC will continue offering its services to the parties to the conflict with a view to facilitating the transfer of those wishing to go from Ethiopia to Eritrea or vice versa, and to promote compliance with the rules and principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Further information: Bruce Mokaya, ICRC Asmara, tel. ++ 29 11 20 24 60 or 20 24 62
Alain Aeschlimann, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++ 2511 518 366

GENEVA

PROTECTING CULTURAL PROPERTY

A meeting on ways to protect cultural property when war breaks out took place near Geneva on 5 and 6 October. It was attended by some 40 international experts, ICRC lawyers and an ICRC representative to the armed forces. Organized by the ICRC, the meeting’s purpose was to discuss the measures that should be taken to implement rules laid down by international humanitarian law to protect cultural property. The main purpose was to study practical implementation guidelines for individual governments. The participants also assessed techniques already in use in different countries to protect cultural property, pointed out a number of problems and encouraged the development in individual countries of legislative and other mechanisms to ensure more effective protection.

The meeting was a complete success. The ICRC’s advisory service on implementing humanitarian law will now work to follow up the participants’ recommendations. Existing guidelines will be amended to bring them into line with the meeting’s recommendations. In addition, a report on the proceedings will be published and a table will be drawn up showing the extent to which the world’s States have become bound by the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, and by the protocols additional to that treaty.

Further information: Press Division, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 88

During the weekend of 21-22 October 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
HEAD OF ICRC DELEGATION MEETS PRESIDENT KOSTUNICA

The continuing hardship facing the people of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and the urgency of addressing the issue of missing persons were among the key matters discussed when the ICRC's head of delegation in the FRY, Peter G. Stocker, was received last week by President Vojislav Kostunica.

After briefing President Kostunica on the activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the country in recent years, Peter Stocker took the opportunity to assure him of the Movement's ongoing commitment to responding to the needs of the country's inhabitants, who have been severely affected by shortages, economic collapse and the consequences of conflict. This situation will doubtless prevail, at least in the short term, despite the new political climate.

Mr Stocker also stressed the crucial importance of providing families with information about the fate of missing relatives so as to end the anguish of uncertainty, and reaffirmed the ICRC's resolve to continue to work towards this humanitarian goal. Another topic covered was the ICRC's activities for people still held in detention.

In response, President Kostunica expressed his full support for the work of the Red Cross in the FRY and stated that the new authorities are seeking ways of dealing with outstanding humanitarian concerns.

In spite of the rapidly changing political situation in the FRY, the ICRC has continued its detention work. Since October 6, over 230 detainees have been visited in five places of detention in Serbia proper, while 20 have been released and transported to Kosovo by the ICRC. Family visits of relatives from Kosovo to Serbia proper and vice versa have also been organized. Around 850 detainees are currently being visited by the ICRC.

Further information: Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++ 381 11 450 590
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2678 or ++4179 217 3216

ANGOLA

ICRC STEPS UP WATER AND SANITATION PROGRAMME ON PLANALTO

Thousands of families fleeing the fighting between government forces and UNITA have taken refuge in camps on the Angolan Planalto, giving rise to major health and hygiene problems. The ICRC has responded by stepping up its water and sanitation programme in the camps; 600 new latrines have been built in a single month.

With the approach of the main rainy season, the ICRC has started digging drainage ditches all round the camps to prevent a build-up of stagnant water in which the malaria-carrying mosquito could breed.
The displaced people include elderly persons, amputees and women on their own, all of whom have major difficulties in erecting shelters. The ICRC is providing materials and teams of builders to help them.

Together with the Angola Red Cross, the ICRC is briefing hundreds of families a day on the basic rules of hygiene.

The ICRC is also assisting the local population; new wells are being sunk in the outlying districts of Kuito and others are due for renovation shortly. To improve hygiene conditions in schools, a latrine-building programme has been launched.

In total the ICRC is meeting the water and sanitation needs of some 22,750 families, or 102,375 people, in the area between Huambo and Kuito.

Further information: Gianni Volpin, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 36 44 54

SUDAN

REHABILITATION WORK CONTINUES IN YIROL

Two years ago, the population of many parts of southern Sudan was ravaged by famine, and humanitarian organizations were struggling to curb high mortality rates among the hundreds of thousands of displaced people living there. Though the situation has now improved, conditions remain difficult and aid work is continuing, with the ICRC concentrating on increasing water supplies and running disease-prevention programmes.

In Yirol, in Western Equatoria state, and in much of the surrounding area ICRC delegates have sunk or repaired some 40 wells to improve people’s access to water. Vaccination campaigns, against tetanus and yellow fever in particular, are conducted day-in, day-out and have now reached most villages in the area. Announcements are made over loudspeakers several hours ahead of time in order to gather the villagers together.

Pregnant women receive special care to ensure that they give birth in the best possible hygiene conditions and to reduce the neonatal mortality rate. A clinic with a dozen beds has been built at the site of Yirol’s original hospital, which was partially destroyed in a bombing raid. Wounded and sick people judged too seriously ill to be treated in Yirol are flown out to the ICRC hospital in Lokichokio, Kenya.

Hygiene is an especially important factor and awareness-raising courses are organized for the local population. These sessions, which always attract large numbers of people, are held in both the area controlled by the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army and the zone under government control.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2045
SOUTHERN AFRICA

ICRC RESTORES CONTACT BETWEEN CHILD REFUGEES AND THEIR FAMILIES

"In 1996, I was playing with friends by the river. We saw people coming towards us and they chased us. I was caught, slapped and taken to a car. They told me that from that day onwards I was a member of their family." This is the story told by 12-year-old Ngaba Nagwali (fictitious name), who was abducted from her home village during the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when she was eight years old. When the ICRC found her, alone among thousands of refugees, she had been living in a camp in Botswana for the previous four years with no news of her family.

Stories such as Ngaba's are only too common. The loss or break-up of families is one of the most tragic consequences of war, and in these circumstances the ICRC does its utmost to trace missing relatives and reunite families.

Ngaba is one of the lucky children whose story will have a happy ending. She was registered by the ICRC in Dukwe refugee camp in Botswana, and the information she supplied was used to locate her mother in the DRC. Mother and daughter have now asked to be reunited.

In Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi and Mwange refugee camp in Zambia, another 16 unaccompanied children who were registered by the ICRC in 1999 and 2000 have had their families located in Tanzania and the DRC. The families have contacted their children by means of Red Cross messages and have also asked to be reunited with the help of the ICRC.

Further information: Carlo von Flue, ICRC Harare, tel. ++2634 79 02 68
AFGHANISTAN

RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT AID FOR DROUGHT VICTIMS

The drought which has stricken Afghanistan continues to take its toll on a population already struggling to survive the effects of years of war.

The impact of the drought has been felt most acutely in the south-western part of the country, where poor rainfall for the last two years has devastated crops and livestock, leaving the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on these resources in an extremely precarious situation.

Recent assessments carried out by the Afghan Red Crescent Society, the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies found that nomadic communities have been the hardest hit, with farmers who cultivate rain-fed land coming a close second. With no rain expected until at least the end of the year, a humanitarian response is crucial to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable communities.

Last week the ICRC began distributing emergency food aid and other supplies in the central province of Ghor. Each of some 20,000 families in Chaghcharan district will receive 60 kg of split peas and 54 kg of ghee (oil) over the next three weeks. This, together with the wheat distributed by the World Food Programme, will cover their food needs for six months. Each family will also be given three blankets. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has provided winter clothing for about 7,200 families.

The Afghan Red Crescent, with the support of the International Federation, is increasing the capacity of its branch in the district, using volunteers trained in basic health care to help the stricken population through the winter.

Further information: Magne Barth/Mohammed Qasem Hilaman, ICRC Kabul, tel. 00873 761 242 260

SIERRA LEONE

FISHING FOR THE FUTURE

Fishing is not just a job for Foday Baka – it is a way of life. The 60-year-old from Gbandi village in Sierra Leone's Pujehun District had always made his living by catching fish in the Moa river. But then the war broke out and, like so many other conflict victims, Foday found himself far from home and unable to support his family. After languishing for nearly six years in camps for the internally displaced, he finally returned to his village only to find that most of it had been destroyed. Now the ICRC's fishing kit programme has helped Foday, his wife and their three sons to make a new start.
The ICRC not only aids war victims in emergency situations; it also helps them to rebuild their lives in the long term. In Sierra Leone this is being done mainly by distributing seeds for staple crops and tools to farmers who have been displaced or have lost everything as a result of the war. During the past six months some 36,000 families have received this type of assistance. The ICRC has also provided vegetable seeds, tools and, most important, training in their use for women's associations comprising nearly 12,000 war widows and other vulnerable women in the Freetown area.

Foday and nearly 100 other families in Pujehun District have been given fishing nets, hooks and other equipment. The fish they catch will be a vital source of protein for their communities and will provide them with a small income. And for Foday, being able to fish again means hope for a brighter future because, as he put it, every time he saw a river during his six years of exile he felt depressed and discouraged.

Further information: Florian Westphal, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++232 22/23 09 54

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
WAR SURGERY SEMINAR CONTINUES

The practical section of the seminar on war surgery that was held in Kinshasa at the end of September began on 23 October. During this new part, which is taking place at the military hospital in Kokolo camp in the capital, doctors and nurses of the Congolese armed forces are trained in the operating theatre by the ICRC doctor. The latter has already operated on two wounded patients with the assistance of a team comprising a dozen military medical personnel. Other patients will be treated in the coming days under the ICRC's technical supervision.

For almost four years the ICRC has been providing the Ministries of Defence and of Public Health in this conflict-torn country with support in order to improve treatment for the war-wounded. The aid includes training for military stretcher-bearers given by members of the National Red Cross Society specialized in emergency assistance, and training given by the ICRC for civilian and military medical personnel who operate on the wounded. Assistance is also provided for all health facilities involved in the evacuation of the wounded, and amputees receive physical rehabilitation at the ICRC-supported prosthetic/orthotic centre in Kinshasa.

Further information: Antoine Tawamba, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 34191
SUDAN

COURSE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND
HUMANITARIAN LAW FOR POLICE INSTRUCTORS

From 14 to 26 October, 22 Sudanese police instructors attended a course on human rights law and international humanitarian law. It was the first such course organized by the ICRC in cooperation with the Sudan Unified Police Forces, which intend to include these topics in their training programmes.

The participants explored a wide range of issues relating to the provisions of the two bodies of law that should be applied by the police during their main duties, such as maintaining public order, making arrests, protecting victims of armed conflict and assisting those in need.

This course is the first stage in a programme agreed upon with the Ministry of Interior during consultations in May 2000 between senior officers of the Sudan Unified Police Forces and the ICRC. Under the programme the ICRC will offer expertise and train a number of police instructors, who will then pass on the knowledge they have gained to officers at the police academy and in training schools.

Further information: Loukas Petridis, ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++249 11 476465

During the weekend of 4 - 5 November 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED/AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIES
RED SHIELD OF DAVID AND PALESTINE RED CRESCENT
ON ALERT IN JERUSALEM

Ever since the troubles flared up, hundreds of Magen David Adom (Red Shield of David) and Palestine Red Crescent first-aid workers and ambulance drivers have been reporting to their respective centres in Jerusalem every morning for fresh supplies, preparing themselves for the next clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, which usually start in early afternoon.

On the Palestinian side, emergency vehicles are drawn up a short distance from the flash-points. A first-aid post is hurriedly set up on the ground floor of a building, away from immediate danger. A short time later, ambulance sirens are heard and the first of the injured arrive for treatment. Fortunately, most of today’s injuries are minor, and the patients can return home after treatment.

On the Israeli side, ambulances bearing the red star of David take the wounded to fully-equipped emergency units.

As night falls and fighting ceases, the first-aid workers return to their bases. The events of the day are reviewed and then everyone grabs a few hours’ rest in preparation for the clashes that the next day will surely bring.

Since the crisis started, the Palestine Red Crescent Society has treated 7,110 persons in its mobile first-aid posts, transferring to hospital the 20% most seriously injured. The Magen David Adom has treated 425 persons, 53 of whom were Israeli soldiers.

A DELEGATE’S WORK ON THE WEST BANK

"We don’t often get the chance to keep to the programme we’ve set the day before. Priorities are continually being changed by events." Caroline Rouvrey, the ICRC delegate responsible for the Ramallah area of the West Bank, is on her way to the small village of Himza, where there have just been clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. The home of a Palestinian family has been partially destroyed, and the villagers are afraid to venture out onto the main roads in the tense atmosphere that has ensued.
Ms Rouvrey enquires about damage and loss of property in the village. The fact that the population of about 100 is restricted to a confined area has heightened fears that supply routes might be cut off. She takes notes and thinks about how things might be improved for the villagers. She offers to ask the Israeli authorities if they will relax their cordon to make it easier for the inhabitants to move around. “In this case there are clearly more victims on the Palestinian side, but the point we always make in our dealings with the various authorities is that the ICRC’s mandate is to help everyone – people’s needs are our only concern.”

About 20 delegates are currently working on the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip and in East Jerusalem.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 07

PHILIPPINES

BRINGING HUMANITARIAN LAW INTO THE CLASSROOM

A seminar to raise awareness of humanitarian law among university professors has culminated in the setting up of a society to spearhead the teaching of the subject in the Philippines.

Participants in the five-day event, organized jointly by the ICRC and the University of the Philippines, included prominent lawyers, professors and judges. They explored various aspects of the law – such as provisions concerning women, children, refugees, internally displaced people and landmines – and discussed the law as it relates to the Philippine experience. Australian Red Cross representatives and ICRC staff working in the region spoke on the connection between humanitarian law and the work of the Red Cross.

The new Philippine Society for International Humanitarian Law, formed as a result of the seminar, will work to encourage inclusion of the subject in the school curriculum and to foster the growing body of related literature in the country.

Further information: ICRC Manila, tel. ++ 632 89 28 901
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

RED CROSS MESSAGE REUNITES FATHER AND DAUGHTER
AFTER 27 YEARS

The ICRC tracing agency in Brazzaville needed only one day to find Bernard (not his real name), a Congolese technician, who had been without news of his family in Cuba for 27 years. When Bernard went to study on the Carribean island several decades ago, he married a Cuban woman with whom he had a daughter, Nancy, in 1968. In 1970, after completing his studies, he returned alone to his home country to put his newly acquired knowledge to use. He corresponded with his family in Cuba for three years, then lost contact with them.

For years, Bernard sent letters to various people, both officials and private individuals, in the Congo and Cuba, in a fruitless attempt to discover the whereabouts of his family. One can hardly imagine his surprise and emotion when a Red Cross message recently arrived from his daughter, whom he thought he had lost forever.

Nancy is a 32-year-old woman now. She too had tried for many years to find her father, but her attempts had also been unsuccessful owing to the many conflicts in the Congo over the years. In desperation, she finally turned to the Cuban Red Cross, which found the solution in the form of a message.

In the Congo, as in some 60 other countries, the ICRC restores and maintains family links. The ICRC delegation in Brazzaville began its search as soon as it received Nancy's message, to which she had attached her father's wedding picture. To the amazed delight of her and Bernard, this time she was in luck.

Further information: Natalie Kohli, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++242 81 12 08
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
ICRC REUNITES 170 UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES

No less than 170 unaccompanied children were able to rejoin their families thanks to a large-scale airlift organized by the ICRC on 3 and 10 November. In the first stage 79 children and adolescents ranging in age from one to 16 years were flown from Goma to the Congolese capital Kinshasa. The Boeing 737 returned to Goma the same day with another group of 14 children. A week later, 77 minors took off from Goma bound for Lubumbashi in Katanga province aboard the ICRC-chartered plane. On their arrival the children were looked after by the ICRC before being handed over to their families, from whom most of them had been separated since the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo flared up again in August 1998.

This operation was the largest airlift of unaccompanied children in the country to date, and the first time that an ICRC aircraft had been able to go directly from Goma to Kinshasa overflying Congolese territory.

Since January 2000, the ICRC has reunited 404 Congolese children with their families and has repatriated 310 children to Rwanda and one to Burundi. It is still trying to trace the relatives of some 1,200 unaccompanied minors, in both government-controlled and opposition-held areas of the country, with a view to organizing family reunifications.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC RESPONDS TO THE CRISIS IN DETENTION PLACES IN SERBIA

On 6 November mutinies broke out in the three largest prisons in Serbia, in Sremska Mitrovica, Pozarevac and Nis, where the majority of people detained in connection with the Kosovo conflict and visited by the ICRC were being held.

ICRC teams immediately travelled to the areas concerned to talk with the prison authorities and the inmates, ensure that the Kosovo Albanian detainees were safe and respond to the urgent needs for assistance arising from the situation. These direct contacts were maintained throughout the crisis and meetings were also held with high level authorities in Belgrade.

Owing partly to security concerns and partly to the destruction of living quarters in the three places of detention, the authorities transferred a number of people held in connection with the conflict in Kosovo and other conflicts to prisons that could accommodate them. Of the 640 detainees whom the ICRC had visited in Sremska Mitrovica, Pozarevac and Nis, over 270 were transferred to seven other prisons. The ICRC, which was notified of the transfers, was able to visit the detainees in their new places of detention and offer them the possibility of contacting their families by means of Red Cross messages. It has also supplied the prisons concerned with mattresses, blankets and hygiene parcels.

After order was restored in the prisons affected by the mutinies, the ICRC talked to all Kosovo Albanians held in Nis and to the representatives of those held in Pozarevac, and it informed their families that they were in good health. The detainees confirmed that they were receiving the assistance provided by the ICRC.

Meanwhile, the ICRC has continued to transport released detainees to their homes in Kosovo. Since 6 November, 18 people have received this kind of help and two family visits have been facilitated for detainees in Zajecar prison.

As a result of the serious damage inflicted on prison kitchens, storage facilities, hospitals and pharmacies, there has been an urgent need for medical and other kinds of assistance from the outset of the protests. The ICRC has responded by providing food (20 tonnes, in addition to 20,400 ready-to-eat meals), a mobile kitchen, kitchen sets, clothing, mattresses and hygiene articles, as well as a wide range of drugs for both chronic and acute diseases. Given the scope of the damage, the ICRC will continue to provide assistance.

Further information: Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++ 38 111 45 05 90
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS
PREPARING FOR WINTER IN CHECHNYA

Although open hostilities have subsided in the past six months, living conditions remain extremely harsh for the Chechen population. In Grozny, where the fighting in late 1999 destroyed most of the remaining infrastructure, a majority of the inhabitants (estimated at 100,000 for the city and its surrounding area) will have to survive yet another winter living in badly damaged buildings without heat, electricity, running water or any sanitation system. Following the reopening of the ICRC office in Grozny at the beginning of October, ICRC local staff, working together with the local branch of the Russian Red Cross, have been stepping up their activities in order to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups in preparation for the coming cold season.

Last week, ICRC local staff began distributing sugar, oil and soap in Grozny and Achkhoy-Martan to supplement the daily bread rations which 15,000 needy people in the main Chechen towns are receiving under an ICRC-supported programme. Gas heaters are also being installed in the homes of elderly bedridden people who are being cared for by local Red Cross staff under the visiting nurses programme (560 heaters will be provided in all). Furthermore, as part of an assistance programme for hospitals, schools, orphanages and old-age homes, distributions of kitchen sets, plastic sheeting and blankets have been underway since October. The reconstruction work on pumping station No 1 in Grozny has now been completed, enabling part of the city's population to have access to clean water starting this week. The ICRC-supported pumping station had already been rehabilitated once before.

Since security conditions still prevent the ICRC from permanently deploying expatriate staff in Chechnya, Daghestan or Ingushetia, assistance programmes are being conducted out of Nalchik (Kabardino-Balkaria) with the cooperation of the local Red Cross branches and ICRC local staff.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 07

CROATIA
TRAINING OF POLICE FORCES

On 20 November, in Zagreb, the head of the ICRC regional delegation in Budapest and Mr Sime Lucin, Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia, signed a memorandum of understanding on the incorporation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law into the training programmes of the Croatian police forces. This is a first step in support of the Ministry's efforts to ensure that the provisions of international law are taught to the police, especially at the operational and tactical levels.

At the signing ceremony, which was held at the Ministry of the Interior in the presence of the dean of the Croatian Police Academy and representatives of the media, the two parties carried out a symbolic exchange of documents. An initial meeting between the ICRC and the Croatian Police Academy to discuss implementation of the memorandum is scheduled for mid-December.

Further information: Nina Zeckovic Ivanjek, ICRC Zagreb, tel.: ++ 3851 30 94 808

SRI LANKA
FLOODS IN BATTICALOA DISTRICT

Since 17 November the entire district of Batticaloa, in the conflict-ridden Eastern Province, has been affected by floods due to heavy rain. In many places the roads are under water and some western areas are virtually inaccessible by land.
The Batticaloa branch of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS), whose volunteers are scattered throughout the district, is currently monitoring the situation. On the morning of 20 November it was informed that marooned people in villages in the western areas had to be evacuated as their lives were in danger.

An ICRC team, including a mobile health unit, immediately set off for Kinnaiyady, near Valaichenai. In the afternoon a joint ICRC/SLRCS rescue operation was launched using three boats. Altogether, four trips were made and about 235 people, mostly women and children, were brought to safety. Fifty-two of them were ill and they were treated on the spot by the mobile health unit. The SLRCS arranged for the evacuees to be housed in a school in Sunkankerny and provided them with food for the night.

A similar operation was carried out on 21 November by the SLRCS with ICRC assistance to evacuate marooned people in the villages of Saravely, Murukkantivu and Pirampaditivu. Three boats were used to bring 131 residents to safety. Most of them were women, children and old people.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989. It currently has 48 expatriates and 300 local staff based at its delegation in Colombo and in its 11 offices in the north and east of the country.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++ 941 50 33 46

**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

**ICRC PUBLISHES ADDENDUM TO ITS "BOOK OF THE MISSING"**

The ICRC has recently published an addendum to the fourth edition of its "Book of the Missing". The book, which first appeared in 1996, contains the names of more than 20,000 people who disappeared between 1992 and 1995, during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and for whom tracing requests have been submitted by their families.

The names of the missing, who come from all over Bosnia-Herzegovina, are listed both alphabetically and by place of disappearance. Other details include the person's date and place of birth, his father's name and the date on which he was last seen.

The addendum contains 563 names of missing persons submitted to the ICRC since the last edition of the book was put out, in June 1998. It includes a further 469 names of people who reportedly died but whose mortal remains have not yet been found.

The publication of the addendum coincides with the fifth anniversary of the Dayton peace agreement, which brought an end to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Under the terms of the agreement, and in accordance with international humanitarian law, the former warring parties have a responsibility to provide the ICRC with information on persons unaccounted for so that their families can learn what happened to them.

To date, the fate of only 3,083 persons whose names appear on ICRC records has been elucidated.

"We are not working for the dead, but for their families", said the head of the ICRC delegation in Sarajevo, Balthasar Staehelin. "Throughout the whole of Bosnia-Herzegovina people are anxious for news, and it is crucial that they be given answers rapidly. They have already been waiting too long."

Further Information: Jessica Barry, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++ 387 33 652 835
AFGHANISTAN
A RACE AGAINST TIME

ICRC staff narrowly won a race against time when they managed to reach an isolated community in a remote area of Afghanistan last week before it was cut off from the outside world by the country's harsh winter conditions.

Food and cooking oil were distributed by the ICRC to some 28,000 families in the drought-devastated district of Chagcharan, in Ghor province, to supplement wheat previously supplied by Oxfam and the World Food Programme. The food should cover the population's needs for the coming six months. In addition, the beneficiaries received blankets from the ICRC while the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provided around 7,000 of the poorest families with warm winter clothing.

It was vital that the operation be completed as soon as possible since heavy snowfalls invariably seal off the roads into Chagcharan, making further aid distributions impossible. Aid organizations have combined their efforts to enable the population to stay in their homes and thus spare them the need to flee to the nearby city of Herat. In addition to the relief distributions, the Afghan Red Crescent Society, supported by the International Federation, has reinforced its district branch with newly trained health-care volunteers to help the residents through the winter.

At the same time the ICRC is planning to foster self-sufficiency among families who have remained and possible returnees to the area by launching an agricultural programme, which will include seed distributions. It is due to begin next year.

Further information: Mario Musa or Magne Barth, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 761 242 260
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2678 / ++ 41 79 217 3216

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
ERITREA/ETHIOPIA

ETHIOPIANS RETURN HOME

Nearly 850 people of Ethiopian origin were repatriated from Eritrea on Tuesday under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As in similar operations in the past, the ICRC acted as a neutral and independent intermediary in accordance with its mandate under the fourth Geneva Convention.

The operation enabled an initial group of 567 civilian internees, who had been held at Ala camp (near Dekemhare, south of Asmara), to cross the Mereb river at a point where it separates the two countries. They were followed by a second group of 276 people who had been released from Sembel prison in Asmara. All had expressed the desire to return to Ethiopia.

During the operation, the returnees were assisted by ICRC staff based in Eritrea. Once on the other side of the river, they were taken into the care of staff based in Addis Ababa, who later placed them in the charge of the Ethiopian authorities. The ICRC was supported throughout the operation by volunteers from the National Red Cross Societies of both Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Further information: Franziska Aebi, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++2511 51 83 66
Bruce Mokaya, ICRC Asmara, tel. ++2911 20 24 60

During the weekend of 2 - 3 December 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Darcy Christen, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 31
CÔTE D'IVOIRE

RED CROSS ASSISTS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

After violence broke out in Abidjan on 4 December, the Red Cross mobilized its first-aid teams and delivered medical supplies to the five main hospitals of the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire.

With the help of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire deployed 124 first-aid workers to provide emergency relief in the country's main cities (Abidjan, Bouaké, Gagnoa, Divo and Odienné) until the legislative elections are held. In Abidjan, where most of the clashes took place, eight teams gave first aid to the wounded and evacuated them to hospitals. According to initial estimates, a total of 256 wounded were treated on 4, 5 and 6 December.

On 4 and 5 December the ICRC also distributed medical supplies to Cocody, Treichville, Abobo and Yopougon hospitals. According to Catherine Delaisse, the ICRC doctor in Abidjan, these supplies should make it possible to treat 350 wounded. The ICRC medical team is closely monitoring the situation in Abidjan's medical facilities with a view to providing assistance for as long as it is needed.

After having approached the authorities, on 6 December the ICRC was given access to the people arrested during the violence. It has thus been able to visit 328 people detained in Abidjan.

Further information: Clovis Sewa, ICRC Abidjan, tel.: ++ 225 20 22 24 59 / 60

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

RED CROSS BRINGS AID TO BOMBING VICTIMS

The opposition-held town of Kalemie in the north-east of Katanga province came under several aerial bombing raids on 1 and 4 December. There were heavy civilian casualties: one dead and 20 wounded in the first raid, and two dead and 12 wounded in the second. ICRC employees working with volunteers from the National Red Cross Society evacuated the wounded to the local hospital.

The ICRC, which regularly delivers medicines to the hospital, provided it with sufficient emergency supplies to treat 20 war-wounded. This morning, an ICRC aircraft was able to land in Kalemie with medical supplies for a further 40 casualties.

Further information: Hanna Mollan, ICRC Goma, tel. ++ 250 083 00461
SIERRA LEONE

ICRC COMPLETES MAJOR DISTRIBUTION

Working in cooperation with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, the ICRC has recently completed a major distribution of relief supplies to nearly 11,600 displaced and resident farming families in Pujehun, Kenema, and Tonkolili districts. An estimated 65,000 people received shelter material, sleeping mats, blankets, buckets, kitchen sets and soap.

In May and June the same farmers were given seed and tools as part of the ICRC's agricultural support programme, which has benefited about 36,000 families this year. Initial monitoring by the Ministry of Agriculture and the ICRC shows that the programme has had encouraging results.

Further information, Florian Westphal, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++232 22 23 09 54

ANGOLA

MORE THAN 300,000 PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM ICRC AID

The ICRC has recently carried out a major seed distribution for 71,612 displaced and resident families living on the central Planalto, thus completing its assistance programme for the year 2000. Altogether, more than 300,000 people received maize, bean, sorghum and groundnut seed, along with fertilizer. They were also given enough food to ensure that the seed would not be eaten up.

Major logistical means were used for the operation, which had to be completed before the rainy season. Two ICRC-chartered B-727s made up to eight flights per day to bring food, seed and farming tools to Huambo and Kuito. The seed was immediately planted by the families, who should be able to harvest the lavras crop between April and July 2001.

Since economic self-sufficiency has now been restored for most villagers living around Kuito and Huambo, the ICRC plans significant cuts in its emergency food aid next year. However, it will increase its support for agricultural production.

Further information: Gianni Volpin, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 36 44 54
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW ON SMALL-ARMS AGENDA

Two major regional organizations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), have adopted plans for combatting the spread of small arms and light weapons and have committed themselves to integrating into them measures to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. The 55 countries of the OSCE (all European countries, Canada, the United States, and five Central Asian countries) have adopted the "OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons", which will take into account a country's record of compliance with international norms on the conduct of hostilities before allowing small arms to be exported to it. At a ministerial meeting held in Mali on 1 December, the 53 member States of the OAU adopted an "African Common Position" on small arms and light weapons. This stressed the importance for compliance with humanitarian law of the struggle against the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms.

"We are very encouraged that both the OSCE and the OAU have now made commitments to address humanitarian concerns arising from small arms exports, and specifically to focus on compliance with international humanitarian law" said ICRC Mines-Arms Unit coordinator Peter Herby. "We hope that steps will now be taken to implement such measures at the national level, and that norms based on respect for humanitarian law will be among the results of the UN global conference on small arms next year."

The ICRC had previously urged the OSCE, OAU, and other regional organizations to consider the implications in humanitarian terms of the proliferation and availability of small arms. According to a study entitled "Arms availability and the situation of civilians in armed conflict", published by the ICRC last year, unregulated arms availability can facilitate violations of international humanitarian law, increase civilian suffering and impede assistance to victims.

Further information: Lena Eskeland, ICRC Mines-Arms Unit, tel. ++41 22 730 2488
Peter Herby, ICRC Mines-Arms Unit, tel. ++41 22 730 2667

During the weekend of
9 - 10 December 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Antonella Notari, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 80
ETHIOPIA/ERITREA

ETHIOPIANS REPATRIATED FROM ERITREA

Some 1,500 Ethiopians crossed the Mereb river from Eritrea into Ethiopia under ICRC auspices on Saturday 9 December. The repatriated Ethiopians had been transferred from three different locations in Eritrea: 500 civilians had been held at Ala camp and nine women at Haz Haz prison, 78 others had been living outside the Ala camp and 919 more came from Adi Abeto. ICRC delegates on both sides of the border helped them cross the river dividing the two countries. Once across, they were placed in the care of the Ethiopian authorities. The ICRC was supported throughout the operation by volunteers from both the Red Cross Society of Eritrea and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society.

The ICRC acted as an independent and neutral intermediary to ensure that these civilians were repatriated in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The ICRC will continue to offer its services to the parties to the conflict with a view to facilitating the transfer of those wishing to go from Ethiopia to Eritrea or vice versa, and to promote compliance with the rules and principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Further information: Bruce Mokaya, ICRC Asmara, tel. ++29 11 20 24 60
Franziska Aebi, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++25 11 51 83 66
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

LEARNING ABOUT LANDMINES

Almost 46,000 primary school children have been competing in recent weeks in ICRC-sponsored mine-awareness competitions throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. Of the 444 teams from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and 324 teams from the Republika Srpska which took part, 20 reached the finals. These were held in Bijeljina on 9 December and in Sarajevo on the next day.

A team from the primary school in Pale, in the Republika Srpska, won the Bijeljina final. In Sarajevo, Zavidovici primary school beat nine other teams in a lively competition that included games, drawings, and a quiz about the safety measures to adopt when finding mines or unexploded ordnance.

Even those who won nothing felt that the competitions had been useful and fun. "They were the event of the month in the Republika Srpska", said Marica Seatovic, Red Cross mine-awareness coordinator in Banja Luka. "They really attracted a lot of attention."

For Aida Semic, Red Cross mine-awareness coordinator in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the children's creativity was the most remarkable thing. "It was the youngsters' ability to express their vision of the mine problem through slogans, drawings, and simple warning messages that struck me most", she remarked.
Many mines still contaminate the soil throughout Bosnia as a result of three and a half years of war. Within months of the signing of the Dayton peace agreement in December 1995, the ICRC began its mine-awareness campaign. The programme is being run in cooperation with other organizations in 130 municipalities by 128 mine-awareness instructors and 19 coordinators. Since the campaign began in 1996, the number of mine accidents in Bosnia-Herzegovina has dropped from almost 50 a month to the current average of nine.

Further information: Vincent Lusser, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 24 58

CHILE

ICRC ATTENDS REGIONAL MEETING IN ADVANCE OF WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM

From 5 to 7 December the ICRC took part in a regional meeting for the Americas held in Santiago, Chile, under the auspices of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in preparation for the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The Conference is to take place in South Africa in 2001.

The ICRC regional delegate for southern Latin America took the floor to address the issue of non-discrimination in armed conflicts, stressing that the problems discussed at the meeting should be tackled by the international community in the context of war as well as peace. Indeed, as seen in armed conflicts past and present — especially those involving ethnic or identity-related issues — inequality or exclusion, whether affecting an entire population, a group or individuals, is one of the root causes of violence and frequently also one of its most tragic consequences.

The ICRC delegate further underscored that the principle of non-discrimination is a key aspect of impartiality, one of the fundamental principles that guide the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In conformity with that principle, and as stipulated in its statutes, the Movement "makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions" and "endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress".

Further information: Gerard Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++5411 43 28 77 71

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 00/01 on ICRC activities in Algeria, dated 6.12.00.

During the weekend of
16 - 17 December 2000, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
COLOMBIA

LARGE-SCALE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

Tens of thousands of displaced people in the rural areas of Colombia have so little freedom of movement that they no longer know what to do. The conflict has been raging for nearly 50 years, and so far every attempt to find a peaceful solution has met with failure. Because of the security situation, these vulnerable people have no outlet for their produce – anyone who travels to an area under the control of the enemy to sell fruit, vegetables or the wood they have cut may be branded as a collaborator.

The ICRC regularly visits these people, spending many hours on foot, on horseback or in small boats to reach them. Part of the ICRC’s assistance programme consists in organizing vaccination campaigns and providing medical care. The displaced are also made aware of hygiene problems so as to reduce the risk of epidemics.

In addition, the ICRC distributes basic food supplies (rice, beans, oil and salt) and the tools and seed the displaced need to grow their own crops. Many of these people are separated from their families and can only keep in touch with them by means of Red Cross messages.

Approximately 50 expatriates and more than 200 local employees are currently striving to assist this population in distress. Besides the delegation in Bogotá, the ICRC has 12 sub-delegations and three offices in Colombia.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 20 45

PHILIPPINES

ICRC AND PHILIPPINE RED CROSS ASSIST 1,000 DISPLACED FAMILIES IN JOLO

The island of Jolo, in the south-western Philippines, made international headlines in April when Abu Sayyaf rebels abducted a group of western tourists who were eventually released. In mid-September the Philippine armed forces launched a major offensive on the island, causing a massive displacement of the population. It was not until mid-November, however, that a joint ICRC/Philippine National Red Cross team was able to carry out a survey of needs, after the armed forces allowed it to move about unescorted.

The team found that approximately 1,000 displaced families were still living in 19 evacuation centres, in tents or school buildings, most of them in deplorable conditions. It immediately started to distribute relief items (plastic sheeting and mosquito nets for babies), carry out water and sanitation activities (disinfection, construction of latrines, digging of garbage disposal pits) and organize information sessions on international humanitarian law.
ICRC and National Society medical staff also provided emergency care for displaced persons, in particular children suffering from measles as the result of an outbreak that threatened to reach epidemic proportions, and the ICRC treated four surgical patients (civilians with gunshot and shrapnel wounds). The ICRC is now considering the possibility of strengthening the medical infrastructure in Jolo, where there is no resident surgeon and the lack of basic medicines, disinfection materials and dressings is chronic.

The Philippine armed forces have recently stepped up their operations in the towns of Patikul and Talipao. As a result, two evacuation centres housing 244 displaced families have been declared off limits. The ICRC and the National Society nevertheless expect to be able to provide assistance there by January.

Further information: Darcy Christen, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 27 50

YUGOSLAVIA

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE PRESEVO VALLEY

Ever since tension began to mount in the Presevo Valley of southern Serbia, ICRC teams have been present in the Gjilan-Gnilane and Nis areas and kept in close contact with the authorities and the civilian population there in order to assess and respond to humanitarian needs.

Joint ICRC and Yugoslav Red Cross teams from Nis started providing assistance in the Bujanovac area on 11 December. So far about 70 tonnes of food have been distributed in 13 villages to some 20,000 people of both Serb and Albanian origin. Emergency surgical supplies have also been furnished to the Bujanovac health centre and the Vranje hospital.

In the Gjilan-Gnilane area, food aid has been provided for displaced persons since late November. To date an average of 120 people sheltering in collective centres have received two hot meals a day in a soup kitchen run by the Netherlands Red Cross, and 75 tonnes of food have been distributed by the local Red Cross to displaced persons living with host families. Medical supplies have been provided for the Gjilan-Gnilane hospital in cooperation with the Finnish Red Cross.

An ICRC team has been present in the so-called Ground Safety Zone since 16 December, carrying out surveys so as to be able to meet emergency humanitarian needs. In addition, the ICRC continues to monitor the situation of persons arrested or captured in the area.

Further information: Vincent Lusser, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 24 58

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

SINGLE RED CROSS SOCIETY SET UP

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina held its constitutive assembly in Sarajevo on 15 December, paving the way for formal recognition by the ICRC and subsequent admission to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. During the historic meeting, Dr Midhat Haracic, head of the Sarajevo Blood Transfusion Institute, was elected to chair the National Society on a rotating basis. His two co-chairmen will be Mr Brano Dursan, a lawyer from Trebinje, and Ms Adela Skaro, a social worker from Tomislavgrad.
This move towards recognition is the outcome of a long process during which representatives of the Red Cross organizations of the country's two entities met regularly for 30 months, through a contact group. The decision taken by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Council of Ministers in September to recognize a single Red Cross Society in the country, combining the entity organizations, was a milestone.

"The lengthy but fruitful dialogue has finally achieved its aim" said Balthasar Staehelin, head of the ICRC delegation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as the assembly came to a close. "This is all the more remarkable in the present circumstances as it was brought about by local people, rather than being imposed from the outside."

Further information: Jessica Barry, ICRC Sarajevo, tel.: ++ 387 33 652 407

**RWANDA**

**HUMANITARIAN LAW SEMINAR HELD AT GAKO MILITARY ACADEMY**

On 8 and 9 December the ICRC held a seminar on international humanitarian law, in cooperation with the Gako Military Academy in Rwanda, which enabled 144 future company commanders, staff officers and military instructors to acquire a basic knowledge of the law and to learn the rules of behaviour in combat. The seminar included an overview of the ICRC's role, mandate and activities in the country and throughout the world.

The training received by the participants, who are to serve as commanders in their respective fields, is part of a programme developed by Kenyan military advisers working in Rwanda. The advisers, who arrived in the country in October, were invited by the authorities to share their expertise in the field of training with members of the Rwandan Patriotic Army.

A seminar on the same subject was held at the Gako Military Academy on 11 and 12 December for 116 participants in courses for non-commissioned officers.

Further information: Patrick Mégevand, ICRC Kigali, tel.: ++250 77 344/5

As 2000 draws to a close...

We send season's greetings to all our readers and our very best wishes for 2001.


During the weekend of 23 - 26 December, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Roland Sidler, on (mobile) ++ 41 79 217 32 58, or from the 30 December to the 3 January, please call duty press officer Darcy Christen on (mobile) ++ 41 79 217 32 31.