ZAIRE
TRAGIC PLANE CRASH IN KINSHASA

When an Antonov 32 cargo plane crashed into a crowded market in Kinshasa on Monday, 8 January, killing over 260 people, the ICRC delegation there swung into action together with over 80 volunteer first-aid workers from the Zairian Red Cross and went to help survivors.

The country's general economic decline is such that only the ICRC and the National Red Cross Society were able to provide immediate and effective assistance. The first-aid teams treated casualties at the scene of the disaster and took dozens of injured people to clinics and hospitals, to which they supplied medicines and bandages. ICRC and Zairian Red Cross vehicles also transported many of the dead to the capital's mortuaries.

The next day, ICRC and Zairian Red Cross staff returned to the scene in order to collect any mortal remains and clean and disinfect the area as a precaution against epidemics, reported Vincent Nicod, head of the ICRC delegation in Kinshasa.

Further information: Roland Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876
Vincent Nicod, ICRC Kinshasa, Tel. ++24388 46 671 (or 41 228)

BURUNDI
EMERGENCY OPERATION IN BUJUMBURA

The town of Bujumbura has been almost entirely without water since 4 January, after its electricity network was sabotaged. Two generators are still working, so two pumps out of eight can provide water to the town's southern districts. Following a thunderstorm on Sunday, 7 January, the two generators also broke down and were out of action for most of the day. The authorities say that it will take a few days to repair the network itself, but other sources indicate that it will take longer.

The ICRC had suspended all its activities in Burundi a month ago for security reasons, but decided on 5 January to mount an emergency operation. Water tanks were installed at the central prison, in some hospitals, on the university campus and in two schools in Mutanga, and ICRC tanker trucks are bringing water to Bujumbura's hospitals and some neighbourhoods. More than 200,000 litres of water were delivered on 7 and 8 January alone.

Various governmental and non-governmental organizations - the latter include Oxfam and the Belgian and French branches of Médecins sans Frontières - are taking part in this ongoing emergency operation.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876
On Christmas Day, the ICRC twin-engined Beechcraft in Senaki (Georgia) took on board a woman and her mother, born respectively in 1915 and ... 1880. When ICRC delegates expressed polite doubts about the old woman's year of birth she replied that the old Czarist officials had indeed made a mistake when issuing her birth certificate; in fact she had been born five years earlier. Nonetheless, according to the ICRC delegates concerned, both women thoroughly enjoyed their short flight to Tbilisi though the strain was apparently greater on the "younger" passenger.

At the other end of the scale, the ICRC Beechcraft also transported a fifteen-year-old boy, badly injured by an electric shock, from an Abkhaz hospital to a more appropriately equipped Georgian one, as well as two "runaways" aged twelve and thirteen who were being reunited with their mother in Tbilisi. The two boys had set off clandestinely to rejoin relatives for a few days in Abkazia.

These are the more unusual cases of people reunited with their families by the ICRC in the region. About ten people are evacuated out of Abkhazia each month by the ICRC, but they are essentially elderly or sick persons left without any means of support since the fighting in 1993.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 4122 730 2307
Erik Reumann, ICRC Moscow, Tel. ++ 7095 241 51 60
ICRC AND THE HOSTAGE CRISIS

As military operations continue in the village of Pervomayskoye, Daghestan, anxiety about the plight of more than a hundred hostages is growing by the hour. Many of the hostages are civilians, including women. On Tuesday 16 January the ICRC contacted the authorities concerned to request a humanitarian truce of a few hours to enable its delegates to evacuate the sick and wounded from the combat zone.

From the start of the crisis the ICRC has tried in vain to bring aid to the victims. Emergency medical materials and other relief supplies have been taken to a place near Pervomayskoye, where 10 delegates, including a doctor, and about 20 local employees are standing by.

So far it has been possible to give medical assistance to only four health posts in neighbouring villages. Food and blankets have been distributed to about 1,000 inhabitants of Pervomayskoye who managed to flee their homes.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2307
Erik Reumann, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++7 502 224 1294

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

RELEASE OF PRISONERS: DEADLINE 19 JANUARY 1996!

A number of statements have been picked up by the press these past few days concerning the lack of progress in the release of prisoners held by the three parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The ICRC wishes to make the following point in this respect: according to the Dayton Agreement, the three former warring parties have until 19 January 1996 to release all persons detained during the course of the conflict.

As suggested in the Dayton Agreement, on 8 January the ICRC handed over to the three parties a plan of operation for the release and transfer of prisoners detained in connection with the conflict. To date (16/1) the plan of operation has not been accepted by the Bosnian government; it has been signed by the other two sides but neither has complied with it. The Bosnian government is linking the issue of prisoners known to be held by the various parties to the issue of persons who are at present unaccounted for. According to the Dayton Agreement the two issues, each of them serious in its own right, are to be dealt with separately. Consequently, as at 16 January only nine detained persons had actually been released.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2454
Pierre Gautier, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 652 407

NORTHERN CAUCASUS

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
RWANDA

END OF ICRC PROGRAMME FOR CIVILIAN POPULATION

The ICRC's assistance programme for the civilian population in Rwanda came to a close as planned at the end of 1995. Some 360,000 people had received ICRC food aid in the prefectures of Kigali rural, Butare and Gikongoro during the second semester. Most of the beneficiaries were people who had returned to their home areas during the year. On the basis of various agricultural surveys carried out in November, the ICRC feels that these people can become self-sufficient in terms of food during the coming harvest season, which is beginning now. ICRC teams of agronomists distributed seed, mainly beans, last August and September under a programme that covered 65,000 families.

ICRC food distributions will henceforth be limited to detainees in prison - about 45,000 people - until the authorities are in a position to take responsibility for the programme.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876
Nina Winquist, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 72 781

New on the ICRC Public Server, at http://www.icrc.org (English only):

- Update on the former Yugoslavia, dated 11 January 1996.

- Summary (January 1996) of the ICRC's activities in Chechnya/northern Caucasus (Fact Sheet on Chechnya). NB: this text was written before the hostage crisis in Daghestan.
NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC STALLED IN CHECHNYA

Owing to the deterioration of the situation in Chechnya, the Russian authorities have since early January restricted travel by ICRC delegates in the region. Limitations have in particular been placed on their access to central Grozny. Distributions of relief supplies to help the most vulnerable people to survive the harsh Caucasian winter have consequently been suspended in the capital for the past ten days. Thanks to local ICRC employees, water is still being supplied to people in Grozny and Gudermes, and the community kitchen in the capital has remained open. However, no other assistance is possible.

The ICRC is today meeting certain government officials in Moscow with a view to ending the impasse and obtaining the authorizations and guarantees needed to carry out all its activities for victims of the conflict. Their talks should continue in the days to come. Meanwhile, delegates are endeavouring to make similar contacts in Grozny.

The team of ICRC delegates dispatched to the Pervomayskoye area during the hostage crisis last week distributed medical supplies, food and blankets in nearby villages where about one thousand people - those who managed to get away in time - had taken refuge.

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

Press Briefing

Tuesday 30 January
2:30 p.m.
ICRC headquarters
with

Peter Stocker
outgoing head of delegation
in Kabul

For further information and to reserve interview slots, call
Joerg Stoecklin, Geneva
Tel. ++41 22 730 2906
SRI LANKA
SHIFTING CONCERNS

Following the fall of Jaffna to the Sri Lankan army in early December, the ICRC's main area of humanitarian concern has shifted east to the Batticaloa region. Once again, the civilian population has been caught up in a spiral of violence despite repeated representations by the ICRC to both sides, reminding them of their obligation under international humanitarian law to show due respect for all non-combatants.

Up to 300,000 people are still seeking a place of refuge to the south of Jaffna while delegates have not to date been able to assist the several thousand people displaced in the government-held area west of the city. In recent months the ICRC has put much emphasis on providing clean drinking water to the displaced communities to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases in overcrowded areas. In its capacity as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC has provided hundreds of thousands of people with large quantities of medical supplies, food and other basic necessities, much of them supplied by the government.

The ICRC has stepped up its protection and tracing activities in the northern part of the island as a result of the high number of displaced people.

Finally, delegates are continuing their visits to detainees on both sides (some 2,000 were seen in 1995).

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2906

Hot off the press:

an ICRC brochure inspired by the "Water and War" symposium (Montreux, 1994).

This publication seeks to raise awareness about the problems that arise over access to water in conflict situations, particularly when pumping or purifying installations become targets.

For the moment, the brochure is available only in English (French and Spanish versions are being prepared). Its price is 25 Swiss francs.

Orders should be sent to Michel Clapasson
ICRC
19 Avenue de la Paix
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

FAMILIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW
ABOUT RELATIVES UNACCOUNTED FOR

As peace is gradually taking hold in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ICRC is very concerned about the fact that many families still have no news of relatives unaccounted for: "These mothers, wives and sisters are understandably terribly anxious to know what has happened to their loved ones", said Beat Schweizer, head of the ICRC delegation in the country.

On Monday, hundreds of desperate women who had escaped from the enclave of Srebrenica when it fell in July directed their anger at the ICRC delegation in Tuzla and demanded immediate answers to their questions. A small group attacked and ransacked the premises, refusing to leave. ICRC delegates were eventually able to calm them down and explain that the ICRC is doing everything possible to help them.

While the ICRC understands that emotions are running high and that it is intolerable to be without news for over six months, it regrets that violence was used. As things stand, it will not be able to help those concerned until the three former warring parties hand over the information they have concerning the missing. It is up to the parties to break the silence.

In conformity with the Dayton peace accord, the ICRC is setting up an expert commission comprising representatives of the three parties and of the international community. It is in this framework that the parties are to exchange information on the fate of thousands of missing people.

Without such cooperation, the ICRC tracing mechanisms cannot function and anguish will continue to be the daily fare of many families throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Further information: Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 652 407
Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 02
AFGHANISTAN
AIRLIFT PLANNED TO KABUL

With the civilian population of Kabul increasingly deprived of food by a blockade, the ICRC has decided to organize an airlift as soon as possible to bring them relief. The operation is intended to allow the emergency programme already under way to continue assisting the most vulnerable members of society: disabled people and their dependants, widows and orphans. Of the estimated 800,000 inhabitants of Kabul and its suburbs, some 100,000 are currently being aided by the programme. The ICRC calculates that 1,000 tonnes of food (largely wheat, beans, oil, rice, salt, sugar and tea) are required monthly to meet their needs.

The last road into Kabul is now closed, and the ICRC's stocks in the city have dwindled rapidly over the past two weeks. "The city is suffering the harshest winter in four years", said Peter Stocker, outgoing head of delegation. "The bakeries are shutting down one after the other. And the food crisis is being exacerbated by rampant inflation and a shortage of fuel: wood, coal and heating oil. Only one single road convoy has managed to reach Kabul since mid-January". He added: "It's not only the poor who are affected by the blockade - the entire population is in danger. It is therefore vital to restore access to the capital".

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

ANGOLA
MORE PRISONERS FREED

ICRC delegates supervised the release by UNITA on 22 and 23 January of 24 people in the town of Quibala, in Kuanza Sul province. This brings to 390 the number of prisoners set free since the Angolan government and UNITA signed the Lusaka Protocol on 20 November 1994.

It was the thirteenth such operation carried out by the ICRC under the mandate entrusted to it by the parties to the Angolan conflict. In recent months, delegates have also gone to Bentiaba, Huambo, Kuito, Menongue, Lubango, Luena and Uige to supervise the release of persons detained in connection with the conflict.

The ICRC is confident that the parties involved will continue these releases, as part of the ongoing peace process, until all those still held have returned to normal life.

Further information: Sue Featherstone, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 366 666
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2265 or 089 202 3660
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

EVERYTHING POSSIBLE IS BEING DONE FOR SREBRENICA FAMILIES

Improved dialogue with the authorities concerned, freedom of movement throughout the region and increased political support under the Dayton agreement should help the ICRC to work on a new basis in addressing one of the most painful aspects of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina - the disappearance, according to relatives, of over 10,000 people.

This number includes the approximately 8,000 people unaccounted for since the Srebrenica enclave fell in July 1995. ICRC delegates had quickly drawn up lists of names of people reported missing, particularly the 3,000 people last seen in the hands of the Serb forces when the enclave was taken. Another list contains 5,000 names of those who reportedly fled before the Serb forces arrived in Srebrenica. However, the ICRC has so far had to contend with the parties' unwillingness to discuss the problem.

Like the rest of the international community, it must now accept that there is little chance of finding many of those missing from Srebrenica alive. Nonetheless, the ICRC knows that thousands of families will continue to be tortured by the vain hope of finding their loved ones until they receive news about their fate. Their ordeal is exacerbated by the fact that ICRC delegates still occasionally come across detainees from Srebrenica.

Faced with the enormity of its task, the ICRC plans to hold a meeting shortly between high-level representatives of the signatories of the Dayton agreement, the countries who sponsored it, and the former belligerents to set up active tracing procedures.

AND FOR PRISONERS STILL DETAINED

After some very busy days at the end of January, when more than 780 prisoners were released by the Bosnian government, the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats, a last group of almost 200 known prisoners currently remain in detention. This number includes over 60 detainees accused of having committed war crimes who, in accordance with Article IX (g) of Annex 1-A to the Peace Agreement, are being held pending further investigations. These persons are held on the basis of suspicion of having committed violations of international humanitarian law during the war in Bosnia. The others should be released without delay.

To be sure that all prisoners held in connection with the conflict are released in accordance with the obligations endorsed by the parties, the ICRC is following up all allegations concerning places of detention where detainees not yet registered by the ICRC might still be found.

Further information: Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++ 387 71 652 407
Pierre Gauthier, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2839
EAST TIMOR
FORMER OFFICIALS REPATRIATED TO PORTUGAL

Last Wednesday, 31 January, four families from East Timor were repatriated to Portugal under ICRC auspices. On arrival in Lisbon the following day they were met by representatives of the Portuguese Red Cross and the Ministry of Social Security, who will assist them. The 29 people, members of the former Portuguese administration and their families, had stayed on in East Timor after the events of 1975. They were flown to Portugal under a repatriation programme set up by the ICRC in 1979 with the consent of the Portuguese and Indonesian authorities; the last such operation was carried out in May 1994.

Acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC helps reunite people from East Timor with their relatives in Portugal, and repatriates persons suffering particular hardship. Since 1979, more than 1,200 people have been repatriated to or reunited with their families in Portugal.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

SOUTHERN CAUCASUS
ICRC SEED PROGRAMME

Taking advantage of the relative calm prevailing in the southern Caucasus, the ICRC is carrying out a large-scale agricultural programme designed to help the region's population grow some of the food essential to its survival. In Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan, several thousand families living in difficult conditions, mostly in villages destroyed by the fighting, will receive packages of seeds so they can grow their own vegetables. A similar programme, set up by the American Red Cross in close cooperation with the ICRC, is currently under way in Armenia in districts close to the former front lines. And in Abkhazia, the ICRC has opened thirteen community kitchens for thousands of elderly people deprived of all support because of the conflict. Under a special programme, five cooperatives are supplying the kitchens with fresh produce (potatoes and other vegetables).

Further information: François Grunewald, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2163

GENEVA
ICRC'S FINANCIAL SITUATION

Despite cash flow problems announced a few months ago, the ICRC closed its 1995 accounts with a deficit of no more than 8 million Swiss francs for its field operations. Its 1996 field budget provides for expenditure of 570 million francs. The ICRC remains concerned about its financing in the years to come and has taken certain measures to broaden its donor base, as was announced by the head of the ICRC's External Resources Department, Mr Christian Kornevall, at a press conference in Geneva on 7 February.

The volume of the ICRC's operational commitments for 1996 is similar to last year's: Africa remains the largest theatre of operations (276 million francs), followed by Asia (88 million) and Central Europe (73 million). Within these three zones, Rwanda (79 million), former Yugoslavia (66 million) and Afghanistan (45 million) top the list of needs.

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2317
CHECHNYA
PERVOMAYSKOYE: THE AFTERMATH

On 6 February ICRC delegates were able to pay a second visit to 12 Russian policemen still being held by Chechen combatants. The twelve, all from Novosibirsk, were members of a group of policemen captured during the events in Pervomayskoye, Daghestan, in mid-January.

The first ICRC visit took place on 25 January, when 17 Russian policemen were seen. Five of them were subsequently released. All the detainees were given the opportunity to write Red Cross messages to their families, and the replies were distributed during the second visit.

The Chechen fighters captured by Russian Federation forces during the Pervomayskoye events have not yet been seen. The ICRC is still waiting for the authorities to reply to its request for access.

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

IRAQ
MONEY IN THE PIPELINE

In response to growing concern about public health in Iraq, the ICRC has launched a programme worth 5.2 million Swiss francs to help maintain a minimum supply of drinking water and to evacuate waste water during 1996. The programme is based on the results of a survey conducted in November and December 1995, and is the continuation of a similar ICRC project carried out in 1995.

ICRC sanitary engineers have selected over 60 installations throughout the country to be provided with spare parts and brought back into operation. Eleven of the facilities are in northern Iraq, nine in Baghdad and 42 in the remaining 13 provinces. The 1995 programme covered some 90 water treatment and pumping stations, and will be completed in the course of 1996 because of lengthy factory delivery, shipment and clearance times.

ICRC involvement in water and sanitation activities in Iraq began in March 1991, immediately after the end of the military operations. On the basis of an initial assessment made while hostilities were still going on, the ICRC launched several programmes to help Iraq's water boards to restore a minimum supply of safe water. During the first six months of 1991, seven million litres of purified water in plastic bags were distributed to 70 hospitals and 40 schools while ICRC engineers carried out repairs on essential installations.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2876
AFGHANISTAN

THE DEADLY LEGACY: SOME FIGURES

Afghanistan is one of the most mine-infested countries in the world. All factions and parties involved in the Afghan conflict during the past 15 years have resorted to mine warfare. The ICRC has compiled comparative statistics showing the magnitude of the landmine problem over the last five years. Medical reports reveal that 1,606 (close to 20%) out of a total of 9,050 war-wounded patients admitted to various medical facilities in 1995 were mine victims. These figures are incomplete because they do not include data from all Afghanistan's hospitals. Moreover, many incidents are unreported, so the total number of mine victims -- dead and wounded -- in the country must be estimated at about 4,000 for 1995 alone. According to Dr Chris Giannou of the ICRC, "there were so many casualties in the Afghan cities that came under intensive bombing and shelling that the proportion of landmine injuries is remarkably high in relation to the overall number of war wounds".

The ICRC's "Evolution of mine warfare" tables show two peaks of mine casualties: one in 1992 and another in 1995. The first corresponds to a large influx of returning refugees, many of whom unknowingly entered mined areas in their home regions. The second peak represents an upsurge in fighting between the Kabul government and the Taliban movement. This involved the widespread use of mines in the city of Kabul itself, resulting in heavy casualties among both combatants and civilians.

Reports from ICRC field nurses indicate that during fighting around the western city of Herat in early 1995, hundreds of people were wounded and "in about half the cases, the wounds were caused by mines".

It is statistics such as these that prompted the ICRC to launch the current worldwide campaign for a total ban on landmines.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906
Chris Giannou, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2579
TAJIKISTAN

DEAD AND INJURED EVACUATED

On 18 February, ICRC delegates in Tajikistan evacuated the mortal remains of 47 government soldiers killed in clashes during the past few weeks with Islamic opposition fighters in the Mionadu valley near Tavildara. A wounded detainee was also entrusted to the care of the ICRC.

The delegates had been taking part since 14 February in a group composed of representatives from the Tajik government, the opposition and the United Nations, whose mission it was to recover the bodies of 92 victims of the recent fighting. After obtaining the necessary authorizations and the guarantee of a cease-fire, the delegates crossed the front line into opposition-held territory, where some of the bodies lay. However, heavy snowfalls forced them to turn back sooner than planned. They hope to return to the area when the weather has improved.

Further information: Erwin Disler, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2869
Thomas Merkelbach, ICRC Dushanbe, Tel. 73772 314 455

MALI

A FORGOTTEN PATCH OF DESERT...

In the next few weeks the ICRC will launch a medical aid and rehabilitation operation in the Bourem area of northern Mali, between Gao and Timbuktu, which has been ravaged since 1990 by fighting between government forces and rebel movements from the north. The health-care system, totally disrupted by looting of equipment and stocks, has not been working for the past five years and children have not received vaccinations.

An ICRC doctor has carried out a survey this month of the health-care situation in the area to find out what kind of aid the population needs. The priority is to assist local Malian staff in getting the four dispensaries in the Bourem area going again and to put together a new vaccination team. In order to serve a partly nomadic population scattered over tens of thousands of square kilometres, 30 people have already been trained in first aid and public hygiene, enabling them to provide basic health care.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876
COLOMBIA

SIGNED IN BOGOTA...

A framework agreement was signed on 17 February between the Republic of Colombia and the ICRC. Supplementing the headquarters agreement that already exists between the two, the new accord significantly strengthens the legal basis for the delegation's work in the country, in particular its efforts to protect and assist the victims of internal violence and to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law.

According to various sources, some 40,000 people die violently in Colombia each year, while about 600,000 have been displaced by the fighting.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2454

AFGHANISTAN

FLYING FOOD

Since the ICRC airlift to Kabul began on 3 February, some 500 tonnes of food have been flown in from Peshawar and distributed to over 70,000 people. Widows, orphans, the elderly and other needy people, including many families with disabled breadwinners, have been the first to receive this emergency aid. The distributions, carried out by volunteers from the Afghan Red Crescent, started in 10 of the 16 districts of the Afghan capital and will be extended to cover the remaining districts as more aid arrives.

Initially intended to meet the needs of 100,000 particularly vulnerable people, ICRC aid will probably have to be stepped up, as within 15 days alone over 60,000 other people came to be registered on the ICRC's distribution lists. In the meantime, the total blockade to which Kabul had been subjected has now eased somewhat with the intermittent reopening of the southern access road. "While it's true that the reopening of the southern route has made it possible to build up emergency stocks sufficient for two weeks", cautioned Mick Greenwood, ICRC relief coordinator in Kabul, "the airlift will go on, both to make up for the shortfall in January and to meet the urgent needs of the people now receiving ICRC aid. And that means bringing in 1,000 tonnes per month."

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2906

Just published

"GUERRE ET SANTE PUBLIQUE"
by Dr Pierre Perrin

This specialized book for health-care and other staff in charge of conflict-related humanitarian operations deals, among other things, with the major health hazards that arise when large groups of people are displaced.

Priced at 35 Swiss francs, the book is as yet available in French only. An English version will appear in May.

Orders should be addressed to: Mr Michel Clapasson, ICRC, 19 avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland (Fax: ++41 22 733 2057).
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

UPROOTED

The ICRC delegation in Pale has launched an emergency programme to assist the tens of thousands of civilians currently fleeing the suburbs of Sarajevo.

Enough first-aid supplies and medicines to cover 80% of the needs anticipated by the ICRC have been delivered to mobile medical facilities set up by the Republika Srpska along the three main routes taken by the displaced people (the roads from Sarajevo to Bijeljina, Visegrad and Foca-Srbinje). The ICRC has also delivered 500 hygiene kits (including soap, washing powder and water-purifying tablets) to five transit camps installed around Pale, and dispatched water tanks, water-purifying chemicals and jerrycans to the Bijeljina, Visegrad and Foca-Srbinje areas.

It is anticipated that about 60,000 people will flee the suburbs of Sarajevo within the next few days. They are expected to be resettled in eastern Bosnia, from the Brcko area in the north-east to the Trebinje region in the south-east.

On 26 February the ICRC also visited the three people currently being detained by the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. Delegates assessed the conditions of detention and interviewed the detainees in private, in accordance with the ICRC's customary procedures. The visit took place pursuant to an agreement reached in May 1995 with the International Tribunal and on the basis of the ICRC's universally recognized humanitarian mandate.

Further information: Pierre Gauthier, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2839
Anne-Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 656 894

SIERRA LEONE

FOOD AID IN KAILAHUN

In three separate operations carried out between 5 and 21 February, an ICRC team brought 150 tonnes of food aid across the border from Guinea into the Kailahun district of eastern Sierra Leone. The supplies were distributed to civilians suffering from shortages in an isolated region under the control of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which is in conflict with the authorities in power in Freetown.

A team of specialists will go next week to Daru, Segbwema and Zimmi to assess the food supply and the health of local people. Their findings will likely result in the rapid launching, in conjunction with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, of a relief operation. The three towns, all in government-held territory, are currently home to some 200,000 people, tens of thousands of whom have fled the fighting. Indeed, from a population of 4.6 million people before the war, 1.6 million of Sierra Leone's citizens are now displaced within its borders and a further 400,000 have taken refuge outside.
Relations carefully cultivated for over a year with all of the parties concerned by the conflict today enable the ICRC to facilitate contacts between the RUF and the authorities in Freetown. When the RUF delegation travelled to Abidjan for negotiations on 25 February, it was aboard aircraft displaying the red cross emblem. Following these first direct talks the ICRC also arranged the return to Freetown of the government delegation.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 222 459
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876

IRIAN JAYA

ICRC CONTACTS OPM.

For the past three weeks the ICRC has been using its good offices in Irian Jaya following the abduction, on 8 January 1996, of both Indonesian and foreign nationals by the Free Papua Movement, or OPM. The ICRC took action after all contact had been broken off between the Indonesian authorities and the abductors, and its efforts continue with the agreement of all the parties concerned. A team of five delegates (including the head of the regional delegation in Jakarta) has been based since 9 February in Wamena, Irian Jaya, from where they are conducting their operation by means of a civilian helicopter. The ICRC has also been using the Bahasa Indonesia services of the BBC and Radio Australia to make as many people as possible aware of the neutral nature of its operation. The basic goal is to facilitate any exchange of information that could lead to a peaceful resolution of the situation, and to restore contact between the 12 individuals still believed to be held (six Indonesian, four British and two Netherlands nationals) and their families.

Forthcoming medical visit to hostages

Last week the ICRC was able to bring about the first exchange of letters between the hostages and their families. Following further exploratory contacts with the abductors, Henry Fournier, head of the ICRC delegation, met local OPM leaders Kelik Kwalik and Daniel Kogoya on 25 and 26 February. The OPM leaders gave the ICRC a second series of messages to be forwarded to the hostages' families, and the ICRC handed over to them a supply of clothing, food and medicines for the 12 people being held in the jungle.

A medical visit to the hostages by the ICRC, which had been scheduled for 27 February, had to be cancelled for logistical reasons. It should now take place on 29 February.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, CICR Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2906

CAMBODIA

A "FORTRESS OF MINES"

For over a month, heavy fighting has been raging between the Khmer Rouge and Cambodian government forces in the north-west of the country. According to ICRC delegates in the region, over half of the wounded arriving at hospitals are the victims of anti-personnel mines. One out of four is a civilian. Reports speak of a veritable "fortress of mines", laid by the Khmer Rouge, which government troops have been storming since they started their offensive in the Pailin area on 15 January.
Hospitals in Battambang have been under particular strain since the offensive began: nearly three quarters of the surgical cases admitted to the city's civilian hospital are war-wounded, and the military hospital has already exhausted the medical supplies provided by the ICRC and thought to be sufficient for the rest of the dry season. In the first month of the offensive, 450 wounded people were admitted to the region's three main hospitals. The ICRC has supplied the Mongkol Borei hospital with a supplementary stock of medicines and provided bandages to the first-aid post in Poipet, where a great many civilians have fallen victim to the regular shelling.

From 30 January to 1 February ICRC delegates also visited 24 security detainees being held by the government in Battambang's central prison.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

NORTHERN CAUCASUS
ASSISTANCE FOR THE WOUNDED

Clashes once again broke out last week between the forces of the Russian Federation and Chechen independence fighters in Novogrozny, in eastern Chechnya, and in both Archty and Galachki, in the neighbouring Ingush Republic to the west. In the past few days ICRC delegates have distributed about one tonne of medicines and other emergency medical supplies to local facilities treating the wounded.

Meanwhile, distributions of drinking water are continuing in some parts of the Chechen capital Grozny, and four community kitchens are serving hot meals daily to almost 2,000 particularly vulnerable residents of the city. Another two kitchens are soon to be opened. The ICRC is running the community-kitchen programme in conjunction with the local Red Cross.

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

ARMENIA
VISITS BEGIN TO SECURITY DETAINEES

An ICRC team made up of two delegates, a doctor and two interpreters began a series of visits to security detainees in Armenia on 13 February. An agreement signed with the Armenian government, the result of lengthy negotiations, gives the ICRC access to all the country's prisons for visits carried out in accordance with its customary procedures.

The visits will enable delegates to ascertain whether the detainees are being held in acceptable conditions, and to register the detainees and interview them in private. Medical assistance will also be provided, according to need, in each place visited.

Meanwhile the ICRC is continuing its visits, begun in 1992, to Azerbaijanis detained in connection with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2307
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA
CONTINUING EMERGENCY

Following the mass exodus of Serb families from Sarajevo in the past week, the ICRC has launched an operation to distribute some 20,000 blankets, 30,000 candles, 25,000 individual parcels and thousands of pairs of women's and children's boots and shoes over the next three weeks, to help this latest wave of displaced people cope with the rigours of winter.

According to ICRC delegates in Bijeljina, the roads in the Republika Srpska are "jammed with cars bearing Sarajevo number plates, all packed with people, leaving little room for belongings".

Some of these most recent victims of a dying conflict simply stop along the way and try to make do in the burnt-out shells of ruined houses. Others are settling in camps or with local inhabitants in Vlasenica, Bratunac, Zvornik, Brcko and of course Bijeljina, where the ICRC is providing daily food rations, emergency medical care and essential water-supply and sanitation facilities.

Further information: Pierre Gauthier, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2839
Anne-Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++ 387 71 652 407/656

NORTHERN CAUCASUS
THOUSANDS MORE DISPLACED

Since 3 March, almost 10,000 people have fled Sernovodsk in western Chechnya because of the fighting between federal Russian troops and Chechen separatist forces. The displaced people are making their way to the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, to southern Chechnya or towards Grozny.

ICRC delegates immediately distributed blankets and food to several hundred people arriving in nearby Ingush villages, in particular Sleptsovskaya and Troitskaya. About 15 tonnes of relief supplies were rapidly dispatched to the area. From Monday 4 March the number of arrivals swelled and delegates distributed aid to some 6,000 people accommodated in public buildings. In southern Chechnya and the Grozny area the ICRC is assessing the situation with a view to providing the necessary assistance.
An ICRC nurse went to medical facilities in villages around Sernovodsk and to the hospital in Sleptsovskaya on 4 March to replenish the medical supplies already provided during the last two weeks.

In the evening of 5 March an ICRC team was still waiting to enter Sernovodsk, where fighting was continuing, to bring aid to the remaining civilian inhabitants and evacuate the wounded.

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

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SRI LANKA

SAILING HOME

The ICRC has just arranged for some 350 civilians from Karainagar and islands west of the Jaffna peninsula to return to their homes. The people concerned had been stranded in the eastern town of Trincomalee since last summer, when the ferryboat Iris Mona ceased to ply between the two regions. The Iris Mona was highjacked on 29 August 1995 by rebels of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

The ICRC operation, which was carried out at the request of the Sri Lanka government, lasted through February and into the first week of March. The civilians travelled aboard the Habarana, a ship chartered by the ICRC and sailing under its protection. Several return voyages were necessary to transport them all. The waters in this area are considered to be within a conflict zone because of frequent armed clashes between the Sri Lanka navy and the LTTE.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

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New on the ICRC Public Server, at
http://www.icrc.org
(English only):

- Update on Sierra Leone, dated 4.3.1996.
"Enough is enough! The most basic rules of war have to be respected", said Jean-Marc Bornet, ICRC Delegate General for Eastern Europe on his return from Chechnya. Mr Bornet deplored the fact that the Russian authorities had remained deaf to repeated ICRC requests for a humanitarian truce in order to assist the trapped civilian population and evacuate the wounded in Gudermes in December 1995, in Pervomaiskoye the following month and, more recently, in Novogrozensky and Sernovodsk. Because of this lack of response and the pattern now established by Russian federal forces when reacting to attacks launched by Chechen fighters from civilian-inhabited areas, the ICRC fears that other towns might suffer in a similar manner.

The ICRC is also concerned about the unsatisfactory security conditions with which ICRC delegates in Chechnya and representatives of other humanitarian agencies have to contend. All have experienced incidents akin to pure banditry, such as extortions, robberies and even kidnappings. Because of this, the ICRC has had to reduce its personnel there to a maximum of eight expatriates for priority work, namely the water and sanitation programme in Grozny and the provision of medical assistance to 20 hospitals and other medical facilities in Grozny and southern Chechnya, where more war wounded may be expected within the next few weeks.

Furthermore, the ICRC has not yet been given regular access to places of detention on either side. Because of the clan structure of Chechen society and the very superficial awareness of international humanitarian law (which, among other things, forbids the taking of hostages), ICRC delegates find the situation with regard to people detained by pro-Dudaev forces difficult to monitor.

For the first time since the fighting flared again in Grozny, ICRC delegates have managed to take in eleven trucks carrying drinking water and food for distribution among the civilian population and hospitals. Assistance was also given during the past week to 11,000 of the displaced people from Sernovodsk who found shelter in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia.

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

SIMPLY (ONE OF) THE BEST

The ICRC's proverbial modesty is being put to the test... in early March we received an e-mail from the "America's Best Committee" informing us that our institutional web site (http://www.icrc.org, should it need repeating) had been selected as one of "America's Best! Hot Site for the Month", a choice based on "content, presentation and usefulness". Needless to say, this shook traditional ICRC reserve right down to its foundations. Our natural instinct for humility suggested a discreet inquiry into this unusual honour. Our electro-sleuths found that only 19 other sites have been paid a similar tribute for this month.

Further information: Karen Saddler, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2391 or, better still, on: webmaster.gva@gwn.icrc.org
ICRC NEWS - READER SURVEY

ICRC News was devised to provide journalists - particularly those working for "wire" agencies and radios - with a regular round-up of ICRC operational news. It aims to highlight humanitarian activities under way in today's conflict zones.

Over the past months, our readers might have noticed some changes in the ICRC News lay-out: the stories have become leaner and, hopefully, pithier. It has been our objective to provide them with a quick yet informative read.

At this stage, we would like to consult with our "end-users". I would therefore be grateful if our readers could find time to answer the following questions and send their answers back to us (by e-mail, fax or even post).

Thanking you in advance,

Kim Gordon-Bates
ICRC News Editor

1) What type of media are you?
wire agency: ☐ radio: ☐
print: ☐ other: ☐

2) Do you find ICRC News useful?
very: ☐ a bit: ☐
not at all: ☐

3) Do you read/use it:
regularly: ☐ sometimes: ☐
hardly ever: ☐

4) Do you phone the numbers provided at the end of each story?
often: ☐ regularly: ☐
sometimes: ☐ not at all: ☐

5) Since ICRC News is an institutional publication do you believe it provides you with all that the ICRC has to offer?
yes: ☐ no: ☐

6) Is the information timely?
yes: ☐ no: ☐

7) How would you qualify ICRC News stories?
user-friendly: ☐ so so: ☐
obscure: ☐

8) An average issue has three or four items. Is this enough?
yes: ☐ no: ☐

9) What attracts you to a particular item?
the geographic tag: ☐ the title: ☐
the news is being broadcast where else: ☐

10) Do you use the ICRC WWW (http://www.icrc.org)?
yes: ☐ no: ☐

11) Is there anything else you would like to see in ICRC News?
more colour: ☐ more quotes: ☐
more figures: ☐ other: ☐

12) Please add any other comment you would like to make:
NORTHERN CAUCASUS
AN ENDLESS NIGHTMARE

Clashes between Russian Federal troops and Chechen independence fighters are becoming ever fiercer. After the village of Sernovodsk, to which the ICRC has still not had access, it is now Samashki which, since Friday 15 March, has been the scene of heavy fighting, including shelling. The ICRC fears the worst for the several thousand people who have been unable to flee and are trapped in the town, for they are all too likely to share the tragic fate of other inhabitants of Chechnya, who can neither receive food aid nor be evacuated from the combat area.

In Sleptsovskaja, in Ingushetia, about 9,000 civilians who managed to flee in time have come to swell the ranks of displaced people from Sernovodsk. In conjunction with other humanitarian agencies, ICRC delegates have swung into action, distributing blankets and food to some 3,000 of them sheltering in public buildings.

The consequences from a humanitarian standpoint are alarming indeed. Whereas in mid-1995 large numbers of displaced persons returned to their villages, a reverse trend has now been observed for several weeks. There are currently estimated to be about 60,000 displaced people in Ingushetia and some 40,000 in Daghestan, where 1,500 people have just arrived from the Noyayurt area, where fighting is also taking place.

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

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
THE DEADLY THREAT

With an estimated 2 to 3 million landmines and unexploded ordnance lying scattered throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, the civilian population faces constant, grave danger. Many people have no choice but to live and work in areas which are heavily contaminated with these deadly devices, especially people close to the former confrontation line, where four years of war have rendered the ground an extremely dangerous place to set foot.

Among the most vulnerable groups are children, who often play in mined areas and who are tempted to pick up strange-looking objects if they are not made aware of the danger. Displaced people on the move and farmers are also easy targets for mines. Precise information about the number of civilians maimed or killed in mine accidents is not known.
The ICRC has launched a comprehensive mine-awareness campaign, in cooperation with the network of more than 150 local Red Cross branches, to inform the civilian population in all of Bosnia-Herzegovina about the threat. Citizens in all communities are being told how to avoid mines and whom to contact if a mine is found.

This emergency information programme consists of daily radio and TV spots sent out by local broadcasters as well as the distribution of 100,000 brochures and 10,000 posters to schools, community centres, various associations, public kitchens and medical facilities, in order to reach the greatest number of people.

The second phase of the mine-awareness campaign will begin next month when a mine expert arrives in Bosnia to conduct workshops with 150-200 local Red Cross volunteers, who will be taught how to disseminate information on landmines in their local communities.

Further information:
Pierre Gauthier, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2839
Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, Tel. ++ 38 771 652 407

SOMALIA
AN ORIGINAL FORM OF EMERGENCY AID

Renewed fighting in one of the most inaccessible areas of Somalia has obliged the ICRC to mount an urgent operation to help some 20,000 families in the south-west of the country. Life in the provinces of Bay and Bakool has become particularly difficult for the civilian population since the towns of Baidoa and Huddur were captured by General Aidid's forces.

Confronted by an already worrying situation that could easily worsen, the ICRC is preparing to deliver a large quantity of tarpaulins and blankets to protect the population from severe weather conditions.

For various reasons essentially connected with security, the ICRC will distribute this aid through a network of intermediaries consisting of traders and village headmen. This unusual form of humanitarian action has proved its worth, making it possible to come to the aid of victims of the Somali conflict while closing monitoring whether the assistance provided goes to those in need and that they put it to proper use.

Further information:
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 28 76
Nic Sommer, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++2542 716 339
AFGHANISTAN
AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMMES RESUME

With the snows melting and spring in the air, the ICRC's agricultural programmes in Afghanistan are beginning to stir. In addition to the existing projects, four nurseries have been set up in districts around Kabul to grow vegetables in greenhouses and distribute the plants to the poorest farmers in the capital's suburbs.

A network of craftsmen specialized in tool-making has been considerably expanded and new workshops have signed production contracts with the ICRC. They will be producing spades, sickles and hoes for the thousands of farmers who are endeavouring to grow crops again in areas devastated by the conflict.

In this country where war has dealt a heavy blow to the environment as well (thus causing a chronic shortage of fruit and firewood) the ICRC has launched a large-scale tree-growing programme under which tens of thousands of trees have been planted in nurseries in the four provinces of Kabul, Parwan, Nangarhar and Ghazni.

In addition, the ICRC and the Afghan Red Crescent are preparing a large-scale campaign to increase awareness of the danger posed by mines. The aim is to help peasants and local leaders to become more effective in facing this constant danger wherever it arises, including regions where there are ICRC agricultural programmes.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 29 06

Press Conference:
ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES
A MILITARY STUDY

There can be no doubt that the most burning issue relating to anti-personnel mines is that of their military usefulness. Every year these weapons claim tens of thousands of victims, most of them civilians - but are they really indispensable for the military? To obtain an answer to this question, the ICRC commissioned a detailed study on the use of this type of mine in conflicts over the past 55 years.

Mr Patrick Blagden, a former Brigadier-General in the British Army and Senior Demining Adviser to the United Nations, and Mr Yves Sandoz, Director of the ICRC's Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, will present the report at a press conference:

on Thursday, 28 March 1996
at 9.30 a.m.
at ICRC headquarters
Projection room, building 3

For further information and to arrange interviews, please contact
Tony Burgener, ICRC Press Division, Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 17
I. Introduction

II. Literature Review

III. Methodology

IV. Results

V. Discussion

VI. Conclusion

References
PHILIPPINES
EMERGENCY ACTION IN MAGUINDANAO

On 25 March two ICRC delegates went to Cotabato City, in the southern part of the Philippines, following the serious clashes that had recently taken place in the Muslim part of the Maguindanao area (Mindanao Province). Fighting broke out in mid-March between Philippine armed forces and rebels of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), causing the displacement of thousands of civilians.

The delegates' task was to assess the needs, particularly in nutrition and hygiene, of displaced people who had been unable to obtain assistance either from the local administration or from the non-governmental organizations present in the area. According to an initial survey undertaken by the ICRC on 18 March at the request of the Philippine National Red Cross, some 4,000 families from the Sultan Kudarat and Laambayong areas have been housed in a dozen evacuation centres. ICRC delegates visited three of these, set up on the premises of primary schools in Laambayong, and noted that several non-governmental organizations were working there. The aim now is to draw up, in cooperation with the local authorities, a plan to cover the needs of the displaced people in all the other evacuation centres.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2906

Press Conference (reminder):

ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES
A MILITARY STUDY

Do armies really need landmines? This question has probably been the most controversial focal point of the whole anti-personnel landmine campaign. To try and answer it, the ICRC commissioned a detailed study on the subject. Mr Patrick Blagden, a former Brigadier-General in the British Army and Senior Demining Adviser to the United Nations, and Mr Yves Sandoz, Director of the ICRC's Department for Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, will present the study at a press conference:

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For further information and to arrange interviews, please contact:
Tony Burgener, ICRC Press Division, Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2317
SIERRA LEONE
A HUMANITARIAN WEDGE

The town of Zimmi, in south-eastern Sierra Leone, has been virtually cut off from the rest of the country for several years by the fighting between the government in Freetown and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). From 20 to 22 March, the ICRC for the first time supplied food aid to this town under government control. Since the roads are too dangerous to use, all travel between the towns of Kenema and Zimmi takes place in a helicopter displaying the red cross emblem. Some 40 tonnes of oil, and corn and soya flour were brought in by air and distributed to 5,600 people. At the same time, a vaccination campaign was conducted for 1,000 children under the age of five.

It was also on board a helicopter marked with a red cross that the ICRC enabled the leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, to travel to Côte d’Ivoire for negotiations with the government of Sierra Leone. Meanwhile the ICRC is continuing its food-aid distributions in the Kailahun area, which is under RUF control.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2876
René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Abidjan, tel: ++225 222 459

BURUNDI
HELP NOW... AND FOR THE FUTURE

Several dozen people were killed or wounded on 20 March during an attack on the Songa area, in southern Burundi (Bururi Province). An ICRC team was on the spot the next day, bringing emergency medical assistance in the form of dressing, injection and perfusion sets. According to early estimates, about 5,000 people fled their homes, most of which were set on fire. Two ICRC convoys also arrived in the Bururi and Rumeza areas on 23 March to distribute more aid (4,600 blankets and hundreds of pans, jerrycans and plastic sheets). On 25 and 26 March, a team of ICRC technicians specializing in problems of water supply and evacuation installed latrines in the places where the displaced people had gathered.

On 19 March the ICRC also completed a major long-term agricultural assistance operation for 125,000 people in the northern and north-western provinces. In all, 220 tonnes of seed and 23,000 hoes have been distributed since 21 February 1996. This operation is intended to enable people affected by the violence to regain a degree of self-sufficiency and thus of dignity.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2876
RWANDA
OVERCROWDING EASED IN KIGALI PRISON

On 22 and 23 March Rwandan authorities transferred more than 3,000 prisoners from Kigali's central prison to new, more spacious quarters in the nearby Gikondo facility, a coffee factory converted into a detention centre. ICRC delegates were present to check the identities of the prisoners and register those who had not been seen previously. They also distributed blankets, soap, detergents, plastic mugs, plates, spoons and a one-week supply of food rations for all the detainees.

The ICRC delegation in Rwanda expressed its satisfaction at the transfer, which has somewhat eased the overcrowding in the Kigali prison. Opening new places of detention nevertheless remains as urgent as ever: the 14 central prisons in Rwanda still house 47,000 prisoners for an estimated capacity of 16,000.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2876
Nina Winquist, ICRC Kigali, tel: ++250 72 781
UGANDA

RESPONSE TO NEW NEEDS HAMPERED BY LANDMINES

The ICRC and Uganda Red Cross Society is preparing a relief operation for victims of the fighting in northern Uganda, where clashes between government forces and the Lord's Resistance Army are reported to have left dozens dead and thousands homeless in the past two months.

A survey conducted by ICRC and Uganda Red Cross teams in Kirombe parish, near the town of Gulu, has identified 124 families in need of immediate assistance. They will be given relief supplies including plastic sheeting, household items and seed. Assessments will continue in other affected districts to determine the number of families needing emergency help.

Many civilians have been injured by anti-personnel landmines laid along village paths. Friedrich Steinemann, the ICRC's regional delegate in Kampala, said: "The mine problem has also hampered the movements of the Red Cross teams carrying out assessments of the victims' needs. We cannot go to certain areas because mines have been laid on the main roads too".

The operation is receiving support from the ICRC's regional logistics centre in Nairobi, which on Tuesday 2 April dispatched a consignment of relief supplies by road to Kampala.

Last year the ICRC and the Uganda Red Cross Society provided assistance for more than 700 families in the Kitgum and Gulu districts affected by the ongoing conflict.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2876
Friedrich Steinemann, ICRC Kampala, tel. ++ 25641 230 517/232 088
Nic Sommer, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++ 2542 716 339
ICRC NEWS READER SURVEY (II)

A few weeks ago ICRC News sent out a brief questionnaire to its readers with the aim of assessing the value of our weekly information sheet to users. Many of you have already sent us your replies, and the results show that the survey was a worthwhile exercise. Many others no doubt intended to answer but never got round to doing so. As a last chance for our busiest readers to make their mark on our development, here is a repeat of the questionnaire. Please return the completed form to ICRC News by fax, e-mail, or post.

We shall publish a breakdown of the survey’s findings in due course.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Kim Gordon-Bates
Editor, ICRC News

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<td>(12) Any other comments:</td>
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION (NORTHERN CAUCASUS)

HUNDREDS WOUNDED

Fighting has continued in the Chechen Republic between Russian forces and Chechen separatist fighters. Further villages - Goyskoye in the west and Vedeno in the south - have now suffered the same fate as Sernovodsk and Samashki. The departure for Daghestan of some 4,500 people in recent weeks would seem to confirm the tension prevailing in the Nozha Yurt and Gudermes area.

Hospitals near the conflict zones have admitted several hundred casualties over the past three weeks, and the ICRC has distributed emergency supplies to a dozen medical facilities in Grozny and southern Chechnya. In Ingushetia and Daghestan, delegates are closely monitoring the situation of recently displaced people. Over 12,000 have so far received food and blankets. In addition, 3,500 of the most vulnerable have received one hot meal a day this week from the seven community kitchens (five in Grozny and two in Gudermes) being operated in conjunction with the local Red Cross.

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

RWANDA

WATER SUPPLIES RESTORED

Many of the inhabitants of Gikongoro prefecture in Rwanda are once again receiving direct supplies of drinking water, and therefore no longer have to make long and arduous trips on foot to fetch it. Working under ICRC auspices, the American Red Cross has just completed a water-supply and sanitation project - one of nine undertaken in the prefectures of Gikongoro and Butare. "Restoring a direct supply of drinking water is one of the most pressing needs in Rwanda", said Markus Baechler, the ICRC’s water and sanitation coordinator, speaking at the ceremony to inaugurate the new system. "When work started here, not a single drop was making it through to the public standpipes along this 48-kilometre network".

Running parallel to the actual rehabilitation work is a programme to make people aware of the need to take care of water-supply systems. The point is being put across in particular by means of a play that has been performed in recent weeks, which also shows people ways to avoid disease caused by contaminated water.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, ++2542 714 075

Large parts of southern Lebanon, areas around the capital Beirut and the northern part of Israel have been under intense fire these past few days. Over 400,000 people have had to leave their homes in southern Lebanon, while many thousands of others have chosen to stay behind despite the fighting. In northern Israel, up to 10,000 people have fled as a result of rocket attacks in the region. The ICRC has expressed its concern about the way the civilian population on both sides of the border is being subjected to military pressure, either coming under direct bombardment or being forced to seek refuge elsewhere.

As a result of this latest upsurge of violence, the ICRC has mobilized resources and personnel so as to expand its operational capacity in the region. To date (16 April), some 1,200 people, mainly in southern Lebanon, have received blankets, family parcels, kitchen sets and mattresses. Some food has also been distributed, and medical supplies have been delivered to five medical facilities and to Lebanese Red Cross posts in Beirut, southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa valley.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876

RUSSIAN FEDERATION (NORTHERN CAUCASUS)
NO ACCESS TO DETAINEES

Since the beginning of this year, when there was a new escalation of fighting in the Republic of Chechnya, the ICRC has not been able to see persons detained by the Russian federal authorities. Its delegates are extremely concerned about the plight of these people, especially those arrested following the clashes in Samashki and Bamut, and have stepped up their attempts to gain access to the Grozny "filtration point" and to other places of detention outside Chechnya. So far, however, the agreement received from the authorities in Moscow has had no effect. In 1995 ICRC delegates visited almost 700 people held by the warring parties in connection with the conflict.

On 12 April delegates finally received permission to enter the village of Samashki, whose hospital did not escape the widespread destruction caused by the fighting. The ICRC immediately began an aid and water supply programme for the 3,000 inhabitants still on the spot.

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

SOUTHERN SUDAN
NOT FORGOTTEN

An ICRC team has just completed a visit to prisoners held by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in a detention centre in the southernmost region of Sudan. The visit, which took place between 10 and 12 April, was conducted in full conformity with the institution's standard procedures. ICRC delegates were allowed to register the prisoners and to hold private interviews with those who so requested. The prisoners also had the opportunity to write Red Cross messages to their families.
ICRC detention activities in southern Sudan resumed early this year. In January, following successful negotiations with the SPLA, delegates visited 229 prisoners held in connection with the conflict in the region.

The ICRC is pursuing its contacts with all the parties concerned with a view to gaining access to all persons detained in relation to the ongoing war in the south.

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BURUNDI

NEW POPULATION MOVEMENTS

The ICRC distributed emergency humanitarian aid to over 37,000 people in five provinces of Burundi between 9 and 12 April. Since early March, 10 out of the country's 15 provinces have been affected by fighting. Patrick Berner, head of the ICRC delegation in Bujumbura, reported: "Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes in the space of a few weeks and are now utterly destitute". In response to these events the ICRC has set up an emergency programme to bring assistance to some 100,000 recently displaced people. The current operation covers the provinces of Gitega, Bururi, Ngozi, Muyinga and Bujumbura rural.

Owing to the scale of new humanitarian needs in Burundi the ICRC has significantly increased the number of personnel and the logistic means it is deploying in the country. Sixty-eight staff, both local and expatriate, 16 trucks and nine trailers have been mobilized for the current operation. In addition, on 11 April an ICRC-chartered Hercules C-130 aircraft brought in 4,300 plastic tarpaulins which are now being distributed in southern and central areas.

Meanwhile the ICRC is continuing to conduct surveys in the country's northern, western, central and southern provinces in order to bring aid as rapidly as possible to all the people affected by the recent fighting.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876  
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Bujumbura, tel. ++257 2 23 280

MALI

WOMEN AND WAR

How do women see their role in conflict prevention and management? This was the subject of a seminar held in Bamako at the end of March which brought together about 20 members of the National Women's Movement for Peace and National Unity and representatives of the ICRC.

An increasing number of women in Mali are seeking to become more fully involved in the life of their country. The movement was established with a view to increasing women's motivation and encouraging their participation in dealing with the Tuareg problem in the north. Women can fulfil a vital role in maintaining social cohesion among various ethnic groups and promoting acceptance of cultural diversity. The members of the women's movement expressed the wish to learn more about international humanitarian law; during the seminar the ICRC explained that under this law women, whether combatants or not, are entitled to special protection.

Discussions centred on the importance of listening to the other person's point of view, the need to take due account of resentment caused by social inequalities, the sensitive issue of rape in armed conflict and its consequences for the victim. The participants felt that they had a role to play in consolidating peace and dealing with the aftermath of the conflict, since they are so close to reality and, as wives and mothers, they offer advice and act as a moderating force in their everyday environment. The dialogue and exchange of information between the women's movement and the ICRC will continue.

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ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES
"DANGEROUS AMBIGUITY"

At the opening meeting of the Review Conference of the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons on 22 April, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga drew the participants' attention to a "dangerous ambiguity" in the new definition proposed to the Conference, under which an anti-personnel mine is one "primarily designed to explode on the presence, proximity or contact of a person".

"Use of the phrase 'primarily designed' as opposed to 'designed' does indeed introduce a dangerous ambiguity", said ICRC legal adviser Peter Herby. Dual-use mines - anti-personnel and anti-tank - and other types of hybrid weapons are already available and are likely to become increasingly cheap and widespread. These devices would be covered neither by the rules of the 1980 Convention nor by national export controls if the proposed definition is adopted and it is claimed that they are "primarily designed" for use against tanks. All efforts made so far to restrict or prohibit use of these perfidious weapons might then prove vain.

INTERNATIONAL POLL: PUBLIC OPINION LARGELY IN FAVOUR OF TOTAL BAN

A poll conducted free of charge for the ICRC by institutes associated with the Gallup International group and Isopublic Zürich has shown that public opinion in 21 countries selected from four continents is largely in favour of a ban on anti-personnel mines. Denmark ranks first with 92% of favourable replies (out of 1,009 people questioned), followed by Spain (89%), Austria, Italy and Switzerland (88%), Russia (83%) and India (82%). The "least favourable" results were obtained in the United States (60%) and Japan (58%). "Our campaign against anti-personnel mines has not yet been launched in those countries," explained Johanne Dorais-Slakmon at ICRC headquarters in Geneva, "and this relatively weak support may change appreciably when the States in question have expressed their views at the Review Conference of the 1980 Convention, which is now meeting in Geneva with a view to strengthening existing rules on the use of anti-personnel mines".

PARLIAMENTARIANS TAKE FIRM STAND

At the 95th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Istanbul from 15 to 20 April, more than 170 parliamentarians from 133 countries signed a petition for submission to the Review Conference of the 1980 UN Weapons Convention. This appeal reflected the views of a very large majority of parliamentarians from all over the world who took a firm stand in favour of the prohibition of the production, storage and transfer of anti-personnel mines.
At the request of the group of countries that had initiated the petition (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland and the United Kingdom), the ICRC submitted it to the President of the Conference, the Swedish Ambassador Johan Molander. ICRC President Cornélia Sommaruga asked Ambassador Molander to take the appeal from the world’s parliaments into consideration during the Conference’s deliberations in Geneva in the coming days.

Further information: Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2319 or Natel 089 203 8913; Peter Herby, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2729

GENEVA

TREATING WAR CASUALTIES

The seventh ICRC Surgical Seminar on the Management of War Wounds ended in Geneva on 21 April. The event, which brought together more than 42 surgeons from 19 countries, provided participants with the opportunity to share experience gained while performing humanitarian work in conflict situations.

At the heart of the ICRC’s war surgery philosophy, which the seminar reaffirmed, is the motto "simple, safe and basic" - whatever is done to assist people wounded in war, it must be efficient, readily available and adapted to their needs.

The non-ICRC participants in the seminar included two Rwandan surgeons who had worked extensively in their war-torn country, a Ghanaian military surgeon with experience in Liberia and two Polish military surgeons.


CD-ROM ON GLOBAL LANDMINE CRISIS

Random Ambush is a multimedia programme designed to make people aware of the problems that arise from the indiscriminate use of landmines. Photos, voice recordings, video clips and high-quality graphics are combined to present a wide range of information on these terrifying devices and the issues that surround them.

Random Ambush will run on any recent Macintosh or multimedia-equipped PC.

English
Price: Sfr 25/US$ 20

Orders to be sent to: ICRC Public Information Division
19, avenue de la Paix
CH-1202 Geneva
Fax: ++41 22 733 2057
Tel: ++41 22 730 2422
E-mail: com_dip.gva@gwn.icrc.org
SOMALIA

HUNDREDS OF CASUALTIES IN MOGADISHU

On 14 April, 17.5 tonnes of emergency medical supplies arrived in Mogadishu aboard an ICRC Hercules aircraft. The supplies were sent in because of a new upsurge of fighting in the Somali capital since the beginning of the month. The figures speak for themselves: between 4 and 21 April more than 650 people were wounded, among them six Somali Red Crescent volunteers injured while trying to evacuate victims of the clashes. ICRC head of delegation Fred Grimm expressed his concern: "It is absolutely essential that the red cross and red crescent emblems be respected, so that the volunteers can get on with their work".

The ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent are continuing to monitor the situation in Mogadishu, so as to be ready to meet new humanitarian needs as they arise. Apart from providing medical assistance, the ICRC is currently assessing the living conditions of several hundred families who were housed in makeshift camps near the combat zones and who have now been forced to move yet again to a safer place.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2876

RWANDA/ ZAIRE

ICRC TRANSIT SERVICE

At the joint request of the Rwandan and Zairian authorities, on 22 April the ICRC repatriated the 35 people who were on board a Boeing 737 of Air Zaire forced to land in Kamambe in western Rwanda because of technical difficulties.

The 26 passengers and nine crew members were first taken to the airport, where they recovered their luggage. They then crossed the border at Ruzizi and were met by representatives of the Zairian authorities and of Air Zaire.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 72 781
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LANDMINES

HEMMEDE IN BY MINES

In Rwanda in recent months, ICRC teams have had to suspend their travel plans on several occasions because of the increasing frequency of mine explosions. Since the beginning of the year landmines - mostly anti-tank - have claimed about 130 victims, mainly in the west of the country.
The ICRC sub-delegation in Cyangugu, south of Lake Kivu and a few minutes from the Zaire border, was recently obliged to restrict the movements of its staff for ten days following the deaths of at least 14 people in mine incidents. This means that the ICRC could no longer work in behalf of detainees, install water-supply systems in the countryside, or take children who had become separated from their parents back to their homes. In short, delegates were cut off from the victims they were trying to help.

Landmines kill and maim. But they can also isolate people, depriving them of the assistance and protection that are essential for their survival. Even more perversely, they can also be used to manipulate the activities of humanitarian organizations by placing certain areas off-limits.

The example of Cyangugu is not unique in Rwanda. The population of four prefectures bordering on Zaire is particularly severely affected by the presence of newly-laid mines. Mine explosions have cost about 60 lives this year and after each successive incident the ICRC has to decide which roads it will or will not use. The danger is all the greater because these roads are often dirt tracks where a mine can be buried in a matter of minutes. Some of the mines have been there since 1994, but most of them have been laid very recently, making travel in the field a hazardous business.

Protection of humanitarian work is on the agenda of the Review Conference of the 1980 United Nations Convention on certain conventional weapons, taking place in Geneva from 22 April to 3 May. Whatever the decisions taken at the Conference, the unpredictable nature of mines greatly increases the risks they represent and makes the results of clearance campaigns unreliable. The situation in Rwanda is a case in point.

Further information: Sylvie Léget, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2794

A NEW WEB VERSION IS BORN!

A French version of the ICRC's Web site opens to surfers on 1 May. French-speakers can now access information on war victims, international humanitarian law, and the humanitarian action and issues related to armed conflict, all in their own language.

The French-language site has its own address:

http://www.cicr.org

It can also be accessed from the English-language Home Page at:

http://www.icrc.org

Further information: Karen Saddler, ICRC Geneva, at webmaster.gva@gwn.icrc.org or tel. ++4122 730 2391
ZAIRE

NEW HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY IN NORTH KIVU

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has supplied emergency aid for 14,000 newly displaced people in the Rutshuru area, east of Masisi (Zaire). More than 50,000 displaced people had already arrived recently in the area, where conflict has flared between Zairian tribes and people of Rwandan origin who have lived there for many years.

The aid, consisting of jerrycans, soap and blankets, is intended to supplement the efforts of local families to help the displaced people settle temporarily in villages. However, the distribution of relief is hampered by the prevailing climate of fear and instability: the displaced people do not dare stay long in one place and it is therefore difficult to keep track of them and to estimate their numbers.

The fighting, which had been limited to the Masisi region, spread to neighbouring Rutshuru in late March, causing more than 65,000 people to be displaced in four weeks. Balthazar Staehelin, head of the ICRC's sub-delegation in Goma, said: "We are particularly concerned about the recent developments as they show that ethnic hatred has now taken hold of a region so far spared by it. As a result, tens of thousands of people have been displaced. What is striking is that these people are not fleeing because of the fighting itself, but out of sheer terror...".

The ICRC is ready to provide protection and assistance for the victims of this situation. However, it is first and foremost up to the authorities to take every necessary measure to protect them.

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Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kigali, tel: ++250 72 781
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2876
WESTERN SAHARA

FORGOTTEN CONFLICT, FORGOTTEN PRISONERS

Four delegates and a doctor from the ICRC visited 540 Moroccan prisoners, out of approximately 1,900 still held by the Polisario Front, in the Tindouf region from 26 to 29 April last. It was the first of a series of three visits planned for 1996 to see all these men, most of whom fell into enemy hands between 1978 and 1982 and have thus spent over fifteen years in captivity.

During the visit the prisoners were able to write Red Cross messages, which will be handed over to their families. A programme for the distribution of parcels sent by the prisoners' families was set up eighteen months ago. Since then the ICRC has delivered about a thousand such parcels.

The ICRC Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa, who headed last month's mission, met high-ranking officials from the Polisario Front to look into the possibility of settling all humanitarian issues resulting from the Western Sahara conflict. The ICRC remains at the disposal of the two parties to oversee the repatriation as soon as possible of all prisoners held in connection with that conflict.

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Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2876
SIERRA LEONE

HELP IN REGAINING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The ICRC started distributing rice seed to farmers in the Kailahun and Pujehun districts, in eastern Sierra Leone, in early May. About 100 tonnes have already been handed out in the region of Bandajuma, which is under the control of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), and in the government-held town of Zimmi. Altogether the programme will provide about 1,400 tonnes of rice and groundnut seed to some 150,000 people living along the Liberian border.

With the cease-fire agreed upon by the government and the RUF in March, the area’s inhabitants are gradually returning to their homes and beginning to work the land again. The fighting in recent years had caused major displacements among the population, seriously hampering agricultural production. As a result, chronic malnutrition and the frequent looting of food supplies had prevented farmers from saving seed for replanting. The distribution programme is aimed at helping people in the area to regain a measure of self-sufficiency.

The ICRC will continue handing out food rations, which will average more than 1,000 tonnes a month for the coming four months, until the next harvest in September and October. It will then reassess the situation and decide whether to scale down food distributions.

Further information: Georges Paclisanu, ICRC Abidjan, tel: ++225 22 2459

UN-ICRC

GUIDELINES FOR UN FORCES

On 10 May in New York ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga handed over to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali a document entitled Guidelines for UN forces regarding respect for international humanitarian law. The document specifies the principles and rules of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols applicable to UN forces deployed in areas affected by armed conflicts. Until now the situation was ill-defined since it is the States, not the UN, that are party to the humanitarian law treaties. Thanks to the new guidelines, it should be possible in future to ensure that UN military operations do not have adverse consequences for war victims or certain categories of prisoners.

The guidelines, which are the result of a series of meetings of legal experts organized by the ICRC, were drafted in close cooperation with the UN services concerned and must be observed by all UN contingents, whatever the mandate involved. Their main purpose, as that of international humanitarian law as a whole, is to preserve human dignity.

The rules applicable to UN forces are essentially those prohibiting attacks on civilian property, those prohibiting or restricting certain means or methods of warfare and those stipulating that only the urgency of a wounded person’s medical condition should determine the order in which he is treated.
The guidelines also stress that in all circumstances the ICRC must be notified without delay of all persons captured or detained by UN forces so that those persons can be visited by ICRC delegates and their families informed of their whereabouts.

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AMERICAS
OAS TO PROMOTE RESPECT FOR IHL

A major step was taken on 10 May to improve compliance with international humanitarian law when ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga and Secretary-General César Gaviria of the Organization of American States (OAS) signed a cooperation agreement at the Washington headquarters of the OAS. The agreement with the OAS, of which virtually all States of the Americas are members, follows the example of existing agreements between the ICRC and the Organization of African Unity, the European Union and the United Nations in that it emphasizes the obligatory aspect of international humanitarian law.

In accordance with its mandate, the ICRC has in recent years taken action in more than a dozen different countries in the Americas, caring for people wounded in fighting, visiting political and security detainees and endeavouring to protect and assist civilian victims of conflict. At present it is following up a request by the parties involved in the situation in the Mexican state of Chiapas to ensure a neutral and demilitarized framework for their negotiations.

At the signing ceremony, Mr Gaviria stressed the particular importance of international humanitarian law in the Americas and placed the OAS firmly behind the ICRC's work, which he said was indispensable to relieving the suffering of all victims of conflict, wherever they may be. He also called on all countries of the Americas that had not yet done so to become party without delay to the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions.

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SWITZERLAND
"THE LAW OF WAR"

A new computer-assisted teaching aid has been developed by the Swiss army in cooperation with the ICRC. This CD-ROM, entitled "The Law of War", explains to soldiers the basic rules they must observe in wartime. The first part deals with the pursuit of hostilities (definition of a combatant, methods and means of warfare allowed or prohibited during an attack) and the second part discusses the treatment of prisoners of war and the protection of the civilian population. Also included is a presentation of the international protective signs (red cross and red crescent emblems, sign protecting cultural property) and of the ICRC's mandate and activities.

At the end of the 90-minute self-instruction course, a test is provided to check the user's knowledge. The CD-ROM exists in English, French, German and Italian, and will soon be made available to armed forces in other countries.

Further information: Peter Hostettler, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++4122 730 2394
AFGHANISTAN

HOSPITAL OPENS IN KANDAHAR

Last Thursday, 16 May, the ICRC inaugurated a new surgical unit at Mirwais hospital in Kandahar. The 150-bed unit, the only one of its kind in the province, comprises three operating theatres, a blood bank, an X-ray service, and cooking and laundry facilities. The project took almost a whole year to complete, since everything - from reconstruction of buildings to training of local staff - had to be done from scratch.

The 300-bed Mirwais hospital, donated to the Kandahar provincial authorities by the People's Republic of China in 1979, had been out of action for some time. After so many years of war the buildings were in ruins and the equipment and staff were long gone. The region's civilian population and the war-wounded had to seek treatment in Quetta, across the border in Pakistan, which meant an arduous seven-hour journey.

As soon as it gained access to Kandahar in early 1995, the ICRC decided to rebuild the hospital. A first-aid post was set up in the hospital grounds in June; then the reconstruction work began, as did the process of hiring and training local personnel. Training will continue to be given by ICRC expatriate staff who will number 15 to begin with, including two teams of surgeons, nurses, a blood-bank specialist and a physiotherapist.

The first patient, admitted on the very day the new unit opened, was a civilian wounded by a mine. He had to have both legs amputated, and would certainly not have survived the journey to Quetta.

Further information: Dr Michéle Jeanmaire, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2581
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2906

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA/EASTERN SLAVONIA

FAMILY MEETINGS ON FORMER FRONT LINE

There are about 100,000 people living in Serb-held Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium. Since 1991 many of them have lost contact with members of their families living elsewhere in the region. As the guns have now fallen silent, relatives separated by the conflict have been trying to find ways of seeing each other again. A joint ICRC/UNCIVAFF (United Nations Civilian Affairs) project, carried out with support from local Red Cross branches on both sides, has organized 18 family meetings at three check-points along the former front line since last November. Each time, the ICRC took people who were without transport by bus to the meeting points, where up to 100 family members from each side were able to spend some time together.
The ICRC is providing the population of Eastern Slavonia with many other forms of assistance. To help the most vulnerable regain a measure of self-sufficiency, in March the ICRC began an agricultural programme under which 10,000 families received vegetable seed kits, 10 kg of seed potatoes and 20 kg of fertilizer. During the coming weeks sugar, salt and vinegar will also be handed out for making preserves. In addition, the most needy among the population - 12,400 elderly and disabled people, orphans and single-parent families with no income whatsoever - receive food and hygiene articles every month.

The ICRC has also distributed medical materials to most of the health facilities in the area and is helping to maintain water-supply installations serving the entire population.

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Patrick Fuller, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++3851 6112 444

SYRIA

HUMANITARIAN LAW FOR THE ARMED FORCES

From 11 to 16 May, six senior officers of the Syrian armed forces attended an intensive course in Damascus on the rules of international humanitarian law and the law of war. The course, organized by the ICRC through its regional delegation in Syria, confirmed the growing interest shown by the Syrian military authorities in giving members of the armed forces instruction in the relevant rules.

The ICRC encourages States to incorporate systematic instruction in international humanitarian law in training programmes for the armed forces in the framework of its activities to disseminate the law in military academies.

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FORMER YUGOSLAVIA
HELPING THEM GET ON WITH LIFE

Hundreds of women whose fathers, husbands and brothers have been missing since the fall of Srebrenica in July last year are still living in total uncertainty concerning the fate of their loved ones. Besides completing the gathering of tracing requests, forwarding these requests to the authorities and trying to obtain answers from them, from mid-June the ICRC will be launching a campaign among the general public, in an attempt to find additional information for these women. In the meantime the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross are implementing a project in order to help them cope with their difficult situation. A total of 115 women and children are now settled in at a centre in Tuzla where a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a social worker and a teacher join efforts to provide therapy as well as skills for future jobs.

"The women have generally been brought up to let their husbands or fathers take charge and make decisions," said Andy Bonnick from the Swiss Red Cross, who set up the project. "We now help them learn to take responsibility for their lives and to be proactive. But of course this is extremely hard - not only because they have to change the way they think about themselves but also because they live with the pain of not knowing what has become of their relatives."

Further information: Anne-Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel.: ++38 771 66 894

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS
ICRC RESUMES VISITS TO DETAINEES

On 22 May 1996, ICRC delegates registered seven detainees at the Grozny "filtration point" in the Republic of Chechnya. This visit, conducted in accordance with the institution's customary working procedures, was carried out after an interruption of over five months, during which the ICRC had been unable to gain access to any individuals held by the Russian federal authorities in connection with the Chechen conflict. The delegates conducted interviews with each of the detainees, who were given the opportunity to write Red Cross messages to their families. Since the beginning of the conflict, the ICRC has registered nearly 800 people detained on either side.

Following the signing on 27 May of a cease-fire agreement between the Russian federal authorities and the Chechen separatists, the ICRC placed itself at the disposal of the parties to play its role of neutral intermediary in the release of detainees provided for under the agreement.

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

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

MEDICAL AIRLIFT

Although the situation in Bangui appears to be settling after the violence of the past few days, access to the Central African capital by road was still difficult on 28 May. The ICRC therefore sent in 1.2 tonnes of medicines and other medical supplies by air from Yaoundé (Cameroon), to replenish stocks in the city's hospitals.

In the course of Sunday 26 May, teams of the ICRC and the Central African Red Cross Society had been able to resume their activities, suspended during part of the previous day because of the confusion prevailing in the capital. On 26 and 27 May, first-aid teams transported several more dead and wounded to the city's hospitals, where medical staff was being replaced by volunteers of the Central African Red Cross.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2876

ANGOLA

ICRC ON THE ALERT TO PREVENT FOOD SHORTAGE

"Given present conditions, the harvest on the Central Planalto will not reach half the amount needed for people's subsistence, nor will there be any surplus for trading or planting", ICRC agronomists concluded following a survey on the food situation in Huambo Province and the Ganda region in Central Angola. The survey determined that the main reasons for the shortage were limited secure zones and the presence of minefields, low labour capacity, farming in areas with extremely poor soil quality, irregular climatic conditions and a lack of seed for short-term harvests.

Under its agricultural assistance programme for 1996, the ICRC aims to support the production of subsistence crops so as to alleviate food shortages anticipated as a result of poor harvests. The ICRC survey also recommends long-term technical solutions for soil improvement, mechanization and large-scale food production, with a view to restoring the region's agricultural production to full capacity.

Targeted to vulnerable populations, the first seed distribution is scheduled for the July planting of irrigated land and is to benefit 75,000 families. A second distribution for the September planting of larger tracts of non-irrigated land will reach 60,000 families. During the past year, the ICRC has distributed 1,500 tonnes of seed to 172,000 families, within both government and UNITA-controlled areas.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2876
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC PLANS TRANSFER OF FORMER DETAINEE RELEASED AFTER PRESIDENTIAL PARDON

On Monday, 3 June, ICRC delegates from Zagreb began visits in Croatia to 64 former detainees who were released following the presidential pardon granted on 30 May 1996 and transferred to a temporary accommodation centre at Djakovo. ICRC delegates carried out pre-departure interviews with the men in order to facilitate their final transfer to a destination of their choice and reunite them with their relatives.

A total of 76 men were pardoned. According to the authorities, 12 of them chose to remain in Croatia after their release. All of the men pardoned had been detained in connection with the hostilities that took place in August 1995 in the former Sectors North and South.

During their stay at Djakovo all the men have been able to have private interviews with the ICRC delegates and send Red Cross messages to their families. For those in the centre who expressed the wish to remain in Croatia, the ICRC will arrange transport to the place of their choice there and inform their families. The names of all the men who wish to go to Yugoslavia will be passed on by the ICRC delegation in Zagreb to that in Belgrade and family reunifications will be organized accordingly by the ICRC.

In Croatia, the ICRC continues to monitor the living conditions and treatment of more than 200 detainees in 14 places of detention who are held for security-related offences or charges in connection with the past conflict.

Further information: Alex Braunwalder, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++ 3851 6112 444

AFGHANISTAN

MERCEFUL (AND TIMELY) ACTION

Following the recent upsurge of fighting south of the capital city of Kabul, ICRC hospitals and first-aid posts had to tend to the highest number of war-wounded in a long time. By chance, the ICRC had officially opened the new surgical wing of the Mirwais hospital in Kandahar the day the fighting broke out. In the days that followed, Mirwais received close to 70 war-wounded, while over a hundred others had to be referred to the ICRC hospital across the border in Quetta (Pakistan), where extra wards were hastily set up in tents.
According to Jean-Luc Metzker, ICRC head of sub-delegation in Kandahar, "It is really thanks to the efficient teamwork between ICRC delegates and our local Afghan colleagues that the Mirwais hospital was ready to cope with such a sudden emergency.

At present, the ICRC has deployed nearly sixty expatriate staff to help the victims of the Afghan conflict, making this one of its largest operations in Asia. Although the problems that arose during the cold months - the chronic food shortages and the lack of firewood - have somewhat receded, the recent indiscriminate shelling of civilian districts in Kabul shows that the ongoing civil war in this Central Asian enclave remains as bitter and brutal as ever.

AFGHANISTAN
GETTING THROUGH

In late May, the ICRC was able to bring a relief convoy, the first since April 1994, down from the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif to the war-torn capital city of Kabul. This involved driving five lorries loaded with 75 tonnes of vegetable oil (an essential cooking ingredient in Afghanistan as in most of Southern Asia) across the Hindu Kush mountains; the route included the notorious Salang Pass tunnel which, at close to three thousand metres above sea level, is one of the highest in the world. Apart from the fact that until then the Salang road had been closed by a particularly active front line, a 2.4 km stretch of the road was known to be mined. In a gesture of humanitarian concern both the Kabul authorities and the Jumbesh, the political militia based in the northern part of the country, agreed to let this section of the front be cleared of mines.

The mine-removal operation was carried out by Afghan specialists recruited and trained by the British-based Halo Trust organization. As an additional gesture of goodwill, both parties allowed 60 civilians to cross the front line in the wake of the convoy as it returned north laden with orthopaedic equipment to manufacture prostheses for landmine victims there.

Apart from seeing an additional overland lifeline opened up for the one million inhabitants of Kabul, the ICRC staff accompanying the convoy were surprised and encouraged by the spontaneous reaction from local people along the route. "People came up waving flags and cheering us on", said Jean-Paul Jacquod, head of sub-delegation in Mazar-i-Sharif. "We really had the impression that more than a convoy had got through that time... we feel we saw the emergence of a renewed feeling of hope."

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906
Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 231
Today the ICRC launched a public campaign to gather information on individuals reported missing during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to provide their families with definite answers as to their whereabouts.

The first issue of a publication containing data collected from the families of 11,000 missing persons, such as personal details and the date and place where they were last seen, is now available at all Red Cross offices in the former Yugoslavia and at the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of countries which have received refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same information can also be accessed on the ICRC public server on the Web at http://www.icrc.org. The ICRC expects this initiative to generate a major response from the public.

Leaflets and posters informing the population about this new publication have been widely distributed through National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and radio and television spots have been broadcast on local networks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the ICRC it is crucial that families now be told what has become of their missing relatives.

"We hope that this large-scale campaign among the general public will help speed up the process", said Beat Schweizer, ICRC head of delegation in Sarajevo. "Distressed families come to our offices every day, but without active support from the population and the authorities concerned we cannot give them the information they need".

Further information: Sophie Bonefeld, ICRC Sarajevo, tel.: ++38771 656 894

AMERICAS

STATES DETERMINED TO ACHIEVE NATIONAL BANS ON ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

Representatives of six Central American States and Mexico unanimously came out in favour of a total ban on the production, possession, transfer and use of anti-personnel landmines and proposed, at a seminar held in Managua on 28 and 29 May, the establishment of a "zone free from anti-personnel landmines on their territories". The meeting, devoted to mines, mine clearance and victim rehabilitation, was organized by the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua. It was attended by 75 officials, including military officers and foreign affairs officials from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama, as well as representatives of United Nations agencies, the Organization of American States and NGOs involved in demining.

The seminar's recommendations, adopted by all the participating States, lay out a series of steps which could lead to Central America becoming the first mine-infested region to free itself entirely from this scourge. In those recommendations the States reaffirm their determination to promote immediate national bans on the production, possession, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines, to
encourage national legislation outlawing such acts, and to assist and provide employment opportunities for disabled mine victims. The meeting further appealed to the international community to increase its support for humanitarian mine clearance and victim rehabilitation efforts in the region. It encouraged the local media to help in disseminating mine-awareness information among populations at risk so as to protect them from falling victim to these weapons.

The participating States also encouraged the adoption by the Organization of American States, which met in Panama City last week, of a resolution calling for a zone free of anti-personnel landmines in the Western hemisphere.

**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES FOR A CONTINENT FREE OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES**

The Organization of American States (OAS), which met in Panama City from 3 to 7 June for its 26th General Assembly, discussed the question of anti-personnel mines as one of the problems of concern to the Western hemisphere, and adopted a resolution providing for the establishment of a continent-wide zone free of all landmines. Secretary-General Cesar Gaviria and numerous representatives of Member States referred to the issue in their statements. The ICRC, for its part, called for a total ban on the use of this indiscriminate weapon.

The resolution urges States to declare a moratorium on the production, use and transfer of all anti-personnel mines and to ratify the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its amended Protocol II. It further provides for the opening of a register at the organization's General Secretariat, to record information on existing stocks, the current mine clearance situation and follow-up activities after each session of the General Assembly.

This text is in line with a resolution recently adopted by the Central American Parliament and with the recommendations on anti-personnel mines, mine clearance and victim rehabilitation endorsed by the Managua seminar at the end of May. The OAS General Assembly also adopted its third resolution on respect for international humanitarian law.

Further information: Sylvie Junod, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2259
Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2454

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS SHORTAGE OF DRINKING WATER**

The inhabitants of Gudermes, the second largest city in Chechnya, were once again without drinking water after clashes broke out in early May between Russian federal troops and Chechen separatists. From 27 May the ICRC resumed its water distributions to the population. Seven tankers are now trucking in some 230,000 litres a day, and in the longer term the ICRC intends to install a pumping station with a daily capacity of 200,000 to 300,000 litres. After the city's electricity supply was restored at the end of March, providing the necessary power to operate the water distribution network, the ICRC had suspended its deliveries of drinking water to Gudermes.

The ICRC's safe water supply and sanitation programme is a vital component of the institution's work in this region where epidemics, and cholera in particular, may break out with the onset of the warm weather. The ICRC is currently distributing more than 700,000 litres of water per day in Chechnya, both in Grozny and in many villages affected by the fighting.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2307
EAST TIMOR
ICRC VISITS DETAINDEES IN BAUCAU

On 15 and 16 June, the ICRC was granted access to people arrested in connection with the violent demonstrations that broke out early last week in the town of Baucau, in East Timor. Two ICRC delegates, one of them a nurse dispatched from the organization's East Timor office in Dili, visited a total of 80 detainees held at two military posts and a police station, in order to ensure that those injured in the demonstrations were receiving proper care. In an effort to ease the general tension, the ICRC representatives then contacted the detainees' families to inform them of their relatives' whereabouts and reassure them. The delegates made a round of the town's hospitals to assess needs, and also monitored the transfer of a seriously injured person to the military hospital in Dili.

The ICRC has maintained a presence in East Timor since 1974, and has been working as a neutral intermediary to facilitate dialogue between the civilian population and the Indonesian authorities. Its delegates regularly visit persons held in connection with the situation on the island. In cooperation with the Indonesian Red Cross Society, the ICRC is also taking an active part in a public health campaign and sanitation programme in areas suffering from a shortage of drinking water.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2906

SIERRA LEONE
MORE FUNDS NEEDED FOR EXPANDING OPERATIONS

The ICRC has just launched a further appeal to donor governments to cover a substantial expansion in its operations in Sierra Leone. This year's budget for its activities there has risen sharply from 6 million to 29 million Swiss francs. In early 1996, the authorities in Freetown granted the ICRC permission to work in the zone controlled by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), where medical and food aid was given to about 25,000 people in March. At the time a team of experts also conducted a survey in government-held territory and distributed relief supplies to 10,000 people who found themselves cut off in the town of Zimmi. The ICRC will now try and provide assistance to 40,000 people in Daru, 70,000 in Segbwema and 10,000 in Pujeahun, and is standing ready for the return of some 20,000 civilians who had sought refuge in Liberia.
Its activities will be centred on the eastern parts of the country, which are hardest hit by the conflict. In those very remote areas of eastern Sierra Leone, where needs for medicines and other medical supplies are acute, ICRC delegates will launch a vaccination campaign among the population and a project to improve the availability of drinking water. A total of 24 delegates, four of them from the British, German, Icelandic and Swedish Red Cross Societies, are now working in the ICRC's offices in Freetown, Kenema and Guékédou, Guinea, in cooperation with about a hundred staff members of the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society.

Since the beginning of the year, Sierra Leone has been in a transition phase marked by the opening of negotiations in Côte d'Ivoire. The ICRC delegations in Freetown and Abidjan have been serving as neutral and independent intermediaries between the parties and have played an active role in the peace process by transporting their representatives to take part in the negotiations.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Freetown, tel.: ++232 22 241 438
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2876

EASTERN SLAVONIA

YOUNG PEOPLE WORK TOGETHER

To pave the way for greater stability in the Srem-Baranja region, the ICRC has recently initiated a community-based project there promoting dialogue between young Croatians and Serbs. Its objective is to encourage young people on both sides of the former confrontation line to respect and care for others, motivating them to set up Red Cross youth structures in their schools.

Volunteer teachers from every primary and secondary school in the region will be trained to act as catalysts for the project, introducing their students to Red Cross ideas and helping them to organize humanitarian activities for their communities. Such widespread promotion of humanitarian behaviour in schools will help build bridges between young Croatians and Serbs, thereby encouraging them to seek solutions together for problems common to both communities.

Two workshops have already been organized for fifty teachers from the Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci and Zupanja municipalities, who are now actively enlisting the support of young people for Red Cross activities. In Srem-Baranja, the first workshop for 25 Serb teachers will be held in the next few weeks.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 4122 730 2608
TAJIKISTAN

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CIVILIANS IN DANGER

The fighting between Tajik government forces and the opposition is continuing to affect tens of thousands of civilians in Tajikistan. Some 3,000 newly displaced people from Tavildara and Mionadu arrived in Kalaikum and Komsomolobad on 22 and 23 June, hungry and exhausted after their long journey through the Pamir mountains. Since the beginning of the year almost 15,000 people have been forced to flee their home areas where conditions are deteriorating by the day.

According to the displaced people themselves, some 25,000 civilians are in imminent danger. Fierce fighting has cut off access for more than two months to territory occupied by the opposition, preventing any supplies from getting into this region, which is extremely poor at the best of times.

Since hostilities resumed early this year, the ICRC has been waiting for the Dushanbe authorities to give its delegates permission to enter this area in order to assess urgent needs and set up an assistance programme. Meanwhile, in coordination with other humanitarian agencies it is distributing food to 5,000 newly displaced persons, a figure which is likely to increase if there is no improvement in the situation.

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

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

TRANSFER OF THREE MUSLIM CHILDREN

More than four years of waiting ended on 25 June for the parents of three children who were transferred to Gorazde under the ICRC's family reunification programme. The boys, aged between 8 and 13, had not seen their parents since the conflict broke out in 1992 and could barely remember them. The eldest had been living with his grandparents in Belut on the Bulgarian border, some 400 kilometres from Belgrade, while the other two, who are brothers, had been in a foster home in Belgrade.

The ICRC had tried several times to reunite the children with their families, but had been refused the necessary authorization by both sides.
For the two brothers, it was a very special occasion. A brand-new sister was there to welcome them home, as their father's new wife had recently given birth to a little girl. "It was terrible to lose my wife and be forced to place my children in a foster home during the conflict", the father explained. "This little girl means life. Now that we are together again, I am the happiest of men".

Since the beginning of the year, the ICRC tracing office in Belgrade has reunited over 53 families between Serbia or Montenegro and central and eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++38 111 761 063

SOMALIA
MOGADISHU: WATER FOR A WAR-TORN CITY

The Somali capital Mogadishu is a typical example of a war-torn city where access to water has become extremely difficult. "In volatile situations where factions are struggling for control, a water-supply system, such as that in Mogadishu, is a prime target. Gaining control of the water supply means political and military power", explained Riccardo Conti, head of the ICRC's water and sanitation unit. Pumping stations are vulnerable to attacks and sabotage, and access to them is easier to control since they are far away from where the water is needed. Even where there is no deliberate damage, the vast amount of fuel or power required to run a water station and the lack of funds for spare parts, technical assistance and proper maintenance of the networks are major difficulties.

The ICRC, together with other specialized agencies, has nevertheless managed to stabilize the situation in Mogadishu. Fortunately the town has reserves of groundwater but, since it is on the shore of the Indian Ocean, experienced hydrologists had to plan the tapping of this source very carefully to avoid contamination by the salt water underlying the layer of fresh water.

Several organizations have been rehabilitating existing boreholes and drilling new ones. The resulting network of boreholes and wells will meet the needs of the city's inhabitants without jeopardizing the future resumption and development of a mains water supply.

"The experience gained in Mogadishu will help the ICRC in other difficult situations and will encourage the donors to support alternative solutions pending the huge investment that will be required to restore a proper distribution network once peace has returned", said Riccardo Conti.

Further information: Riccardo Conti, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2352

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://ww.icrc.org (English only):
- Update on ICRC activities in Haiti, dated 18.06.96
- Update on ICRC activities in Iraq, dated 18.06.96
- Update on ICRC activities in former Yugoslavia, dated 25.06.96
INDIA

REPORT ON ICRC VISITS TO DETAINEES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

On 26 June, in New Delhi, the ICRC officially submitted to the Indian government a first report on its preliminary findings during a series of visits to detention centres holding Kashmiri militants. The visits took place in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding signed on 22 June last year stipulating that the ICRC would be allowed to visit all individuals arrested, detained or imprisoned in connection with the situation prevailing in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The report submitted to the Indian authorities covers the period from 30 October 1995, when the visits began, to 15 April 1996.

During this period ICRC delegates had access to 2,234 detainees. They carried out 36 visits to 27 places of detention, including central jails outside Jammu and Kashmir where some of the militants are being held.

ICRC reports on visits to detention centres are confidential documents intended only for the authorities to whom they are submitted. The Indian Home Secretary, Mr K. Padmanabhaiah, stated: "The recommendations made in the ICRC report relate to the treatment and interrogation of the detainees, the general conditions of detention, and the medical facilities that are available to the detainees. The recommendations include the need to make specific budget allocations to create sufficient capacity to house properly all detainees, to improve the upkeep of places of detention, and to provide adequate medical care for detainees".

Further information: David Delapraz, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++9111 469 8202
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):
- Factsheet on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 2 July 96
- Factsheet on ICRC activities in Nagorny Karabakh, dated 2 July 96
AFGHANISTAN
KABUL UNDER FIRE

A rocket attack that hit Kabul on 26 June turned an ordinary day into a terrifying nightmare for residents of the city, whose routine activities were once again brutally disrupted. Immediately after the attack began, cries rang out, stalls in the bazaar were hastily shut down and the first casualties, including women and children, lay in the streets. About one hundred shells and rockets rained down on the capital, many of them landing in the Wazir Akhbar Khan district where one of Kabul's main hospitals is situated. This violent onslaught, attributed to the Taliban militia entrenched south of the city, appeared timed to coincide with the return that night of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to take up his duties as prime minister.

According to early estimates, over 60 people were killed in the attack. In addition, ICRC representatives reported that by nightfall 130 wounded people had been admitted to Kabul's 21 medical facilities. In a single day - one of the blackest in Afghanistan's protracted war - more victims were claimed than during the preceding three months.

The ICRC and the Afghan Red Crescent were nevertheless able to proceed with their relief distributions to 30,000 of the most needy families.

Once again, the civilian population of Kabul has borne the brunt of wanton violence perpetrated in violation of the basic principles of international humanitarian law. The ICRC delegation in the city has renewed its representations to the belligerents, urging them to spare all civilians and civilian property.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 28 0231
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

CIVILIANS UNDER FIRE IN SOUTHERN CHECHNYA

Heavy fighting flared once again on 9 July in several villages in the southern part of the Republic of Chechnya, shattering a six-week-old cease-fire between the Russian federal authorities and the Chechen separatists.

ICRC delegates close to the conflict zones (four in the south-west and two in the south-east) are monitoring the situation and standing by to assist the wounded. As soon as the fighting broke out they began distributing emergency supplies to the medical facilities in both Urus Martan and Grozny that have been receiving casualties.

The ICRC yesterday appealed to the warring parties to comply with international humanitarian law, urging them in particular to spare the civilian population and those taken prisoner and to care for the wounded.

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2317

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

ANSWERS SLOW TO EMERGE FOR ANXIOUS RELATIVES

The nearly 14,000 families from Bosnia-Herzegovina who have filed tracing requests with the ICRC in the hope of finding missing loved ones are still without news. The unbearable anxiety about the fate of fathers, husbands and brothers still persists. However, some families will soon be receiving answers. When the Working Group on Missing Persons, which was set up and is chaired by the ICRC, met on 9 July in Sarajevo, the former warring parties came forward with information on more than 200 cases which will now be cross-checked by the ICRC before the families are informed.

Under the Dayton Agreement, the parties committed themselves to providing information through the ICRC’s tracing mechanisms on all persons unaccounted for. In addition, the ICRC is gathering information on the issue of missing persons from all other reliable sources and passing it on to the families.

Since January 1996, almost 300 cases have been resolved thanks to information gathered through the Working Group and the ICRC tracing system. Only about 20 of the people concerned were found to be alive. Nevertheless, when the ICRC is obliged to give a family the terrible news that someone dear to them is dead, this at least allows them to begin the grieving process and to make decisions about how to get on with their lives.

"The families have the right to know", says Beat Schweizer, head of the ICRC delegation covering central Bosnia. "Resolving this issue depends on the former warring parties as they are inevitably the major source of information. Although the process of gathering data is on track, it is unfortunately much too slow for families who have been waiting such a long time for answers"

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2608
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

LAW OF WAR FOR THE ARMED FORCES

The ICRC and the Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have just concluded a cooperation agreement for the training of Yugoslav army officers in the field of international humanitarian law, also known as the law of war. The document was signed by Pavle Bulatovic, Federal Minister of Defence, and François Bellon, head of the ICRC delegation in the country, during a ceremony held at the Ministry of Defence on 3 July.

The framework agreement covers a renewable period of five years, during which the ICRC will assist the Federal Ministry of Defence in organizing training sessions for military and civilian personnel of the Yugoslav armed forces. It also provides for other activities aimed at disseminating the law, such as the joint publication of educational materials and participation of members of the Yugoslav armed forces in international seminars on the subject.

"Spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law is an integral part of the ICRC's mandate as initiator and guardian of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols", said François Bellon. "In the post-war era, such activities must be expanded to enhance awareness of these vital rules".

Now that the agreement has been signed, an ICRC specialist will be going to Belgrade to set up, together with the Federal Ministry of Defence, an appropriate training programme, which is due to be introduced in the last quarter of 1996.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Belgrade, tel. ++38 111 761 063
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2608

SENegal

FIRST VISITS

The ICRC has for the first time visited prisoners in Senegal. In early June a team of delegates, including a doctor, saw persons arrested in connection with the events in Casamance. They visited and registered 138 individuals being held at Dakar-Rebeuss prison and a further 45 at Ziguinchor prison. In both cases the delegates were able to speak freely with all the detainees, who had an opportunity to write Red Cross Messages to their families.

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2317

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://ww.icrc.org (English only):
- Update on ICRC activities in Sri Lanka, dated 5.07.96
SOMALIA

CAMEL SICKNESS

An emergency programme run by the ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent Society has helped save thousands of camels belonging to nomads in the Nogal region near Garoe. At the end of May the camels were found to be suffering from a virulent form of pneumonia; owners were losing money as they had to stop selling milk, while the price of medicine tripled on the local market. Up to 70 per cent of herds were affected.

The ICRC has made a special effort to plan its assistance with a view to the long term and to avoid supplying medicine directly, which would disrupt the local economy. Following an agreement with local leaders and traders, the ICRC undertook to supply drugs at a subsidized price. The programme was administered through the Somali Red Crescent, and Somali vets were employed to advise owners on treatment. An interim assessment in June showed that the disease had been brought under control and that the animals were responding well to the treatment.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2876
Nic Sommer, ICRC Nairobi, tel.: ++254 2 723 963

MALI

WATER FLOWS AGAIN

On 10 July the ICRC completed the dredging of a canal linking Lake Faguibine to the Niger River in the Timbuktu area of northern Mali. The canal had become silted up as a result of successive droughts in the 1970s, and again in 1984 and 1985; this had drastically reduced the area of the lake, its alluvial banks and the land fertilized by the Niger floods. The 40,000 lakeside inhabitants, who lost most of their herds, will now have more land to grow grain and vegetables.
The month-long dredging operation, carried out by 200 workers, including 70 former combatants demobilized in 1995, will double the area of irrigated arable land, bringing it to 10,000 hectares. This achievement is all the more vital since thousands of people who used to live around the lake and were displaced by the conflict in northern Mali between 1990 and 1995 will be returning in a state of total destitution. Providing them with the conditions they need to regain self-sufficiency can only help maintain stability in the region.

Further information: Suzanne Hofstetter, ICRC Bamako, tel.: ++223 22 07 09
René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Abidjan, tel.: ++225 222 459

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):
- Factsheet on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 17 July 96

During the week-end of 20-21 July 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Joerg Stoecklin, on (mobile) 079 202 36 80
AFGHANISTAN

FIRST FOOD DISTRIBUTIONS IN BAMIYAN

The ICRC last week expanded its activities in Bamiyan, a town 250 kilometres north-west of Kabul, when a convoy of seven trucks managed to get through with 60 tonnes of food, seed and farming implements. The food was intended for 370 of the poorest families (comprising over 2,500 individuals) in a particularly remote area. Shortly after the convoy's arrival on Thursday, 18 July, distributions began at five points accessible to the residents of 25 villages in the Bamiyan valley.

This is the first time that an ICRC convoy has succeeded in reaching Bamiyan from Kabul; all previous attempts were halted by fighting in the area. The food-aid programme being developed by the ICRC in Bamiyan will have three main categories of beneficiaries: disabled people without work, widows caring for more than three children, and the poorest of the poor. The present distributions (wheat, rice, beans and cooking oil) were arranged in conjunction with the valley's shura, the traditional Afghan local assembly, and should last for two months.

Alongside the food-aid programme itself, the ICRC will help to repair the Bamiyan office of the Afghan Red Crescent Society and to rebuild the region's irrigation systems. Contacts fostered with the province's authorities will also enable the ICRC to visit detainees being held by the Wahdat party.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC, Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 29 06
Jean-Luc Paladini: ICRC Kabul, Tel. ++ 873 382 280 131

TAJIKISTAN

WARRING PARTIES ENLIST ICRC HELP IN RELEASES

An agreement between the Government of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition was signed on 21 July 1996 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. In it the parties asked the ICRC to take part in the release of prisoners captured in the fighting.

The parties will provide the ICRC with lists of prisoners and with unhindered access to places of detention so that delegates can privately interview the detainees prior to their release and transfer.

This process will be carried out in stages and should be completed by the end of August.

The ICRC delegation in Dushanbe has contacted both parties to confirm its availability as of 24 July and to remind them of its working procedures.

Further information: Bertrand Kern, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2869
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

BOSNIAN CHILDREN EMBRACE RED CROSS VALUES

For a few children in Bosnia-Herzegovina, learning more about the values underlying Red Cross work has taken the form of an enjoyable game. The Red Cross has organized a summer school a few kilometres from the Republika Srpska town of Modrica, in north-western Bosnia. The first of three scheduled 12-day sessions started on 15 July. Others will begin on 29 July and 15 August 1996. In all, 150 pupils ranging in age from 9 to 13 years will be welcomed at the school.

"Our aim is fairly modest," says Ole Johan Hauge, a Norwegian ICRC delegate in charge of the project. "We're trying to bring basic Red Cross and humanitarian values home to these children. They are so full of energy and so responsive to the material that it's more a case of us trying to keep up with them".

The children are looked after by a team of 10 people from the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, who endeavour to provide a warm and friendly atmosphere for the various role-playing games, exercises and discussions.

Schoolchildren represent one of ICRC's main target audiences in its work to promote acceptance of Red Cross values. Once the ICRC is no longer present in the Republika Srpska, volunteers from the local Red Cross will continue this type of work among young people.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2608

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):

- "Registry of mine incidents", as of 23 July 1996

During the week-end of 27-28 July 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Ruben Ortega, on (mobile) 079 202 42 00
SRI LANKA

ICRC DELEGATES CONTINUE TO ASSIST CIVILIANS IN NORTH

Out of concern for the large number of civilians fleeing the fighting between the Sri Lankan Army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in northern Sri Lanka, ICRC delegates remained up to 31 July in the LTTE-held town of Kilinochchi, as the only representatives of humanitarian organizations there. They are now gradually redeploying their activities westwards towards the Malawi region, where the population has increased more than fourfold over the past few days.

The delegates remained in Kilinochchi in spite of the shells and rockets falling on the town as the Sri Lankan Army advanced southwards from Elephant Pass. By 31 July almost all the town's inhabitants had left, not knowing where to find a safe haven. After the closing of the hospital on 26 July, a first-aid post had been set up in the ICRC sub-delegation. Twelve serious casualties have meanwhile been evacuated further south to Anuradhapura, ICRC staff and ambulances alone being allowed to cross the lines between the warring parties.

The ICRC has also made repeated approaches to the parties in an effort to gain access to displaced civilians in other areas of northern and north-eastern Sri Lanka. The situation remains particularly critical for an estimated 280,000 people who left the Jaffna peninsula during a Sri Lankan Army offensive in April to seek refuge in LTTE-held territory. Until now these displaced people have been living almost entirely on assistance provided by the Sri Lankan authorities. The aid programmes are currently disrupted by the fighting, which has caused further population movements.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2086

RWANDA

RETURN OF REFUGEES

In response to last week's emergency caused by the forcible repatriation of thousands of Rwandan refugees from Burundi, the ICRC - along with other humanitarian organizations - has been working in the Butare region to try to deal with the problems arising from the operation. ICRC teams took dozens of sick and wounded people from the border to the transit camp set up in Butare by UNHCR, and moved swiftly to install a water supply for the camp. ICRC delegates are trying to locate the parents of some 150 unaccompanied children who are among those repatriated. Six of these children became separated from their families during the recent repatriation. In the returnees' areas of origin, ICRC teams are keeping a close watch on conditions and are visiting people arrested by the authorities. A total of 80,000 detainees are currently being monitored by the ICRC in Rwanda.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2716 339
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876

INDIA

DISSEMINATION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The ICRC's New Delhi delegation held a series of five one-day workshops for senior officers of the border security force and the central reserve police force in the state of Jammu and Kashmir between 17 and 24 July.
The workshops, which were conducted by an ICRC delegate to the armed forces and the coordinator of ICRC activities in Jammu and Kashmir, were attended by around 100 officers up to the rank of brigadier.

The focus was on the importance of humane behaviour in containing armed violence, the proportionate use of force and the conscious choice of military targets. The universal obligation of all armed forces to abide by the principles of international humanitarian law was also stressed. The nature of the ICRC’s role, with particular reference to its work in Jammu and Kashmir, was explained to the participants, who represented one of the world’s largest paramilitary forces.

The ICRC began its constructive dialogue with the Indian paramilitary forces in academies and other training centres three years ago. The recent courses in Jammu and Kashmir brought this dialogue into an operational environment for the first time.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++91 11 463 1723
Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2086

AFGHANISTAN
TOGETHER AT LAST!

16 July 1996, 10 a.m. - Hanifa is scanning the skies over Mazar-i-Sharif with growing impatience. At last a speck appears: the ICRC aircraft from Kabul. As soon as it taxis to a halt Abdul Hakim emerges. He looks around hesitantly, then sees Hanifa and dashes down the steps. He has not seen his wife for four years.

In 1992 a rocket destroyed their house in Kabul, leaving the family homeless. Hanifa made her way to Mazar-i-Sharif to join her three adult children, while her husband left for Pakistan. When Abdul Hakim returned to the Afghan capital in June 1996, he heard that the ICRC was reuniting families and a seed of hope began to grow.

The ICRC set up its family reunification programme in Afghanistan in mid-1995, giving priority to the most vulnerable individuals:

- women, enabling them to join their husbands or, if the husband has died, another close relative;
- children under 16, who are reunited with their parents;
- persons over 60 years of age, who are reunited with their spouses or children.

Since the beginning of this year arrangements have been made for 43 people to rejoin their families.

This activity is part of a wider programme whose primary aim is to restore family links. Since 1994 the ICRC has been gradually setting up a countrywide network for the collection and distribution of Red Cross messages. Thanks to the cooperation of the Afghan Red Crescent and many National Societies in Europe and Central Asia, thousands of Afghan civilians have been able to restore or maintain contact with relatives abroad. So far this year 6,092 messages have been collected, 2,116 of them from detainees visited by the ICRC, and 4,800 have been distributed, 961 of them to detainees.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2086
Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 131

For any information you may need on Thursday 1 August (national holiday) or the weekend of 3-4 August, please call Rolin Wavre, duty press officer, on:
079 202 4200 (mobile)
UGANDA

JOINT RELIEF OPERATION IN THE NORTH-WEST

The ICRC and the Uganda Red Cross Society are carrying out the first stage of a new joint relief operation for displaced people in the Koboko area of north-western Uganda. Some 2,500 families are housed in two camps, Benge and South Kochi, after fleeing their homes near the Sudan border earlier this year because of clashes between the West Nile Bank Front and Ugandan government troops.

An initial distribution of maize flour, beans and oil was carried out on 22 July. The Red Cross team also gave out blankets, hoes, shovels and kitchen utensils, and is planning to distribute seed in the near future.

The operation is scheduled to last for six months. A similar programme has been conducted in areas of northern Uganda that have been seriously affected by fighting involving another rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army, since the beginning of the year.

Further information: Frédéric Steinemann, ICRC Kampala, tel. ++25641 230 517
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2876

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

AFTER THE STORM

One year after "Operation Storm" 74-year-old Slana Djujic had heard nothing from her family, who had fled along with more than 150,000 other people when the Croatian forces launched their offensive on former Sectors North and South.

Then, last week, a tracing delegate working out of the ICRC sub-delegation in Vojnic had news for her at last. A Red Cross message had come from her daughter Nadia, now living in Serbia, and finally, after twelve lonely and anxious months, she learned that her family were safe and together.

Slana's sense of isolation is compounded by the fact that she, like many other elderly Serbs left behind after the offensive, is now living alone in a remote village, barely able to fend for herself now that the support once offered by the community around her has disappeared. She also admits to living in constant fear of becoming a target of the violence, which unfortunately is still rife in the region.
Today, the plight of the "forgotten people" of Former Sectors North and South is one of the most crucial humanitarian issues faced by the ICRC in the former Yugoslavia. Over the past year, the mobile relief and protection teams regularly touring the towns and 600 remote villages in the region have identified around 3,500 elderly people who are most at risk; these are people plunged into misery because they were too ill or frail to make the journey with those who fled or simply did not want to leave their homes to face an uncertain future.

The combination of continuing security problems and the threat of further hardship when winter comes has prompted the ICRC this week to call upon the Croatian government to take firm steps to improve the overall security situation in the area, not only to protect the vulnerable but also to create a climate which will encourage their families to return and provide the care and support that their older relatives so desperately need.

Further information: Patrick Fuller, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++385 1 6112 444
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2678
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / CHECHNYA

ICRC CONVOY FINALLY REACHES CENTRAL GROZNY

On 10 and 13 August, the ICRC appealed to the parties for a truce in order to evacuate the wounded, bring aid to the city's trapped inhabitants and enable civilians to leave combat zones.

A first convoy carrying blankets and food for victims in the centre of Grozny has managed to get through to the ICRC office building there today (14 August). Since today's lull in the fighting another four or five hundred civilians have taken refuge in the ICRC premises.

After fierce fighting broke out in Grozny on 6 August, the ICRC office building, which is itself situated in the centre of the city, was transformed into a makeshift hospital and shelter as hundreds of civilians sought safety and support. The red cross emblem marking the compound has so far been respected by the parties.

By Monday morning (12 August) the ICRC had run out of blankets, mattresses and candles as it struggled to help the 450 civilians, mainly women and children, who had arrived over the weekend fleeing the fighting. Later in the day, delegates managed to evacuate 200 of the displaced and 30 wounded patients to the safer outskirts of the city.

The ground floor of the building was converted to care as well as possible for the sick and wounded, some of whom were transferred directly from Hospital 9 which is no longer in operation. Doctors from the hospital have been providing first aid and have performed surgery on the most critical cases. Meanwhile nurses have delivered at least four babies born inside the ICRC premises.

A water pipe discovered by chance in the cellar of the building has enabled delegates to provide the population with drinking water by installing a tap outside. For months, ICRC tanker trucks have been supplying the city of Grozny, parts of which are completely deprived of running water, with 400,000 litres a day. Conditions have been too dangerous over the past few days for this supply to continue, and the water shortage resulting from the fighting is of major concern to the ICRC.

Further information: Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++7095 926 5426
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2608

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

FACING UP TO THE DANGER OF MINES

Every month, mines in former Yugoslavia continue to kill and maim the unwary. It is therefore crucial to warn people of the potential danger they face when moving around.

At the beginning of the year, the ICRC launched a major mine-awareness campaign to alert the largest possible number of people in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. It is now following up with a second phase which, besides a visual approach with posters and a radio and TV media campaign, also consists of community training for population groups most at risk.
These groups include displaced people who return to places from which they had fled, farmers who have no choice but to work in the fields and children who might venture into dangerous areas, even though they have been told to be careful and stay away.

To help keep the population mine-conscious in the long term, the ICRC is beginning to train mine-awareness field officers based throughout the region. In Croatia, these field officers will train local Red Cross volunteers to work within the community, whereas in Bosnia they will themselves take the message to the most vulnerable population groups.

To ascertain the actual danger that mines represent for the population, the field officers will also collect data from communities about the number of accidents, where they took place and the type of risks the victims had taken when they were injured or killed by a mine.

"Although the conflict has ended, mines will remain a very real danger for years to come", said Norman Farrell, ICRC dissemination delegate in Bosnia. "This programme is a vital step towards developing a sustainable community-based approach which, by heightening the population's awareness of mines, will help to save lives in the future."

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2608

INDIA

BATTALION BRIEFED

On 8 August, the ICRC delegation in New Delhi held a briefing for the Indian Army's 16th Guards Infantry Battalion Group, which is shortly to be deployed as part of the UN peace-keeping force in Angola. It took place at the Battalion's request, which was conveyed to the ICRC via Indian Army headquarters in New Delhi, and was attended by more than 50 of the Battalion's officers.

During the briefing, the nature of the ICRC's role in general and more specifically its tasks in Angola were explained to members of one of the world's largest armed forces. Particular stress was placed on ICRC guidelines for UN peace-keeping forces and the universal obligation for armed forces to comply with the principles of international humanitarian law.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++91 11 469 8385
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2906

During the week-end of 17-18 August 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 079 200 57 75

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION/CHECHNYA

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CIVILIANS STILL IN GROZNY

On the morning of 22 August, with some 50,000 civilians reportedly left in Grozny, the major offensive expected following the expiry of the ultimatum had not begun. Extremely concerned about the situation, the ICRC had called on the parties the previous day to respect the civilian population, which - under the terms of international humanitarian law - must be protected from the dangers arising from military operations.

Several ICRC teams are coming to the aid of tens of thousands of displaced people who have fled the city in recent days. On 14 August an ICRC aid station was set up in Pobedinskoye, 15 km north of Grozny, to distribute food, water and blankets. Another post was opened in Znamenskoye on 20 August to assist people making their way towards northern Chechnya and Ingushetia, where some 4,000 displaced have received help from the ICRC.

In the past week, ICRC teams have provided medical and surgical supplies to medical facilities in Grozny and other places in Chechnya currently treating some 1,500 war wounded. In view of the number of wounded and the urgent need for assistance, a surgical team has been sent to the spot and a field hospital arrived on 22 August in Mineralnye Vody, in the south of the Russian Federation.

Since the resumption of hostilities on 6 August, over 1,000 people have been evacuated from the ICRC’s premises in Grozny to the northern outskirts of the city, and dozens of wounded have been treated in a makeshift hospital set up in a wing of the ICRC building. In recent days four ICRC convoys have reached Grozny with about a hundred tonnes of relief supplies for the city's inhabitants, who are in cruel need of food and water.

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

NEW YORK

UN SECURITY COUNCIL INVITES ICRC TO SPEAK ON ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

For the first time in its history, the ICRC recently agreed to take part in a UN Security Council debate in New York. The topic under discussion was indeed a crucial one: on 15 August the President of the Council, the German ambassador, officially submitted the problem of anti-personnel mines to the Member States. In spite of the disappointing results achieved during the latest session of the Review Conference of the 1980 United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, held in Geneva in May, the international community has clearly refused to give up the struggle.

Apart from the members of the Security Council, the representatives of some 20 other countries and the ICRC expressed their views on the medical, social and economic impact of the use of mines, and on the dangers involved in mine-clearing operations. The ICRC stressed the unspeakable human suffering and the extent of the damage caused by these sinister weapons. The institution has invested
considerable efforts in promoting the development of legal instruments providing for the protection of civilians in the face of this growing scourge.

In his address to the Council, Peter Küng, the ICRC head of delegation to the United Nations in New York, said that the institution was convinced of the inherently indiscriminate nature of anti-personnel mines, which rendered them particularly inhumane; these weapons should therefore be outlawed, as poison gas was in 1925.

While continuing to work towards a ban on the production, storage, transfer and use of landmines, and pursuing its efforts to stigmatize the use of these weapons in the public conscience, the ICRC warmly welcomes the regional and national initiatives being taken by a growing number of States towards this end. Particular mention should be made of the Canadian government's invitation to countries which unilaterally support a ban - and have announced moratoria on the use of mines - to participate in an international conference to be held in Ottawa on 3 October. The next session of the UN General Assembly is due to consider a draft resolution calling on States to negotiate an international agreement providing for a worldwide and total ban on these weapons.

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SRI LANKA
ROLLING NORTH AGAIN

The latest military offensive in northern Sri Lanka has compelled some 150,000 civilians to flee the Kilinochchi area and seek refuge elsewhere in the Wanni region, which is controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The region's infrastructure is very poor, so thousands of displaced people have been accommodated in makeshift shelters or have settled under trees along the roadside.

Since the ICRC is the only humanitarian organization with operational capacity currently present in Wanni, the main aim is to make certain that the basic needs of civilians are addressed. The ICRC's first priority was to establish contact with all the parties, namely the army, the LTTE and local government officials, to ensure resumption of the government food supply which had ceased on 17 July. On 14 August the first food convoy made its way north under ICRC protection through the front line near Vavuniya. This operation was a temporary measure designed to break the deadlock and make sure that the food reached the displaced.

The ICRC has launched an emergency relief programme for the 7,000 most affected families, using its emergency stock (plastic sheeting, mats, bedsheets, soap and cooking utensils) in Wanni; more supplies should be sent in shortly. The six ICRC mobile health teams assisted by the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society have also provided basic medical aid to the affected population. As there is a shortage of water and sanitation facilities in Wanni, the ICRC is planning to repair and improve water pumps in the region, to deepen open wells and to build latrines; it also intends to produce leaflets on the safe use of water, for distribution among the displaced.

Further information: Krishanti Weerakoon, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++941 508 404
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org
(English only):
- Update on ICRC activities in Chechnya / Northern Caucasus, dated 14.08.96

During the week-end of 24-25 August 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / CHECHNYA

FIGHTING HAS DIED DOWN, BUT THE NEEDS REMAIN ACUTE

On Tuesday, 27 August, the ICRC obtained permission from both warring parties to set up its field hospital in Novy Atagy. Assembly began the following day.

Peace and quiet have gradually been returning to Grozny in recent days but few displaced residents have ventured to return to the city, deserted by much of its population in reaction to the chaos of last week. ICRC delegates have resumed their activities, in particular the distribution of food and water. Since 14 August, 20,000 people have received such assistance in Grozny itself, and on 27 August a sixth convoy brought relief for 8,000 more. In all, some 60,000 people in Chechnya have recently benefited from ICRC assistance.

With the prospect of larger numbers of Grozny's population returning to their homes, the ICRC is assessing the state of the city's medical and water-supply facilities. The first step will be to determine what is needed to bring hospitals No. 9 and No. 4 back into working order. ICRC sanitary engineers are developing a network to distribute water by tanker truck pending the repair of pumping stations destroyed during the fighting and restoration of the electricity supply.

Over the past few days, delegates have collected some 2,000 Red Cross Messages, more than half of which have already been forwarded to the addressees.

Further information: Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, Tel. ++70 95 926 54 26
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 23 07

TAJIKISTAN

SUFFERING IGNORED

The ICRC is deeply concerned by the plight of civilians cut off in Tavildara, a town which the opposition regained control of on 16 August. The cease-fire agreement concluded between the Tajik government and the opposition on 21 July in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan has once again proved a dead letter. According to people who have managed to flee in the past few days, most of those remaining in the town are elderly, sick or disabled and have been left without food or medicines; it is impossible for them to undertake the three-day trek across the mountains necessary to escape.

The ICRC has been trying in vain for six months to gain access to this region of the Pamirs which separates the semi-autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan from the rest of the country, and a large part of which (the Mionadu and Tavildara valleys) has gradually come under the control of the opposition forces since the beginning of the year.

The release by both sides of captured combatants and other detainees was provided for in the July agreement, and a target date was fixed for 20 August. Not only have these releases not taken place, the ICRC has not yet even received any lists of the individuals to be set free.

It must therefore be recognized that the latest series of negotiations has had no tangible effect: the cease-fire is not being respected, access has not been granted to the people directly affected by the fighting and promises to release prisoners have not been kept.

Further information: Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, Tel. ++70 95 926 54 26
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 23 07
NORTHERN IRAQ
DETAINNEES VISITED AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTED

Heavy fighting has been taking place since 17 August between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in the Iraqi governorates of Arbil and Sulaimaniyah. When the fighting broke out, ICRC delegates promptly assessed the needs in the region's eight main hospitals, to which over 400 casualties have so far been admitted, and distributed a large quantity of medical supplies.

The ICRC approached the commanders of both parties with a view to gaining rapid access to prisoners. On 26 August, several dozen prisoners held by the KDP in Akra were registered and interviewed in private. The following day, a visit was made to persons being held by the PUK in the Sulaimaniyah area.

A memorandum was handed to both parties on 28 August recalling the basic rules of international humanitarian law, including those governing the conduct of hostilities. In particular, it reaffirmed the obligation to spare persons not taking part in the hostilities and the need to show due respect for the red cross and red crescent emblem and for medical units.

The ICRC has 12 delegates in northern Iraq, assisted by local staff members. They are based at its Dahuk and Sulaimaniyah offices and the Arbil sub-delegation.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 28 76

RWANDA AND GREAT LAKES REGION

ID PHOTOS PROVE SALVATION OF LOST CHILDREN

Since July 1994, 26,673 children lost in Rwanda and surrounding countries have been reunited with their families. Over 8,000 others have at least been put in touch with their loved ones. This is the result of an operation combining the efforts of the ICRC and several other organizations.

In cases where these "unaccompanied minors" are either very young, sick or severely traumatized by what they have experienced, it is virtually impossible to obtain accurate information about their identity and that of their parents. In order to overcome this difficulty, UNICEF began taking ID photos of the children staying at its own centres and those run by its partners. The photos are then displayed in the camps around Goma, Zaire, an initiative that has so far enabled 2,000 children to be returned to their families.

Both the ICRC and UNICEF will be represented at a photo-journalism festival to be held from 30 August to 15 September in Perpignan, in southern France. An information session on unaccompanied minors, including an audiovisual presentation and discussion, will take place on the evening of 5 September.

Further information: as of 30 August, a representative with a portable telephone may be reached at ++41 79 202 22 36

INDONESIA

AFTERMATH

Three ICRC delegates, including a doctor, started a series of visits on Friday 23 August to activists being held on subversion charges following last month's riots. The Friday visit took place in the Office of the Attorney General, in Jakarta.

The delegates were allowed to conduct private interviews with 10 activists from a youth organization called the "People's Democratic Party" and with Muchtar Pakpahan, chairman of the Indonesia Prosperity Trade Union.

The visit enabled the delegates to assess the material and psychological conditions of detention and to ascertain whether the detainees have access to adequate medical care.

Further information: Sri Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, Tel. ++62 21 720 72 52
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2906

During the week-end of 31 August - 1 September 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 200 57 75
IRAQ

IRAQI ATTACK: ICRC TAKES IMMEDIATE ACTION

On 31 August the Iraqi army and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) launched an offensive on Arbil. The Kurdish city, which was in the hands of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), fell the same day. Hundreds of civilians hurriedly left their homes to seek temporary refuge in safer locations.

Hospital sources put the number of wounded at 150. On 1 September the ICRC started to give the city's main hospital assistance in the form of medical and surgical supplies.

Also on that day ICRC delegates began visits to more than 70 detainees in the hands of the KDP, including 22 captured during the latest fighting. Approaches are still being made to the various Kurdish factions in order to gain access to all captives.

To ensure prompt assistance should the situation deteriorate, the ICRC has stockpiled medical supplies in both Arbil and Sulaymaniyah. In addition, a convoy from Amman carrying several tonnes of emergency medical supplies is due to arrive soon in Baghdad.

Despite the departure of a number of humanitarian organizations from Sulaymaniyah and Arbil, the ICRC is maintaining its team of 12 delegates in the three main cities of Kurdistan, in addition to its delegation in Baghdad.

Further information: Cristina Fedele, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 28 36

RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS

DRINKING WATER SCARCE IN GROZNY

The last twenty months have witnessed fierce fighting between Russian federal troops and Chechen separatists, particularly in Grozny. Several times the city has been devastated. In August its key installations were hit again, leaving the population - currently estimated at 80,000 - without drinking water, electricity or medical care, all the hospitals having been destroyed or badly damaged during the fighting.

Providing drinking water to people in Grozny remains a priority for the ICRC. At the end of August, as soon as the situation allowed ICRC engineers access to the only serviceable pumping station in the city, distributions to the city's inhabitants resumed. Restored to an operational state, the pumping station set up by the ICRC in February 1995 now supplies 400,000 litres of chlorinated water daily. Of this amount, between 200,000 and 250,000 litres
are transported by ICRC trucks, which feed storage tanks at numerous distribution points. This provides every inhabitant with an average of three litres of the precious liquid each day.

By next week, anticipating the gradual return of Grozny’s inhabitants, the ICRC plans to increase its water distributions to 500,000 litres per day following the expected arrival of three more trucks - one provided by the Danish Red Cross - with a capacity of 20,000 litres each.

In addition, the ICRC’s water and sanitation programmes in the region are continuing, for example at Gudermes, where 200,000 litres are distributed each day, and at Khasavyurt (Daghestan), where engineers are at work to get the city’s main pumping station operational again.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Nalchik, tel. ++78 66 225 45 74
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 23 07

TAJIKISTAN

FIGHTING PERSISTS AS WINTER APPROACHES

As the tug-of-war over Tavildara continues and fighting in the surrounding area prompts yet more families to flee the devastation that has engulfed their homes, the ICRC is preparing for further distributions of humanitarian aid to displaced people both north and south of the conflict zone. Food is being handed out regularly for the time being, but night temperatures are starting to fall with the approach of winter: other assistance must urgently be provided before the already difficult logistical conditions are exacerbated by bad weather.

South of Tavildara, in the Darwaz region of Gorno-Badakhshan, the ICRC is awaiting delivery of clothes, shoes, blankets and mattresses for immediate distribution to some 6,000 displaced people. Stoves made in Kyrgyzstan will also be handed out, as will fuel for cooking and heating. North of Tavildara, the authorities have given ICRC delegates permission to evaluate conditions for displaced people in the uppermost reaches of the Garm valley, as far as Jirghirtal. Relief activities will now be extended to this area, in accordance with the results of initial surveys. In the south-west, ICRC surveys are being carried out in Pianj, where almost 1,000 displaced people are reported to have gathered. West of where the fighting is taking place, in the Shagnau area and further afield, in Dushanbe, food parcels are still being distributed at regular intervals to the displaced. A total of approximately 15,000 people were assisted in Tajikistan last month.

Further information: Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++70 95 926 54 26
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 23 07
AFGHANISTAN
FIRST TRAINING COURSE FOR THE DISABLED

On 31 August the ICRC launched a training programme for the disabled, complementing its traditional humanitarian assistance. This programme is the result of cooperation between its prosthetic centre and its agricultural rehabilitation team in Kabul.

The basic idea is to give disabled young people without any family support an opportunity to learn marketable skills. Twenty candidates who fit this profile were selected by the ICRC centre in Kabul for an initial course in agricultural techniques, such as the grafting and pruning of fruit trees.

This month-long course is split into two parts: one week of theory and three weeks of practical training at the ICRC’s tree nursery in Bagram, situated about 60 km north of Kabul and comprising a million fruit trees.

The trainees are not paid but will each receive 6 kg of wheat flour at the end of their course. Although the ICRC will not provide them with employment, they should have no trouble finding a job since specialists in the grafting and pruning of fruit trees are in high demand. The ICRC also hopes that some of those who have completed the course will pass on their know-how to others throughout Afghanistan.

The initial cost of the training, which is given by four local employees from the ICRC agricultural rehabilitation team, is 8 million afghanis (about 600 US dollars).

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 131
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 29 06

For any information you may need on Thursday 5 September (Geneva holiday) or the weekend of 7-8 September, please call Pierre Gauthier, the press officer on duty, on: (mobile) ++41 79 202 36 70.
NORTHERN IRAQ
CASUALTIES AND DISPLACEMENTS

On the evening of 9 September, the town of Sulaymaniyah was taken by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK). No fighting was involved, but Koi Sanjaq and Dukan were the scene of violent clashes which left many wounded. The ICRC has provided additional medical assistance to two towns' main medical facilities.

According to early estimates, over 50,000 people fled from Sulaymaniyah as the PDK forces approached. The ICRC is currently assessing needs among displaced people around Penjwin. Several hundred have already returned to Sulaymaniyah, but in case some of them remain in the Penjwin area the ICRC is preparing to send in a convoy from Baghdad carrying basic necessities such as blankets, cooking utensils, jerricans, soap and emergency medical supplies. ICRC delegates are also stepping up their contacts with the parties with a view to providing protection for persons who have been arrested. Over 500 people have been visited since 17 August, when the latest hostilities broke out.

The ICRC has 16 delegates working in northern Iraq and six in Baghdad.

Further information: Cristina Fedele, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2836

RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS
AID FOR 200,000 PEOPLE

During the coming weeks the ICRC will be providing assistance for some 200,000 people in Chechnya and the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan under an emergency relief programme for persons displaced as a result of the most recent fighting. About 80,000 have already received food parcels, blankets, jerricans, soap and rolls of reinforced plastic sheeting since the 22 August cease-fire.

In addition, the ICRC is planning to distribute aid to 25,000 vulnerable individuals in Grozny, Gudermes and Argun, and 10,000 of them will be given warm clothes. Fifty thousand children will also receive winter clothing.

Following the peace agreement reached on 31 August between Russian federal forces and Chechen separatist fighters, and with winter approaching, the plight of the civilian population is giving great cause for concern. The tens of thousands of people who had fled Grozny are returning to find a city in ruins, with no essential services. Some villages in southern Chechnya have also suffered major destruction.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Nalchik, tel. ++78 66 225 4574
Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2307

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
INDIA

TALKING WITH THE MILITARY

A two-day seminar entitled "International humanitarian law: its significance in the modern world" and organized jointly by the department of the Judge Advocate General of the Indian army, the ICRC and the Indian Red Cross Society was held in New Delhi on 28 and 29 August 1996. It was the second seminar of its kind, the first having taken place in 1988.

The Indian army Chief of Staff, Gen. Shankar Roy Chowdhury, delivered the opening address and introduced a new booklet, the "Code of conduct for combatants".

Senior officers of the Indian armed forces, from both operations and legal departments, ICRC delegates and representatives of the Indian Red Cross gave presentations on international humanitarian law and human rights law and their applicability in various military operations. The participants felt that the field of application of these two bodies of law needed further clarification, particularly in regard to low-intensity conflicts.

A talk entitled "The applicability of international humanitarian law to United Nations peace operations" was given by Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar, commander of the UN forces in the former Yugoslavia in 1992-1993.

The seminar enabled the Indian armed forces, the fourth largest in the world, to reaffirm their commitment to international humanitarian law. This interaction with army officers also provided an opportunity for the ICRC to explain the legal basis for its activities, especially its operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

The ICRC Delegate General for Asia and the Pacific expressed the hope that this dialogue with the army would encourage the Indian government to reconsider signing the two Protocols additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++ 9111 469 83 85
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2906

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):
- Update N° 96/2 on ICRC activities in Iraq, dated 6.9.96
- Factsheet on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 6.9.96

During the week-end of
14 - 15 September 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Pierre Gauthier, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
SWITZERLAND
WAS THE ICRC INFLTRATED BY NAZIS?

In early August, documents found in the files of the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and dating back to the end of the Second World War began to circulate. Some of the allegations they contained were reported by the press; the impression was given that the ICRC had been infiltrated by agents on the Nazi payroll.

These allegations are extremely serious and the ICRC is investigating them with the utmost care. Its archival staff immediately began to look for any record of the persons or acts mentioned. Their research has enabled a dossier to be compiled, which is available from the ICRC's Press Division.

In brief, the initial findings are as follows. Of the 21 people who were purportedly ICRC representatives, according to the US documents, only 16 actually did work for the ICRC. In several cases, ICRC delegates were labelled as "enemy agents" and accused of espionage simply because the US agent had no idea whatsoever of the ICRC's mandate; he was surprised, for instance, that an ICRC delegate passed on technical details about a ship, the SS Canada. The ICRC had, however, received the information from the French government in exile and been requested by it to notify the German authorities that the vessel was being put into service as a hospital ship; the notification was sent in accordance with the Hague Convention No. X.

Similarly, the US agent accused an ICRC delegate of communicating the names and addresses of two prisoners of war. Yet this was normal ICRC practice: the ICRC communicated information about millions of prisoners of war to their States of origin and their relatives.

As yet the ICRC cannot certify that there were no Nazi (or other!) agents in its ranks during the Second World War. It is nevertheless quite clear that the OSS agent misinterpreted activities carried out entirely openly and with the consent or at the request of the Allies, and qualified them wrongly as espionage. The ICRC will contact the team of US research workers currently sifting through the OSS files and give them its replies to these allegations, which must be clarified.


NORTHERN IRAQ
VISITS TO DETAINNEES

Since 16 August, about 800 people captured during recent clashes in northern Iraq between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have been visited and registered by the ICRC. Teams of delegates based in Dohuk, Arbil and Sulaymaniyah are stepping up their rounds to have access to all detainees and to keep a check on their welfare. When the ICRC receives information that a detainee has been released, the family is contacted to verify it.
ICRC delegates have also made several visits to hospitals in the region and to areas near the Iranian border to assess the needs of displaced persons, in particular for medical care. Ad hoc medical aid has been given to the most vulnerable among them.

An ICRC convoy arrived in Sulaymaniyah from Baghdad at the end of last week to set up contingency stocks sufficient for 6,000 people (blankets, tents, cooking sets, tarpaulins and soap). At a time when several other organizations have had to suspend their operations, the ICRC has increased its delegation in northern Iraq; it now has 16 expatriates working there, together with about a hundred local employees.


AFGHANISTAN

ICRC CALLS ON ALL PARTIES TO PROTECT CIVILIANS

The military developments in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan in recent days have once again taken a heavy toll among the civilian population. According to media reports, 12 civilians were killed during air raids on the provincial capital Jalalabad and about 50 were wounded, including more than a dozen children. ICRC personnel helped to evacuate the wounded to the Jalalabad Public Hospital, the main surgical facility there.

To avert further such casualties as far as possible, the ICRC in Afghanistan appeals to all warring parties to respect and protect civilians and to refrain from inflicting suffering upon the civilian population through indiscriminate attacks.

Besides the air raids of 14 and 15 September on Jalalabad, shelling of residential areas of the capital Kabul over the past year has also regularly caused a very high number of civilian casualties. On two occasions in June this year alone, a total of 84 civilians were killed and 200 more were injured.

After the latest changes of territorial control in the east of the country, the ICRC immediately approached the competent authorities on all sides and obtained the necessary assurances that it could continue its humanitarian work in the region, i.e. evacuate the wounded, provide medical aid for the surgical hospital in Jalalabad, care for and rehabilitate amputee victims of mines and unexploded munitions, protect people detained by all parties to the conflict and assist internally displaced persons.

In Kabul, the ICRC continues to provide food and other essential items to some 30,000 particularly vulnerable families whose breadwinners have been killed or disabled. To maintain this assistance, as well as support for the surgical facilities, continuously open supply routes to the capital are vital.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 382 280 131
Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2086
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC ASSISTANCE GETS THROUGH

On Friday 13 September, ICRC delegates managed to get emergency relief supplies through to the civilian population of Tavildara. They reported that the town, which has once again come under government control, has been very seriously damaged and that the fighting between government and opposition forces has left the few remaining inhabitants - most of the 6,500 had already fled the clashes of recent months - completely destitute.

The relief convoy was the first to reach Tavildara for the past five months. The delegates immediately distributed food, blankets, mattresses and medicines to the approximately 230 people who had stayed on there, including 26 psychiatric patients.

Fighting continues with ever-increasing intensity in the Garm valley and the number of casualties needing treatment is rising steadily. A tonne of medicines and other emergency medical supplies, delivered by a second team of ICRC delegates on 13 September, has been distributed to hospitals in the towns of Garm and Komsomolabad.

Since 6 September, opposition forces have taken control of the town of Dzhirgatal', in the upper Garm valley, and of Tajikabad, the last town before Garm.

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

STOP PRESS....

TRIBUTE TO ICRC'S WORK FOR MINE VICTIMS

The ICRC has been awarded a prize of one million Swiss francs by the Italian-Swiss Balzane Foundation based in Milan (Italy).

This award will enable the humanitarian organization to increase its urgently needed assistance to thousands of people injured every year by the 10 million anti-personnel mines sown in war-torn Afghanistan over the last decade. The ICRC is currently operating four prosthetic/orthotic centres there, in Kabul, Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad. In 1995, it produced 4,268 artificial limbs and fitted 3,084 new patients, of whom 23.2% were children under the age of sixteen. In cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent, the ICRC is also conducting large-scale mine-awareness programmes for communities living in mine-infested areas.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2086
Johanne Dorias-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2319

During the week-end of
21-22 September 1996, for all information
please call the press officer on duty, Tony Burgener, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
OTTAWA CONFERENCE ON ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES
A STRATEGY FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF MINES

As an observer with special expertise on the mines issue, the ICRC will be taking an active part in the International Strategy Conference to be held in Ottawa from 3 to 5 October under the auspices of the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This Conference is the first formal meeting of States committed to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines - bringing together all countries that support an immediate ban and are willing to take action at the international, regional and national levels to reach that objective. Since 1993, a total of 43 States have taken such a stand, 25 have already renounced or suspended the use of anti-personnel mines, and 11 have begun destroying their existing stocks. Almost 200 participants and observers - representatives of governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations - are expected to attend the Ottawa meeting.

The magnitude and gravity of the mines scourge prompted the ICRC to launch a global awareness-raising campaign in November 1995, with a view to stigmatizing these barbarous weapons in the public conscience. For Ottawa the ICRC plans to use its Web site to show photos taken in Cambodia as the Conference actually proceeds by Tim Page, who won fame as a photographer during the Vietnam war. Page knows the country well and is familiar with its countless vicissitudes. His task will be to inspire the Conference and promote its goals through vivid illustrations of the day-to-day reality of minefields and their consequences for the victims. The novelty of this "Seven days in a minefield" project is that every day the photos will appear on the Web site within hours of Page capturing the scenes on film. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are being encouraged to set up Web site links so as to create a forum for international dialogue on this photo documentary. The kick-off date is 29 September, and the display will continue through to the end of the Conference on 5 October.

Further information:
on the awareness-raising campaign: Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2319
 on the Tim Page/Web project, Karen Saddler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2391

PRESS BRIEFING

Monday 30 September
3 p.m.
PALAIS DES NATIONS
Geneva
(Press room 3)

CANCELLED

Press kits will, however, be available to journalists at the Palais des Nations.
TAJIKISTAN
"SOMETIMES IT'S LIKE BEING AT THE VERY END OF THE EARTH"

Thomas Merkelbach, the ICRC's head of delegation in Tajikistan, could not be more explicit. At a press conference in Geneva, he turned the spotlight on the forgotten conflict plaguing this country. His greatest concern was the growing number of mines being laid in Tajikistan. The ICRC has, moreover, still not been granted access to certain areas. In the Mionadu Valley, some 5,000 civilians are completely cut off from the outside world. ICRC convoys have to cover huge distances to reach the victims, driving 2,500 km instead of the usual 300 km from Dushanbe to Kalai-Khum, for example.

The ICRC currently has 30 delegates and 150 locally hired staff working to assist about 20,000 displaced persons and other individuals requiring aid, and its activities in Tajikistan are constantly expanding. Last July, the organization launched an appeal for over 12 million Swiss francs to meet ever-growing needs in the country.

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

On the ICRC public server - http://www.icrc.org (in English only):
- Update No. 96/3 on ICRC activities in Iraq (as at 20 September 1996)
- Update No. 96/3 on ICRC activities in Liberia (as at 20 September 1996)
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Tajikistan (as at 24 September 1996)

For any information you may need during the week-end of 28-29 September, please call the press officer on duty, Peter Iseli, on:
(mobile) ++41 79 357 50 03
Liberia

Work continues with Liberian Red Cross staff and volunteers

Thanks to its locally hired employees the ICRC is continuing to work in Monrovia, while the head of delegation, based in Freetown, Sierra Leone, conducts frequent missions to the Liberian capital. As most basic health care facilities in the country are now closed, the ICRC is distributing medical supplies to four Liberia National Red Cross clinics in Buchanan, Dolo's Town, Gbargna and Gbatala, and is providing support for a mobile clinic treating over 2,000 patients a week in Greater Monrovia.

Because of the breakdown in the water trucking system, the ICRC has had to increase its distributions of the raw materials needed to maintain and chlorinate more than 1,000 wells, on which Monrovia's inhabitants are once again dependent for their water supply. The ICRC has also extended its programme for the exchange of Red Cross messages, set up with the National Society. This offers the capital's population a chance to make contact with relatives who have fled to refugee camps in neighbouring countries or elsewhere outside Liberia.

After being forced to withdraw from Liberia on 12 April this year, the ICRC issued a statement condemning "the serious and systematic violations of the elementary rules of international humanitarian law and of the minimum principles of humanity" committed during the conflict. The major difficulties encountered by humanitarian organizations have only confirmed the ICRC's position that the conditions necessary for it to resume a full-scale humanitarian operation have not yet been fulfilled. Indeed, the ICRC considers that the situation has not markedly improved in terms of access to the population and respect for humanitarian law.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Abidjan, Tel. ++225 22 24 59

Tajikistan

A further 1,500 people displaced in a single week

Since 23 September over 1,500 people have fled the Mionadu valley and the Tavildara region, where the situation is becoming unbearable for civilians. The valley, which is under opposition control, has been cut off from the outside world since the beginning of the year. The town of Tavildara, recently retaken by government forces, is the only location in the area to have received relief. On 13 September the ICRC managed to reach the town, isolated by the fighting for five months, and delegates found the town largely destroyed.
The region's population was poor even before the conflict, and in the present circumstances they may not make it through the winter. Many inhabitants, for the most part women, children and elderly people, have therefore decided to abandon their villages and flee. About a thousand have gone to the Garm valley, while 500 others have taken refuge in Khovaling following an exhausting 150-km march over Pamir mountain passes, some of which are more than 3,000 metres high.

The ICRC is currently assisting 20,000 displaced people in Tajikistan.

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

RUSSIAN FEDERATION - NORTHERN CAUCASUS
NEW ICRC HOSPITAL MUCH IN DEMAND

Many patients have been admitted to the ICRC field hospital in Novy Atagi (25 kilometres south of Grozny) since it opened on 2 September. War-surgery needs grew dramatically in the southern part of the Chechen republic after Russian federal troops and Chechen fighters clashed there in August 1996.

The cease-fire that was subsequently concluded has made it possible for patients to come to the hospital from far-away villages and from Grozny (where all medical facilities were damaged in the fighting). In all, 105 wounded people have been hospitalized, 136 operations carried out and over 500 outpatients treated.

Most of those treated by ICRC medical teams are suffering from complications because they failed to receive adequate treatment while the fighting was going on. Mine victims and people hit by stray bullets are also among the patients.

In an effort to provide war-wounded patients with the best possible treatment and post-operative care, the ICRC has begun an expansion of the hospital. There are currently 23 expatriates, including two surgical teams, working at the facility, along with over 100 local staff, 40 of whom are engaged in purely medical work.

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

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):

- Anti-personnel mines: An overview 1996, dated 26.09.96
SEVEN DAYS IN A MINEFIELD, ON
HTTP://WWW.ICRC.ORG

The aim of the International Strategy Conference to be held in Ottawa at the end of this week (3-5 October 1996) is to make further progress towards the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines. To highlight the suffering of mine victims and make their voices heard, the ICRC has launched a special project. Famous war photographer Tim Page and ICRC News editor Kim Gordon-Bates are currently in Cambodia to observe at first hand the human tragedy caused by landmines; every day for a week they are sending four photos and an up-to-the-minute text which can be accessed by all Internet users (http://www.icrc.org).

The project, entitled "Seven Days in a Minefield", is designed to heighten awareness among the public and those attending the Ottawa Conference, where the pictures and text are shown on a large screen.

The photos taken on 1 October focused on the ICRC's prosthetic workshop in Battambang. One picture shows an amputee trying out his new artificial legs on an exercise bike. The caption reads: "The machines, in motion and yet static, create an impression of unreality. Meanwhile, human flesh appears to be relegated to a secondary role by the artificial". The accompanying text describes how Tim Page, himself a former mine victim, sometimes has to turn away from such scenes, exclaiming "It's tearing me up!".

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2317
Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Cambodia, Tel. ++ 885 23 362 096

During the week-end of 5-6 October 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79.357 5003
AFGHANISTAN  
EMERGENCY AID

Since Kabul was captured by Taliban forces on 26 September, the ICRC has had to take action on several fronts to keep up with the swift pace of events in the Afghan conflict. Its first major concern was to ensure that the residents of the Afghan capital would receive vital supplies. Assurances regarding ICRC action were immediately obtained from the Taliban leadership.

On 1, 2, 4 and 7 October, several convoys (79 trucks in all) brought 1,415 tonnes of goods, mostly food but also blankets, coal, medical supplies and orthopaedic equipment, from Peshawar to Kabul. Distributions were rapidly organized in the Afghan capital, where the ICRC is feeding nearly 250,000 destitute people - more than one quarter of the total population. On 9 and 10 October, the distributions will be extended to 1,700 disabled people who are receiving regular food rations from the ICRC. On 10 October as well, a convoy is scheduled to bring foodstuffs to Bamiyan, about 100 kilometres north-west of Kabul. This operation should furnish adequate food supplies through to the end of November for 5,000 widows, displaced persons and disabled people in the city.

Medical supplies sent to Taligan

Meanwhile, the Taliban have pursued their offensive north of the capital towards the Panjshir valley, where the forces of Ahmed Shah Masood are entrenched. Commander Masood asked the ICRC to meet the medical needs of local people affected by the fighting. On 8 October, therefore, 500 kilos of medical supplies and blankets were flown from Kabul to Taligan, a town in Takhar province located between the front line and the Tajik border. The same day, two ICRC vehicles set off from Taligan on the road to Faizabad, in Badakhshan province, in an attempt to reach the northern part of the Panjshir valley.

The ICRC remains concerned about the situation of the people displaced by the recent fighting. A team of delegates has been sent to the area around Taligan, Faizabad and Farkhar to assess the scale of the population movements and the needs of those - mostly ethnic Tajiks - who have fled Kabul and the combat zones. Initial reports put the number of displaced people in and around Taligan at about 5,000. The ICRC is continuing its survey.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, Tel. ++ 873 382 280 131  
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 29 06
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

THREE MORE COMMUNITY KITCHENS IN GROZNY

With winter approaching and many people in Grozny having difficulty obtaining enough to eat, the ICRC has opened three more community kitchens, bringing the city's total to eight.

Following the destruction inflicted during the recent fighting in August, which deprived the city of basic infrastructure and services, the situation remains precarious for a large portion of the population. For the third winter in a row, the most vulnerable (the elderly, the disabled and welfare cases) are exposed to the cold, living in utter destitution in lodgings that have often been damaged and are difficult to heat.

Since early 1996 the ICRC has been striving to help these people by serving them hot meals in community kitchens, a programme being carried out in cooperation with the local branch of the Red Cross. By the end of this week, it should be possible to provide hot meals to more than 4,000 people a day.

Two community kitchens are also operating in Gudermes. They serve 800 meals a day, 150 of which are for patients at the city's psychiatric hospital. The ICRC is planning to open a third in the near future.

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

ARMENIA / AZERBAIJAN

CONFLICT AND FOOD SECURITY IN THE SOUTHERN CAUCASUS

What are farmers doing, ploughing and sowing away amid the ruins? How can tender green shoots of wheat be growing in the war-ravaged earth of the southern Caucasus?

While political negotiations to resolve the crisis involving Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh follow their course, the inhabitants of the areas affected by the conflict continue to live in extremely difficult conditions. A severe drought over the summer has further exacerbated the food problems they are facing.

Working together with the American Red Cross, the ICRC has been stepping up its activities to help restore agriculture in the area and is currently running several programmes to this end.

In late September 1996, 520 tonnes of wheat seed for autumn sowing were distributed to Armenian, Azerbaijani and Karabakhi farmers, enabling them to recultivate a total of 2,200 hectares of land throughout the area affected by the conflict. A small project was also set up on an experimental basis to provide credit to farmers in particularly hard-hit villages, thus giving them access to the means of production they need.
In 1997 the ICRC plans to distribute young potato plants and various types of vegetable seed for family gardens, thereby improving food security. Finally, small projects aimed at producing greater quantities of seed potatoes will be set up to give people access to healthy, quality produce.

Most of these programmes provide for the distribution of literature on farming methods and information cards on anti-personnel mines and the precautions to be taken in high-risk areas.

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

MALTA CONFERENCE
A NEW STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

A conference on the law of armed conflict in a new strategic environment will be held in Malta on 16 and 17 October. The meeting, organized by the Maltese government in close conjunction with the ICRC, will be attended by the military chiefs of staff, or their representatives, from the various countries of the Mediterranean. The ICRC will be represented by Mr Yves Sandoz, its director for principles and law, who will address the participants on the difficulties faced in applying international humanitarian law to conflicts marked by widespread anarchy, such as that in Liberia, and to conflicts in which the aim is to assert group identity, such as that in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He will also suggest ways in which solutions might be found.

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 17
Mr Sandoz’s speech may be obtained from the ICRC Press Division but not published before 16 October.

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org (English only):
- Fact Sheet on ICRC activities in Somalia dated 30.9.96
- Fact Sheet on ICRC activities in Former Yugoslavia: past and future, dated 7.10.96
- Fact Sheet on ICRC activities in Afghanistan, dated 8.10.96

During the week-end of 12-13 October 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rubén Ortega, on (mobile) 41 79 357 5003
AFGHANISTAN

WOUNDED INUNDATE HOSPITALS - ICRC SENDS NEW CONVOYS

As the fighting continues in Afghanistan, a fresh influx of wounded is filling hospitals in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad. Every day the ICRC has been helping to bring out the victims, in particular those wounded on the front line along the highway linking the Afghan capital with the Salang plain to the north.

The six main Kabul hospitals with surgical facilities admitted some 300 further casualties between 5 and 11 October. The Taliban forces airlifted over 300 victims of the fighting to Kandahar on the 12th and 13th. The next day, Kandahar's Mirwais hospital admitted 194 patients. To deal with this influx the ICRC, which runs the facility, reinforced its staff there on 15 October by dispatching an extra surgical team from Quetta, Pakistan.

In the meantime, the ICRC has carried on its work to protect prisoners. Last week it visited 100 held by the Taliban in Jalalabad. As of 13 October, 70 others had been registered and visited in Kabul. In addition, ICRC delegates in Taligan contacted officials of the former government with a view to obtaining access to Taliban prisoners.

The ICRC is continuing to distribute food in Kabul, in particular to widows and disabled people. Two more convoys laden with flour and vegetable oil are scheduled to leave Peshawar, Pakistan, for the Afghan capital this week.

Finally, a convoy that left Taligan on 9 October carrying two ICRC teams as well as medical supplies and blankets reached the northernmost part of the Panjshir valley on 14 October after crossing a number of passes in the Hindu Kush mountains.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, Tel. ++873 382 280 131
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2906

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

AID TO SCHOOLCHILDREN

Beginning next week, schools in the Chechen cities of Grozny, Gudermes and Argun will be the object of an ICRC assistance programme, the first phase of which is intended to benefit 17,000 schoolchildren.

While the situation has been calm in the Chechen republic since the end of August 1996, the oncoming winter months are expected to be harsh. Many residents of Grozny are living in
ruins that will require lengthy reconstruction work. But life is returning to normal, numerous obstacles notwithstanding. Children have returned to school, though the damage sustained during last summer's fighting means that not all classrooms can be heated.

The ICRC has therefore decided to launch a programme to assist children enrolled in the most severely damaged schools. They will be served sandwiches and tea every schoolday at noon. The programme, which will be carried out in conjunction with parent-teacher associations, will continue throughout the winter and should benefit some 45,000 children.

The ICRC has already furnished school supplies to 16 schools in Grozny. In addition, rolls of reinforced plastic sheeting have been distributed, according to need, to a number of Grozny schools to insulate classrooms from the cold. In southern Chechnya, 27 schools in the Shali area have also received plastic sheeting.

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

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:

During the week-end of 19-20 October 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 203 79 80
NORTHERN IRAQ
ICRC AID FOR WOUNDED AND DETAINNEES

The intense fighting that has been raging for several days between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), particularly in the Dokan lake region, has again caused heavy losses. Between 250 and 300 war wounded have been admitted to ICRC-assisted hospitals in the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah areas since mid-October. Around 200 of these casualties were initially screened and given first aid at the Rania hospital near Dhokan. ICRC nurses have distributed emergency medical supplies such as dressing sets and medicines to surgical facilities on both sides, sufficient to treat several hundred patients.

Since 12 October, ICRC delegates have visited some 300 persons detained on either side in connection with the conflict. In accordance with its mandate, the ICRC is continuing its attempts to obtain access to all detainees and to be allowed to talk to them without witnesses in order to assess their conditions of detention and treatment.

In an effort to promote respect for basic humanitarian standards and values, radio spots explaining the rules of conduct in hostilities have been given to local radio stations in KDP- and PUK-held areas.

Thirteen delegates and around 70 locally hired staff are working out of three ICRC offices in northern Iraq, located in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk. Stocks of blankets, jerrycans, cooking utensils and plastic sheeting sufficient for around 6,000 people are available to assist internally displaced civilians should the need arise.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2086

SIERRA LEONE
AGRICULTURAL REHABILITATION: A PRECONDITION FOR PEACE

Although peace talks between the Sierra Leone government and the United Revolutionary Front have not yet yielded any definite results, the February 1966 cease-fire remains officially in effect. With the relative calm of the last few months, some displaced people and refugees have gradually been returning to their villages in the east of the country, which had been almost entirely depopulated by the fighting. More than 15,000 of the 180,000 people receiving ICRC assistance are former Sierra Leonean refugees who recently returned from Guinea or Liberia.

To meet the needs of the civilian population during the rainy season, which is the most critical time of year from the nutritional viewpoint, the ICRC has distributed some 4,000 tonnes of food over the last six months. It also provided farmers with 1,200 tonnes of rice and groundnut seed and 45,000 hoes so that they could begin to plant crops again. The harvest has already begun, and it should enable the population to regain a measure of self-sufficiency in terms of food. According to Peter
Klinck, an ICRC agricultural engineer, agricultural rehabilitation cannot be completed in a single year, so a second seed distribution will take place in 1997. In addition, 24,000 families will receive tomato, onion, eggplant, pepper, cucumber and okra seed for their vegetable gardens next month.

Alongside its activities to promote nutritional rehabilitation, the ICRC is providing support for health centres and helping to repair water supply systems in the east of the country. It also visits persons detained in connection with the conflict and runs a network for the exchange of family messages between refugees abroad and their relatives in Sierra Leone.

Further information: Laurent Fellay, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++232 22 241 438

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119 MILLION LANDMINES...

On 18 October, a public-interest TV spot produced by the ICRC for its campaign against anti-personnel landmines won first prize at an international competition in Amsterdam, held on the occasion of the 16th International Fundraising Workshop in which about 400 humanitarian organizations took part. The spot is designed to alert public opinion to the indescribable suffering endured by the victims of landmines, by giving figures for the mines likely to kill or maim innocent civilians over the next few years. It has been translated into five languages and broadcast by the major satellite networks and TV stations in 24 countries. At present, some 119 million anti-personnel mines lie scattered in more than 70 countries, not counting the new ones laid every day. The information campaign launched by the ICRC at the end of 1995 is being continued in the hope of stigmatizing landmines and putting an end to this scourge.

Further information: Patrick Mahassen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2392

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PRESS BRIEFING

RESPECT FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW
‘A VAST CHALLENGE AND ONE WAY OF MEETING IT:
THE ICRC ADVISORY SERVICE

will be held
on Thursday 24 October 1996
at 10.00 a.m.
at the International Conference Centre, Geneva (ICCG)
(The room number will be posted in the main lobby)

During the week-end of
26-27 October 1996, for all information
please call the press officer on duty, Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
GREAT LAKES REGION
ASSISTANCE IN GOMA

Following the evacuation of its remaining delegates from Bukavu on 28 October, the ICRC is now concentrating its activities in the Goma area. At the new Mugunga II camp, where some 200,000 Rwandan refugees have arrived from the Kibumba camp further north, it has set up a meeting point to restore contact between members of families split up in the confusion. The names of persons being sought are called out over megaphones by local employees walking through the camp. Once again, hundreds of small children have become separated from their parents. The ICRC has also installed a health centre in the new camp.

In Kanyaruchina, a few kilometres north of Goma, material assistance (blankets, soap, kitchen utensils, jerry cans) has been provided to more than 12,000 displaced Zairians forced to flee their homes when fighting broke out near the Kibumba camp.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2876
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++ 25 42 716 339

TRIBUTE TO ZAIRIAN RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS

Anarchy, chaos and terror have taken hold of Bukavu, forcing UNHCR and most other humanitarian organizations to start withdrawing their staff on 26 October.

Expatriates working for the ICRC and for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies attempted at first to pursue their humanitarian activities alone, but on 28 October, in the face of insurmountable difficulties, they also left the city. Some 300,000 Rwandan refugees and thousands of displaced Zairians are now abandoned to their own fate. In Bukavu, armed groups are fighting over whatever goods can still be found. In the midst of this horror, volunteers from the Red Cross Society of Zaire are showing admirable courage and determination. Every morning, wearing Red Cross tabards and protective gloves and masks, they bury dozens of men, women and children killed during the night throughout the city, risking their own lives to ward off epidemics.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++25 42 716 339
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

OVER 15,000 TRACING REQUESTS

With the number of tracing requests collected by the ICRC having now reached a total of some 15,700, the search for people missing in connection with the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina has taken on new proportions. The ICRC has so far been able to provide information on 985 people, only a small number of whom have been found alive.

This burning humanitarian issue is regularly discussed by the Working Group on Missing Persons which meets once a month in Sarajevo and is chaired by the ICRC. The group's task is to obtain information on those missing from high-level representatives of the former warring parties.

Last June the ICRC launched a regional public information campaign to help trace missing people and provide their families with definite answers regarding their fate. As part of the campaign, it has issued two editions of a publication containing the names of those missing, other personal data and details on the circumstances in which they disappeared. Leaflets, posters and television spots are also being used.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2608
Nina Winquist, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++38 772 656 835

SRI LANKA

ACTIVE NEUTRALITY

The ICRC sub-delegation in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, acted as a neutral intermediary in the release, on 23 October, of three groups of Sri Lankan fishermen whose boats had been boarded in mid-October by naval units of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The fishermen had been detained and their belongings confiscated.

Having first secured permission in principle from the Sri Lankan authorities and the LTTE, ICRC delegates accompanied the fishermen back to their families. The ICRC took part in a similar operation last July.

On 21 October, LTTE representatives in the same region contacted ICRC delegates and asked them to hand over to government authorities the bodies of two soldiers killed in recent fighting. The ICRC, which has been working in Sri Lanka since 1989, is regularly asked to facilitate such operations in its capacity as a neutral intermediary recognized by all the parties to the conflict.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906
Krishanti Weerakoon, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++941 508 404
PHILIPPINES
RELIEF IN THE SOUTH

On 24 October, 682 displaced families on the island of Mindanao (southern Philippines) received food and other aid as part of a joint ICRC-Philippine National Red Cross operation. The families, forced from their homes by an upsurge of fighting between government troops and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) forces in Cotabato and Maguindanao provinces, have found temporary refuge near Cotabato City. An estimated 863 more displaced families in four other areas are soon to be given similar assistance.

The fighting in central Mindanao appears to have taken a turn for the worse in recent days, reportedly claiming numerous civilian and military casualties. The ICRC has been asked to provide medicines to help meet the needs in this area.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2906

INDIA
WAR IN THE MEDIA

Intended as a pilot project for the ICRC's New Delhi delegation, a two-day seminar (26-27 October) on "Humanitarian Reporting of Armed Conflict" turned out to be a truly unique experience: it marked the first time in the region that journalists, army officers and aid personnel came together to discuss humanitarian issues relating to armed conflicts.

The seminar emphasized the difficulties faced by humanitarian organizations working in today's unstructured conflicts and the increasing pressure placed on them to provide information in the absence of more traditional sources. For the ICRC, the primary aim of good working relations with the media is to facilitate its activities for war victims.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2906
Savita Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++ 91 11 463 17 23

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 22.10.96

During the week-end of 2-3 November 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03

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Head of Press: Tony Burgener (Tel.: 730 23 17) - Editor: Kim Gordon-Bates (Tel.: 730 23 02)
GREAT LAKES
ICRC READY TO ACT

Given the scope of the human tragedy now unfolding in Zaire, the international community is urgently seeking ways to deal with the situation. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is all the more concerned as thousands of victims of the fighting are in an area which is, for now, off limits to all humanitarian organizations.

Yet ICRC teams in the area have 11,000 tonnes of food and emergency relief supplies at the ready - sufficient to meet the immediate needs of some 360,000 people - and enough sanitation supplies (in particular for the provision of drinking water) for 200,000. A fleet of some 70 trucks and one aircraft are standing by. The ICRC is in contact with all the parties to the conflict and is reminding each of its obligations under international humanitarian law, as well as reaffirming its own desire to begin work as quickly as possible. A relief operation has now become imperative owing to the scale of the needs created by the conflict and aggravated by the adverse weather. All that is standing in the way of the operation are adequate security guarantees.

The ICRC has therefore sent its Director of Operations, Mr Jean de Courten, to Brussels to take part on 7 November in the European ministerial meeting called to study possible means of assisting the victims of the fighting in Kivu. The World Food Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are also sending representatives.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876
Nic Sommer, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++25 42 716 339

SIERRA LEONE
EMERGENCY MEDICAL ACTIVITIES IN BO

Clashes in Bo on 29 and 30 October between the Sierra Leonian armed forces and Kamanjoes (traditional hunter groups recently formed into militias) resulted in dozens of casualties. The ICRC immediately dispatched a nurse to the city to join a delegate already at the scene. The two worked with first-aid staff from the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, evacuating the wounded and visiting the government hospital, which treated some twenty patients suffering from gunshot wounds.

The ICRC is carrying out a medical and public health programme in the Kenema, Kailahun and Pujehun districts in the east of the country, supplying basic medicines and covering all the operating costs of 12 health centres in the area. ICRC nurses supervise local medical staff and monitor both obstetric cases and the nutritional status of local children. A vaccination campaign was launched last March to combat childhood diseases and yellow fever. The ICRC is also repairing and chlorinating wells in order to increase the amount of drinking water available for the region's population, most of whom have been displaced for several years.

Further information: Laurent Fellay, ICRC Freetown, Tel. ++232 22 240 981
NORTHERN IRAQ
AID TO INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

The ICRC launched a relief operation on 2 November for over 3,000 internally displaced people in northern Iraq who have for several weeks been taking refuge in the Zaleh region, near the Iranian border. Delegates have distributed tents, blankets and cooking and hygiene items to people who fled the fighting in October 1996 between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

A similar programme is now under way in Arbil for nearly 2,000 displaced people from the governorate of Sulaimaniyah.

ICRC delegates are continuing visits to people captured by both factions. They have registered over 900 detainees since 12 October, when the PUK began its counter-offensive.

The ICRC is currently working in the governorates of Dahuk, Sulaimaniyah and Arbil, with a staff of 13 delegates and over 70 local employees.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876

AFGHANISTAN
MEDICINE ON THE MOVE

The ICRC has stepped up its emergency medical activities in response to the continuing fighting north of Kabul. To supplement the warring parties' own arrangements for the evacuation of the wounded, delegates working in conjunction with the Afghan Red Crescent Society have had two ambulances ferrying casualties every day from the front line to the main hospitals in the Afghan capital. The victims are collected along two main roads linking Kabul and Bagram airport some 60 kilometres away. Evacuating the war-wounded often entails crossing enemy lines, and on 3 November an ICRC vehicle driven by a field officer was caught in the cross-fire.

In October more than 300 war-wounded were admitted to the capital's Taliban-run military hospital, a facility receiving a degree of ICRC medical support. Over the same period, two other Kabul hospitals, both of which have since 1993 been receiving full ICRC support for their surgical services (medicines and other medical supplies, fuel oil and food), admitted nearly 350 more victims of the conflict. The five facilities administered and assisted by the ICRC in Afghanistan (Karte Seh and Wazir Akhbar Khan hospitals in Kabul, Mirwais hospital in Kandahar, Jalalabad provincial hospital and Ghazni hospital) have admitted a total of 1,877 patients since 29 September. Many other victims have been hospitalized outside the capital by the belligerents themselves, some in the Panjshir valley, under the control of Commander Masood. The ICRC has therefore dispatched a consignment of medicines and other medical supplies there as well.

On 31 October delegates assessed the need for surgical supplies at the Qala-I-Now hospital located in Badghis province in the north-west, where General Dostom's forces are engaged in an offensive. The ICRC sub-delegation in Herat is also closely following the situation of hundreds of civilians who recently streamed into the town after fleeing the fighting.

In both Kabul and the rest of the country the ICRC is continuing its protection work. From 29 September to 4 October, 1,054 new detainees held by all parties to the conflict were visited and registered.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Kabul, Tel. ++873 382 280 131
Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2086
NORTHERN CAUCASUS / CHECHNYA

GROZNY DROWNING IN SEWAGE

Water and electricity have been restored to some parts of Grozny, but the volume of waste water and sewage that has accumulated since August 1996 is so great that the drainage system is completely clogged, leaving pumping stations unable to function. Sewers are beginning to overflow into the basements of buildings and some streets, posing a serious public health risk.

ICRC engineers have begun working to clear and repair the city's thirteen pumping stations. It will take extra equipment and two weeks of work removing some 10,000 m³ of sludge before the drainage system can be overhauled.

The ICRC also plans to work closely with local media in an information campaign to warn the population of contamination risks.

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

TAJIKISTAN

THREE MILLION FRANC BUDGET EXTENSION

Faced with a need for humanitarian action in Tajikistan that is growing more acute day by day, the ICRC has once again increased its budget for programmes to assist the victims of the conflict between government and opposition forces in that country. The estimated expenditure for 1996 has therefore increased from 12 million to 15 million Swiss francs.

The harsh climate and appalling road conditions are posing serious logistical problems for the ICRC, which has been forced to take special measures (acquiring 15 additional four-wheel-drive vehicles) to keep some population groups from becoming completely cut off by the snows. An example is Tavildara, a town that has seen sporadic fighting. There the ICRC has distributed food, warm clothing and medicines to the remaining population of some 2,500, mostly women, children and elderly people.

Over 20,000 displaced people who have fled the fighting or the resulting isolation are currently receiving regular ICRC assistance in Dushanbe, the Garm valley and Kalai-Khum, in Gorno-Badakhshan.

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

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:

- Update on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 04.11.96

During the week-end of
9-10 November 1996, for all information
please call the press officer on duty, Pierre Gauthier,
on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
TAJIKISTAN
CIVILIANS AT RISK

The situation is steadily deteriorating for civilians in the Tavildara area, where opposition forces have taken control of Kalai Hussein and Sagirdasht, just below the pass leading from central Tajikistan to the autonomous eastern region of Gorno-Badakhshan.

Last week an ICRC convoy delivered 10 tonnes of flour for distribution to about 2,500 people still living there in extremely difficult conditions due to the fighting and heavy snowfalls. In the course of the past six weeks the ICRC has provided this isolated community with medicines and over 40 tonnes of relief supplies, including food, blankets and reinforced plastic sheeting.

Note: TV footage showing the situation in the Tavildara valley is available at the ICRC Audiovisual Division.

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

GREAT LAKES
VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

Some Red Cross volunteers working in the Zairian town of Bukavu have not waited for government and international operations to get under way, but have taken matters into their own hands. In an admirable initiative, two Zairian employees of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, together with members of the Zaire Red Cross Society, have set up their own health centre, using materials which they managed to salvage here and there. The centre is now providing emergency care to over one hundred people a day.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876
Nic Sommer, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2 716 339

CAMEROON
SPEAKING OF CURRENT CONFLICTS

A four-day workshop organized by the ICRC on the teaching of international humanitarian law to the armed forces opened in Yaoundé on 12 November. It brought together senior officers from over 20 mainly French-speaking African countries in charge of instructing their respective troops in the rules of humanitarian law, and experts from the Organization of African Unity and the French military cooperation department.

International humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict, is an expression of resolve on the part of the world's States to establish basic regulations governing the conduct of hostilities, so as to limit the suffering endured by civilian and military victims. It stipulates that individuals not taking part in the fighting - civilians and wounded or captured combatants - must be treated humanely.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
At a time when growing passions are causing a surge in wanton violence accompanied by systematic and large-scale violations of humanitarian law, there is a vital need to step up efforts to spread knowledge of the basic humanitarian rules so that they will become more widely respected. This is the only way to put an end to the spiral of violence and hatred and to promote a return to peace and normality.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Yaoundé, tel. ++237 22 58 59

SOUTH ASIA
NEW CONCEPT IN TRAINING ARMED FORCES

From 2 to 9 November the ICRC regional delegation covering South Asia held a course to train retired officers of various armed forces in the region as instructors in the law of war.

This new approach, which consists in calling upon eminent officers to instruct members of the armed forces in their own countries, is expected to help the ICRC achieve a greater and more meaningful impact in promoting the universal values enshrined in international humanitarian law.

Fifteen officers from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka attended the course, held at Hua Hin in Thailand. The moderators were the ICRC regional delegate to the armed forces, the head of delegation in New Delhi and an ICRC legal expert based in Jakarta.

The standard of the course was enhanced by the vast experience and high calibre of the participating officers, who came from all three services, i.e. the army, navy and air force. Also present were representatives of paramilitary forces and officers who had served in UN operations. The Sri Lankan participants were war-wounded veterans unable to remain in active service but who were perhaps best suited to teaching troops about the rules governing the conduct of hostilities.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++9111 463 17 23

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 96/3 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 06.11.96
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 08.11.96
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Tajikistan, dated 08.11.96

During the week-end of 16 - 17 November 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Tony Burgener, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
"The fighting spread to the entire town, even the night before. We had no choice. We had to leave Bukavu for Walikale and then Kisangani". The ICRC employee left on that fateful day, 30 October. Fleeing the conflict, he became a Zairian displaced person like thousands of others. With a bundle on his head, he stepped up the pace, passing groups of civilians - mainly old people, women and children - all trudging north-west. "Every five minutes I passed yet another straggling band of displaced people". He walked six days without stopping, rested one day, and then rejoined the exodus, his only sustenance some sugar cane and a bit of cassava meal given by the elders of the villages along the way. To steer clear of the perils of the main road, he wandered for 18 days from country trails to forest tracks. Finally, on Saturday 16 November, exhausted, he knocked on the door of the ICRC office in Kisangani. He wanted just three things: news about his family which had left Bukavu before him, food, and water.

This ICRC employee's story is but one example of what is happening all over Kivu: thousands of Zairian men, women and children are fleeing, and no one knows for sure where they are or what help they need. Their plight is today the ICRC's main concern in Zaire. Since the beginning of the crisis and for the last three weeks the ICRC has attempted to gain access to these victims who have been displaced by the conflict and deprived of any assistance. The head of the Kisangani sub-delegation, Andreas Fuog, believes that in the next few days there will be an influx of displaced Zairian families fleeing Bukavu on foot, but it is difficult to estimate how many. They are expected to arrive soon after the ICRC employee, who was able to move faster because he was young and on his own.

Notwithstanding the multiple difficulties barring access to these thousands of displaced people, the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire have sent a truck loaded with four tonnes of medicines, food and blankets to meet them on the way. It set out from the ICRC's logistic base in Kisangani on 20 November.

The ICRC is taking every possible step in the capital to ascertain the whereabouts of all the victims and set up an emergency assistance programme.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++ 243 12 880 0968
Roland Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2876

AFGHANISTAN

KABUL: THREATENED BY HUNGER AND COLD

The ICRC delegation in Kabul reports that the cost of one month's supply of coal and staple foods for an average family reached the equivalent of two months' wages in November, while fighting continued just 20 km from the capital. The message is alarming: no matter what the coming winter may bring (there have already been sub-zero temperatures), access to food will be a major concern for the city's one million inhabitants.
In early November the ICRC began a series of distributions to help the capital's 16 districts through the winter. Coal, blankets, stoves and plastic sheeting were supplied to the most needy population groups (widows, orphans, the disabled and the elderly), in addition to the basic foodstuffs (flour, vegetable oil, beans and rice) that the ICRC has been providing for over a year to 200,000 people, or nearly a quarter of the city's population. The Afghan Red Crescent Society is also taking care of a number of impoverished families (over 2,000 people), with the financial support of the ICRC. A total of 1,800 tonnes of food is thus being distributed each month.

The ICRC's relief administrator in Kabul, Jean-Pascal Salvaj, says that this supplementary food aid provides half of the estimated daily requirement of 2,400 calories per person. It should be adapted to meet needs as they arise, taking the following two factors into particular account:

- a spiralling inflation rate (400% since the beginning of the year) which shows no signs of levelling off. Although Kabul's market is well stocked, staple foods such as flour and oil remain unaffordable for many of the city's inhabitants. The exchange rate of the afghani, the local currency, which had strengthened from approximately 20,000 to 12,000 afghanis per US dollar after the arrival of the Taliban, is now back at 18,000 afghanis per dollar;

- the population's monthly income. The new Taliban administration has paid the salaries of a number of civil servants for the month of October. But more and more people, both residents and displaced people, are now unemployed. They include most of the capital's gainfully employed women who, except for certain medical staff, have lost their jobs.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2086

**MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA**

**ICRC VISITS MOROCCAN PRISONERS HELD BY THE POLISARIO FRONT**

Between 28 October and 9 November 1996 a team of six delegates, including a doctor, visited 847 of the approximately 1,920 Moroccan prisoners still held by the Polisario Front. This was the last of a series of three visits carried out between December 1995 and November 1996, during which delegates met nearly all of these prisoners. Most have been in captivity for over 15 years.

All of those who wished to do so sent a photo and a Red Cross message to their families. A distribution system for parcels sent by families was set up two years ago by the ICRC; it has enabled over 1,000 such parcels to be delivered to the prisoners so far this year.

In the past twelve months, 185 Moroccan and 66 Sahrawi prisoners have been able to return to their families. They were released respectively on 19 November 1995 and 31 October 1996, under ICRC auspices and thanks to the efforts of the United States, Argentine and German governments.

The tragic situation of prisoners captured during the Western Sahara conflict remains a major concern of the ICRC. It will continue to make all the representations that it considers necessary and reiterates its availability to assist in finding a comprehensive solution to this humanitarian problem.

Further information: Werner Kaspar, ICRC Tunis, tel. ++ 21 61 789 134
Roland Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2876
THAILAND

LAW OF WAR SEMINAR FOR THE ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES

A four-day seminar to promote awareness of the law of war among senior Thai military officers was held from 12 to 15 November by the ICRC Regional Delegation for East Asia together with the Thai Supreme Command.

More than 50 high-ranking officers from the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Supreme Command took active part in the seminar, which was the first to be organized in almost a decade. The Thai military officers were given class-room war exercises during which they learned, among other things, how to strike a balance between military necessity and humanitarian requirements when making military decisions. Other topics of the seminar included the law of neutrality, operational planning, behaviour in action and war crimes.

Further information: Niphat Taptagaporn, ICRC Bangkok, tel. ++ 662 251 04 24

ICRC VICE-PRESIDENT ADDRESSES WORLD FOOD SUMMIT

An ICRC delegation led by Vice-President Eric Roethlisberger attended the UN summit on food security which took place in Rome from 13 to 17 November. In his statement, Mr Roethlisberger stressed that respect for international humanitarian law is a crucial factor in ensuring food security in conflict situations. With reference to the current crisis in eastern Zaire, he particularly underscored the fact that the right to assistance - including food aid - essential for the survival of civilians in armed conflict is enshrined in that law. The ICRC also prepared a report for the summit on its approach and experience with regard to food security in situations of armed conflict.

Further information: Meinrad Studer, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2708

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 96/6 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 18.11.96

During the week-end of 23 - 24 November 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rolin Wavre, on (mobile) 41 79 357 15 24
Rwanda

1,000 children already reunited with their families

Before some of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire returned home, among them were more than 19,800 unaccompanied children who had been identified but had not yet been able to rejoin one of their parents. Today, it is impossible to know what has become of many of these children, and there are certainly thousands of others, both in Zaire and in neighbouring countries, who became separated from their parents during the recent refugee movements.

In the short term, everything is being done to find rapid means of restoring contact (active tracing) between unaccompanied children and parents seeking lost children. Each child is registered and where possible, a Red Cross message is sent immediately to one of its relatives. The ICRC gives top priority to such messages in its distribution network, in the hope of finding one of the child's parents as quickly as possible.

This past week a further 4,000 unaccompanied children have been registered by ICRC teams. They have all been taken back to their home provinces, and 1,000 of them have already been reunited with their families.

Further information: Laura O'Mahony, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 72 781
Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Gisenyi, tel. ++871 68 228 23 30

Afghanistan

Medical and food aid on all fronts

The ICRC decided to airlift 1,700 kg of medicines and other medical supplies into northern Afghanistan on Monday 25 November. The consignment is intended for hospitals in the Panjshir valley, one of the strongholds of the forces opposed to the Taliban administration.

The aircraft had to make two round trips between Gardez and the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif, where the supplies are being loaded onto trucks and will be taken to the Panjshir valley by road. Medicines, sterile dressings and blood serum for transfusion will be distributed to several hospitals in the area. Médecins du monde and Pharmaciens sans frontières are also involved in this operation.
On 24 November, a convoy which was scheduled to travel from Kabul to Gulbahar had to be cancelled because of heavy fighting about 20 km north of the capital, but the ICRC managed to evacuate many casualties on either side of the front line.

There are also humanitarian needs in the north-western province of Badghis as a result of the armed clashes there. An ambulance service has been set up in Qala-i-Nau to evacuate the wounded arriving from the front line, situated in the Murghab area. The ICRC is giving assistance to the town's 30-bed hospital and to the military hospital in Herat. Large numbers of displaced people are still streaming into Herat. Some 400 displaced families are already receiving food rations from the ICRC; blankets, plastic sheeting, candles and soap will be distributed to them on 30 November.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 96/8 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 22.11.96

If you would like to receive the English versions of ICRC press releases and the weekly ICRC News by e-mail, please send your e-mail address to: pmw.gva@gwn.icrc.org

During the week-end of 30 November - 1 December 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rubén Ortega, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03
PEACE IMPLEMENTATION CONFERENCE IN LONDON  
MAIN FOCUS ON MISSING PERSONS

The Peace Implementation Conference for the Dayton agreement will be held on 4 and 5 December in London.
The ICRC's work in the former Yugoslavia continues to focus on the search for missing persons. 
Delegates have so far:
- collected nearly 16,000 individual files from the families of those who remain missing;
- centralized all the available information about the missing;
- assigned to each of the former warring parties, as part of a working group set up and chaired by the ICRC, specific responsibility for inquiring into cases of missing persons;
- published the complete list of the names of those who remain missing and launched an extensive campaign among the general public to maximize the chances of obtaining data on the missing.

So far, answers have been found in nearly 1,000 cases. A few dozen persons for whom tracing requests were filed have turned out to be alive. None of them was 'found' by the ICRC in a 'secret' place of detention, and it is therefore to be feared that all the missing persons who could have come forward of their own accord have already done so, and that the remaining thousands are no longer alive.

In its capacity as a neutral intermediary between the families of the missing persons and the former warring parties, the ICRC will nevertheless actively pursue the search for reliable data and forward the information gathered to the families, who now face the difficult task of coming to terms with their loss and regaining some peace of mind. Ascertaining the fate of their missing relatives should aid them in that process.

A press briefing will be held in London by ICRC President Cornélion Sommaruga today at 4.30 p.m.

Further information: Anton Burgener, ICRC Geneva, Tel: ++ 44 421 64 66 13
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel: ++ 41 22 7302281

PRESS CONFERENCE ON 18 DECEMBER 1996  
ICRC EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR 1997

On 18 December, the ICRC will make an emergency appeal for its 1997 field operations. At a press conference scheduled for 2.30 p.m. at ICRC headquarters, Director of Operations Jean de Courten will outline the challenges facing the organization as this year draws to a close and describe the ICRC's financial situation. The 1997 appeal will contain complete information regarding the finances and objectives of each of the 50 field delegations, and will be addressed to the ICRC's donors (mainly governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC, Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 23 17
NEWS

TAJIKISTAN

A VALLEY UNDER FIRE

Opposition forces seized control on 1 December of the small town of Garm, north-west of Dushanbe, thus breaking the cease-fire that had been agreed between local representatives of the warring parties and had held for some two months. The local ICRC team reacted immediately to the renewed hostilities by providing medicines and other emergency medical supplies for the treatment of those wounded in the fighting. Finding themselves extremely close to the action, the five delegates also distributed food and blankets and managed to forward Red Cross messages across the battle lines. This work was welcomed on both sides.

Hundreds of displaced families have sought refuge in the many villages of the Garm Valley, itself divided between government and opposition forces. These people have fled the fighting that has been flaring sporadically in this mountainous region. A road with numerous checkpoints is the only access route for emergency relief, which the ICRC sends to groups of people cut off by the rugged terrain, the harsh weather conditions and the dangers of relentless warfare.

At present, over 23,000 displaced people are receiving regular ICRC assistance in the Garm Valley, Dushanbe and Kalaikhun, in Gorno-Badakhshan.

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

LIBERIA

THE ICRC VISITS 129 SIERRA LEONEANS

From 28 to 30 November the ICRC visited 129 Sierra Leoneans held captive by members of the United Liberation Movement of Alhaji Kromah (ULIMO-K). During the visit, which took place in Bopolu, in the district of Lofa, ICRC delegates were able to interview the detainees in private and assess their state of health.

Several hundred Sierra Leoneans who recently fled the eastern part of that country and sought refuge in Liberia were arrested by members of ULIMO-K, a faction of the Liberian Council of State. The ICRC is planning to carry out similar visits in the coming days in order to register all the detainees.

It is up to the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone to determine the status of these people. Should the parties decide to organize their repatriation, the ICRC will speak with each of the detainees individually to make sure that they indeed wish to return home.

Further information: Franz Rauchenstein, ICRC Monrovia, tel. ++231 226 306
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 28 76

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update 96/11 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 02.12.96
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Former Yugoslavia, dated 29.11.96.

During the week-end of 7-8 December 1996, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC VISITS 110 PRISONERS HELD BY OPPOSITION FORCES

On 7 December, four ICRC delegates based in Garm visited 110 government soldiers captured by opposition forces during the fighting which took place in the area on the first of the month. The delegates spoke to each prisoner in private, in accordance with the ICRC's standard procedure, to assess their conditions of detention. They provided medical supplies for the prisoners and will deliver more assistance during a forthcoming visit.

In the past 10 days, the delegates have also distributed food, blankets and medicines to victims of the recent upsurge in violence. Since the road linking the area to Dushanbe has been cut off by the fighting, this was only possible thanks to the stocks that the ICRC keeps on the spot.

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

Reminder

PRESS CONFERENCE ON 18 DECEMBER 1996
ICRC EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR 1997

On 18 December, the ICRC will make an emergency appeal for its 1997 field operations. At a press conference scheduled for 2.30 p.m. at ICRC headquarters, Director of Operations Jean de Courten will outline the challenges facing the organization as this year draws to a close and describe the ICRC's financial situation. The 1997 appeal will contain complete information regarding the finances and objectives of each of the 50 field delegations, and will be addressed to the ICRC's donors (mainly governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC, Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 23 17

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update 96/13 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 9.12.96
- Update 96/3 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 5.12.96

During the week-end of 
14 - 15 December 1996, for all 
information 
please call the press officer on 
duty, Suzanne Berger, on 
(mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
At a meeting with the heads of the Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva, originally scheduled to launch the ICRC's financial appeals for 1997, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga gave the ambassadors details of the previous day's tragic events in Chechnya and condemned "this barbaric act" in the strongest terms. "If we accept that such intolerable behaviour will continue in a climate of indifference, then the intolerable will become the rule. Yesterday's tragedy must be seen from this perspective if it is to have any meaning. It is a challenge to us all: governments, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations alike. (...) There are clear choices to be made, and clear messages to be given." Mr Sommaruga concluded: "While it is too early for any definitive decision about the future of our humanitarian action, and in particular about our presence in Chechnya, the reactions of your governments and their support will certainly make a vital contribution to our common effort to preserve an oasis of humanity in the very midst of conflict."

Mr Sommaruga's statement can be obtained from the ICRC Press Division, tel. ++41 730 2309.

A press release will be issued on Monday 23 December with details of the ICRC's financial appeals for 1997, which are in the order of 142 million Swiss francs for the headquarters budget and 618 million for the field budget. The press file will be available at the Press Division on Monday.

**ZAIRE**

**ICRC STILL ONLY ORGANIZATION WORKING IN SHABUNDA**

The ICRC is providing assistance for almost 50,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees who have gathered near the town of Shabunda, 200 km west of Bukavu. This temporary site deep in the forest is seeing several thousand new arrivals every day. The aid operation is being conducted in extremely arduous conditions because of the nature of the terrain and heavy rainfall. Supplies are first airlifted by heavy transport plane from Nairobi to Kundu in eastern Zaire, then transferred to lighter aircraft which can land at Shabunda. There they are loaded onto dugout canoes, and for the last part of the journey bicycles have to be used.

On 17 December an ICRC team went to Lubutu to assess the situation of 120,000 other refugees who are living in very difficult conditions.

Further information: Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 730 2826
The second phase of the campaign launched to trace people still unaccounted for following the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina has proved a great success: hundreds of new tracing requests were collected and a considerable amount of fresh information was gathered during the three-week period.

The number of incoming requests jumped from less than 100 a week nationwide to more than 450. In the capital Sarajevo, for example, an average of 17 requests a week were filed prior to the second phase; this figure rose to 200-300. In Tuzla, 293 families approached the ICRC with information on missing family members, as compared with 83 in the previous three weeks.

"We are overwhelmed by these results, which once again point up the vital importance of our work here. The massive influx of requests shows that thousands of families are still searching for their loved ones", said Bardia Bodaghi, ICRC tracing coordinator in Sarajevo. He added that the ICRC will do its utmost to provide families with answers in 1997. To date, the ICRC has gathered nearly 18,000 tracing requests, but only 1,000 cases have been resolved.

Last March the Working Group on Missing Persons decided that the ICRC would collect tracing requests only up to 14 December 1996, and would then concentrate all its efforts on finding answers.

The current phase of the campaign was launched on 21 November as a reminder to the families of missing persons of the deadline. A third phase aimed at gathering as much information as possible on what happened to those still unaccounted for will begin in February 1997.

The campaign is being conducted in cooperation with national and local Bosnian press, radio and TV, throughout the Federation and the Serb Republic. As a result of the massive increase in demand, the ICRC has now agreed with the former warring parties that the deadline for handing in tracing requests will be extended for a further three months.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++ 38 771 652 407
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2281

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 96/15 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 17.12.96

Should you require any information during the weekend of 21-22 December
or over the holiday (24-25 December),
please contact duty press officer
Tony Burgener
on ++4179 202 3670 (mobile phone)
ICRC EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR 1997

After the profound shock and sorrow of hearing that six of its delegates had been murdered in Novye Atagi, Chechnya, on Tuesday, 17 December 1996, the ICRC owes it to the hundreds of thousands of victims all over the world to continue its efforts to relieve their suffering. Considerable thought will have to be given to analysing new ways of carrying out humanitarian operations, but in the meantime the ongoing operations in 25 conflict zones and 20 regional delegations need to be supported and financed. The appeals for 1997 were accordingly launched by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga in Geneva on 18 December 1996: a total of 142 million Swiss francs (107 million US dollars) is requested for the headquarters budget, and of 618 million Swiss francs (465 million US dollars) for the field budget. The field budget shows an increase of 8% compared to the initial budget for 1996, without taking possible operations in Zaire into account.

The largest proportion of the field budget is assigned to Africa, with 236 million Swiss francs (38% of the budget), followed by Eastern Europe and Central Asia with 128 million (20%) and Asia with 110 million (18%). The operations with the highest budget for 1997 are those in Rwanda with 67 million Swiss francs, followed by Afghanistan with 61 million and the former Yugoslavia with 57 million. In terms of specific activities the budget is divided up as follows: 29% relief activities, 26% tracing and detention-related activities and 15% health-related activities.

Financial problems in 1996
54 million Swiss francs still lacking

The shortage of funds for the current year is a source of concern for the ICRC. A total of 54 million Swiss francs (41 million US dollars) is still needed to close the 1996 accounts without a deficit. Moreover, pledges amounting to 60 million francs and as yet unpaid still have to be honoured. If donors do not respond immediately to close the gap, the ICRC will most probably face an unprecedented financial situation at the end of the year.
The headquarters appeal concerns two major areas: operational support for emergency activities conducted in the field and long-term activities aimed at ensuring greater protection for conflict victims; these tasks are backed up by administrative and communication activities. There are 665 permanent staff working at ICRC headquarters today.

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2317

ICRC activities from January to September 1996

**Detention:** over 100,000 prisoners visited in more than 1,500 places of detention in 52 countries.

**Tracing:** More than 1.3 million Red Cross messages forwarded between relatives separated by conflict; more than 4,000 persons reunited with their families.

**Relief supplies:** more than 45,000 tonnes of relief supplies (food, clothing, blankets, tents, etc.) distributed.

**Medical aid:** medical supplies worth more than 18 million Swiss francs distributed.

**Surgery:** more than 7,000 patients admitted to six ICRC hospitals in Africa, Asia and Chechnya, where more than 14,500 surgical operations were performed. Two other ICRC-supported hospitals received medical supplies and technical assistance for more than 6,000 patients and carried out almost 10,000 surgical operations.

**Assistance for the disabled:** Involvement in 21 prosthetic/orthotic projects in 10 countries where more than 3,000 amputees were fitted with prostheses, while more than 1,000 people received orthopaedic appliances.

Should you require any information during the 24-25 December, please contact duty press officer

Tony Burgener
on ++ 4179 202 3670 (mobile phone)

or from the 28 December to the 1st January, please contact duty press officer

Kim Gordon-Bates
on ++ 41 79 50 03 (mobile phone)