SOMALIA
- While the fighting that had raged in Mogadishu since 17 November 1991 between the troops of General Aidid and those supporting the interim President, Mr. Ali Mahdi, became even more intense, the ICRC set up a hospital (Keysaney) in a disused prison in the northern sector of the Somali capital.
- The ICRC brought in 1,700 tonnes of medicines and medical supplies.

CAMBODIA
For the first time since the start of the conflict in Cambodia, on 14 January the ICRC was able to visit persons detained in Phnom Penh. The ICRC had been trying to gain access to people detained in connection with the conflict for more than 12 years.

HONDURAS
The first seminar on international humanitarian law for Central American security forces was held in Tegucigalpa from 20 to 24 January. It was organized jointly by the ICRC and the Honduran armed forces.

AFGHANISTAN
By 16 February the ICRC had completed its first visit to the SEDARAT temporary detention centre in Kabul, where the delegates saw 36 detainees. The visit took place after the Ministry of State Security, at the end of 1991, gave the ICRC access to prisoners it was holding.

ALBANIA
The ICRC exhibition entitled “Humanity in the midst of war” opened on 20 February at the International Cultural Centre in Tirana. The exhibition, mounted to mark the 125th anniversary of the original Geneva Convention and already seen in almost all countries of Central and Eastern Europe, is designed to heighten the visitors’ awareness of the principles of international humanitarian law.

IRAQ
One year after the Gulf war, the ICRC still had some 50 expatriate staff working throughout the country. The hospital at Naopares in northern Iraq, opened by the ICRC on 8 October 1991, had already performed about 700 operations. In the south, several ICRC teams were providing the technical and material assistance necessary to put various water treatment and supply plants back into operation.

ANGOLA
The first phase in the release of prisoners captured during the Angolan conflict was completed: by 14 February, 3,983 prisoners had been freed, 3,043 by UNITA and 940 by the Luanda government.

MARCH
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA
In response to requests filed by their families, the ICRC managed to trace about 2,800 people reported missing. Most of them were being detained, and were identified by ICRC delegates registering inmates during
visits to places of detention. In addition, the ICRC forwarded over 5,000 messages to detainees’ families.

CAMBODIA
On 7 March the authorities in Phnom Penh released 91 prisoners in the presence of ICRC delegates.

TRANSCAUCASIA
The ICRC distributed emergency medical aid to nine hospitals and dispensaries in Karabakh, and airlifted some 8,000 blankets, 3,000 kitchen sets and 500 family parcels to Baku for the tens of thousands of displaced people in Azerbaijan.

APRIL
ETHIOPIA
Having been allowed access to Ethiopian detention centres in early February for the first time since 1974, the ICRC visited eight such centres in and around Addis Ababa. Its delegates talked without witnesses to some 2,000 people detained following the change of government in May 1991.

SOUTH AFRICA
The ICRC and the South African Red Cross evacuated people wounded in clashes that took place in early April in Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg.

PERU
The ICRC continued to visit security detainees in Lima province, where the events of 5 April had led to the dissolution of the National Congress and the arrest of a number of political figures.

SEVILLE: EXPO ‘92
The pavilion of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement opened on 20 April in the presence of Ms. Carmen Mestre, President of the Spanish Red Cross.

AFGHANISTAN
Jan Karlsson, an Icelandic Red Cross nurse working for the ICRC, was shot dead on 22 April in Maidan Shar, south of Kabul. The attack occurred as an ICRC doctor and a delegate, who were accompanied by Mr. Karlsson, were about to drive two wounded Afghans to the surgical hospital in Kabul. A man stepped from the crowd that had gathered around the ICRC vehicles and fired on Mr. Karlsson, who was killed instantly.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
The ICRC launched a support programme for 19 hospitals in the republic, which were short of surgical supplies to treat the many people wounded in the fighting.

MAY
SPAIN-SEVILLE
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement celebrated World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on 8 May. The Movement’s pavilion at Expo ’92 in Seville was officially inaugurated in the presence of ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga and other leading figures of the Movement.

JORDAN
The ICRC exhibition “Humanity in the midst of war” was inaugurated in Amman on 9 May, in the presence of Prince Hassan Ibn Talal and other dignitaries.

IRAN/IRAQ
The ICRC supervised a repatriation operation involving seven Iranian and 15 Iraqi prisoners of war from the Iran-Iraq conflict, and 55 Iraqi servicemen who had been held by the Iranian authorities in connection with the Gulf war.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
- As the fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina reached new levels of intensity, the ICRC continued its work throughout the republic. Two trucks travelled from Belgrade to Trebinje, in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, carrying 1,250 family parcels and more than four tonnes of food and other relief supplies for people displaced or cut off by the fighting.
- ICRC delegate Frédéric Maurice, 39, died in Sarajevo on 19 May from wounds sustained the previous day. Mr. Maurice and two other ICRC delegates were injured when their convoy, which was carrying emergency medical supplies for a Sarajevo hospital, came under attack while entering the city.

JUNE
SOMALIA
Between January and June the ICRC transported 50,000 tonnes of food (rations comprising rice, lentils and cooking oil) to Somalia. Part of the supplies were distributed to 250 community kitchens throughout the country, which were providing hot meals for 375,000 victims of the conflict between rival Somali factions.

MOZAMBIQUE
Mozambique was hit by the worst drought of the century. Its most critical effects were felt in the south of the country, while in the north it was the conflict that had caused severe food shortages. With other humanitarian organizations on the spot, the ICRC drew up a plan of action for the next nine months, providing for emergency assistance to about 200,000 people in six areas suffering from the combined effects of drought and conflict.

IRAQI KURDISTAN
The first-ever dissemination courses on international humanitarian law got underway in Iraqi Kurdistan, after being launched in mid-
speaking town in Moldova, and 1,300 in Dubassary (Trans-Dniestria).

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Following the shelling of the main town, Stepanakert, in early August, ICRC delegates provided medical supplies to the local hospital.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

- ICRC delegates made a fourth visit to the Manjaca detention camp, near Banja Luka, where they distributed 6,000 blankets, soap and cleaning products, and 2.5 tonnes of extra food to about 3,700 detainees. More than 11,000 people in 15 places of detention throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina had been visited to date.
- At the international conference on the former Yugoslavia held in London, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga again appealed urgently to all the parties to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law. He also called for the release of detainees, mainly civilians, being held for the most part in the north and east of the republic.

MYANMAR

On 25 August the Union of Myanmar (formerly Burma) deposited with the Swiss authorities its instrument of accession to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, with no reservations or declarations. Myanmar’s accession will take effect on 25 February 1993, bringing to 171 the number of States party to the Geneva Conventions.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

At its meeting of 27 August, the ICRC Assembly officially recognized the Saint Kitts and Nevis Red Cross Society (West Indies). This brings to 152 the number of National Societies members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

SEPTEMBER

SOMALIA

An ICRC ship, the “Osman Kurt”, carrying 6,500 tonnes of rice, beans and cooking oil, docked in the port of Mogadishu, the first ship to do so after the harbour had been closed for two weeks.

The ICRC and WFP (United Nations World Food Programme) announced that they were to continue their coordinated relief operation for four months, to bring help to the starving and war-weary Somali population. The two organizations planned to bring in 52,150 tonnes of food each month, 19,150 tonnes to be supplied by the ICRC and 33,000 tonnes by WFP. The ICRC had dispatched more than 100,000 tonnes of food to Somalia since the beginning of 1992.

FAR EAST

ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga carried out a two-week tour in Asia, visiting the Republic of Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The purpose of his mission was to strengthen ties with the authorities and the National Red Cross Societies in the countries concerned.

ETHIOPIA

The ICRC opened an orthopaedic centre in Mekele, capital of Tigre province.

OCTOBER

SOMALIA

Each month, the ICRC provided 24 tonnes of medical and surgical supplies to the many hospitals, clinics and health centres throughout Somalia. In October, the Keysaney hospital in the northern sector of Mogadishu was admitting an average of 130 new patients a week. The ICRC continued to supply food to about 600 communal kitchens, enabling them to serve one or two hot meals a day to one million people.

SOUTH AFRICA

The South African Ministry of Law and Order authorized the ICRC to visit all police stations in the country. Many detainees have died in police custody in recent years.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

All the parties to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina agreed to carry out the unilateral and unconditional release, before the end of October, of all civilian and military prisoners who had not committed grave breaches of international humanitarian law. The agreement was reached by plenipotentiary representatives of the belligerents during negotiations held at ICRC headquarters on 30 September and 1 October.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION

Mr. George Weber, Secretary General of the Canadian Red Cross, was appointed Acting Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at the Executive Council’s session held in Swaziland on 5 October. Mr. Weber was due to take up his duties on 1 January 1993.
MOZAMBIQUE

The head of the ICRC delegation in Mozambique, Felice Dindo, met Afonso Dhlakama, President of the RENAMO armed opposition movement, on 19 October in Maringue (Salta province).

Mr. Dhlakama confirmed that all the roads in Mozambique would be opened to humanitarian convoys.

During October the ICRC stepped up its large-scale relief operation, carrying supplies by road and by air. More than 40,000 people received food and material assistance.

LIBERIA

Alarmed by the escalation of the fighting in Liberia, on 25 October the ICRC called on all parties concerned to respect the basic principles of international humanitarian law.

MALAWI

The Malawi government invited the ICRC to visit all detainees held in the country's prisons and police stations, including persons held for security reasons. These were the first visits by the ICRC to prisons in Malawi for 20 years.

IRAN/IRAQ

ICRC delegates visited the detention camp known as Ramadi IX, 100 kilometres west of Baghdad, on 8 November. They were allowed to talk without witnesses to 64 Iranians captured during or after the Shi'ite and Kurdish uprisings in 1991.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Violent clashes between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani forces continued within the enclave. With the onset of winter, the population was having increasing difficulty in obtaining vital supplies. The ICRC distributed 950 family parcels to displaced people suffering the greatest hardship.

RWANDA

The number of displaced people fleeing the fighting and taking refuge in camps in the north of the country more than doubled between the beginning of June and mid-July, finally totalling 350,000. A survey carried out in November revealed alarming rates of malnutrition in the camps, and the ICRC made plans to increase its aid to the local Red Cross.

AFGHANISTAN

The number of victims of landmines admitted to ICRC hospitals since April 1992 increased by up to 130% compared with figures for the same period in previous years. Some 1,700 cases were treated in 1992 at the ICRC hospitals in Peshawar and Quetta (Pakistan), and at the former ICRC hospital in Kabul.

SOMALIA

The ICRC carried on working in Somalia during the operation by the international buffer forces. It continued to provide food and medical assistance, to trace missing persons and to reunite separated family members, while also pursuing its agricultural and veterinary programmes. It concentrated on areas where the population was suffering severe hardship, especially in the Bardera, Baidoa and Belet Huen areas.

In the ports, the ICRC unloaded 3,000 tonnes of food, supplied by itself, and 4,000 tonnes of rice donated by French schoolchildren. The port of Kismayo was closed, but two ships, one French, the other chartered by the ICRC, together carrying 15,600 tonnes of rice, beans and cooking oil, were able to dock in Mogadishu on 16 December.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

On 18 December, 418 prisoners still held by Bosnian Serb forces in Manjaca camp (north-western Bosnia-Herzegovina) were released and transferred under ICRC auspices.

Manjaca camp was then closed down. The ICRC hoped that this closure was permanent as conditions in the camp made it totally unsuitable for use as a place of detention.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, together with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, form the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

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EDITORIAL

After Budapest

Over the past century and a quarter, the governments and the various components of the International Red Cross have come together at twenty-five International Conferences. Should this tradition begun in Paris in 1867 be continued?

The stormy debate at the last Conference in Geneva in 1986 over the participation of the South African government delegation, and the indefinite postponement, for fear that an equally fractious dispute would break out over Palestinian participation, at the Conference scheduled to take place in Budapest last November, have raised the question as to whether there is any point in maintaining this tradition.

Make no mistake: it is not merely a matter of regretting the passing of some quaint custom. International humanitarian law, and indeed our Movement itself, have been forged at such Conferences. To abandon this exceptional forum would inevitably leave humanitarian law open to the encroachment of political considerations, and would eventually weaken the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and compromise the universal dimension of its Principles.

There is thus a great deal at stake, ultimately much more than the issues that led to such difficulties in Geneva and Budapest, which themselves are far from insurmountable.

The Movement must therefore waste no time in contacting the governments to reaffirm its desire to preserve the International Conference. In so doing, it will show that it is ready to face up to the problems of our time and has no wish to take refuge in a nostalgic vision of the past.

In too many parts of the world the Red Cross is still regarded as an old-fashioned, rather genteel institution. But it is down in the street, close to the victims, that the Red Cross will draw the strength it needs to win the governments over, just as it was in Solferino that Henry Dunant tapped the forces that led to the original Geneva Convention.

We are looking forward to the 26th International Conference.

Yves Sandoz
Director, Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement

SOMALIA

1,700 Tonnes of Relief Unloaded near Mogadishu

Two ICRC ships arrived in Somalia on 18 January, one in Merca, 100 km south of Mogadishu, and the other in Adale, 120 km north of the capital.

Unloading of the 1,700 tonnes of relief and medical supplies on board began the same day and is proceeding rapidly. The task of transporting and distributing the food will be carried out entirely by local staff. For more than two months, unsafe conditions and the persistent fighting had made it impossible for ships loaded with relief supplies to bring aid to Mogadishu.

The ICRC currently has seven staff members in the northern part of Mogadishu and six in the city’s southern sector. The Key Saney hospital, which the ICRC recently set up in a disused prison north of the capital, has now received its medical equipment from Adale.

The ICRC also has five expatriate staff in “Somaliland”, where 30,000 displaced people have massed in the Burao area after fleeing the fighting in mid-January. The ICRC has taken a number of wounded to the surgical hospital in Berbera and is closely monitoring the situation of the whole group, who are suffering particular hardship because of the wintry conditions on the region’s high plateaux.

In another sphere of activity, last year the ICRC’s Tracing Agency processed some 22,000 family messages from Somalis displaced within the country and their families. Working with the Somali Red Crescent, the ICRC thus endeavoured to offset the collapse of telephone and postal services caused by the ongoing conflict in the country.

“Somalia now rivals Liberia as our biggest operation in Africa”, said Christine Béguelin of the ICRC’s Central Tracing Agency in Geneva. “At our Mogadishu office we have set up a poste restante service to facilitate the exchange of news between displaced people and their relatives.”

The Tracing Agency has an office in Djibouti and two others in camps for Somali refugees in Kenya, apart from the ten inside Somalia itself. Their work is coordinated from Nairobi.
Almost Half the ICRC’s Field Staff are Engaged in Medical Work

Interview with Dr. Rémi Russbach, head of the ICRC’s Medical Division

The ICRC’s involvement in medical activities has grown especially rapidly in recent years. How did this come about?

Almost half the ICRC’s field staff are now engaged in medical work, whereas 20 years ago the institution’s medical activities were very limited. There are historical reasons for this change. At the time of the Second World War, the armed forces of the belligerent countries had well-organized medical services that were capable of caring for the wounded, so the only action the ICRC had to take was to remind governments of their obligations in this respect. In the 1970s, situations reminiscent of Solferino began to emerge, that is, people were dying on the battlefield because medical services were either nonexistent or quite inadequate to meet the needs. Later, in the 1980s, we began to see large numbers of displaced and destitute civilians who were physically weakened and vulnerable to disease. They too had to be helped, and the ICRC was therefore obliged to become much more involved in the medical sphere to make up for the lack of government-sponsored medical and war surgery facilities.

Do you have trouble finding qualified medical staff?

That depends on the job. The National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are a great help in this regard, and can always be relied on to provide us with qualified people. But when a Swiss doctor is urgently needed, to take part in prison visits for example, we sometimes have difficulty, though nothing insurmountable.

What role do ICRC doctors play in prison visits and what are the limits to what they can do?

Their functions are many and varied. Their main concern is the general level of health in the prison, and hence the detainees’ living conditions, food, hygiene and quarters. Then they assess the establishment’s health-care system. Is it adequate? Is there always someone there whom the prisoners can consult? Is there a system for taking seriously ill prisoners to hospital? Finally, the visit has a much more personal dimension: the meeting between the doctor and the individual detainee, when any ill-treatment suffered by the latter is discussed. This intensely personal contact demands qualities quite different from the ability to assess the public health aspect and we need doctors who are good at both.

What are the main areas of ICRC medical activity?

A large number of our staff in the field are involved in war surgery; we perform almost 40,000 operations a year. We have a dozen war-surgery units and hospitals throughout the world that require enough surgeons, anaesthetists and nurses to work around the clock. Many of the doctors and nurses we use are taken locally; they do most of the work under the supervision of expatriate doctors. Then there are our orthopaedic activities. We have 27 orthopaedic centres throughout the world in which eight to ten thousand amputees are fitted per year. (See “Medical activities”, p. 4.)

In which countries are expatriate medical staff most active?

Mainly in countries that have been at war for a long time. The conflict in Afghanistan, for example, keeps us very busy although it no longer has the attention of the media. We have a war surgery hospital in Kabul and two other hospitals over the border in Pakistan, in Peshawar and Quetta. Then there is the conflict in Cambodia. We have three surgical units inside the country — in Pursat, Kampot and Mongkol Borei — and a hospital in Khao-i-Dang, on the Thai border, where there are still many refugee camps. In Africa, the situation in Somalia is currently causing us great concern. We are doing our best to work in Mogadishu in barely tolerable conditions. The security situation there is so critical that we are able to do only a fraction of what is needed. Elsewhere in Africa, we have a surgical hospital in Lokichokio, Kenya, to treat the wounded from southern Sudan.

When the ICRC arrives in African or Asian villages with its panoply of modern technology, is there a risk of disrupting a certain social equilibrium based on traditional medicine?

It seems to me that in such situations the social equilibrium you mention is long gone. Moreover, traditional medicine loses a great deal of ground in war situations. This is sometimes regrettable, as traditional techniques are extremely effective against certain diseases, but in other cases it is a good thing because some traditional practices can do a lot of harm. We have worked together with practitioners of traditional medicine in Thailand, where we set up the first Khmer centre for traditional medicine, a hospital bringing together doctors who, unlike those in China, are used to working alone. We have thus been able to utilize the positive aspects of traditional medicine and I don’t think we have caused any disruption. We respect local techniques and, although we usually work in emergency situations, we proceed with a view to development and try to make sure that our project will be taken over by someone else when we leave.

Does the ICRC then risk becoming involved in development aid programmes that are not part of its mandate?

The line between emergency work and development work is very difficult to draw, especially when the emergency is taking place in an underdeveloped area, which is usually the case. Everything you do in such circumstances can be regarded as development work. But we never arrive in a country with the intention of staying on in the long term since the ICRC is an organization which, by definition, works only in conflict situations. On the other hand, even during the emergency it is possible to have an idea of what the project could become later and to try to make sure that the staff trained and structures set up will serve as a basis for future development.

Interview by Salvatore Saguès
Ethiopian Ex-servicemen’s Long Road Home

Since last June the ICRC has been running a vast aid operation in conjunction with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society for demobilized soldiers of the former regime who have been streaming south in an attempt to reach their places of origin. Some 235,000 of them have now returned home. This report was filed by Jo Fox, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ information delegate in Nairobi.

There's a crowd of men outside an Ethiopian Red Cross branch office. They are between 18 and 45 years old — all were soldiers in Mengistu Haile Mariam’s army. They have been demobilized following the takeover of the country by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), end of May 1991. These men have travelled many thousands of kilometres across the drought- and war-ravaged country: they are weak and dejected and are now queuing for food.

Ato Tilahun Girma is among the crowd. A soldier for 15 years during the former regime, he had been stationed in Eritrea during the last years of the war. When his army was defeated he was told to go back home and he started walking. After ten days, exhausted and weak, he reached Adigrat in the province of Tigray in northern Ethiopia, 30 kilometres from the Eritrean border. There at the Red Cross transit camp he received food, drink, shelter and treatment for an old bullet wound which had reopened during the long, hard walk.

From Adigrat he moved on to the Red Cross reception centre at Mekele, capital of Tigray province. There he waited many weeks for his official release papers to be issued by the Ethiopian authorities. These papers allowed Tilahun to board, together with fellow ex-servicemen, a Red Cross-chartered bus which took him to his home. He did not travel empty-handed. Along with eight prepackaged meals — a legacy from the Gulf War — and a ration card. This was his meal ticket, entitling him to five months’ food supply to be collected from the nearest Ethiopian Red Cross Branch Office.

Tilahun is just one of the 235,000 ex-soldiers returned to their homes by the Red Cross over the last eight months from centres to which it provided assistance in the northern part of the country and from government-run camps in the southern part of Ethiopia. This huge and complex operation involved 1,000 Red Cross workers (50 ICRC delegates and 950 members of the National Red Cross Society, mainly youth volunteers), and called on the resources of all 28 Ethiopian Red Cross branches nationwide.

Yet how did the Red Cross become involved in such a programme which at first sight seems to have little to do with its traditional role? Theo Verhoeff, the ICRC delegate responsible for the operation, explains: “There was great humanitarian need and the Red Cross was able to mobilize the necessary resources to alleviate the plight of these soldiers with reasonable speed.”

The first phase of the operation involved the provision of basic shelter, food and medical care to ex-soldiers gathered in the camps in the northern part of Ethiopia. The second phase comprised the transport of all the ex-military to their places of origin. The third and ongoing stage involves the distribution of food rations for a period of five months to the ex-servicemen in their home areas, pending the setting-up of a rehabilitation programme by the government in conjunction with international donors.

In September, the ICRC joined forces with UNHCR to bring home 50,000 Ethiopian ex-soldiers who had fled to Sudan during the days following Mengistu’s defeat. A large reception centre was set up at Addis Ababa International Airport. Staffed by 50 ERCSC youth volunteers, the centre received an average of seven flights per day over a two-month period. As men walked down the steps they kissed the ground. Many had never expected to see their homeland again.

The last flights carried sick and wounded ex-military. In preparation, the reception centre was transformed into a field hospital with a capacity of 200 beds. Eleven ICRC and ERCSC medical staff cared for patients suffering from acute conditions such as malaria, relapsing fever and the effects of severe malnutrition. The most serious cases were transferred to hospitals around Addis Ababa.

For the soldiers, however, the story didn’t end with their return home. In some ways, their problems are only just beginning. As Tilahun explains: “I cannot find work. No one will give me a job. When we lost the war, my wages stopped and I couldn’t send any money to my wife. Now there are eight of us in my family depending on Red Cross food — and it’s not enough.”

Tilahun is in a better position than many. Those soldiers who simply walked the long, hard journey home without passing through the official demobilization process now have no ration card and no means of obtaining food. They arrived home with simply the clothes on their back. Many had not seen their families for years, and when they reached their villages found that their relatives had moved on, or that their wives had given them up for dead and had married other men. Many soldiers end up sleeping in the road. For those in the country areas there is the problem of land. The entity previously responsible for land allocation no longer exists and no alternative infrastructure has yet been set up.

What is the future for these men? This is the problem that the transitional government of Ethiopia, with the support of the international community, now has to address.

Meanwhile, for Tilahun and thousands like him each day is a struggle for survival. In Amharic Tilahun means: “The one who gives shelter to his family.” May he soon be given the means to do this.
French Technician's Body Repatriated from Angola

On 10 January 1992, six men climbed into a helicopter in the Angolan capital Luanda and took off for the north of the country. Their destination was Lemba; their purpose to exhume the body of Francois Grossenbacher, a young French technician who was abducted on 21 February 1990 and died 35 days later following a forced march. Among the helicopter's passengers were Vincent Nicol, head of the ICRC's delegation in Luanda, and a specialist in forensic medicine sent by the French Foreign Ministry. The specialist subsequently identified the body by its hair and using dental records provided by the victim's family. The body was quickly taken to Luanda and then on to France for burial, thus ending a Tracing Agency operation that had begun almost two years ago.

After being approached by the victim's family in April 1990, the ICRC immediately contacted UNITA representatives in Switzerland and Angola. Nothing could be done, it was explained, because the body was buried in a remote and inaccessible conflict zone. Further contacts were made following the ceasefire signed in May of that year and in July UNITA agreed in principle to allow the ICRC to repatriate the body. But the military men who could pinpoint the grave's exact location still had to be found. Mr. Grossenbacher's family stepped up its representations to both the French government and the United Nations. In October, the ICRC at last received written permission from UNITA. At the family's request, the ICRC was present at the exhumation, an operation made possible by the peace process now under way in Angola.

Two Breakthroughs in Asia

In the space of two days the ICRC gained access to detainees in Afghanistan and in Cambodia whom it had hitherto been unable to visit despite the fact that they were entitled to protection under the ICRC's mandate.

On 14 January, for the first time since the Cambodian conflict began, delegates were able to visit detainees in Phnom Penh in accordance with the ICRC's customary procedures. Those visited were eligible for release under Article 21 of the agreement signed in Paris last October by the four parties to the Cambodian conflict. All 290 persons visited were in fact released the following day under ICRC auspices and in the presence of Prince Sihanouk, Chairman of the country's Supreme National Council.

On 13 January, the ICRC began visiting detainees held in Kabul by the Ministry of State Security. Delegates had never before had access to these detainees although they had been visiting prisoners held by the Ministries of Justice and the Interior since late 1987. "It is indeed a coincidence that we have succeeded in these two cases simultaneously after twelve years of intensive negotiations", remarked Jean-Michel Monod, the ICRC's Delegate General for Asia and the Pacific. "But the underlying factors are different. In Cambodia, the ICRC's efforts received a boost from both the Paris agreement and pressure exerted by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. In Afghanistan, there is perhaps less international pressure but the internal political situation has played a role in bringing the ICRC's longstanding negotiations to a successful conclusion."

This success is not complete, however: in Cambodia delegates have not yet been able to visit detainees held by the other factions, and in Afghanistan progress with the opposition movements in this respect has come to a standstill. What has been achieved is nevertheless encouraging and reduces the number of countries in Asia that continue to refuse the ICRC's offers of its services to visit detainees, Myanmar (formerly Burma) remaining one of the most unreceptive in this regard.

Orthopaedic Technicians Complete Training in Chad

At the end of 1991, a ceremony was held at the Kabalaye orthopaedic workshop in N'Djamena to award Chadian government certificates of professional competence to nine orthopaedic technicians.

The nine had undergone three years of training at the workshop run jointly by the ICRC and the Catholic Development Fund (CDF), a 370-member Chadian NGO run by a French Jesuit, Father Pierre Faure. The success of the programme is an encouraging sign that the CDF will soon be able to take the centre over completely. "When the ICRC withdraws from an orthopaedic project, those left running it sometimes experience management difficulties", explained Alain Garachon, orthopaedic coordinator at ICRC headquarters in Geneva. "This happened, for example, in Ethiopia in 1988. In Chad, we have been working with a reliable partner and the main thing is that the CDF will be taking over a project manned by trained staff."

The ICRC, which has been present in Chad since 1981, met the cost of extending and equipping the centre and sent an expatriate team to work there, headed by Mr. Francois Muller. Mr. Muller will remain in N'Djamena until the end of 1992 to train the centre's future Chadian director. This will pave the way for a smooth transfer of management at the centre, which produced 184 prostheses last year and has fitted some 1,700 amputees since 1981. One of the recent graduates is an army lieutenant who will be assigned to the military hospital to act as liaison officer between amputees and the orthopaedic centre. The other technicians will be employed at the Kabalaye centre but may subsequently go to work in the Moundu or Benoye centres in the south of the country. "We successfully transferred an orthopaedic project to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health in April 1990", said Alain Garachon. "Of all the orthopaedic programmes that the ICRC is currently involved in, this one in Chad probably has the best chance of doing well after the ICRC's withdrawal."

The ICRC currently runs 27 such projects in 13 countries.

Tracing Agency

French Technician's Body Repatriated from Angola

On 10 January 1992, six men climbed into a helicopter in the Angolan capital Luanda and took off for the north of the country. Their destination was Lemba; their purpose to exhume the body of Francois Grossenbacher, a young French technician who was abducted on 21 February 1990 and died 35 days later following a forced march. Among the helicopter's passengers were Vincent Nicol, head of the ICRC's delegation in Luanda, and a specialist in forensic medicine sent by the French Foreign Ministry. The specialist subsequently identified the body by its hair and using dental records provided by the victim's family. The body was quickly taken to Luanda and then on to France for burial, thus ending a Tracing Agency operation that had begun almost two years ago.

After being approached by the victim's family in April 1990, the ICRC immediately contacted UNITA representatives in Switzerland and Angola. Nothing could be done, it was explained, because the body was buried in a remote and inaccessible conflict zone. Further contacts were made following the ceasefire signed in May of that year and in July UNITA agreed in principle to allow the ICRC to repatriate the body. But the military men who could pinpoint the grave's exact location still had to be found. Mr. Grossenbacher's family stepped up its representations to both the French government and the United Nations. In October, the ICRC at last received written permission from UNITA. At the family's request, the ICRC was present at the exhumation, an operation made possible by the peace process now under way in Angola.

MEDICAL ACTIVITIES

Orthopaedic Technicians Complete Training in Chad

At the end of 1991, a ceremony was held at the Kabalaye orthopaedic workshop in N’Djaména to award Chadian government certificates of professional competence to nine orthopaedic technicians.

The nine had undergone three years of training at the workshop run jointly by the ICRC and the Catholic Development Fund (CDF), a 370-member Chadian NGO run by a French Jesuit, Father Pierre Faure. The success of the programme is an encouraging sign that the CDF will soon be able to take the centre over completely. "When the ICRC withdraws from an orthopaedic project, those left running it sometimes experience management difficulties", explained Alain Garachon, orthopaedic coordinator at ICRC headquarters in Geneva. "This happened, for example, in Ethiopia in 1988. In Chad, we have been working with a reliable partner and the main thing is that the CDF will be taking over a project manned by trained staff."

The ICRC, which has been present in Chad since 1981, met the cost of extending and equipping the centre and sent an expatriate team to work there, headed by Mr. François Muller. Mr. Muller will remain in N’Djaména until the end of 1992 to train the centre’s future Chadian director. This will pave the way for a smooth transfer of management at the centre, which produced 184 prostheses last year and has fitted some 1,700 amputees since 1981. One of the recent graduates is an army lieutenant who will be assigned to the military hospital to act as liaison officer between amputees and the orthopaedic centre. The other technicians will be employed at the Kabalaye centre but may subsequently go to work in the Moundu or Benoye centres in the south of the country. "We successfully transferred an orthopaedic project to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Health in April 1990", said Alain Garachon. "Of all the orthopaedic programmes that the ICRC is currently involved in, this one in Chad probably has the best chance of doing well after the ICRC’s withdrawal."

The ICRC currently runs 27 such projects in 13 countries.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the recognized National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, is one of the three components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

An independent humanitarian institution, the ICRC is the founding body of the Red Cross. As a neutral intermediary in case of armed conflicts or disturbances, it endeavours on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions to protect and assist the victims of international and civil wars and of disturbances and tensions, thereby contributing to peace in the world.

The ICRC is financed through voluntary contributions from States, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and private individuals. If you wish to support the ICRC, contributions should be sent to: Swiss Bank Corporation, 1211 Geneva 11 - Account No. 129.886.8, or Post Office Account No. 12-5527-6.
A FEW THOUGHTS ON RELIEF WORK

Few other subjects have been so widely debated in recent times as how to improve the quality of humanitarian assistance. The end of the Cold War and its aftermath have further fuelled this debate, with the result that humanitarian issues are becoming increasingly entangled with those of a political nature.

We have thus been confronted with a great number of articles and open discussion fora addressing, for instance, the pros and cons of humanitarian intervention and the use of military resources for relief work. These considerations certainly form part of the changed humanitarian assistance environment with which the ICRC, as well as all the other humanitarian organizations, has been dealing since the beginning of the nineties.

The ICRC Relief Division, when asked to contribute to this special edition on ICRC assistance activities, decided not to go into those important subjects here since they have already been extensively discussed both inside and outside the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It has chosen instead to focus on other aspects of relief work which are either unknown or increasingly overlooked in this changed humanitarian assistance environment.

We do not wish to question the importance of the debate on this changed environment. However, we must stress that the man or the woman doing the actual work in the field remains the key to any successful relief operation. An assistance programme drawn up in the most professional manner by very experienced staff will never succeed if the backbone is missing, namely a sufficient number of well trained and experienced relief delegates who are ready to work over lengthy periods of time in precarious living and security conditions. It is not always easy for the ICRC to find men and women who have both the intellectual capacity and the physical stamina to work in that kind of difficult conditions. Yet those capacities, even combined with a sound humanitarian vocation, are not enough, as relief work itself has become increasingly difficult. It should be recognized that humanitarian assistance can and must be carried out only in a scientific and professional manner which should leave no place for amateurish behaviour. The sheer will to help is thus not sufficient to guarantee successful relief work. That is why one of the articles in this Bulletin highlights the importance of training.

In recognizing the necessity for a constant adaptation of ICRC relief programmes to the new humanitarian assistance environment described above, it tends to be forgotten that similar thought should be given to preservation of the natural environment in which we carry out our relief operations. The recent conference in Rio de Janeiro has clearly demonstrated the need for very drastic measures to save at least what is left of the original natural habitat. Regrettably, in times of war such considerations are becoming a secondary priority. It is even understandable that such priorities are suddenly changing if actual physical survival is at stake. We should then never expect any initiative to be taken by the affected population itself to preserve its own natural environment. It should thus be the moral obligation of any serious humanitarian organization to carry out relief work in such a manner that, in so doing, a minimum of damage is caused to nature. The ICRC has given, and continues to give, considerable attention to this particular issue in the framework of its two currently largest assistance programmes. Another article therefore takes a look at how the ICRC, with the help of outside expertise, has tackled the problem of saving energy in its community kitchens in Somalia and describes the stoves programme in former Yugoslavia.

Many will agree with us if we say that it is therefore not at all easy to choose the right moment to withdraw, as there is always the fear that a situation of newly restored peace may rapidly revert to war again. Angola is just one of many recent examples. Besides choosing the right moment for withdrawal, intensive preparation is required by all those involved in the relief effort: ourselves, other humanitarian organizations, other members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the local authorities, the donor community and, last but not least, the previously assisted population itself. Our third article thus tries to explain ways and means of moving in the most coherent manner from the emergency to the withdrawal phase, with the aim of leading the affected population out of its initial complete dependency on outside assistance and enabling it to become self-sufficient.

Andreas Lendorff
Andreas Lendorff has been head of the ICRC's General Relief Division for the past ten years.
"Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited". So says Article 14 of Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, while Additional Protocol I (Art. 54) prohibits the destruction of "objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as ... crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works ... whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive". Yet time and again recent conflicts have directly or indirectly destroyed the fabric of rural society and the means of agricultural production. Across the globe, ever longer lines of farmers without land and herdsmen without herds are forming at food-distribution points.

In many cases, food relief is vital. It brings a short-term reprieve to people cut off from food supplies by armed conflict and its consequences. But experience has shown that this type of assistance is not enough. In 1992, almost all the seed and farming tools distributed in Somalia had to be imported from neighbouring countries, as they were practically unobtainable on the spot. This year, not only has much of the required seed been purchased locally, but a large number of hoes have been ordered from village blacksmiths, thus promoting local industry.

Once a war is over and its effects have eased, rehabilitation and development can gain ground. At that point the ICRC can withdraw, leaving the specialized development agencies to take over. In both Somalia and Mozambique, the ICRC's agro-veterinary teams are in constant touch with their counterparts from other organizations in order to enlist reliable partners and work out procedures for an eventual handover.

Owing to the complexity of this process, programmes must be constantly reassessed. It is essential in such circumstances for ICRC agronomists to work very closely with nutritionists and those in charge of emergency relief operations.

Thus the aim of current food assistance programmes is to enable the beneficiaries to survive today and stay alive tomorrow. Famine victims, refugees and displaced persons are given food aid to get them through the immediate crisis, but if they are to survive in the long term local resources — particularly livestock — must be sustained and help provided to restore agricultural and veterinary activities. Such programmes are now a well-established component of ICRC operations, enabling the beneficiaries to regain a measure of self-sufficiency and thus their human dignity. Frequently launched while the emergency is at its height, these activities already prepare the ground for rehabilitation and development, in short, a return to normal life.

François Grünwald

François Grünwald is an agronomist in the ICRC's General Relief Division.
Day by day the economies of most of the world's developing countries are sinking into deeper trouble. And for those among them in the grip of an armed conflict the situation is far more serious: people lack food, water, adequate housing and heating, medical care and many other basics. The ICRC's assistance programmes do what they can to alleviate such situations.

But there are other problems — deforestation, desertification and other forms of environmental degradation — which must be addressed if we really want to help the victims of conflict or natural disaster. Indeed, one of the inherent risks of humanitarian assistance is the possibility of negative secondary effects. The beneficiaries may, for example, become dependent on the relief provided, losing any incentive to improve their lot since aid organizations are meeting their vital needs. The environment itself can suffer as a result of humanitarian assistance operations; it is up to the organizations providing aid to ensure that the best possible use is made of local resources with the least possible damage to the environment. Bearing this in mind, the ICRC has been looking at several new approaches.

One of the ICRC's concerns recently has been finding fuel-efficient ways of cooking and heating. In most countries where the ICRC works, wood is generally the fuel used for both. Large-scale wood consumption obviously contributes to deforestation and desertification. To avoid this, it was essential to develop means of cooking and producing heat which would require less wood, could be made locally, and would be simple to use and acceptable to the people concerned.

In Somalia, where the widespread insecurity and constant pillaging of humanitarian aid convoys have made it impossible to ensure delivery of relief to those who truly need it, the ICRC concluded that the only way of feeding famine victims in the short to medium term was to set up "community kitchens". The food is usually prepared and cooked by Somali Red Crescent workers and then distributed under ICRC supervision. A source of energy had to be found to operate these kitchens without cutting down the few trees and bushes that remained in the region, so the ICRC consulted a number of experts, including REDI (the Renewable Energy Development Institute), to seek alternatives. REDI's experience in designing energy-efficient ovens and heating stoves proved very useful. ICRC specialists visited the Institute to watch the construction and testing of new designs for Somalia.

At the same time, a number of trials were being conducted in camps for displaced persons to see whether the different prototypes worked on the spot and were acceptable to camp residents. Key factors such as ease of operation, the types of fuel available and the need to cook food quickly made it necessary to conduct trials in field conditions.

Technical advice from Mr. Waclaw Micuta of REDI and testing in the field led to the development of models suitable for various requirements. Some of them are more appropriate for rural areas and village refugee camps, while others are designed for large groups of displaced people in urban areas.

This has already resulted in considerable savings in firewood, and the lessons learned will doubtless find very useful applications in other situations, particularly in Africa and Asia, where environmental degradation is often compounded by armed conflict and over-population.

A REDI stove has also been used in the framework of the ICRC's relief programme in the former Yugoslavia, where many thousands of people have been displaced by conflict. Those who manage to return to their homes often find their houses badly damaged or even completely destroyed. Last year the ICRC set up a "winter relief" programme to help the returnees survive the region's harsh winter. As most of them had no means of keeping warm, stoves were included. These stoves are different from those tested in Somalia, their main purpose being to produce heat, although they can also be used for cooking. They can run on either wood or coal.

What these stoves have in common with those tested in Somalia is that they can be produced cheaply using locally available materials, they are simple to use and are very economical in terms of fuel. Some 15,000 such stoves have been made by companies in Zagreb. Paid for with European Community and British Government funds, they have been distributed to families, schools, hospitals and other institutions.

François Rueff

François Rueff is head of the technical unit at the ICRC's General Relief Division.
The necessity for training is no longer hypothetical but is an absolute reality. A comparison between today and ten years ago is evidence enough: the number of ICRC operations has risen steadily; the provision of relief assistance has more than doubled; requirements for field personnel have increased sharply; and security issues have become a prominent cause for concern. All at a time when the professionalism of relief workers has gained tremendous importance. This was the environment that led to the addition of a strong training component to the priorities of the General Relief Division several years ago.

The current complexity of operations demands that relief workers acquire an incredible pool of expertise and know-how before they arrive "on the spot". They must gain an understanding of such varied subjects as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and management systems; the context of the operation within which they will work (policies, priorities of needs, cultural dynamics, political framework, etc.) and the logistics involved (warehousing, transport, statistical reporting, etc.).

In addition, this "changing humanitarian assistance environment" has brought with it a proliferation of information and data. Field staff must consequently also be aware of their own limits. Learning how to utilize the expertise of specialists within the ICRC thus becomes yet another component for the training curriculum.

Considering the nature and scope of ICRC relief operations, it is no easy task to target training. The training needs of both new and experienced delegates have to be met, be they National Society or ICRC personnel, to the satisfaction of the individual and the institution. To prepare delegates for their work in the field and make them feel confident that they are well prepared is a major activity for the General Relief Division.

Continuity of the training message is paramount and thus adds the essential component of coordination. What is being said in a National Society to people participating in delegate training courses must be the same message as is relayed here in Geneva to newly recruited delegates. In this sense the input received in developing the Basic Training Course (BTC) has been most valuable. Establishing linkages is another vital success factor in providing training within our context.

The two-day Introduction to Relief Operations first held in December 1991 has been an excellent first step towards giving new relief administrators/delegates the knowledge they are most likely to need to do their job. To date nine such courses have been held, with at least five taking place each year. Advanced or more specialized training sessions (e.g. courses for vehicle fleet supervisors or relief coordinators) are also an important feature of the Relief Division's training programme. Case studies, practical exercises and role-playing are used to integrate operational realities more effectively into the realm of training. Evaluations have shown that participants have found this to be an extremely useful and lively method of learning. In this way we have sought to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Feedback and follow-up are integral parts of the training process. We have to know what happens not only during courses but also, and more importantly, after they are over and the participants are in the field. Each course must have this two-way component built in. In addition, evaluation systems will have to be further developed to assess whether or not skills learnt have affected behaviour, concepts have been understood and procedures are being correctly applied. Future initiatives will continue to focus on developing our basic introductory level of training as well as the support materials to accompany these initiatives. Advanced and specialized training must be carefully evaluated and modifications made to ensure that we are truly raising the level of professionalism within the relief context and reaching out to involve others where mutually beneficial goals can be shared. The need to remain open to new ideas and approaches to the way we have always done business must not be forgotten.

The people we send to the field from National Societies and the ICRC as front-line relief workers are the life-blood of our operations. Traditional models of training and development for human resources in the humanitarian aid context clearly require modification. Commitment must be stronger than words, it must be action, but suitable action to ensure the protection of our human resources as well as that of the people we serve.

Deborah Gibson

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The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

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The prospects looked rosy: refugees had returned to Cambodia from the Thai border, an interim UN administration had arrived and there were rumours of elections, so 1993 seemed set to mark the end of the conflict in Cambodia.

One month ahead of the elections the future now looks bleak and holds little promise of a genuine political solution likely to end the suffering of the Khmer people.

The latest news is that certain factions are again laying mines in areas recently cleared. Although the ICRC was able to withdraw from the Thai border late in March, its presence in Cambodia itself will be needed for a long time to come.

On 25 April 1992 the mujahidin entered Kabul. Despite the fierce fighting that raged in the capital throughout summer, more than a million Afghans were able to return home from Pakistan after twelve years in exile.

One year later, and a month after the signing of what should have been a final peace agreement between the Afghan parties involved, civilians are still dying daily from rocket fire in Kabul or being injured, often fatally, by mines almost everywhere in the country.

So while able to reduce and redeploy its staff in Pakistan (closure of the hospital in Peshawar and transfer of the delegation to Islamabad), in Afghanistan too the ICRC must remain present and very much so, both in Jalalabad and in Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul. Its delegates are among the last foreigners still working there day by day to ease the plight of the population.

Against this turbulent political and militant setting, the conflict in Sri Lanka seems quite static. Unfortunately, there is no sign of a brighter future for the victims.

Admittedly, the ICRC is present throughout Asia and the Pacific, with regional delegations in New Delhi, Bangkok, Jakarta, Hong Kong and Suva; however, it is not yet working in every situation where the civilian population, the prisoners or the wounded should be able to receive its protection and assistance.

Scanning the news over the past few months, we find that from Myanmar to the Korean peninsula there are still quite a number of situations in which greater respect for the principles of international humanitarian law and a better understanding of the ICRC's role could bring many improvements.

Jean-Michel Monod

Jean-Michel Monod was appointed as the ICRC's Delegate General for Asia and the Pacific in March 1990.
Delegates flying Air Lanka on their first mission to the country may already have been surprised to find themselves sitting beside tourists avid for sunshine and a sparkling sea. The tourists themselves may also have been shocked at Colombo airport to see a dusty Red Cross mailbag lying between two suitcases plastered with exotic stickers. The humanitarian symbol may for once have appeared as a threat to the holidaymakers and their dreams of scenic tranquillity.

There lies the paradox: Sri Lanka is like a postcard that masks great suffering.

From here, it is as though the war was merely an abstraction, as though all was calm in the best of all worlds. The brightly coloured catalogues say so. Yet war is still raging in Sri Lanka, that idyllic little country described as the “emerald pearl”; it is an amorphous war, muted yet pitiless, which has brought death to tens of thousands of civilians and combatants over the past ten years.

Just another forgotten conflict, you may say. Of course, some European countries are simply awash with Tamil refugees. There are some 20,000 of them in Switzerland alone, and they are almost everywhere else in Europe and in Canada. But people have forgotten why.

In 1989 the ICRC was invited by outgoing President Ranasinghe Premadasa to assist victims of the internal political crisis. Whereas the JVP\(^1\) uprising was virtually crushed in 1989, the ground-swell of inter-ethnic conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils has surged again in the north and east. The postcard quickly fades and gives way to pictures of death and destruction somewhere on the inner pages of the dailies.

Over the past three years, 60 ICRC delegates have constantly been visiting some 10,000 detainees in 500 places of detention. They are still doing so.

Under its emblem the ICRC is protecting road and sea convoys carrying some 80,000 tonnes of foodstuffs and medicines each year to the Jaffna peninsula in the north of the country; through branches of the National Society it is providing financial aid for the reconstruction and maintenance of huts for civilians displaced by the fighting. In terms of the number of delegates, this large-scale operation is one of the biggest being carried out by the ICRC anywhere in the world.

The war in Sri Lanka is a reality all right, and the dusty ICRC mailbags will continue to arrive in large numbers at the airport, as will the travellers. Though the destination is the same, the context is different - a glimpse of paradise for some and a vision of hell for others. After all, the palm-trees at Bentota are unmoved by human suffering.

Eric Junod

Eric Junod is delegate for Sri Lanka at ICRC headquarters in Geneva.

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\(^1\) JVP: Janatha Vimukti Peramuna — People’s Liberation Front
A hundred or so combatants squeeze together on the floor of the wooden barracks. They are back on leave from the fighting west of Battambang and have been called together for a meeting with the ICRC. Malaysian Blue Berets from the United Nations peace-keeping forces help to install television equipment. The soldiers ask “Are the Red Cross people going to show us a sentimental, a funny or an action video?”

Explaining the red cross and the red crescent emblems in Cambodia is not so simple nowadays.

Red crosses and crescents are very much in evidence there. Above all they are to be seen on the many white Land Cruisers which have been driving to and fro throughout the country since the October 1991 agreement was signed in Paris. “The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is independent of the United Nations, but do the UN ambulances and medical vehicles also bear red crosses or crescents?” Officers and soldiers alike attentively follow the explanation.

It is only since July 1992 that the doors have been open to the ICRC to disseminate international humanitarian law among the armed forces. The dissemination programme started in billets for Cambodian soldiers being demobilized under the Paris accord and was subsequently extended to troops on active service. Delegates have been able to organize presentations among four factions involved in the conflict. For the army of the State of Cambodia, this was often the first contact with the ICRC, whereas the factions controlling areas near the Thai border have been familiar with the ICRC since it began working at the border in 1979.

“We really want to respect humanitarian rules, but what is the ICRC doing to see that they are observed by the other side?” That is the question every faction always raises. “Aren’t the ICRC people afraid to enter the Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) area?” The government soldiers smile incredulously. After the session they asked the driver much the same question: “Wasn’t the ICRC away from Cambodia between 1975 and 1979?”

Next day the ICRC Land Cruiser, loaded with the video and television equipment, drives on into Democratic Kampuchea. Combatants and villagers come for the meeting there, where access is denied to the UNTAC forces. “Are mines causing heavy casualties in countries other than Cambodia?” The astonished, wide-eyed children watch the video film taken in Afghanistan. Combatants keep their distance but follow the session with interest. “Will our enemies stick to the rules of humanitarian law?” “The ICRC can come back; we understand your work now and the Red Cross will be respected.” In Cambodia, where the wounds of war run deep and ancestral enmities persist, explaining the ICRC’s work and the Movement’s principles poses a challenge. The ICRC has become active inside Cambodia only recently but its work is becoming better known. Mine victims from the different factions are being tended by ICRC surgeons at Mongkol Borei hospital. Amputees brought in by the ICRC from remote villages to the orthopaedic centre at Battambang are meeting other war disabled. Members of separated families located and placed in contact by the Tracing Agency are able to communicate again. Posters and T-shirts in support of the blood-bank are already a part of the Cambodian landscape but here, too, information and education must continue. Rumours travel fast in this country where the telephone is the preserve of foreign organizations. For the ICRC’s activities to be understood and accepted, the underlying humanitarian principles must be explained as well.

Doris Pfister

Doris Pfister is the desk officer responsible for dissemination in Cambodia.

1 UNTAC: United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.
The ICRC has been working in East Timor for over fourteen years, not counting an interruption between December 1975 and March 1979. Its activities there are conducted from its office in Dili, where two delegates are permanently based. The regional delegation in Jakarta provides constant operational support.

In East Timor the ICRC's foremost priority is to help ensure greater respect and protection for the civilian population. Its main activities nowadays are as follows:

**Visiting detainees**

In 1992, the delegates visited 110 persons held at 20 places of detention in East Timor and Jakarta. The ICRC also organizes family visits to detainees.

**Tracing**

The main tasks are to trace missing persons and forward Red Cross messages. In addition, the ICRC helps in many cases to arrange for repatriation and for families to be reunited: since 1979 more than 1,200 people have been repatriated or reunited with their relatives in Portugal or Australia.

**Health programme**

Together with the Indonesian Red Cross, the ICRC has been engaged since 1988 in a pilot programme to improve public health in isolated villages. It is designed mainly to provide safe drinking water. So far 29 projects to sink wells and tap springs have been put into effect, using simple, cheap methods.
THE AFRICAN CHALLENGE

The ICRC’s Africa zone covers 46 countries south of the Sahara. It is the institution’s largest theatre of operations in the world, with its seven regional delegations, 11 delegations and some 20 sub-delegations. Every day, over one and a half million victims receive assistance and protection from about 400 expatriates and 3,000 permanent local employees of the ICRC and their partners in the National Societies. With annual budgets of more than 450 million Swiss francs and staff amounting to half of the institution's delegates, the Africa zone may seem a very costly proposition indeed. In fact, this merely reflects the terrifying magnitude of the tragedy befalling the peoples of Africa.

Without wishing to indulge in “Afro-gloom”, we have to acknowledge that things are getting worse in many African countries, which are having considerable difficulty in coping with the transition period brought about in part by the end of the cold war. Today Africa is the scene of about 15 major conflicts, leaving countless victims in their wake. The catastrophe has many underlying causes, and responsibility lies with the international community as much as with African leaders. Throughout the region, economic collapse has led to social, ethnic and religious problems, an imbalance between urban and rural areas, the erosion of public authority, and corruption.

What can the ICRC do in the face of such immense problems? In our view, its role is crucial. The cornerstone of Red Cross work is bringing help to victims—whoever and wherever they may be. It cannot, of course, solve all problems everywhere, but that is not the point. Action symbolizes hope and a different approach to adversity. Take Somalia, for instance. In 1991, most people had given up on this country torn apart by conflict and famine. Only the ICRC and a handful of non-governmental organizations persevered, forcing the international community to review its position, and the results are there for all to see. Of course, the tragedy is by no means over, but at least the scandal of world indifference towards the plight of the Somali people has been averted.

Somalia is not the only example: there is also the Sudan, Rwanda, Liberia and Angola, to quote but a few countries where hundreds of thousands – even millions – of victims will survive thanks to humanitarian aid.

The ICRC is not alone in taking up the challenge. It can rely on its partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and above all on the voluntary workers or employees of National Societies. These are the Movement’s “humanitarian troops”, battling to counteract the folly of combatants in the field. A great deal of good will can also be found within the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and especially among the African peoples themselves.

The ICRC is therefore by no means fighting a lost cause. On the contrary, spurred on by its principles and despite its contradictions and limitations, it is convinced that it can and must act as a pioneer.

This profession of faith would be pointless if it were not backed up by a constant drive for greater professionalism, creativity and flexibility. (Efficiency is not enough; sometimes, miracles are needed.) In Africa, the ICRC must at all costs preserve its mobility and its ability to intervene quickly.

Finally, let us spare a thought for our colleagues—expatriates, local staff and National Society personnel—who have sacrificed their lives to the humanitarian cause. We owe it to them as well to do everything we can to pursue our mission.

Jean-Daniel Tauxe

Jean-Daniel Tauxe was appointed ICRC Delegate General for Africa in January 1992.
Northern Rwanda: the fighting has driven nearly one million people out of the country's most fertile region.

Rwanda, often called "the Switzerland of Central Africa", is a lush and mountainous country. With an area of 26,340 sq.km, and a population of 7.4 million, it is, after Bangladesh, the most densely populated country in the world (282 inhabitants per sq.km.).

For the last two years, this "country of a thousand hills" has been the scene of a civil war opposing government forces and the troops of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (FPR).

The fighting in the north has forced the civilian population to seek refuge in makeshift camps in regions further south. The displaced people have lost everything, and their only shelter against the torrential rains are roofs made of leaves or sorghum thatch. The lucky ones have plastic sheeting for protection. But at such high altitudes everyone suffers from the cold.

Around the 40 or so camps, hundreds of acres of forest have been chopped down. The trees are needed to build huts, for heating and for cooking. However, the inevitable consequence of tree-felling is soil erosion. Yet another scourge. The ICRC has been working in Rwanda without interruption since the beginning of the conflict in 1990. It stepped in just in time to prevent the worst; but lasting solutions are yet to be found. The scale of the disaster is so great that it would be unrealistic to hope to cover needs of such magnitude and diversity, except in the very short term.

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The ICRC began providing food aid to the displaced population in January 1991, working in cooperation with the Rwandese Red Cross. The number of displaced persons, initially 12,000, rose to 90,000 in April 1992, and then to 350,000. Today, a further outbreak of fighting has driven the figure up to 900,000. No-one has as yet been able to return home.

At the moment, the displaced people are totally dependent on foreign aid for survival. They are all waiting for peace to return so that they can go home and start farming their land again. But their prayers have not yet been answered. Peace negotiations are still under way in Arusha. So far, however, they have not yielded any concrete results, and disagreement persists between the government and the FPR.

After the cease-fire in March 1993, a demilitarized zone was established, but it does not yet have a proper administration and the military situation there remains potentially dangerous. The area is littered with mines, and so unsafe that its inhabitants do not dare to return. Concerned about the seriousness of the situation, and in order to avert a major humanitarian catastrophe, on 17 March 1993 the ICRC sent a memorandum to the Rwandese Government and the FPR, requesting that priority be given in the peace negotiations to a speedy and safe return for the displaced persons.

If the situation persists the ICRC believes that, whatever efforts are deployed by humanitarian organizations, the displacement of nearly one million people in this overpopulated country will inevitably spell disaster.

The threat of famine looms large. Hygiene conditions in the camps are poor. The total lack of privacy is unbearable. And there is a shortage of drinking water.

Pending a political solution, the ICRC, in cooperation with the Rwandese Red Cross, has had to step up its assistance programme significantly. At the end of 1992, some 4,000 tonnes of relief were being distributed every month. In March 1993, the figure had risen to 8,300 tonnes. Since the end of April, 2,800 tonnes have been distributed every week (i.e., 11,200 tonnes a month), and the ICRC hopes that it will soon be able to bring in as much as 13,000 tonnes of relief per month.

The logistical problems are enormous. Convoys have to cross Tanzania, and relief sometimes has to be shipped in by ferry. Most of the food is provided by the World Food Programme, which has organized an airlift...
between Kampala and Kigali. Food distributions are difficult because of overcrowding in the camps. Displaced people have also settled randomly around the villages, causing tensions among the resident population. The general confusion is compounded by the disruption of administrative services, leading to even greater insecurity.

In critical circumstances like these, ICRC staff and the 250 volunteers of the Rwandese Red Cross have to exercise strict supervision when sharing out the food at more than 30 different distribution points every day.

Without the National Society’s presence, it would have been impossible to carry out such a large-scale operation, especially since the Kigali delegation is staffed by only 20 expatriates who are also engaged in a host of other activities (e.g., protection, tracing agency, medical assistance and public health).

The ICRC periodically travels to the area under FPR control, where it has distributed medical supplies and visited a number of detainees.

Through its constant presence in the country, the ICRC provides protection for the civilian population, which is one of its fundamental tasks. When ethnic strife flared up, the ICRC was the only organization able to intervene.

When the conflict broke out, the Rwandese Government and the FPR gave the ICRC the guarantees it needed to do its work. Its delegates have been able to carry out the full range of activities they had set out to accomplish, and the Red Cross emblem is known and respected by the combatants.

The ICRC also has access to the country’s prisons. Last year, it visited 1,799 detainees in 30 places of detention, and 404 were seen in the first three months of 1993.

When hostilities resumed in February, the ICRC mobilized a surgical team, which performed 227 operations in a very short lapse of time. ICRC teams have distributed some 25 tonnes of urgently needed medicines and surgical material and have been evacuating the wounded from the front lines to hospital for treatment.

A drinking water supply system was rapidly set up to cope with the emergency. It was decided to use mobile distribution units, supplying some 200 cubic metres of water per day, which can follow the people as they move from one place to another (there are now 97 distribution points with a total capacity of 350,000 litres per day).

The Belgian Red Cross is also extremely active in Rwanda. In close cooperation with the ICRC, it is in charge of non-food aid and supplies medical assistance to hospitals and dispensaries.

The magnitude of the needs has compelled the ICRC to readjust its initial 1993 budget for the country, which has risen from 15.7 to 127.5 million Swiss francs. This makes the ICRC’s operation in Rwanda the largest in Africa, after Somalia.

Graziella De Vecchi

Graziella De Vecchi is the ICRC’s head of sector for Rwanda.

Dombe was taken by RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance Movement) in November 1991. Since then Médecins Sans Frontières, which used to fly to the region regularly, has not been able to return.

Today, the guns have fallen silent, and the two parties have assured us that the road has been cleared of mines. The main road to Goonda is paved, and therefore safe. After that, there are 60 km of dirt track to Dombe.

The ICRC is to distribute food there and above all seed, which will help 60,000 people to become self-sufficient again.

Wilson, RENAMO’s mine-clearing expert who is riding with me, proudly sports two enormous brass earrings. He chain-smokes (our cigarettes!). He says he is looking forward to having another ride in a car.

As we had been assured before leaving that the track would be open and free of obstacles, we ask the RENAMO soldiers to remove the branches we find blocking the way. Civilians are filling in the trenches they had dug a few months back to stop the enemy’s advance.

Progress is slow. It is stiflingly hot and every suspicious bump strikes fear in our hearts. Could it be a mine?

At kilometre 25, the fighting must have been intense. Burnt-out lorries and bones bleached by the sun are all around us. At least 20 rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells, some still intact, testify to a strategy used during the conflict, namely to sever all communication routes.

At kilometre 50, the results of this strategy are there for all to see. A bridge has been completely destroyed. We are told that four antitank mines exploded, plunging the structure into the ravine.

At sunset, after six hours of driving, we reach Dombe. The administrator greets us with the words “Deus é grande”.

A week later, our lorries loaded with seed and food set off two anti-personnel mines. Luckily, only the vehicles are slightly damaged. The people of the region will gather at a distribution point considered safe to receive their rations.

Several months later, in March 1993, Dombe’s inhabitants were able to harvest the first crops grown with seed provided by the ICRC. The danger is over.

“Deus é grande”

Roger Ruffy

Roger Ruffy spent 18 months in Mozambique, where he was head of the ICRC’s sub-delegation in Beira. Since his return to headquarters in Geneva, he has been in charge of fund-raising for ICRC operations in Africa.
ICRC OPERATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active in South Africa for almost 30 years. ICRC delegates started visiting prisoners convicted of security offences in 1963. In the mid-1980s, in cooperation with the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS), the ICRC began community programmes in townships in the Reef. In 1988 a joint relief operation for victims of violence started in Natal, extending to the Reef in 1990. Visits to prisoners resumed in late September 1992, while in October the ICRC was authorized to make unannounced visits to detainees in police custody throughout South Africa.

VISITS TO PRISONERS AND DETAINEES

South African police stations

ICRC delegates have been visiting police stations in South Africa since October 1992, after receiving authorization from the Minister of Law and Order to visit detainees in police custody throughout the country.

By the end of March 1993, delegates had made more than 160 visits to 130 police stations in the Witwatersrand, Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and Eastern Cape.

In line with its mandate, the ICRC pays particular attention to areas of unrest and focuses on security detainees. The visits, which are not notified in advance, are carried out according to standard ICRC operating procedures worldwide; this includes the right to speak to detainees in private, to register their names, to have access to all facilities used in connection with detention and to repeat the visits. (In 1992 ICRC delegates visited more than 95,000 detainees and prisoners in 54 countries.)

The purpose of the visits is purely humanitarian: ICRC delegates assess the material and medical conditions of detention and the treatment of detainees. After the visits, the ICRC submits confidential reports to the relevant authorities, making recommendations — where necessary — for improvements.

As a neutral and independent body, the ICRC does not question the reasons for a person’s detention, or try to obtain a prisoner’s release. Its sole concern is to safeguard his or her physical and psychological well-being.

Homelands

The ICRC also visits prisons and police stations in the homelands of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Kwa Zulu and Transkei.

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

The ICRC and the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) run a joint relief operation for victims of violence in troubled areas, particularly Natal, the Reef and the Eastern Cape. More than 64,000 people have received assistance in Natal since mid-1988 and over 36,000 have been assisted in the Reef since August 1990.

First-aid and training

The original role of the Red Cross was to assist and protect the wounded in time of conflict. In troubled areas of South Africa the ICRC and the SARCS are present during potentially violent situations, with first-aid teams, equipment and ambulances.

Assistance for victims of violence

Blankets, food, kitchen sets and soap are provided, as needed, to:
- families whose dwellings and property have been destroyed as a result of the unrest,
- people who have fled a violence-stricken area and have gathered in temporary shelters,
- families whose breadwinners have been killed or seriously injured during the violence.

Vouchers worth up to 800 rand are given to families to offset the cost of burying relatives killed in the violence.

All assistance is given impartially on an emergency, one-time basis. Assessments are first carried out on the spot by ICRC/SARCS personnel to establish the needs of the people concerned, and aid is then given accordingly.

SPREADING THE HUMANITARIAN MESSAGE

ICRC and SARCS staff make presentations about the Red Cross to various target groups among the South African population, from the authorities to the grass roots. These sessions are intended to provide information on the organization’s activities in South Africa, the principles underlying Red Cross work (in particular humanity, independence and neutrality) and the basic humanitarian rules to be observed in all circumstances, namely:
- not to attack people who take no part in the fighting, or their property;
- to get help quickly to all who need it;
- to let the Red Cross do its work.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, together with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, form the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

The ICRC is financed through voluntary contributions from States, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and private individuals. If you wish to support the ICRC, contributions should be sent to: Swiss Bank Corporation, 1211 Geneva 11 - Account No. 129 986 0, or Post Office Account No. 12-5527-6.
Conflict is rife throughout the world – yet the Middle East remains a key area of concern for the ICRC and the international community. Day after day reports come in of new acts of violence and new victims. Day after day those same acts send ICRC delegations into action.

International armed conflicts such as the Iran/Iraq war and the Gulf crisis have caused immense suffering. Thousands of prisoners of war have still not been repatriated; the mortal remains of tens of thousands of fallen soldiers have still not been returned to their families; more than 100,000 servicemen are still unaccounted for. At the same time, innumerable civilians have been forced to leave their homes, families have been split up and many people have simply disappeared.

The ICRC is seeking ways to resolve all these various problems. It is particularly concerned about the plight of the Iranian and Iraqi prisoners-of-war who have not yet been repatriated. When a soldier is captured in battle, he is kept prisoner until the end of the fighting solely for security reasons. He must therefore be released and repatriated as soon as hostilities cease. Here, as elsewhere, the ICRC does whatever it can to ensure that States meet their obligations under the Third Geneva Convention relating to the treatment of prisoners of war.

Turning now to another international conflict, the ICRC continues to assist civilians protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention in the territories occupied by Israel. Despite ongoing peace negotiations, the living conditions of the Palestinian population are steadily deteriorating, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Both Palestinian and Israeli civilians, including children and old people, are falling victim to acts of indiscriminate violence. In its dealings with the authorities, the ICRC always has the same goal: full implementation of the Fourth Convention, which provides protection for the civilian population in such circumstances. The institution’s work in this area contributes to respect for human dignity and fosters the mutual trust without which true dialogue is impossible. At the present historic juncture, compliance with international humanitarian law can tip the scales in favour of peace.

A number of States in the Middle East and North Africa are prey to internal tensions, and in others tension has degenerated into conflict. There is violence, often indiscriminate. Acts of insurrection, sometimes part of larger movements, are followed by mass arrests. Civilians – whether involved or not – see their living conditions worsen and face daily threats to their safety and even to their lives. The ICRC must meet the challenge raised by both these conflicts themselves and the suffering they cause.

In the event of internal conflict, the ICRC offers to take action on the basis of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions. In cases of internal tensions and disturbances, it may also propose its services to the States concerned on the basis of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the resolutions of international conferences. Taken together, these elements confer on the ICRC an active role in protecting and assisting all victims of violence.

An offer of services by the ICRC is based on the institution’s “right of initiative”. The services in question include protection activities (visits to persons deprived of their freedom because of the conflict situation) and in some cases also medical assistance and/or food aid to vulnerable groups.

The ICRC naturally draws no distinction between victims on the basis of the type of conflict involved. Anyone affected by acts of violence arising from internal tensions or disturbances is entitled to receive ICRC protection and assistance. Delegates carry out these activities in many States around the world, and must be in a position to do so in the Middle East and North Africa as well.

Throughout those two regions the ICRC is currently focusing its efforts on spreading knowledge of the role its delegates can play in situations of internal unrest, the specific nature of its work and its purely humanitarian objectives. By means of seminars, publications and radio and television broadcasts it is seeking to gain greater acceptance by the authorities for the universal values it defends and thus to be allowed to go into action as soon as conflict breaks out.

Michel Cagneux

Michel Cagneux is the ICRC’s Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa.
The ICRC's regional delegation for North Africa, based in Tunis, coordinates the institution's activities in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Libya, and supervises the action taken in connection with the Western Sahara conflict. The delegation maintains contact with the authorities and the National Red Crescent Societies of the countries it covers in order to consolidate the ICRC's presence in the region and gain wider acceptance of the specific activities entrusted to it by the international community.

The delegation's main task is to promote compliance with international humanitarian law by spreading knowledge not only of the law itself but also of the history, principles, ideals and work of the Movement. Lectures, seminars and exhibitions are organized and media exposure sought in an effort to reach the principal target groups, in particular government authorities, the armed forces and academic circles.

Last October in Tunis, the delegation and the Tunisian Red Crescent mounted an exhibition entitled "Humanity in the midst of war", which demonstrated how situations of armed conflict had led to the drafting of legal instruments and how the law had developed to keep pace with modern warfare and its consequences. In December the delegation held a course on humanitarian law for some 30 lawyers and military officers from across North Africa. In January, about 40 high-ranking officers from the Mauritanian armed forces attended a seminar in Nouakchott which was followed by practical exercises in the proper conduct of military operations and the behaviour in combat required by humanitarian law.

The work of the delegation does not stop at dissemination, however. It also urges governments and National Societies to take action at the national level to ensure implementation of the humanitarian treaties by which the region's States are bound. It reminds the authorities of the ICRC's mandate under those treaties to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees in their places of detention. It also offers the ICRC's services in visiting people detained for security reasons.

One of the regional delegation's longstanding concerns has been the plight of prisoners taken in connection with the Western Sahara conflict (both Sahrawis held by the Moroccans and Moroccans in the hands of the Polisario Front). Many of these have been languishing in captivity for 17 years.

In Algeria, members of the delegation were visiting persons detained in connection with the events of June 1991 and January 1992 until disagreement over the procedure for the visits led to their suspension in July 1992. Discussions continue but the ICRC has not yet been able to resume its programme of visits.

François-Xavier Robadey

François-Xavier Robadey is the delegate at ICRC headquarters with responsibility for North Africa.
DRINKING WATER FOR IRAQ

Two sanitary engineers from the ICRC travelled through Iraq last April to assess water treatment facilities. Their survey showed that economic sanctions against Iraq and the freezing of the country's financial assets had badly affected the operation of both water supply and sewage treatment plants.

Barred from receiving spare parts, water treatment plants in Iraq are currently operating well below their design capacity. The failure of a pump or of an electrical circuit is enough to put them out of action. In Baghdad, for example, what in the past would have been insignificant hitches now regularly deprive hundreds of thousands of people of drinking water and constitute a direct threat to their health.

During their three-week mission, the ICRC engineers visited the major treatment stations in Baghdad and Basra. They also inspected several dozen plants operating in smaller towns. Their discussions with plant supervisors enabled them to draw up a list of priorities for ICRC action.

On the basis of these findings the ICRC decided to resume its technical assistance to the most vulnerable installations for a six-month period. The institution had carried out a previous assistance programme from February 1991 to September 1992, mainly involving the provision of spare parts. This time the aim will be to supply water treatment facilities in Baghdad, Basra and other hard-hit areas with the most urgently needed parts. This indispensable equipment will be installed by Iraqi technicians. An ICRC engineer will be available to help them and will organize one-day courses to ensure optimum maintenance of the equipment.

One person will be recruited in Geneva in June to make the necessary purchases. He will also deal with any export problems that arise (companies often being ill-informed as to how the UN sanctions work). In this context the ICRC's role will thus once again be that of an intermediary.

Philippe Rey

Philippe Rey is the engineer in charge of the ICRC's sanitation programme in Iraq.

THE GULF: SCARS OF THE WAR

More than two years after the end of active hostilities, civilians are still suffering both physical hardship and mental anguish as a consequence of the Gulf war.

Many families are split up, with some members in Kuwait and some in Iraq. All official communications between the two countries remain cut, but thanks to the ICRC these separated relatives can correspond by means of family messages which are forwarded through the Central Tracing Agency with the help of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society. In 1992, more than 23,000 such messages were exchanged between Iraq and Kuwait.

Families dispersed by the conflict naturally wish to be reunited. For example many people, often stateless bedun who have neither Iraqi nor Kuwaiti papers, were trapped in Iraq during the conflict and now want to rejoin their families in Kuwait. Acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC submits requests for family reunifications to the authorities concerned. When all the necessary official documents have been obtained, delegates organize the actual reunification. One hundred and fifty people were transferred in this way from Iraq to Kuwait and 36 from Iraq to Saudi Arabia in 1992.

Another particularly painful and sensitive problem is that of people reported missing. Indeed, many families in Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia still have no news of a brother or a father. Only the governments involved are able to shed any light on the matter. At the request of the States, however, the ICRC has been and remains deeply involved in the effort to trace the missing. It establishes files on individuals who have disappeared and acts as an intermediary in the forwarding of requests and replies.

The work of the Central Tracing Agency thus fosters conditions in which peoples divided by war can achieve reconciliation.

Monique Crettol

Monique Crettol is head of the Middle East sector at the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency.
For 25 years now one of the largest of the ICRC's delegations has been the one in Israel and the occupied territories. At present, 31 expatriates are working there to facilitate and monitor Israel's implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relating to the protection of the civilian population. The delegates' main bases are in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Gaza. From there they move freely throughout the occupied territories, even during curfew. Their primary task is to observe the conduct of the occupying troops. Some 70 locally recruited employees working out of 12 offices in the larger towns of the territories enable the delegates to remain in close touch with the Palestinian residents, who are offered the services of the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency, i.e. forwarding of family messages to relatives abroad, notification of the whereabouts of arrested family members, issuing of detention certificates, etc.

Each delegate knows enough elementary Arabic to serve as a link between newly arrested people who are undergoing interrogation and their families. Some 12,000 detainees are currently being held in the general sections of prisons and in four military detention camps. For several years the ICRC organized two visits a month for detainees' families. The programme was taken over in September 1992 by the Norwegian Red Cross, which in coordination with local branches of the Red Crescent transports between 30,000 and 40,000 people a month from their homes to the places of detention and back.

The ICRC and the Israeli authorities are in constant contact and delegates regularly report on any violations of international humanitarian law that they observe in the occupied territories or in places of detention. Their representations to the authorities concern matters such as the treatment of detainees, the expulsion from the territories of persons protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention and the demolition of houses in the course of police operations carried out by the Israeli armed forces.

In spite of its tireless efforts over the past quarter century of Israeli occupation, the challenges now facing the ICRC in Israel and the occupied territories are basically the same as they were in 1967.

This is why ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga went on mission there once again in May of this year (his previous visit dates back to 1989). During his talks with senior Israeli officials, including President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin, and prominent Palestinians such as Mr. Faisal Hussein and Mrs. Hanan Ashrawi, Mr. Sommaruga stressed the beneficial effects of compliance with international humanitarian law. Ultimately, peace will depend on respect for such values.

Werner Kaspar

Werner Kaspar is the delegate at ICRC headquarters with responsibility for Israel and the occupied territories, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

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THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DIVISION:
Delegates in the forefront of multilateral diplomacy

New challenges
Since the end of the Cold War, the extreme violence unleashed in numerous conflicts has testified to complete disregard for the most elementary principles of international humanitarian law.

The increasing use of aid to pursue political objectives is undermining the neutrality of humanitarian work.

The multiplicity of players now present on the operational scene is giving rise to new needs in terms of coordination.

Multilateral mobilization
In order to halt the erosion of human values, a conscious commitment of States to that effect is urgently required. “To respect and ensure respect” is a fundamental obligation of States, which furthermore have undertaken to act in cooperation with the UN when serious violations occur. A constant reminder must be given of that obligation, particularly at international conferences.

Representing the ICRC in the great fora of multilateral diplomacy – the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), Ministerial Conferences and Summits of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Conferences of Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and of the League of Arab States (LAS), Ministerial Conferences and Summits of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the IPU Inter-Parliamentary Conference – delegates of the International Organizations Division (IOD) are working to heighten that indispensable humanitarian awareness in circles of political responsibility.

That work may take various forms: first will come bilateral discussions, then the distribution of documents and, whenever feasible and appropriate, the issuing of statements.

As part of this general mobilization, the IOD is closely involved in the preparations for the Conference for the Protection of War Victims, which the Swiss Government is convening in Geneva at the end of August.

After leading the New York delegation for five years, Jean-Paul Fallet became head of the International Organizations Division in August 1992.

Operational coordination
With more and more people and organizations becoming involved in humanitarian work, coordination systems have had to be set up within the United Nations. IOD delegates, frequently assisted by colleagues with specialized knowledge of the various geographical regions, regularly take part in meetings of the Interagency Standing Committee and its numerous working groups; the ICRC has observer status at meetings of the Committee.

In this multidisciplinary context, the institution’s representatives try to meet such challenges as reconciling the ICRC’s indispensable independence with the need for consultations, the neutrality of humanitarian work with the political support that work requires, and the individual nature and purpose of each organization with a mutual adherence to a certain number of fundamental principles.

Setting the course for action
The “humanitarian environment” is developing so rapidly that continual adjustments have to be made. Yet the numerous appeals for aid force the ICRC to act at once, leaving too little time to stand back and consider.

Since the IOD frequently attends various fora where mainstream ideas are discussed and takes part in numerous symposia, seminars and round tables, another of its tasks is to help with this essential process of anticipatory thought and analysis within the ICRC.

Structural flexibility
As a unit of the Department of Operations the IOD, which also takes part in senior management meetings of the Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, deals with certain spheres of activity, notably human rights, in Geneva itself (see Dominique Borel’s article). Fortunately the Division, with its highly mobile delegates, can count on reliable support in the field: firstly, the important delegation in New York (see the article by its head, Peter Künig), then delegates in Addis Ababa, Cairo and Riyadh, all three of whom liaise with the regional organizations (see Zidane Meriboute’s article) and, finally, the regional delegations whose services are a vital link in mobilizing support for the ICRC’s work.

Jean-Paul Fallet
COOPERATION BETWEEN THE ICRC AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Besides cooperating with the worldwide, specialized organizations (UN, WHO, ILO, etc.), the ICRC has built up good working relations with the regional organizations (OAU, OIC, LAS, Council of Europe). Thus constructive regular contact has been established with organizations which apparently operate on the basis of so-called “closed” statutes, i.e. exclusively intended for the members of the regions which they cover, and deal respectively with “Pan-African”, “Pan-Islamic” or “European” matters.

Despite their apparent reserve, the ICRC has gradually managed to gain their confidence and be admitted as a matter of course into these organizations. This confidence derives from the fact that the ICRC protects and assists victims in the field. So it is not by chance that the ICRC has been received favourably and even warmly welcomed within these regional fora. This reminds me of a comment made to me at the OAU Summit of Heads of State in Abuja (Nigeria), where a senior diplomat intervened just when I was going up to his Minister to ask for an appointment for the leader of our delegation to see him: “I must admit”, he remarked with a smile, “that initially I didn’t understand why your delegation, with its rather western look, was here; but as soon as I realized it was the ICRC, I said brav! Your place is amongst us because, after all, yours is one of the few organizations which works effectively and impartially on behalf of the Afro-Arab world...”. Needless to say, this eminent diplomat did not fail to arrange a meeting with his Minister in the minutes that followed.

Organization of African Unity (OAU) – Addis Ababa

The OAU undoubtedly plays a major role in defending the interests of the “Afro-Arab world”. It was founded in 1963 on a continent in the throes of decolonization, beset by wars and mass migrations. Its headquarters is in Addis Ababa; with 52 members it represents one third of the international community.

The ICRC has steadily increased its cooperation with the OAU’s three main bodies: (1) the Assembly of Heads of State and Government; (2) the Council of Ministers; and (3) the General Secretariat headed by Dr. Salim A. Salim (Tanzania). In 1986 the OAU adopted a resolution in support of the ICRC’s humanitarian work. Since then, cooperation has been intensified even further and has culminated in the ICRC being granted observer status at the OAU. This status was ratified by the conclusion of a cooperation agreement signed by Dr. Salim A. Salim and President Sommaruga in Geneva in May 1992. The relations between the ICRC and the OAU are important because they enable our institution to be present to greater effect within bodies which determine the course of social and humanitarian programmes in Africa; the OAU is furthermore becoming more and more actively engaged in the prevention and peaceful settlement of inter-African conflicts.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights – Banjul, Gambia

In March 1992, the ICRC was unanimously granted observer status within this Commission, the statutes of which were painstakingly and scrupulously drawn up by African intellectuals and diplomats.

The Commission, composed of eleven distinguished Africans directly elected by the heads of state, plays a decisive role in promoting human rights. In addition, it is responsible for examining periodical human rights reports by African governments and for investigating individual complaints; this is a major step forward in upholding the dignity of African citizens.

The ICRC has established very friendly relations with the African Commission and keeps it informed of developments with regard to respect for and the implementation of international humanitarian law, as well as providing up-to-date information about its activities in Africa.

Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) – Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

The OIC is composed of 51 States in Asia, Africa and the Arab world. It has three main bodies: the Conference of Islamic Kings and Heads of State and Government (Islamic Summit Conference); the Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers; and the General Secretariat headed by Dr. Hamid Alghabid (Niger). The General Secretariat serves as a liaison between the member States and facilitates consultations and exchanges between those States and organizations interested in the Muslim world. One of the aims of the OIC is to defend the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian interests of Muslim countries. It has gained enormous respect among intellectuals and diplomats in the Third World for its pragmatic approach and active role in the peaceful settlement of disputes (Afghanistan, Somalia).
The ICRC is regularly invited to take part in the meetings of Islamic Kings and Heads of State and of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and is likewise in steady contact with the General Secretariat in Jeddah and the Permanent Delegation of the OIC to the international organizations in Geneva. It should be noted that in recent years the OIC has adopted several resolutions supporting the ICRC’s humanitarian work.

**League of Arab States (LAS) — Cairo**

The ICRC also cooperates with the League of Arab States. Set up in 1945 at the suggestion of Egypt, its purpose is to try to restore and consolidate unity within the Arab world and promote cooperation in economic and financial matters, communications, and cultural, social and humanitarian affairs.

Its main bodies are: (1) the Arab League Council; (2) the Arab Specialized Organizations; (3) the Specialized Ministerial Councils; and (4) the Secretariat General, headed by Dr. Esmat Abdel Magid (Egypt).

The ICRC maintains contact with the League of Arab States, especially with its Secretary-General, to exchange views and organize seminars on international humanitarian law.

* * *

For the ICRC delegate to specialized regional organizations everything is a matter of preparation, then steering and lastly following up each mission. Like a musician tackling a new score, he first of all needs stamina (although the conferences are very short, a lot of midnight oil has to be burnt to produce the resolutions on time), then he has to absorb the atmosphere peculiar to each conference; he must therefore have a feel for the problems under discussion and win the participants’ trust by speaking frankly, while clearly emphasizing the ICRC’s humanitarian, impartial and neutral message. At times this is more appropriate than simply mounting a promotional stand which some of the delegates wished to see; or it might be more effective to distribute widely a document of some thirty pages giving a detailed explanation of international humanitarian law in relation to human rights and practical examples of its implementation; or to mount a promotional stand which some of the representatives felt that without a minimum of human rights commissions (Europe, Africa, Latin America).

However 1993 has been a very special year for human rights, as the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna in June. The IOD actively helped to prepare for the Conference; it took part in four preparatory committees attended by almost all States and numerous NGOs. Major controversial issues were tackled, for instance:

- Should priority be given to the right to development or to human rights? Some countries felt that without a minimum of development, human rights could not be addressed. Others conversely felt that development was not possible without respect for human rights.
- Another major issue: selectivity as regards human rights. Why, some people say, should rich countries claim the right to criticize poor countries? They ought to put their own house in order! Why are certain Security Council resolutions mandatory for some countries and not for others? Another source of debate was the assertion: Human rights derive from a western way of thinking; they ought to be reconsidered to take specific cultural conditions into account.

A delegation headed alternately by the ICRC President and by the Director of the Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement (including several people from the various units within the institution) went to Vienna. Its objectives were:

- to represent the ICRC at this world event, the last of which took place in Tehran in 1968;
- to put across the message that the most serious excesses occur during armed conflicts, hence the importance of knowing and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law;
- to distribute widely a document of some thirty pages giving a detailed explanation of international humanitarian law in relation to human rights and practical examples of its implementation;
- to mount a promotional stand which some 5,000 participants could consult if they so wished;
- to show films, with commentaries, about the activities of the ICRC;
- and, of course, to have the benefit of numerous contacts at all levels.

At the time of writing, the results of the Vienna Conference are not yet known, but clearly the IOD looks forward with great interest to the outcome of this event. Will it reflect the world’s indecisiveness or will there be a consensus at least be reached on what it has been agreed to call the “hard core” of human rights – rights which cannot be waived under any circumstances?

Zidane Meriboute

**THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DIVISION AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

An important task of the IOD is to keep track of human rights developments in various international fora.

Although human rights as such are not the direct responsibility of the ICRC, respect for them during armed conflict and its aftermath does come within the ambit of international humanitarian law, of which the ICRC is the guardian.

In fact, there are numerous situations where human rights and international humanitarian law overlap and must both be taken into account. To ensure that international humanitarian law is implemented in the field, one of the ICRC’s roles is to stress its applicability in conflict situations of that kind, especially when the very conflicts themselves prevent mechanisms for the protection of human rights from operating.

Many situations examined by the United Nations from the human rights point of view are thus also of concern to the ICRC. Moreover the ICRC is operationally active in many areas which are subject to United Nations scrutiny, and in particular to that of the Commission on Human Rights at the United Nations Office in Geneva, which conducts an annual review between February and March of all human rights issues throughout the world. Some of the subjects discussed by this Commission are later taken up by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in New York. The IOD must be present in these various fora not only to keep world problems under close observation but also to monitor references to ICRC activities, either in official United Nations reports or in resolutions passed there. The IOD delegates must ensure that any such reference to the ICRC is correct, perhaps suggesting a more appropriate version which would better serve the interests of the victims or if necessary having the mention deleted. In order to do so, the delegates must keep in contact with diplomats and members of NGOs as well as with representatives of regional organizations, which frequently have their own human rights commissions (Europe, Africa, Latin America).

The ICRC maintains contact with the League of Arab States, especially with its Secretary-General, to exchange views and organize seminars on international humanitarian law.

Dominique Borel

At the ICRC, Dominique Borel is the delegate to the international organizations.
THE ICRC DELEGATION IN NEW YORK

It might be wondered why the ICRC has set up quarters in New York, the home of Broadway and the Metropolitan Opera House. The answer is obvious as soon as you remember that this city is not only a unique microcosm of our planet, but has also been host to the United Nations since 1946. Although it is thousands of miles away from the victims of armed conflicts whom we seek to assist and protect, New York gives us immediate, unparalleled access to over 180 governments in a single day.

Observer at the United Nations

In its post-Cold War strategy for peace the world body has considerably increased its interest in humanitarian activities, often closely linking them to considerations of a more political nature. Key principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, such as humanity, neutrality and impartiality, have practically been co-opted by some UN departments and agencies concerned. In October 1990, the ICRC was granted observer status, facilitating contacts and cooperation with various UN bodies.

The General Assembly and most of its main committees are constantly dealing with problems we are also seeking to resolve. In the last ten months, the ICRC addressed the United Nations eight times, including twice in the plenary session. These statements covered items such as humanitarian coordination, militarization of humanitarian aid, environment and armed conflicts, the problem of mines, a specific conflict situation (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and various aspects of the promotion of and respect for international humanitarian law.

Contacts with the Security Council have become an almost daily (and sometimes nightly) routine, as both institutions are dealing with the same situations of armed conflict worldwide, although from different standpoints.

Frequent contacts also take place with representatives of UN Member States. Often these countries are either parties to armed conflicts in places where the ICRC is working or they are otherwise concerned by or interested in ICRC operations and related matters.

As for the UN Secretariat, we keep in touch with most offices and occasionally the 38th floor, the working home of the Secretary-General. Emphasis is placed on contacts with the Departments of Political Affairs, Peace-Keeping Operations and Public Information and the Office of Legal Affairs, but above all with the newly created Department for Humanitarian Affairs.

Good relations also exist with the UN specialized agencies and some NGOs, although most of our contacts with them take place in the field or in Geneva.

At a time when the number and intensity of armed conflicts are on the rise, our institution has neither the exclusive mandate nor the necessary resources to deal with all of the world's humanitarian needs, which are greater and more urgent than ever before. Today, the ICRC is more convinced than ever that thanks to its experience, know-how and independence it can be a most valuable partner to the United Nations.

Guest in North America

It goes without saying that the ICRC presence in North America also facilitates frequent contact with the National Societies concerned, as well as with governments, in order to prepare special missions from and to the ICRC's Geneva headquarters. Frequent lectures and speeches at selected seminars, conferences and round tables on subjects of direct concern to the ICRC are also part of our job. Last but not least, the New York delegation not only maintains close relations with the UN but also accredits press correspondents and, in close cooperation with the National Red Cross Society, other American media representatives interested in ICRC activities and operations worldwide.

Peter Küng

Peter Küng is head of the ICRC's delegation in New York.
THE ICRC, CUSTODIAN OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Ever since it was founded, the ICRC has been closely associated with the development of international law as it relates to armed conflicts. It was upon the initiative of the ICRC that governments adopted the original Geneva Convention of 1864 for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field.

Thereafter it has concentrated on developing international humanitarian law to keep pace with the changing nature of conflicts. The ICRC, custodian of this body of law, and the institution's jurists prepare for the drafting of new provisions, promote the law, explain it in Commentaries, contribute to its dissemination, reexamine its relevance and encourage its development.

However, the ICRC is also responsible for monitoring application of the law and has a mandate to protect and assist victims of conflict. In carrying out this mandate amidst military operations, in occupied territories or in areas affected by disturbances and violence, ICRC delegates witness at first hand the reality of war and the ignorance of or contempt often shown for humanitarian rules. The legal delegates assigned to operations ensure that the ICRC's activities are carried out within a proper legal framework and prepare the way for further legislation and new working guidelines. Conflicts not only take a heavy toll in terms of loss of life and destruction of property; they also crush all hope or belief in a better world. Many of the horrors we are witnessing today could have been avoided if the existing provisions of humanitarian law had been respected by all parties.

Because of the major discrepancy between the law and what actually happens on the ground, it is vital that the implementation of international humanitarian law be seriously discussed. The ICRC therefore welcomes the initiative taken by the Swiss government to convene an International Conference for the Protection of War Victims in August/September this year. It might be hoped that at the present juncture, when the atrocities committed during armed conflicts are attracting more public attention than ever before, States will give a clear indication that they really intend to implement the measures provided for under humanitarian law.

Toni Pfanner

Toni Pfanner has been Head of the ICRC's Legal Division since the beginning of 1993.
Despite universal acceptance of the 1949 Geneva Conventions (181 States party) and the very wide participation in their Additional Protocols I and II of 1977 (126 States party to Protocol I and 117 States party to Protocol II), much undeniably remains to be done if all the provisions contained in those instruments are to be fully implemented.

The Conventions and Protocols create an obligation for States to take, in peacetime, the national measures necessary for implementation of their provisions in the event of conflict. Having such measures adopted is a matter of constant concern for the jurists at the ICRC. For instance, States party to the Geneva Conventions have been sent a series of questionnaires to find out what national measures they have taken, or are planning to take, to implement the law. At the same time many contacts — both at the national level and at regional meetings — have been established with a view to alerting government authorities to the importance of adopting these national measures.

Provisions as important as those dealing with serious breaches of humanitarian law, which are considered as war crimes, will become really effective only if appropriate penal legislation is introduced to lay down sanctions and penalties. The protection of the red cross or red crescent emblem, vital to the safety of medical staff, establishments and transports also depends on appropriate internal measures penalizing any misuse. Efforts made by States to discharge their obligation to respect and ensure respect for the international humanitarian law treaties must therefore be backed up by more effective preventive measures.

However, for the system to function properly, steps should also be taken to repress violations of international humanitarian law. The studies now being carried out by the UN with a view to creating an international tribunal to try persons accused of war crimes and the setting-up of the International Fact-Finding Commission should make for an improvement in the application of international humanitarian law.

Maria-Teresa Dutli

Maria-Teresa Dutli has been a member of the ICRC's Legal Division since 1988.

The twenty signatories of the Geneva Convention of 22 August 1864.
While international humanitarian law must certainly be developed, accepted and disseminated, it must above all be put into effect during armed conflicts. This is the task of States, armed forces and every individual. It is also the objective of the several thousand ICRC expatriate and local staff working in conflict zones. However, they do not wander around battlefields and places of detention with copies of the Geneva Conventions in their hands. To protect the victims they often use arguments which are humanitarian and practical rather than legal. Yet international humanitarian law is the universally accepted basis for their work. This fact carries considerable weight even in circumstances where the law is not specifically invoked.

The ICRC has a small team made up of four jurists, based in Geneva but frequently on mission, who try to provide delegates with the legal arguments they need. This service is intended to improve the delegates' own understanding of the law and to help them in their representations to the authorities. Law which is not invoked becomes a dead letter more imperceptibly but even more rapidly than law which is flouted or is misused for political purposes – the two other major dangers to which international humanitarian law is exposed.

Although in some circumstances humanitarian law is not even mentioned by its custodian, the ICRC, this is not because staff working in the field consider it to be pointless. The true reason is that, when faced with a choice between advancing legal arguments or gaining access to the victims of a situation, they are often compelled by the principle of humanity to opt for access.

The difficulties begin when a given situation has to be defined, which is necessary for application of the law. What State likes to be described as an occupying power within the meaning of the Fourth Geneva Convention, or to hear references to an internal armed conflict occurring on its territory, or to be told that the law of armed conflict applies also to operations of a profoundly humanitarian nature? All too often States do not believe what the treaties, their own jurists and the ICRC assure them, namely that the application of humanitarian law has no effect whatsoever on the legitimacy of their cause.

Then there is a problem of defining a person's status. Who is a prisoner of war, or an enemy civilian, or a neutral civilian, or even a civilian in the hands of his own party amidst the utter confusion that characterizes present-day conflicts, for instance in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia and Iraq?

After the innumerable questions of interpretation, to which field operations frequently require a reply within 24 hours, come the questions as to what happens when the fighting ends. What delegate likes to abandon "his or her" victims without the protection afforded by the Conventions when a conflict is over but the situation remains unstable?

The law supplies fundamental guidelines and support for the work of the ICRC. If the same could be said of States, the fate of millions of victims would be different.

Marco Sassòli
Marco Sassòli is the coordinator of the legal delegates assigned to ICRC operations.
EXAMPLES OF THE LEGAL DIVISION’S ACTIVITIES

□ CD-ROM on international humanitarian law. This provides a comprehensive, well-organized and periodically updated compilation of the main texts relating to international humanitarian law and offers easy access to documents which are sometimes unavailable elsewhere. (At the moment, the CD-ROM exists only in French; a bilingual English/French version should be ready by September 1993.)

□ Regional seminar for the French-speaking countries of Africa on national measures to implement international humanitarian law (Yaoundé, November 1992).

□ Courses on international humanitarian law for diplomats accredited to the United Nations in New York (January 1993) and Geneva (March 1993), organized by the ICRC’s International Organizations Division.

□ Courses on international humanitarian law for professors of public international law (Geneva University Graduate Institute of International Studies, July 1993).

□ Multidisciplinary symposium on anti-personnel mines, under the auspices of the ICRC’s Medical Division (Montreux, April 1993) to see what action might be taken to limit the harm caused to civilians and the environment by these weapons.

□ Working meeting with the jurists of the International Law Commission to discuss the Draft Code of Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind and the setting-up of an ad hoc international tribunal to give rulings on serious violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia (June 1993).

□ Working meeting with the members of the International Fact-Finding Commission (May 1993).

□ Meetings of experts on the protection of the environment in times of armed conflict, under the auspices of the ICRC (January and June 1993), with a view to drawing up a report for submission to the 48th General Assembly of the United Nations (Autumn 1993).

□ Participation in the preparatory conference (April 1993) for the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, due to take place under the auspices of the Swiss government in Geneva in August/September 1993, and drafting of a keynote document later sent to all participating States.

□ Participation in the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993).

□ Meeting of experts on the law of naval warfare, organized in cooperation with the San Remo International Institute of Humanitarian Law (Geneva, September 1993).

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International Conference for the Protection of War Victims
FROM WORDS TO ACTION

Eight hundred and fifteen delegates from 160 States, 39 Ministers, 20 Deputy Ministers and 12 Secretaries of State, the United Nations Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement represented by the Presidents of the ICRC and the Federation and the Chairman of the Standing Commission, and all the major governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the sphere of armed conflict — the Swiss government succeeded within the space of a few months in arranging for all these to come together in Geneva to discuss the protection of war victims and adopt a substantive declaration on the issue. The International Conference for the Protection of War Victims was undeniably a success.

Nothing but talk, sceptics might say: what we need is action.

Of course, the holding of the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims is not an end in itself, nor can one really speak of success unless victims are actually spared and suffering is alleviated. So words, and in particular the Declaration adopted by the Conference, must now be translated into deeds. The international community is faced with an enormous task; the discussions are over, and the time has come for resolute commitment to action.

However, the Conference must also be viewed as a signal. The report submitted by the ICRC called upon States to refuse to accept as inevitable the human tragedies unfolding today in the former Yugoslavia, in Somalia, Angola and many other places. The States did so. It requested them to make every effort to prevent such situations from arising: they agreed to do so, just as they agreed to find ways of helping, despite everything, the victims of situations which have not been brought under control.

The signal that the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims has sent out to the international community must therefore indicate an emergence from the mire of racism, self-seeking isolationism, war and indiscriminate violence and a move towards mutual respect, solidarity, conciliation, and humanity in the midst of war. These ideals may not be achieved in our time, but it is vital that we strive towards them.

So let us take action. However, we must never forget the power of words, nor overlook the fact that on occasion action can take the form of words.

Words can kill as surely as weapons. They can be put to pernicious use in the media, fomenting hatred in the hearts of men and leading children to take up arms. Yet it is also on words, on the commitment of States, that a brighter future will be built. It is words that must convey the humanitarian message in all languages to all peoples of the world. Through words, dialogue can prevail over force.

And surely our first message, in humanitarian terms, to combatants imured in their convictions, in prejudice and intolerance should be: “Talk to each other”!

Yves Sandoz
The Conference was considered to be a great success, not only because the Final Declaration was adopted by all delegations, but also because of the spirit of goodwill, discipline and tolerance which pervaded the three-day meeting. The humanitarian dimension prevailed over any differences of opinion among participating States and remained the focal point of the discussions. Philippe Kirsch, Canadian Ambassador and Chairman of the Drafting Committee, was highly praised for his efforts in conducting the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Declaration.

Addressing the Conference, Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti said that Switzerland, as the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions, had hoped that all participants would state loud and clear their commitment to the fundamental values enshrined in
international humanitarian law and thus give the international community the impetus to implement that law, the validity of which was unquestionable. He was pleased to note that the objective had been met.

In adopting the Declaration by consensus, 160 States agreed to take firm action to apply the humanitarian rules enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. They refused to accept the spreading of war, violence and hatred throughout the world, and the fact that the fundamental rights of the individual are violated in an increasingly grave and systematic fashion. They moreover refused to accept that wounded should be “shown no mercy, children massacred, women raped, prisoners tortured, victims denied elementary humanitarian assistance, civilians starved as a method of warfare, obligations under international humanitarian law in territories under foreign occupation not respected, families of missing persons denied information about the fate of their relatives, populations illegally displaced, and countries laid to waste”.

The States affirmed their intention to work towards the universal application of humanitarian law and to ensure that the representatives of humanitarian organizations had unrestricted access to the victims of conflict. They also undertook to promote greater respect for the red cross and red crescent emblems and to try and ensure that humanitarian aid workers were able to work in secure conditions, without putting their lives in danger. They moreover agreed to step up the teaching of international humanitarian law, especially for the armed forces, and undertook to work towards the establishment of an international war crimes tribunal, so that violations of the law would be duly prosecuted. The States entrusted the Swiss government with the mandate of convening an open-ended intergovernmental group of experts to study practical means of promoting full respect for international humanitarian law.

Following the adoption of the Declaration, the Special Rapporteur, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga, summed up the conclusions of the Conference in seven main points. Referring to the frequent praise of the ICRC’s humanitarian work, the President made a point of thanking all speakers, in particular on behalf of the National Societies which played a vital role in the ICRC’s operations worldwide, and on behalf of the Federation.

Mr. Sommaruga also stressed that the Conference should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather as the starting point for long-term action to ensure that war victims received the protection advocated by all delegates who had taken the floor. The seven points of agreement reached by the Conference were as follows:

- **Universal ratification of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols:** States which had not already done so should be actively encouraged to become party to those legal instruments and to reconsider any reservations made to the Conventions.

- **Improving knowledge of international humanitarian law:** States should endeavour to make the teaching of international humanitarian law an integral part of instruction for all members of their armed forces, from senior officers down to the rank and file. How indeed could humanitarian law be respected if it was not known to those who had to apply it, President Sommaruga wondered. He added that the media had a vital role to play in calling for respect for the victims of war.

- **Clarification of roles:** The blurring of the respective responsibilities of States, international organiza-
Dear Reader,

Following a review of its publications policy, the ICRC has reluctantly decided to discontinue the ICRC Bulletin. The last issue of the Bulletin will therefore appear in December 1993.

The ICRC will advise you in due course of its plans to keep you informed of the institution's activities.

We are confident that we can count on your understanding.

The Editor

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In the second half of 1992, ICRC delegates registered 10,800 detainees and visited 52 detention centres in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Visits continued to 2,750 detainees in 18 places of detention.

In view of the enormous medical needs, the ICRC dispatched a second mobile surgical team to Somalia to supplement the one that had been working there for over a year. Their presence was needed to provide emergency surgery for numerous mine-blast and gunshot casualties.

With the arrival of the second team, provided by the Netherlands Red Cross, more time was also to be devoted to teaching war surgery techniques to Somali doctors and nurses.

The ICRC was deeply shocked and distressed to learn of the violent death, on 14 January, of Kurt Lustenberger, its administrator in Bardera.

The ICRC continued its humanitarian activities for numerous war casualties in Kabul despite increasingly violent clashes between rival mujaheddin groups and daily indiscriminate shelling of inhabited areas. Thanks to its contacts with all the parties concerned, it was able to organize weekly humanitarian convoys to bring medical supplies from Pakistan to the Afghan capital.

The violent fighting which broke out on 25 January in Ruhengeri, Gisenyi and Kibuye, in northern Rwanda, claimed numerous lives and caused over 3,000 people to flee their homes. The ICRC was the only humanitarian organization to remain on the spot.

Following the recent outbreak of fighting between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) and the Rwandese army, most of the 350,000 displaced people living in the north of the country — near Ruhengeri, Byumba and Ngarama — fled further south. Since many people in the south had also taken to the roads, some half a million displaced people were in need of food and shelter. Despite the logistic problems due to the large-scale population movements, the ICRC managed to dispatch a first consignment of relief supplies to the area. Delegates also transported over 50 wounded and sick people to a hospital in Kigali.

On 13 April the ICRC launched an urgent appeal for an additional 111.8 million Swiss francs to fund its activities in Rwanda, bringing the total amount allocated for 1993 up to SFr. 127.5 million. Together with the Rwandese Red Cross, the Belgian Red Cross and the World Food Programme, the ICRC planned to assist 900,000 displaced people who were afraid of returning to their homes in the most fertile areas of the country.

Since February ICRC medical delegates had been evacuating the wounded from the front lines and an ICRC surgical team had
performed 227 operations at the main hospital in Kigali.

MAY

SUDAN

On 10 May the ICRC carried out its first flight to southern Sudan since suspending its activities there a year earlier. The flights were resumed as a result of an agreement with the Sudanese government signed on 21 March. The ICRC planned to visit people detained in connection with the conflict and provide medical care for the wounded. The most serious cases were to be transported to hospitals in southern Sudan or to the ICRC hospital in Lokichokio (north-western Kenya), where greater facilities were available.

AFGHANISTAN

Beginning on 12 May, Kabul was again the scene of violent clashes between rival factions and of indiscriminate shelling. As a result, numerous medical facilities were damaged and the hospitals still in working order admitted over 3,200 casualties. Despite extremely difficult conditions, the ICRC distributed medicines and emergency supplies, such as blankets and mattresses, to various hospitals and medical facilities in the city.

JUNE

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

On the night of 9 June, 1,500 Bosnian Croat women, children and elderly people were transported from Turbe to Novska in Croatia, under ICRC auspices. They belonged to a group of 3,000 civilians who had fled the fighting in the town of Travnik, held by Muslim forces, and had surrendered to Bosnian Serb forces in Turbe. The ICRC had previously secured the agreement of the Bosnian Serb authorities in Turbe and the authorities of the Republic of Croatia.

JULY

GEORGIA

Hundreds of people were injured in Abkhazia during a fresh outbreak of fighting in the second half of July.

The ICRC thereupon launched an appeal to the Georgian and Abkhaz authorities urging them to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, especially those relating to the protection of civilians and the treatment of prisoners. The ICRC also continued to seek access to all the people detained in connection with the conflict.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

The conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, well into its second year, took an increasingly heavy toll. The need for ICRC protection and assistance rose accordingly.

The following figures for ICRC activities between July 1992 and June 1993 are indicative:
- 16,300 detainees were visited;
- 6,800 detainees were released under ICRC auspices;
- 1,300 people were reunited with their families;
- 1.5 million Red Cross messages were handled;
- 38,850 tonnes of relief supplies worth SFr. 86.4 million and medical equipment worth SFr. 14 million were distributed.

AUGUST

ANGOLA

A series of air attacks caused widespread destruction and claimed an unknown number of civilian victims in various parts of Huambo, including residential areas. The indiscriminate assault, which began on 2 August, gave rise to an unprecedented need for urgent humanitarian assistance.

On 4 August the ICRC delegation in Huambo was completely destroyed during an air attack by government forces. By miracle the staff escaped injury.
delegates visited 23 detainees awaiting trial in the RUSSIAN FEDERATION. Red Cross messages, often the only link between detainees and their families or the relative of a refugee living in a camp in former Yugoslavia was delivered in Sarajevo to forward in connection with the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

The situation had been stabilized.

Carrying out an emergency programme once the needs of the displaced with a view to aid agencies working in Georgia, also surveyed the needs of the displaced with a view to carrying out an emergency programme once the situation had been stabilized.

The ICRC therefore launched an appeal to the military and civilian authorities urging them to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, especially those relating to the protection of the civilian population and the safety of civilians in Burundi following the coup d'état on 21 October. Indeed, over 100,000 people had fled violent clashes in the north, north-east and east of the country and sought refuge in the neighbouring States of Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire.

The ICRC was extremely concerned about the safety of civilians in Burundi following the coup d'état on 21 October. Indeed, over 100,000 people had fled violent clashes in the north, north-east and east of the country and sought refuge in the neighbouring States of Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire.

The ICRC therefore launched an appeal to the military and civilian authorities urging them to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, especially those relating to the protection of the civilian population and the treatment of prisoners.

The three-millionth Red Cross message forwarded in connection with the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was delivered in Sarajevo to the relative of a refugee living in a camp in Austria. Red Cross messages, often the only link between detainees and their families or between members of a family separated by a conflict, play a crucial role in areas where the regular postal service has broken down.

While its delegation in Sukhumi resumed visits to hospitals and distributions of emergency medical supplies, the ICRC voiced its concern about the situation of civilians in Georgia, where tens of thousands of people had taken to the roads to escape the fighting or hidden in the mountains for fear of reprisals. ICRC delegates, together with teams from other aid agencies working in Georgia, also surveyed the needs of the displaced with a view to carrying out an emergency programme once the situation had been stabilized.

The ICRC was concerned about the sharp rise in the incidence of tuberculosis, a disease which was meanwhile killing some 13,000 Cambodians annually and was estimated to have infected about 40,000 people in the country.

ICRC relief activities were stepped up as the situation of over 200,000 people displaced by the fighting in Abkhazia and living in Mingrelia rapidly worsened with the onset of winter. The ICRC stepped up its relief activities, planning to provide assistance for 40,000 of these people during the three coldest months.

The ICRC opened two feeding centres in southern Sudan to treat severely undernourished and sick children and adults living in the camps for displaced people in Malakal and Obel.

Before 1988 Israel was holding an average of 4,500 Palestinian prisoners; when the intifada started, up to 17,000 Palestinian prisoners were detained and since 1992 the average has hovered around the 12,000 mark. The institution regularly visits all such prisoners held in Israel and the occupied territories, monitoring conditions of detention and medical care, making representations to the Israeli authorities in cases of need, and requesting the improvements that in the end make so much difference to those behind bars.

Nearly 27 years have elapsed since the ICRC started working permanently in Israel and the occupied territories: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Golan Heights. Now that Israel is set to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and Jericho under the terms of the Declaration of Principles signed on 13 September 1993, the ICRC is in an ideal position to help smooth the transition to autonomy, especially as regards all matters linked to humanitarian issues.

Detention activities have always been a major part of the ICRC's work in the region. Before 1988 Israel was holding an average of 4,500 Palestinian prisoners; when the intifada started, up to 17,000 Palestinian prisoners were detained and since 1992 the average has hovered around the 12,000 mark. The institution regularly visits all such prisoners held in Israel and the occupied territories, monitoring conditions of detention and medical care, making representations to the Israeli authorities in cases of need, and requesting the improvements that in the end make so much difference to those behind bars.

A vital programme

One of the important ways in which detainees can be supported is to receive visits from their families. By 1988 the ICRC was already arranging such visits, and the work involved took on major proportions when the number of detainees rose dramatically during the intifada. In 1992 an agreement was signed with the Norwegian Red Cross (NRC) under which this National Society took on the responsibility for financing and organizing the programme under ICRC auspices. The procedure works as follows.

The Israeli authorities issue lists of detainees entitled to a visit from their families. The lists are posted outside the local
ICRC offices in the occupied territories, and when families see the appropriate names they fill out family visit request forms which the ICRC then forwards to the authorities for approval. If the prison to be visited is in Israel, the stamped form replaces the visa that families would normally need to cross the “green line” separating the occupied territories from that country. On their allotted day, armed with the forms and their ID cards, the families board buses arranged either by the ICRC or the “Central Committee of the Red Crescent Societies”. The whole procedure is supervised by a full-time NRC coordinator.

One example of a regular trip is from the Gaza Strip to the Qeziot military detention centre in Israel. The buses, sometimes as many as 20 of them, arrive at the checkpoint at 6 a.m., having picked up 50 passengers each at various points in the Gaza Strip. Then the lengthy security procedure begins: the passengers have to get out of the buses and their forms are checked carefully against their ID cards. Passengers are body-searched and scanned with metal detectors, and the buses are searched thoroughly. In extreme weather conditions the process can be tiresome, especially since a high proportion of the visitors are elderly people and small children. The NRC coordinator discusses with the authorities ways of making life more comfortable for them; for instance, suggesting that shelters be erected at the checkpoint. Similarly, at Qeziot itself, located in the Negev desert an hour and a half’s drive away, where families are at the mercy of the weather, shelters and minimal toilet facilities have been arranged for use during the long wait. People shuffle forward slowly, dealt with in groups, watched over by heavily armed guards and herded into wire enclosures without seating to await their turn.

Finally, prisoners are brought in batches of 25 from the camp itself, and wait behind a double row of fencing. They and their relatives, three to each prisoner (with no limits on children under two years of age), all shout at each other across the fences for 45 minutes. A major step has been achieved through negotiation between the ICRC and the camp’s special liaison officer: in some enclosures special gates have been made in the wire so that small children can be passed through and hugged by their fathers for 10 minutes. This is a precious privilege.

In 1992 some 287,600 people visited their detained relatives under this scheme, and the number for 1993 looks likely to be similar. The benefits of cooperation

The successful cooperation between the NRC and the ICRC in running the huge family visit programme is an encouraging example of what can be done when resources and expertise are pooled. Another example of cooperation between the ICRC and a National Society is the programme for financial assistance to ten private Palestinian hospitals located in the West Bank and Gaza. The scheme, which started on 1 April 1993, is funded by the European Community and implemented by the Netherlands Red Cross Society in coordination with the ICRC. The budget totals about six million US dollars for a twelve-month period and covers 20-30% of the running costs of the health institutions. It has so far contributed to providing medical services to, amongst others, some 32,000 inpatients.

The programme includes the emergency centre of the El Bireh “Red Crescent Society”, which provides services to some 220,000 people in this West Bank town and in surrounding villages. The “Red Crescent Society” runs a 24-hour emergency centre equipped with three ambulances, health and maternity clinics, a laboratory, pharmacy and mother and child health-care centre. It also helps to organize the family visit programme mentioned above, and last summer arranged a one-month youth camp for 60 girls and boys at an El Bireh school, paying particular attention to dissemination of Red Cross/Red Crescent principles.

One of the keys to a peaceful future in the autonomous territories may well prove to be cooperation. As the handover of power takes place, the Palestinians will find themselves in sole charge of health structures of vital importance to the community. The ICRC is playing its part by coordinating efforts to support such structures and encouraging cooperation to this end with the Federation, the participating National Societies, the existing “Red Crescent” structures and the Israeli counterpart, the “Magen David Adom”.

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