HOSTAGES IN PERU

ICRC'S HUMANITARIAN ACTION CONTINUES

The ICRC is continuing to provide food and medical assistance for the hostages held since 17 December last at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima by members of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).

Every day delegates deliver two hot meals per person, water, hygiene items and other basic necessities to the residence, and two ICRC doctors give regular medical consultations to the 74 people still being held there.

During the past three weeks delegates have also been offering the hostages moral support and have arranged for the exchange of some 1,800 Red Cross messages between them and their families.

The ICRC is trying to maintain, by its presence, a calm atmosphere both inside and outside the residence. It constantly reminds Peruvian government representatives and MRTA members alike that one condition for its presence is that no initiative be taken which could endanger the hostages' lives or physical safety.

At the start of the crisis the ICRC was asked by the Peruvian authorities and the representatives of the MRTA to act as a neutral intermediary. It is working to facilitate dialogue between the two parties with a view to securing a peaceful solution.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 2848

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/1 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 7.1.97

During the week-end of 14-15 December 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

ICRC VISITS DETAINED CIVILIANS AND REBEL SOLDIERS

On 8 January an ICRC delegate visited 46 people held in Bangui by the Central African gendarmerie in connection with the mutiny that started in mid-November last year. Among those being held are nine rebel soldiers captured by French troops during their operation on 5 January and then handed over to the gendarmerie nationale. Some of the detained civilians have since been released, but the soldiers remain in custody.

The delegate took note of the identity of each of the captives and checked their state of health. First-aid workers from the Central African Red Cross Society go to the gendarmerie every day in order to deliver food and basic hygiene items.

The visits are conducted with the approval of the Ministry of Defence, under a 1992 agreement between the Central African Republic and the ICRC authorizing the organization to carry out regular visits to persons held in the country for security reasons.

Further information: Ulrich Bédert, ICRC Yaoundé, tel. ++237 225 859

COLOMBIA

EMERGENCY AID IN YONDO-ANTIOQUIA AREA

ICRC delegates based in Bucaramanga, in the department of Santander in central Colombia, went to the municipality of Yondó (department of Antioquia) on 10 January to take emergency aid to victims of the internal violence in Puerto Nuevo, a village on the banks of the River Ité. They were accompanied by representatives of the Colombian Red Cross.

Fifteen of the village's 20 houses had been burnt down by armed men. One person died in the incident and another is reported missing.

It was nightfall before the ICRC and Colombian Red Cross team reached Puerto Nuevo, known to its inhabitants as Cooperativa, after a ten-hour drive along almost impassable tracks. The 70 or so villagers - two-thirds of them children - fled into the woods when they saw the approaching vehicles, and emerged only when they recognized the red cross emblem. The team gave them food, kitchen utensils, hygiene items, blankets and mattresses. For the time being they are sheltering in the few houses left standing. The ICRC is closely monitoring developments in the situation so as to afford them protection.
There are reported to be 300 displaced persons in the Yondo-Antioquia area. "The Puerto Nuevo incident is serious", said Christophe Kleber, head of the ICRC's subdelegation in Bucaramanga. "It could well signal an escalation in the conflict."

According to human rights organizations in Colombia, the consequences of the internal conflict are disastrous for the civilian population. They estimate that every year 73,000 people are driven from their homes, 2,600 are killed and more than 500 others are taken captive.

The ICRC delegation in Bogotá is concerned about the increasingly severe effects of the internal violence in humanitarian terms.

The ICRC has been working in Colombia since 1980. It currently has a delegation in Bogotá, subdelegations in Cali, Medellín, Apartadó, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla and Villavicencio, and offices in Saravena, Florencia and Pasto, with a fourth due to open shortly in Cúcuta. The organization operates with a staff of 42 delegates and 90 local personnel in the country.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Bogotá, tel. ++571 310 3985
Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2454

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/1 on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus.
dated 10.1.97

During the week-end of 18 - 19 December 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rolin Wavre, on (mobile) 41 79 357 15 24
AFGHANISTAN
A LITTLE POORER EVERY DAY

The population of Kabul is growing poorer with every passing day. A further 20,000 people displaced by the recent fighting have added their numbers in the past week to the thousands of destitute people already living in the Afghan capital. The new arrivals are made up of families who have fled the Mir Bachakot area, the scene of the latest Taliban offensive. The ICRC distributed food aid (flour, beans and vegetable oil) where needed and provided them with blankets, soap and charcoal. The number of poverty-stricken people living in Kabul and receiving regular ICRC assistance is constantly rising: last autumn it stood at 180,000 and has now increased to 216,000 - about a fifth of the city's current population. With the breakdown of the local economy, the severity of the winter weather and the effects of a never-ending conflict, it is now up to international organizations to meet the needs of an increasingly exhausted populace.

In December alone, prices rose in Kabul by 25%. Some provinces in the north saw inflation rates of 140%, prompting demonstrations, in Kunduz for example. The devaluation of the afghani, the local currency, is one reason for the increase in the cost of living. A week before Ramadan it lost 16% of its value, an event which had a serious impact on the price of staple foods, with tea, flour, sugar and rice suddenly becoming unaffordable. The purchasing power of civil servants (whose monthly salaries range from four to five US dollars) is now equivalent to the price of a single 7-kg bag of rice per month.

With poverty spreading and most of Kabul's districts still without electricity, the ICRC is making a special effort to provide the people assisted by it with the means to keep warm. It is continuing to distribute blankets, candles, charcoal and wood stoves to the disabled, war widows and orphans, who are among the most vulnerable inhabitants of the Afghan capital.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, Tel. ++873 682 283 880
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2906

RWANDA
REFUGEES RETURN TO KAMEMBE

In the south-western Rwandan town of Kamembe humanitarian organizations are now facing a flood of returning refugees from Zaire, most of whom are in very poor health. Since 8 January nearly 2,000 people a day have been crossing the border near Bukavu. Delegates have aided dozens of the weakest individuals, and some 300 have been hospitalized. A water distribution centre with a capacity of 18,000 litres per day has been set up at the Nyagatare transit centre.
The ICRC was saddened and indignant to learn of the murder in Ruhengeri on 18 January of three Spanish representatives of Médecins du monde. The ICRC is no stranger to such events, two of which in 1996 took the lives of nine of its delegates in Burundi and Chechnya. Its expatriates stationed in Gisenyi and Ruhengeri are now in Kigali, where intensive discussions are being held at the ICRC delegation and numerous outside contacts have been made in order to work out an approach that will allow the ICRC to continue working for all the victims of conflict in the region.

Further information: Laura O'Mahony, ICRC Kigali, Tel. ++ 250 72 781
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++ 2542 716 339
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2876

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

VISIT BY ICRC PRESIDENT

ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga has spent the last week visiting relief projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina and meeting political and spiritual leaders and local Red Cross representatives.

In both entities - the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina - the ICRC is working closely with the national Red Cross Societies of Germany, Austria and the United States to implement programmes in aid of the poorest of the poor in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Seeing some of the 200,000 people in the country who daily brave cold and embarrassment to queue for a bowl of hot soup or a package of dry food, President Sommaruga remarked that, despite the international community's present focus on longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation, there are more immediate needs that must continue to be addressed.

On several occasions in various parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina the ICRC President met representatives of the families who have filed tracing requests with the ICRC and are still waiting for an answer regarding the fate of missing relatives. Mr Sommaruga acknowledged that those of the missing who were able to come forward of their own accord have probably already done so and that it is to be feared that the remaining 18,000 are no longer alive.

President Sommaruga held meetings with two of the three members of the country's collegial presidency, Mr Krezimir Zubak and Mr Momcilo Krajsnik. He also met Mr Haris Silajdzic, the new Co-Chairman of the central government's Council of Ministers, and Mr Jadranko Prlic, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Further information: Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, Tel.: ++ 387 71 652 407
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel.: ++ 41 22 730 22 81

During the week-end of 25 - 26 December 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
NEW RWANDA
NEARLY 8,000 CHILDREN REUNITED WITH THEIR FAMILIES

Since the beginning of the mass return of Rwandan refugees from Zaire and later from Tanzania, some 10,500 unaccompanied children have been registered and cared for by the ICRC and its working partners in the field. To date, three-quarters of them have been reunited with their families, thanks to active tracing on the road, in transit centres and, finally, in their communes of origin.

As the first wave of refugees returned from Zaire last November, 6,350 lost children were collected along the way and 5,150 of them (81%) were reunited with their families. A further 2,600 became separated from their parents when returning from Tanzania; of these 1,900 (74%) rejoined their families. During the latest influx of refugees from Zaire via Bukavu and Kamembe, ICRC delegates on the spot have already coordinated the registration of 1,500 more unaccompanied children; so far almost 800 have been reunited with relatives.

Among the ICRC's partners in the Rwanda tracing programme are Save the Children (UK), Concern, World Vision, Feed the Hungry International, and the Rwandan Ministry for Social Affairs. The operation is also being coordinated with UNHCR and UNICEF.

Further information: Laura O'Mahony, Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++ 2542 723 963

THE ICRC AND THE USE OF ARMED GUARDS

The fact that the ICRC is considering the use of armed guards following a recent meeting of its heads of delegation held to discuss problems of security in humanitarian action has been misinterpreted in some sectors of the media. The ICRC clearly does not intend to protect humanitarian activities with armed escorts, and strongly reaffirms its conviction that humanitarian work must be dissociated from military operations aimed at ensuring security and restoring law and order in regions affected by conflict. The ICRC thus rules out the use of armed escorts to protect humanitarian convoys or any other humanitarian activity.

On the other hand, in situations marked by increasing crime and banditry, the ICRC has decided to step up security for its expatriate and local staff and its premises by advocating the use of armed guards at residences and at the workplace. This service will be provided by guards recruited from local, officially recognized security firms; it will be offered as long as it is accepted by the authorities and the population, and only to protect staff from criminal activity.
In situations where the risk stems from a problem of acceptance of the ICRC's presence and of its humanitarian action, the ICRC will continue to try and establish a permanent dialogue with all parties to the conflict. This dialogue is essential in order to obtain guarantees of respect for the ICRC's staff and infrastructure and for those of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies working to assist conflict victims.

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

AFGHANISTAN

MARSHALLING AID FOR ORPHANS

Countless Afghan children have died in shelling or in landmine explosions; many others have succumbed to malnutrition or disease (over 4 million since 1979, according to UNICEF). Among the survivors are those who are now orphans - war orphans whose existence has been forgotten by the belligerents. In Karte Parwan, one of the poorest districts of Kabul, a number of humanitarian organizations are fighting to save 500 children, along with their orphanage.

It has been several months now since the Tahia Maskan orphanage received any assistance whatsoever from the authorities. Just a few weeks ago its young inmates were completely destitute, without heating, food or clothing. Working with Médecins sans frontières, Solidarités, the World Food Programme and other agencies, the ICRC rallied support and material aid for the orphanage. Food and firewood were provided and pullovers and shoes distributed. Some of the foreign journalists on assignment in Kabul were moved by the children's plight. One of them, a French TF1 television reporter who recently won the Pierre Mille prize for her coverage of Afghanistan, has just told the ICRC that she intends to donate the award money to the orphanage.

Saving the Tahia Maskan orphanage will be a long-term undertaking. Its Afghan employees know this: most of them are still at work, though they receive no pay.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 682 283 880

Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

During the week-end of
1 - 2 February 1997, for all information
please call the press officer on duty,
Joerg Stoecklin, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
ETHIOPIA

ICRC ASSISTS 2,000 DISPLACED FAMILIES

In the past week an ICRC team has distributed basic non-food relief supplies (blankets, jerrycans, buckets and soap) to 2,000 heads of displaced families in the Dolo area of Ethiopia, near the point where the borders of Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya converge. The families concerned had fled the tense situation on the border between Ethiopia and Somalia. Surveys conducted in October and December last showed that around 10,000 people of the Marehan and Rahanwein tribes had left their homes to seek refuge in Ethiopia, where they were receiving no assistance from either the authorities or international organizations.

"The Marehan have mingled with the local population, who were already living in extremely precarious circumstances and suffering acute food shortages due to drought", explained delegate Didier Roguet on his return from the distribution, which was carried out with the help of some of the elders in the area and with the approval of the civilian and military authorities. "But between 3,000 and 4,000 Rahanwein who had fled the fighting around Baidoa are now huddled in a makeshift camp about 2 km outside the town of Dolo, where they are cut off from any aid or other support. More displaced people are arriving every day."

The distributions in and around Dolo covered 800 Marehan and 600 Rahanwein families. Relief supplies were also distributed in Suftu, 38 km to the west on the Kenyan border, where displaced people of various ethnic origins have taken shelter. The ICRC delegation in Addis Ababa intends to discuss the situation in this largely neglected area with the respective authorities and other aid agencies.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++25 11 51 83 66

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ICRC STEPS UP SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSONS

As part of its continuing effort to help the families of missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ICRC is currently reviewing its methods of obtaining information from the former warring parties on the whereabouts of the thousands of people still unaccounted for.

Since March 1996, individual tracing requests collected by the ICRC have been submitted to the Working Group on missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Working Group, set up and chaired by the ICRC, has so far held monthly meetings attended by representatives of all the signatories of the Dayton peace agreement.

The last three meetings of the Working Group became the scene of political debates between the former warring parties and no progress was made on the main issue. The families of missing persons, also represented at the meetings, expressed their helplessness and frustration at this development. Of the 18,000 tracing requests collected to date, only 1,000 have received answers.

The ICRC now intends to hold bilateral and multilateral consultations with the former belligerents in order to boost the process. New mechanisms will have to be found and the composition of the delegations attending the meetings reviewed in order to place the former warring parties before their responsibilities and obtain reliable information for the families.

Further information: Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 652 407
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
On 17 January Chad became the first country this year to announce its accession to Protocols I and II additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. This paves the way for further accessions in 1997, an important year for the Protocols as 8 June will be the twentieth anniversary of their adoption. Together with the Geneva Conventions, these instruments form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law.

Some years after the Second World War, struggles for independence from colonial rule and revolutionary conflicts flared up in various parts of the world. In these new situations the four Geneva Conventions, which lay down rules relating to armed conflict between sovereign States, did not apply. In modern warfare, civilians pay a heavy toll and control of the population is often the main issue at stake. The ICRC therefore felt that the legal protection afforded by the Conventions should be extended to the victims of this type of conflict and of civil wars, which were becoming increasingly frequent. The two Additional Protocols remind combatants of their obligation to distinguish at all times between civilians and military objectives and to respect, in all circumstances, the "fundamental guarantees" which prohibit such acts as the taking of hostages, torture, murder, mutilation, affronts to personal dignity (including sexual abuse) and collective punishment.

Yet, in the twenty years since 1977, results have been long in coming. So far, 147 States have acceded to Protocol I (which protects the victims of international armed conflict) and 139 to Protocol II (applicable in non-international conflicts), while 188 are bound by the Geneva Conventions. With the improvement in the political climate following the end of the Cold War, the ICRC hopes that this anniversary will prompt other countries to make the commitment to respect and ensure respect for these international treaties which are so basic to the protection of conflict victims.

According to René Kosimik, ICRC Deputy Director for International Law and Policy, "the essence of the two Protocols is as topical as ever: the deadly anarchy that reigns in so many of today's conflicts makes it more crucial than ever to affirm the principle of respect for civilians, which lies at the heart of international humanitarian law.


ICRC EXPRESSES PROFOUND SHOCK AT KILLING OF FOUR HUMAN RIGHTS WORKERS IN RWANDA

The ICRC was shocked and saddened to learn of the death of four United Nations human rights monitors and their local driver in Rwanda on Tuesday 4 February. The killings, which come only weeks after the murder in Ruhengeri of three Spanish representatives of Médecins du monde, bring into sharp focus the dangers facing humanitarian workers in the region. Following that tragedy, the ICRC temporarily withdrew its staff from Gisenyi and Ruhengeri to the capital, Kigali. Discussions are still under way to find an approach which will allow the ICRC to continue its humanitarian work in the region.

Further information: Josue Anselmo, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++ 250 72 781
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2678

During the week-end of 8 - 9 February 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update 97/1 on ICRC activities in the Rwanda, dated 28.1.97
TAJIKISTAN
CONCERN OVER HOSTAGES

With the hostage crisis in its ninth day, the ICRC is deeply concerned about the 14 people still held in captivity following the release of two ICRC staff last Friday.

ICRC operations in Tajikistan are currently suspended. However, a small team has remained in the country and delegates in Dushanbe stand ready to deliver food and medicine to the hostages, and evacuate the sick if necessary. The ICRC welcomed the release yesterday of a sick hostage.

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

CROATIA
SURVIVING THE PEACE

Last week, in several Croatian villages near the former front lines, the ICRC launched the third phase of its first-ever campaign to raise awareness of mines among affected populations. Since the beginning of the campaign in the country, the aim has been to reduce the danger presented by an estimated 3 million live mines and some 150,000 additional explosive devices that remain in the ground. Other hidden weapons and ammunition depots left behind following various offensives also constitute a serious problem.

This type of danger is especially acute in post-war periods, when people begin to cross former front lines and enter unmarked minefields, and when children at play discover abandoned weapons and ammunition. Over the past three years in Croatia, some 300 children have been killed by mines and more than 900 amputations have been performed on mine victims. In a country where unexploded devices from the Second World War are still being found, specialists believe that the problem will continue to exist for at least 20 more years.

The mine-awareness campaign in Croatia is being conducted with the help of volunteers from the Croatian Red Cross, 83 of whom were trained by an ICRC mine expert during the second phase of the project. During the current phase, these trained volunteers will run seminars in their communities. Moreover, in order to reach as many people as possible, a new series of TV and radio spots and press advertisements is being launched, and posters are being printed and put up in schools and other public places.

Further information: Nela Sefic or Bruce Biber, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++385 1611 2444
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281
AFGHANISTAN
PROVIDING RELIEF FAR AND WIDE

Displaced, dispersed and cut off, the victims of the Afghan conflict seem more destitute than ever as winter advances. Recent fighting in Charikar and Jabal-Saraj to the north of Kabul has forced thousands of civilians to take to the snow-covered roads. Very often, they have little access to food or medical care. On 3 and 4 February, for the second time in six months, the ICRC had to fly emergency supplies to the few medical facilities that exist in the Panjshir valley. At the same time, it arranged for a convoy of donkeys to carry food, clothing and blankets to a group of 1,500 people trapped by snow on the north-western slopes of the Hindu Kush mountains. Like many other displaced civilians, the group had fled the front line at Salang, 80 kilometres north of Kabul, and was heading for the town of Pul-i-Khumri in Baghlan province.

From Pul-i-Khumri, the ICRC is currently distributing food to some 6,000 people forced from their homes by the latest clashes between Taliban government forces and units of the opposition coalition. But as delegates conduct surveys in Baghlan province, other needs come to light. North of Salang, a group of 2,400 displaced civilians, half of whom are amputees, has been provided with food and firewood; in Dare Kayan, another group of 1,500 people, many of them children, is also receiving temporary assistance.

The ICRC undertakes individual operations such as these in addition to its regular distributions of food to the needy in Kabul (210,000 people) and to displaced civilians around the towns of Bamyan (4,600) and Ghazni (1,800) to the west and south-west of the capital, respectively. Moreover, the ICRC recently distributed one tonne of dates during Ramadan to 2,000 detainees to whom it has access throughout Afghanistan.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 130
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2906

During the week-end of
15 - 16 February 1997, for all information
please call the press officer on duty, Rolin Wavre, on
(mobile) 41 79 357 15 24
TAJIKISTAN
HOSTAGE CRISIS RESOLVED

The ICRC was extremely relieved to learn that the last five hostages held in Obigarm, Tajikistan, had been released.

With regard to the gradual resumption of its activities to assist the victims of the conflict, the ICRC has contacted the other humanitarian organizations working in the country, as well as government authorities and the opposition, to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to safeguard humanitarian activities.

When its work resumes, the ICRC will give priority to food aid and medical assistance for prisoners.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

GENEVA
ICRC URGENTLY APPEALS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The ICRC last week presented its 1997 budget requests to its major donors. Director of Operations Jean de Courten urged a generous response, warning that the organization wanted to avoid being forced into a position where it had to choose between victims because it lacked the financial means to carry out its mandate in full. The previous year had seen crises in Chechnya, the Great Lakes region of Africa, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Peru, East Timor, Colombia and Sierra Leone, dramas in which the ICRC was frequently one of the few humanitarian players present, carrying out work that was often unique. These examples illustrated the need for an independent and impartial humanitarian organization, and that organization needed the financial support of the international community.

Specific appeals for financial contributions to the ICRC’s 1997 operations were first made last December. A total of 142 million Swiss francs is being requested for the headquarters budget, with 674 million francs (including a special appeal for 31.9 million francs for work in Zaire) needed for the field budget.

The largest portion of the field budget is allocated to Africa: 268.2 million francs, or 41.2%. This is followed by Eastern Europe and Central Asia with 128 million francs (20%), and Asia with 110 million (17%). At present, the operations with the highest budgets for 1997 are those in Rwanda (67 million francs) and Afghanistan (61 million).

The higher 1997 budgets for traditional ICRC activities, such as work to prevent violations of international humanitarian law and cooperation with National Societies, reflects the importance attached by the ICRC to ensuring that those who live in the areas where it works have a better understanding of the organization and its values and principles, and to strengthening the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement as a whole.
As it closed its accounts for 1996, the ICRC faced a 20-million-franc deficit for its field operations. "We are certainly concerned about the final result for 1996", said Jean-Marc Bomet, the new head of the External Resources Department, "although more than 8 million francs of the deficit are accounted for by the shortfall carried over from 1995". He nevertheless stressed that immediate steps must be taken to halt this trend. Mr Bomet said that the ICRC planned to make greater efforts to find new donors both among governments and in the private sector.

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

PERU

ICRC MAINTAINS ASSISTANCE TO HOSTAGES

Seventy-two of the people taken hostage on 17 December 1996, when members of the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) occupied the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima, are still being held.

On 11 February direct preliminary discussions aimed at drawing up an agenda and procedures for subsequent talks began between representatives of the government and the MRTA group occupying the residence. The discussions are being held in an office set up by the ICRC in a building across the street. The building is marked with the ICRC emblem, which the Peruvian authorities and the MRTA have promised to respect.

The talks are taking place in the presence of the Guarantor Commission, comprising Mgr Juan Luis Cipriani, the Bishop of Ayacucho; Mr Anthony Vincent, the Canadian ambassador in Lima; ICRC representative Michel Minnig for humanitarian questions; and Ambassador Terusuke Terada of Japan as an observer.

When the armed MRTA group occupied the Japanese ambassador's residence last December, it detained over 700 people who were attending a reception held to mark the birthday of the Emperor of Japan.

Michel Minnig, head of the ICRC delegation in Lima, was among the guests. Within hours he had arranged for the release of about 300 hostages, mainly women and elderly people. Since then another 300 have been freed in various groups, under ICRC auspices.

Since the crisis began, ICRC delegates have made daily deliveries of food and drink to the residence (over 12,000 meals, 15,000 litres of drinking water and 5,000 litres of various other drinks have been supplied to date) and have monitored sanitary conditions. They have exchanged nearly 5,000 Red Cross messages between the hostages and their families. ICRC medical delegates check on the health of the 72 hostages every day, and keep the MRTA regularly informed of their findings so that the group can take the appropriate decisions. The ICRC also facilitates the work of independent medical specialists monitoring the hostages' state of health.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2454

During the week-end of
22 - 23 February 1997, for all information
please call the press officer on duty,
Tony Burgener, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC BACK AT WORK

After a two-week suspension of operations during the hostage crisis, the ICRC started carrying out food distributions again last week for displaced persons in the Vanch Valley of Gorno-Badakhshan and in reception centres around Dushanbe. It has also resumed its nutritional and medical assistance for 5,500 prisoners.

At the same time, a team of delegates travelled to the mountainous region of Tavildara to assess the needs of people cut off from the outside world because of the harsh winter and suffering the effects of the fighting that took place in the autumn of 1996. The ICRC's relief programme in Tajikistan will cover the needs of some 30,000 people this year.

The delegates resumed their visits to hospitals treating the war-wounded in Dushanbe. In the town of Garm, where typhoid had broken out among patients coming from the capital, they quickly issued advice on preventive measures and provided assistance for the local hospital.

The ICRC currently has 39 expatriate delegates in Tajikistan. It also has about 240 locally recruited staff working at its delegation in Dushanbe and in its offices in Garm and Khorog.

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

RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC IN CHECHNYA

After six of its delegates were murdered in Novye Atagi, the ICRC withdrew its expatriate staff from Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. Some aid programmes in the northern Caucasus are still under way, however, thanks to the ICRC's locally recruited staff and the local Red Cross.

Rehabilitation work has now been completed in surgical hospitals Nos. 4 and 9 and in the blood bank in Grozny. Steps have been taken to ensure that the main pumping station, which supplies drinking water for many of the city's inhabitants, remains in working order.

The ICRC has handed over all its stocks of medicines and other medical supplies to the Chechen Ministry of Health. As planned, the Ministry will distribute them as needed to health facilities under its responsibility.
The 18 community kitchens (14 in Grozny, three in Gudermes and one in Argun) are still in operation, providing more than 8,000 hot meals a day for the elderly and vulnerable individuals. The local Red Cross has delivered 3,000 food parcels, 1,500 sets of toiletries and 15 tonnes of flour to eight institutions (orphanages, homes for the blind, and so forth). In addition, 45 tonnes of flour, three tonnes of sugar, more than 3,500 tonnes of cooking oil and thousands of sets of winter clothing will be distributed to the inhabitants of villages in southern Chechnya affected by the conflict.

The ICRC is continuing to provide support for the social welfare programmes conducted by the local committees of the Russian Red Cross in Chechnya, Daghestan and Ingushetia, enabling nurses to give home care to elderly people and the disabled. In Daghestan, work to improve hygiene facilities in centres housing displaced persons has almost been completed.

Sessions on international humanitarian law for Russian federal troops based in the south of the Russian Federation are being organized out of Nalchik, in Kabardino-Balkaria.

ICRC representatives recently held talks with authorities at the highest level in both Chechnya and Ingushetia. Nothing new emerged regarding the investigation into the assassination of the six ICRC delegates. In view of the continuing insecurity, the ICRC cannot yet envisage the return of its expatriate staff, whether to conduct regular missions or on a permanent basis.

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

ETHIOPIA

NEW ICRC OFFICE IN THE SOUTH-EAST

Following several preparatory missions, a team composed of two water/sanitation engineers, a health delegate, an administrator and two field officers has now opened a new ICRC office in the town of Gode, in south-eastern Ethiopia. This part of the "Somali National Regional State" is suffering the effects of a potentially severe drought, and is also the scene of frequent population movements due to continuing tension on both sides of the border between Ethiopia and Somalia.

The team's tasks will include helping to rehabilitate wells in several woreda (districts), developing a programme to monitor the health of essential livestock, and introducing simple technology for tsetse control. After close study of the way in which the area's predominantly nomadic and tribal society functions, the ultimate aim will be to define medium- and long-term measures to support and strengthen traditional survival mechanisms.
The team was accompanied by the delegate in charge of the ICRC subdelegation in Harar, who had talks with representatives of the woreda administration and with the Ethiopian Defence Forces based in the area to secure acceptance of the ICRC's presence and to explain its working procedures.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++2511 51 83 66
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2876

SOUTHERN AFRICA
FOR AN ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINE FREE ZONE

Nine Red Cross Societies from the countries of southern Africa met in Maputo in the week of 24 February, at the invitation of the ICRC, to devise a regional strategy in the context of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's global campaign calling for an immediate ban on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines.

In a declaration adopted by the meeting, 12 National Red Cross Societies urged all countries in southern Africa to participate actively in the work of the Ottawa Group of pro-ban States; to support the early conclusion of an international treaty prohibiting the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines; to work towards the establishment of a zone totally free of anti-personnel landmines in southern Africa; and to adopt and implement national legal prohibitions on anti-personnel landmines.

The ICRC hopes that this declaration will encourage similar initiatives throughout the continent and worldwide. Recent decisions by South Africa and Mozambique to ban the use of anti-personnel mines are important moves towards a regional mine-free zone and the ICRC urges other States to take similar action. The creation of such a zone in southern Africa will, however, also require active support from the international community in clearing mines already laid and in destroying remaining stockpiles of anti-personnel mines.

The ICRC and the National Red Cross Societies were in Maputo to participate in the Fourth International NGO Landmine Conference, held from 25 to 28 February. The Conference brought together more than 450 representatives of local and international NGOs, regional and donor governments and media representatives from over 60 - mostly African - countries. The event focused on both the global landmine issue and the regional problem in southern Africa and was part of the "Agenda for Action" of the Ottawa Group of 50 States, which are committed to working together towards a ban on anti-personnel mines.

Further information: Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2319
THE ICRC AND THE OSS ALLEGATIONS

Following allegations that appeared in the press last summer, calling into question the actions of some of its delegates during the Second World War, the ICRC resolved to shed full light on that period in its history. The working group set up for the purpose has just completed another stage in its investigation, and its conclusions are summarized in a document released to the press on 3 March. The allegations were based on a number of reports by agents of the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of today's CIA, and suggested that ICRC delegates had been involved in activities that were inconsistent with the organization's humanitarian mandate.

Having made a thorough search of its archives and those of the Swiss Confederation, the ICRC can now firmly state that, among the 49 individuals whose names are quoted in the OSS documents, only 18 worked for the organization, and only three of those appear to have committed reprehensible acts. The first was involved in illicit currency dealings, while the other two were found guilty of espionage, apparently motivated by personal gain. In the first case only were the dealings conducted while the person was in the service of the ICRC; the affair ended with his resignation following an internal investigation. In the other two cases, the activities in question took place either before or after the individuals concerned were employed by the ICRC. All the other allegations stemmed from obvious misunderstanding of the ICRC's mandate and working procedures.

In view of the facts that have now come to light, it appears evident that during the Second World War only a small number of individuals fell prey to influences contrary to the humanitarian ideal. The report on the three cases is available from the ICRC on request.

Further information: Kim Gordon-Bates. ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 02

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/2 on ICRC activities in the Rwanda, dated 19.2.97
- Update 97/2 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 19.2.97

During the week-end of 8 - 9 March 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
ALBANIA

VIOLENCE UNABATED

With the unrest in Albania continuing to spread, insurgents have seized control of a quarter of the national territory. In the south of the country, law and order are no longer being enforced and military bases have been abandoned to the population. As a result, large numbers of people are armed and, according to unofficial sources, at least 40 have died since the beginning of the insurrection.

The Albanian Red Cross is active throughout the country, including the areas of unrest, delivering medical aid and food to hospitals. To date, the ICRC has provided it with essential surgical supplies for the treatment of 400 wounded.

The ICRC, which returned to Albania on 4 March, is also setting up an office in Tirana this week. Its delegates are currently conducting surveys in the south and meeting the highest Albanian authorities in the capital with a view to being granted access to detainees held by the government.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

SOMALIA

FLOOD CONTROL IN THE JUBA VALLEY

The ICRC has just completed the first phase of a major project in southern Somalia’s Juba Valley to protect against flooding, which destroys crops and causes severe hardship for thousands of farming families every year. The project, launched following a survey along a 200-km stretch of the Juba Valley, aims to rehabilitate more than 100 damaged sections of dykes built to protect fields bordering the Juba River. Already, the four worst-hit sections, all located south of Jilib and totalling 1.5 km in length, have been repaired.

The main problems are erosion of the riverbank on which the dykes are built, overflowing during major floods, which washes the dykes away; damage caused by farmers who dig into the dykes to irrigate their fields; and termite infestation, which weakens the structure until breaches occur. Most of the dykes, originally constructed by the former Somali government, have not undergone any systematic repairs or maintenance since the early 1990s.
According to ICRC experts, the US$500,000 rehabilitation project, which involves carrying out repairs to just under 8 km of the dyke structure, will help reduce the threat of flooding and improve food security for farmers and all the people who depend on them. The project is being undertaken in close cooperation with the local communities, which have provided teams of labourers to do the work, using heavy machinery and equipment made available by the ICRC. Construction is scheduled to be completed by mid-May.

During last year's floods - the worst for more than a decade - tens of thousands of hectares of crops for the Gu season, which is the main growing season in Somalia, were washed away. In a bid to make up for the shortfall, ICRC staff distributed new seed to some 20,000 farmers and supplied sandbags to shore up the river banks as a stopgap measure. The ICRC has been supporting communities in the Juba Valley for more than two years through a variety of health, agricultural, veterinary and sanitation programmes, and has been providing them with food and other relief.

Further information: Claude Voillat, ICRC Nairobi, Somalia delegation, tel. ++2542 723 963
ALBANIA

READY TO HELP THE MOST VULNERABLE

Surveys carried out over the last two days in the regions of Albania affected by the recent unrest have confirmed that social welfare institutions are in urgent need of help. ICRC teams of relief and medical experts went to the towns of Sarande, Gjirokaster, Fier, Delvine, Tepelene and Vlore in the south, Elbasan in the centre, and Shkoder and Kukes in the north to assess the situation there. They met directors of hospitals, orphanages and a home for the elderly, who told them that they would very soon face a critical shortage of food and medicines.

In Gjirokaster, for example, the hospital was struggling to cope with an influx of people wounded by stray bullets, and at the home for the elderly, the director said that his warehouse had been looted of all food. Although the local community had stepped in to help, he was concerned that he would only be able to feed his residents for a few more days. The atmosphere in Gjirokaster and other towns was one of uneasy calm, but there was still evidence of armed groups, and looting appeared to be continuing.

The ICRC is working with the Albanian Red Cross to find out what logistic resources are available to address emergency needs. An appeal to donors for 15 million Swiss francs was launched on 17 March.

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Press Division, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2309

FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

AFTER FIVE YEARS, A RED CROSS MESSAGE REUNITES BROTHER AND SISTER

Last week, after five years of agonizing silence, a woman in Croatia discovered through a Red Cross message that her brother was alive.

The brother, a Serb living in Croatia, fled his home in 1991 as war approached and later settled in the Banja Luka region of Bosnia-Herzegovina. His sister, a middle-aged woman married to a Croat and living in a small village close to the border with the former Sector South, decided to stay behind and they lost touch completely.

Then a few days ago she received a surprise visit from one of the ICRC mobile teams based in Knin. She was handed a Red Cross message written by her brother, reassuring her that he was alive and wanted to make contact with his family again.
Although communications have improved greatly since peace returned to the former Yugoslavia and many displaced families have been able to get in touch with their relations by normal means, the Red Cross message network remains vital for people living in remote regions, especially elderly persons confined to their homes. In areas where minorities are still in a vulnerable position, the presence of the ICRC also provides a degree of protection.

Last year alone, the ICRC handled over 370,000 Red Cross messages in connection with the former Yugoslavia. In close cooperation with National Societies and the local Red Cross, over 18 million messages have been processed since 1991, making this the biggest such operation since the Second World War.

Further information: Nina Paulsen, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++11 385 1 6112 444
Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 656 894

PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

APPEAL FOR A TOTAL BAN ON ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

On 7 March the ICRC and the Council of Europe's Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography held a joint seminar in Budapest on anti-personnel landmines, an issue on which the Parliamentary Assembly and the ICRC have been cooperating closely. The seminar addressed an 11-point appeal to member States of the Council of Europe, urging them to take an active part in the effort to achieve a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines and to sign an international treaty to that effect at the Ottawa Conference scheduled for December 1997. The Committee also called for increased contributions to rehabilitation programmes for mine victims, mine-clearance operations and mine-awareness campaigns for populations at risk.

The States represented at the seminar included Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Norway, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have special status within the Council, also sent representatives.

The discussions were sometimes charged with emotion. One participant told the tragic story of a close relative who was recently killed by a mine blast as he was working in his vineyard. At present, 19 of the 40 member States of the Council of Europe support a total and immediate ban on anti-personnel mines. Ten have renounced the use of mines, and two have suspended their use.

The seminar's conclusions will be the subject of a report and a draft resolution, which will be submitted to a forthcoming session of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Further information: Peter Herby, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2729
Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2319
NIGERIA

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

A three-day workshop on the teaching of the law of armed conflict for some 60 instructors, senior staff of military academies and high-ranking officers from all branches of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was held at the Command and Staff College in Jaji/Kaduna in the first week of March.

The workshop opened in the presence of the Commandant of the Command and Staff College, Maj. Gen. J.M Inienger, and the ICRC regional delegate based in Lagos. This is the third time in as many years that such an event has been organized jointly by the ICRC and the Nigerian armed forces, complementing other programmes at the National War College and the Infantry Centre and Schools. The workshop once again highlighted the excellent cooperation between the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the ICRC in the area of instruction in the law of war.

Further information: Walter Stocker, ICRC Lagos, tel. ++23 41 269 1881

GENEVA

OIC SECRETARY GENERAL VISITS ICRC

The newly-elected Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Dr Azzedine Laraki, was received on 18 March by ICRC President Comelio Sommaruga. During their meeting they discussed various humanitarian issues affecting member States of the OIC.

Mr Sommaruga expressed his appreciation of the OIC's unreserved support in the effort to achieve a ban on anti-personnel landmines. In many countries, including some OIC member States, landmines continue to have a devastating effect on the civilian population and on national economies. The talks also focused on ways and means of strengthening mutual cooperation and on possibilities for translating this cooperation into practical action.

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/2 on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 14.3.97

During the week-end of 22 - 23 March 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
ZAIRE
BACK IN KISANGANI

ICRC delegates returned to Kisangani on 20 March for the first time since rebel forces captured the city five days previously. There they carried out a survey to enable the ICRC to establish operational priorities. They found that there are some 25,000 displaced people in the Kisangani area who need help to return to their places of origin. A second priority is access to detainees, including large numbers of people arrested when the city fell.

While all international staff from the ICRC, the UN and various non-governmental organizations were withdrawn from Kisangani, the Zairian Red Cross continued working tirelessly to take wounded people to hospital and give first aid. Now back in Kisangani, the ICRC will fully support local Red Cross medical work.

To restore contact between people who fled the fighting and relatives who stayed behind, the ICRC will establish a Red Cross message service in conjunction with the Zairian Red Cross. For those who decide to embark on the 700-km journey home, aid stations will be set up along the main roads to the east. The most vulnerable - children, the elderly, pregnant women and wounded people - will be transported by lorry as far as road conditions permit.

Delegates are maintaining their presence in Lubumbashi, though they are spending the nights in Ndola, across the border in Zambia. Some staff based in Kinshasa have been redeployed to Brazzaville, the capital of Congo, to prepare an operations base in case the situation deteriorates in the Zairian capital.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 723 963

ALBANIA
LAWLESSNESS PREVAILS

After evaluating the needs of hospitals and welfare institutions throughout the country, the ICRC is currently assessing the security situation in order to obtain safe passage for its humanitarian aid convoys. To date, the only secure access by road into Albania is via the southern border with Greece. Although Tirana airport has reopened to civilian traffic, large relief consignments cannot be taken into Albania as no safe warehousing facilities have yet been identified there.
The latest ICRC aid distributions have taken place in southern Albania, where basic emergency medical supplies were delivered last weekend in response to pleas from hospitals. In social institutions such as orphanages, old peoples' homes and centres for the mentally handicapped, staff are valiantly trying to provide food for those in their care. Many have had their stocks looted and, despite help from the local communities, have food to last for only a few days. To keep a closer watch on the situation in southern Albania, an ICRC office has been opened in the town of Gjirokaster.

As long as the security environment remains dangerously volatile, the ICRC must give very careful consideration to the risks involved. With the active help of Albanian Red Cross staff, ICRC teams have so far travelled extensively without encountering any problems, but all possible precautions continue to be taken.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 35 035
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

RWANDA
MOST OPERATIONS RESUME

The ICRC partially suspended its activities in Rwanda on 6 February. Ten days later it took the decision to gradually resume them. Although many places in Rwanda still remain off-limits to the organization's 60 expatriates there, most ICRC operations are to some extent now under way again.

Water and sanitation programmes are in progress in Kigali, Gikongoro, Byumba, Kibuye and Gitarama, and ICRC medical teams have resumed work at Kibuye hospital as well as at the limb-fitting centre in Gatagara. Meanwhile, prisons and communal lock-ups in accessible areas are being regularly visited, and children reunited with their families. The ICRC is paying special attention to the most vulnerable among Rwanda's population, with food being distributed to 16,000 schoolchildren in four prefectures (Gitarama, Butare, Gisenyi and Ruhengeri). Some 1,200 orphans have returned to school after the ICRC provided them with school kits and tuition fees. The Runyinya project, in which houses are being built for almost 400 women and children, survivors of the genocide, should be completed by the end of April. Lastly, a number of agricultural, bee-keeping and knitting projects have been started.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 77 3442

AFGHANISTAN
A LETHAL EXPLOSION

In the early morning of 19 March the explosion of an ammunition dump caused panic in the town of Jalalabad some 120 km east of Kabul. The explosion, which occurred in the police headquarters compound, also destroyed about ten nearby buildings.
The members of the ICRC sub-delegation in Jalalabad and volunteers from the local section of the Afghan Red Crescent helped to evacuate the victims, including many civilians. One hundred and four people were admitted to the town's provincial hospital, while 175 with minor injuries received first-aid treatment there. More than 200 volunteers donated blood. On Friday a United Nations mine-clearance team was still busy clearing the scene of any remaining explosives. According to a partial death toll drawn up by the Taliban administration, fifty of the officials there at the time of the explosion were killed. Seventeen deaths were registered at the provincial hospital in Jalalabad.

The ICRC promptly launched an emergency operation to provide material assistance for around 500 people whose homes had been destroyed or damaged. Cooking utensils, fuel and plastic sheeting were distributed to them.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladin, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 130
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA
VISIT TO MOROCCAN PRISONERS HELD BY POLISARIO FRONT

From 17 to 23 March a team of four delegates, including a doctor, visited 805 of some 1,900 Moroccan prisoners still in the hands of the Polisario Front. This was the sixth time since 1993 that the ICRC had visited this group of prisoners, most of whom have been in captivity for nearly 20 years.

All those who wished to do so sent a photo and a Red Cross message to their families. A system to distribute parcels sent by the prisoners' families was set up by the ICRC two years ago; between December 1996 and March 1997 it enabled 538 parcels to be delivered.

An agreement between the ICRC and the Polisario Front calls for a second visit to take place in November 1997 so as to allow the 1,100 prisoners not seen during this visit to benefit from the ICRC's protection and humanitarian services.

The ICRC is continuing to do everything possible to resolve this humanitarian issue.

Further information: Werner Kaspar, ICRC Tunis, tel. ++2161 789 134

During the week-end of 28 - 31 March 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03


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ALBANIA

FOOD DISTRIBUTED

The director of a day-care centre for mentally handicapped children heaves a sigh of relief when she sees the ICRC aid convoy. Like the staff of other social-welfare institutions and hospitals visited during the ICRC's first round of food distributions (completed in central and southern Albania over the Easter weekend) she is struggling to find the wherewithal to feed the people in her care. And like the other ten staff members at the centre - in Durres, west of Tirana - she has received no salary for over a month. Many of the children, ranging in age from two to nine years, are forced to sleep at the centre because their parents are too frightened to bring them home in a town where the nights are still shattered by the crackle of gunfire. The staff have shown impressive dedication in meeting their daily needs.

Recent surveys carried out by the ICRC across Albania show that homes for the mentally handicapped, hospitals, orphanages, old people's homes and other such institutions are hardest hit by the unrest plaguing the country, as they are utterly dependent on the government for food and medical supplies.

Around 10 tonnes of food was dispatched from the ICRC's logistical base in Ioannina/Konitsa, Greece to social welfare institutions in Gjirokaster, Permet, Tepelene, Elbasan, Librazdh and Durres. Further distributions will begin soon in northern Albania.

Although the ICRC has so far encountered no security problems in the course of its distributions, the situation remains extremely volatile. Precautions will thus continue to be taken to minimize the risk.

While welcoming efforts to make the general environment more secure for humanitarian work, the ICRC rejects the idea of armed escorts for its staff delivering humanitarian supplies.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Tirana, Tel.: ++ 355 42 33 151
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel.: ++ 41 22 730 22 81

COLOMBIA

ARMED GROUPS RELEASE CIVILIANS

Seven people held captive by armed groups involved in Colombia's internal conflict were handed over to ICRC delegates last week.

Five of the captives had been held by the ACCU (Rural Self-Defence Groups of Cordoba and Uraba), some for eight months. On 26 March they were released in the Uraba region, in northern Antioquia department, and handed over to a joint commission, which included an ICRC delegate. Immediately following their release the ICRC provided them with transport home to their families throughout Colombia.

Three of the five had been visited by ICRC delegates several times during their captivity, and were thus able to maintain contact with their families by means of Red Cross Messages.
On 23 March, a German national held since December 1996 by the ELN (National Liberation Army) was handed over to an ICRC delegate based in Valledupar, capital of the department of Cesar. The ICRC arranged for him to return to his family in Quito, Ecuador.

In the same department, a Colombian who had been held captive for several weeks was released by the ELN on 28 March. He too was handed over to a Valledupar-based delegate.

The ICRC provides humanitarian services for persons who have been abducted in Colombia. It urges the armed groups holding these people to confirm that they are being held captive. It asks that the captives be allowed to contact their families by means of Red Cross Messages and that delegates be allowed to visit them. It also arranges transport home once they are released.

Since last August, 40 people have been released under ICRC auspices by armed groups in Colombia.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Bogota, Tel. ++571 636 7094
Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++4122 730 2454

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
CAMPAIGN TO TRACE THE MISSING - PHASE 3

The ICRC has launched the third phase of its programme to trace persons reported missing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. An advertising campaign is under way to tell all those who may know what has happened to a missing person that the families need their help, and urging them to contact the nearest ICRC office in the former Yugoslavia or national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in other countries. If they so wish, their identities will be kept confidential.

The process of collecting this information has thus far been slow and the results meagre. Efforts are therefore now being redoubled to put an end to the excruciating uncertainty still endured by the families affected.

The ICRC is also publishing the third edition of its book containing the names of the more than 17,300 individuals for whom the ICRC has received tracing requests. The new edition takes two forms: a list of names in alphabetical order and a list of names according to place and date of disappearance.

Further information: Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, Tel. ++387 71 656 894
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2281

SOMALIA
ICRC ACTS TO CURB CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN THE SOUTH

An outbreak of cholera in the southern Somali town of Wanlaweyn resulted in more than 430 deaths between 15 February and 17 March, according to ICRC medical staff. To date, almost 2,000 cases of the disease have been reported in the area, about 90 km west of the capital Mogadishu. Samples tested in Nairobi have confirmed the presence of cholera.

ICRC health delegates, who carried out an initial survey in Wanlaweyn - home to between 10,000 and 13,000 families - said that only one of five wells in the town was working. Following the survey, the ICRC donated medical supplies, such as oral rehydration solutions and antibiotics, and arranged for eight local people to undergo immediate training in preventive and curative care with Somali Red Crescent personnel in Mogadishu.
Local people in Wanlaweyn have now set up an isolation camp for cholera patients. Joint ICRC/Somali Red Crescent teams have been working with the community to improve conditions in the camp, for which the ICRC provided tents and other items. ICRC water engineers have also installed a 15,000-litre water tank and overseen the construction of sanitary facilities.

Several hundred cases of cholera, which commonly occurs in Somalia between the end of January and early April, have likewise been reported in Mogadishu. There, too, the ICRC and its partner on the ground, the Somali Red Crescent, are providing preventive and curative care, along with UN agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Further information: Claude Voillat, Laura O'Mahony, ICRC Nairobi, Somalia delegation, tel. ++2542 723 963

INDONESIA

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMANITARIAN LAW

As part of its efforts to promote international humanitarian law in Indonesia, on 12 and 13 March the ICRC held a seminar in Ujung Pandang, Sulawesi on non-international conflicts. Over 300 people took part in the event, which was sponsored by the Hasanuddin University. They included civil servants and journalists as well as representatives of the armed forces, academic circles and the Human Rights Commission in Indonesia. The ICRC's role in conflict situations not covered by the Geneva Conventions was the subject of lively debates conducted by the head of the ICRC regional delegation in Jakarta, who made a point of explaining the ICRC's right to take any humanitarian initiative and its unique role as a neutral intermediary.

During the previous week the ICRC had discussed the same subjects with commanding officers of the armed and security forces in East Timor. It is starting another seminar on humanitarian law this week in Jakarta, this time for the special units (Kopassus) of the Indonesian armed forces.

The ICRC has been present in Indonesia since the 1970s and is engaged in programmes in Aceh, Sumatra and Irian Jaya to provide protection for the civilian population and for people in prison. It also has an office in Dili (East Timor), where it is continuing the same kind of activities. Last but not least, the task of the regional delegation in Jakarta, which besides Indonesia also covers Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, is to spread knowledge of humanitarian law and the activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the region.

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ALBANIA

AID DELIVERIES CONTINUE DESPITE PREVAILING INSECURITY

ICRC assistance is continuing to focus on social welfare institutions such as hospitals, orphanages and homes for the elderly and disabled. Recent surveys carried out in central-eastern and south-eastern Albania yielded the same results as earlier assessments throughout the country: it is these institutions that are facing the most acute shortages, but the still highly volatile security situation makes it unsafe to stock large quantities of food.

The ICRC has therefore decided to carry out regular distributions of smaller amounts of food and medicines to allow them to function for one or two weeks without putting them at risk.

So far, the ICRC has delivered 15 tonnes of food and 14.5 tonnes of medical supplies to Albania. A further distribution of 20 tonnes of food to northern parts of the country is to take place before the end of the week. The ICRC has 15 expatriates working in Albania, including a delegate from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies who is attached to the ICRC delegation.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++ 355 42 33 151
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2281

AFGHANISTAN

FLOUR SHORTAGE AND NEW WAVE OF DISPLACED PERSONS

In Afghanistan the price of flour went up by 50% at the beginning of this month, creating further hardship for the country's war-weary population. The authorities in Pakistan, where flour is in short supply, have stopped exports to neighbouring Afghanistan. Afghan civilians, just emerging from the region's harsh winter and already suffering the effects of spiralling inflation and shortages of all sorts, are now facing a lack of bread, their staple diet. Last week the price of bread almost doubled, placing it out of reach of a large part of the population, especially the countless displaced people in the country.

The most vulnerable groups are the hardest hit. Among the 300,000 civilians receiving assistance from the ICRC and the Afghan Red Crescent in Kabul, 210,000 people (war widows, orphans and the disabled) fall within this category and are increasingly if not entirely dependent on humanitarian aid. Their numbers are swelled daily by new arrivals: 3,000 people driven from their homes in the Shamali area, 50 km north-east of Kabul, by the recent fighting have taken shelter in public buildings in the capital. Many of them are women with no family support whose only means of survival is what their children receive from begging. The ICRC is planning to help them by organizing the distribution of basic foodstuffs (rice, flour, beans), blankets and coal.
In the north-west of the country the influx of displaced people is reaching alarming proportions. In Herat, UNHCR estimates their number at 34,000. Among these, more than 18,000 civilians in the city and the surrounding area are now dependent on aid provided by the ICRC, which is thinking of transferring them gradually to a camp made up of tents. Continuing fighting in Badghis province has displaced 7,000 more people whom the ICRC is also assisting, mainly in the town of Qala-i-Now.

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Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

REPAIRS COMPLETED AT SOKOLAC PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Last week the Norwegian Red Cross (NORCROSS), operating under the auspices of the ICRC, completed six months of rehabilitation work on the 300-bed Sokolac Psychiatric Hospital, 35 km east of Pale in the Republika Srpska. The hospital, which is filled to capacity, is run by 150 staff and comprises 15 buildings covering an area of 20,000 square metres.

During the war no maintenance work at all was carried out. The hospital’s windows were broken, the heating system was often out of order, and hygiene conditions were deplorable. In the winter of 1992-1993, 142 of the patients either died of starvation or froze to death. This prompted the ICRC to take action. Deeply concerned by the plight of people housed in psychiatric hospitals and institutions for the mentally and physically disabled, it began supplying them with food, hygiene products and medicines on an ad hoc basis, and was often the only agency to do so. It still maintains contact with these institutions today.

NORCROSS concentrated its efforts on the closed wards, where living conditions were most critical. Some of the patients there are permanent residents, having been in the hospital for more than 20 years. They have often been forgotten by their relatives or have no-one left to care for them. The building housing the central kitchen, the laundry service and the administrative offices was also repaired.

The Sokolac project reflects the ongoing commitment of the ICRC and donor Red Cross Societies to supporting social welfare institutions throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Further information: Nina Winquist-Galbe, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++387 71 652 407
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2281

TAJIKISTAN

ICRC ASSISTANCE IN TAVILDARA AREA

An ICRC team, now back in this region which passed into the hands of the Tajik opposition last December, is going to distribute food aid (flour and cooking oil) at the end of this week. The supplies are destined for about 20 villages in the Tavildara sub-district, comprising 2,300 people out of a population estimated at 4,000 before the hostilities.

Since the cease-fire agreed between the parties at the end of last year, displaced people have been gradually returning to their home villages, hoping to arrive in time for the planting season. The ICRC’s objective is to cover the needs of the valley’s population for the next three months, up to the summer harvest. The ICRC team is planning to extend its assistance operation from next week to villages in the Childara sub-district.

Five months have gone by since the ICRC last carried out aid distributions in the Tavildara area, which was hard hit by the fighting in 1996. Last autumn more than 40 tonnes of food, blankets and plastic sheeting were supplied.

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

FAMILY VISITS TO DETAINED FROM EASTERN SLAVONIA

Last Saturday, as a result of an initiative taken by the ICRC, families living in the region of Eastern Slavonia, Srem and Baranja were able to pay a first visit to relatives detained in a prison in Pozega (Western Slavonia).

The ICRC began talks on the matter with the Croatian Ministries of Justice and the Interior some weeks ago. After all the necessary authorizations had been obtained, and thanks also to the support of UNTAES, four prisoners were eventually allowed to see their relatives after years of separation.

The families, from the towns of Beli Manastir and Vukovar, were taken in ICRC vehicles to the prison, where they were allowed to spend an hour and a half with their loved ones in the visitors' room. Emotion ran high, and eyes filled with tears as people embraced for the first time in up to five years.

This family visit was the first organized by the ICRC for detainees whose relatives live in the Eastern Slavonia region. The programme is to be extended to cover other detainees held in prisons throughout Croatia.

Further information: Nina Zeckovic, ICRC Zagreb, tel. ++385 1 611 24 44
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

SOUTHERN AFRICA

EXPERTS TO CONSIDER FUTURE OF LANDMINES

The ICRC is hosting a seminar of experts from countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Harare from 20 to 23 April 1997 to discuss the future of anti-personnel landmines in the region. The seminar, which is being held in cooperation with the Organization of African Unity and the government of Zimbabwe, will bring together senior officials from Ministries of Defence and of Foreign Affairs. In his invitation to the governments of SADC countries, ICRC President Comelio Sommaruga stated: "It is our hope that the Harare seminar will mark a turning point in efforts to free southern Africa from the terrible human suffering and severe socio-economic burdens which landmines have inflicted". The ICRC was specifically requested to convene the seminar by the Ottawa Group of 50 pro-ban States as part of the plan of action adopted at the Ottawa Conference on Landmines in October 1996.

Further information: Stuart Maslen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2533
Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2319

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/3 on ICRC activities in the Rwanda, dated 7.4.97

During the week-end of
12 - 13 April 1997, for all
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please call the press officer on
duty, Suzanne Berger, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 70

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ZAIRE

AIRLIFT FOR DISPLACED ZAIRIANS

The ICRC has started airlifting some 15,000 displaced Zairians now in Kisangani back to the Goma and Bukavu region. On Tuesday 15 April, a Hercules C-130 made a first flight to Bukavu with 105 people on board. A B-727 is due in Kivu today. The two aircraft are expected to make two or three shuttle flights daily.

In Kisangani, the ICRC transports the displaced people to the airport, taking particular care to keep families intact. Each family is given food and material assistance to help with its resettlement.

Since 7 April, a cargo plane has been flying food, medicines and other relief supplies from Nairobi to Kisangani. This relief is subsequently distributed by volunteers of the Red Cross Society of the Republic of Zaire to the displaced people in Kisangani and to the crowds of Rwandan refugees along the Kisangani-Ubundu railway.

Further information on the spot: Tony Burgener, tel. ++ 871 692 281 030

ALBANIA

COUNTRYWIDE RELIEF DISTRIBUTIONS

ICRC distributions of food and medicines are currently taking place throughout Albania to some 50 social welfare institutions (hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly or disabled). The people housed there are the most destitute in the country. The ICRC has launched this urgent but limited operation on their behalf to bridge the gap in supplies via official channels without undermining Albania's attempted economic recovery.

Since the beginning of March, about 40 tonnes of food and 15 tonnes of medical supplies have been distributed by the ICRC and the Albanian Red Cross. Institutions that received ICRC assistance for the second time have not announced any security incidents (such as looting after the first distribution).

The ICRC now has about 20 expatriate staff deployed in Albania, including a delegate from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Offices have been opened in the capital Tirana and in Gjirokaster in the south.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 33 151
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
For the first time in the history of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a separate section on humanitarian action was adopted in the final document issued at the conclusion of NAM's XIIth Ministerial Conference held in New Delhi from 7 to 8 April 1997. The conference was attended by two ICRC representatives as guest participants.

In their statement, the NAM Ministers underlined the importance of promoting respect for the universally recognized humanitarian principles and for international humanitarian law, particularly the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols. They also invited those States which have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions. Moreover, NAM's objectives now include mention of the need to respect international humanitarian law.

This statement was acknowledged by the ICRC as a significant step by the 113-member movement of developing countries, a movement which represents two thirds of the world's population and covers a number of countries where ICRC operational activities are underway.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++ 91 11 43 94
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2906

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/6 on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 11.4.97
- Update 97/1 on ICRC activities in Afghanistan, dated 10.4.97

During the week-end of
19 - 20 April 1997, for all information
please call the press officer on duty,
Rubén Ortega, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
In the first seven days of a large-scale resettlement operation launched by the ICRC, 2,000 displaced Zairians were flown from the Kisangani area back to Goma and Bukavu aboard a Hercules C130, a Boeing 727 and WFP/UNHCR aircraft. The first to return were 150 unaccompanied children who had lost contact with their parents in the course of the past five months. Most of them were reunited with their fathers and mothers or other family members, and a few were taken to orphanages. The ICRC's airborne operation, involving 150 to 200 round trips between mid-April and the end of May, will enable some 20,000 people from the Kisangani area and another 1,000 from Kindu to return home. A further 35,000 people stranded in Kalemie will be assisted on their way across Lake Tanganyika back to the Uvira area. Once back home each family will receive a kit containing three blankets, a jerrican, a tarpaulin, a cooking pot, 1 kg of soap, a hoe and 30 g of vegetable seed. Kits will also be distributed to some 100,000 Zairian refugees returning from Kigoma, Tanzania, and to 100,000 Zairians making their own way back to the Kivu area. The ICRC's relief programme will cover a total of 220,000 to 250,000 people over the next three months.

Another programme which is designed to alleviate anxiety among the Zairian displaced population is the Red Cross message service. About 10,000 messages were exchanged with Kinshasa between early March and mid-April, enabling many separated family members to re-establish contact with each other after months of uncertainty. In several cases memorial ceremonies had already been held for people who were believed to have died, when news of their survival arrived.

LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES AT STAKE

The ICRC is helping more than 250 volunteers of the Red Cross of Zaire to carry out their tasks in aid of refugees in Kasese and Biafo, south of Kisangani, where around 80,000 people are stranded in disastrous conditions. Every day the volunteers bury 60 to 80 refugees, many of whom died before their very eyes of dysentery, cholera, malaria, or simply from exhaustion. The bodies are laid in community graves in groups of ten, often without having been properly identified. The death toll was at its highest when the refugees were making their way from Ubundu and had to cross the River Zaire; here hundreds of people died, some of drowning.

At the beginning of this year the volunteers had to work without any help from International Red Cross organizations. But they never gave up and continued to do what they could for the refugees with the scant resources available to them.

While the Zairian Red Cross volunteers are faced with the task of burying the dead, they also have the more gratifying duty of distributing the food supplies provided by the World Food Programme for the refugees in the camps. Although they undoubtedly have the will and the determination to continue their exemplary work, it is by no means certain that the majority of the refugees will be able to survive for long in this extremely hostile environment. The lives of thousands of people are now at stake.

Further information: Paul-Henry Morard, ICRC Kisangani, tel.: ++871 682 281 030
ALBANIA

THIRD ROUND OF DISTRIBUTIONS IN VLORE

Over the weekend, a third ICRC/Albanian Red Cross aid convoy carrying food and medicines arrived in the south-western port of Vlore. The supplies were delivered to the main hospital, the local psychiatric institution and three orphanages.

Convoys have left this week for Shkoder in the north and Korce and Bilisht in the east of the country, where food and medical supplies will be distributed to hospitals and social welfare institutions in the towns and surrounding areas.

The ICRC began its relief distributions in Albania in mid-March. Thanks to their close cooperation with the Albanian Red Cross, ICRC delegates have been able to explain the aims of the operation and their presence is well accepted by the population.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Tirana, tel.: +355 42 30 457

SOUTHERN AFRICA

MOVE TO BAN LANDMINES

A regional seminar of experts on anti-personnel mines, held from 20 to 23 April in Harare, Zimbabwe, has taken the first step towards declaring Southern Africa a mine-free zone. The experts concluded that even though anti-personnel mines might serve a limited military purpose, their utility was far outweighed by the appalling humanitarian consequences of their use.

Military and defence officials, together with high-level representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs from all 12 States of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), called on their governments to put an immediate end to all new deployments and to enact national prohibitions on the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of this weapon.

Participants urged the SADC to place the issue of landmines high on its agenda and to give urgent consideration to matters such as joint training in mine clearance, the establishment of an anti-personnel mines data bank, the promotion of technological cooperation, and expanded programmes for assistance to mine victims.

They further encouraged active participation in the continental conference on landmines to be convened by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Johannesburg this coming May. At this meeting over 50 Member States will be urged to sign an international treaty banning anti-personnel mines at a conference in Ottawa, Canada, at the end of this year.

The Harare seminar was organized by the ICRC, with support from the OAU and the government of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

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New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/7 on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 18.4.97

During the week-end of 26 - 27 April 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Pierre Gauthier, on (mobile) 41 79 357 15 24
TAJIKISTAN
ICRC DISTRIBUTIONS IN 19 VILLAGES

Relief supplies were distributed last week in the mountainous eastern region of Tajikistan, bordering on the Gorno-Badakhshan semi-autonomous province. An ICRC team provided oil and flour to some 4,000 inhabitants of 19 villages in the Childara sub-district, near Tavildara, which has been controlled by Tajik opposition forces since December 1996.

The valley was hard hit by the fighting last year. The distributions are part of a programme to tide the population over for a period of three months until the next harvests, and should enable the region to become self-reliant again. Some 6,300 beneficiaries received such assistance in April. As from next week the ICRC will provide the region's medical facilities, whose stocks have not been replenished for several months, with the necessary medical supplies.

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

AFGHANISTAN
OVER 400,000 PEOPLE RECEIVING ICRC ASSISTANCE

More than 400,000 people are currently receiving ICRC assistance in Afghanistan, including almost 300,000 in Kabul alone. Over 200,000 of them (destitute war widows, orphans, disabled and elderly people) are considered to be particularly disadvantaged. Both in the capital and in the west and north of the country there are also a growing number of needy families recently displaced by the fighting.

The largest population movements have occurred in the Herat area and Badghis province. Nearly 300 people fleeing the fighting along the Murghab river are arriving each day in and around Herat. As possible accommodation in the town is limited (the public buildings were soon full to overflowing), ICRC delegates have been registering new arrivals at the Shadai transit camp. In view of the overcrowding in the existing facilities, the ICRC has begun setting up a new camp outside the town to house the 18,000 displaced people in the area; it is already providing them with food and other aid. The camp site is being cleared of mines, wells are being sunk and latrines built, and 4,500 tents are on their way.
Equally large numbers of people are seeking refuge in other parts of the country. The ICRC sub-delegation in Mazar-i-Sharif, in the north, is assisting over 26,000 displaced people gathered in Mazar-i-Sharif, Kunduz, Faizabad, Taloqan and Pul-i-Khumri. The ICRC is also working in Bamyan, Ghazni, Jalalabad and Kandahar, and is considering ways of organizing distributions in the Panjshir valley.

In most of the areas affected by the conflict, ICRC distributions are carried out in conjunction with the Afghan Red Crescent Society. Over 13,000 tonnes of essentials have been distributed in the past three months.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 28 01 30
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

ADDIS ABABA
JUDGES KAMA AND GOLDSTONE AT OAU/ICRC SEMINAR ON REPRESSION OF WAR CRIMES

The repression of grave breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court are the focus of a joint OAU/ICRC seminar on April 29 and 30 for ambassadors accredited to the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Judge Laity Kama, President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, and Judge Richard Goldstone, former Chief Prosecutor of the Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as Professor Ahmed Mahiou, President of the UN International Law Commission, and Professor Deni Segui, Rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission on Rwanda, will address key issues and developments.

"The holding of this seminar symbolizes the importance which, for some years now, has been given to the crackdown on serious breaches of international humanitarian law", said Judge Kama in the introduction to his presentation: "The OAU and the repression of war crimes and violations of human rights". International efforts to ban anti-personnel landmines are also being reviewed by the seminar.

The event is expected to serve as an opportunity for an in-depth exchange of views and experience among diplomats, members of the Ethiopian government and representatives of the OAU and the ICRC. Conclusions and recommendations of the two-day seminar will be submitted to the OAU’s Committee of Twenty on Refugees and Displaced Persons for presentation to the Heads of State at their summit conference in Harare/Zimbabwe next June.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++2511 518 366
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

MAKING A BAN EFFECTIVE

A meeting of experts met in Bonn on 24 and 25 April to discuss possible compliance measures for inclusion in a future treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines. The meeting, convened by the German government, was attended by representatives of 121 countries, together with delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations, NATO and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

While the meeting did not reach any detailed conclusions, it provided an opportunity to discuss various means of ensuring respect for any future treaty. Certain delegations argued for the inclusion of verification mechanisms similar to those used in disarmament agreements on weapons of mass destruction. However, others maintained that such mechanisms were inappropriate in relation to anti-personnel mines, and that unduly obtrusive and costly mechanisms should be avoided. Support was also expressed for drawing on compliance mechanisms already used in other fields, including a reporting system, the criminalization of violations, and the establishment of a fact-finding or implementation commission.

The ICRC and other delegations stressed the importance of establishing a total ban on anti-personnel mines as rapidly as possible, pointing out that while the effectiveness of any agreement had to be ensured, negotiations on verification should not be allowed to block agreement on a total ban. It was also important that any compliance measures should emphasize the positive aspects of any new regime - by encouraging transparency, building confidence and promoting international cooperation to deal with the existing scourge of landmines.

Further information: Paul Berman, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2077
Johanne Dorais-Slakmon or Keith Howell, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2319

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/6 on ICRC activities in Zaire, dated 25.04.97

During the week-end of 3-4 May 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Doris Pfister, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
Close to 1,100 unaccompanied children were returned to Rwanda from the Kisangani region in the first six days of the airlift that began on April 30. The ICRC is processing all the information concerning these children as part of efforts by several agencies to ensure that they are reunited with their families as quickly as possible. Because unaccompanied children are a priority for the airlift, they constitute roughly a third of the returnees now arriving in the Rwandan capital Kigali.

Working together with Save the Children (UK) and the UNHCR, the ICRC is coordinating the registration of these children, the vast majority of whom are old enough to provide information about their families and location of their former homes. It also checks its database for any additional information about their identity or family. Using its network of contacts throughout Rwanda, the ICRC ensures that they are placed in orphanages in their home areas until they can be reunited with their loved ones. ICRC field staff are fully engaged in the effort to locate their relatives and arrange reunification.

Following the massive return of Rwandan refugees from Goma and Tanzania in December 1996, over 80% of the 10,000 unaccompanied children registered by the ICRC were reunited with their families within three weeks.

Further information:
Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, Tel. ++250 77 344
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 28 76

CHEMICAL WARFARE
A RELIC OF HISTORY?

The first Conference of States party to the Chemical Weapons Convention opened in The Hague on Tuesday 6 May. The primary task of the Conference is to set up the new Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), an agency with some 500 staff, including inspectors to monitor government compliance with the Convention’s provisions.
Following the widespread use of chemical weapons in the First World War the ICRC protested "with all the force at our command" against this means of waging war and called for its prohibition. If chemical warfare were not outlawed, the International Committee foresaw "a struggle which will exceed in barbarity anything which history has known so far". The ICRC's appeal, together with widespread public revulsion at the use of poison gas, led to the adoption of the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons.

Though the use of chemical weapons was outlawed in 1925, there have since been confirmed reports of their use in a small number of cases. The ICRC hopes that the Convention's entry into force and the establishment of the OPCW will ensure that chemical warfare becomes a relic of history. It therefore urges all States that have not yet done so to adhere to the Chemical Weapons Convention at the earliest possible opportunity. It also calls upon the States party to the Biological Weapons Convention to develop an effective mechanism to monitor compliance with that treaty's provisions in order to ensure that biological warfare is similarly averted.

Further information:
Peter Herby, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 27 29
Stuart Maslen, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 25 33

For any information you may need on Thursday 8 May (national holiday) or the weekend of 10-11 May 1997, please call Rolin Wavre, duty press officer, on: 079 357 15 24 (mobile)
CONGO

EMERGENCY OPERATION FOR RWANDAN REFUGEES

The ICRC has launched a temporary and exceptional operation to assist thousands of Rwandan refugees who are crossing the Zaire River into Congo, many of them in an appalling state of health. The refugees, who have walked through Zaire along jungle paths, are gathering near the Congolese fishing village of Liranga, where there is no drinking water, food or shelter for them.

The riverside village, surrounded by forests and swampland, is accessible only by boat or helicopter. An ICRC team from Brazzaville which carried out a survey in Liranga between 8 and 12 May found that over 3,000 refugees had been registered by the local authorities and several hundred more were arriving in the area each day. On the other side of the river, upwards of 20,000 are said to be waiting to cross -- provided they can pay local boatmen for the passage. Those with no money, or who are too sick to go any further, are left behind in Zaire.

Karen Thibaud, a member of the ICRC team on the spot, said the refugees were physically exhausted and malnourished. "There are likely to be many more crossing in the coming days, and they will need help urgently. We shall try to meet their immediate needs, but if we are to assist them in the longer term they will have to leave this area, which is barely suitable as a place of transit."

On 12 May the ICRC sent a first helicopter-load of food to Liranga. The following day a cargo plane arrived in the Congolese capital, Brazzaville, with 11 tonnes of high-protein biscuits, medical supplies and water/sanitation material. This will be taken by a smaller aircraft to Lukolela, a missionary station with an airstrip some 80 kilometres south of Liranga.

The ICRC is in contact with the Congolese authorities, UNHCR and other organizations with a view to coordinating the operation for the refugees.

ZAIRE

MORE WORK FOR THE TRACING AGENCY

The ICRC delegation in Kinshasa has seen a steep rise in the number of people anxious to restore contact with their families elsewhere in the country. In the past three and a half weeks, some 1,100 people have visited the office to write Red Cross messages -- a tenfold increase compared with just a few weeks ago. Philippe Beauverd, head of the tracing agency in Kinshasa, said that people separated from their families because of the conflict were learning about the service by word of mouth. Incoming messages are being distributed in the capital's 24 districts by Zairian Red Cross personnel.
Meanwhile, the Zairian Red Cross has organized the distribution of food parcels to some 17,000 displaced Zairians living in Kinshasa. The food (basic rations for one month, including flour, oil, salt, sugar and beans) was provided by various organizations in the capital, and the operation financed by the ICRC.

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 88 46 900
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2876

CAMBODIA

NOW THAT THE WAR IS OVER: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

Since the end of the fighting in Cambodia's north-western district and former Khmer Rouge-controlled zone around the town of Pailin, the ICRC has been able to resume its task of restoring contact between family members separated by the war. Taking small steps -- before the seasonal rains set in -- a local field officer sent to the area has managed to locate 12 people from a list of 15 sought by their next of kin. In two cases, this was the very first time the families had received any news of their relatives in over 20 years.

According to the field officer, Phnom Malai, "the parents burst into tears when they heard that their sons were still alive".

In the first quarter of 1997, tracing activities were carried out in all the Cambodian provinces. The overall volume of Red Cross messages collected (1,044) and distributed (701) during this period remained considerable as a result of the numerous visits conducted by ICRC delegates to the country's places of detention.


SENEGAL

STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN LAW

Some 30 high-ranking Senegalese officials from various ministerial departments and other sectors of the public administration took part last week in a seminar on the implementation of international humanitarian law. The purpose of the seminar was to examine relevant national legislation and propose new measures for strengthening it.

The seminar issued several recommendations, including ratification by Senegal of the UN weapons convention (which restricts, in particular, the use of anti-personnel mines), the adoption of legislation to protect the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and the continuation of dissemination programmes for the armed forces, the gendarmerie and the police.

Further information: Ibrahim Cissé, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 241 293

For any information you may need on the weekend of 17-18 May or on Monday 19 May 1997 (national holiday) please call Rubén Ortega, duty press officer, on: 079 217 32 03 (mobile)
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (FORMER ZAIRE)

AFTER THE STORM

Teams of volunteers of the National Red Cross Society collected a total of 228 bodies in and around Kinshasa on Sunday 18 and Monday 19 May. They also evacuated more than a dozen wounded to various hospitals and clinics.

On Tuesday they transferred several dozen bodies from the morgue at Mama Yemo Hospital to a field outside the city for mass burial. The bodies, including some that had been brought to the morgue by other means, had not been identified and had to be buried for reasons of public health.

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 88 46 900
Rolin Wavre, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2876

SRI LANKA

EMERGENCY AID AS FIGHTING FLARES

A large-scale military operation launched by the Sri Lanka armed forces on 13 May in the northern part of the island has resulted in a new wave of displaced people and a high number of casualties, mainly combatants belonging to LTTE and government forces. During the first few days of the hostilities the ICRC has been assisting some 1,800 displaced families by distributing emergency items such as plastic sheeting, cooking utensils and hygiene requisites. Six Sri Lanka Red Cross mobile health teams are taking care of the medical needs of the local and newly displaced population in the Vanni region affected by the fighting. The ICRC is supporting these teams and has provided medical supplies to the hospitals of Mallavi, Akkarayan and Mullaitivu to help them cope with the influx of wounded.

The offensive has entailed even greater hardship for an already conflict-stricken region: the number of displaced persons has increased sharply and access to food, medical assistance and other humanitarian essentials has been severely restricted. The ICRC, which already has a permanent presence in the Vanni with seven expatriates and 33 locally recruited staff, has set up a new office in Vavuniya, on the southern side of the front line. From there delegates are assisting the displaced persons in transit centres and people living in small villages which are cut off from basic services.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++ 941 503 346
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC VISITS 128 PRISONERS

On 16 and 17 May, two delegates visited 128 government soldiers held by the Tajik opposition forces following the fighting that took place in Tavildara district in 1996. The delegates spoke to each prisoner in private, in accordance with the ICRC's standard working procedure in order to assess their conditions of detention. 66 prisoners took the opportunity to write Red Cross Messages which are now being dispatched to their families. The ICRC will continue regular visits to these captives until their release.

For several years now, the ICRC has been seeking permission at the highest level to visit all detainees arrested in connection with the conflict of 1992 and ensuing internal violence. Some progress was made on the opposition side: already last December, delegates were able to visit a group of 110 government soldiers most of whom have been released since. However no access has been granted so far on the government side.


ALBANIA

AN UNEASY NORMALITY

Although certain schools have reopened and some governmental services seem to have been resumed, the high number of weapons in circulation and the resultant violence continue to give rise to growing unease throughout Albania. In this prevailing widespread insecurity, the Albanian Red Cross and the ICRC have both experienced the loss of a vehicle in the southern port of Sarande, in two separate incidents without harm to their staff. The stolen ICRC vehicle was later returned in Gjirokaster.

However, official supply channels have been restored for several hospitals in the centre and north of the country, and the ICRC has begun to adjust its distributions of food and medical supplies accordingly. From the end of May on, the ICRC will continue to keep a close check on the situation of hospitals and other social welfare institutions and will limit its activities on their behalf to ad hoc emergency distributions, thus supporting attempts to get state-run supply channels back to normal.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2281

LANDMINES

AFRICA MOVES WITH A BANG TOWARDS A BAN

Representatives of more than 40 African States gathered in Johannesburg this week for the Conference on a Landmine-Free Africa: the OAU and the Legacy of Anti-Personnel Mines. The conference, which began on Monday 19 May and continued until Wednesday afternoon, 21 May, addressed three aspects of the landmines problem in Africa: government policy, especially with regard to an international prohibition of landmines; mine clearance; and victim assistance. Presentations in plenary and working groups were given by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and included a report on the conclusions of the ICRC-sponsored regional seminar on mines held last month in Harare.
As a symbolic first step towards a landmine-free Africa, South Africa's Defence Minister Joe Modise detonated 4,700 anti-personnel landmines in a controlled blast at the Alkantpan military base in the Northern Cape province on the final day of the conference. South Africa has announced it will destroy its existing stockpile of 186,000 anti-personnel landmines by the end of this year.

Further information: Keith Howell, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2592

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND THE BALTIC

STOCKHOLM: NGO SEMINAR TO PROMOTE MINES BAN

Some 50 participants, including representatives of Red Cross Societies from Finland, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Ukraine, are expected in Stockholm on Friday, 23 May, for a three-day seminar on anti-personnel landmines. The event, which is being organized for countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic by the Swedish UN Association and two Swedish NGOs, aims to raise awareness and foster dialogue among governments and NGOs from the region. Government representatives are invited only for the first day of the seminar, which will hear presentations on various aspects of the mines problem, including progress towards an international anti-personnel landmine ban treaty following the Ottawa Conference of October 1996, from governments of Austria, Canada, Croatia, Germany and Sweden. The ICRC will give an account of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's work on the issue. The second and third days of the seminar are devoted to a series of strategy workshops for NGOs.

Further information: Stuart Maslen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2533

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No. 9 on ICRC activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and neighbouring countries, dated 21.05.97

During the week-end of 24 - 25 May 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 200 50 03
AFGHANISTAN

PLANNED OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH

The deterioration in the military situation in Mazar-i-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, over the past 48 hours has forced the ICRC temporarily to suspend its operations in the region, as hazardous security conditions are preventing its delegates from continuing their work in the field.

The departure of a convoy scheduled to provide 200 tonnes of food aid for displaced families in Pul-i-Khumri has been postponed, as has been the distribution of 21,000 blankets and other relief items for flood victims in Sar-i-Pul and the delivery of food supplies for 250 families (1,500 people) in Maimana.

A dozen delegates are currently on the spot in Mazar-i-Sharif, and ICRC operations will resume as soon as security conditions permit. Priority will be given to assessing the town's requirements in terms of food, assistance to the destitute, care for the wounded and support for hospitals, and to visiting persons arrested in connection with the conflict.

The delegates plan to go to Shibarghan, 150 km west of Mazar-i-Sharif, to assess the local hospital's needs. They will also cover the stretch of road leading to Andkhui, north-west of Shibarghan, in the province of Fayab, to remove the bodies of people killed in the recent fighting. All the deceased will be buried according to Islamic rites. Prior to burial, photographs will be taken of mortal remains that are impossible to identify. The photos will be handed over to the ICRC tracing agency and used to try and help families who have filed tracing requests for missing relatives.

A few days before fighting between various factions broke out in Mazar-i-Sharif, the ICRC had done the rounds of several local hospitals to assess their requirements. Medical supplies were delivered to the town's civilian hospital, the military hospital and the Chemical Factory Hospital.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 130

SIERRA LEONE

EMERGENCY MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

Over the last few days the ICRC delegation in Freetown has managed to keep some essential activities going amidst the confusion following last weekend's coup d'état. Sierra Leone Red Cross first-aiders have evacuated several dozen casualties to medical facilities in the capital.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
On 26 and 27 May, ICRC teams went to the Netland and Connaught hospitals where more than 40 seriously wounded patients were waiting to be operated on. The delegates delivered enough medicines and emergency medical supplies (anaesthetics, antibiotics and dressings) to treat about 200 casualties. On Tuesday they transferred 33 wounded from Connaught to Netland hospital, where two surgeons are performing operations.

The ICRC delegation in Sierra Leone comprises 24 expatriate delegates and 200 local staff working in Freetown, Kenema, Segbwema and Zimmi. During recent months some 11,500 displaced people have received resettlement aid in the form of three months' food rations. An agricultural assistance programme covering 180,000 people is under way in the east of the country, where the ICRC is also providing support for 12 health centres and a mobile clinic serving isolated communities. The delegation also carries out regular visits to detainees and arranges for the exchange of family messages between Liberia and Sierra Leone.

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

**RWANDA**

**DO YOU KNOW THIS CHILD?**

How do you trace the families of infants too young to know their full names or from where their families come? This is the problem facing the ICRC and other agencies doing tracing work in Rwanda, which have been very successful so far in tracking down the relatives of children returning from the former Zaire.

The ICRC and UNICEF have published a 44-page booklet containing colour photos of 242 Rwandan children who became separated from their parents during the repatriation from Zaire in November 1996. There are now plans to produce a second booklet with the pictures of 400 unaccompanied infants, all newly registered by the ICRC.

The booklet, which is distributed throughout the country, asks anyone recognizing a child to contact one of the ten local ICRC offices. The children whose photos are shown are being cared for by MSF-Belgium near Gisenyi, by Concern in Ruhengeri and by the Rwandan and Belgian Red Cross in Gitarama.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 77 344

**SOMALIA**

**TAPPING WATER SOURCES IN BAY REGION**

An ICRC water and sanitation team is currently putting the finishing touches to two major projects aimed at improving water supply and storage in the central Bay region of Somalia. Following the heavy rains of the past month, the newly rehabilitated water catchment at Bur Hakaba, an area between Baidoa and Mogadishu where there is a large nomadic population, is already full. The work on the catchment - an extensive, natural valley reservoir which had become silted up - is the first such project to be undertaken by the ICRC in Somalia this year. In 1996 a total of six catchments around the country were rehabilitated.
Under a separate project, the team has been drilling a new borehole at Doya Nunay, 40 km south of Baidoa. Almost 100 metres deep, the borehole will benefit local herdsmen once it is properly equipped. Two other boreholes in the area are being rehabilitated; a third, in Baidoa itself, was put back in operation in 1996. In addition, five more new boreholes are currently being drilled by the ICRC: two in Lower Juba and the others in Galguduud, Muduug and Medina (Mogadishu).

Further information: Laura O'Mahony, ICRC Somalia in Nairobi, tel. ++2542 723 963

**INDIA**

**ICRC REPORT ON VISITS TO DETAINEES IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**


The report gives a thorough assessment of the situation in places of detention and deals with specific concerns such as respect for the dignity of the individual, the physical and psychological welfare of detainees, the treatment of detainees by the security forces and prison authorities after arrest, the availability of adequate medical care and communication between detainees and prison authorities.

The efficiency of the ICRC's activities in this sphere is assured by the close working relations it maintains with the prison authorities at all levels and the private talks it holds with detainees, with whom it is essential to build up a relationship of trust. Reports such as this are confidential and intended only for the authorities to whom they are submitted. The ICRC began visiting detainees in Jammu and Kashmir on 30 October 1995 following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian Government on 22 June 1995, and a first report was submitted on 26 June 1996.

Access to all detainees arrested and detained in connection with the prevailing situation in Jammu and Kashmir continues to be high on the ICRC's working agenda.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++9111 463 43 94


During the week-end of 31 May - 1 June 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
SIERRA LEONE

ICRC ACTING AS NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY

On Monday 2 June, fighting broke out around the Mammy Yoko hotel in a seaside suburb of Freetown, where a large number of civilians had taken refuge. Following negotiations with the parties concerned - Nigerian troops and Sierra Leonean combatants - ICRC delegates succeeded in arranging for the evacuation of civilians and the wounded who were besieged in the hotel by the fighting. Some 350 people were taken out under the ICRC's protection and made their own way back to the city. A further 300 people took the opportunity to leave for another beach-front hotel, and six casualties were evacuated to a hospital in town.

The ICRC started taking steps on Wednesday 28 May to facilitate the evacuation of foreigners from Freetown to Conakry, Guinea, and by the next day 134 people had been transferred under its protection.

On 26 May emergency units of the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, using vehicles put at their disposal by the ICRC, collected some 20 wounded people from the streets of the capital and took them to medical facilities. One major problem is encouraging qualified medical staff to remain at their posts, as they have been subjected to intimidation and fear for their safety. The ICRC has dispatched a three-member surgical team to Conakry, Guinea; the team is standing ready to go to Freetown as soon as security conditions allow. In addition, two nurses are on standby in Europe.

During recent months the ICRC has been providing agricultural assistance in the form of seeds and resettlement aid, carrying out tracing activities and spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law in Sierra Leone.

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

Representatives of donor governments and humanitarian organizations will be meeting in Wolfsberg, Switzerland, from 8 to 10 June for a broad discussion on two substantive topics, namely "Threats to humanitarian action" and "Environment and armed conflicts". The meeting is being convened at the invitation of the ICRC, as a follow-up to the Humanitarian Summit organized by the European Commission in Madrid on 14 December 1995.

A video press conference will be held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on Tuesday, 10 June, at 1.30 p.m.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4179 202 3670
AFGHANISTAN
MAINTAINING A VITAL PRESENCE

The renewed fighting in several parts of northern and eastern Afghanistan over the last ten days or so has led to a sharp rise in humanitarian needs. The ICRC has provided assistance in evacuating some 600 war casualties to various hospitals in the country, some of which have also received considerable quantities of medical supplies.

In the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif, delegates have managed to give medical aid to 30 wounded detainees in the central prison. As in Kabul, the ICRC is helping to transfer the wounded to hospital and is distributing the necessary supplies to medical facilities. Patients with no resources and no family are also provided with food.

Under its mandate to afford protection to non-combatants, the ICRC is preparing to register some 700 detainees currently being held in prisons in Mazar-i-Sharif. To the west, in Herat, delegates are about to register 750 others captured by the Taliban during the recent fighting.

Further information: Jean-Luc Paladini, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 382 280 130

SRI LANKA
EMERGENCY FOOD AID REACHES NORTH-EAST

The first in a series of ICRC-escorted food convoys has reached communities affected by the fighting in north-eastern Sri Lanka. Starting last Saturday, about 80 Sri Lankan government trucks, escorted by ICRC vehicles, brought emergency supplies (rice, dhal and flour) to displaced people and destitute local residents in the area around the town of Periamadhu. A further 48 trucks are due to arrive at the same destination on Wednesday. This is the first time a humanitarian convoy has been able to reach this area since the Sri Lankan government's offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was launched three weeks ago.

In accordance with established procedure in Sri Lanka, the government channels essential supplies to the civilian communities in LTTE areas through its resident agents on the spot. Such humanitarian operations are set up following an agreement reached by the two warring parties and are conducted under the protection of the Red Cross flag.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++941 503 346

ALBANIA
ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME ENTERS NEW PHASE

Up to 350,000 people in Albania - 10% of the country's population - will be receiving ICRC/Albanian Red Cross (ARC) assistance in the coming three to four months. The aid, in the form of 20-kg family parcels containing basic foodstuffs and hygiene items, is intended to supplement the resources of the families concerned. Distributions began last week, covering some 6,000 families in Tirana and Durres.

This is the second phase of the joint ARC/ICRC humanitarian programme in Albania. The first phase, consisting of aid for social welfare and medical institutions, has been completed. Since the beginning of March this year the ARC/ICRC has delivered supplies to about 60 such institutions throughout the country.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 30 457
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES
REGIONAL INITIATIVE IN TURKMENISTAN
TO DISCUSS GLOBAL BAN

The government of Turkmenistan is hosting a Central Asian Regional Conference on a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines in the capital, Ashgabat, from 10-12 June 1997. Invitations have been extended to the other four Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and also to Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Georgia, India, Iran, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Turkey. The aims of the Conference are to increase regional awareness of the anti-personnel mine crisis; to promote dialogue on the issue among governments and organizations in Central and Southern Asia and the Caucasus; and to encourage participation in the international effort to negotiate a ban on anti-personnel mines. Presentations on various aspects of the mines issue will be given by representatives of Canada, Norway, the ICRC, the United Nations and selected non-governmental organizations affiliated to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Further information: Peter Herby, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2729

INTERNATIONAL AS RELEVANT AS EVER

The twentieth anniversary of the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions is coming up on 8 June. Two decades ago the world was seeing the emergence of new types of conflict as the colonial era drew to a close, and in 1977 the ICRC succeeded in having these treaties adopted to reaffirm the responsibilities that were - and still are - incumbent on States and belligerent parties with regard to civilians, non-combatants and persons in their power.

Protocol I deals with international armed conflicts and wars of national liberation, and Protocol II with internal armed conflicts. While the Geneva Conventions have achieved almost universal acceptance with 188 States Parties, 147 States are bound by Protocol I and only 139 by Protocol II.

Given the conflicts currently raging in many parts of the world, the ICRC feels that these two instruments of international humanitarian law which afford indispensable protection for victims are more relevant than ever. It therefore calls on States that have not already done so to state their intention of adhering to the Protocols, and urges all governments to work diligently to ensure respect for their provisions. In the ICRC's view the texts as they stand, although not perfect, are sufficiently precise and flexible to cover most eventualities in ongoing conflicts and those that may arise in the near future.

Copies of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols may be obtained by writing to the ICRC Press Division.


New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update No. 1 on ICRC activities in Sri Lanka, dated 29.05.97
- Update No. 1 on ICRC activities in Former Yugoslavia, dated 2.06.97
- Update No. 1 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 3.06.97

During the week-end of 7 - 8 June 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Philippe Lazzarini. on (mobile) 41 79 333 20 46
Planes, boats, trains, trucks, cars... just about every means of transport imaginable was brought into play for the ICRC's transfer of more than 6,500 people displaced within the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).

The operation began on 15 April with an airlift: using a Hercules, a Boeing 727 and a DC3 (later joined by another transport plane dispatched from Nairobi), in six weeks the ICRC transferred a total of 6,019 people from Kisangani and Kindu to Bukavu, Goma, Isiro, Bunia and Lubumbashi. Other displaced persons were taken from Kisangani to Lubutu and Walikale by truck, and to Bafwasende by smaller vehicles. The ICRC also paid the train fares for 150 people from Lubumbashi to Kalemie.

In a new phase of the operation, which got under way on 2 June, a further 6,000 displaced people will be taken from Kalemie to Uvira. The whole undertaking is expected to continue for several more months, and forms part of a global assistance programme for the displaced population in the region.

Each family of returnees has been given a kit of essential items to help them settle back into their homes. The ICRC is also continuing to provide food and other assistance to the most vulnerable, in places affected by the passage of large numbers of people, looting and insecurity. A seed distribution programme is planned for the most affected areas.

All these assistance activities are aimed at helping between 250,000 and 300,000 people in the east of the country over the coming months. The ICRC is also continuing its rehabilitation and support work -- begun before November 1996 and maintained during the conflict -- for medical facilities in the east. This programme is seen as a vital contribution towards helping returnees resume a normal life.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 716 339

Congo Brazzaville
ICRC back at work

After being trapped indoors for several days by the heavy fighting in Brazzaville, ICRC delegates were finally able to reach the airport on 10 June and begin to help evacuate foreigners from the town, using an ICRC-chartered plane. Priority is being given to women, children and the ill. Fourteen people were taken across the river to Kinshasa on the first flight and further trips back and forth are now taking place.

The authorities in Congo Brazzaville have meanwhile granted the ICRC permission to resume its flights from Kinshasa to Lukolela, where Rwandan refugees have gathered after crossing the river from the former Zaire. After a six-day interruption, the ICRC plane will start up its round-trip journeys again on 11 June to deliver food and medical supplies that will be distributed by two ICRC expatriates and volunteers from the Congolese Red Cross.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 22 81
**RWANDA**

**ICRC RESTORES WATER SUPPLY FOR NYANZA**

Water is flowing from the taps once again for the residents of the southern Rwandan town of Nyanza. Less than 24 hours after receiving a request from the local authorities, the ICRC had a new pump delivered from its Kigali warehouse. Nyanza's 29,000 residents were suffering from a severe water shortage after two of the three pumps feeding the municipal reservoir had broken down.

The new pump, with a capacity of 35 cu.m/hour, has restored the water supply for the town's population and for its schools, hospital, health facilities and detention centres. The construction of the cement base, the plumbing and electrical connections were handled by the national utility company, Electrogaz. "Over the past few years we have done our best to provide emergency assistance to those in need", said Nicolas Stein, head of the ICRC's water and sanitation unit in Rwanda.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel: ++250 77 344

**EAST TIMOR**

**AFTER THE VIOLENCE**

On 5 and 6 June the ICRC was granted access to all 23 people still being held in connection with the violent attack on a police barracks in Dili, the capital of East Timor, on 28 May. Twenty of them are at Dili Police Headquarters, while the remaining three, who were injured in the incident, are in the city's military hospital. Seven of the detainees were visited on the first day, the 16 others on the next. Twenty-five arrests had been reported after the attack, which happened on the eve of the Indonesian general election, but two people were released on 6 June.

Earlier in the week, on 3 and 4 June, the ICRC went to the town of Baucau, east of Dili, to collect information on an ambush there on 31 May in which a number of policemen were killed. The team saw the commander of sector A, the chief of police, the deputy head of the military district, and a number of representatives of civil society. Reportedly, thus far there have been no arrests in connection with this incident. While in Baucau, the delegates met the family of the two civilians killed in another attack there on 28 May. The ICRC is also scheduled to meet the families of the policemen who died in the ambush on 31 May.

The ICRC has been present in East Timor since 1974, working as a neutral intermediary to facilitate dialogue between the population and the Indonesian authorities.

Further information: Sri Wahyuendah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++6221 720 7252

**ALBANIA**

**DANGER: WEAPONS**

The proliferation of weapons among the Albanian population following the looting of abandoned military installations constitutes a real threat, especially for young people. In recent months, a growing number of incidents have been reported in which people have suffered severe burns, lost limbs or even been killed owing to the mishandling of firearms or explosives.
To ward off this danger the Albanian Red Cross, with the support of the ICRC, has organized its first media campaign informing the population, in particular young people, of the risks involved in handling weapons of any kind. The first phase of the campaign, which kicks off this week, includes a 30-second radio spot and the distribution of an information leaflet to the public at large. Some 70,000 vulnerable families will receive a copy of the leaflet together with food parcels.

During the second phase, beginning next week, a television spot will be broadcast and an assessment made of the impact of the campaign among families.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 30 457
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

HUMANITARIAN MEETING IN WOLFSBERG
DEFYING INHUMANITY

The growing challenges facing the humanitarian community in today's conflicts - where both civilians and humanitarian workers are often targeted for attack - were the subject of discussions by some 70 eminent representatives of donor governments and humanitarian organizations gathered at the invitation of the ICRC in Wolfsberg, Switzerland, earlier this week.

The meeting devoted much of its time to evaluating the difficulties humanitarian organizations face when trying to gain access to entire groups of conflict victims, in particular in the light of recent experience both in the Great Lakes Region of Africa affected by the 1994 genocide and in other parts of the world.

Several participants expressed deep concern at the reports of repeated violations of international humanitarian law in the Democratic Republic of Congo and called on the new authorities to allow access to all refugees and internally displaced persons in the country so that assistance and protection can be provided to them.

In closing the forum, ICRC President Corneliu Sommaruga underlined the importance of establishing a closer dialogue between politicians and humanitarian players to enable both to be more effective in their respective tasks when confronted with human tragedies. He also pointed out the ongoing urgency of bringing the perpetrators of war crimes to justice and stressed the need to explore the problem of environmental degradation as a potential source of future conflicts.

The Wolfsberg forum was convened in follow-up to the humanitarian summit held on the initiative of Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, in Madrid in December 1995. It was proposed that similar high-level meetings be organized in the future.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 23 17
The text on the page is not legible and cannot be accurately transcribed.
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC RESUMES WORK IN BRAZZAVILLE

Now that the intense fighting that recently rocked Brazzaville has died down, the ICRC has been able to resume its activities in the Congolese capital. Over the past three days, the organization's Twin Otter aircraft has made five flights from Kinshasa to Brazzaville, bringing in four tonnes of medical supplies. These urgently needed items were distributed on Wednesday to the city's main hospitals, whose stocks had run out. Three delegates, including a nurse, are currently in Brazzaville where they are continuing the distributions to medical facilities and maintaining contact with all the parties involved in the situation there. The ICRC has supplied the Congolese Red Cross with material to enable its volunteers to collect and bury the dead still lying in the city's streets.

It remains extremely difficult to move about in Brazzaville, every trip requiring numerous contacts with all those carrying weapons. It is absolutely essential that everyone - from the fighter on the street to the most senior political or military leader - understand that the Red Cross, and the ICRC in particular, is working impartially to meet the immediate needs of all the victims of the conflict.

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Kinshasa, Tel. ++ 243 88 49 165

COLOMBIA

A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY

The release on 15 June of some 70 government soldiers held by guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was the outcome of a long process of negotiation between a number of parties. The ICRC transferred the freed soldiers from their places of detention to a site where they were examined by ICRC and Colombian Red Cross Society medical staff. They were then formally handed over to the government side.

As part of its ongoing work aimed at ensuring that non-combatant civilians are spared the effects of fighting, the ICRC has stepped up its presence in the conflict areas.

The ICRC will continue visiting places of detention throughout the country and providing medical assistance where required. Owing to the prevailing violence in Colombia, some 650,000 civilians have been driven from their homes to seek refuge safer areas. The ICRC is supplying them with food and medical assistance through the Colombian Red Cross.

Further information: Ruben Ortega, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 24 54
ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES
CENTRAL ASIAN CONFERENCE

The government of Turkmenistan hosted Central Asia's first-ever conference on means of achieving a global ban on anti-personnel mines, from 10 to 12 June in Ashgabat. The conference was opened by Turkmenistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Boris Shikhmyradov, who declared his country's strong support for the Ottawa process aimed at concluding a treaty by the end of 1997 to outlaw anti-personnel mines.

The conference brought together representatives of the five Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) as well of Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey to consider the human and social costs of landmines in the region, international efforts to bring about a ban and means of stepping up mine clearance and assistance for the victims. An expert from the ICRC's delegation in Tashkent attended the conference and addressed the assembled representatives on international humanitarian law as well as treatment and rehabilitation for mine victims.

BRUSSELS CONFERENCE TO MOVE TOWARDS MINE-BAN TREATY

More than one hundred States, the ICRC, the United Nations and various non-governmental organizations are expected to attend the Brussels International Conference for a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines, which will take place from 24 to 27 June 1997. The Conference, hosted by the Belgian government, is an official follow-up to the Ottawa Conference held last October. Its purpose is to review progress made towards a worldwide prohibition of anti-personnel landmines and to agree on the action required to bring the negotiation of a treaty banning these weapons to a successful conclusion before the end of this year.

Governments wishing to attend the Conference as full participants will be required to support the Brussels Declaration, which commits them to negotiating a ban treaty by the end of 1997. All other guests will be present only as observers. The Conference itself will be in two parts: the first two days will deal with the key elements to be included in the treaty, and the other two will focus on various aspects of the anti-personnel mine problem in a series of four round tables. In the second round table, ICRC President Comelio Sommaruga will address the issue of an integrated approach to victim assistance.

Further information: Stuart Maslen, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++4122 730 2533
Johanne Dorais-Slakmon, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++4122 730 2319

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update No. 97/01 on ICRC activities in the Republic of Congo, dated 17.06.97
- Update 97/01 on ICRC activities in Colombia, dated 17.5.97
- Update 97/02 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 10.6.97

During the week-end of
21 - 22 June 1997, for all information
please call the press officer on duty, Suzanne Berger, on
(mobile) 41 79 217 32 03

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Head of Press: Philippe Lazzarini (Tel.: 730 21 90) - Editor: Kim Gordon-Bates (Tel.: 730 23 02)
Amid renewed hostilities, the ICRC has again intensified its activities in several parts of the country. On 23 June an ICRC team from Freetown managed for the first time to join up in Kambia and Makeni, in western Sierra Leone, with another team from Conakry to assess the needs of several thousand people displaced by the latest clashes in the capital. The ICRC delegates also visited the Pademba Road prison, where they had access to all detainees. They were able to register the people arrested in connection with the recent events in Freetown and to speak in private with them.

In the east, the ICRC and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society stand alone in trying to cope with the growing needs. Three casualties have been transferred by road from Zimmi to Kenema, where a first-aid post was set up at the delegation when fighting threatened to engulf the hospital. Delegates have distributed food and medical supplies to the most vulnerable groups of civilians (orphanages and hospitals). In Segbwema the distributions of seed and implements that began last week have continued, despite the clashes in the rest of the country. This assistance is intended to help some 100,000 people to resettle.

In all, there are 23 expatriate delegates deployed in Zimmi, Kenema, Segbwema, Freetown and Kambia. They are working in very difficult conditions, particularly in the east. Most activities are being carried out in close cooperation with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and its teams in the field.

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

After a temporary lull, the situation in the Congolese capital has again deteriorated over the past 48 hours, limiting the scope for action of the four ICRC delegates on the spot and their local colleagues, the first aid workers of the Congolese Red Cross.

Together, they nonetheless managed on 20 June to evacuate 60 young orphans stranded in a home near the airport, in a particularly exposed area. Cared for by Catholic nuns, the children - the youngest only two weeks old - had been without food or contact with the outside world since the fighting began. After first obtaining the consent of all parties, the ICRC delegates organized a convoy of ten vehicles to transfer them to the less dangerous Bakongo district.

Teams of Congolese Red Cross first aiders and ICRC delegates have already buried about a hundred bodies strewn around the city. They will continue to provide the hospitals there with emergency medical aid insofar as security conditions allow them to do so.

Further information: Paolo Dell'Oca, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. +243 88 46 900
NEPAL

ARMY TRAINING TO INCLUDE HUMANITARIAN LAW

The Royal Nepalese Army has agreed to introduce international humanitarian law (IHL) as an integral part of its training programme, with effect from June 1997. The decision to include a training syllabus in IHL for all its five echelons from senior officers to junior ranks, and also for its UN operations, came as a result of the efforts made by the ICRC’s Regional Delegation for South Asia, which has been interacting with the Royal Nepalese Army for over two years in conjunction with the Nepal Red Cross.

The first course in IHL, designed by the ICRC’s Regional Delegate (South Asia) for Relations with Armed and Security Forces for Battalion Commanders, starts on 25 June 1997 at the Army Staff College in Tokha, Kathmandu. The course includes field and classroom exercises dealing mainly with the behaviour of soldiers in action. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, its relevance and the role of the ICRC and the Nepal Red Cross Society will also be discussed. The course is being conducted by Brig. Gen. Digamber S.J.B. Rana (Retd), Brig. Gen. Dipta P. Shah (Retd) and Lt. Col. Lai Bahadur Chand (Retd), who attended an extensive ICRC training programme last year and have been acting as ICRC regional consultants to the Royal Nepalese Army.

A Nepali version of the booklet *Code of conduct for combatants* has been prepared for the course, with a foreword by the Chief of Staff of the Royal Nepalese Army.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++ 9111 462 23 38
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2906

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An account of the ICRC's operational activities and its efforts to promote international humanitarian law throughout the world.

Copies (in English or French) may be obtained from the Press Division, tel. ++4122 730 2309

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/02 on ICRC activities in Afghanistan, dated 19.6.97
- Update 97/03 on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 19.6.97
- Update 97/03 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 19.6.97
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 25.6.97.

During the week-end of
28 - 29 June 1997, 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: Philippe Lazzarini (Tel.: 730 21 90) - Editor: Kim Gordon-Bates (Tel.: 730 23 02)
PHILIPPINES

ASSISTANCE FOR 27,500 DISPLACED CIVILIANS

The ICRC began a relief operation on 28 June for thousands of civilians who have fled their homes as a result of an upsurge in fighting on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao.

Under the operation, conducted jointly with the Philippine National Red Cross, relief supplies will be distributed to over 4,600 families (about 27,500 people) in 36 different locations in the province of Cotabato del Norte. Each family will receive a 10-day ration of rice, sardines, drinking water and soap. The distributions are being carried out by volunteers from the Davao and Cotabato branches of the Philippine Red Cross.

The mass exodus of civilians from villages in the combat zones to the towns of Pikit, Kabacan and Pagalungan started on 16 June, prompted by violent clashes in the region between the Philippine army and units of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Quoting official sources, the local press has reported that the ongoing fighting has already claimed over 150 victims. ICRC delegates who travelled to the area on 25 June witnessed the arrival of thousands of families, together with their livestock. They were being housed in makeshift camps and were obviously in urgent need of aid.

The ICRC is staying on the spot to monitor the situation and to remind the warring parties, if need be, of their obligation to respect the civilian population.

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

SRI LANKA

LAW OF WAR TRAINING FOR THE AIR FORCE

The Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) has just held, in cooperation with the ICRC, its first-ever course on the law of war for officers and instructors.

The four-day course, organized by the ICRC, was held at the Diyatalawa air force base from 23 to 26 June and was attended by 56 air force personnel. It focused on the following topics: terminology, basic categories under the law (combatants, non-combatants, prisoners of war, protected zones, protected services and property), conduct of operations, behaviour in action, the commander's responsibilities, and the role and mandate of the ICRC worldwide and in Sri Lanka in particular.
The talks were given by the ICRC regional delegate to the armed forces and his deputy, both based in New Delhi, the senior dissemination and information officer based in Colombo, and the Commanding Officer of SLAF Diyatalawa, Wing Commander T.P.C. Obeysekera.

In his opening address, Wing Commander Obeysekera said that for the SLAF the course was an historic occasion. He stated: "The observance and implementation of the law of war undoubtedly contribute to the betterment of every airman. Discipline and order are the very basis of any armed force dedicated to defending the sovereignty of a country. No undisciplined armed force has ever won a war". He also stressed that "abiding by the rules of the law of war will always win the hearts and minds of the people, so crucial in an internal armed conflict, as is the case in Sri Lanka today".

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++941 503 346

SENEGAL

JOURNALISTS EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH ICRC

About 20 Senegalese journalists from public and private media organizations took part last week in a seminar organized in Dakar jointly by the ICRC and the Senegalese Press Agency on the theme of the media and humanitarian action. The meeting gave the journalists and the ICRC representatives an opportunity to exchange views, especially on the principles of neutrality and objectivity and on the need to respect a degree of confidentiality. The seminar concluded with the journalists stressing the importance of closer cooperation between the ICRC and the media.

Further information: Ibrahim Cissé, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++21 241 293

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/04 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 26.6.97.
- Update 97/09 on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 27.6.97
- Update No. 97/10 on ICRC activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and neighbouring countries, dated 1.07.97

During the week-end of 5 - 6 July 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
CAMBODIA

HOSPITALS SHORT OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Following the clashes that broke out in Cambodia on Saturday 5 July, a number of hospitals, particularly in Phnom Penh, have almost run out of medicines and other medical supplies. The situation remains uncertain in the areas of Battambang and Siem Reap, with tension running high and security conditions still hazardous along the main access routes. While some diplomatic representations in the Cambodian capital are trying to arrange for the evacuation of their nationals, the ICRC is pursuing its efforts to deliver the necessary supplies to hospitals, to transfer the wounded and to ensure the protection of detainees.

Since the beginning of the events, the ICRC delegation in Phnom Penh has remained in constant radio contact with the teams deployed by the various National Red Cross Societies working in the capital (in particular the American, Australian, French and Japanese Red Cross Societies), and is doing its utmost to meet the most pressing humanitarian needs. On Sunday 6 July a convoy delivered medicines and other medical supplies to the city's main hospitals with surgical facilities. Other convoys evacuated Cambodian and foreign civilians trapped in the Tuol Kork neighbourhood near the airport, where heavy fighting was taking place, to the city centre. People wounded in the clashes were transferred from the Kossamak hospital, which had been hit by shells, to the Calmette and Sihanouk hospitals. A survey conducted on 7 July in these three hospitals showed that their medical stocks had almost completely run out; 98 war-wounded - nine of whom have since died - had been admitted since the fighting broke out. The Calmette hospital, which saw a particularly large influx of casualties, is in urgent need of antibiotics, antitetanic serum, surgical kits, sutures, surgical gloves and dressing materials.

On Tuesday 8 July the ICRC requested access to persons detained in Phnom Penh, and made the rounds of the PJ, T3 and Tuol Sleg prisons.

In Battambang, the prison came under mortar fire on 7 July and four detainees were wounded. ICRC delegates, working with staff of Médecins sans Frontières, organized first aid and transferred two of the wounded to the local military hospital. The ICRC also provided food for the detainees held in Sisophon, who had been left to fend for themselves.

The ICRC has been working in Cambodia since 1979. Its tasks include visiting detainees, restoring family links and promoting awareness of international humanitarian law. The ICRC also runs an artificial limb-fitting centre in Battambang, and a factory for manufacturing prosthetic components and a blood bank in Phnom Penh.
The ICRC delegation in the Cambodian capital and its sub-delegation in Battambang are staffed by 16 expatriates, including a representative of the Japanese Red Cross, and 150 Cambodian personnel. On Sunday 6 July, part of the staff not involved in operational activities were transferred to Thailand.

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

KENYA

RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS ASSIST OVER 130 VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

The Kenya Red Cross Society, with support from the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, took 75 wounded people to various hospitals during the riots which broke out in Nairobi on Monday 7 July. Another 58 people were given first aid on the spot and then discharged. Among the casualties were 31 security personnel and 12 university students.

"We try and do our best", said a volunteer as he took a well-deserved break with his team in a Land Cruiser whose stretcher was stained with blood. His team had already carried out nine evacuations that morning.

The ICRC provided additional vehicles and funds for the entire first-aid operation in the country, and the International Federation supplied radio handsets and vehicles.

The ICRC's support forms part of a disaster preparedness programme launched in 1996 to help prepare the Kenya Red Cross to come to the aid of any victims of violence in the country. With assistance from both the ICRC and the International Federation, the National Society will continue to monitor the situation and stand ready to provide the necessary services should similar events arise in the future.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 716 339
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

UGANDA

AID FOR CIVILIANS IN THE WEST

Following the recent clashes in Bundibugyo, teams from the ICRC and the Uganda Red Cross Society went to the town to launch a relief operation for civilian victims of the conflict. On 21 and 24 June, they delivered supplies of maize flour, beans and vegetable oil for 1,800 people.

The ICRC subsequently extended the operation to destitute civilians living in the conflict-stricken areas of Kasese and Kabarole, distributing blankets, jerricans and soap. This brings the number of people who have received aid from the ICRC and the National Society in western Uganda to over 3,500.
The ICRC has staff permanently based in Kasese. In cooperation with the Uganda Red Cross, they are closely monitoring the situation from the humanitarian standpoint and are standing ready to take action should further needs arise in the region.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 716 339
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

SOMALIA

WRITERS JOIN FORCES FOR "GOOGOOS" PROJECT

Some of Somalia's leading writers and poets have joined the ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) in developing a new series of plays focusing on humanitarian issues. Over the past few months, literary figures all over the country have been invited to create "googoos", or traditional short sketches, drawing on a number of themes that include the use of weapons, women and war, dependency on aid, clan rivalry, and the effects of the local drug "kat".

The ten best contributions, which were selected by a panel representing all regions of the country, are currently being filmed and recorded for wide distribution throughout Somalia. The "googoos" will form part of the joint ICRC/SRCS campaign to raise awareness of the Red Cross/Red Crescent in Somalia; they will also serve to generate discussions on humanitarian issues among both Somali youth and militia groups and to promote respect for traditional Somali rules in times of conflict.

Further information: Laura O'Mahony, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 723 963/4/5

ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES

ASIAN EXPERTS MEET IN MANILA

Some 30 military experts are expected to attend an Asian Regional Seminar on Anti-Personnel Mines, to be held from 20 to 23 July in the Philippine capital Manila. The objective of the seminar, which is being organized by the ICRC in cooperation with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs and the Philippine National Red Cross, is to initiate an informal dialogue among independent Asian analysts on issues central to the future of anti-personnel mines in the region. Participants will discuss current international political and legal initiatives regarding these weapons, the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, the military effectiveness of anti-personnel mines, regional and international cooperation in mine clearance, and possibilities for regional initiatives to tackle the anti-personnel mines problem. The seminar is expected to issue recommendations to States in the region, with particular emphasis on the military utility of anti-personnel landmines.

Further information: Paul Bonard, ICRC Manila, tel. ++632 892 89 01
Peter Herby, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2729

During the week-end of
12 - 13 July 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Joerg Stoecklin, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80

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REPUBLIC OF CONGO

THE EXODUS CONTINUES

Hundreds of people have been wounded and an unspecified number killed in fighting that has raged through Brazzaville since 5 June. Tens of thousands have fled the city as a result of the shelling, some headed north, others south.

Obliged for security reasons to temporarily withdraw its expatriate staff on 26 June, the ICRC has nevertheless continued to provide largely medical assistance to hospitals and health-care posts through its local staff and the Congolese Red Cross, still actively assisting the victims.

On 9 July the ICRC received permission from the authorities in Kinshasa for expatriate staff to cross the Congo river, thereby enabling two tonnes of medicines and food to be dispatched urgently to Mbambu island, a precarious refuge (given the lack of drinking water and sanitary facilities) for the 3,000 displaced people who have gone there.

A cease-fire came into force on 15 June, but widespread uncertainty remains as to whether it will be observed on the ground.

Further information: Paolo Dell'Oca, ICRC Kinshasa, Tel. ++243 88 46 900

SIERRA LEONE

THE WORSENING PUBLIC HEALTH SITUATION

On 7 July the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and the ICRC opened a new health-care post in Macauley, a poor, inner-city area of Freetown, the Sierra Leonean capital. Consultations, treatment and basic vaccinations for children (diphtheria, tetanus, polio and measles) are provided free of charge. Several thousand people have already been seen at four similar centres, which were opened in west Freetown the previous week. Meanwhile, an ICRC surgical team is continuing its work at Freetown's Netland hospital, to which ten of the 40 people wounded in the last weekend's fighting were admitted.

A few medicines are still available at Freetown pharmacies, but as most people have not been paid for months, very few can afford to buy them. To make matters worse, the onset of the rainy season has seen a sharp rise in the number of cases of malaria, dysentery and respiratory infection - diseases that can prove fatal if they go untreated.
The situation is every bit as alarming in the rest of the country. Repeated clashes between rival forces along the main roads have made any movement hazardous. ICRC delegates operating out of the south-eastern town of Kenema are still bringing assistance to hospitals and a few other health-care facilities scattered throughout the area. On 10 July an ICRC-chartered aircraft flew in 1.6 tonnes of medicines to supply the pharmacy at the hospital in Kenema.

The violence currently prevailing in several areas of Sierra Leone is having tragic human consequences. Recent population movements touched off by the fighting have not only endangered people's health but led to hunger. The rainy season is already the most critical period of the year for the food supply; now, with most food-aid organizations driven out by the fighting, a spectacular increase in malnutrition is likely.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Freetown, Tel. ++232 22 241 438

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/1 on ICRC activities in Cambodia, dated 15.7.97

During the week-end of 19 - 20 July 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rubén Ortega, on (mobile) 41 79 202 32 03
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

DAILY SUPPLIES FERRIED ACROSS RIVER CONGO

Every day, six ICRC delegates cross the Congo on barges loaded with food and medical supplies from Kinshasa for people in Brazzaville.

Congolese Red Cross staff accompany the delegates on their rounds. To the north of the city the number of displaced persons has been estimated at 60,000. There are also 2,000 Rwandan refugees, including about 100 unaccompanied children, in the Bilolo camp 30 km north of the capital, and some 25,000 displaced people in more than 80 locations to the south. In addition, the ICRC is bringing aid to the 10,000 displaced who have taken refuge on islands between the two cities.

Supplying all these people with drinking water and providing support for medical facilities are also top priorities. Latrines are being installed to prevent disease, and experts are repairing water reservoirs damaged in the fighting.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 48 402

ALBANIA

ICRC AND ALBANIAN RED CROSS RESUME OPERATIONS

The ICRC and the Albanian Red Cross have now resumed activities after temporarily suspending their aid programme because of the heightened tension surrounding the elections in Albania. The joint team has now succeeded in reaching people in need, but the security situation remains highly volatile and banditry is still rife in some areas.

Delegates have travelled to towns in the centre and north of the country, delivering over 25,000 family parcels since they resumed their distributions of food and other basic items for destitute families. More than 58,000 parcels have been handed out by the ICRC and the Albanian Red Cross since the programme began earlier this year.

Meanwhile, medical delegates are continuing to provide ad-hoc medical and surgical supplies to hospitals. In the south of the country stocks are reported to be running particularly low, but the medical teams have not been able to travel to the region because of hazardous security conditions. The Albanian Red Cross and the ICRC are now looking at alternative ways of reaching these institutions.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 30 457
HEALTH

ICRC AND WHO DRAW ATTENTION TO TB IN PRISONS

The ICRC and the World Health Organization (WHO) have joined forces to focus world attention on the serious problem of tuberculosis in prisons.

The two organizations recently convened a meeting in Azerbaijan, which was attended by TB experts from Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia and representatives of other agencies concerned. Following the meeting, a declaration was issued in which the ICRC and WHO called upon governments around the world to take steps to improve health care for prisoners and provide adequate treatment for those suffering from the disease.

The Baku Declaration underlined the scale of the problem, warning that TB had become a major health hazard for prisoners. The threat was compounded by the spread of HIV in prisons, which increases the risk of death from TB, and by the development of drug-resistant, often incurable forms of the disease.

The Declaration pointed out that the problem was not confined to prisons. "Tuberculosis in prisons easily spreads into the community from infectious prisoners and infectious prison staff (...). If there is no response to our call for action, incurable tuberculosis will increase deaths among prisoners and their families, and prison staff and the community."

Last year, in accordance with its mandate, the ICRC sent teams into some 2,000 places of detention in over 60 countries. Such teams include medical delegates, who assess the health of prisoners, access to medical care and sanitation conditions and make the necessary recommendations to the detaining authorities.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2678

During the week-end of 26 - 27 July 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rubén Ortega, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 01

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With the final performance on 24 July of *Askari*, a tragicomedy by Ben Tomoloju, the Nigerian Red Cross Society and the ICRC regional delegation in Nigeria concluded a three-month-long campaign to promote tolerance through the theatre.

After its première in Lagos on 9 May, *Askari* toured 20 of Nigeria's 30 states. Travelling by train from one state capital to another, the cast gave a total of 30 performances to some 30,000 enthusiastic spectators who flocked to schools, open-air centres and regular theatres. Some performances of the play, which was given broad publicity in the media, drew an audience of up to 3,000 people.

In Nigeria, the theatre is a popular medium for promoting social dialogue and spreading new ideas. In the case of *Askari*, although the performances were open to everyone, the message was aimed mainly at young people.

The feedback from the public, including government officials who saw the play, has been extremely positive. Indeed, the military administrator of Delta State was so enthralled by the performance given in Asaba that he urged national television to broadcast the play. "Its message", he said, "should reach all Nigerians".

A videotape and a radio version of *Askari*, featuring some of Nigeria's most popular actors and actresses, have recently been completed. In addition, television and radio documentaries exploring the theatre's potential for mass communication are currently in the final stages of production.

Further information: Jacqueline Erb, ICRC Lagos, tel. ++234 1 269 00 82 / 269 18 81

A conference on children in situations of armed conflict in Africa, held in Addis Ababa from 24 to 26 July and attended by ministers, international organizations and NGOs, agreed unanimously to support a recommendation by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) condemning the recruitment of children under the age of 18 into armed forces or groups.
The conference, which was organized by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) in cooperation with the OAU, also appealed to all African governments to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and urged that a special committee be set up to follow up its decisions, working closely with the OAU's conflict resolution mechanism. In addition, it unanimously adopted a recommendation urging that a code of conduct for peace-keeping forces be drafted with a view to providing special protection and treatment for children, in accordance with the rules laid down in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

The ICRC mission to the OAU took part in the conference as an observer and gave a talk on the tracing of unaccompanied children and family reunification.

The participants also discussed a wide range of issues relating to displaced persons, the rights of children and child labour in armed conflicts, anti-personnel landmines and alternatives to refugee camps.

Further information: ICRC mission to the OAU, Addis Ababa, tel. ++251 151 83 66

For any information you may need on Friday 1 August (national holiday) or the weekend of 2-3 August 1997 please call Doris Pfister, duty press officer, on: 079 217 36 70
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
FRONT-LINE ACTIVITIES

After contacting all the relevant authorities in the northern and southern parts of the capital, Brazzaville, on 1 August the ICRC and volunteers from the Congolese Red Cross removed five corpses from areas of the city close to the front line.

The ICRC also provided the various armed groups with the equipment necessary for removing bodies from zones where the cease-fire has not yet taken hold.

In parallel, the ICRC is continuing to supply drinking water, provide medical care and install latrines for the population displaced by the fighting. Distributions of relief supplies (soap, blankets, jerricans and cooking pots) and food (rice, beans, oil and salt) for tens of thousands of people affected by recent events will be organized within the next few days.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 48402

RWANDA
HELPING LOST CHILDREN FIND THEIR PARENTS

In the hope of reuniting some families split up by war, the ICRC and UNHCR are currently arranging for scores of Rwandan parents to visit two centres for unaccompanied children.

In June the ICRC, in cooperation with UNICEF, published a 44-page booklet with photos of 220 unaccompanied children who came back to Rwanda last November. Most of them are under six years of age, and therefore unable to give their names or accurate information about their families.

Since the 2,500 copies of the booklet were distributed throughout Rwanda, families from all over the country have been coming forward, and it is believed that all but a dozen of the children have been identified. The ICRC and UNHCR are currently providing transport for about 20 families at a time to the two institutions caring for the children so that a second, on-site identification can be carried out. The operation started in late July and will continue until mid-August. Thus far some 40 families have been reunited with their offspring thanks to the photo-tracing programme.

Since last November's massive repatriations the ICRC and other agencies, such as Save the Children, have managed to reunite about 80 per cent of the returning unaccompanied children with their families.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 77 344

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
SRI LANKA
A NEW APPROACH TO FARMING AID

As a result of the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), since 1987 there has been a general decline in agricultural and fishing production throughout the country's eastern and northern provinces, particularly in areas controlled by the opposition forces.

The ICRC recently decided to take a fresh look at its agricultural and fishing aid programme, begun in 1996, in an effort to find the most useful way of bolstering the economic well-being of the population in those areas. There was general consensus among farmers, NGOs, government officials and LTTE forces that the existing irrigation system was in bad need of repair, a problem exacerbated by the drought which has persisted in the east over the past 18 months. Concerns over security have been preventing funds from the National Irrigation Rehabilitation Project, financed by the World Bank, from reaching the government departments in charge of maintenance.

There has also been a shortage of seed in those provinces as farmers find it difficult to place orders and make advance payments to the Agrarian Services Department. Another problem is the lack of information to encourage farmers to use natural fertilizer instead of relying on chemical fertilizers.

Taking all those factors into account, it was decided to shift the emphasis from distributing aid to helping the Departments of Irrigation, Agriculture, Agrarian Services and Fisheries to carry out their respective functions. The ICRC intends to do so by using its good offices, since it is perceived as neutral and has access to opposition-held areas and contact with both sides in the conflict. It will assist the various departments in making security arrangements, obtaining permits, transporting equipment into areas under LTTE control, and altogether help create a climate of confidence. It is hoped that this strategy will significantly increase the amount of land under cultivation and boost food production, thus benefiting especially the many poverty-stricken people living in the provinces concerned.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++662 251 04 24

During the weekend of 9 - 10 August 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC ASSISTS VICTIMS OF FIGHTING IN DUSHANBE

When clashes broke out in the Tajik capital Dushanbe on 9 August, the ICRC responded immediately by distributing medical assistance to four hospitals (two military and two civilian) in the city and to a military dispensary. These facilities had admitted an estimated 50 casualties. The ICRC aid provided was sufficient to treat 150 wounded.

The two days of fighting between different factions belonging to the Tajik armed forces could threaten the fragile peace agreement signed by the Tajik government and the Islamist opposition at the end of June, and highlight the volatile nature of the situation.

On 12 August an ICRC team travelled to Tursunzade, west of Dushanbe, and another went to the south of the country to deliver medical supplies and assess the situation in medical facilities. Delegates are also evaluating the extent of the destruction caused since July by sporadic clashes between the same factions of the government armed forces.

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

ETHIOPIA

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN WITH A RED CROSS MESSAGE

For two days at the end of July, about 18,000 inhabitants of the eastern Ethiopian city of Harar gathered at the main stadium, a football field and a downtown square near the historic mosque to enjoy performances of Circus Dire Dawa, one of five groups making up the "Circus in Ethiopia" movement. A youth circus group of the Harar branch of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) was also taking part.

The circus programmes offer a unique combination of performances featuring traditional music and dance and humanitarian messages devised by the ERCS and the ICRC. For this particular occasion, Circus Dire Dawa had prepared, in cooperation with the ICRC and the National Society, a short play on the evacuation of the wounded in a conflict situation and assistance to displaced civilians, and a sketch illustrating the dangers of dependence on outside aid and the struggle for self-reliance. The latter is a major issue not only for the Red Cross network but also for the "Circus in Ethiopia" project, which expresses the aspirations of a young generation emerging from years of war and disaster.
Relations between the growing circus movement and the ERCS at branch and national levels will be further strengthened by a cooperation agreement on joint initiatives to promote humanitarian values and principles. While actively supporting this cooperation, the ICRC is also continuing to work with the different circus groups in organizing events relating to its own specific fields of activity.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++251 1 51 83 66
OSLO CONFERENCE TO CONCLUDE ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN TREATY

Representatives of more than 100 States are expected to attend a Diplomatic Conference hosted by the Norwegian government in Oslo from 1 to 19 September to conclude a treaty banning the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel mines. The ICRC, the United Nations and an international coalition of non-governmental organizations will be present as observers.

The ICRC has stressed three key points in relation to the upcoming negotiations. First, the importance of a clear and unambiguous definition of an anti-personnel mine. Second, the need for an immediate and unequivocal ban on the production, transfer, and use of anti-personnel mines, with corresponding obligations to destroy stockpiles and clear emplaced mines within the shortest possible timeframe. Third, so as to ensure that the treaty is effective, no reservations should be allowed to its provisions.

Canada has issued an open invitation to all States to sign the treaty at a Ministerial Conference due to take place in Ottawa from 2 to 4 December 1997.

Further information: Stuart Maslen, Mines Unit, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2533

ALBANIA

CHLORINE TO REDUCE HEALTH HAZARD

To prevent contamination of the water supply, a risk which increases during the hot summer months of August and September and can pose a serious health threat to the population, the ICRC has donated 52 tonnes of chlorine to the Albanian water authority.

The consignment will ensure uninterrupted supplies of safe drinking water throughout the country for more than two months. It was dispatched in response to a request from the water authority, which has been cut off from its normal sources of supply during the recent unrest in the country, and is intended as a stopgap until the Albanian authorities are able to take over.

This is the second delivery of chlorine since the launch of the joint Albanian Red Cross/ICRC emergency assistance programme. In mid-May, 50 kits for testing chlorine levels and 22 tonnes of chlorine were handed over. "If the population has no access to clean water, standards of hygiene deteriorate and this often leads to the spread of disease", said Jean-Marie Falzoni, ICRC Relief Coordinator for Albania.

Further information: France Hurtubise, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++355 42 30 457
KENYA
EXHIBITION IN NAIROBI
ON HORRORS OF LANDMINES

The ICRC, together with the Kenya Coalition Against Landmines, is holding a one-week exhibition of photos, slides, films and videos in Nairobi from 19 August in support of the global campaign for a ban on landmines. The exhibition, called "The Horrors of Landmines", is being shown at the Mzizi Arts Centre and is aimed at the general public and opinion-makers.

Various other events, such as storytelling, poetry recitals and musical performances by the Mzizi arts group, are taking place at the same time. One day will be devoted to presentations and discussions on different issues relating to landmines, such as their effects on agriculture and their implications for refugees.

The landmines campaign has received support from one of the top bands in Kenya, which goes by the name "Them Mushrooms". Last year the group produced a song entitled "Toys of Death" calling for a total ban on landmines.

Further information: Nicole Brechtbuehl, ICRC Regional Information Office, Nairobi
Tel. ++2542 761 339

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW
SHARING EXPERIENCES IN AFRICA

The first-ever regional meeting of African national committees for the implementation of international humanitarian law took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 12 and 13 August. This event, held at the initiative of the ICRC, brought together representatives of interministerial committees and other eminent specialists in this field from 12 States which have already set up national committees or are in the process of doing so: Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The participants invited all African governments to create such national bodies. They also defined the means required to strengthen the effectiveness of existing committees and to smooth the way for those currently being set up.

One of the meeting's objectives was to compare the experiences of the various national committees. It was found that they faced similar problems, notably the need to improve knowledge of international humanitarian law among their members, the difficulty of finding experts capable of assessing national legislation in the light of treaty obligations, and the lack of the necessary materials and documentation.

Supporting the efforts of such national committees is one of the main tasks of the ICRC's Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law. The Abidjan meeting gave it an opportunity to establish working relations with existing national bodies in Africa and to discuss with them their respective roles and activities.

Further information: Michel Djiena Wembou, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 222 460

During the weekend of
23 - 24 August 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 01
ICRC MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR ATTACKED REFUGEES

ICRC emergency medical supplies have been donated to the Gisenyi hospital in north-western Rwanda to help treat people injured in an attack late last week on a nearby refugee camp.

Official reports state that over 130 people were killed and at least as many wounded. The Mudende camp, near the town of Gisenyi, housed thousands of people who had fled fighting in the Masisi region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

During the weekend, the ICRC delivered dressing kits for five hundred people and 2,000 litres of IV fluids, as well as IV kits, material and medication to treat burns and cuts, painkillers, antibiotics, antimalarial medication and sterilized and non-sterilized gloves.

Local ICRC employees visited the hospital in Gisenyi on 23 August and saw that supplies to care for the wounded were inadequate. Authorization to donate the material was obtained the same day and, because the ICRC maintains emergency stocks throughout the country, delivery was completed within 24 hours.

"It's part of our mandate to be ready to help victims of conflict," said Dominique Dufour, head of the ICRC delegation in Rwanda. "We hope these supplies will partly alleviate the suffering of these people."

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 77 344

BRAZZAVILLE AND KINSHASA

MEDICAL AID ON BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER CONGO

The regular shelling that continues to devastate the centre of Brazzaville has forced the front-line Talangay hospital, the sole medical facility in the northern part of the Congolese capital, to move elsewhere. Its staff and patients were transferred on 22 August to a quiet area 20 km further north and housed in a school in the small town of Kintele. The ICRC has installed a 10,000 litre water tank there and built latrines. Delegates and Congolese Red Cross volunteers are also regularly distributing surgical and other medical supplies to all medical facilities in both northern and southern Brazzaville.

The ICRC is meeting the needs of people fleeing the fighting: it is supporting temporary health posts along the roads. Up to 15 such posts have enabled the thousands of displaced people seeking refuge outside the city to be provided with drinking water and medicines.

On the other side of the river, in Kinshasa, the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has set up a triage centre with the help of the ICRC for the wounded and sick who manage to get across. It is staffed by about a dozen of the National Society's first-aid workers and an ICRC nurse, who treat minor injuries and ailments on the spot. More serious casualties are taken by the ICRC to the General Hospital in an ambulance loaned by the Belgian Red Cross.
In case other victims of the conflict in Brazzaville arrive, the ICRC is also providing medicines and other medical supplies to the General Hospital, where about a hundred beds have been specially prepared, and to two other Kinshasa hospitals. To date, it has transferred 45 people to hospital and is monitoring their progress.

Assistance is being ferried by barges across the river Congo river from Kinshasa to Brazzaville several times a day. Fearing that the hostilities as yet centred in Brazzaville might spread to other parts of the country, the ICRC is considering every possible means of transporting humanitarian emergency aid further inland by river or otherwise. Its team has been increased and now consists of some 30 expatriates.

Further information: Paolo Dell’occa, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 34 191

AFGHANISTAN

NO END TO THE SUFFERING

With the continuing fighting, the infrastructure in ruins, the galloping inflation, the countless people displaced and the scourge of mines, to alleviate the suffering in Afghanistan is a more formidable humanitarian challenge then ever.

Since the beginning of the year the number of direct victims of the conflict has risen sharply. A Taliban offensive on the Mazar-i-Sharif district last May resulted in particularly heavy casualties, then there were sporadic but equally violent clashes in July and August. After visiting just over 3,500 prisoners in 1996, the ICRC has already registered more than 5,000 in the first six months of this year. Its distributions of food and other relief supplies are likewise growing steadily: in addition to the 220,000 people already assisted by it in 1996, especially among the needy residents of Kabul, more than 80,000 other beneficiaries in the Herat, Qala Nau, Maimana, Mazar-i-Sharif and Pul-i-Khumri districts and in the Panjshir valley are now also receiving ICRC aid.

The north of the country is at present a virtual enclave and essential medical supplies there have been severely disrupted. In the next few days the ICRC will be organizing an airlift of about 100 tonnes of medicines and other medical items to Mazar-i-Sharif to ensure their availability until the end of the year. It has also observed that the death rate among war casualties in the Charikar and Baghram districts north of the capital is alarmingly high: every third and sometimes even every second casualty is dying for lack of appropriate care. Increased assistance in the form of supplies and staff is therefore envisaged.

In view of this critical situation, the management of the ICRC has just decided to allocate an additional 25,439,899 Swiss francs for its humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, thus raising the 1997 budget for its operations there to 87,029,314 Swiss francs.

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

During the weekend of
30 - 31 August 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03
NORWAY
MINE BAN ON COURSE

With 121 States represented at the Diplomatic Conference on an International Total Ban on Anti-personnel Mines, currently under way in Oslo, the international community has an excellent opportunity to rid the world of these appalling weapons once and for all.

Having cared for the victims of countless conflicts, the ICRC knows only too well the long-term suffering endured by those who step on anti-personnel landmines and survive. The organization decided many years ago that the military value of these weapons is far outweighed by the horror inflicted on the civilian population of countries all over the world. An official observer at the Oslo Conference, the ICRC is emphasizing the need for a clear definition of anti-personnel mines and a treaty to impose a comprehensive and immediate prohibition with no exceptions, reservations or loopholes.

The entire Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been campaigning for over three years for such a ban. Earlier this year, its efforts were bolstered by support from Diana, Princess of Wales, who took up the cause of the thousands of innocent victims of these deadly devices in Angola, Bosnia and so many other countries. The ICRC Vice-President, Mr Pierre Keller, will represent the International Committee at Princess Diana's funeral on Saturday, 6 September.

Further information: Mary-Anne Andersen, ICRC Geneva, Oslo Conference
Tel. ++47 913 40 720 or ++47 944 62 446

BRAZZAVILLE / KINSHASA
RELIEF WORK PROGRESSING

The conflict currently ravaging Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of the Congo, has been scattering its victims to both sides of the Congo river. ICRC delegates leave Kinshasa daily to cross the Congo river on barges to Brazzaville. The Congolese capital has been split in two by a line along which artillery duels have been intensifying. The delegates have been working without let-up on both sides of the line, so far concentrating on providing drinking water and medicines to those displaced by the fighting. Across the river in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, large numbers of refugees have been arriving in dug-out canoes.

Delegates have been working since June to bring food to victims taken to a medical facility north of Brazzaville as well as to those caring for them there, who are unable to provide for themselves. When fighting resumed on 15 July, over 150 patients had to be evacuated to Kinshasa in order to receive adequate care.

The ICRC's Central Tracing Agency has succeeded in reuniting 13 children, separated by the fighting from their families, with relatives in places affording a measure of safety on the outskirts of Brazzaville and in a refugee camp in Kinshasa. A further 26 unaccompanied children have been registered by the ICRC but their families have not as yet been located. Elsewhere, the 60 youngsters evacuated in June from a children's home situated on the front line were subsequently taken to safety south of the city and are doing well in their new home safely removed from the fighting.

Further information: Paula Dell'Oca, ICRC Kinshasa, Tel. ++243 12 34 191
KENYA

HELP FOR VICTIMS OF RECENT VIOLENCE

The Kenya Red Cross Society has been working with the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to provide relief and medical assistance to over 5,000 victims of the wave of violence that broke over northern and southern coastal areas of the country on 13 August.

The ICRC's Nairobi delegation has been working through its Mombasa office to assist the Kenyan Red Cross in its relief work, providing 3.5 tonnes of beans, 8 tonnes of maize seed, 1,000 litres of cooking oil, 10 cartons of high energy biscuits and 20 roles of plastic sheeting. Distributions have been carried out in Mombasa itself, in Likoni, Kwale and Kilifi to the south, and in Malindi to the north.

Over 3,000 internally displaced persons have gathered with all their personal belongings at Likoni's Catholic church and at the cathedral in Mombasa, where the wounded and sick are receiving care from a medical team. During the last weekend in August, thousands of people fled from Likoni, where they feared being caught up in a sweep by security forces looking for weapons stolen during the recent raid on the police station there.

Victims have been assisted by the national Red Cross Society's Mombasa branch and encouraged to contact their families and inform them of their whereabouts. The Society's national tracing service has set up a network through which people can contact Red Cross branches for information about relatives they believe may have been affected by the clashes. As of the end of August, 109 messages had been received by the Kenyan Red Cross tracing service in Nairobi for distribution to family members throughout the country and abroad.

Further information: Nicole Brechtbühl, ICRC Nairobi Information, Tel. ++254 716 339

ETHIOPIA

MEDIA POISED TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT LANDMINES

Government officials and media representatives have expressed their willingness to play a role in promoting an immediate ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines. Some 40 government and media representatives gathered on 29 August for a one-day workshop in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa aimed at creating greater awareness among the public about the dangers posed by these deadly weapons, particularly in heavily mined areas of the country.

Presentations by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ethiopian Demining Project, the ICRC and other participants served as the basis for lively discussions on the disastrous personal and socio-economic consequences of anti-personnel landmines as well as the arduous and expensive work required to clear mine-infested areas.

Informed by a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the Ethiopian government was fully committed to the "Ottawa process", the media representatives called upon the government to take an active part in the Oslo Conference currently under way with the goal of achieving a consensus on an effective and comprehensive ban treaty.

In recommendations made by the workshop as the meeting drew to a close, the participants also appealed for greater financial and technical support for mine-clearing and for work to help mine victims. Mass media, government and private agencies, the Demining Project and the Red Cross were all called upon to work together in mine-awareness programmes intended for those living in affected areas.
The workshop, the first to bring Ethiopia’s media together with representatives from the ministries and aid agencies concerned, was jointly organized by the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the ICRC.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, Tel. ++2511 518 366

RWANDA

A SIGN OF HOPE

Children’s voices will soon once again echo down the halls of the Kigali school run by the Salesien Sisters of Don Bosco. In 1994 the ICRC turned the school into a place of refuge in the midst of the wave of mass killings then sweeping through the country. The International Committee, which is continuing its still sorely-needed action to help hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, is returning the compound to the Salesien Sisters of Don Bosco, who will reopen the school there this month.

The offices and the surrounding compound hold vivid and tragic memories. In 1994 they sheltered close to a thousand people during the genocide and the battle for Kigali. “These buildings have been the scene of both suffering and courage”, says Primo Corvaro, head of ICRC’s sub-delegation for eastern Rwanda.

One building being handed back to the religious order was used temporarily as a makeshift hospital with operating theatre, one of the few medical facilities to remain open throughout the events of 1994. Over two thousand people were treated there. Two Rwandan staff and several patients were killed when a shell landed on the operating theatre. A number of other staff and Rwandan Red Cross volunteers lost their lives in the attempt to bring wounded people to the complex.

The ICRC is today continuing to assist the people of Rwanda through work to restore access to drinking water and to distribute food and other essential items. It is also supporting health-care centres throughout the country. Over three million Red Cross messages have been forwarded, thus enabling contact to be restored between relatives separated by the conflict. Thanks to the ICRC, some 28,000 unaccompanied children have so far been reunited with their families. In addition, over 120,000 detainees receive regular visits and assistance from ICRC delegates in Rwandan prisons and local lock-ups.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, Tel. ++250 77 344

During the weekend of
6 - 7 September 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Doris Pfister, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
COMOROS

AID FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Following last week's clashes on the island of Anjouan in the Comoros archipelago, an ICRC delegate travelled there with members of the Comoran Red Crescent to deliver urgently needed medical supplies, tents and cooking sets, and to make an on-the-spot assessment of the population's needs. The ICRC has also contacted the local authorities with a view to gaining access to all government soldiers (reportedly over 80) taken prisoner during the unrest, and visiting them in accordance with the organization's customary working procedures.

Since the fighting on Anjouan broke out a week ago, 50 Red Crescent volunteers have been giving first aid to the wounded and attempting to locate people reported missing. The local Red Crescent is also using its radio communication network to pass family messages between the main island, Grande Comore, and the secessionist islands of Anjouan and Moheli, thus reassuring family members and helping them to restore contact with their relatives.

According to the latest figures, at least 40 people were killed and 25 injured in the clashes.

Further information: Jo Fox, ICRC Pretoria, tel.: ++ 2712 437 335
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 4122 730 2281

SRI LANKA

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Last week the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary in the return of a North Korean merchant vessel, the Morang Bong, which had been seized by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in early July and subsequently ran aground off the north-east coast of Sri Lanka. The ship, under ICRC escort, was towed by a neutral tugboat to Trincomalee harbour on 2 September.

Following the seizure of the Morang Bong and the capture of its crew, the ICRC was asked to facilitate the dialogue between the ship's owners and the LTTE. On 10 July the body of a sailor who had died during the LTTE attack was handed over to the ICRC and taken to Colombo, and two days later the remaining 37 crew members were released and repatriated under ICRC supervision. The ICRC also forwarded the crew's appeal to the LTTE to return their ship, as it was their sole means of livelihood. In response, on 14 August the LTTE decided to release the vessel under the auspices of the ICRC, indicating that it was doing so "on humanitarian grounds".
The ICRC has been working in Sri Lanka's conflict areas since 1989; its traditional humanitarian activities include protecting detainees, restoring contact between separated family members, providing assistance to the civilian population, disseminating rules for behaviour in combat, and acting as a neutral intermediary whenever required.

Further information: Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 41 22 730 29 06
Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel.: ++ 941 503 346

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No. 97/2 on ICRC activities in the Republic of Congo, dated 5.09.97

For any information you may need on Thursday 11 September (Geneva holiday) or the weekend of 13-14 September 1997 please call Philippe Lazzarini, duty press officer, on: ++ 41 79 333 20 46 (mobile)
PERU

ASSISTANCE FOR DISPLACED VILLAGERS

Following an outbreak of armed violence during the last week of August near the town of Tingo María, in the district of Beraun, close to 1,000 civilians fled their villages and took refuge in a safer area south of the town along the right bank of the Huallaga river. The ICRC sub-delegation in Tingo María provided emergency assistance (food, clothing, blankets, kitchen utensils) to 210 displaced families, who returned to their homes 10 days after receiving the aid. ICRC delegates in the region subsequently organized an information session for the villagers on international humanitarian law and the ICRC's activities.

Further information: Ruben Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 4122 730 2454

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

WATER AND HYGIENE: A PRIORITY

The teams of Congolese Red Cross volunteers and ICRC delegates who are helping people displaced by the fighting in the capital, Brazzaville, are not expecting any improvement in the situation with the onset of the rainy season. The need for assistance, especially drinking water, is growing by the day and the impending rains will only hamper relief work.

The ICRC and the aid organization Médecins sans frontières have set up five water tanks, which are being replenished on a regular basis, along the road leading north from Brazzaville through hundreds of kilometres of savannah. The ICRC has also built latrines and installed showers for tens of thousands of displaced people in the southern part of the capital.
Similar assistance is being provided on Mbamu, an island set in the middle of the Congo river between Brazzaville and Kinshasa, where thousands more have found refuge. The ICRC has repaired a well on the island and distributed the tools necessary to dig more wells. It has also set up showers and dug pits for the disposal of refuse.

In the coming days, the ICRC will distribute canvas sheeting against the rain to displaced persons who are still without shelter.

**Further information:** Paolo Dell'Oca, ICRC Kinshasa, tel.: ++243 12 34 191

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**COMOROS**

**ICRC VISITS DETAINES**

On 11 September the ICRC visited 83 persons captured during the recent clashes between government soldiers and secessionist forces on the island of Anjouan in the Comoros archipelago.

The visit took place in accordance with the ICRC's customary working procedures: all the detainees spoke in private with an ICRC delegate and had the opportunity to write Red Cross messages to their families. The next day they received basic hygiene articles (toothbrushes, toothpaste and soap) from the ICRC. The messages written were distributed on the island of Grande Comore, with the assistance of the Comoran Red Crescent.

**Further information:** Jo Fox, ICRC Pretoria, tel.: ++27 12 437 335

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During the weekend of 13-14 September 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Rubén Ortega, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03
SOMALIA

SEED TO AID REVIVAL AFTER FLOODS

The ICRC has just completed a programme aimed at providing seed for over 20,000 people whose crops were destroyed by recent flooding in Lower Shebele, south-west of Mogadishu. The rains have damaged one third of the cultivated land of the region, considered to be Somalia's main breadbasket, and have destroyed up to 90% of the crops in certain areas.

After conducting several survey missions by plane when the area was flooded and then by car and on foot, ICRC teams identified some 4,100 families in need of immediate assistance in particularly stricken parts of the region. Within three weeks of the final survey the aid programme was planned and implemented. Over 57 tonnes of maize, cowpea and sesame seed were distributed. "The seed was bought locally because these varieties are best suited to the region's climate", said Christophe Langenkamp, the ICRC agronomist in charge of the programme. "People will be able to harvest new crops within just over three months from now."

This seed distribution programme, together with other projects, forms part of the ICRC's close monitoring of food needs in Somalia.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel.: ++254 2 716 339

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 97/10 on ICRC activities in Albania, dated 23.9.97

During the weekend of
27 - 28 September 1997, for all information please
call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates,
on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03
IRAN/IRAQ

46 PRISONERS OF WAR FREED

Forty-six Iraqi prisoners of war were freed by the Iranian authorities and repatriated under the auspices of the ICRC on 26 September. The delegates involved in the operation travelled to the Islamic Republic of Iran and interviewed each of the prisoners in private to make sure that they wished to be repatriated. Accompanied by the ICRC delegates, the prisoners were then taken to the Mundharieh-Khosravi border post where they were handed over to the authorities of the Republic of Iraq.

Nine years after the end of hostilities in the war between Iran and Iraq, the ICRC is still endeavouring to secure the release of all prisoners of war and to find out what happened to missing persons, so as to inform their families. Thousands of prisoners remain in captivity and the fate of tens of thousands of people reported missing on both sides is still unknown.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2317

INDIA

TALKING LAW

The ICRC’s regional delegation for South Asia recently concluded a series of three presentations on basic humanitarian rules for combatants at the Border Security Force (BSF) Subsidiary Training Centre in Srinagar in the Kashmir Valley. The one-day sessions were attended by 57 senior and junior officers, including instructors who are expected to incorporate the course material in their ongoing training programmes for BSF personnel deployed in Jammu and Kashmir. The conduct of operations in situations of internal violence, the behaviour of security forces in action, and the law of war and its relevance in non-international conflicts were among the subjects discussed. The ICRC’s other operational activities in Jammu and Kashmir include visits to security detainees in accordance with a memorandum of understanding signed by the ICRC and the Indian Government on 22 June 1995.
The regional delegation also ran a course for the police in New Delhi from 24 to 26 September, focusing on the provisions of international humanitarian law applicable in internal disturbances. The topics covered included legal and ethical conduct in law enforcement, an overview of human rights law, arrest and detention, and vulnerable groups in law enforcement; there was also a classroom exercise on the escalation of violence. The participants were a cross-section of 25 officers - ranging from the level of station house officer to the Assistant Commissioner of Police - directly involved in law enforcement and the maintenance of public order.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++91 11 462 2338

Tribute to a Neapolitan surgeon, a precursor of Henry Dunant

The Bari branch of the Italian Red Cross has presented the ICRC with a bronze bust of the surgeon Ferdinando Palasciano, who as early as 1847 put forward the proposal that the war-wounded be given neutral status, one of the basic tenets of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Palasciano, who was born in Capua, near Naples, in 1815 and died in 1891, took part in the battle of Messina as a doctor with the rank of captain in the Bourbon army and refused to obey when ordered by his superiors not to give aid to wounded enemy soldiers.

The bust was unveiled at ICRC headquarters on 26 September in the presence of ICRC President Cornello Sommaruga and Mr Camillo de Luca, President of the Bari branch of the Italian Red Cross.

During the weekend of 4 - 5 October 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Doris Pfister, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
Further to various reports in the media stating that the International Red Cross may abolish its emblem and replace it with a "culturally neutral" diamond logo, please find hereafter a statement by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga.

Quote

The red cross and red crescent are currently used around the world both as a protective symbol in wartime and as the identifying emblems of national and international organisations of our Movement. Tragically, in many of today's conflicts the emblems are neither understood nor respected.

In November the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will be discussing six different suggestions by a working group set up to address these issues. The proposals include ideas to introduce a third neutral, protective emblem for use in time of armed conflict, and to permit the recognition of national organisations using other identifying emblems. The objectives remain: to secure the best possible protection for the innocent victims of war and to ensure that our international Movement, based on the worldwide value of humanity, is truly universal. No decision will be taken by the Movement in November. The emblem is enshrined in international law and any final decision will have to be taken by the 188 States party to the Geneva Conventions.

Any solution must clearly take account of the emblems currently in use. There is no plan to end the use of the emblem or name of the red cross or the red crescent by the humanitarian organisations of our Movement. The red cross is an emblem which I, and the ICRC delegates working around the world to protect victims of armed conflict, wear with pride.

Cornelio Sommaruga
President
International Committee of the Red Cross

Unquote
null
UGANDA

AID FOR 14,000 DISPLACED

The ICRC has just finished distributing blankets, plastic sheeting and soap to over 14,000 internally displaced people in Nyahuka, south-western Uganda. The town's original population of 3,000 increased six-fold when thousands of people sought refuge there from the surrounding hills, fleeing the clashes which broke out in the area last June. "Some of the displaced have found shelter in crowded churches and schools, but most of them are living in makeshift huts in the bush around Nyahuka", said Louis Grasveld, the ICRC field delegate who supervised the distribution. The operation went ahead smoothly thanks to the support of the Uganda Red Cross Society, whose volunteers first registered all the beneficiaries and then helped distribute the supplies.

The distribution is part of a vast operation launched three months ago by the ICRC and the National Red Cross Society to assist some 70,000 internally displaced people in the south-western districts of Kasese, Kabarole and Bundibugyo. To date, in the first two districts about 30,000 people have received relief supplies and monthly food rations, while in Bundibugyo roughly the same number have been given blankets, soap and plastic sheeting.

"The operation will last until December, the start of the harvest season", said Claudio Baranzini, head of ICRC operations in Uganda. "After that, we will of course continue to monitor the situation in the region, in close cooperation with the local Red Cross, so that we can step in quickly should new humanitarian needs arise."

Further information: Claudio Baranzini, ICRC Kampala, tel. ++25641 230517
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++2542 716339

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

PRIORITY IN KIVU GIVEN TO CLEAN WATER AND MEDICAL CARE

The ICRC has completed its relief operation for displaced Congolese in the Kivu area under which 150,000 people received food, seed and other basic items, and is now endeavouring to improve the provision of drinking water and medical care.

In Goma, ICRC engineers have restored the sanitary installations in seven health-care centres and work is currently under way to rehabilitate three other medical facilities. Together with Regidesco, the national water company, the ICRC is extending the water-supply network in two districts of the town.
Further south, in the Bukavu area, the ICRC has set up a gravity-feed system for Nyangezi hospital. The same type of system will be used to supply densely populated areas in the suburbs. Meanwhile, a similar project is nearing completion on the island of Idjwi, where 12 kilometres of pipe have recently been laid to supply Monvu hospital and 12 small towns.

In addition to providing medicines and various other items, the ICRC is covering the running costs of the hospitals in Bukavu, Goma and Uvira. An ICRC team made up of two doctors, a nurse and a radiologist has also set up basic and advanced training courses for the staff of the 170-bed local hospital in Uvira.

Since the beginning of this year, the ICRC has supported 52 health-care centres in Kivu (10 in Bukavu, 29 in Uvira and 13 in Goma). These centres, each of which gives between 10 and 20 consultations a day, meet the medical needs of approximately 270,000 people.

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

KENYA

LOCAL RED CROSS OPERATION CONTINUES

The Kenya Red Cross Society is pursuing the operation it launched on 13 August after violence broke out in the region of Mombasa, claiming dozens of lives and forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes. Some 4,000 displaced persons who took refuge in seven churches and mosques are receiving food and other basic necessities, a medical team is treating about 60 patients a day, and hygiene conditions are being monitored so as to prevent any outbreak of infectious diseases. Thanks to the Red Cross message network, moreover, some of the displaced have been able to get in touch with their relatives once again: so far 80 replies have been received to some 420 Red Cross messages sent around the country and abroad, giving as many victims reason to hope that they will soon be reunited with their loved ones.

Meanwhile, the Kenya Red Cross is keeping a close watch on the humanitarian situation and stands ready to take action if new needs should arise. "These population movements will probably continue until after the general elections scheduled for the end of the year", said Alex Munai, who is in charge of the Society's programmes. "We are therefore putting together a plan of action that will enable us to meet needs during the coming three months."

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++ 2542 716 339
AFRICA
MUSIC DEFIES WAR

Using music to promote greater respect and protection for war victims in Africa: that is the challenge taken up by the ICRC and six of the continent's most popular artists. This week marks the worldwide release of the album "So why?", recorded by Youssou N'Dour (Senegal), Papa Wemba (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Jabu of Bayete and Lucky Dube (South Africa), Lagbaja (Nigeria) and Lourdes Van-Dunem (Angola). The title song expresses the emotion they felt after meeting war victims in KwaZulu/Natal, Liberia, southern Sudan and Angola, on a trip they took with ICRC representatives to some of the worst-affected regions in Africa.

With the help of the media, record distributors and retailers, disk jockeys and street vendors, the ICRC hopes to reach people who are already or may become involved in violence, and all those who can in some way influence the conduct of conflict. The aim is to raise public awareness so that a modicum of respect will once again be shown for humanitarian values. The ICRC is relying on the musicians' talent and fame to drive the message home.

A documentary film will be broadcast by satellite throughout Africa starting on 9 October. Entitled "Music goes to war", it shows the artists on their trip and composing the song. A book about this unique experience, with a foreword by President Nelson Mandela, will come out in November.

Further information: Philippe Lazzarini, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++4122 730 21 90

During the weekend of 11 - 12 October 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
NEWS

CONFLICT IN NAGORNY-KARABAKH

MORTAL REMAINS OF TEN PEOPLE RETURNED

Two ICRC teams accompanied Azerbaijani and Nagorny-Karabakh officials on either side of the front line on 14 October as the mortal remains of ten people were returned to the authorities concerned. The ICRC was present in its capacity as a neutral intermediary and at the request of the parties.

The ICRC earnestly hopes that this operation will be only a first step towards resolving the issue of the persons reported missing in connection with the conflict. It would like to ascertain the fate of over 2,200 other missing persons whose families are still without news more than three years after the signing of a cease-fire agreement. Together with the families, the ICRC drew up lists containing the names of the missing and submitted them to the authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny-Karabakh last June.

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

COLOMBIA

CONFLICT TAKING INCREASINGLY HEAVY TOLL

The approaching municipal elections in Colombia and the numerous clashes that have broken out between the parties to the conflict are causing a serious deterioration in security conditions for the civilian population.

On 3 October the ICRC delegation in the country was asked to give assistance to the survivors of an attack in the department of Meta that targeted a judicial commission comprising some 40 members. Eleven people were killed and 16 wounded in the incident.

The ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross have distributed food and other basic necessities to 50 recently displaced families. During the past two weeks more than 300 families have been forced to leave the Chocó region. Similar situations are reported in the departments of Nariño, Norte de Santander, Arauca, Antioquia, Bolívar and Putumayo, and also in Magdalena department where 200 families have fled the Plato and Fundación area. In Llanos del Yari (Caquetá), emergency assistance has been distributed to over 400 persons, and in Urubá more than 16,000 people displaced by the conflict are still living in extremely precarious conditions. ICRC delegates are currently conducting a survey of the situation in Urubá in order to assess needs in the various camps for the displaced and to determine whether it might be possible for the people concerned to return to their homes. Over 900 families have received emergency aid in recent weeks.
At present the ICRC has 44 expatriate delegates and about 100 local staff working in Colombia. By the end of June delegates had visited 3,732 detainees in 84 detention centres.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2454

INDIA
FORGING LINKS IN SOUTH ASIA

A regional workshop for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of South Asia opened in New Delhi on 14 October 1997, with the aim of setting up a tracing network to help restore contact between separated family members in the region.

The five-day session is being held jointly by the Indian Red Cross Society and the ICRC. Tracing services are based on the principle of respect for the family and the right of its members to maintain the family unit. Under international humanitarian law, families are entitled to correspond with their loved ones from whom they have become separated and to be informed of the fate of relatives who have gone missing.

It is with these principles in mind that the Indian Red Cross Society, the Nepal Red Cross Society, the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the Pakistan Red Crescent Society have come together in the first regional event of its kind to exchange views and examine how the ICRC's technique and expertise in this sphere can be applied to peacetime tracing activities in South Asia.

The workshop is expected to consolidate working relations between the National Societies of the region, which will draw up a plan of action designed to alleviate the suffering of separated family members.

Further information: Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel. ++911 462 23 38

KENYA
RAPID REACTION TO VIOLENCE IN NAIROBI

On Friday 10 October clashes broke out in the eastern part of the Kenyan capital Nairobi between an opposition faction and police units. With 18 volunteers and six vehicles, Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) teams immediately went into action to help people caught in the violence. Thirty people received treatment on the spot.

Alex Munai, the KRCS director of programmes, declared: "Our first-aiders received full cooperation from both sides and were not in any way hindered in their efforts to tend the wounded".

Further information : Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 716 339
**RWANDA**

**COURSE IN LAW OF WAR FOR ARMY INSTRUCTORS**

On 13 October the ICRC opened a week-long course in international humanitarian law, also known as the law of war, for 25 instructors from military academies throughout Rwanda. The course is designed to assist the instructors in teaching the subject to the troops and officers of the Rwandan army.

The law of war covers such matters as respect for civilians and non-combatants, the treatment of prisoners and the wounded, and the use of force in proportion to legitimate military objectives. Under the Geneva Conventions, States are responsible for spreading knowledge of this body of law among their own armed forces. The ICRC has been running such courses for national armies and other organized armed forces worldwide for the past 25 years.

The coordinator of the ICRC's dissemination programme in Rwanda, Glenn O'Neil, described this week's course as the first stage in a broader programme of cooperation with the Rwandan army to ensure that the law of war is included in military training. The participants will be given ready-to-use training materials, lesson plans, case studies and practical examples of how the law of war should be applied in combat situations. "We are rebuilding our training structure", explained the Head of the Rwandan Army Operations and Training Department, Lt. Col. Patrick Nyanvumba. "We want to incorporate this material at the outset so that we can achieve self-sufficiency in teaching it as quickly as possible."

**Further information:** Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. +250 77 344
NORTHERN IRAQ

AID DISTRIBUTIONS CONTINUE AS CEASE-FIRE HOLDS

With the resumption of fighting on 13 October between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), over four hundred Kurdish families fled their homes in northern Iraq. The ICRC has stepped up its aid to these internally displaced persons, whose plight is aggravated by harsh weather conditions as winter sets in. The scale of the clashes between the rival Iraqi Kurdish factions also prompted the ICRC to increase its assistance to seven medical facilities in the area. Mobile dispensaries along the front line received first-aid material, while hospitals treating more serious casualties were supplied with surgical equipment and medicines.

The deadline set by the KDP for the withdrawal of the PUK forces has now passed, but the precarious cease-fire is still holding. This enables the ICRC to continue its distributions of humanitarian assistance and its visits to over 320 prisoners captured since 13 October.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2317

AZERBAIJAN

PERMANENT DANGER

In parallel with the worldwide campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines, at the beginning of this year the ICRC delegation in Azerbaijan launched a campaign designed to prevent mine accidents by explaining to people living near the Nagorny Karabakh front line how to avoid injury from these deadly weapons. An initial assessment shows that the project, which is financed by the Swedish Red Cross, has had encouraging results, and there are plans to extend it to other parts of the southern Caucasus.

The programme is aimed primarily at children and farmers, the two groups most exposed to the danger of landmines. So far over 120,000 families in Azerbaijan have been reached during relief distributions by means of leaflets placed in seed packets, printed messages on school exercise books, etc. The local media have also made an active contribution to the campaign.

The limb-fitting centre run with ICRC support in Baku is a source of valuable information for the project. A story book and an animated cartoon are being produced for children, and effective means of reaching farmers are under study. The ICRC delegation is also setting up a network of partners within the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan and other organizations in the country and training them to raise awareness of the problem on a wider scale.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2307
BHUTAN
VISITS TO SECURITY DETAINEES

Between 9 and 16 October the ICRC carried out a series of visits to security detainees in Bhutan. The persons concerned, who have been convicted of "anti-national activities", are held in the central prison in Chamgang and in the Thimphu detention centre. The series of visits, the tenth since 1993, took place under a memorandum of understanding signed in that year by the Bhutanese authorities and was conducted in accordance with the ICRC's standard visiting procedures.

The ICRC's visits to persons deprived of their freedom are carried out on condition that its delegates have access to all detainees within its terms of reference, are able to speak to them in private, and are allowed to repeat the visits and follow up each detainee in the long term.

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

SOMALIA
PROMOTING BLOOD DONATION

The chronic shortage of blood for surgical patients at Keysaney hospital in Mogadishu North has prompted the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and the ICRC to take urgent steps to convince the city's inhabitants of the need to give blood. Community leaders were consulted about attitudes and practices relating to blood donation in the local culture so that an appropriate message could be formulated for a reticent population.

In September two "blood transfusion awareness" workshops were held by the ICRC in cooperation with the SRCS at Keysaney hospital. Among the participants were community elders and representatives of international organizations and the media. The Chairman of the Islamic Court gave an address on blood donation as perceived in Islamic law. "Whoever saves a human life shall be regarded as though he has saved all mankind", was one of many verses from the Koran he quoted to show that there were no religious reasons for not giving one's blood.

The success of the workshops, which ended with a spontaneous and voluntary blood donation session, proved that the collection of blood in Mogadishu is not impossible. It is hoped that a sustained promotion effort will keep the stock of blood units from falling once again to a dangerously low level.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 716 339
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

SAFE WATER SAVES LIVES

A pumping station has gone into service to improve the water supply to the city of Khasavyurt, in Daghestan. The station will provide some 12,000 cubic meters of drinking water daily to Khasavyurt's supply network.

Following the influx of some 20,000 people displaced by the fighting in Chechnya, the ICRC undertook a vast project in early 1996 to increase the quantity and quality of the water available to the city's 85,000 inhabitants, who for years had suffered endemic cholera and sporadic outbreaks of typhoid fever and dysentery, and now risked further epidemics of water-borne disease. The ICRC began rebuilding the pumping station, which had long been out of service, and repairing damaged sections of the 22-km stretch of pipe that connected it to the city. A holding tank was also repaired and a chlorination station equipped with automatic chlorinators to disinfect the water before it is pumped into the distribution network. A high-tension line and transformer were installed to ensure an adequate electricity supply. The entire programme cost 180,000 US dollars.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 23 07
Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, Tel. ++ 7095 220 26 16

SOMALIA

LIVESTOCK FOR THE DESSTITUTE

For the past year, the ICRC has been supporting a scheme to raise sheep and goats in northern Somalia. The project is managed by the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), which is considering extending the programme to other parts of the country in view of good results in Berbera and Hargeisa.

Somalia is a country where livestock plays an important role in people's lives and represents a major sector of the economy. The ICRC is helping the SRCS to build up a herd of sheep and a herd of goats to provide animals to destitute nomadic families so that they can once again make a living from traditional skills rather than being dependent on outside aid.
"The animals came through the last severe drought with minimal losses", says Trishit Biswas, an ICRC delegate. "Everybody put a lot of effort into keeping the animals alive and healthy, so it comes as no surprise that there's such enthusiasm about the programme".

Impressed by the scheme's achievements in the north, the Red Crescent branches in Mogadishu and Kismayo, further south, have expressed interest in launching similar projects. Delegates expect the ICRC to further develop this project wherever possible throughout Somalia.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++ 2542 716339

ARGENTINA
A HUMANITARIAN TOUCH

Operation Cruz del Sur, the first joint manoeuvres ever carried out by the armed forces of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, took place from 12 to 15 October in southern Brazil, near the border with its two neighbours. The purpose of the exercise was to prepare for peace-keeping operations, a process that began with international military exercises carried out in Rio de Janeiro last August under the auspices of the US military's Southern Command.

The ICRC was the only civilian organization invited to participate in Cruz del Sur. The regional delegate based in Buenos Aires and the Bogotá-based delegate responsible for promoting knowledge of and respect for international humanitarian law in the armed forces of Latin America both took part, organizing an exchange of prisoners and helping the forces involved in the exercise to identify the rules of that law applicable to the peace-keeping context.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 4122 730 24 54

During the weekend of 1 - 2 November 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Kim Gordon-Bates, on (mobile) 41 79 357 50 03

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No. 97/03 on ICRC activities in the Republic of Congo, dated 28.10.97
SOMALIA

AFTER THE FIGHTING, THE FLOODS

The exceptionally heavy rains that have hit Somalia in recent days are causing extensive flooding in the Juba valley, making the land unfit for farming and thus depriving much of the area's population of its only means of subsistence. Deeply concerned by the situation, the ICRC is carrying out surveys to find the best way of coming to the inhabitants' aid.

For many of those concerned this is only the latest in a series of misfortunes. Indeed, a considerable number of people have been displaced from around Baidoa as a result of the wave of violence which swept through the region between last May and August and is still continuing, though in an abated form.

The ICRC is currently carrying out a relief programme in the area for tens of thousands of people displaced by the fighting. Since early October clothes, blankets, plastic sheeting, cooking sets and jerrycans have been distributed to over 7,000 beneficiaries in the Lower Shabele region, south-west of Mogadishu; a further 20,000 displaced persons are receiving similar aid in the western Bay region, and there are plans to assist 10,000 others in the region of Bakol, to the north.

The delegate in charge of ICRC activities in the area, Raymond Desarzens, notes that the hostilities - and now the floods - have hit the most vulnerable members of the population, farmers and their families. "Most of them have lost the little they had", he said. "Worse still, they no longer have access to their land, which was their sole means of subsistence."

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++ 2542 716339
Two officials of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the coordinator of the human rights programme of the Department of Antioquia were released on 1 November after having been held for nine days by a Colombian armed opposition group, the National Liberation Army (ELN).

Manfredo Marroquín, a Guatemalan national, and Raúl Martínez, a Chilean national, both OAS election monitors, and a Colombian official, Juan Diego Ardila, were abducted by the ELN as they were travelling by car near Medellín on 23 October. The conditions for their release were agreed upon after lengthy negotiations between the ELN and a mediation commission comprising representatives of the National Reconciliation Commission (CCN), the Antioquia Peace Commission and the government.

The ICRC took part in the negotiation process and carried out the logistical arrangements for the release of the hostages, who were taken away in three helicopters bearing the ICRC emblem. They were later transferred to the town of Santa Ana, in Antioquia, where they met members of the CCN and the international election-monitoring commission.

COLOMBIAN AMBASSADORS AT ICRC HEADQUARTERS

At the initiative of Colombia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ICRC invited the country's ambassadors in Europe to a one-day seminar on the Red Cross and international humanitarian law in Geneva on 31 October last. The participants, who were accompanied by Colombia's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, included a former President of the Republic, several former government ministers and three former commanders of the Colombian armed forces.

The seminar covered the following main topics: challenges facing the ICRC and its humanitarian action, differences between international humanitarian law and human rights law, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ICRC operations for conflict victims, and promoting knowledge of international humanitarian law among the armed forces. The ICRC also voiced its concern regarding recent developments in the armed conflict in Colombia and the growing number of uncontrolled armed groups there, and restated the offer of its services in seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The participants were received by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga and by the organization's Delegate General for the Americas and the head of its delegation in Colombia, who all stressed the ICRC's good working relations with the parties to the conflict and the fact that its delegates had unimpeded access to the entire territory of the country.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2454
CAMPAIGN FOR LANDMINE VICTIMS
UEFA-ICRC PARTNERSHIP

The fundraising campaign launched by the ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross in aid of victims of anti-personnel mines will reach its peak in the coming weeks with a series of TV phone-ins, made possible by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

Under an agreement reached by UEFA and the ICRC, the Red Cross in Switzerland and 20 other European countries will be able to broadcast, free of charge, a TV spot at half-time in UEFA Champions League matches to be played on 5 and 19 November and 3 December next. The spot appeals to viewers to support Red Cross work in 45 limb-fitting centres throughout the world. UEFA itself has pledged a major contribution to ICRC activities for amputees in Georgia and in one African country.

Viewers in Switzerland will be able to pledge their donations by calling the following number: 0848 80 80 10 [if the regulations of your newspaper/radio-TV station permit, please include the above phone number].

Further information: Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2384

During the weekend of
8 - 9 November 1997,
for all information please call
the press officer on duty,
Suzanne Berger,
on (mobile)
41 79 217 32 03
SOMALIA/ETHIOPIA

FLOOD VICTIMS NEED URGENT HELP

The ICRC has this week launched an emergency relief operation for the victims of flooding in Somalia brought about by torrential rains that have caused the Shabele and Juba rivers to overflow their banks. ICRC pilots transporting humanitarian aid have reported that, in some places, the rivers are eight kilometres wider than usual. The swollen waters have washed away entire villages, recently sown maize and sorghum crops, patiently built irrigation canals, food and seed supplies and livestock. The situation is nothing short of a catastrophe, with an estimated half-million persons affected in southern Somalia alone.

The ICRC has dispatched personnel by road from Mogadishu to the areas surrounding the flooded towns of Jilib and Marere, in the Middle Juba district. Further north along the Juba river, staff have been flown in to the town of Buale in order to gather precise information on the number of victims and devise the best way to reach them. They have so far identified at least 10,000 families in need of aid.

ICRC aircraft have delivered high-energy biscuits, blankets and tarpaulins to some 3,000 households in the towns of Luuq and Burdubo, in Gedo district. Owing to the absence of dry firewood, these biscuits are for the moment the only food available for immediate consumption. A further 10,000 households should benefit from ICRC aid in the immediate future if the weather, and the state of the landing strips, permit.

In Ethiopia -- unlike Somalia, where there is no national authority or State structure -- the government has taken prompt relief action. While food needs are being covered by the government, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, supported by the ICRC, is focusing on the distribution of essential non-food items (blankets, plastic sheeting, jerrycans, etc.) and basic medical supplies, as well as seed to enable agriculture to resume immediately.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++2542 723 963
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 2281

UGANDA

AID TO 80,000 PEOPLE DISPLACED IN THE SOUTH-WEST

Whenever 35-year-old Biira, mother of nine children, wants to see her house again, she has to negotiate steep hill paths, escorted by three soldiers of the Ugandan army. For a year now, this area of south-western Uganda, near the country's borders with Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been the scene of regular clashes between the Allied Democratic Forces and the Ugandan army. Nearly 100,000 people have had to abandon their homes and their fields.
Some 10,000 of these people have found refuge in the deserted houses of Kilembe, a town that just a few years ago accommodated the families of workers at a cobalt mine there. Now, Biira has nothing but the scant harvest of cassava leaves which she gets from a tiny hillside plot of land allotted her by the local authorities. She is alone in taking caring of her children, who share with her a small room that doubles as kitchen and bedroom.

On 8 November, the ICRC organized a food distribution in Kilembe to augment the displaced people's meagre resources. Despite the burden of the heavy basket perched on her small frame, Biira was all smiles as she carried home her sack of flour, plus cooking oil, salt, beans and soap.

Since June 1997, the ICRC has been setting up programmes to provide aid in the form of food and other essential items for displaced Ugandans, most of whom live in extremely precarious conditions.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel. ++254 2 723 963

RWANDA
HELPING THE VULNERABLE HELP THEMSELVES

The need is simple but pressing: seeds and a hoe. For some of the poorest people in Rwanda, the rudimentary means to grow their own food spells the difference between being dependent on outside aid and being self-sufficient.

In the last two months, the ICRC has acted through local associations and Rwandan non-governmental organizations in different areas of the country to distribute seed, agricultural tools and fertilizer to over 2,000 people.

With the start of the rainy season, this assistance will allow the beneficiaries to plant beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, maize, carrots, cabbage and onions, thus enabling them to start back down the road to autonomy.

Many of these people are widows or orphans and often support an entire household. Most work small private or collective plots owned by local non-profit organizations. In other cases, however, age or infirmity makes it impossible for them to do the heavy work required to prepare the plots for planting. In these cases, the ICRC provides additional aid to the organizations owning the plots to enable them to organize food-for-work programmes to get the planting done.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, Tel. ++250 7 278 3

RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCUSUS
AFTERMATH OF A CONFLICT

The situation in the northern Caucasus remains a source of humanitarian concern, and security conditions still leave a great deal to be desired. More than a year after the end of hostilities in Chechnya, a section of the population -- largely destitute elderly people, orphans and the disabled -- is poverty-stricken and in need of assistance.
For the inhabitants of the capital Grozny, another hard winter is looming. Reconstruction work is progressing slowly and the supply networks for water, electricity and heating, which were destroyed during the conflict, are not yet fully operational again. The first to suffer from this situation are the elderly, often of Russian origin. To assist them the ICRC has just launched a new programme that will enable 10,000 of them to obtain bread throughout the winter.

Since six of its expatriate staff members were murdered in Novye Atagi in December 1996, the ICRC has been maintaining some of its activities in Chechnya and the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Daghestan from Nalchik, in Kabardino-Balkaria, where it has a team of twelve delegates. So far this year, it has provided food to over 30,000 persons in Chechnya, while nearly 68,000 children have received school supplies. This aid is distributed by local ICRC employees and by branches of the Russian Red Cross, whose social welfare programmes are funded by the ICRC. In Ingushetia and Daghestan, as in Chechnya itself, the security situation prevents the ICRC from deploying expatriate staff there.

Meanwhile, the ICRC has broadened the scope of its activities in the northern Caucasus. Working out of Nalchik, it is supporting the programmes of local Red Cross branches to assist particularly vulnerable people in the four republics of Adigea, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaievo-Cherkessia and North Ossetia, and also in the territories of Krasnodar and Stavropol in the south of the Russian Federation. For example, 30,000 people (displaced and particularly vulnerable) benefited from food distributions in these two territories in August and September 1997. The Red Cross branches in the seven republics reach a monthly total of 1,200 people with their home-care programmes, while also providing 1,200 particularly vulnerable people with food and other essential items.

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

**COLOMBIA**

**ESCORT TO FREEDOM**

The ICRC delegation in Colombia has facilitated the release of two engineers, held hostage since early 1997 by the National Liberation Army, one of the main guerrilla groups in the country. The releases, which occurred on 9 November, took place in the department of Antioquia and the department of Magdalena. The two men, a 47-year-old Norwegian and a 41-year-old Spaniard, had been captured on 21 February and 27 June respectively.

Nearly all the parties to the conflict in Colombia have for some years now been involved in hostage-taking. In recent months, the number of incidents has soared alarmingly. As of 15 October 1997, more than 420 cases had been recorded by the ICRC delegation in Bogotá, compared with 273 for the whole of 1996.

Hostage-taking is a grave breach of international humanitarian law under Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions. ICRC action in such cases is strictly humanitarian, with delegates limiting themselves to contacting the hostage-takers, visiting the persons held, forwarding Red Cross messages between captives and their families or representatives, where necessary providing basic essentials, and where appropriate furnishing logistical support at the time of release.
Between 1 January and 15 October 1997, the ICRC helped in the release of 219 persons who had been abducted throughout the country. In addition, the ICRC coordinated the release on 15 June of 70 soldiers who had been held captive by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces. As regards the two engineers who have just been released, the ICRC had no direct contact with them during their captivity, but was able to send them messages from their families and supply them with clothes.

Further information: Rubén Ortega, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 24 54

YEMEN

SEMINAR DECLARES SUPPORT FOR OTTAWA TREATY

A seminar on anti-personnel mines held in Sana'a, Yemen on 3 and 4 November began with an announcement by the Yemeni government that it would sign the Ottawa treaty. It ended with an appeal to all other countries to do the same. Some 50 participants from governments and international and non-governmental organizations adopted the seminar's declaration, which also calls on the international community to increase funding for mine clearance and assistance to mine victims.

The seminar, the first of its kind in the region, was organized by Sweden's Save the Children (Radda Barnen) in conjunction with the Yemen Mines Awareness Committee and the United Nations office in Yemen. It was hosted by the Yemeni government.

Representatives of the Sudanese and Yemeni Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC took part in the seminar, which was attended by government representatives from more than a dozen countries in the region.

Further information: Mary-Anne Andersen, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 2329
SOMALIA/ETHIOPIA
160 TONNES OF AID AIRLIFTED SO FAR

Thousands of Somalis remain under threat from floods due to the overflowing Juba and Shabelle rivers. The rains in Ethiopia and Somalia show no sign of slackening and are still causing deaths, damage to food stocks and contamination of sources of drinking water.

To respond to the emergency, the ICRC has organized an airlift between Nairobi and the affected areas, sending in supplies daily aboard a Buffalo plane, a Cessna Caravan and a chartered Boeing 707. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that local airstrips are regularly rendered unusable by fluctuating water levels.

The 16 round trips made to date into the flooded regions of Somalia have delivered over 160 tonnes of urgently needed relief supplies, including high-protein biscuits, tarpaulins and blankets, for some 50,000 victims. An additional 91 tonnes of tarpaulins and blankets have been purchased in Mogadishu and are presently on their way to the affected areas by road.

In the town of Belet Huen on the Shabelle river, a health delegate seconded to the ICRC by the British Red Cross has set up a health post, together with the Somali Red Crescent Society, to meet the needs of some 25,000 people who took refuge on higher ground outside the town when their homes were flooded. A water and sanitation delegate is studying means of providing these people with drinking water and pit latrines to avoid a further deterioration in health conditions.

The ICRC aircraft have also transported numerous journalists and four specialists of the French Sécurité civile corps sent by the French government, which was contacted by the ICRC, to enable them to assess the situation for themselves. The ICRC currently has eight staff working in Somalia.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++250 723 963
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

EAST TIMOR
ICRC VISITS PEOPLE INJURED IN DILI DEMONSTRATION

On 15 November the ICRC was finally granted access to people injured the previous day when violent clashes broke out during a demonstration at the University of East Timor in Dili. Delegates visited two soldiers and six civilians at Vira Husada military hospital. Among the civilians seen was a wounded student whom police had dragged from a vehicle marked with the red cross in which he was being evacuated. The ICRC delegation protested on 14 November to the Indonesian authorities about this brutal act. It is currently pursuing its efforts to locate all the people arrested during the demonstration.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
The ICRC has been working in East Timor since 1974. Its activities focus on seeking to ensure respect for the civilian population, monitoring conditions of detention and restoring contact between separated family members. Together with the Indonesian Red Cross, it is also carrying out a public health programme whose main aim is to provide remote villages with supplies of safe water.

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

RWANDA

CHILDREN SEEK PARENTS THROUGH ICRC PHOTO ALBUM

There are 440 pictures in all, each of an infant holding a board with an identification number in front of him or her. Some appear bewildered, others stare timidly, a few smile. They are all very young, most of them between one and four years of age.

These are children who became separated from their families during the return of Rwandan refugees from the former Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo). Because they are so young, they are unable to provide any information about their identity, the names of their parents or their places of origin.

The ICRC, with the help of UNICEF, is distributing 2,500 copies of the photo album to churches, municipal offices and NGOs throughout Rwanda, even in the most remote areas of the country. Entitled "Do You Know This Child?", the album contains a plea to anyone who recognizes any of the children to contact the nearest ICRC office.

"Because we have so little information", explained Roberta Martinelli, the ICRC Tracing Agency coordinator in Rwanda, "there is no other way of carrying out an active search for their relatives. We hope the album will bring the families to us."

Last May, the ICRC distributed the first photo-tracing album with 208 pictures of infants. Over 100 of the children in this first album have now been reunited with their families. "As well as the parents of those children", Ms Martinelli added, "hundreds of other families have contacted us because of the album, providing useful details about their own lost children."

Since the mass return of refugees to Rwanda last November, the ICRC has registered 1,800 cases of children separated from their families and too young to give any information about them. A third photo-tracing album is already being prepared and should be distributed at the beginning of next year.

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++250 72 783

LEBANON/ISRAEL

HOME AT LAST!

In the summer of 1980, Mohammed, a 24-year-old Israeli national of Palestinian origin, went on a college trip to northern Israel. He did not return. His family tried for years to find him, but finally lost hope. Then in June 1995 they received a Red Cross message he had sent from the ICRC delegation in Beirut.

Mohammed, upset by an unhappy love affair, had crossed into Lebanon where he had been arrested because he had no papers. He spent years in prison, during which his mental health deteriorated. After his release he approached the ICRC to send a Red Cross message.
His family in Israel, with the help of ICRC delegates in Israel, Lebanon and Jordan, started trying to make arrangements for his return. His mother travelled to Jordan, hoping to organize his repatriation from Lebanon via Jordan to Israel. The ICRC in Beirut finally obtained a laissez-passer allowing him to board a plane for Amman. On 4 November 1997 he was welcomed by his mother and other members of his family at the airport in the Jordanian capital, and on 9 November he crossed the River Jordan and reached his home.

Thus Mohammed was reunited with his family after 17 years of separation filled with anguish and uncertainty. "We all thought Mohammed was dead - but he is here now with us", one of his cousins exclaimed to ICRC delegates in Amman.

Although the wars that raged in the Middle East are considered to be over, countless people are still separated from their loved ones. ICRC offices in the region regularly receive requests for help from families hoping to find their relatives and to see them again someday.

Further information: Mu'in Kassis, ICRC Amman, tel. ++962 6 688 645

FAMOUS SCULPTOR DONATES WORK TO ICRC

The ICRC was recently honoured to be presented with a remarkable work of art by celebrated Swiss sculptor Marcel Perincioli.

In what he says is the last project of a most distinguished career, Mr Perincioli has created a group of bronze figures which capture powerfully the dejection and hopelessness of displaced people. Last week the Bernese artist came to ICRC headquarters in person to deliver the work, which he decided to donate in recognition of the ICRC's commitment to easing the plight of civilians displaced by armed conflict.

The sculpture will remain on show in the Grand Salon at ICRC headquarters in Geneva.
Ten thousand people stranded in the Jilib area, in the lower Juba Valley, have finally been reached by ICRC relief teams bringing medical supplies, blankets, tarpaulins and high-protein biscuits. The area, one of the worst hit by flooding, had been inaccessible for weeks.

Contacted by radio near Jilib while distributing relief to some 4,000 people on a piece of ground surrounded by flood waters, ICRC field officer Abdi Khalaq said that most of the people there were women and children, many suffering from malaria and diarrhoea. "The food situation is critical and there is no shelter available", he added. His was the first assistance received by the victims since they had fled the rising waters. The ICRC has already identified three nearby villages in a similar situation and relief is being organized for their inhabitants.

The present distributions come at the end of a long journey, which started a week ago when 22 ICRC trucks set out from Mogadishu to Jilib, loaded with 170 tonnes of relief for the 41,000 flood victims in the region. Travelling along a levee, the convoy was halted 60 kilometres from its destination at a portion of the structure that had crumbled under the strain. Local people packed sand bags to make the stretch passable, allowing the convoy to proceed. The trucks were later blocked again, this time only 20 kilometres from Jilib, when sudden flooding inundated 15 kilometres of road, whereupon volunteers from the Somali Red Crescent Society and local communities began to transfer the supplies onto boats for distributions in the Jilib area. The operation is continuing.

Since an ICRC airlift started on 11 November, staff have been able to bring medical supplies, biscuits, shelter materials and blankets to over 50,000 people affected by the flooding in Somalia. Over 13,000 people have been assisted in Belet Huen, 10,000 in Luuq and Burdubo, 20,000 in Bardera and 10,000 in the Jilib/Marere area. A total of 230 tonnes of relief have been airlifted from Nairobi to Somalia, with supplies then being flown directly to Buaale, Luuq and Burdubo. Trucks have been used to supply both Jilib and Belet Huen. All relief items were flown in from Nairobi, with the exception of 96 tonnes that were purchased in Mogadishu itself.

"A great deal has been achieved so far", says Patrick Berner, head of the ICRC's Somalia delegation. "But the situation for tens of thousands of people in Buaale, Belet Huen and the Jilib/Marere area remains critical. Despite enormous difficulties, the operation is continuing."

In Ethiopia, meanwhile, distributions of humanitarian aid in the Gode and Afder areas are gaining ground following the arrival of two helicopters sent by French forces based in Djibouti and placed at the disposal of a recently established regional Task Force to coordinate efforts to assist tens of thousands of people affected by the persistent rains and flooding in the south-east.

The Task Force is headed by a widely respected leader of local elders and made up of representatives of various local authorities, the Ethiopian Bureau for Disaster Preparedness and Health and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS).
The ICRC is actively supporting the ERCS. In three flights made by an ERCS/ICRC-chartered Hercules transport aircraft, a total of 10,000 blankets, 80,000 square metres of plastic sheeting and 5,000 jerrycans as well as dispensary and paediatric sets have been brought to Gode. This assistance is calculated for the needs of some 50,000 people. Around 1.8 tonnes of veterinary medicines to treat around 430,000 sick camels, cattle, sheep and goats have also been delivered.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, Tel ++2542 717 443

AFGHANISTAN

WOMEN GRADUALLY BEING READMITTED TO KABUL HOSPITALS

After two months of patient negotiations with the Taliban authorities, the ICRC has observed that women are being readmitted to Kabul's two main hospitals. Likewise, many Afghan female medical staff resumed work at both establishments last week. On 18 November, 25 women were admitted to Karte Seh while 30 were being treated at Wazir Akhbar Khan. With a total of 450 beds, the two hospitals together have over 600 Afghan medical staff (including 140 women). Both have surgical facilities and receive funding and supplies from the ICRC. During the first seven months of this year, over 4,600 patients -- men, women and children -- were admitted, half of them with war wounds.

The gradual readmission of women into Kabul's hospitals follows a period of crisis that began in early September, when the Ministry of Public Health decided to channel all female patients into a single place of medical care. Noting that the facility was ill-equipped, most of the humanitarian organizations in the Afghan capital expressed their concern. The ICRC immediately started discussions with the Ministries of Public Health and Foreign Affairs. The aim was to find practical solutions ensuring access for all to high-quality medical treatment, while showing due respect for the religious traditions and practices favoured by the Taliban leadership.

On 5 November, the Taliban officially informed the ICRC delegation of its wish to reach an agreement regarding the existing "mixed" facilities. To this end a special committee was set up with the task of monitoring the situation in the capital's 22 hospitals. The body is composed of representatives of the Ministries of Justice and Public Health, the head of the religious police, and staff from the ICRC, the United Nations and a number of non-governmental organizations in Kabul.

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

SRI LANKA

20 VILLAGERS RELEASED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

On 22 November, 20 villagers from Irrakkandy, Trincomalee district, who had been held for months by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were handed over to the ICRC. The operation took place in the Vanni area.

The villagers were part of a group of 39 people captured by the LTTE in early July, the rest of whom had been handed over to the ICRC in recent months.

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

The ICRC has 50 expatriates and 300 Sri Lankans working in its offices in Colombo and 11 towns in the north and east of the country.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, Tel. ++ 941 503 346
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC, Geneva, Tel. ++ 4122 730 2906
ICRC delegates on 19 November resumed visits to 121 Nigerian prisoners of war and civilian internees detained by the Cameroonian authorities following fighting on the Bakassi peninsula in February and April 1996.

The ICRC began regular visits in May 1996, but these were interrupted by the Cameroonian government in August 1997.

On the Nigerian side, despite repeated representations to the authorities in Abuja, no information has yet been obtained regarding Cameroonian military personnel unaccounted for since the fighting in 1996.

The territorial dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula was submitted to the International Court of Justice in 1994 but remains unresolved.

Further information: Daniel Augstburger, ICRC Yaoundé, Tel. ++ 237 225 859
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81

As part of the ICRC's activities to aid those held prisoner in connection with the Western Sahara conflict, five delegates including a doctor visited 1,227 Moroccan prisoners detained by the Polisario Front near Tindouf, Algeria. During the visits, which took place between 14 and 22 November, all prisoners who so wished were able to send a Red Cross message and a photo to their families.

Under agreements reached between the ICRC and the Polisario Front, delegates have been authorized to see all 1,905 registered prisoners over a period of one year.

These men's situation is a matter of deep humanitarian concern for the ICRC. Most have spent over 15 years in captivity. The organization would like to see a solution that provides for their speedy repatriation as well as the return of Sahrawi refugees.

The next visit to the prisoners is due to take place in March 1998.

Further information: Werner Kaspar, ICRC Tunis, Tel. ++21 61 789 134

A joint survey team from the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross Society has been in Irian Jaya since 19 November to assess the food needs of people hit by the drought in an area already affected by conflict.

The work of the six-member team, based in the town of Timika, will initially focus on the south-central part of the island, a particularly remote and inaccessible area owing to the mountainous terrain. The survey will then continue, starting in Wamena, in the southern Baliem Valley. This mission is intended to establish the infrastructure and logistics needed for an aid operation rendered urgent by the steadily growing food shortage threatening the local population.
According to data gathered during an initial ICRC survey carried out in September, the drought afflicting Irian Jaya, which extends over the whole region, is the worst for nearly a century. With their plight aggravated by night frosts, the local population of nearly 400,000 people have been deprived of their crops, and rivers and streams where they traditionally fish have dried up. Of the people affected, 90,000 are said to be displaying worrying signs of malnutrition, which increases susceptibility to diseases endemic to areas surrounded by jungle, i.e. malaria, dysentery and respiratory infections. According to the Indonesian authorities, the drought has already caused nearly 500 deaths from such causes.

The ICRC has taken action on many occasions in Irian Jaya, particularly in connection with violence between the Indonesian authorities and the Free Papua Movement (or OPM — Organisasi Papua Merdeka). In addition to visiting persons detained by the security forces, delegates have monitored the situation of people repatriated from Papua New Guinea as well as playing the role of neutral intermediary in connection with a hostage-taking by the OPM last year in Wamena.

Further information: Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Djakarta, Tel. ++6221 720 72 52
Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, Tel. ++41 22 730 29 06

LANDMINE ISSUE ON INDIA'S AGENDA

To promote understanding of the worldwide landmines crisis among India's decision-makers, the ICRC and the Indian Centre for Humanitarian Law and Research co-hosted a one-day seminar in New Delhi on 23 November 1997. The event was attended by more than 70 high-level Indian government representatives and military and legal experts as well as by a representative of the Canadian government. The discussion was lively and centred around the issue of the humanitarian costs of anti-personnel mines versus their military utility. Participants expressed strong interest in the problem and said that the debate would continue. India is among the countries that have indicated they will not sign the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction, at the treaty-signing Conference to be held in Ottawa, Canada on 3 and 4 December.

Further information: Mary-Anne Andersen, ICRC Geneva, Tel.: ++ 41 22 730 23 29

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No 97/02 on ICRC activities to assist the flood victims in Somalia and Ethiopia, dated 19.11.97
- Update 97/01 on ICRC activities in Irian Jaya, dated 24.11.97

During the weekend of
29 - 30 November 1997, for all
information please call the press
officer on duty, Joerg Stoecklin, on
(mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
TAJIKISTAN

ICRC SHOCKED BY HOSTAGE’S DEATH

The ICRC was shocked and saddened to learn that one of the two French aid workers held hostage in the Tajik capital Dushanbe had been killed on 30 November as a rescue attempt was under way. The young woman who died and the other hostage both worked for humanitarian organizations. The ICRC considers that this tragic event, which came in the wake of several other security incidents, cannot but jeopardize the delivery of humanitarian aid which the population so sorely needs. The prevailing insecurity is hampering activities to assist and protect victims in the country, and the ICRC evacuated a dozen of its delegates to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, following the abduction of the two aid workers on 18 November last. It plans to reassess its staff deployment in Tajikistan at the end of this week, in the light of the measures taken by the authorities to restore adequate security.

The ICRC has maintained a presence in the country since late 1992, focusing on the protection of persons deprived of their freedom and on medical assistance to hospitals and other health facilities, which have been hard hit by the economic crisis and the years of conflict between the government and the Islamist opposition. In the Garm and Tavildara valleys, it is distributing food and other essential items to the most vulnerable among the displaced people who returned home after the signing of the cease-fire agreements at the end of December 1996. Two delegates are currently based in Garm, with another two remaining in Dushanbe.

Between January and September 1997 the ICRC visited some 200 detainees, most of them held by the opposition, and arranged for the exchange of 650 Red Cross messages between them and their families. It also supplied food aid for people held in government prisons and gave material assistance to more than 22,000 people affected by the conflict.

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

INDONESIA

ALARMING SITUATION IN IRIAN JAYA

Initial reports from the joint ICRC/Indonesian Red Cross team currently on a fact-finding mission in Irian Jaya are giving cause for serious concern. The team, based in Timika, has been flying daily helicopter shuttles since 19 November to the villages hardest hit by the drought affecting the whole region.

Last week, the six experts on the team visited three particularly remote localities in the Mimika district, situated in a conflict area where the Free Papua Movement (or OPM - Organisasi Papua Merdeka) has often made its presence felt. They found the nutritional and health status of the population of this high plateau region in central Irian Jaya to be alarming. Preliminary surveys showed that young children were the primary victims of malnutrition. In Alama and Nggin, two of the villages visited, the team noted that more than 55% of children aged one and five were suffering from serious malnutrition. The villagers reported that the yam crops, one of the main sources of food, had been destroyed from the combined impact of drought and night-time frost. The next harvest is not due for six or nine months. For the time being, the inhabitants of the two villages have made a start on the survival rations supplied to them by the Indonesian army, which has bases in the vicinity.
On the medical side, anaemia, malaria and respiratory diseases are widespread, and the experts observed that mortality was on the rise. For the time being, the team could do little more than distribute selective emergency aid in the form of medicines and rice for logistic reasons. The Indonesian Ministry of Health has announced its intention of sending specialists to the scene to implement malaria control measures. This week the team is continuing its survey in the Kora and Wusak valleys, east of Timika.

On 24 November the ICRC launched a provisional appeal for funds, with a target of two million Swiss francs, to help people at risk in Irian Jaya.

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Joerg Stoecklin, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2906

AFGHANISTAN

RECORD NUMBER OF DETAINTEES VISITED

During the first nine months of 1997, the ICRC visited 7,826 detainees in 74 detention centres in Afghanistan. These figures show a sharp rise over those recorded for the whole of the previous year (2,700 prisoners), pointing to the continuation of a conflict which, this year too, has seen large-scale military offensives in the northern part of the country.

The ICRC currently has access to detainees in prisons under the control of all parties to the conflict, whether they belong to the Taliban movement or to the Northern Coalition (the Jamiat, Wahdat and Jumbesh forces). This freedom of action enjoyed by the ICRC, in a context marked by a strong resurgence of ethnic tension and violations of humanitarian law, was restricted between June and September following the clashes around Mazar-i-Sharif. During that period, the ICRC provided medical treatment for - and ensured the survival of - hundreds of wounded Taliban combatants who had been taken prisoner. But it was unable to gain access to all the persons captured by the Jumbesh forces of General Malik Pahlawan. This state of affairs was denounced in a press release issued on 11 August. From 25 October onwards, however, ICRC delegates were authorized by the new Jumbesh authorities of Mazar-i-Sharif to resume their visits to the detention centres of the region. They were also able to supervise several release operations (41 Taliban freed last week from Mazar-i-Sharif prison, 17 others transferred by plane from Mazar-i-Sharif to Jalalabad on 1 December, and 51 prisoners released in the Panjshir region on 2 December by Commander Massoud).

Detention conditions in Afghanistan have led the ICRC to increase its assistance to prisoners. Work to put wells back into service and improve hygiene in prisons has been undertaken on a broad scale. Clothing, shoes, mattresses, blankets, soap and cooking utensils are distributed regularly to people in prison. In addition, the ICRC is supplying wool to several hundred of the country's 14,000 war widows whose essential needs it is meeting; this enables them to produce knitwear for the detainees and thus earn a small income.

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

ETHIOPIA/SOMALIA

NO END IN SIGHT TO THE HUMAN TRAGEDY

Rain has continued to fall unabated over eastern Ethiopia and southern Somalia in the past week. What was supposed to be the light rainy season known as "deyr" is turning out to be the heaviest rainfall since 1961. According to meteorologists, there may be no letup until the end of the year.
In the Somali region of Lower Shabelle the inhabitants' plight is worsening by the hour, with the water levels rising steadily over the last five days. Although the ICRC teams are working around the clock to distribute aid (high protein biscuits, blankets and tarpaulins) to the victims of the overflowing Juba and Shabelle rivers, the impact of their efforts appears small in comparison with the magnitude of the disaster.

In the Lower Shabelle region, the ICRC is still dealing with the first phase of the emergency, as new villages are flooded and access routes cut off. In the Jilib/Marere area, thousands of inhabitants are living off scraps carried by the floodwaters, and their nutritional and health status is deteriorating rapidly.

Meanwhile, in Ethiopia three helicopters continue their daily shuttles out of the small airport of the town of Gode to provide assistance for as many displaced people and stranded villagers as possible in the flooded areas of Gode and Afder in the south-east. Every day, new isolated or flooded villages are being discovered. Their inhabitants are in desperate need of shelter, food and basic medicines; malaria, dysentery and other infectious diseases are spreading because of poor nutrition and the shortage of clean water.

Owing to the limited logistic resources, aid has not been able to reach more than 25% of the stricken areas. Conservative estimates already speak of more than 16,000 displaced persons and 100,000 people directly affected by the disaster.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2 717 443
Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++251 11 518 366

SENEGAL
AT WORK IN CASAMANCE

On 3 December an ICRC team began a series of visits to persons arrested in connection with the events in the Casamance region of Senegal and held in places of detention in Dakar, Ziguinchor in the south, and Kolda in the south-east. In the course of these visits, which will continue until 12 December, the team, made up of the ICRC regional delegate and a doctor, will hold private talks with the detainees in order to assess their conditions of detention and treatment. Since June 1996 the ICRC has been conducting regular visits to detainees in Senegal who fall within its mandate. In addition, on 26 November the ICRC supplied the regional hospital in Ziguinchor with 715 kg of medical and surgical equipment to help provide treatment for people wounded in the conflict.

In cooperation with the ICRC, the regional committee of the Senegalese Red Cross Society last week distributed food aid to more than 740 families (approximately 7,000 people) in Ziguinchor who had been forced to flee their homes following clashes in Casamance between the Senegalese armed forces and the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance. Each displaced family received 25 kg of rice and 2.5 kg litres cooking oil.

These humanitarian operations are conducted by the Senegalese Red Cross with ICRC support in a context marked by a resurgence of hostilities in the region since last summer.

Further information: René-Luc Thévoz, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 222 459

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
"Thanks to you, life can start again in Brazzaville!" This was the emphatic tribute paid to the ICRC by an engineer from the national water supply company (SNDE) as the precious liquid began to flow again from the Djiri water pumping station.

Since late October the ICRC has been doing its utmost to restore the drinking water supply in the capital. Brazzaville had been without running water and electricity since the early days of the conflict, which broke out on 5 June 1997. Previously, the inhabitants - who are now returning to their homes in increasing numbers - had been obliged to use the tanks installed by the ICRC, which were regularly replenished from its water tankers, at various points in the city.

The ICRC took care of logistics and supplied the cables needed to repair the power line feeding the Djiri water pumping station. After several weeks' work and with the provision of over 100 tonnes of chemicals to purify the water, the station was back in service on 27 November with an output of 45 million litres per day. Another 30 million litres are being supplied by the second station in Djoué, which is also receiving ICRC support.

The people of Brazzaville expressed joy and relief at the return of the water supply. The lines of women and children carrying buckets to the distribution points have almost disappeared. "During the war, we had forgotten what normal life was like, when we could wash, quench our thirst and cook without having to count the number of glasses of water we used", said one woman, visibly happy at seeing the water running again from the taps in her area.

The work is not yet over, however: there are countless leaks in the supply network because of the heavy shelling which devastated the city. With the help of the ICRC engineers, around a hundred leaks have already been repaired, and there are plans to install between 200 and 300 public distribution points in places where the network is too badly damaged.

The ICRC has made a commitment to the Congolese engineers to guarantee, at least until spring 1998, the supply and transportation of chemical products, maintenance equipment and tools needed to ensure that the two water supply stations can continue to function.

Further information: Paolo Dell'Oca, ICRC Kinshasa, tel. 00243 12 34 191

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New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No 97/03 on ICRC activities to assist the flood victims in Somalia and Ethiopia, dated 1.12.97
- Update No. 97/01 on ICRC Special Appeal "Assistance for Mine Victims", dated 26.11.97

During the weekend of 6 - 7 December 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 357 15 24

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SOMALIA

FLOOD VICTIMS FACE RISK OF MALARIA

The ICRC has so far distributed aid to some 100,000 flood victims throughout southern Somalia, more than 40,000 of them in the Jilib/Marere area. On the Marere dyke, where 4,000 people have been trapped by floodwaters for over a month, a sanitation team has just installed water purification and supply systems in three separate places to provide the population with drinking water and improve conditions of hygiene. An assessment of the sanitation facilities in the nearby town of Hargeisa, also hit by the flooding, shows that damaged and contaminated wells could be quickly cleaned and restored to working order. ICRC sanitation engineer Pascal Jansen, who recently came back from the area, reports that it is infested with mosquitoes and that malaria is one of the major problems affecting the stricken population. "People are asking for mosquito nets, antimalarial medication and soap."

The ICRC has now set up a mobile clinic on the Marere dike. On 10 December, an ICRC health worker will start a series of trips by motorboat to reach the many other stretches of dry land where people have taken refuge. The main purpose of this operation is to administer antimalarial treatment to the flood victims.

The assistance provided in the Jilib/Marere area forms part of a broader ICRC operation covering the whole of the flood-stricken region along the Juba and Shabelle rivers, which in recent years has been devastated by civil war.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++ 2542 717 443

ETHIOPIA

LACK OF ROAD ACCESS CAUSES SERIOUS CONCERN

Intense efforts have been made by the authorities, the Italian government, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the ICRC to supply food, shelter and medicines by helicopter to thousands of displaced people in south-eastern Ethiopia. However, in the wake of the recent flooding, the sheer impossibility of bringing assistance by road from the town of Gode to the villages along the Wabe Shebele river and in the Afder area continues to hamper the relief operation.

For the two weeks that they were available (up to 6 December), two Puma helicopters sent by Djibouti-based French forces made daily flights to distribute vital food, medicines and emergency equipment to six major settlements and hundreds of displaced persons from small villages.

This week, however, the coordinating task force in Gode has only a single helicopter for carrying out its work, though there is enough food, equipment and medicine to cover the immediate needs of between 50,000 and 100,000 people, as well as sufficient stocks of veterinary medicines for treating 400,000 head of livestock. Nevertheless, without usable roads, many of the isolated communities and groups of displaced people in the vast areas along the border with Somalia will remain without help.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Addis Ababa, tel. ++2511 518 366
RWANDA
SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR ORPHANS

After waiting quietly in line for their names to be called, the youngsters come forward to take a mattress and blanket each and receive an armful of school supplies. Before carrying their new possessions back to the dormitory, they applaud and thank those in charge of the distribution. These 69 young people, aged between 12 and 18, all lost their parents during the 1994 genocide and are now trying to rebuild their lives. With the assistance of the Association for the Support of Survivors of the Genocide, they and 121 other students are attending a secondary school in the commune of Kanzenze in central Rwanda.

They have teachers and staff to look after them, and the school is building classrooms and dormitories on the site of a former hospital. But their needs begin with the most basic items: school equipment and proper sleeping quarters. Some are three to a bed at present, and 55 students share one pit latrine enclosed with plastic sheeting.

At the request of the Association, the ICRC has given a school kit, a mattress and blanket, soap, a kitchen set, a jerrycan for water, and material for a school uniform to each of the youngsters. Each school kit consists of 22 notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers, a ruler and a geometry set. In addition, the ICRC pays the students' tuition fees, which amount to 25,000 Rwandan francs (80 US dollars) each per year.

The coordinator of the Association, Ndimbati Claver, explained that this help is important because of the devastation of 1994. "Those events caused not only the damage you can see, but also the wounds hidden inside," he says, looking at the adolescents. He underlined the importance of working with these young people. "As in any other country, our young people are the future and their education is of vital importance."

The ICRC is providing school kits and paying tuition fees for over 1,400 orphans throughout Rwanda, thus allowing them to continue their secondary education. "Part of our mandate is to aid recovery in the aftermath of conflict and to assist the vulnerable," explained Chérine Pollini, the ICRC delegate responsible for these projects in Rwanda. "Helping these orphans to rebuild their future by allowing them to complete their education is an integral part of the ICRC's role in Rwanda."

Further information: Bernard Barrett, ICRC Kigali, tel. ++ 250 72 783
Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81

IRAN/IRAQ
NEW HOPE FOR REPATRIATIONS

Two Iranian servicemen captured in 1991 were unilaterally released by the Republic of Iraq on 4 December. This gesture followed the unconditional release on 29 November of 496 Iraqi prisoners of war captured during the conflict between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988). All the above-mentioned persons were repatriated to their respective countries under the auspices of the ICRC. Delegates interviewed all the servicemen individually in private to make sure that they wished to be repatriated.

The ICRC hopes that these favourable developments will spur on the repatriation process, as thousands more prisoners are waiting to be released and reunited with their families.

Further information: Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 23 17

During the weekend of 13-14 December 1997, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Michael Kleiner, on (mobile) 41 79 202 42 00
AFGHANISTAN

FOOD CONVOY REACHES BAMYAN

The first trucks in a food convoy organized by the ICRC reached the district of Bamyan, in the Hazarajat region, on 12 December. Traditionally one of the poorest in the country, this region has been beset by chronic difficulties in obtaining supplies. It is currently experiencing food shortages owing to the partial blockade of its south-bound roads, which are held by Taliban forces.

The convoy had long been delayed by dangerous conditions prevailing along the only roads leading to this enclave situated at an altitude of close to 2,000 metres and surrounded by snow-capped peaks. Altogether, the trucks will bring more than 300 tonnes of flour, or the equivalent of 3,000 rations, to Bamyan. Two-thirds of this amount is to be distributed to the 2,000 vulnerable families (some 15,000 people) that the ICRC has been assisting since 1996. The remainder will be kept as emergency supplies.

Several thousand people recently displaced from Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif have taken refuge in Hazarajat. Like the 250,000 local inhabitants, most of them Shiites, they are living in particularly difficult circumstances; some have taken shelter in caves near statues of the Buddha which overlook the valley.

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

IRIAN JAYA

ALARMING REPORT

"It is the worst drought within living memory. Malnutrition and malaria have taken on devastating proportions, especially in the areas affected by the conflict. Famine has reached the final stages in some of the villages in the highlands, with children and the elderly the main victims." In an initial report sent to Geneva, a team of ICRC and Indonesian Red Cross experts, who have been conducting a survey in Irian Jaya since 19 November, gave an alarming account of the situation there, especially in the Mimika district and the Jayawijaya mountains.

According to the report, crops in the central highlands have been destroyed by the six-month drought. Food reserves, 80% of which consisted of yams, have now been exhausted and the next harvest is not expected until June or July. Those hardest hit by malnutrition and malaria are the people who fled the conflict areas last year for the lower-lying forests and valleys. In two of the villages visited, 20% of the population has died since October. In others, 55 % of all infants are
suffering from severe malnutrition and 95% of the villagers have malaria. According to the team, "the fate of thousands of people will be decided in the next two months". The survey is to continue in the Baliem valley, where, according to Indonesian sources, more than 250,000 people are at risk.

To alleviate the crisis, the ICRC plans to provide the affected population with emergency food rations over the next six months. So far, it has only been able to distribute some rice and a few medicines to about 2,500 people in the nine villages already visited. A consignment of 50 tonnes of high-protein biscuits donated by the Norwegian government arrived at the beginning of the week and two helicopters (one light and one heavy) are now available for use.

Logistical problems and fund-raising are major concerns for the organizers of this operation: a light helicopter costs 25,000 US dollars per month to run, and few governments have so far agreed to help finance humanitarian work in Irian Jaya. Meanwhile, meteorologists have predicted that El Niño will continue to wreak havoc in the region until mid-1998.

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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
DISPLACED PEOPLE GO HOME ON BARGES

It is on board what look like floating villages plying the waters between Kinshasa and Kisangani that the ICRC has taken home many of those displaced during the conflict which brought Laurent Désiré Kabila to power. One of these barge convoys, pulled by the Ketsy and carrying 613 passengers, took 43 days instead of the expected 21 to cover the 1,500 km that separate the two cities. The delay was caused by a shortage of fuel in Mbandaka, the half-way point, and by mechanical problems.

On 5 December, the day before the convoy's arrival in Kisangani, the ICRC sent another boat out to meet the barges and register all the passengers. Because of an outbreak of measles on board, 34 people were taken to hospital immediately on arrival in Kisangani; all the other passengers were vaccinated and the barges were disinfected. Thanks to these measures, the outbreak was contained.

Now that these displaced people have returned to Kisangani, others originally from Goma, Bukavu and Kindu are to be taken home by plane, boat or train.

The third and final barge convoy between Kinshasa and Kisangani has now arrived at its destination four days ahead of schedule.

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SOMALIA
RESPONDING TO THE VICTIMS' NEEDS

The flooding of the lower Juba and Shabelle valleys continues to give cause for great concern, with no improvement in sight. On the contrary, still more people are reportedly on the move or have been stranded, and access to the most hard-hit areas remains limited owing to the prevailing insecurity and the fact that airstrips are partially under water.

To make matters worse, little change is expected over the coming months. Even if the floodwaters begin to recede, the damage to infrastructure, such as housing, water-supply facilities and roads, combined with the depletion of food stocks, will have a lasting impact on the population.

Lack of clean water and unsanitary conditions are a growing problem as people continue to rely on floodwaters for all purposes. Together with malnutrition, this has been the main cause of death so far. On the basis of the most recent information available, and with UN operations starting up, the ICRC is presently focusing on three types of relief work, in coordination with the other humanitarian agencies present in the field.

First of all, the ICRC is continuing to distribute emergency food and other relief to some 30,000 of the most severely affected people in the lower Shabelle region.

Secondly, health problems are being addressed in two ways: a small boat is travelling around the lower Juba valley distributing antimalarial medicine, and sanitation engineers are cleaning up wells and installing water-supply and sanitation facilities for some 90,000 people in the same area.

Lastly, food is also being distributed in bulk together with seed as a means of ensuring that the seed will be saved for planting and not immediately eaten. This programme, which has now begun in the Gedo, Bay and Shabelle regions, will benefit some 46,000 farming families (215,000 people).

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PERU
BREAKTHROUGH

After President Alberto Fujimori announced last week that the ICRC could at last resume its visits to persons convicted of "terrorism and treason", a team of delegates, including a doctor, conducted a surprise visit to the women's prison of Santa Monica de Chorrillos. During the visit, the ICRC was able to follow its customary procedures. The ICRC welcomes this breakthrough, which will go some way to enabling it to meet its humanitarian obligations in Peru.

Before the hostage-taking at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima on 17 December 1996, visits to detainees (over 4,000 people at the time) were one of the ICRC's major activities in the country. These visits were suspended by the authorities as a result of the hostage crisis. A new series will begin in early 1998.

NEWS

COMOROS
NEW ICRC VISIT TO DETAINEEs

In early December, an ICRC delegate conducted a follow-up visit to detainees being held on the island of Anjouan, in the Comoros archipelago, in connection with the clashes that took place there between government soldiers and separatist forces on 3 September.

After 30 detainees were released on 18 November, 27 people from the main island, Grande Comore, were seen by the delegate, who came from the regional delegation in Pretoria. During the visit, which took place in accordance with the ICRC's customary procedures, the detainees received hygiene and leisure items. They also had the opportunity to write personal messages, which Comoros Red Crescent volunteers delivered to their families.

The ICRC has taken a keen interest in the mediation efforts pursued by the Organization of African Unity (OAU); in particular it closely followed the international conference that brought together the various parties concerned in Addis Ababa from 10 to 13 December.

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GENEVA

FUNDING: THE LIFELINE OF HUMANITARIAN WORK

At a press conference held on 16 December, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga outlined the organization's financial situation to the international community (represented by members of the permanent missions in Geneva) and to the media. For the second year running, the ICRC's operational costs are expected to exceed the amount of the donations received: in order to cover the budget of 696.99 million Swiss francs, an additional 58.11 million francs must be raised by the end of 1997. The President described this shortfall as a "matter of extreme concern", especially since a considerable sum already pledged by donors (116.27 million francs) had not yet been received.

Operational expenditure for 1998 is expected to drop slightly (to 675.25 million francs) as compared with this year. The greater part of the budget (47%, up 7% from 1997) is to go to Africa, where the ICRC's humanitarian activities will focus on Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Great Lakes region (in particular, assistance to some 130,000 detainees in Rwanda) and Somalia, a country that has been devastated both by war and by natural disasters.

The second largest sum will be spent in Asia (19%, i.e. 6% less than in 1997). At present, the most extensive operation is taking place in Afghanistan, where, on both sides of the front lines, the ICRC is assisting landmine victims and the most vulnerable groups, responding to medical needs and endeavouring to deal with problems arising from the unequal treatment of men and women. Another major priority for the ICRC is its work in Sri Lanka and in Irian Jaya, which has been extremely hard hit by conflict, drought, hunger and malaria, among other things. ICRC activities in the Caucasus and Tajikistan will account for 11% of the budget (down 25% as compared with 1997) and those in Western Europe and the Balkans will make up 10% of the budget (a decrease of about 2.5%).
The ICRC's work in the Middle East, in particular in northern Iraq, Israel and the occupied and the autonomous territories, will account for 7% of its total budget (7.4% more than in 1997). Expenditure in the Americas, in particular in Colombia, will amount to only 6% of the budget (nevertheless an increase of 16% over 1997).

Generally speaking, most of the budget will cover activities that undoubtedly can only be carried out by the ICRC: its "protection" work, which principally involves visiting hundreds of places of detention throughout the world (accounting for 28% of expenditure, up 17% from 1997). The second largest sum of money will go to assistance operations (27% of the budget, an increase of 3%) and health-related work (14%, up by 1.5%). Less "visible" activities will account for just under 6% of the budget, an increase of 10% over 1997; these have become increasingly vital as a result of the worsening security situation arising mainly from the lack of dialogue and from misunderstanding between ICRC delegates and the parties to certain conflicts.

The ICRC has been able to meet its stated aim of keeping administrative costs down: its headquarters budget for 1998 (separate from its operational budget) stands at 143.3 million francs, only 0.6% higher than in 1997, an increase that is well below the annual rate of inflation in Switzerland.

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As 1997 draws to a close, we send our readers the season's greetings and our very best wishes for the New Year.
