ANGOLA

ASSISTANCE FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE

The ICRC has strengthened its operational capacity in Angola so as to be able to respond to the new humanitarian needs created by the resumption of hostilities, particularly in Huambo and Bié provinces. On 2 January it sent 2,000 tarpaulins, 3,000 blankets, 1,500 kilos of soap and 700 kilos of medicines to Huambo.

This assistance is to be distributed within the next few days. The medicines will be used to treat wounded civilians who have been admitted to the Huambo hospital since the shelling began on 30 December 1998.

In Huambo, five ICRC expatriates and 60 Angolese employees are striving to meet the needs of the displaced and the most vulnerable. The ICRC is also in daily contact with its team of nine Angolese employees in Kuito, where assistance will be provided as soon as possible to thousands of displaced people and local residents.

Further information: Marjolaine Martin, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++244 23 644 54

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

CONGOLESE CIVILIANS ARRIVE IN BANGUI

The deteriorating situation in the northern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has prompted several thousand people to flee their homes and cross the river Oubangui. On the other bank, in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, some of them have found shelter with relatives and about 1,300 others have been received in open-air centres.

With the help of the ICRC, the Central African Red Cross Society, which has mobilized 40 volunteers, has begun to provide these people with food and material assistance. It is also setting up kitchens where meals of rice and beans will be prepared and distributed directly to the refugees. Four wounded people, including one child, have been hospitalized in the capital.

The ICRC has been working on a permanent basis in Bangui since 1997. It is following the situation closely with a view to taking further action if necessary.

Further information: G. Valéry Mbaoh, ICRC Yaoundé, tel. ++237 22 58 59
IRAQ
ICRC REHABILITATES DAMAGED HOSPITAL

During the recent military action against Iraq, Saddam General Hospital in the town of Tikrit (300 kilometres north of Baghdad) was damaged by several nearby explosions. The ICRC has hired two local contractors to rehabilitate the hospital under its supervision so as to ensure that the 400-bed facility can function properly again. Work started on 26 December and should be completed within two months.

The heating system has already been repaired and shattered windows have been replaced to protect the patients from the cold weather. Further repairs will be carried out on the false ceilings and lights. As for the air-conditioning system, it will have to be restored to working order by early spring, when temperatures in the region start rising above 40 degrees.

ICRC activities are proceeding normally again with a staff of 12 expatriates in Baghdad and 11 in northern Iraq.

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

GUINEA-BISSAU
ICRC REHABILITATES SIMAO MENDES CENTRAL HOSPITAL

Since the signing of a cease-fire in Guinea-Bissau in early November 1998, the ICRC has begun to rehabilitate the country's main medical facility, the 500-bed Simao Mendes Central Hospital, which employs 600 people in the capital, Bissau.

The hospital was hit by artillery fire when clashes broke out between government troops and rebels on the outskirts of the capital on 7 June. The buildings housing the operating theatre, the maternity and radiology departments and the administration were the most severely damaged and these services had to be moved into makeshift premises. The radiology building was destroyed by a shell but the equipment is still in working order.

A local company has been entrusted with the repairs, which are being carried out in agreement with the Ministry of Health and financed by the ICRC. The work will ensure that the population, which is trying to recover from several months of conflict, can once again have access to adequate health care.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81

During the weekend of
9 - 10 January 1999, for all information please call the
press officer on duty Corinne Adam,
on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
ICRC staff distributed essential relief supplies in Huambo's Munda neighbourhood on 7 January. Tarpaulins, blankets, soap, cooking utensils and pails donated by UNICEF were provided for 426 displaced families (totalling 2,595 people) who had fled to the town in the previous three weeks.

A similar distribution will be carried out on 13 January to 2,400 families (around 12,000 people) in the Benfica neighbourhood.

Since 5 January the ICRC has been delivering several thousand litres of drinking water daily to supplement mains supplies for around 20,000 people living in the São José neighbourhood, which has seen a sizeable influx of displaced people.

Basic medicines and bandages have also been delivered to the main hospital in Huambo, which has remained open since the start of recent events.

The ICRC is strengthening its operational capacity in the area. Additional delegates have been deployed and two special flights were chartered from Nairobi on 8 and 9 January to replenish stocks.

The ICRC is preparing to send a survey team to Kuito in the next few days. If conditions allow, delegates will also visit other conflict zones.

Further information: Marjolaine Martin, ICRC Luanda, tel: ++244 2 364 454

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GUINEA-BISSAU
ICRC AIDS 8,000 IN SOUTH

The ICRC has delivered food to the Empada area of southern Guinea-Bissau, where nearly 8,000 people were facing severe hardship as a result of their isolation during the conflict and the collapse of a dike, which flooded rice fields around 24 villages.

Unable to cross the front lines, the inhabitants of the southern areas of Quinara and Tombali were cut off from the outside world between June and November last year. The failure of their crops made residents of the 24 villages even more vulnerable. The ICRC therefore decided to make a special food distribution to meet their needs over the next two months.

The ICRC has been present in Guinea-Bissau throughout the conflict. It closely monitors matters of humanitarian concern and conducts regular surveys throughout the country. After making general relief distributions during the second half of 1998, it has now decided to focus on particularly vulnerable areas.

Further information: Gilbert Deléchat, ICRC Dakar, tel: ++221 8241 293

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/01 on ICRC activities in Iraq, dated 8.01.99.
- Update No 99/01 on ICRC activities in Angola, dated 7.01.99.

During the weekend of 16 - 17 January 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
AFGHANISTAN

ICRC FLIES OUT 20 DETAINES RELEASED 
BY COMMANDER MASSOUD

On 15 January, the ICRC succeeded for the first time in bringing back to Kabul, by plane, 20 detainees released from prisons in the Panjshir valley (north-eastern Afghanistan).

The detainees, from Kabul and nearby provinces, had been held for military and/or security reasons and were released for Aid-ul-Fitri, the Muslim holiday celebrating the end of the Ramadan fast. They were flown out from Bagram airport (Shamali).

As part of the operation, the ICRC flew in 2.5 tonnes of supplies provided by the Taliban authorities for detainees still held in Panjshir. It then flew out supplies provided by Commander Massoud for detainees held by the Taliban in Kabul. Envoys from both sides were taken on board to carry out the distributions.

This is the first time that the ICRC has helped representatives of the Taliban and Commander Massoud to provide assistance for prisoners held by the other party. The exchange of envoys should make it possible to hold direct discussions on issues related to detainees.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2224
Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 761 242 260

ICRC

ACCESS TO CONFLICT VICTIMS: A MAJOR CHALLENGE 
FOR THE ICRC

At a press conference held on 20 January, ICRC Director of Operations Jean-Daniel Tauxe presented the organization's operational budget for 1999 to the media. Mr Tauxe, who had previously met with representatives of the permanent missions to the United Nations in Geneva, took this opportunity to provide an overview of humanitarian problems in the world and to outline the principal challenges which the ICRC is facing today.
A number of major trends emerge from an analysis of conflict situations in 1998 and they must be taken into account when carrying out humanitarian operations. Generally speaking, conflicts today have a tendency:

- to be unpredictable (as shown by the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the events in Indonesia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Kosovo);
- to expand and engulf whole regions (as have the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan);
- to drag on with no prospect of settlement (Sudan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka);
- to be reactivated (Angola and Iraq).

Impoverishment is another serious problem. The widening gap between rich and poor throughout the world has led to an inexorable increase in crime and violence. As a result, in almost every country where the ICRC is working, conflict situations have been exacerbated by acts of pure banditry.

Finally, from a humanitarian point of view, civilians caught up in conflicts are no longer simply victims; they have also become targets, as is the case in the Balkans, Central Africa, Sierra Leone and Colombia.

The changing nature of conflicts presents the ICRC with two major challenges, the first having to do with access to victims, the second with ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. Various types of difficulties are involved.

The ICRC's methods of action, which are based on the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence, are increasingly brought into question and it is becoming more and more difficult to have them accepted. In volatile situations, the organization's ability to act is hampered by the need to ensure the safety of the victims and of humanitarian workers. Finally, an ever greater number of players are involved in the violence, and it is extremely important to find out who they are and to make them aware of their responsibilities.

For the ICRC, the main task consists in developing strategies to meet these challenges. In the first place, it must remain in close proximity to the victims while taking security constraints into account. Secondly, it must broaden its network of contacts while keeping up a dialogue with its traditional political and military negotiating partners and with other players as well, in particular representatives of civil society and of the economic sector.

In 1998 a great number of political and security constraints prevented the ICRC from fully achieving its planned objectives in countries such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, the organization maintained a permanent presence in 58 countries and its delegates were able to visit over 190,000 persons held in about 1,300 places of detention. Moreover, 64,000 tonnes of relief supplies valued at 76 million Swiss francs were distributed in 50 countries.

The field budget for 1999 amounts to 660,169,500 Swiss francs. This is slightly less than the 1998 budget, which was initially set at 675 million francs.
The ICRC has introduced a new system for defining its objectives and drawing up its budget. This system is based on target populations rather than on activities, and objectives are set in terms of results. The new approach should make it possible to assess the needs of the victims with greater precision and to carry out a more accurate analysis of the environment in which they live. The 1999 budget is thus both more explicit and more realistic in terms of objectives.

The greater part of the budget (48.2 %) will be spent in Africa, with priority being given to Central Africa, the Horn of Africa, Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries. The rest of the budget has been allocated as follows: 19.9 % will go to Europe and North America (the Balkans in particular); 17 % to Asia and the Pacific (mainly Afghanistan and Indonesia); 7.9 % to Latin America (especially Colombia, but also Peru and Mexico); and 7 % to the Middle East and North Africa (Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, and Iraq, in particular).

To mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Conventions, which is to be celebrated in 1999, the ICRC has launched a project entitled "People on War" in 12 countries affected by armed conflict. The object is to enable those who have lived through war to speak up and explain how they perceive international humanitarian law and what they expect of the future. The survey will also be carried out in six countries where peace prevails so as to obtain the views of people whose only knowledge of war comes from the media. At the end of the survey a report will be drawn up with a view to generating a broad debate.

Further information: Françoise Derron, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 29 15

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
-Update No.1 on ICRC involvement in Sierra Leone, dated 15.01.99.

During the weekend of 23 - 24 January 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
GUINEA-BISSAU

RELIEF FOR RETURNING RESIDENTS

After fleeing their homes when Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau, was racked by heavy fighting in the summer and autumn of last year, most of the city's 300,000 inhabitants have been gradually returning since a peace agreement was signed in November. Most of the fighting took place in central Bissau but many heavy artillery shells landed in the outskirts as well.

Working in conjunction with the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau, the ICRC has begun providing non-food aid to people living in houses damaged during the hostilities. Over 18,000 people are estimated to be living in 2,500 such homes throughout the capital. Because of the extremely difficult conditions they face, they have been given priority in distributions of tents, buckets, mats, jerrycans and soap.

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

KENYA

RED CROSS AIDS THOUSANDS OF DISPLACED PEOPLE

In a survey carried out in late December and early January, three months after cattle raiders descended on the Wajir district in Kenya's remote North-Eastern province, the Red Cross has found thousands of people, mainly women and children, still displaced and fending for themselves in desolate camps.

"We distributed food and other aid to the victims immediately after the attack", said Vincent Nicod, head of the ICRC's Nairobi delegation. "But the fact is that these people have lost their only means of subsistence and continue to be in desperate need of help. The stronger individuals have built makeshift shelters. Others, however, are sleeping in the open in the cold night air, which makes them vulnerable to chest infections. And in their weakened condition, that can be fatal."
Working in close conjunction with the Kenya Red Cross Society, the ICRC has been distributing rice, beans, cooking oil, salt, blankets, tarpaulins, cooking pots and basic medicines to the neediest victims of the violence. The more than 800 families benefiting from the aid are survivors of attacks by unknown raiders on several villages in Wajir district on 24 October. The raids left nearly 150 people dead while 17,000 head of cattle – the mainstay of the region's nomadic society – were stolen.

The families, now living in three camps, have told the Red Cross that they are still too frightened to return to their homes. To ease their plight, plans have been made to dig four boreholes to provide clean water in the camps, which are located on barren, arid terrain.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++254 2 728 387
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

SUDAN

TEACHING THE LAW TO COMBATANTS

In mid-January the ICRC organized a four-day course on the law of armed conflict which brought together 31 senior officers of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the Bahr el Gazal region. This was the first event of its kind organized with the SPLA since the ICRC resumed its activities in Sudan last June.

At the same time some 230 members of the Sudanese government armed forces and 180 policemen attended presentations on international humanitarian law in Bentiu, in western Upper Nile state. Two sessions were also organized in Leer and Bentiu for 760 members of the government-supported Southern Sudan Defence Forces.

Similar programmes are under way in the government-held towns of Wau and Juba as well as in a number of SPLA-controlled areas.

A three-day humanitarian law course had been held in November for 27 senior officers in charge of training from different units at the Command and Staff College in Khartoum. Instruction in humanitarian law for the Sudanese armed forces was further strengthened throughout December, when participants in the November course organized sessions on the law of armed conflict for over 360 officers and non-commissioned officers.

Sudan has been racked by more than 15 years of bitter civil war and the ICRC has always attached great importance to promoting knowledge of the law of war among combatants on all sides.

Further information: Laurent Dufour, ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++249 11 47 64 64
COLOMBIA

AID TO VICTIMS OF FIGHTING IN THE NORTH

In the past few weeks ICRC delegates and members of the Colombian Red Cross have been assisting people affected by an upsurge in violence between self-defence groups and guerrilla forces in areas controlled by the guerrillas in the northern Colombian departments of Cesar and Magdalena.

In Magdalena, the districts of El Banco, Playon de Orozco and El Piñon have been the scene of armed attacks by self-defence groups, as has Santa Isabel (Curumani district) in Cesar. These attacks have resulted in a large number of deaths, driven hundreds of people from their homes and caused widespread destruction; many houses have been torched.

So far, ICRC delegates have distributed food and provided medical care for nearly 2,400 people, while furnishing financial assistance to those who, fearing for their safety, wish to leave for other parts of the country.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2224

During the weekend of 30 - 31 January 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 70
NORTHERN IRAQ
ASSISTANCE FOR SEVERAL THOUSAND DISPLACED PEOPLE

Last week ICRC delegates completed a major distribution of winter relief supplies for several thousand of the most vulnerable displaced persons in northern Iraq. An estimated 120,000 people have been driven from their homes by the fighting there in recent years.

As the displaced live in tents or in open, unheated public buildings, conditions are harsh during the winter months when temperatures can drop below zero. In cooperation with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society and the local administration, the ICRC provided blankets, carpets and heaters to protect them from the cold. More than 11,000 children aged 6 to 12 received warm jackets.

The situation in the area remains difficult for many of the displaced, and the need for humanitarian aid is still acute six months after the September peace agreement between the two main Kurdish parties was signed in Washington D.C.

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

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
ICRC OPENS AN OFFICE IN KALEMIE

On 28 January an ICRC team conducted a survey of the humanitarian situation in Kalémié, on Lake Tanganyika, an eastern area of the country partly controlled by the opposition movement, the Congolese Rally for Democracy. The ICRC decided to open an office there in order to meet the needs of the local population, as supply routes, by both land and water, are regularly cut off and food prices are rising steadily. The problem is compounded by the fact that the hostilities have prevented many farmers from tending their fields.

The survey also revealed the precarious working conditions of the town's medical personnel. A shortage of basic medicines and surgical instruments is hampering consultations and surgical operations, despite the skill and dedication of the staff, and all the sterilizers are out of order.

The inhabitants of Kalémié are isolated from the rest of the country because of insecure road conditions. With the ICRC's help they will be able to re-establish contact with relatives in other parts of the DRC. For example, a number of women and children in Uvira are separated from their families who have remained in Kalémié.

The ICRC is active in other eastern towns as well, with mobile teams, based in Goma and Bukavu, covering Uvira, Kisangani, Kindu and Bunia. It is providing medical aid, distributing food and other supplies, visiting detainees, organizing the exchange of family messages between separated relatives and arranging for children to be reunited with their families. Eight expatriates and 130 locally recruited personnel are currently working in the area partly controlled by the Congolese Rally for Democracy.
The ICRC is also present in the rest of the country, with a staff of about 15 expatriates and 550 local personnel. It visited over 3,000 detainees in 1998, and continues to provide medical assistance, food and non-food aid to those in need. It is actively engaged in raising awareness of international humanitarian law, and works in close cooperation with the National Red Cross Society.

Further information: Juan Martínez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2281

PAKISTAN

RED CROSS MESSAGE CIRCLES THE GLOBE TO REACH DESTINATION

After being approached by an Afghan family in September 1998, the Australian Red Cross contacted the ICRC in Geneva with a Red Cross message containing the following request: "Please try to forward this message to Mr Naw Roz Ali, a victim of the Afghan conflict. His family has been looking for him for seven years; last known address Kabul". The ICRC forwarded the message from Geneva to its delegation in Kabul, but no trace was found of Mr Ali, so it was returned to Australia.

In January 1999 the Australian Red Cross told the ICRC that it was now thought Mr Ali could be in Pakistan. The Red Cross message was sent from Geneva to the ICRC sub-delegation in Peshawar, near the Afghan border. The family had given the address in Peshawar of a man who might know the whereabouts of Mr Ali. Yaqub Ali, one of the ICRC's local employees in the town, went to the address, which was in a business district largely inhabited by Afghan refugees. "Yes", he was told, "Naw Roz Ali is in the next room. But he's not well, so be careful". For this reason, Yaqub gently prepared the old man by taking him out of the shop where he was working. Naw Roz Ali told how his life had been wrecked by the fighting and bombing in Kabul. In 1992 his neighbourhood had been shelled and the residents had fled in panic. When he returned, he had found his house destroyed and his family gone. Yaqub made sure that Naw Roz was strong enough to be given word of his family, whether good or bad. They spoke a little more, then Yaqub handed over the Red Cross message.

"Your son wrote this letter. Your family is well."

"At first", says Yaqub, "the old man said nothing but stared at his son's signature with tears in his eyes. Then he read that his wife and children had fled the war in Kabul and taken refuge in Pakistan. They had then spent five years in India before leaving for Australia. The message ended with the words: 'If this reaches you, make sure you tell us how you are. My mother and I will know no peace until you do'".

Later that day, using the telephone number given in the message, the old man called his family in Australia.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 761 242 260
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224

During the weekend of 6 - 7 February 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
ANGOLA

REKINDLING HOPE

On 4 February three ICRC delegates and three local employees evacuated 73 orphans from the town of Kuando, in Huambo province, to the city of Huambo. The children had been trapped in the orphanage of the Catholic mission, situated in an area that had become particularly dangerous. They were evacuated at the request of the orphanage's management.

The children, who had been left in the care of the church, were placed in Catholic institutions in Huambo. A convoy of four vehicles carried out the operation under the protection of the red cross emblem.

The ICRC is continuing to provide non-food assistance to victims of the fighting in Angola. Blankets, soap, kitchen utensils and plastic buckets have been given to 635 displaced people from Katchiungo and Vila Nova who have taken refuge on the premises of a private hospital in Huambo.

Further information: Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++24 42/36 66 67-36 66 66
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2281 or ++4179 202 4200

SENEGAL

FOOD AID FOR 6,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE

On 27 January the ICRC, working with the regional committee of the Senegalese Red Cross Society in Ziguinchor, carried out a food distribution for displaced people in the Ziguinchor and Bignona departments of Casamance. The beneficiaries had fled their villages because of the insecurity that prevailed following clashes between Senegalese government forces and the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC).

According to a count made by the National Society last December, 558 families, or 6,211 people, are receiving food aid. Some 31 tonnes of rice and 15 tonnes of millet were handed out in the latest distribution.

Despite the improved climate of the past few weeks, when for the first time since 1993 President Abdou Diouf met Fr Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, the historic leader of the MFDC, many of those displaced are still afraid to return to their villages.

Further information: Gilbert Delechat, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 8 241 293
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281 or ++4179 202 4200
IRAQ

RELIEF AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN THE SOUTH

Last week 20 families whose houses were partially or totally destroyed when a stray missile hit Basra on 25 January received kitchen sets, kerosene heaters, tarpaulins and food parcels following an assessment of needs by ICRC delegates.

An emergency stock was also set up in the city to enable the ICRC and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society to respond immediately to any future needs. The stock comprises 1,000 blankets, 70 tents, medical kits for 500 war wounded, 100 tarpaulins, kitchen sets and soap.

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

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA

URGENTLY NEEDED MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ARRIVES

An ICRC shipment of 1.5 tonnes of essential medical supplies and 1,000 blankets arrived last week in Oran, Algeria, and was delivered to the Polisario Front near Tindouf by the Algerian Red Crescent. The beneficiaries will be Moroccan prisoners and local medical facilities.

The decision to send in medical supplies was taken following the visit late last year of an ICRC team to Moroccan prisoners held by the Polisario Front, a number of whom suffer from chronic illnesses.

In 1998 ICRC delegates visited a total of 1,729 Moroccan prisoners and a further 84 former prisoners who were released in April 1997 and are still awaiting repatriation.

The ICRC is extremely concerned about the situation of these men, most of whom were captured between 1978 and 1982. The organization is stepping up representations to the parties involved in order to bring about a humanitarian solution as soon as possible and remains available to supervise the repatriation of all prisoners held in connection with the Western Sahara conflict.

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

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No 99/02 on ICRC activities in Angola, dated 5.02.99.
- Update 99/02 on ICRC activities in Iraq, dated 8.02.99.

During the weekend of 13 - 14 February 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Françoise Derron, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03

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Could you kindly let us know your E-Mail address by sending it to: pmaire@icrc.org
AFGHANISTAN

ICRC FACILITATES THE RELEASE OF 40 PRISONERS

On 13 and 14 February the ICRC delegation in Afghanistan facilitated the simultaneous release of 20 prisoners held by the Taliban and 20 others held by the Jamiat-i-Islami forces of Commander Massoud. The prisoners, some of whom were suffering from chronic illnesses and were released on humanitarian grounds, were taken across the front line just north of Kabul aboard an ICRC plane.

The negotiations which led to these releases started in January, when the ICRC enabled envoys from each side to visit prisoners held by the other. A plane was used to carry out the operation since this was considered the safest means of transporting the sick.

RED CROSS / RED CRESCENT ASSISTS 10,000 EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS IN FOUR DAYS

Following the earthquake that hit the provinces of Wardak and Logar, south-west of Kabul, on the evening of 11 February, the ICRC, the Afghan Red Crescent Society and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies responded immediately to the crisis, pooling their logistical resources, manpower and expertise. By 16 February in the morning, Red Cross and Red Crescent teams had assessed the situation in 63 stricken villages and 28 truckloads of shelter materials had been dispatched to 20,000 victims in the affected areas. Over 10,000 people had already received assistance and the distributions were continuing.

In the 63 villages where the assessment was carried out, 5,468 houses have been destroyed and 5,581 families are in need of assistance. So far, the earthquake is reported to have killed 37 people and injured 256.

"The relatively low number of casualties is due to the fact that the main shock wave was preceded by a minor tremor, which gave people time to rush outside", said ICRC delegate Rod Charters, who is coordinating the distributions. "The current humanitarian crisis stems from the massive destruction that occurred in villages. Tens of thousands of people are in urgent need of shelter."

While continuing its assessment and distributions on the spot, the ICRC and its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners are closely monitoring the health and food situation in the aftermath of the earthquake. The difficulty of their task has been compounded by bad weather and the remoteness of some of the affected villages.

Further information: Josué Anselmo, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 761 242 260
ICRC PRESIDENT WARNS OF GROWING DIFFICULTIES IN PROTECTING WAR VICTIMS

On 12 February, speaking at the invitation of the United Nations Security Council, ICRC President Comelio Sommaruga warned of the growing difficulty of protecting civilians in armed conflicts around the world and called for caution in the imposition of economic sanctions.

The ICRC was invited by Canada, which currently holds the presidency of the Security Council, to address an open session on the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

Mr Sommaruga stressed that genocide, ethnic cleansing and attacks on humanitarian personnel were becoming ever more widespread. Although they were increasingly repudiated by armed groups, the guiding principles of the ICRC - humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality - continued to be of vital importance.

He added that the politicization and devaluation of humanitarian action had made it more difficult than ever for the ICRC to assist victims in numerous conflicts throughout the world.

"This insidious trend", said the ICRC President, "has been observed in the Great Lakes region, in West Africa, in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, and in certain Asian countries. The full horror of the consequences is familiar to us all. The unimaginable pain borne by the populations in these areas can leave none of us indifferent."

The ICRC seeks to establish and consolidate close contacts with all belligerents - governmental or otherwise - in order to remind them of their duty to protect civilians from the effects of war. This and other vital aspects of the organization's work was being made more hazardous and problematic by "an ever greater tendency to demonize the enemy", said Mr Sommaruga.

The ICRC President warned of the "privatization" of tasks that had previously been the responsibility of States. He raised a number of related issues, such as the humanitarian responsibilities of economic groups which set up security forces to protect their own interests and the political obligations of States when such economic groups encroach on their areas of jurisdiction.

Turning to the question of sanctions, Mr Sommaruga said, "Nothing can justify punishing an entire population for its government's misdeeds." While it was not up to the ICRC to comment on the use of sanctions per se, the organization was duty-bound to request exemptions so that people in need could receive humanitarian assistance.

The 50th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Conventions, which have now been ratified by 188 States, will be celebrated in 1999. To mark the occasion, the ICRC has launched a worldwide survey on the theme "Even Wars Have Limits" in order to gather the opinions of ordinary people caught up in conflicts.

Further information: Françoise Derron, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 29 15

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

During the weekend of 20 - 21 February 1999, for all information please call the spokes man on duty Urs Boegli, on (mobile) 41 79 203 94 05
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

RELIEF FOR EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS IN DAGHESTAN

The two earthquakes that shook the western district of Kizliar in the republic of Daghestan on 31 January and 2 February 1999 severely damaged two villages, forcing nearly 1,000 inhabitants to flee their homes. Some have found refuge with relatives and friends while others are sheltering in tents or greenhouses. With direct ICRC support, the local branch of the Russian Red Cross last week distributed food parcels, plastic sheeting, jerrycans, blankets, candles, and gas and kerosene stoves to homeless villagers.

There were reports of another earthquake in the same area on 22 February. Further assistance will be provided if the need arises.

These relief operations are carried out as part of the ICRC's cooperation programme with the local branches of the Russian Red Cross in the northern Caucasus, the main objective being to prepare these organizations to respond to emergencies.

Since 1996 the ICRC office in Khasavyurt, Daghestan has been staffed by national employees while overall ICRC activities in the northern Caucasus are coordinated out of Nalchik, in Kabardino-Balkaria.

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

KENYA

SUPPORT FOR MEDICAL TRAINING COLLEGE

As part of its ongoing effort to alleviate the plight of hundreds of amputees throughout Kenya, the ICRC in mid-February donated equipment and materials worth some US$ 10,000 to the Kenya Medical Training College's faculty of orthopaedic technology.

The gift comprises a full set of tools and machines as well as enough raw materials to produce 100 light-weight, low-cost and recyclable artificial limbs made of polypropylene.

Klaus Spreyermann, deputy head of the ICRC's Nairobi delegation, noted that the organization's physical rehabilitation service, set up 20 years previously, had a two-pronged approach that provided both material support for limb-fitting workshops and training for their staff.
"We are certain that the technologists' newly learnt skills will be put to good use", said Anastasia Kimeu, acting deputy principal at the Medical Training College.

With a view to the future, the ICRC has also provided the college with training opportunities. Two of its technologists recently completed a one-month course at the organization’s physical rehabilitation centre in Addis Ababa. The ICRC programme of material support and training has also been extended to Kenyatta National Hospital, the Kangemi Rehabilitation Centre and the Kikuyu Hospital Ortho-rehabilitation Centre.

Further information: Nina Galbe or Bertha Owuor, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++2542 728 387

PERU

ICRC TAKES PART IN FIRST COURSE ON LAW OF WAR FOR ARMED FORCES

From 15 to 19 February three ICRC delegates served as instructors in the first course on international humanitarian law to be held by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Peruvian armed forces. The course, which took place in Lima, was attended by 36 high-ranking officers of the armed forces and the national police.

The principal aim was to make participants aware of the importance of knowing the law and to draw the attention of the relevant authorities to the need to train instructors from among members of the Peruvian military and police forces.

During the closing ceremony, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed his wish to step up cooperation with the ICRC in order to spread knowledge of the law of war and stressed the duty of military authorities to train instructors in this field.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224
Graziella Leite Piccolo, ICRC Lima, tel. ++511 460 2719

During the weekend of 27 - 28 February 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
LEBANON

ICRC ACTIVE IN BORDER VILLAGE

The recent forced integration of Amoun into the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon did not prevent the ICRC from conducting daily visits to the small front-line village. Responding to the needs of the population, which over the years has dropped to some 60 mostly elderly inhabitants, delegates distributed food parcels, bread, fruit and vegetables as well as fodder for livestock that could not be taken to nearby fields. The mobile clinic run by the ICRC in the area was dispatched to the village, where it treated 29 patients.

In addition, delegates arranged for the transfer of several villagers who needed either to go to or leave Amoun for urgent reasons. Delegates also transported dairy products on behalf of local producers to be sold in Nabatieh, the closest market town, as a means of limiting their losses.

Last Friday, Amoun was returned to non-occupied Lebanon following demonstrations by Lebanese students. It is therefore no longer necessary for the ICRC to monitor the situation on a daily basis.

The ICRC has been working in Lebanon for over 30 years. Present activities focus on visits to detainees held in the Israeli-occupied zone and on medical and material assistance to civilians living in highly volatile areas.

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

SENEGAL

NOT JUST FOR THE MILITARY

The ICRC joined forces with the Senegalese national police on 25 February to raise awareness about international humanitarian law among 120 members of police units in Casamance, in the south of the country.

The national police commander in the Ziguinchor and Kolda districts told the assembled officers that humanitarian law was not only a matter for the military — the police were also greatly concerned by these rules.
The presentation in Casamance marked the beginning of a series of such events that should eventually reach all main national police units in Senegal. "The work of the police is not military in nature", said the deputy director of Senegal's military justice department and co-presenter at the event. "Policemen do not usually deal with combatants but with people who disturb public order, demonstrators and so on". With ICRC support, the national police force published the first-ever Senegalese handbook of international humanitarian law regarding action to maintain public order. It is intended to guide all police units in implementing specific rules.

The series of awareness-raising events for the national police complements the programme carried out by the ICRC in 1998 for Senegal's armed forces, in which 1,500 officers and men attended humanitarian law courses at 15 military bases and a soldier's handbook was published. "It is true that the ICRC is essentially concerned with the armed forces", explained the head of the organization's regional delegation in Dakar. "But in a situation of internal violence such as in Casamance, it is not always easy to distinguish between police action and military operations".

Further information: Gilbert Deléchat, ICRC Dakar, tel.: ++ 223 824 12 93

In a process of reorganisation, we would like to send our ICRC News and Communications only by E-Mail. Could you kindly let us know your E-Mail address by sending it to: pmaire@icrc.org

During the weekend of 6 - 7 March 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 22 779 33 22 or ++ 41 79 202 36 70
ICRC NEWS

YUGOSLAVIA/KOSOVO

ICRC ASSISTS CIVILIANS CAUGHT UP IN CLASHES

ICRC teams have been travelling daily to villages in the area of Kosovo bordering on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to assist civilians caught up in the fighting which erupted there last week between Serbian security forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Earlier this week, the ICRC was the only organization to reach civilians trapped in the village of Globocica, where it delivered food and other relief items to around 400 people. It also visited Kotlina, Lac and other villages in the same area following successful negotiations with both sides for access to the frightened civilians. Along with the relief supplies, the ICRC brought a medical team to perform on-the-spot surgery on the wounded and arranged for over 50 women, children and elderly persons to be evacuated.

Robin Bovey, ICRC relief delegate based in Pristina, said: "The situation of these people is pitiful. They are completely surrounded by the fighting and extremely frightened. We have been coordinating our work with other agencies such as UNHCR, and the ICRC has been concentrating on the most exposed communities. It is impossible to know exactly how many people are caught up in the fighting and we will continue to visit the areas involved to find out exactly what the needs are and attempt to meet them."

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Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 2678

CAMEROON

PRISON VISITS BEGIN

On 1 March the ICRC began to visit places of detention throughout Cameroon after the authorities accepted its offer of services. In accordance with the ICRC's customary procedures, ICRC delegates will have free access to all places of detention and will be able to talk with the detainees in private and repeat their visits on dates set by the ICRC. A confidential report on the conditions of detention and the treatment of detainees will be submitted to the authorities concerned.

Further information: Daniel Augstburger, ICRC Yaoundé, tel. +237 22 58 59 / 23 94 25
People on War

The 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which are the most important international instruments aimed at upholding human dignity in times of war, will be celebrated on 12 August 1999.

This anniversary is more than a simple commemoration. It is an opportunity to reflect on the past, come to terms with the present and look to the future. The ICRC has therefore launched a project entitled People on War that will assess the role of humanitarian law in modern-day warfare.

Although People on War has many facets, its basic purpose is to ensure better protection for people affected by armed conflict.

At the heart of the project is a worldwide survey of thousands of people in around a dozen countries affected by armed conflict. ICRC staff will ask these people about their personal experiences, how they feel about the idea of imposing limits on warfare and how they think respect for humanitarian law can be improved. The results of this survey, which started in October 1998 and is scheduled to continue until August 1999, will be communicated to the participants and shared with the world at large.

Starting with the article printed below, we shall be publishing on a regular basis the personal stories of some of those who have already taken part in the survey: refugees, combatants, detainees, mine victims and displaced people in various countries. The views expressed in these stories are those of people who have been directly affected by conflict and do not reflect the ICRC's position on the issues involved.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA
"WAR IS A KILLING GAME"

War begins where diplomacy ends, and international humanitarian law is most likely to be violated when ordinary citizens take up arms. That is the opinion of Zoran Grujic, assistant director of information for the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre.

"There were endless negotiations before the war", Grujic said. "We became quite famous for drawing maps and carving up the country. When people finally realized they couldn't agree on anything, they decided to fight it out. War does away with the need for diplomacy. All you need is rifles."

"If only someone had forced us to come to terms back then - and Dayton clearly shows that in such cases force can be effective - I think the war would never had begun. We were left to decide on matters that we obviously couldn't deal with by ourselves."
Surrounded by exhibits of landmines and maps of minefields, Grujic spoke without emotion. As he explained: "Those who lived through the war in Sarajevo became inured to all sorts of things. It was horrible enough to be walking along safely and to see people being shot at just down the street... After the war, it took me quite a while to feel like a civilian again."

"If anyone had told me we would go to war - however obvious it was at the time - I would have said, 'Maybe in Bosnia, but never in Sarajevo.' Nobody used to care about names. Then the war began, and names became associated with ethnic groups. That's the way it goes. You think war could never break out and suddenly things change."

Although Grujic became a soldier, he never fired a shot. "I consider human life far too precious to be wantonly destroyed," he said.

Instead, he removed landmines and collected unexploded munitions. All too often he found himself gathering body parts into piles for burial later.

"My understanding used to be that war was a killing game with strict rules set by the Geneva Conventions. Now that the war is over, I would drop the second part of that sentence," Grujic said. "War is a killing game, full stop. War victims were ill-treated here, it was terrible... But I'd rather not go into that."

Most soldiers were ordinary men who were dragged into war. They were not highly trained killers, Grujic said.

"I mean, if someone shoots at you, you're going to shoot back. That's how it happens," he said. "Most soldiers are very young, with a lot of Rambo movies behind them. So they have to prove themselves. It's very difficult to explain to them why they have to obey rules they didn't make. It's war. They make up their own rules."

Further information: Françoise Derron, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 29 15
Béa Vanhove, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 25 92
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SUDAN

200 MEDICAL STUDENTS TRAINED IN LOKICHOKIO
IN THE LAST DECADE

On 28 February sixteen newly trained Sudanese nursing aides left the ICRC's Lopiding surgical hospital in Lokichokio, northern Kenya, to return to their home-based hospitals and clinics in southern Sudan. Since 1989, when the ICRC launched its programme for nursing aides, around 200 Sudanese have received nursing, physiotherapy and laboratory training at Lopiding hospital.

The students are trained for six months as assistants in the operating theatre, ward nursing, anaesthesia and physiotherapy, or for four months in laboratory techniques. They also receive some basic instruction in the rights and duties of medical personnel during armed conflicts. The students are selected for their personal qualities (e.g. knowledge of English) and professional experience.

FAMILY REUNITED IN BAHR-EL-GHAZAL

On 23 February the ICRC organized the first family reunion in Sudan in more than four years.

Eight-year-old Majok Tong Akon was brought home to his father in Aweil after being separated without news from his family for almost one year. The little boy was registered by the ICRC in Wau last December. At this point he wrote his father a Red Cross Message which ICRC delegates delivered to Aweil. The father replied at once: "My dearest son Majok, I have received your message. Thank God you are alive. I had lost hope. We are fine. I hope you are well. [...] As you know I am here alone. Your brother is in the village. Please, I want you to come to me in Aweil. [...] Please greet those who are taking care of you. [...] May God bless you."

There was a positive response when the ICRC contacted local and national authorities for permission to reunite the family. Looking out of the window of the ICRC aircraft coming in to Aweil, Majok was all smiles and joy. Just minutes later he was in his father's arms.

Since November 1998 the ICRC has registered 349 unaccompanied minors displaced by the conflict in Wau and has been working to locate their families.

Further information: Laurent Dufour, ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++249(11) 47 64 64
IRAN/IRAQ
ANOTHER 502 PRISONERS REGAIN THEIR FREEDOM

On 16 March, a total of 449 Iraqi prisoners of war held in Iran and 53 Iranian detainees held in Iraq were repatriated under the auspices of the ICRC. The operation, at the Mundharieh/Khosravi check-point on the border between the two countries, was supervised by ICRC delegates who registered and checked the identity of all those concerned, and held private interviews with each of them to ensure that they were going home of their own free will.

This event marks another step towards a final resolution of the humanitarian issues arising from the Iran/Iraq war, which ended in 1988. It follows similar operations in April and December 1998 and brings the total number of prisoners released in the past eleven months to over 6400.

Since the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq conflict in 1980, the ICRC has helped to repatriate more than 90,000 POWs from both sides.

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

LIBERIA
50TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN GETS UNDER WAY

The ICRC chose 15 March, the date on which Liberia celebrates the birth of its first president, to launch a number of activities connected with the campaign promoting the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. These activities will continue for a period of several months.

The high point will be reached on 12 August, when a statue symbolizing respect for humanitarian law will be unveiled in Monrovia.

In order to make children and young people familiar with the institution's mandate, the ICRC is also organizing a series of concerts and other artistic events in urban and rural neighbourhoods. In cooperation with the Liberian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, it has invited music groups to perform on stage.

On Monday 15 March nearly 800 young people gathered on a Monrovia beach to listen to 15 different acts. The success of this event has meant that the ICRC has received a large number of requests from those wanting to take part in the next concert.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Monrovia, tel. ++231 226 306

During the weekend of 20 - 21 March 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Françoise Derron, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Update No 99/01 on ICRC activities in Somalia, dated 10.03.99
- Update 99/02 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 11.03.99
LIBERIA

REHABILITATION PROJECT UNDER WAY IN EIGHT PRISONS

In early March the ICRC began restoring kitchen and sanitary facilities in eight Liberian prisons, three of them in Monrovia and five in rural areas. Sacks of cement, bricks, tools and water storage tanks had to be trucked from the capital to remote parts of the country, as no materials or equipment were available on the spot.

The project was launched following the ICRC’s decision to extend its traditional programmes in aid of prisoners to cover common law detainees as well, since seven years of war have left the Liberian prison administration with hardly any technical and financial resources. The work is being done in close cooperation with volunteers of local branches of the Liberia National Red Cross Society and should take four to six weeks to complete.

At the same time, the ICRC is distributing food and other basic necessities to some 250 prisoners. Among these are 35 civilian and military security detainees falling within the organization’s mandate and held in two prisons in the capital.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Monrovia, tel. ++231 226 306

MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA

ICRC MEDICAL TEAM VISITS MOROCCAN PRISONERS HELD BY POLISARIO FRONT

Between 6 and 20 March an ICRC team made up of a doctor, an ophthalmologist and a dentist visited a large number of the 1,877 Moroccan prisoners held by the Polisario Front in the Tindouf area of Algeria. The main purpose of the visit was to assess the men's state of health and the availability of medical care for them in the region. As delays regarding the UN settlement plan and uncertainty surrounding its implementation have held up the prisoners’ repatriation, the ICRC is trying to find ways of providing these men, most of whom have been held for close to 20 years, with more specialized care on the spot.

During the visit the ICRC eye specialist examined 135 prisoners and performed 44 operations. The dentist discussed needs with the two dental nurses, who are prisoners themselves, and the doctor gave 170 consultations. She found that many of the prisoners needed special tests and treatment that could only be given in a properly equipped hospital.

In addition to the equipment needed to perform eye surgery, the medical team brought a supply of insulin. They noted that the aid sent from Geneva in February this year had arrived safely. It consisted of soap and other hygiene items, blankets and basic medicines for the Moroccan prisoners and Sahrawi refugees.
The ICRC delegates paid particular attention to the 83 men freed in April 1997 and still awaiting repatriation to Morocco. Two of the men released at the time have since died.

All the individuals visited were given the opportunity to send Red Cross messages and photos to their families.

The ICRC remains deeply concerned about the situation of these men, most of whom were captured between 1978 and 1982. It trusts that some solution can be found to all the problems of a humanitarian nature still outstanding in connection with the Western Sahara conflict, and stands ready to supervise the repatriation of all prisoners.

Further information: Pierre Ryter, ICRC Tunis, tel. ++216 1 78 91 34

The People on War project

Half way there...

Officially launched last November, fine-tuned in Colombia the previous month, the ICRC's People on War project has reached its halfway mark. The consultation aimed at assessing the opinions of hundreds of people on war has now been completed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Philippines, South Africa, Lebanon and Somalia. In all, six country situations out of the dozen or so planned. Still to come: Georgia-Abkhazia, Nigeria, El Salvador and Afghanistan, plus one or two other locations for which official authorization to begin the consultation is still pending.

The consultation has been proceeding satisfactorily despite logistical and unforeseen obstacles. In Somalia, for example, the extremely volatile situation and general lawlessness in the country made it very difficult for people to gather in a serene environment and talk about the question of ethics in war. In South Africa, the consultation team rediscovered townships that had been bitterly divided in the past and a KwaZulu-Natal where the wounds of earlier violence were slowly healing.

The net result so far has been a commitment from people from extremely diverse communities to discuss their problems and the values they uphold. The final step will be to draw up country reports analysing the ethical standards that were applied to each context. The aim of the project, which is closely linked to the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions on 12 August this year, is to promote an international debate on the concept of limits in war - in other words the fact that being in conflict with another group of people, for whatever reasons, does not justify inhumane behaviour. An overall report covering all countries will be drafted for the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent next November.

Further information: Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 23 02
Béa Vanhove, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 25 92

WAR AND WATER

War and water have always been inextricably linked. The logic is clear: destroy your opponents' access to water and you reduce their ability to fight. In the arid Middle East, many analysts believe that one of the region's more intractable, underlying disputes is over the control of water courses. Yitzhak Rabin, the former Israeli Prime Minister, once said that "if we solve every other problem in
the Middle East, but do not satisfactorily resolve the water problem, our region will explode". The poor state of Afghan agriculture - and hence the poverty of the bulk of the population - is in no small measure due to the destruction of the centuries old irrigation canals following the Soviet invasion in 1979.

"For the last thousand years, every Thursday at noon seven men in solemn black have taken their places on high thrones before one of the side doors of the Cathedral of Valencia, Spain", writes Liesl Graz in the ICRC's latest publication, War and Water. These men, the judges of the "Water Tribunal", are elected to preside over the water channels that bring life to the city and richness to the surrounding countryside, which would otherwise be a barren plain. It is said to be the oldest judicial institution still functioning in Europe, if not in the world.

In parched areas, control over water means power.

Disagreements between States on how to share water from the rivers Jordan, Tigris and Euphrates have compounded broader political differences. Questions of access to water from the Ganges, Mekong and Nile have the potential to increase tension between upstream and downstream States.

However, predictions that future wars will be fought over water, rather than, for instance, oil, have fallen short of the mark. This despite, as the World Bank points out, the fact that about 40% of the world's population lives in the 250 river basins shared by more than one country.

The truth appears, as ever, more complex. While possession of water represents power, its scarcity can foreshadow deeper, societal problems. "Shortages reduce food production, aggravate poverty and disease, spur large migrations and undermine a State's moral authority and capacity to govern. Over time, these stresses can tear apart a poor society's social fabric, causing chronic popular unrest and violence", writes Thomas Homer-Dixon, of the University of Toronto.

"Scarcity of water will not so much be the source of conflict as will be the inability of governments to reconcile contending interests", writes Randolph Kent, a policy adviser on humanitarian matters. "There is a growing concern that more and more States no longer have the capacity to resolve the contending interests that have emerged in modern, complex societies", he adds.

Water is synonymous with life. Even during war and its aftermath water and access to water must be treated with at least a modicum of respect.

War and Water is the first issue of an annual ICRC publication called Forum. The articles, commissioned from journalists and experts in the field, are designed to stimulate debate on a vital humanitarian issue.

This publication can be ordered from the ICRC's Public Information Centre.

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

ICRC AID FOR CIVILIANS FLEEING KOSOVO

On 29 March the ICRC decided to withdraw its international staff from Kosovo because of the rapidly deteriorating security situation, which prevented it from pursuing its humanitarian activities. The ICRC deeply regrets having had to make this decision, especially in view of growing concern about the plight of civilians in the province, and considers its return to be a matter of priority.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people have fled Kosovo and are arriving in the republic of Montenegro and neighbouring countries in a shocked and exhausted state and in urgent need of help. As it has been since the beginning of the crisis, the ICRC is striving, together with the National Red Cross Societies concerned and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to provide medical and other aid while strengthening relief teams and replenishing stocks.

ICRC teams working with the Albanian Red Cross are also attempting to put relatives back in touch with each other by broadcasting family names over the radio. In Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Red Cross teams have remained on the border, sometimes throughout the night, to distribute relief supplies to new arrivals.

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

ANGOLA

ICRC STILL IN KUITO

Over the past few days Kuito, on the Angolan Planalto, has again come under shellfire, prompting many inhabitants of Kunje and other particularly exposed areas on the outskirts of the city to converge on the centre. These displaced people have swollen the ranks of thousands of others who are already sheltering in the provincial capital. The toll taken by the shelling is as yet unknown.

The only expatriate staff of humanitarian organizations to remain in Kuito are an ICRC delegate and a surgeon and a doctor from the Belgian branch of Médecins sans frontières. The ICRC has decided to stay on in order to pursue its assistance activities for conflict victims.
In March the ICRC provided 1,193 newly displaced families with relief consisting of 352 plastic tarpaulins, 1,660 blankets, 239 jerrycans, 263 kitchen sets and 435 bars of soap.

The Kuito-Bié prosthetic/orthotic centre, run jointly by the ICRC and the Angolan Ministry of Health, is continuing to fit amputees with artificial limbs.

Further information: Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 364 366/454

TAJIKISTAN

ICRC ASSISTS TYPHOID VICTIMS IN GARM

In an effort to contain an epidemic of typhoid fever that broke out in Garm two weeks ago, the ICRC and the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan have provided assistance to medical facilities and launched a public awareness campaign throughout the area. Two-thirds of the 150 people so far infected have been hospitalized.

While encouraging the local authorities to take as much responsibility as they can, the ICRC has supplied the main hospital and several smaller ones with mattresses and blankets for 150 beds in preparation for emergency admissions, together with chlorine powder and tablets to treat the water supply, intravenous infusions and basic medicines such as antibiotics. The ICRC delegation in Dushanbe has so far sent two trucks to Garm with urgently required medical supplies and stands ready to provide further support if necessary.

An ICRC health delegate based in Garm is coordinating the response to the epidemic together with the local authorities and non-governmental organizations on the spot (Médecins sans frontières, Pharmaciens sans frontières and the Aga Khan Foundation).

In addition to its delegation in Dushanbe, the ICRC has an office in Garm and one in Khorog. The organization has been working in Tajikistan since 1992.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/01 on ICRC activities in Afghanistan, dated 29.03.99
- Update 99/01 on ICRC activities in Sudan, dated 31.03.99

During the days 2,3,4 and 5 April 1998, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) ++ 41 79 217 32 16
YUGOSLAVIA

ICRC SENDS AID TO ALEKSINAC

Following the NATO air strike on Aleksinac last Monday, the ICRC and the Yugoslav Red Cross jointly carried out a survey of the humanitarian situation in the town. Today the ICRC dispatched 5,000 blankets for people whose homes were destroyed in the attack and who have found shelter with family and friends. A further consignment comprising 2,000 square metres of plastic sheeting to cover broken windows and 500 mattresses will be sent on Saturday 10 April.

In addition, the ICRC is looking into ways of helping the medical centre in Aleksinac, which was serving some 65,000 people in the region but is now badly damaged, to resume its work. A team will also visit Nis, Vranje and other areas of southern Serbia to determine the needs of civilians affected by the air strikes. Another team is going to Novi Sad on 13 April to assess the situation there, particularly in view of the disruption of the city's water supply.

The ICRC is working in close cooperation and coordination with the Yugoslav Red Cross. Since the beginning of the air strikes, it has provided the National Society with about 125 tonnes of food, 19,000 blankets, 22,000 jerrycans and some medical assistance. More medical supplies for treating the wounded (blood bags, blood testing kits, etc.) are currently being purchased by the ICRC at the request of the Yugoslav Red Cross.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2678
Doris Pfister, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2307

LIBERIA

SPREADING KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

"It is essential for combatants to observe the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law during military operations carried out in situations of unrest or violence", said an officer who had just completed a course on humanitarian law for future instructors of the Liberian military, police and security forces. "I learned a lot about humanitarian law and principles today and now I feel confident enough to teach my colleagues the basics. Such courses should be held for all senior staff, who must set an example."

The ICRC and the Liberian Red Cross have just launched a large-scale programme in Monrovia which comes at a crucial time, since the army and police are currently undergoing a major reorganization.
In late March two days were devoted to presentations on humanitarian law. The first for senior officers of the police and security forces and the second for the military. The forces concerned then selected 25 participants to take an instructors' course given by Liberian teachers, education specialists and jurists and a joint ICRC-National Red Cross team. The practical exercises and case studies aroused particular interest, prompting lively debates. The course also provided members of various units of the Liberian armed and security forces with an opportunity to meet officially for the first time.

In order to familiarize the population with humanitarian principles, the ICRC has also organized a series of weekly concerts given by local musicians and singers. The performers stress the importance of humanitarian law, seeking to make it understandable both to young people and to adults whose schooling was interrupted by the events that devastated the country.

Further information: Roland Sidler, ICRC Monrovia, tel. ++231 226 306

UGANDA
SEED FOR THE DISPLACED

Adelaide is the head of one of the 62,000 displaced families living in 26 protected villages in Acholiland who received relief supplies from the ICRC during the last week of February and the first week of March. The assistance comprised 750 tonnes of maize, sorghum and bean seed, 62,000 vegetable kits, 66,000 hoes and 185,000 kg of soap.

In early March there were already signs of the rains that announce the beginning of the first planting season in Acholiland. The displaced people in the protected village of Pabbo, in the Gulu district of northern Uganda, could be seen sitting on open ground, holding containers of all sorts. Adelaide was tense with anticipation, as this was the first time she was to receive a distribution of this kind since she had been displaced from her home some two kilometres away.

Several months previously Adelaide and her family of six had had to take refuge in the protected village, leaving all their belongings behind, because of armed clashes between rebels and Ugandan government forces. She had no hope of finding any of their possessions if they ever went back to the family house. So the prospect of being able to plant and harvest her own crops in her small plot of land close by was like a dream come true.

Each family received the same amount of seed, delivered by the ICRC with the assistance of Uganda Red Cross volunteers directly into the hands of the beneficiaries, with no intermediaries. After what seemed like an eternity, Adelaide carried away her share which, to her surprise, included not only seed but also a hoe and soap.

Further information: Georges Comninos, ICRC Kampala, tel. ++256 41 232 088/232 450

During the weekend of 10 - 11 April 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA & ALBANIA

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

Restoring contact between family members separated by conflict is a major Red Cross priority. With refugees transferred to various camps in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and other countries, the number of families split up by the crisis is a problem of grave concern. The majority of these people, after suffering the shock of having to abandon their homes, are now desperately looking for relatives of whom they have lost trace in this tragic process.

An agreement was concluded in Albania last week between the ICRC and three radio networks: Radio Tirana, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle associated with Radio France International, which have agreed to broadcast the names of refugees so that they can let their relatives know where they are. So far, 50 to 100 names are being broadcast every day. Meanwhile two Albanian newspapers have already published more than 500 names, and thanks to the Red Cross telephone link several hundred refugees have succeeded in contacting relatives living in third countries. From this week on, 44 mobile phones will be made available to the refugees.

In Macedonia, the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations have now registered over 150 unaccompanied children in the transit camps and have received more than 300 applications from parents who have lost trace of their children. The Macedonian Red Cross and the ICRC are taking the necessary steps with the authorities concerned so that these families can be reunited.

To support these tracing efforts, the ICRC has deployed eight delegates in Macedonia, seven in Albania and three in Yugoslavia.

VISIT OF ICRC AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION PRESIDENTS TO THE REGION

ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga says the crisis in the Balkans amounts to a political and social catastrophe with tremendous humanitarian consequences. Speaking at a meeting of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Geneva on Tuesday, Mr Sommaruga emphasized that the Movement had to take every precaution to retain its independence from the political players in the conflict, in order to assist and protect the victims on all sides.

President Sommaruga paid tribute to the Red Cross Societies of Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which had taken action to help refugees as soon as the crisis developed. Mention was also made of the work of the Yugoslav Red Cross to assist victims of the NATO bombing.
The President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Dr Astrid Heiberg, said the situation in the Balkans was the most difficult challenge facing the Movement today, both because of its complexity and for the difficulties encountered in reaching the victims. She stressed the need for close coordination between all the Movement's members to ensure an effective and rational response.

The meeting was called to coordinate Red Cross action for the victims of the crisis. Dr Heiberg and Mr Sommaruga flew yesterday afternoon to the region for talks with the authorities and the Red Cross in Albania and Macedonia.

Further information: Nic Sommer, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678

SRI LANKA

ICRC ESCORTS FOOD CONVOYS TO VANNI REGION

Following last week's military operation against positions held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the Vanni region, the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary, escorted five government convoys bearing the red cross emblem through a newly opened checkpoint at Uyilankulam (Mannar).

The operation, conducted at the government’s request, enabled 89 trucks to bring flour, sugar and kerosene to civilians living in three LTTE-held districts in the Vanni region. Their supplies had been cut off for two weeks.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989. It currently has 44 expatriates and 300 local staff based at its delegation in Colombo and its 11 offices in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel. ++94 1 503 346
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224

AFGHANISTAN

ICRC ASSISTS IN RELEASE OF PRISONERS

On 11 April the ICRC facilitated the simultaneous release of prisoners by the Taliban and by Commander Massoud's Jamiat-i-Islami forces.

The prisoners, eight in all, were freed and handed over to the ICRC after an agreement was reached between the two sides. They were then flown by ICRC plane across the front line.

This is the fourth time that the ICRC has taken part in such an operation since the beginning of the year and both sides appear optimistic that more prisoners will be released.

The ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary between belligerent parties and facilitates the safe return home of prisoners.

Further information: Hilaman Mohamad Qasem, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++873 761 242 260
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224
Last weekend 20 African, American and European experts were invited by the Paris-based International Law 90 Research Centre (IL 90) to take part in a discussion on compliance with international humanitarian law held at the University of Abidjan.

Speaking before an audience of some 300 people, including many students and lawyers, Olivier Russbach, the Director of IL 90, went straight to the point: "What can humanitarian law do to contend with the horrific acts that are committed in conflicts throughout the world today? Are its rules so very difficult to abide by? Is it merely a pipe dream? Do we need a new set of rules?"

"Humanitarian law is indeed a reality - brought into being by States - and it must be put into practice as it stands", replied Professor Hubert Oulaye, Director of the Côte d'Ivoire Legal Research Centre (CIREJ). However, as pointed out by Adama Dieng, Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva, "those who created the law also flout it". He added: "If humanitarian law is to carry any weight and if States are to take their obligation to comply with it seriously, then it needs political backing. For this to happen, public opinion must rally behind it".

This was also the opinion of René Kosirnik, ICRC Deputy Director for International Law and Communication, who stressed the importance of mobilizing average citizens, "since everyone needs the protection of humanitarian law in wartime and its rules reflect basic values that we all share".

This is where the People on War campaign, launched by the ICRC to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, comes into play. By encouraging war victims, combatants and legal experts to speak out, it aims to stimulate a worldwide debate on how to ensure greater compliance with humanitarian law.

Further information: Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 2224 60 / 61
INDONESIA

AID TO SOME 18,000 INTERNALLY DISPLACED

Following sectarian riots on Ambon, one of the Moluccan islands, the Indonesian Red Cross Society has, with ICRC support, come to the aid of more than 17,500 internally displaced people in the last month.

Representatives of the Red Cross Society together with ICRC delegates are monitoring the food and medical situation in the 10 camps where people have gathered. They have provided them with rice, beans, oil, salt, high-energy biscuits, mats, soap, household utensils and school necessities. With a view to strengthening the image of the Red Cross as an organization that takes impartial action, the team has also held sessions to explain the Movement's work and its principles to the various communities.

The riots on Ambon first erupted in January. Hundreds of lives were lost and many houses burned. At the beginning of April, two other islands in the Moluccas archipelago – Tual and Tanimbar – suffered similar violence.

Further information: Endah Sri R. Wahyu, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 6221 720 72 52
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 2224

SUDAN

ICRC COURSE AT INFANTRY SCHOOL

Officers and men of the Sudanese army have attended a series of presentations on the basics of the law of armed conflict. These were prepared by the ICRC and the Sudanese Red Crescent and held from 8 to 13 April.

In all, 28 officers from a range of training units, 80 company commanders and 210 non-commissioned officers attended the courses at the infantry school located in Jebeid, a garrison town founded more than 70 years ago by the Italians as a support base for their war in Ethiopia. Most sessions were conducted by a retired Sudanese military judge and a retired German army colonel, both members of the ICRC's pool of training officers.

Meanwhile, commanders of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army in the Upper Nile and Bahr el Gazal regions are attending a similar course this week in Tonj. In November of last year, a three-day course in humanitarian law was held for 27 senior officers at the Command and Staff College in Khartoum. Similar courses are planned in April and early May for the Southern Sudan Defence Forces (allied with the government of Sudan).

Further information: Laurent Dufour, ICRC Khartoum, tel. ++249 11 476 464
Rotary International this week launched an unprecedented appeal to 29,000 clubs in 160 countries to donate money for immediate assistance – through the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – to the victims of the crisis in the Balkans. A special fund with an initial contribution from the Rotary Foundation of 500,000 US dollars has already been set up.

Rotary has been involved in humanitarian endeavour in the region for some years. In response to the Bosnian crisis, clubs donated some six million dollars in cash plus supplies which were distributed through their own channels. "Given the magnitude of this crisis, it makes sense to join with the International Red Cross since they are well equipped to meet immediate needs in this region", said Rotary International President James Lacy. "It is Rotary's hope that this rapid response will secure the future of thousands of people, children as well as their parents".

ICRC President Cornelia Sommaruga welcomed Rotary's decision. "This initiative is not only a sign of Rotary's strength and its commitment to people in need all over the world, it is also a source of encouragement for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in its daily work in the field."

The Movement has staged a major operation in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. A total of 120 expatriate staff assisted by hundreds of local employees are concentrating their efforts on medical and food assistance but also on enabling people to restore contact with relatives from whom they have been separated. The Red Cross will step up its operations over the coming weeks and the Rotary funds will cover a major part of the needs to be met.

Rotary International groups in Switzerland and Germany have over the past three years been conducting a major fund-raising campaign to help victims of anti-personnel mines. Over 1.5 million dollars has been raised so far to support the ICRC's limb-fitting centre in Battambang, Cambodia and the component factory in Phnom Penh.

With 1.2 million members, Rotary International is one of the world's largest voluntary service organizations and is dedicated to helping people in need.

Further information: Red Cross / Red Crescent operations – www.icrc.org or www.ifrc.org
Rotary appeal – Tony Burgener, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 23 84, or
David Alexander, Rotary International, tel. ++1 847 866 3245 (see also www.rotary.org)

If you want to receive our regular situation report on the crisis in the Balkans, please send your e-mail address or fax number to: pmaire@icrc.org or send a fax to ++ 41 22 734 82 80.

During the weekend of 24 - 25 April 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
The ICRC has delivered aid to an isolated area in northern Albania where there is no international humanitarian presence because of the volatile security environment.

Last week an ICRC helicopter took food and medicines to the town of Bajram Curri in Tropojë, the northernmost district of Albania. Refugees arriving in Tropojë, which borders the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, are in a particularly precarious security situation, due especially to problems of criminality. In addition to the 2,200 refugees in the district, a further 4,000 people have been displaced from villages near the border.

Further assistance will be delivered to the refugees and displaced in Tropojë and to the hospital at Bajram Curri, which is treating around 15 war-wounded patients a day.

The ICRC continues to work closely with the Albanian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to bring relief and medical assistance to the refugee population in Albania.

The ICRC is also striving to meet the enormous demand of people who have lost contact with relatives in Albania. At present the main services are radio broadcasts which have enabled thousands of refugees to let their relatives know of their whereabouts, and telephone links in six towns and cities, which are giving people the chance to talk directly to their families around the world.

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Tirana, tel. +871 761 846 110
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 2678
BALKAN CRISIS

ICRC REUNITES SEPARATED FAMILIES

ICRC tracing staff working in Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have for the first time succeeded in reuniting members of families who were separated as they fled Kosovo into the two neighbouring countries.

Last week, delegates took three young children, the children's grandmother and a 17-year-old boy from Macedonia to Albania, where their families had been located. The first family had been split up as they scrambled to flee Kosovo. The boy had lost track of his father, who, unlike his son, eventually ended up in Albania after the border to Macedonia was suddenly opened some weeks ago.

These were the first families to be reunited between the two countries. The transfer was part of a tracing operation that began in the former Yugoslav republic when it became apparent that many families had been split up during the chaotic exodus from Kosovo and sudden influx into Macedonia after the border was opened. The ICRC has set up tracing offices in seven of the main refugee camps in the country in order to help families restore contact.

The information gathered in the camps is processed and cross-checked at the ICRC's tracing centre in Skopje. So far, the organization has managed to bring together over 150 families whose members were living in different camps in Macedonia and has registered more than 400 children separated from their parents. Delegates have also collected the names of around 1,000 parents searching for their children.

Further information: Francois Zen Ruffinen, ICRC Skopje, tel. ++389 70 231 269
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678

ETHIOPIA/ERITREA

ICRC VISITS NEWLY CAPTURED PRISONERS

Delegates of the ICRC visited some 300 Eritrean prisoners of war between 17 and 19 April. The prisoners, captured since hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia resumed in February, are currently being held in a transit camp. The ICRC team, which included a health delegate, registered the POWs and interviewed them in private, in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention.

In addition to the new prisoners, the ICRC is continuing regular visits to POWs and interned Eritrean civilians at Bilate camp to verify whether their living conditions are in keeping with the rules of international humanitarian law.

In Eritrea, meanwhile, the ICRC is pursuing its efforts to gain access, as required by the Third Geneva Convention, to Ethiopian POWs captured since the conflict erupted last year.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81 or ++41 79 217 32 17
SUDAN
WAR-SURGERY SEMINAR

The ICRC and the Sudanese military medical corps held a joint three-day workshop on war surgery in Khartoum from 27 to 29 April. "This exchange of experience and knowledge between ICRC and military surgeons should help improve care for wounded people in Sudan, a country that has suffered 16 years of internal conflict," said ICRC orthopaedic surgeon Chris Giannou. This is the second time that the ICRC has organized such a workshop in Khartoum.

"At the first workshop we took a general approach", Dr Giannou added. "This time we focused on limb trauma, which should prove useful to those who organize medical training programmes in the Sudan."

The course was attended by around 100 people including 20 surgeons in training, 35 medical students, 12 civilian doctors, 10 military medical officers and five nurses. Speaking at the opening ceremony, the Minister of Defence stressed the benefit in humanitarian terms of such cooperation between the ICRC and the military medical corps.

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

SOUTHERN AFRICA
PEACE-KEEPING EXERCISE

Two ICRC delegates took part in a four-day peace-keeping exercise dubbed Blue Crane – the biggest such event ever organized in Africa.

The exercise was held from 22 to 25 April at the South African National Defence Force's battle school in Lohathla, Northern Cape province. The simulation involved more than 4,000 soldiers from 12 of the 14 countries of the Southern African Development Community and was part of a larger three-week programme on peace-keeping monitored by the United Nations. Each day the South African army, hosting the exercise, prepared incidents requiring role-playing in which not only the military participants took part but also humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC, UN agencies and a range of NGOs. The events involving the ICRC included a simultaneous release of prisoners, negotiations with armed groups and an exchange of mortal remains.

The ICRC's active participation in the exercise helped the military and other humanitarian agencies gain a better understanding of its role and mandate. One feature was a series of presentations by ICRC staff on international humanitarian law. The emphasis on the essential distinction that must be drawn between humanitarian agencies and the military will hopefully make it easier to coordinate their respective activities and share information in any future operations.

Further information: Janet Szabo, ICRC Pretoria, tel. ++27 12 437 335

During the weekend of 8 - 9 May 1999, for all information please call the spokes man on duty Urs Boegli, on (mobile) 41 79 203 94 05

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BALKANS CRISIS

AID STEPPED UP FOR AIR STRIKE VICTIMS IN YUGOSLAVIA

The ICRC delegation in Belgrade, together with the Yugoslav Red Cross, has increased its assistance for victims of air strikes in various parts of the country. Last week some 50 tonnes of bulk food and over 5,000 individual food parcels were distributed in Surdulica, Novi Sad and Valjevo. Relief also included plastic sheeting, blankets and mattresses, hygiene parcels, jerrycans and candles.

Following the bombing of areas of Nis at the end of the week, surgical supplies were sent to the city's medical centre, where the wounded are being treated. Similar deliveries have been made in the past 10 days to Surdulica, Novi Sad, Aleksinac, Prokuplje, Vranje and Valjevo.

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS: GROWING NUMBER OF REQUESTS

Since the beginning of the crisis, the ICRC has registered nearly 650 unaccompanied children in Albania and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and over 1,200 families have asked for help in tracing children or otherwise vulnerable persons. Delegates have so far been able to reunite members of 73 families within Macedonia or Albania, transferring some across the border. This activity is being carried out in cooperation with the local Red Cross and other organizations, including UNHCR, UNICEF, SCF and CARE.

Meanwhile, phone links continue to be an essential means of restoring contact between family members when refugees first arrive in Albania and Macedonia. Many refugees then keep in touch through Red Cross messages. Up to now over 4,200 such messages have been sent through the ICRC, which has also made telephones available in Montenegro.

Radio Tirana and four major international networks (BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio France International and Voice of America) continue to broadcast lists of names so as to let people know that their relatives are safe. More than 3,000 names of refugees in Albania, and a smaller number in Montenegro, have so far been read out over the air.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel: ++ 41 22 730 26 78
GUINEA-BISSAU
RESUMPTION OF FIGHTING: RED CROSS EVACUATES WOUNDED

On the evening of 6 May government troops loyal to President Vieira and rebel forces led by General Mane clashed for the fourth time since a cease-fire was signed in August 1998. The next day, after violent fighting in the streets of Bissau, government forces surrendered to General Mane's military junta. At least 80 civilians and combatants died and 180 were wounded in the clashes.

As soon as the violence broke out, the ICRC provided the Simao Mendes Hospital with emergency medical aid consisting of 8 dressing kits that covered the needs of about 320 wounded. On 7 and 8 May, teams from the Red Cross Society of Guinea-Bissau evacuated about 60 wounded and 80 dead (including the bodies of 55 civilians found in a shelter for displaced persons that was "mistakenly" hit by two shells). Other National Society teams helped medical personnel by cleaning the hospital.

As calm returned to the capital, the ICRC approached the military junta and ECOMOG forces to obtain rapid access, in conformity with its mandate, to those arrested. On 10 May ECOMOG handed over to the authorities some 600 government troops and other persons, some of whom had sought safety in ECOMOG camps during the fighting. Since the beginning of the conflict in June 1998 the ICRC has visited 78 prisoners.

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

AFGHANISTAN
VACCINATION PROGRAMME RESUMES IN PARWAN PROVINCE

After more than two years of interruption due to the conflict, a vaccination programme has started up again in Parwan Province, north of Kabul.

The ICRC has assessed the situation in 11 vaccination centres and rehabilitated an efficient cold chain in nine of them with material airlifted from Kabul to Bagram. This will make it possible to immunize 50,000 children and 66,000 women against the most common diseases as part of campaigns organized by UNICEF and the public health authorities.

UNICEF will now take over the monitoring and coordination of the vaccination programme while the ICRC continues to provide logistical support.

The ICRC is currently assessing the situation in six additional centres located in Kapisa Province, north of Kabul.

Further information: Hilaman Qasem, ICRC Kabul, tel: ++873 761 242 260

On Thursday 13 May and during the weekend of 15-16 May, please contact Françoise Derron on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03 for general information and Nic Sommer on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 60 for information on the Balkans.
RUSSIAN FEDERATION/ NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC SUSPENDS WORK

Following the abduction of ICRC delegate Geraldo Cruz Ribeiro in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, on Saturday 15 May, the ICRC took the decision to suspend all but its emergency humanitarian activities in the northern Caucasus until further notice.

Mr Cruz Ribeiro, a 55-year-old delegate seconded to the ICRC by the New Zealand Red Cross, has been working in Nalchik since 1998. One of his main tasks was to support the home-visiting nurses programmes run by local Red Cross branches. This involved coordinating the work of 90 local nurses who give home care to 2,300 particularly vulnerable people – most of them elderly – in the region.

For the past two and a half years the ICRC has been supporting social welfare programmes organized by Russian Red Cross branches in eight northern Caucasus republics (Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Kalmukia, Karachia-Cherkessia and North Ossetia) and in the territories of Krasnodar and Stavropol in the southern part of the Russian Federation. In addition, it has been running its own relief programmes to help victims of the Chechen and Ingush-Ossetian conflicts. Altogether, it has regularly provided assistance for over 40,000 people in the region.

Since the end of 1996, security conditions have prevented the ICRC from deploying expatriate staff in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, where assistance programmes have nevertheless continued thanks to the cooperation of the local Red Cross branches and local ICRC staff.

The ICRC remains in contact with the authorities in Nalchik, where four of the nine expatriate staff are staying on, and those in Moscow through its delegation there. It is determined to clear up this grave security incident and will spare no effort to secure Mr Cruz Ribeiro’s release. A crisis unit has also been set up at ICRC headquarters in Geneva to monitor developments.

Further information: Françoise Derron, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2915

SIERRA LEONE

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
BACK IN FREETOWN

The two international components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, together returned to Sierra Leone on 17 May to resume operations for tens of thousands of people in need of emergency assistance.
Aid programmes are being taken up again after an interruption of four months. The first phase will involve an overall assessment of needs, but immediate priority will be given to urgent action such as providing temporary shelter for internally displaced people in the capital Freetown and supplying clinics in several districts with basic equipment.

During the outbreaks of fighting in January, the first task of the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS) was to get the wounded to health posts and hospitals and to collect the dead from the streets. The SLRCS runs three health centres in Freetown: at the National Stadium (west), Home Street (central) and Bailor Barrie's Compound (east). The centres are staffed by trained nurses and volunteers.

In addition, the SLRCS has two teams of first aiders working at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown, which has a functioning Red Cross blood bank.

The ICRC, working with the SLRCS, will handle emergency relief, health services, the dissemination of humanitarian law and the restoration of family links, while the International Federation will set up blood bank systems, carry out feeding programmes in schools and kindergartens, provide support for SLRCS activities and help the National Society build up its operational capacity.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281
Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 222 459

International Federation in Geneva: Geir Andreassen, tel. ++4122 730 4471
Yves Bellègo, tel. ++4122 730 4377 or mobile ++4179 416 3881
International Federation in Abidjan: Souleymane Koné, tel. ++225 21 28 91/22 48 53

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
RED CROSS BURES DEAD, ASSISTS AIR RAID VICTIMS IN EASTERN KIVU

On Thursday 13 May, ICRC emergency teams checked on the needs of families directly affected by the Tuesday bombing of Goma and Uvira in the eastern Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. First-aid volunteers from the National Red Cross Society buried more than 20 dead.

The ICRC found about 500 people who had suffered the effects of the bombing. Most of them had seen their homes and belongings destroyed and had sought shelter with host families.

"People around town in Goma are very sad today. We want to help civilians who have lost family members, including Red Cross staff, in any way we can. Naturally we hope there will be no more of these attacks, but we stand ready to provide assistance if need be", said Alain Kolly, head of the ICRC mission in Kivu.

The ICRC rapidly set about distributing blankets, plastic sheeting, kitchen sets and jerrycans to people left homeless. They were also given maize, beans and vegetable oil. Earlier the ICRC had handed over medical supplies, medicines and 50 blood bags to the hospitals in Goma and replenished the emergency stocks of the Uvira hospital.
Immediately after the attack, the Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of the Congo sent 10 teams of first-aid volunteers to bury the dead and take the wounded to hospital. The volunteers pulled more than 20 bodies from the rubble and evacuated dozens of wounded.

Ten ICRC expatriates are currently working with 130 Congolese staff in the Kivu region and in Kisangani.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Nairobi, tel. ++25 72 51 27 28 or ++25 42 72 83 87
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281 or mobile ++4179 217 3217

SENEGAL

ICRC AIDS 100,500 DISPLACED IN CASAMANCE

In cooperation with the local branch of the Senegalese Red Cross in Ziguinchor, the ICRC distributed 83.5 tonnes of rice and millet to some 10,500 displaced people in the Casamance region of Senegal from 11 to 17 May. The people concerned had fled their homes because of fighting between Senegalese government forces and the separatist Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance.

The latest clashes took place on 29 and 30 April around Ziguinchor airport and on the outskirts of the town. The ICRC has been carrying out ad hoc distributions of food aid to the displaced in the Ziguinchor area since 1997. The recent handout was the second this year.

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

For any information you may need on the weekend of 22-23 May or on Monday 24 May (national holiday) please call the press officer on duty
Juan Martinez: 41 79 217 32 17
CAMBODIA

RED CROSS MARATHON AGAINST MINES

To raise awareness of the plight of war victims and especially of people injured by anti-personnel mines, Chris Moon is attempting to run the length of Cambodia, from the northern town of Poipet to the southern port of Sihanoukville. Chris set off from the Thai-Cambodian border on 15 May and hopes to reach Sihanoukville by 31 May. The 700-km run is taking him through some of the country’s most heavily mined areas.

Chris is well placed to talk about the problems encountered by mine victims. This former deminer, who in the past worked at clearing the fields in northwestern Cambodia which are now supporting the families of returnees, lost his lower right arm and his right leg during mine-clearance operations in Mozambique in 1995. The accident did not discourage him: less than a year after leaving hospital Chris completed the London Marathon in just over five and a half hours, raising funds for Cambodian mine victims. Since then he has undertaken several fund-raising runs for charities assisting the disabled, and in February 1998 he carried the Olympic torch into the stadium at the Nagano Winter Olympics in Japan.

"I do not consider myself a victim", says Chris, "I chose to be a deminer. People living in areas infested by mines do not have a choice." For the Cambodian run he is receiving logistic support from the ICRC and is being encouraged by hundreds of Red Cross volunteers who gather to cheer him on his way.

While mine clearance has significantly reduced the threat to civilians in some areas, Cambodia remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. To demonstrate their support for the run and for the Ottawa treaty, which Cambodia is in the process of ratifying, the local authorities in Battambang province organized the destruction of a stockpile of some 700 mines and munitions in the presence of the media.

Further information: Aleksandra Matijevic, ICRC Phnom Penh, tel. ++855 23 360 071

During the weekend of 29 - 30 May 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
ICRC teams based in Albania are striving to alleviate the anxiety of former detainees who have recently arrived from Kosovo and are desperate to locate and rejoin their families.

Over 1,000 men who reached the border town of Kukes after being released from detention in Kosovo were given the opportunity to make a satellite call to their relatives and give details about themselves to the ICRC so that its tracing services could reunite them with their families.

Walter Stocker, team leader in Kukes, said the men were considered a priority group by the ICRC: "All of them arrived alone and immediately told us that after the ordeal they had gone through their main need was to rejoin their families. We are doing everything we can to help them." With the information gathered in Kukes, the ICRC in Albania and at headquarters in Geneva can respond to the many enquiries it is receiving from people who wish to know if their relatives are among the men released and if they can be put in touch with them.

Some of the men have already managed to find their families in Kukes. One tracing delegate witnessed the reunion of six men with their families in a refugee camp after following their cases for five weeks. She recalls: "Last week they were very depressed, so it was extremely gratifying to see how relieved they were to know their relatives were alive and to be with them again."

This latest effort is part of an overall ICRC tracing programme in Albania which is using a variety of means to address the urgent problem of families torn apart by the crisis in the Balkans.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 41 22 730 26 78
On 28 May a team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) met representatives of the National Liberation Army (ELN) in the countryside around San Pablo, in the northern Colombian department of Bolivar. The ICRC team delivered clothing, medicines and Red Cross messages from relatives of the hostages. The ELN representatives likewise handed over Red Cross messages from the hostages; these were delivered to their families the following day.

The ELN is still holding 25 passengers from the Avianca Fokker aircraft hijacked on 12 April when en route from Bucaramanga to Bogotá.

On the basis of reports in various Colombian newspapers that the hostages would be set free on 28 May, a number of hostage families had organized parties to celebrate the supposed release. However, the reports turned out to be mere rumours. The ICRC regrets that competition among the news media led to the publication of unsubstantiated information which was not checked with the ICRC delegation, as this caused suffering among those concerned.

The ICRC is in regular contact with the ELN on the ground and stands ready to arrange the release of those still held hostage.

More information: Carlos Rios, ICRC Bogotá, tel. ++571 636 7346
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224
MOROCCO / WESTERN SAHARA

ICRC VISITS PRISONERS HELD BY POLISARIO FRONT

Between 18 May and 1 June an ICRC team consisting of a doctor and a dental prosthetist carried out a visit in the southern part of the Western Sahara to 310 of the 1,877 Moroccan prisoners being held by the Polisario Front. Their aim was to visit these prisoners again so as to evaluate detention conditions and complete the medical assessment begun during the March 1999 visit to the camps in the Tindouf region, which was undertaken to ascertain the needs of the prisoners and the local possibilities for their treatment. Medical resources are even more limited in the southern camps than in the camps of the Tindouf region. The doctor drew up a list of prisoners to be transferred to the Tindouf camps for eye surgery during the next ICRC visit. Meanwhile, the dental prosthetist evaluated prisoners’ requirements and went to the Tindouf region to begin setting up a prosthetics laboratory in one of the camps there.

The doctor paid particular attention to the cases of 83 of the 85 prisoners freed in April 1997 who are still waiting to be repatriated to Morocco (two have died since being freed).

During the visit, the delegates noted that the prisoners were pinning their hopes on the new timetable for the UN settlement plan, which provides for their repatriation at the beginning of the year 2000. To date, these hopes have been regularly dashed by delays in the plan, which was drawn up at the time of the ceasefire in 1991. Any further postponement of the UN timetable would have a disastrous effect on the already weakened morale and health of the prisoners. The majority of these prisoners have been interned for more than 20 years and many of them would find it difficult to bear the prospect of their captivity being prolonged for a further, indefinite period.

All the prisoners visited and those freed were able to send Red Cross messages and photos to their families. The ICRC provided aid in the form of insulin, medicines and medical equipment. Dental equipment was also dispatched for both Western Saharan refugees and the Moroccan prisoners.

The ICRC remains ready to repatriate the prisoners as quickly as possible and wishes to see a solution to all the humanitarian problems associated with the Western Saharan conflict.

Further information: Pierre Ryter, ICRC Tunis, tel.: ++ 216 1 78 91 34
COLOMBIA / VENEZUELA

RETURN OF 2,200 COLOMBIANS FROM VENEZUELA

Following violent clashes between Colombian autodefensa groups and opposition forces, which claimed some 10 lives last week in the village of La Gabarra (department of Norte de Santander), close to 2,200 Colombians crossed the border into Venezuela. They were repatriated on 5 and 6 June to Cúcuta, the capital of the department. The operation was carried out in coordination with the Venezuelan and Colombian authorities and all the repatriations were voluntary.

On 3 June, an ICRC delegate based in Cúcuta travelled to La Gabarra to assess the humanitarian situation. At the request of the authorities (who also asked for assistance from UNHCR), the head of the ICRC mission in Venezuela visited the first civilians who had arrived from across the border. These people were taken charge of by the Venezuelan armed forces and transported by road and helicopter to accommodation at the military base in the village of Casigua and in other public buildings.

As there was a possibility that other Colombian civilians would try to cross the border, Venezuelan Red Cross volunteers remained in the area to provide any necessary humanitarian aid.

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

RWANDA

FIVE YEARS OF SEPARATION COME TO AN END

The grandmother could do nothing but throw her arms in the air, as if her emotions had left her speechless. After five years of separation, she had just been reunited with her two grandchildren: Vincent, 12, and Furaha, 13. The children had fled their village in the town of Kanombe, near Kigali, in 1994. By escaping with other adult members of the family to what was, at that time, still Zaire they were able to save their lives, unlike their parents.

The arrival of the two ICRC vehicles caused a crowd to gather. It was quite an event in this remote corner of Kigali Rural and cries of laughter rang out all around. Furaha almost danced for joy as, with a huge smile on her face, she embraced the members of her family. As for Vincent, he was more reserved. He simply shook hands, keeping his eyes fixed on the floor.

For months, the two children had been staying at a centre in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like many other youngsters, they had been waiting for the day to come which would bring an end to five years of separation from their family and would allow them to return to their place of birth. Five years of turmoil which had swept the region and seen them lose all contact with their family in exile. Finally, on 3 June, they were transferred from Goma to Kigali by ICRC aircraft.
"The grandmother is overcome with emotion, she doesn't know how to thank us", whispered Ibrahim, a Rwandan working for the ICRC Tracing Agency at the Kigali East sub-delegation. After obtaining signatures on a few official documents, the ICRC delegates departed, leaving Vincent, Furaha and the group to their emotional reunion. Other children were waiting in the cars to be taken back to their families. These families, more often than not, consisted of uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, the parents having been the victims of genocide.

Reuniting unaccompanied children with their families is one of the ICRC's main activities in Rwanda. More than 110 Rwandan employees are working full time on the project. There are currently some 6,300 children in Rwanda and close to 1,000 more outside the country hoping to rejoin their relatives. Since 1994, around 63,000 children have already been reunited with their next of kin, more than 15,000 of these by the ICRC.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 22 24

KENYA
RED CROSS HELPS KENYA MEDICAL TRAINING COLLEGE PRODUCE ARTIFICIAL LIMBS LOCALLY

On 4 June the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTC) began producing low-cost prosthetic limbs locally with the help of equipment worth KSh 700,000 (US$ 10,000) donated by the ICRC. Manufacturing prostheses in Kenya will reduce the need to import expensive ready-made components and lower the cost of production from KSh 45,000 to KSh 10,000 per limb.

An initial 100 prosthetic limbs are being produced under the supervision of two Kenyan lecturers who have recently returned from an ICRC-sponsored one-month training course in Addis Ababa. A total of 36 students are currently in training.

Speaking after watching the first artificial limbs come off the production line, Donbosco K'Ochumba, head of the Faculty of Orthopaedic Technology at the Training College, said: "We are now better equipped to help a marginalized sector of Kenyan society gain a new lease of life." Although the project is based in Nairobi, Mr K'Ochumba stressed that it will benefit Kenyans nationwide.

Deputy Principal Paul Tuukuo said that the amputees benefiting from the new technology are gaining in confidence and will be able to move more independently and do things for themselves.

The ICRC's Special Fund for the Disabled was created in Addis Ababa in 1983. Its purpose is to provide sustainable projects to assist amputees and other physically disabled people. This mainly entails setting up or providing support for prosthetic workshops and training programmes.

As an alternative to wood and polyester resin, since 1988 the ICRC has been using thermoformable plastics: polypropylene and polyethylene. These materials are used for the manufacture of sockets and various other components such as knee joints, feet and alignment devices.
The advantage of this recyclable technology is that light and modern prostheses can be produced at very low cost, making expensive imports unnecessary and providing employment for local workers.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Nairobi, tel.: ++225 728 387
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2224

CAMBODIA

LAW OF WAR SEMINAR FOR MILITARY COMMANDERS

Fifty-one senior officers of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) attended a presentation on the law of war delivered on 4 June by an ICRC delegate specialized in dissemination to the armed and security forces. The presentation was part of a five-day seminar on human rights and the law of war organized by the RCAF in cooperation with the ICRC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which brought together high-ranking officers from the six military regions of Cambodia.

Although the responsibility for training armed forces in the law of war remains that of the States signatory to the treaties containing its rules, the ICRC supports the RCAF in this area by providing it with expertise and educational material. Currently a pool of army officers trained as instructors in the law of war conducts seminars for both soldiers and officers throughout Cambodia. To facilitate their task, the ICRC and the RCAF training directorate will soon release a jointly produced videotape which shows the rules of this law applied in practical situations.

Further information: Aleksandra Matijevic, ICRC Phnom Penh, tel.: ++855 23 360 071

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org :
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in the Russian Federation/northern Caucasus, dated 08.06.99

During the weekend of 12 - 13 June 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
CRISIS IN THE BALKANS
TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NEWLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN NEED

With the beginning of the withdrawal of Yugoslav security forces and the deployment of an international security force in Kosovo, an estimated 24,000 internally displaced people, mainly of Serb but also of Montenegrin and Roma origin, have crossed into other parts of Serbia since 11 June, while another 9,000 have headed for the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro.

The Yugoslav Red Cross responded rapidly to this new emergency, setting up transit points on all the roads linking Kosovo with the rest of Serbia where the displaced are given water, food and medical treatment. Three reception centres have also been established in Prokuplje, Nis and Ribarice to provide them with shelter. The ICRC has donated 12,000 individual food parcels and 5,000 litres of fuel to the Yugoslav Red Cross in support of this latest assistance programme. Furthermore, two tonnes of tinned food were purchased locally for distribution by the local Red Cross branch in Nis, and two tonnes of flour, salt and oil - enough to bake about 1,000 loaves of bread - were supplied to the Novi Pazar branch.

During the past two months, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, together with the Yugoslav Red Cross, has distributed over 335 tonnes of food, 50,000 food parcels, more than 16,700 blankets and hygiene products to the most vulnerable groups in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Over 25,000 sq m of plastic sheeting and 76,000 sq m of tarpaulin have been handed out to people whose homes were damaged by bombing. In addition, sufficient surgical supplies and medicines for the treatment of 1,300 war-wounded have been delivered to 11 hospitals in Yugoslavia.

KOSOVO

Since its return to Kosovo on 24 May, the ICRC has continued to distribute aid directly to internally displaced people in the Podujevo, Stimlje, Glogovac and Srbica areas. To date it has supplied more than 20,000 individual food parcels, around 100 tonnes of bulk food, over 5,000 blankets, 500 kitchen sets, 2,100 baby parcels, 2,400 jerrycans and 2,000 sq m of plastic sheeting. A great many of the displaced people are very anxious to have their families informed of their whereabouts. At present 2,500 such requests are being handled by telephone, by means of Red Cross messages or by broadcasting names over international radio networks.

Further information: Jette Soerensen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678
SOLOMON ISLANDS
AID FOR THE DISPLACED ON GUADALCANAL

In view of the internal tension on Guadalcanal, which has caused large numbers of civilians to flee their homes, three ICRC delegates have gone to the island. On 14 and 15 June they supplied food and hygiene items for people who have taken refuge in six reception centres run by the Solomon Islands Red Cross. Further distributions are scheduled during the coming days for people taken in by relatives. The delegates are also helping the National Society to set up a system of registration for the displaced.

Some 7,500 people have now flocked to the capital Honiara. Of these about 2,500 have already left Guadalcanal for Malaita or other nearby islands, sometimes with the aid of the local Red Cross, 2,000 are sheltering in the National Society's six reception centres and 3,000 others are staying with relatives.

The ICRC is maintaining its contacts with all the parties concerned with a view to gaining access to all those in need of assistance, especially people in areas cut off from food supplies.

The Solomon Islands are covered by the ICRC's regional delegation in the Philippines, which also has offices in Sydney, Australia, and Suva, Fiji.

Further information: Thomas Gurtner, ICRC Manila, tel. ++61 40 911 99 05
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2224

COLOMBIA
RELEASE OF 33 PERSONS ABDUCTED BY ELN

Late on 15 June, 33 of some 70 people held for the last 17 days by the National Liberation Army (ELN) were released with the logistic support of the ICRC delegation in Colombia. The persons concerned were among those abducted while attending Mass at the church of La Maria in Cali in the southern Valle department.

The release took place following complex negotiations between the government and the ELN. The latter requested on the one hand that a commission be set up comprising government bodies, representatives of the Church, political parties and the international community, and journalists, and on the other that the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross take charge of the actual release operation.

The process began at about 6 p.m., when the hostages were transferred aboard buses marked with the red cross emblem from the place where they had been held to the small village of El Cedro in the south of the country. They were then taken to the Pascual Guerrero stadium in Cali, where they were reunited with their families.

Negotiations for the release of the remaining hostages taken at the La Maria church and those abducted following the hijacking of the Avianca aircraft in April are due to begin on 21 June.

During their period of captivity in a cold, mountainous area, the ICRC provided the hostages with humanitarian assistance in the form of clothing, blankets and medicines.

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

ICRC STARTS "PEOPLE ON WAR" CONSULTATION

On 12 June the ICRC embarked upon a process to elicit the views of Afghans on their experiences and concerns, their hopes and their fears, in a society that has seen 20 years of war. The programme, which was launched with two focus group discussions in Peshawar, Pakistan, and will be pursued in various parts of Afghanistan during the coming weeks, is part of the ICRC campaign entitled "People on War". The aim is to sound out the opinions of thousands of people in a dozen countries which have been directly affected by armed conflict and six countries at peace. The programme in Afghanistan is one of the last stages in a process which has now been completed in nine countries scarred by war.

Women from the Afghan refugee community and former mujaheddin who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan are taking part in the first two focus groups in Peshawar. Six other groups comprising specific sectors of the Afghan population, such as religious leaders, farmers, fighters, housewives and female medical staff, will be set up as a team of ICRC expatriate and national staff, moderators from the BBC Afghan Education Programme and an external research consultant proceed to various locations inside Afghanistan. The focus groups will be supplemented by in-depth interviews with a selection of individuals and an opinion survey carried out by distributing questionnaires to 1,000 people throughout the country.

The "People on War" project reaches out to people who have vast and valuable experience, their own hopes and dignity, and the potential to shape their own future. It is intended to increase worldwide awareness of the rules that already exist for the protection of people in wartime and to encourage discussion of humanitarian law in the context of today's conflicts.

Finally, ordinary people caught up in war will be asked what suggestions they have for achieving a greater degree of humanity in such circumstances. The ICRC expects this pragmatic project to make a major contribution to the humanitarian agenda of the twenty-first century. In view of the pressing need for a thorough review of humanitarian issues, the ICRC hopes to stimulate a universal debate which will take stock of the past and look to the future.

Further information: Paul-Henri Arni, ICRC Islamabad, tel. ++9251 920 30 09
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224

NIGERIA

"PEOPLE ON WAR": ICRC CONSULTATION ON BIAFRA CIVIL WAR

"Attacking civilians is the work of the Devil", exclaimed a mother who had lost several of her children in the Biafra civil war (1967-70). She was taking part in one of eight group discussions on that war and the rules of international humanitarian law which the ICRC and the Nigerian Red Cross Society have organized since 1 June in Lagos, Enugu, Port Harcourt and Kaduna.

These discussions are part of the "People on War" project now being conducted in 12 countries stricken by war in their recent history. To mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which protect the victims of armed conflict, the ICRC wants to give a voice to those involved in and affected by war. In Nigeria the mothers of victims, medical staff, captured soldiers, contemporary journalists, students and teachers, together with former field
commanders of both the Federal armed forces and the Biafran army, have expressed their feelings and opinions on topics such as the protection of civilians, the blockading of humanitarian aid and the process of reconciliation. The group discussions will be followed by a representative survey carried out in 12 Nigerian states, and will be supplemented by a series of in-depth interviews with individuals.

Even now, 30 years after the civil war came to an end, many Nigerians are still overwhelmed by the suffering it caused. "I was so small, so helpless", sighed a nurse who tried to treat wounded soldiers and civilians near Port Harcourt. Recalling images she has only seen on TV, a young university student said: "I feel pain, agony and suffering over and over. I see useful talents wasted. I see dreams that never came true. I see events that cast a cloud over this nation. I see regrets."

The results of the worldwide "People on War" consultation will be presented to the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in November 1999, with the aim of achieving fuller respect for the rules of international humanitarian law in the twenty-first century.

Further information: Jean-Jacques Gacond, ICRC Lagos, tel. ++2341 2690082
Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 222460 / 222461

PERU

FIRST COURSE IN LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT FOR INSTRUCTORS FROM ARMED FORCES AND POLICE

In early June the ICRC's Lima delegation, in cooperation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Peruvian military, organized the first training course in the law of armed conflict for the country's armed forces.

Twelve officers from the three armed services and two from the national police took part. In the second phase of the training programme, which began on 20 July, the instructors visited a number of military bases in emergency zones and gave their first courses. Representatives of the ICRC and of the Joint Chiefs of Staff accompanied them to help with the presentations and assess the results.

Further information: Grazielle Leite Piccolo, ICRC Lima, tel. ++511 460 2719
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Peru, dated 14.06.99
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Mexico, dated 14.06.99
- Fact sheet on ICRC activities in Afghanistan, dated 14.06.99

During the weekend of 19 - 20 June 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
YUGOSLAVIA
CLEAN WATER FOR NOVI SAD AND VOJVODINA

Since April, when the water supply was cut for some 90,000 residents of Novi Sad on the south side of the Danube, the ICRC has launched a number of projects aimed at ensuring that those affected have sufficient clean water.

As an emergency measure, two tanker trucks were dispatched to the area in late April. Since then, the ICRC has ordered 27 water-storage tanks, each with pipes and distribution taps, to be installed at four locations in the affected area. So far, about a dozen such tanks have been set up. Their installation is progressing as quickly as the local producer can deliver them.

At the same time, two small water-treatment stations are being planned as a means of countering the problem of excess iron and manganese in local water. Both plants will be able to treat 10 litres per second.

The Public Health Institute in Novi Sad is about to receive assistance in measuring the quality of water, soil and air. The Institute is responsible for environmental control in the province of Vojvodina, where the need for such control has substantially increased since the refineries and chemical plants in the area were hit during the NATO campaign. The equipment being procured by the ICRC for the Institute includes a highly sophisticated instrument to measure fallout from the decomposition of crude oil, an ultraviolet spectrophotometer to check the composition of water, the corresponding software and disposable laboratory material.

Finally, the ICRC is importing an oil-absorbent chemical that should eliminate the oil spill from the damaged refinery into the area where wells providing Novi Sad's water supply are located.

EASING TROUBLED MINDS

The ICRC has enabled more than 300 families in Kosovo to contact their loved ones. The organization's staff there are using mobile satellite phones to give people the chance to contact relatives who are abroad or in other parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For the moment, three such phones are in use and are being taken all over the province's territory to reach as many people as possible. On 21 June staff visited the town of Malishevo, where 215 people made calls. On 22 June 142 made calls in Urosevac and Gnjilane.
Many who have used the phones are people who remained in Kosovo after the NATO airstrikes began and who have not had any contact with their families since March. Others are recent returnees from Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia who want to tell their relatives that they have arrived safely. "The chance to make a telephone call meets a very human need to let your loved ones know you are safe", says Edith Baeriswyl, head of the ICRC sub-delegation in Kosovo.

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++381 63 344 164
Jette Soerensen, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2678

REMINDER:
Photographs of Red Cross and Red Crescent activities in Albania and Macedonia are available from the ICRC Public Information Department (contact Lo Chamrong, tel. ++41 22 730 2036)

A 10-minute English-language video edit in either Betacam (international soundtrack) version or VHS on the ICRC’s work to restore family links for refugees in Macedonia is also available from the Public Information Department (contact Myriam Perrenoud, tel. ++41 22 730 2406).

PERU

ICRC ASSISTS 23,000 PEOPLE IN UCAYALI

Following the heavy flooding that devastated Coronel Portillo province in the department of Ucayali, the ICRC assisted 23,000 people for about 10 days. A total of 5,000 families living in 150 villages received food aid and hygiene items.

ICRC delegates based in the region carried out the operation in cooperation with teams of Peruvian Red Cross volunteers.

The ICRC has 19 delegates and 44 local employees working in Peru. They are attached to the Lima delegation, the Tingo Maria sub-delegation and offices in Huancayo, Ayacucho, Chiclayo, Cajamarca, Tarapoto, La Merced and Puno.

PERUVIAN POLICE INSTRUCTED IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN LAW

Twenty-six officers of the Peruvian national police force completed a course in human rights law and international humanitarian law on 21 June. The group comprised 21 commanders and other high-ranking officers (all men) and five sub-lieutenants (women), who were appointed according to seniority and were part of a recently created special unit.

The course lasted for five weeks, six days a week, during which the participants received full-time training to enable them to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law. Under a follow-up and advisory programme established by the
ICRC delegate to Latin American police and security forces, the officers will in turn teach human rights law and humanitarian law to their colleagues across the country.

This is the first time that Peruvian police officers have received instruction in these branches of law. The training takes into account their specific tasks and emphasizes knowledge of basic rules that, as law-enforcement personnel, they are responsible for applying.

Further information: Graziella Leite Piccolo, ICRC Lima, tel. ++511 460 27 19

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

PEOPLE ON WAR: NATURE GETS THE BETTER OF "ADJUTANT TUHON"

On 19 June the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire launched a new phase of People on War, the ICRC's world-wide campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. At Ky-yi Village, a private institution for the rehabilitation of street children in Abidjan, a theatre group gave its very first performance of a play on the theme "Even wars have limits".

The audience quickly warmed to the play's plain-spoken language and inventive plot. "You idiots!" a turtle exclaimed after routing the men of a cruel army officer named Tuhon. "Don't you know enough to abide by the rules?" Wishing to impress his superiors, Tuhon had urged his unit to wage a ruthless campaign against the northern rebels. But when it began to attack women and children, other forces — those of nature — rose to their defence. The officer, who refused to learn his lesson, was finally deserted by his men and captured by an enormous spider that threatened to eat him alive.

The campaign in Côte d'Ivoire provides for the organization of cultural events, debates on international humanitarian law and the use of surveys conducted by the ICRC in countries affected by war. A hundred diplomats, government representatives, artists and journalists attended the inauguration ceremony at Ki-yi Village. The play, the first in a series on war and its limits, will be performed every evening at the Ki-yi Village theatre, whose shows are highly popular with local people.

Further information: Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 22 24 6061

ICRC RECEIVES ONE MILLION BANNER ADS

The members and Web visitors of a global banner exchange, "HyperBanner" (http://www.Hyperbanner.net), have selected the ICRC to receive one million banner placements across the HyperBanner network.
HyperBanner used its "Hyper-Poll" interactive Website tool to conduct the banner-donation poll, which began on 21 May and ran for 19 days on HyperBanner Websites world-wide. More than 7,000 site visitors voted for one of four international humanitarian organizations to receive a donation of one million banners (ICRC, UNICEF, UNAIDS and Greenpeace International).

As winner of the poll, the ICRC (http://www.helpicrc.org) will be able to place ads throughout HyperBanner's global network (with customers in 31 countries). The ICRC ad campaign will be launched shortly.

"We are very grateful and excited to receive the banner donation from HyperBanner because it gives us another means by which to publicize the work of the Red Cross, make people aware of our needs and show them how they can help", said Ilona Pongracz, deputy head of private fundraising at the ICRC. "We remain heavily involved in emergency work in Kosovo and elsewhere, and by using online banners we can immediately expand our publicity endeavour and enhance world-wide visibility and support."

Further information: Ilona Pongracz, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 2383

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No 99/03 on ICRC activities in Angola, dated 22.06.99.

During the weekend of 26 - 27 June 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 22 779 33 22 or ++ 41 79 217 32 31
ANGOLA

AGRICULTURAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME IN HUAMBO

Giving people the means to overcome increasingly severe food shortages without making them dependent on food aid: such is the aim of the vast ICRC agricultural assistance programme launched in Huambo on 21 June.

The programme, which is to benefit both residents and displaced persons, will be carried out in two phases corresponding to the two growing seasons of the Angolan Planalto. The first phase, covering June and July, provides for the distribution of agricultural supplies to all the families concerned. Displaced families will also be given food aid.

Last week, 12,319 families in the town of Huambo each received a hoe, cabbage, onion, tomato, carrot and eggplant seed and 5 kilos of fertilizer. These supplies will be provided to a total of 34,437 families in Huambo and nearby villages. In addition, as from next week half-rations of food (maize, pulses, oil and salt) will be distributed every month to 45,947 displaced persons in Caála, Cuando and Calenga.

The second phase of the programme will begin in August with the distribution of agricultural kits (seed and fertilizer) and half-rations of food. This phase will last until the next harvest in March-April 2000.

Further information: Marjolaine Martin, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++2442 364 366

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/01 on ICRC activities in Uganda, dated 29.06.99

During the weekend of
3 - 4 July 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17

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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

COURSES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW
FOR POLICE OFFICERS

As part of the ICRC's ongoing work to teach international humanitarian law to the forces of law and order, 15 officers from the Abidjan police have received training both in the basic provisions of international humanitarian law applicable to maintaining order and in the principles governing the work of the Red Cross. The four-day seminar (22-25 June) was conducted by five Ivorian instructors (two gendarmes and three police officers, all trained by the ICRC). Field exercises helped illustrate the elementary rules of conduct in law enforcement. A team of 15 first-aid workers from the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire also took part.

Discussions focused on various subjects including the perception of ICRC neutrality, the ICRC's real-life role as guardian of the Geneva Conventions, the protective value of the red cross emblem, the applicability of international humanitarian law in situations involving internal disturbances and, and the issue of how to ensure that those who violate humanitarian law are punished.

The ICRC also took part in a similar, half-day session attended by 28 police officer cadets from 12 French-speaking countries in Africa who are currently training at the Ecole à Vocation Régionale in Abidjan.

Further information: Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. ++225 / 222 459

During the weekend of 10 - 11 July 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Françoise Derron, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03
BALKANS CRISIS

MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH IN KOSOVO

ICRC relief, protection, tracing and mine-awareness delegates have begun making joint field trips to isolated communities in Kosovo in order to provide a range of services designed to meet the most immediate needs of the inhabitants.

The first such trip took place last week, when delegates went to Junik, a village near the Albanian border which is still difficult for many organizations to reach and where phone lines are down. They found 2,000 people who were in urgent need of food and anxious for news of their relatives. The presence of mines in the area is also a problem and has reportedly already claimed the lives of two young children.

In response to the needs expressed by the villagers, relief delegates distributed wheat flour and family parcels while the tracing team, equipped with three satellite phones, helped people call their relatives abroad. Other delegates distributed leaflets about the dangers posed by mines.

"This approach is probably the most efficient way of tackling all the different needs at once", said relief delegate Matthias Mollet. "Instead of telling people that we were only bringing food and that we would have to take their tracing and protection requests back to Pristina for someone else to deal with, we were able to handle everything on the spot. It is also indicative of the wide range of problems currently faced by the population."

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Pristina, tel.: ++ 381 63 344 164
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 4122 730 26 78

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/01 on ICRC activities in Colombia on behalf of internally displaced people, dated 13.07.99

During the weekend of 17 - 18 July 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
SUDAN

EMERGENCY WARD FOR
ICRC HOSPITAL IN LOKICHOKIO

On 31 July the ICRC will inaugurate a new emergency ward in its Lopiding field hospital in Lokichokio, northern Kenya, along the border with Sudan.

"Lopiding is the best equipped medical facility in this far-off border region", explained ICRC medical coordinator Pierre Gratzl. "But it is a field hospital, meant above all to provide care for surgical patients and war-wounded from Sudan. Of course, in the past we also treated local emergency cases."

The ICRC has long been aware of the medical needs of the growing population in Lokichokio, which for the past 10 years has been the main base for relief operations conducted in Sudan by the ICRC and Operation Lifeline Sudan. Besides the ICRC facility, the nearest hospitals are 80 (Kakuma) and 200 (Lodwar) kilometres away. Together with the Kenyan Ministry of Health, the ICRC decided to open the new ward to treat emergency cases from the district of Turkana. Staffed by two doctors (under contract with the Ministry) and 12 nurses (under ICRC contract), the ward has 20 beds for in-patients and an intensive care unit with five beds.

Further information: Nina Galbe, ICRC Nairobi, tel.: ++ 2542 728 387

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions on 12 August 1999, the ICRC, the Swiss Confederation and the city of Geneva plan to host a ceremony in which a solemn appeal will be launched to all peoples, nations and governments of the world, urging them to reaffirm the commitments made to war victims in these treaties.

For details on the events scheduled for 12 August, for press accreditation to the official ceremony (requests must be received by 5 August) and for information on the Geneva Conventions, please contact:

Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2302, fax: ++4122 730 22 50, e-mail: kgordonbates.gva@icrc.org

During the weekend of 24 - 25 July 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga has said that efforts to build stability in the Balkans must have a direct impact on the lives of people affected by a decade of war.

Dr Sommaruga was speaking at a press conference today on his arrival in Sarajevo to attend the summit of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. He welcomed the Stability Pact initiative but cautioned that it must be based on transparency and partnership with local authorities.

President Sommaruga stressed that the area of key concern for the ICRC, which has worked in the region since 1991, was the plight of tens of thousands of families in Bosnia, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – including Kosovo – who remained without news of relatives who disappeared during the fighting.

"For these people," he said, "stability means not just the absence of fighting or the creation of jobs, but is linked intimately with peace of mind and heart."

The Red Cross remained committed to acting on behalf of the families for as long as the problem persisted, and urged the authorities in all the countries concerned to make every effort to respond to the families' need for information.

Dr Sommaruga also emphasized the importance of strengthening civil society, and referred to the role played by the Red Cross – in war and peace – in all countries of the region. In some areas the Red Cross structure had collapsed along with the former Yugoslavia itself, and their renewal and strengthening was high on the list of ICRC priorities.

Dr Sommaruga stressed the ICRC's deep sense of responsibility. "We owe it to the people of this region, " he concluded.

Further information: Urs Boegli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 79 203 9405
Jon-Hans Coetzee, ICRC Sarajevo, tel. ++ 387 71 652 407 or ++ 387 90 132 282

CRISIS IN THE BALKANS
ICRC HELPS RESTORE FAMILY LINKS

Hundreds of families without news of their relatives have now been relieved of their anguish.

In July the ICRC received information on the whereabouts of around 2,000 people arrested in Kosovo and now detained in Serbia. Since then, hundreds of families have streamed through its offices in Kosovo every day.

In Prizren, a town in southern Kosovo, 200 families have found the names of their relatives on the lists of detainees and have been able to write Red Cross messages. Hundreds of other detainees have been identified by their families at offices in Pec and Pristina, the capital.
Shaban, whose brother disappeared from his home in Djakovica, Kosovo, in April, was among those who received good news. "I didn't know whether he was alive or not until I got a telephone call from the Red Cross saying they had a message from him and asking me to come and pick it up."

But for others there is no news at all. Monique Crettol, protection coordinator in Pristina, said: "It is really heartbreaking to see mothers looking for the names of their sons -- and not finding them. It will take a long time to find out what happened to all the people who still remain unaccounted for in Kosovo."

Further information: Daline Carlisle, ICRC Tirana, tel. ++ 871 682 286 532

IRAQ

DECAYING INFRASTRUCTURE RAISES CONCERN FOR THE POPULATION

In view of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Iraq after two wars and nine years of embargo, the ICRC has decided to address the population's growing needs by stepping up its medical assistance and water and sanitation activities. As Michel Minnig, former ICRC head of delegation in Baghdad, put it: "Humanitarian action alone cannot solve all the problems that people are facing as a result of the embargo. Since the ICRC can only relieve some of the suffering, it is focusing on fields where it has specific expertise."

Following a major survey of medical and public-health needs conducted last spring, new programmes are being set up this month to repair 10 referral hospitals and 20 primary health centres. These programmes will also provide surgical material and other supplies for the main hospitals in each of the country's 18 governorates and ensure training for local medical and surgical staff, who will receive scientific literature and be able to attend seminars. Finally, in view of the severe drought currently affecting the region, the worst recorded since 1932, the ICRC plans to extend and improve intake systems for water treatment plants so as to ensure a sufficient supply of drinking water.

Iraqi infrastructure, already damaged during the 1991 Gulf War, has suffered considerably from the subsequent imposition of sanctions. Medical facilities, in particular, can no longer respond to essential needs. Buildings have not been maintained, previously imported modern equipment and basic supplies are not being replaced, and since training is no longer provided for qualified nurses and doctors, skills are being lost. Says Michel Minnig: "UN Resolution 986 covers the population's basic needs in food and medicine but this has no effect on the country's deteriorating infrastructure. In hospitals, for example, most of the bulbs in operating theatre lamps are broken and basic tools such as sterilizers are out of order. These are the specific kinds of problems the ICRC wants to address."

The ICRC has been present in Iraq since the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980. For the last nine years it has focused on helping local engineers maintain water-treatment plants throughout the country and on running rehabilitation programmes for the war-disabled. In the north, where various armed factions are still fighting, the ICRC has been assisting vulnerable people. When the US/British air strikes against Iraq started in December 1998, basic medical assistance was provided for hospitals in areas affected by the bombing.
In early July, to finance the new programmes, the ICRC launched an appeal for 7.7 million Swiss francs, bringing the total budget for its operations in Iraq to 21.7 million francs.

There are currently 28 expatriate delegates (16 in Baghdad and 12 in the north) and over 200 local staff working in the country.

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

AFGHANISTAN

THE BOY WHO STEPPED ON A MINE AND KEPT ON RUNNING

"I felt very sad that day, even in the morning. I don't know why", says 14-year-old Amir Jan, sitting forlornly in Kabul's ICRC-run Karte Se Hospital.

A tall, thin boy from farming stock, he was born and bred in a village near the capital, Kabul.

"We were late coming home from school. A group of us were running and I took a short cut. I don't why I took it. I wasn't thinking."

A simple decision of the kind most people in the world take hundreds of times a year without suffering any consequences. But along Amir Jan's path that day there was a landmine.

"I couldn't see what I stepped on. I was running and suddenly I heard an explosion. I don't know what else happened... I stood up and ran about 100 yards -- I could manage that -- but when I looked at my hand and feet and saw they were bleeding I fell down. I didn't know I was wounded, I was just running."

Two hours later he was taken to the local hospital and from there to Kabul.

Mohammed Khan, the doctor who treated Amir Jan, takes up the story. "When he came here he was in a state of shock. His foot had not been completely blown off, there was still some bone and flesh that could help him run for some distance."

"Medically speaking, the patient may feel the first blow. But as the pain sets in he is not able to deal with it and he loses control. He thinks he doesn't feel any pain, which is why he may still be able to run."

"When something like that happens, the body is not physically in a condition to run but the mind tells it to stand up and carry on. It's extraordinary."

Mohammed Khan had to amputate Amir Jan's leg. Below the knee, so the boy was quite lucky. And now, of course, he will get an artificial limb.

Outside the ward Mohammed Khan leans back against the wall in the drone of the nearby generator, dark glasses hiding his eyes. "When I perform an amputation on a boy like him, I feel as if I'm cutting off my own foot", he says.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. +41 22 730 2061
PAKISTAN

TRAINING IN HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW FOR POLICE

On 24 and 27 July, 25 instructors and staff members of the Elite Police Training School in Lahore and the Sihala Police College near the capital, Islamabad, attended two one-day workshops, receiving basic instruction in international humanitarian law, human rights law and the principles, methods and practice of law enforcement. The leaders of the workshops, a Dutch ICRC consultant specialized in dissemination among police forces and an ICRC delegate based in Pakistan, also gave a general presentation on the ICRC, the fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the development of international humanitarian law.

The workshops, which were followed by discussions with the commanders and deputy commanders of the two institutions, was the first stage of a new programme recently approved by the authorities of Punjab. Under Pakistan's federal system, law enforcement and police training are the responsibility of the provinces, Punjab being the largest with a population of around 75 million.

Besides improving understanding of universally accepted principles and standards in law enforcement and policing, the aim of the workshops was to acquaint the participants with the contents of an in-depth instructors course to be held in October and November for two groups of around a dozen people and to adapt the ICRC's approach to the specific needs of Pakistani police training institutions.

Further information: Peter Iseli, ICRC Islamabad, tel. ++9251 920 30 09

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions on 12 August 1999, the ICRC, the Swiss Confederation and the city of Geneva plan to host a ceremony in which a solemn appeal will be launched to all peoples, nations and governments of the world, urging them to reaffirm the commitments made to war victims in these treaties.

For details on the events scheduled for 12 August, for press accreditation to the official ceremony (requests must be received by 5 August) and for information on the Geneva Conventions, please contact:

Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2302, fax: ++4122 730 22 50, e-mail: kgordonbates.gva@icrc.org

During the weekend of 31 July - 1 August 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
AFGHANISTAN

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR MEDICAL FACILITIES

Since fighting resumed north of Kabul last week, the ICRC has increased its support for medical facilities in the capital, the Shamali plain and the Panjshir Valley, and for first-aid posts close to the front line to ensure that the war-wounded can be given proper care. Delegates are keeping a close watch over the situation in hospitals, where several hundred people have received surgical treatment.

Delegates working in the ICRC's offices in Kabul and the Panjshir Valley are also monitoring population movements and assessing potential humanitarian needs.

Concerned by the humanitarian implications of this renewed outbreak of hostilities, the ICRC is maintaining a constructive dialogue with the parties to the internal conflict, reminding them of their obligation to respect the lives and property of all persons protected by international humanitarian law.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 22 24

SRI LANKA

EVACUATING THE SICK BY SEA

On 1 August, the ICRC began evacuating serious medical cases from the Vanni, the northern province held by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), by sea. By Monday, eight patients had been transferred to Mannar hospital aboard fishing boats protected by the red cross emblem and escorted by ICRC delegates.

The plight of the local population, especially the sick, has taken a turn for the worse since late June, when military operations resulted in the closure of the only land route to and from the Vanni, thus halting the delivery of food and medical supplies as well as all civilian movement.

The boats sailing from Mannar Island to Iluppaikadavai, off the Vanni coast, enabled students living in the Vanni to receive their question papers for the GCE Advanced Level examinations currently being held all over the island.

The ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary, has been seeking to have the land route re-opened by urging both the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and the LTTE to consider the humanitarian issues involved.
The ICRC will continue the medical evacuation operation until the SLA and the LTTE reach agreement on this matter.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989. It currently has 44 expatriates and 300 national staff working in its offices in Colombo and in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Further information: Harasha Gunawardene, ICRC Colombo, tel.: ++94 1 503 346
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 22 24

Thursday, 12 August will mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. The ICRC, the Swiss Confederation and the Canton and City of Geneva will be sponsoring the launch of a Solemn Appeal to all peoples, nations and governments of the world to reaffirm commitments made on behalf of the victims of war.

For more information on the events scheduled for 12 August (particularly for press accreditation to the main official ceremony, no accreditation accepted after 5 August) and on the Geneva Conventions, please contact Kim Gordon-Bates (tel.: ++41 22 730 2302, fax: ++41 22 730 2250, mobile: 41 79 217 3206, or e-mail: kgordonbates.qva@icrc.org).

Starting on 12 August, a special Website page will carry the texts of speeches, photos and transcripts for general use (address: www.onwar.org/12Aug/).

During the weekend of
7 - 8 August 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Françoise Derron,
on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 03
50 th ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

Official programme for 12 August 1999

10 a.m.: Alabama Room, Geneva Town Hall

• Signing of the Solemn Appeal by leading international figures

NB: this event is not open to the press in view of the limited capacity of the room; photos and videos of this part of the commemoration will be available at http://www.onwar.org/12aug/, or on request on ++ 4122 730 2716

11.15 a.m.: Place des Volontaires

• Inauguration of the "Banners" exhibition, designed by Françoise Bridel, by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga

• Start of the performance by violinist Vanessa-Mae

11.45 a.m.:

• Opening of the room in the Forces Motrices building to the public

12 noon: Forces Motrices building - Official ceremony

• Welcoming addresses (in chronological order): Mr Pierre Müller, Mayor of the City of Geneva; Ms Martine Brunswig Graf, President of the Council of State of the Republic and Canton of Geneva; Ms Ruth Dreifuss, President of the Swiss Confederation

• Musical interlude by Vanessa-Mae

• Public reading of the Solemn Appeal by Mr Cornelio Sommaruga

• Addresses by the signatories of the Solemn Appeal and by Ms Trix Heberlein, President of the Swiss Federal Assembly

1.40-2 p.m.:

• Press conference at the Forces Motrices building
3-4 p.m.:

- Special session of the Jean Pictet Competition
  Pleading and role-playing in international humanitarian law

8.30 p.m.: Forces Motrices building

- Charity concert by Vanessa-Mae and the strings of the Geneva Chamber Orchestra in aid of the victims of the Sudanese conflict

NB: Journalists needing to install equipment (cameras, tape recorders, etc.) at the Forces Motrices building are kindly requested to do so by 11.30 a.m.

* * *

The List (in alphabetical order) of leading international figures who will sign the Solemn Appeal in the Alabama Room of Geneva Town Hall on 12 August 1999:

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

Mr Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Argentina, 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, will be unable to attend for health reasons.

please consult Http://www.onwar.org (for information on the ICRC's "People on War" project) and Http://www.icrc.org (for information on Geneva Conventions)

Further information: Kim Gordon-Bates, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 41 22 730 2302, mobile: ++ 41 79 217 32 06, fax: ++ 41 22 730 22 50 or by e-mail: kgordonbates@icrc.org
A new version of the ICRC’s CD-ROM on international humanitarian law (IHL) has just come out in English and French. It comprises:

- 91 treaties and other texts (law governing the conduct of hostilities, law relating to the protection of war victims from 1856 to the present);
- the commentaries on the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two 1977 Additional Protocols;
- a list, updated at 31 December 1998, of signatures, ratifications, accessions and successions relating to IHL treaties and the full text of reservations, declarations and objections thereto;
- and, for the first time, under the heading "National Implementation", examples of national implementing laws and regulations and domestic case law pertaining to 20 countries (English only).

The CD-ROM’s powerful search capacity enables users rapidly to find a text or a specific article of a treaty and easily to scan texts and establish links between them.

The CD-ROM on IHL will be very useful to both legal experts and law students, law faculties and libraries, armed forces, governments and organizations working in conflict situations.

Price: 49 Sfr or 30 US$
Copies can be ordered from:
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Public Information Centre, 19 Avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva
E-mail: webmaster.gva@icrc.org
Fax: ++4122 733 20 57
The Geneva Conventions under fire

The development of the law of war and the challenge of applying it in the changing environment of warfare

The 20th century, having seen two World Wars, the invention and use of chemical and nuclear weapons, and a record number of people, in particular civilians, killed in hostilities, can justifiably be called the “century of war”. It is also the century that produced the first-ever universal humanitarian treaties.

Rules governing the conduct of warfare were not laid down in international treaties until the late 19th century, and the experience of World War I soon exposed their shortcomings. Countries at war were obliged to protect soldiers wounded during combat. But the rights of prisoners were not yet fully guaranteed. The fate of two million POWs depended on the good will of their captors. All this changed during the 1920s, when the international community extended legal protection to POWs.

From the time of the Spanish Civil War, attacks on civilians became a significant feature of 20th-century warfare. In the Far East too, major cities were attacked with little regard for civilian lives, and the Nazi Blitzkrieg changed the nature of conflict. The authorities of the Third Reich even argued that deportations and concentration camps were not illegal under the written law of war. Indeed, the mass killing of civilians was illegal under customary law, but was not expressly prohibited by international treaties. The blanket bombing of cities, however, came to a terrible climax when nuclear bombs detonated over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

From that moment on, the survival of the human race depended on its ability to regulate war. In 1949, the three existing Geneva Conventions were revised and a fourth created specifically to protect civilians during armed conflict.

But it soon became evident that there were gaps in these new laws. In the post-war years, armed insurgents began to take on established regimes, and the treatment of civilians became a key issue. The Americans had similar experiences during the Vietnam war, during which they found themselves fighting an almost invisible enemy. This prompted the international community to debate the lessons learned from civil wars. Its representatives developed the law of armed conflict, providing greater protection for civilians during hostilities: the 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions also covered internal conflicts.
The Berlin Wall, the ultimate symbol of the Cold War, was torn down in 1989. But instead of the era of peace and stability which everyone had hoped would follow, new forms of conflict began to emerge. With the end of the Cold War, superpower rivalry in most parts of the world decreased. Before 1989, the conflicts in Africa, Asia and South America had been proxy wars. The entire political world was watching. Today these conflicts are left to drag on alone. Furthermore, they no longer conform to the traditional patterns of international wars between States, and they are not always fought by professional soldiers. In prison camps, men are starved and ill-treated. Innocent civilians are slaughtered and buried in mass graves. In such a moral and political vacuum, the survival of civilized society itself is at stake.

But now the international community has resolved to investigate these crimes, and the prosecution of war criminals is not confined to Europe (the Hague Tribunal). An International Criminal Tribunal has also been set up in Arusha, in northern Tanzania, to try persons suspected of being involved in the Rwandan genocide.

These trials underline the international community's increasing commitment to prosecuting war criminals - and also its attempts to give teeth to the Geneva Conventions.

For the most part, the wars of the 1990s are marked by chaos and savagery. The humanitarian laws, painstakingly codified over the past century, seem to have become negligible. New ways have to be found and efforts have to be intensified to keep the worst horrors of war at bay and to ensure that victims of conflict can preserve their dignity. These efforts cannot be made soon enough, given the fact that the Geneva Conventions are also built upon the basic principle that warfare is limited by the dictates of the public conscience.

"People on War"
The flagship project marking the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions

Many months ago, when 12 August 1999 was just a distant date on the calendar, the ICRC was wondering what would be the most appropriate way to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Obviously this could not be a joyous occasion - there had been too much suffering in the intervening years - but nor could it be allowed to pass unnoticed. Hence the idea of carrying out a wide-ranging opinion survey among war victims and persons bearing weapons, asking "ordinary" people who had been directly affected by war how they understood, on the basis of their own experience, the slogan "Even Wars have Limits".

For the purposes of this project, entitled "People on War", the ICRC recorded the views of thousands of people in 11 countries affected, or previously affected, by war: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia/Abkhazia, Israel and the occupied and the autonomous territories, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia and South Africa. The information was gathered by means of individual questionnaires, interviews and group discussions. In parallel, a similar but less detailed survey was conducted among the population of countries at peace: France, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. An American consultancy firm, Greenberg Research Inc., was enlisted to work out the best polling methods for this unique project and to analyse the results.
A separate report will be drawn up for every country covered, and a consolidated comparative report will be published at a later date. This will be the first complete "X-ray", so to speak, of the state of international humanitarian law, of which the Geneva Conventions are the cornerstone.

For the ICRC, and indeed for all those concerned directly or indirectly with the development of humanitarian action and wishing to resolve the pressing problems that are impairing its effectiveness, the People on War project should provide some valuable insights during the coming months. By launching an international debate on the validity of the principles of international humanitarian law and offering interested circles the first comparative study on the level of knowledge of the law, and by opening a fresh dialogue with warring parties and other players, the project promises to be a major asset in the preparation of the humanitarian agenda for the 21st century.

The project has already reached a great many people - far more than the thousands of participants interviewed in various contexts, because it has been a vast logistic exercise requiring the personal involvement, both physical and intellectual, of hundreds of volunteers from National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and a considerable number of other local partners and contacts.

In the ICRC's view, the very fact of having managed to complete a consultation on this scale despite enormous organizational difficulties is a success in itself, even though the analysis of the data and the drafting of the reports is taking longer than anticipated. Further details, a model questionnaire and, shortly, the initial results can be found at www.onwar.org, the project's special Website.

On the eve of the anniversary that prompted the People on War project, the ICRC derives much satisfaction from the renewal of its dialogue with people whom it considers to be of the utmost importance: those who make war or suffer its effects on the ground. The ultimate aim is to mobilize public opinion worldwide. Through the People on War project, the ICRC is declaring that war is not inevitable, and that moreover it is determined by the conscience of the individual.

QUOTES

"If you find yourself in a conflict, do not lose your human quality. Do not dehumanize yourself. That will help you a lot not to make mistakes and waste human lives. And that is the best you can hope for in a conflict, not to lose your humanity."
Former guerrilla fighter in El Salvador

"It is quite painful to kill a person. We are killers - we have killed. Our hands are red with blood. We thought we were protecting the community, yet today we are seen as killers."
Former fighter in a South African township

"I would like to say how important the level of awareness among people is to enforce a law. There are a lot of people who unfortunately do not know about these rules, these laws. They become victims themselves ... when harm is inflicted on them. They think this is normal. They think this is how it should be, that this is life, because they are ignorant."
Woman in Lebanon whose husband is missing
"My sister aged 57, who lived in Sarajevo alone, was killed there. If I had caught the man who killed my sister I would have cut his throat on the spot. Don't think I wouldn't have. However, I think differently now that the passions have cooled. But at that moment I don't know what I would have done to him, out of rage."

_Civilian in Bosnia-Herzegovina_

"Killing the prisoners will not bring back a dead relative, nor will it solve the war. Instead it is degrading and against Islam. They should hand them over to the relief agencies."

_Displaced women in Somalia_

"If a country is attacked from the outside, the people draw closer together. In an internal conflict, the beastly nature of people is revealed. They turn out to be able to kill children."

_Elderly woman in Georgia_

"A war without rules would be a cruel war where nothing would count. Only winning. And winning is not all."

_Guerrilla fighter in Colombia_

* * *

The 50th anniversary around the world

_Starting point for a "humanitarian groundswell"_

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies all over the world are carrying out a wide range of activities on and around 12 August to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, taking part in the ICRC's "People on War" campaign and promoting awareness of the rules governing warfare.

These activities on the national level are aimed at a variety of target groups. In cooperation with the authorities, educational institutions and the military, a number of seminars, round tables and conferences on international humanitarian law (IHL) are being held. Some National Societies have translated the Geneva Conventions into their national languages for the first time, while others are supplying schoolchildren with IHL classroom packs and books containing stories illustrating practical cases. Lectures on IHL are being given at high schools and universities, grants awarded to IHL students, and youth group meetings organized to spread knowledge of the humanitarian principles.

The media are being briefed extensively with a view to creating an ongoing dialogue on the significant role they can play in the dissemination and implementation of IHL. Public interest in the 50th anniversary has been fostered through exhibitions, concerts, sports events, the issue of commemorative stamps, opinion surveys, competitions and rallies, the planting of trees, campaigns promoting the emblem and film festivals, as well as through the media. Most National Societies are using their press contacts to have the material produced by the ICRC's "People on War" Campaign Unit published in their national media.

On 12 August itself, special programmes will be broadcast on TV and radio, and articles and editorials by Red Cross/Red Crescent representatives will appear in newspapers and magazines. In Geneva, the President of the ICRC will read out a Solemn Appeal reflecting the concerns of people consulted on IHL throughout the world. The appeal will be endorsed by a group of prominent figures invited in their personal capacity, including United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Swiss federal, cantonal and city authorities, diplomats based
in Bern or Geneva, and the heads of international organizations will attend the commemoration ceremony.

The results of the "People on War" consultation will be presented to the 188 States party to the Geneva Conventions and the 175 National Societies during the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (31 October - 6 November 1999).

And then what? A more wide-ranging humanitarian plan of action will be debated and adopted during the Conference, and the results of the consultation will give the awareness campaign new momentum. Together, the events marking 12 August and the public presentation of the results of the consultation will be the starting point for the creation of a "humanitarian groundswell" which should surge forward into the new millennium. The public awareness of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the Geneva Conventions already achieved through the Millennium and the People on War campaigns is expected to stimulate far-reaching debate on core issues which will contribute to the drafting of the humanitarian agenda for the beginning of the 21st century.

* * *

Official programme for 12 August 1999

10 a.m.: Alabama Room, Geneva Town Hall

- Signing of the Solemn Appeal by leading international figures
  NB: this event is not open to the press in view of the limited capacity of the room; photos and videos of this part of the commemoration will be available at http://www.onwar.org/12aug/, or on request on ++4122 730 2716

11.15 a.m.: Place des Volontaires

- Inauguration of the "Banners" exhibition, designed by Françoise Bridel, by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga

- Start of the performance by violinist Vanessa-Mae

11.45 a.m.:  

- Opening of the room in the Forces Motrices building to the public

12 noon: Forces Motrices building - Official ceremony

- Welcoming addresses (in chronological order): Mr Pierre Müller, Mayor of the City of Geneva; Ms Martine Brunschwig Graf, President of the Council of State of the Republic and Canton of Geneva; Ms Ruth Dreifuss, President of the Swiss Confederation

- Musical interlude by Vanessa-Mae

- Public reading of the Solemn Appeal by Mr Cornelio Sommaruga
Addresses by the signatories of the Solemn Appeal and by Ms Trix Heberlein, President of the Swiss Federal Assembly

1.40-2 p.m.:

- Press conference at the Forces Motrices building

3-4 p.m.:

- Special session of the Jean Pictet Competition
  Pleading and role-playing in international humanitarian law

8.30 p.m.: Forces Motrices building

- Charity concert by Vanessa-Mae and the strings of the Geneva Chamber Orchestra in aid of the victims of the Sudanese conflict

NB: Journalists needing to install equipment (cameras, tape recorders, etc.) at the Forces Motrices building are kindly requested to do so by 11.30 a.m.

* * *

The List (in alphabetical order) of leading international figures who will sign the Solemn Appeal in the Alabama Room of Geneva Town Hall on 12 August 1999:

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

- Mr Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Argentina, 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, will be unable to attend for health reasons.
In the afternoon of 12 August, as the various events take place and as material becomes available, the ICRC will publish on the Internet the official text of the Solemn Appeal, the addresses given by the speakers and a selection of high-resolution pictures illustrating the day's proceedings for print media. A verbatim transcript of the press conference will also be available as from Friday the 13th. The photos may be freely used, but credits must be included. All this material can be found at the following address:

Http://www.onwar.org/12aug

During the weekend of 14 - 15 August 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
ANGOLA

ICRC STEPS UP ASSISTANCE ON THE PLANALTO

On 16 August three cargo planes chartered by the ICRC carried more than 100 tonnes of food and other supplies to Huambo. The planes - a Hercules and two Boeing 727s - made seven round trips in all.

The assistance was intended for the tens of thousands of people living in the outskirts of Huambo and Kuito - both displaced persons and local residents - who have been suffering since early this year from the escalation of the fighting. Now in full swing, the operation will continue for the next six months and provide these people with 3,000 tonnes of food a month. Agricultural supplies, including tools and seed, are being distributed as well.

On 9 August ICRC delegates flew back to Malange, where, for security reasons, they had not been able to go for months. After an initial assessment of needs, the delegates provided the city hospital with medical supplies for the treatment of some 200 war-wounded.

On 11 August an appeal was launched to raise 42 million Swiss francs (28 million dollars). With a total budget of slightly more than 54 million francs (36 million dollars), the ICRC operation in Angola will thus become the organization's third largest in Africa. Among other things, the money will be used to fund aid programmes for the civilian population.

Further information: Françoise Zambellini, ICRC Luanda, tel. ++ 24 42 364 454
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 81

COLOMBIA

ICRC TO ASSIST OVER 170,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE IN 1999

The internal conflict in Colombia has intensified over the last six months, taking an increasingly heavy toll on the civilian population and forcing more and more people to flee their homes. The ICRC has therefore decided to expand its emergency assistance programme for 1999.

In cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross, ICRC delegates will provide emergency aid for an estimated 171,000 internally displaced people this year. They also plan to ensure some degree of self-sufficiency for communities that have been displaced for long periods of time by providing them with relief items such as agricultural tools and fishing equipment.
Through their regular contacts with all the parties to the internal conflict, ICRC delegates seek to promote respect for international humanitarian law with a view to creating the conditions in which civilians can remain in their homes and live there in safety and dignity.

The ICRC has been active in Colombia since 1969. Fifty delegates and 150 local staff currently operate out of the delegation in Bogota and 14 other offices in the country.

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

SOLOMON ISLANDS

ICRC ASSISTS 7,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE ON THE ISLAND OF MALAITA

ICRC delegates have recently mounted an emergency operation to assist some of the 17,000 people who have fled their homes and sought refuge in and around the capital, Honiara, and on the island of Malaita since violence broke out in the Solomon Islands four months ago.

From 23 July to 13 August, local Red Cross teams backed up by two ICRC delegates assessed needs in the northern, central and southern areas of Malaita and distributed six weeks' rations of rice and tinned fish to nearly 7,000 people. Other items such as vegetable seed, fishing kits and detergent were provided as well.

ICRC activities in the Solomon Islands will now shift back to Guadalcanal province.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Thomas Gurtner, ICRC Manila, tel. ++ 61 40 911 99 05

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

A CULTURAL FESTIVAL AGAINST THE EXCESSES OF WAR

"Even though war reflects lack of understanding among peoples, it still concerns us all". With these words the compelling voice of Ivorian singer Ano Mira soared over the crowd gathered in the open-air theatre at Abidjan City Hall. The occasion was a three-day cultural festival organized by the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire, in cooperation with the city authorities, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

The events began in the afternoon of 12 August with a joint press conference given by the Movement (the ICRC, the Côte d'Ivoire Red Cross and the Federation) and the Ministry of Justice, which chairs the National Interministerial Committee for the implementation of international humanitarian law. Representing the Ministry of Justice, the director of the Legislation Department reaffirmed the government's support for Red Cross efforts to promote humanitarian law and expressed his pleasure at seeing the country resound to the rhythm of the concerts arranged for the festival.
On Friday 13 and Saturday 14 August, 50 of Côte d'Ivoire's best groups and entertainers performed on the open-air stage during two non-stop shows of music, dance, theatre and comedy. In addition, seven artists showed their works alongside the ICRC's "People on War" photo exhibition. Numerous information and activity stands and (of course) local culinary delights gave a real fairground atmosphere to the event, which was designed to raise awareness of the limits that must be placed on war. The festival attracted an audience of more than 5,000.

"It's wonderful - all the big names in Ivory Coast show business have taken part entirely free of charge", exclaimed Elina Salo, an ICRC administrative delegate in Abidjan, "and they have all made a real effort to get the message of humanitarian law across". Some of them, however, would have preferred to see war abolished completely. As famous comedian Adama Dahico put it, we need once and for all to "cross out the word war — with a big red cross".

Further information: Christian Frutiger, ICRC Abidjan, tel. +225 22 24 60/61

LIBERIA
TRIBUTE TO THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a statue was unveiled on 10 August in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, a country which has recently emerged from a fratricidal seven-year war.

Placed on a pedestal in the city's main street, the statue depicts seven life-size combatants stretching out their arms towards a volume containing the Geneva Conventions. The signatory States are represented by flags on a huge globe.

The Liberian Ministers of Culture and Defence, a representative of the United States embassy, a representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and members of the Liberian Red Cross, the International Federation and the ICRC all publicly expressed their commitment to the Geneva Conventions. Along with the guests of honour and an audience of several thousand people, they later watched local cultural groups perform traditional dances and act out scenes portraying violations of international humanitarian law.

Further information: Charles Kpan, ICRC Monrovia, tel. +231 226 306

During the weekend of 21 - 22 August 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Amanda Williamson, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 16
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

RED CROSS HELPS KISANGANI RESIDENTS

An ICRC-chartered aircraft flew in a tonne of relief supplies to Kisangani on Monday 23 August. In response to the fighting that erupted there in mid-August, ICRC staff are supervising relief, visiting persons detained in connection with the events and assessing the security situation together with the various parties to the conflict.

As soon as the ceasefire came into effect on 18 August, the ICRC began working with volunteers from the country's Red Cross Society and staff from the Netherlands branch of Médecins sans frontières to take more than 50 wounded persons — both military and civilian — to the town's 16 hospitals and other health-care centres. ICRC staff meanwhile surveyed the needs of those public and private medical facilities and provided emergency supplies. In all, they counted 131 military and civilian war-wounded patients.

In addition, 80 local Red Cross volunteers helped the ICRC remove the mortal remains of 34 soldiers killed during clashes between Ugandan and Rwandan troops, and Red Cross teams cleaned and disinfected the streets where intense fighting had raged for four days.

Finally, the ICRC evacuated 17 representatives of various United Nations agencies who had been participating in a vaccination programme in the area and were taken by surprise by the Kisangani fighting. With them was a wounded Western journalist.

Further information: Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 22 81
In an effort to deal with any contingency following the UN-sponsored ballot held in East Timor on 30 August, the ICRC's Jakarta delegation has dispatched a shipload of food and other relief supplies to the territory. The consignment contains blankets, sarongs, water containers, plastic sheeting, tarpaulins, cooking utensils and other household and personal hygiene items for around 50,000 persons. The food (sugar, rice, salt, green beans and cooking oil) is enough to feed 10,000 people for two weeks.

Following the vote, the ICRC facilitated the transfer to Catholic missions of several hundred newly displaced people from the police stations to which they had fled. Delegates provided them with food and other aid. It is estimated that the events in the run-up to the vote forced over 1,200 people to flee into West Timor. Since the beginning of this year, the ICRC has supplied 10,000 displaced persons with non-food relief. Some 20,000 people have received basic medical care.

The ICRC currently has 11 delegates in East Timor and another in West Timor, who is part of a rapid response team operated jointly by the Geneva-based organization and the Indonesian Red Cross Society.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 9111 469 83 85

Kosovo farmers anxious to till the fields they were forced to abandon during the conflict are to receive support from the ICRC as part of an approach aimed at helping residents of the province regain self-sufficiency.

Many farmers returned to their homes to find buildings, equipment and supplies destroyed or stolen, making it impossible for them to cultivate their land. Starting this week, farmers in six districts will receive fertilizer and seed with which to plant a winter-wheat crop for harvest next summer. Eventually, some 15,000 will benefit from the ICRC programme, which is being run in conjunction with other agencies.
Agricultural expert Matthias Mollet explained how the programme came about. "At the moment many farming families are dependent on food aid. We asked them what they want and they told us they want to grow their own food on their own land. So we are helping them do just that." At the same time every effort must be made to ensure that landmines and unexploded ordnance are cleared from agricultural land and to make farmers aware of the risks before they return to work.

"Of course, not every farmer will have the equipment he needs to plant a crop this year", Mollet pointed out. "In addition to supplying seed and fertilizer, the Red Cross is also planning a programme to provide both tractors and spare parts."

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Pristina, tel. ++ 381 63 344 164
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 26 78

NAMIBIA
SECURITY DETAINES VISITED IN THE CAPRIVI STRIP

The ICRC has completed an initial series of visits to security detainees arrested by the Namibian authorities in early August under a state of emergency which has since been lifted. The arrests took place in the wake of secessionist activities in the Caprivi Strip, a narrow piece of land lying between Angola and Botswana.

The Ministry of Defence authorized the ICRC to visit the security detainees on 17 August. The same day a team of three delegates, including a doctor, went to the police station in Katima Mulilo. Visits continued on 20 August at the Grootfontein military base and prison and were completed on 25 August when delegates saw one detainee at the civilian hospital in Windhoek. A total of 112 detainees was registered by the ICRC and 77 Red Cross messages were collected which will shortly be distributed to the families of the detained.

The visits were carried out in accordance with standard ICRC procedures, including private interviews with the detainees. In addition, the ICRC, which has been present in Katima Mulilo since the clashes started, assessed the situation in humanitarian terms and provided the town's hospital with emergency medical supplies furnished by the Namibia Red Cross.

Further information: Urs Boegli, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 730 23 89

INDONESIA
AID FOR 11,000 DISPLACED PEOPLE

In the aftermath of inter-ethnic clashes in Sambas, West Kalimantan earlier this year, the ICRC worked in conjunction with the local branch of the Indonesian Red Cross to distribute relief supplies to people forced to flee their homes. Between March and May, 58,000 non-food items (mattresses, personal hygiene items and packs of detergent) were delivered to people who had sought refuge in camps in Pontianak and Singkawang.
In June, the ICRC learned that the food situation had dramatically deteriorated in the camps. Together with the local Red Cross it decided to organize a two-month distribution, from July to September, to supplement the rice provided by the Indonesian authorities. The Red Cross programme supplied some 46 tonnes of beans, 40 tonnes of cooking oil, 40 tonnes of dried fish, 13 tonnes of sugar and three tonnes of salt to around 11,000 displaced people. The ICRC also supported a supplementary feeding programme run by the local department of health for children under five years of age, providing among other things two tonnes of oil and 1.5 tonnes of sugar. Malnutrition has since diminished. The ICRC will be phasing out its support following assurances by the authorities that they will continue the programme.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 41 22 730 22 24
Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 9111 469 83 85

Medal commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a limited number of commemorative medals were struck in silver and gold by the ICRC in conjunction with the Intermünzen company of Bettlach, Switzerland. On 12 August, the anniversary date, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga awarded a gold medal to each of the 12 signatories of the Solemn Appeal made on that occasion.

The medals can be viewed and ordered on the following Websites: [http://www.helpcicr.org](http://www.helpcicr.org) and [http://www.intermuenzen.ch](http://www.intermuenzen.ch). Those made of gold are numbered. All purchasers will receive a certificate of authenticity signed by President Sommaruga.

During the weekend of 4 - 5 September 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on
++ 41 22 779 33 22
or
++ 41 79 217 32 31
BALKAN CRISIS
CLEANING WELLS IN KOSOVO

When Din Mehmeti returned to Kosovo earlier this summer after two months in Macedonia, he found his house in ruins and an alarming reek emanating from the well from which he and his family had always drawn their water.

Sadly, this is a common legacy of the recent conflict. Of the 20,000 wells in Kosovo, over half are believed to have been contaminated with animal or human remains or with rubbish, or have simply grown stagnant through lack of use. With many rural communities totally dependent on them for their water supply, wells are an important symbol of self-reliance.

For Din Mehmeti and his neighbours, however, there was another nagging concern: two people from the village were missing; the fear was that their bodies had been thrown down the well, as had all too often happened in other villages.

Water and sanitation engineer Glen Hanna, who heads the ICRC's well-sanitizing operation in Kosovo, confirms that their fears were well-founded. "We have taken bodies out of wells on occasion. In addition to our immediate goal – which is obviously to clean the wells – this allows the victims' families to bury their loved ones. And naturally we help the people relying on the contaminated wells to find alternative water sources until clean water can be drawn from them again."

The well-sanitizing team that came to Din Mehmeti's village that day arrived with a generator, a pump and a rig to lower one of its members into the well. With a protective suit and face mask covering his entire body, he went down the meter-wide shaft to a depth of about five metres. The assembled crowd watched anxiously and covered their noses against the stench released as the water was churned below. Eventually the smell's source – the carcass of a farm animal – was hoisted up. The well was subsequently pumped out and disinfected.

There were mixed feelings at the discovery of what lay at the bottom of the well: relief, on the one hand, but also renewed sadness that the men are still missing, with no information on their whereabouts.
There were also thanks for the team who perform this unsavoury but vital work. Since January this year the ICRC has cleaned over 1,700 wells in Kosovo. "We can do about 100 a week at the moment", says Glen Hanna. "Our aim is to restore people's pre-war water supply. We hope to expand our teams so we can double the rate at which we sanitize the wells. We want to give people quicker access to safe water."

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Pristina, tel.: ++ 381 63 344 164
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++ 41 22 730 2678

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

- Fact sheets - all dated August 1999 - on the organization's activities in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda.

- Fact sheets - all dated August 1999 - on the work of ICRC regional delegations in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

For any information you may need on Thursday 9 September (holiday) or on the weekend of 11-12 September, please call the press officer on duty Suzanne Berger, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 37.
**EAST TIMOR**

**ICRC RETURNS TO DILI**

Two ICRC delegates returned to Dili on 14 September to assess the situation there in humanitarian terms and meet military authorities to discuss security guarantees that would enable the organization to resume its work in East Timor.

Though the delegates received assurances from the military, security problems in Dili and the surrounding area remain. Indeed, the two were struck by the scenes of destruction and of despair among people still present in the capital, who are in urgent need of help. Like the ICRC office itself, most of the city's houses have been looted and burned down.

While it has not yet been possible to organize a large-scale relief operation, the two delegates were able to carry out a small distribution. They are now looking for suitable storage areas as well as medical facilities capable of providing care. Aircraft will be chartered to deliver both the supplies and the logistical means needed for a more comprehensive return to East Timor. Teams of medical, relief, logistical, water-and-sanitation and administrative staff are preparing to leave for the territory.

Meanwhile, non-food items such as blankets, tarpaulins, cooking sets, jerrycans and sleeping mats are being distributed to displaced people, who have come to the Belu and Atambua districts of West Timor near the border with East Timor, by a 20-member team (including medical staff) from the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross Society. The security situation in the border zone has been very poor - two ICRC employees from East Timor have been abducted - and threats have prevented the organization from having more than limited access to the camps in the area. According to official figures, some 200,000 people have so far crossed from East into West Timor. Over 70,000 East Timorese have sought refuge in several camps in Belu district and another 24,000 in Kupang district. More displaced people are continuing to arrive and the ICRC will step up its activities to cope with the increasing needs.

Further information: Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel.: ++6221 720 72 52
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2224
BALKAN CRISIS

KOSOVO: DISTRIBUTION OF BLOOD TRANSFUSION SUPPLIES

The ICRC has begun to provide blood bags, antiserum for determining blood groups and various tests for blood-borne diseases under a project worth DM 444,000 that is part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement’s general medical programme in Kosovo. Six hospitals in the province are to receive the supplies from the main blood centre in Pristina.

"Nearly all operations require blood transfusions, especially those involving wounded patients", said Dr Folke Lampen, ICRC medical coordinator in the provincial capital. "It is absolutely essential that the blood be collected and stored safely and that it be properly screened."

However, Dr Lampen warned, the major need is for donors: "The supplies will be of great help, but first of all we must build up our blood bank. At present, patients’ relatives are the only donors."

"Together with our colleagues from the local Red Cross and the rest of the Movement, we are looking at ways of setting up a system to ensure that all patients who need blood transfusions receive them."

Further information: Daloni Carlisle, ICRC Pristina, tel.: ++381 63 344 164
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2678

SERBIA: ICRC HELPS REPAIR DAMAGED BUILDINGS

With the harsh Balkan winter approaching, the ICRC is working quickly to ensure that health facilities and community centres have glass to repair windows shattered during the NATO air strikes.

In northern Serbia, the ICRC has begun distributing window panes to two major hospitals and six centres housing refugees and displaced people. In addition, one hospital in Sremska Kamenica has been provided with an independent source of water as its own supply was cut off when the Novi Sad water main was destroyed.

Distributions have also begun in the south, where a survey showed that nine major and several smaller public buildings were in need of repair. Around half of these are medical facilities and the rest are centres where people who fled Kosovo and refugees from the conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have found shelter. All the work is being carried out by local contractors.

"It’s not just a matter of replacing standard window panes", explained Zoran Popovic, who is in charge of the programme. "Some facilities, such as the Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Vrsac, no longer have any heating, so we had to install special insulating glass. This is an essential part of preparing for winter."

Further information: Gordana Milenkovic, ICRC Belgrade, tel.: ++381 11 450 990
Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 2678
INDIA
POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN HUMAN RIGHTS, HUMANITARIAN LAW AND REFUGEE LAW

The Indian Society of International Law (ISIL), a research-oriented national institution for the promotion of public international law, is offering a one-year postgraduate diploma course in human rights, international humanitarian law and refugee law. The course was launched on 6 September with financial and technical backing from the National Human Rights Commission, the ICRC and UNHCR.

"This is the first course of its kind in all of South Asia which combines in a single package the three distinct legal regimes intended to protect the individual and promote respect for human dignity", said Dr D. S. Mohil, ISIL Director.

The classes on humanitarian law will be taught jointly by ICRC staff based in New Delhi and by eminent professors and practitioners. The course is designed to explore in detail topical issues such as the changing status of combatants in modern conflicts, the legal and humanitarian implications of anti-personnel mines, the impact of the International Criminal Court, the situation of vulnerable groups in armed conflicts and the development of minimum humanitarian standards.

This issue-based approach is supplemented by an introduction to humanitarian law and an overview of the protection afforded conflict victims under the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. The course will also emphasize developments in humanitarian law in South Asia.

Further information, Savita Varde-Naqvi, ICRC New Delhi, tel.: ++9111 469 83 85
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 22 24

The Geneva Conventions, 50 Years On, a 10-minute television programme co-produced by the ICRC and broadcast worldwide by APTN Roving Report, will be available on video at the end of September in English, French and Spanish. The video features the 50th anniversary events held in Geneva on 12 August 1999 and illustrates some of the basic rules of the Geneva Conventions. The ICRC holds the copyright. Delegations, National Societies and broadcasters should contact the Public Information Centre (DC/COM/CIP) to order either VHS or BetaSP copies.

During the weekend of 18 - 19 September 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Françoise Derron, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
EAST TIMOR

230 RED CROSS MESSAGES GATHERED IN ONE DAY

On 27 September the ICRC in Dili gathered 230 messages from people anxious for news of their relatives. Having learned by word of mouth that the ICRC's tracing agency had opened an office in Dili, people from the city and its outskirts arrived in small groups to find out how the ICRC "postal service" worked. Thousands were separated from their relatives during the recent events in East Timor and have no means of contacting them.

The messages will be sent to Red Cross offices in the region and those to whom they are addressed will be able to answer them. The ICRC will then deliver their replies. A satellite phone has also been installed in the ICRC offices in Dili so that those who have a number to reach can try and get in touch with their relatives more quickly.

Further information: Christopher Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 2061

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NEWLY DISPLACED

Following the latest Russian air strikes in Chechnya and the resulting displacement of an officially estimated total of 30,000 to 50,000 people seeking refuge in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia, the ICRC is stepping up its current assistance programmes in order to respond to new humanitarian needs.

According to an initial assessment carried out by the local Red Cross in Nazran (Ingushetia), many of these people have found shelter among the local population but they are in urgent need of bread, blankets, stoves and other essential items. Consequently, additional relief convoys are being organized in Nalchik (Kabardino-Balkaria).

Serious security constraints during the past two and a half years have led the ICRC to withdraw its expatriate staff from the republics of Chechnya, Daghestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Stavropol Krai, where assistance programmes continue to be implemented from the ICRC sub-delegation in Nalchik thanks to the local Red Cross network and 115 ICRC local employees stationed throughout the eastern part of the Northern Caucasus.

Since hostilities broke out in Daghestan and on its border with Chechnya in August, the local Red Cross and ICRC local staff have distributed food and other assistance to nearly all the estimated 30,000 people who have been displaced. Furthermore, medical facilities treating the war-wounded have been provided with emergency equipment and medicines both in Daghestan and Chechnya.

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

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
SUDAN

SEED AND TOOL DISTRIBUTION SHOWS PROMISING RESULTS

Over 300,000 Sudanese received seed and tools from the ICRC last March. With the rainy season already well advanced, delegates went back to some of the distribution points to assess the programme’s impact on people’s ability to grow their own food.

"If the rains don't stop early this year, I'll have enough to survive," said Athiok Kwik as she cut a stalk of the sorghum she had planted. Athiok and her daughter had left their little village called Malual Muok, in Bahr al-Ghazal province, during the famine last year and had gone to the town of Tonj, where an ICRC feeding centre provided them with assistance. Later, when the ICRC seed and tools were distributed, she was given her share by the community leaders.

Interviews with beneficiaries in various areas showed an improvement in the situation of the most vulnerable. The groundnut and okra seed had been widely planted and these crops had even been replanted for a second harvest. However, the sorghum seed had been used more sparingly since the Sudanese normally rely on a broad range of local varieties which they mix to minimize the risk of crop failure.

After monitoring the programme for one month, ICRC agronomist Raphy Favre concluded: "The more vulnerable people were, the more willing they were to plant ICRC seed. However, targeting the most needy is not an easy task in these communities, which tend to share relief items equally among clans, lineages and families.

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

During the weekend of 2 - 3 October 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty
Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
SUDAN / DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC REUNITES 11 CHILDREN WITH THEIR FAMILIES

Few among the many forgotten Congolese refugees living in the southern Sudanese town of Juba can imagine being able to return home one day. But for 11 children from two families that were split apart by the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this became a reality last week. Eight brothers and sisters whose parents died a year ago were reunited with their uncle and three others with their father in Kisangani on 28 September.

It all began with an exchange of Red Cross messages earlier this year and visits to the children in Juba by UNHCR and ICRC tracing staff. The youngsters were then transferred to Khartoum, where they were met by a UNHCR team, and onwards to Nairobi, where they boarded an ICRC plane that brought them back to their country. After this long journey of 5,000 km, they can now begin a new life.

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

IRAN / IRAQ

275 PRISONERS FREED

On 30 September, 275 Iraqi prisoners of war held in Iran were repatriated under the auspices of the ICRC. The operation, which took place at the Mundharieh/Khosravi checkpoint on the border between the two countries, was supervised by ICRC delegates who registered and checked the identities of the prisoners and held private interviews with each of them to ensure that they were going home of their own free will.

This event marks yet another step towards a final resolution of the humanitarian issues arising from the Iran/Iraq war, which ended in 1988. The fourth release operation carried out since April 1998, it brings to 6,675 the number of prisoners freed by both sides since that date.

Since the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq conflict in 1980, the ICRC has helped repatriate more than 95,000 prisoners of war held by both sides.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel.: ++41 22 730 2307
EAST TIMOR
ASSESSING THE NEEDS

ICRC relief and medical staff have begun fanning out from Dili to assess the needs facing East Timorese as they return to their devastated towns and villages.

Improved security conditions and the arrival this week of an ICRC helicopter have enabled delegates to focus on the situation outside Dili. Thus the organization has set up an office in the town of Baucau. A relief delegate and a medical delegate have travelled to nearby Lospalos, where people are now trickling in from the mountains and back to their homes. They have found a wrecked city with a still fearful population in particular need of food and hygiene supplies. Medical delegate Vivike Heelsberg described the scene. "It was shocking when we arrived to see the smouldering ruins – you could still smell the smoke in the air. There is no great emergency now but people are in need of everything. Surprisingly, one of the biggest requests is for soap."

A second team of delegates flew from Dili to Ainaro in the south, where they encountered a similar scene: virtually nothing had been left standing. A handful of people were in the streets and there were reports that many more were still hiding in the mountains. The town's hospital had been ransacked, then burnt to the ground. A lone doctor, who was attempting to cope with the needs of the entire community, told delegates that the only reason he had not joined his family in Baucau was that he no longer had a pair of shoes.

The delegates have delivered basic medical supplies to Ainaro and are planning a follow-up operation to provide townspeople with further relief and possibly bring serious medical cases to the ICRC hospital in Dili.

Lotte Lauper, who is supervising ICRC relief operations in the former Portuguese territory, said that the organization was doing its utmost to encourage people to return to their homes. "We want to see them settle back into their communities. That is the only way we can really help them during the uncertain times that lie ahead."

In Dili itself and the surrounding district of Liquisa, the ICRC is continuing its distribution of food and other relief.

Further information, Amanda Williamson, ICRC Dili, tel. ++ 872 761 843 955

RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS
HELP FOR THE DISPLACED AND OTHER VICTIMS

As renewed hostilities in the Chechen republic enter their third week, tens of thousands of people fleeing the fighting have continued to pour into neighbouring Ingushetia, bringing the number of displaced in that tiny republic to well over 100,000 according to official sources.
While many people found refuge with local families in the early days of the crisis, later arrivals have been living in tents in small camps along the border with Chechnya. Some have no shelter at all.

Last week, a team of five ICRC expatriate staff went to Nalchik, in Kabardino-Balkaria, to step up existing relief programmes in areas of the northern Caucasus affected by the latest developments. This work is being carried out jointly by local Red Cross branches and ICRC staff. Precarious security conditions in the area have made the task more difficult for humanitarian workers, who face the challenge of responding to the victims' needs while minimizing the risks to themselves.

By the end of last week, non-food distributions by the Ingush Red Cross branch and local ICRC staff had reached nearly 4,000 newly displaced people in Ingushetia. With support from the ICRC, the branch also started producing several thousand loaves of bread a day for the most vulnerable among the displaced. Indeed, all ICRC and local Red Cross relief is aimed primarily at those living in the open.

In Chechnya itself, meanwhile, the ICRC has built up its medical stocks in Grozny to supply hospitals in the republic treating the wounded.

In Daghestan, finally, additional food stocks have been brought in for the nearly 10,000 recently displaced Chechens as well as for others who have been there since August.

In addition to these emergency programmes, the ICRC is continuing to support local Red Cross branches engaged in social assistance programmes benefiting some 40,000 persons in 10 republics and other areas of the northern Caucasus.

The ICRC is centralizing its relief stocks for the region in Nalchik. At the moment these consist of food parcels, kitchen sets, jerrycans, candles and plastic sheeting for 75,000 people. In addition, 40 tonnes of high-protein biscuits and other emergency supplies are expected to be delivered shortly.

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

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/04 on ICRC activities in Indonesia/East Timor, dated 11.10.99

During the weekend of 16 - 17 October 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

RED CROSS MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN CHECHNYA

Continuing hostilities in Chechnya have caused a growing number of people to seek shelter outside the republic and Grozny has now been deserted by about one third of its population. Among those who remain behind, many are simply too old, sick or disabled to flee.

The local Red Cross home-visiting nurses programme, which has been assisting more than 700 vulnerable people in Chechnya for nearly three years, has thus become more crucial than ever. Working jointly with local Red Cross volunteers, local ICRC staff are continuing to run this programme and a programme that has been regularly providing bread for about 8,000 people in the capital.

Red Cross staff in Chechnya are also monitoring the needs of medical facilities, which are treating a growing number of war-wounded. Well over a hundred patients have recently been registered in the main hospitals, which rely on ICRC emergency medical equipment and medicines. Last week, the ICRC sent enough supplies to Grozny to care for about 1,000 war-wounded.

Since Grozny has been without electricity for the past 10 days, ICRC-supported pumping station No 1, which had been providing 20,000 inhabitants with clean water until the latest violence, has become the sole source of drinking water in many parts of the city and even in nearby villages, where it is carried in by trucks.

Further information: Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, tel.: ++ 70 95 926 54 26

EAST TIMOR

WATER RUNNING AGAIN FOR RETURNEES IN DILI

The water network, which was badly damaged when Dili was destroyed, is slowly being repaired thanks to the materials and support which the ICRC is providing as part of a multi-agency effort to ensure that the population has access to water.

Yesterday the water began flowing again at the rate of around 40 litres per second for the returnees living in Becora, a district of Dili. As a result, people can once again use the communal fountains, which ran dry when the electricity needed to generate the pumps was cut.

These repairs are part of a major water and sanitation programme jointly launched by the ICRC and other agencies such as Oxfam. The aim is to rehabilitate bore-holes, pumps and water treatment plants in Dili, many of which have been poorly maintained, and to provide the local water authority with the tools and spare parts needed to repair leaks. Strong emphasis has been placed on enabling the water authority to take over from the agencies in the future.
According to Patrick Kilchenmann, ICRC water and sanitation engineer: "Most of the senior staff have left and only a small number of technicians remain. They are a highly motivated team, but they need supervision and don't have the means to do the job. It was impressive to see how they managed with what little they had to stop up the countless leaks that occurred when the city was destroyed. We are very careful to include them in all our decisions since they will eventually be in charge."

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Dili, tel. ++ 872 761 843 955

**EAST TIMOR**

**RADIOLINK SERVICE FOR THE DISPLACED**

Radiolink, a service to help people who were separated from their families during the crisis in East Timor, was launched on 19 October by BBC World Service, the ICRC and the British Red Cross.

According to recent estimates, up to 300,000 East Timorese are currently displaced in West Timor and other parts of Indonesia. Many of them have lost contact with their families and friends. Giving people news of their loved ones and reuniting families is a vital part of Red Cross work in such situations.

Several thousand Red Cross message forms have been filled in by displaced persons both in East Timor and in West Timor. These messages are being delivered jointly by the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross Society. In addition, the ICRC in East Timor has registered hundreds of names for radio broadcast. The partnership with BBC World Service should help reassure all those who are desperately waiting for news.

Chris Greene, World Service's Managing Editor for South-East Asia, said: "In societies that have been ripped apart by violence, radio can play an important role in helping people get back in touch with their families."

As part of the Radiolink service, a 15-minute programme in Indonesian will be broadcast on BBC World Service every weekday at 10.40 GMT on two frequencies, 7160 KHz and 9680 KHz. The programme, which will be heard throughout the archipelago, will give details about displaced East Timorese who have asked the Red Cross to help them trace their relatives. There will also be a special web page.

The Radiolink service for displaced East Timorese is initially planned to run for three months. A similar service was set up earlier this year for refugees from Kosovo.

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

**ZIMBABWE**

**ICRC REPATRIATES THREE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES**

On 21 October, for medical reasons, the ICRC repatriated from Kigali to Harare three members of the Zimbabwean armed forces detained in Rwanda in connection with the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The decision to release these prisoners of war was taken by the Rwandan authorities in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions. During their captivity in Rwanda, the prisoners had been registered and regularly visited by the ICRC.
The ICRC has carried out two other repatriations this year, both for medical reasons. On 22 April it repatriated a member of the Rwandan armed forces from Zimbabwe to Rwanda and on 14 July a member of the Zimbabwean armed forces from Rwanda to Zimbabwe.

The ICRC will continue to offer its services to all the parties to the conflict so as to promote the application of international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1997 Additional Protocols.

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

SRI LANKA

MORTAL REMAINS RETURNED

On Saturday 16 October, the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary in the transfer of the mortal remains of 32 combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed in the latest round of fighting between the rebels and Sri Lankan government forces. The bodies were handed over to the ICRC by the Sri Lankan Army at Mankulam, from where they were taken north across the lines dividing the warring parties and handed over to the LTTE. Three more such transfers took place on Sunday.

As it does in other countries, the ICRC in Sri Lanka uses its neutral status to return the mortal remains of combatants and civilians when asked to do so by the parties concerned. In Sri Lanka this year it has so far transferred the remains of 38 Army personnel and 83 members of the LTTE.

The ICRC has been present since 1989 in Sri Lanka, where it currently has 50 expatriates and 300 local staff based at its delegation in Colombo and in its 11 offices in the north and east of the country.

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

During the weekend of 23 - 24 October 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC REOPENS OFFICE IN BUNIA

On 13 October the ICRC reopened its office in Bunia, in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The office, which is situated in the district of Ituri, near the Ugandan border, had been closed since August 1998. The ICRC returned to the area following the recent outbreak of interethnic violence between the Hema and the Lendu.

According to local sources, the fighting has claimed thousands of lives and many villages have been destroyed since July. The ICRC and MSF-Holland estimate that 100,000 to 150,000 people have fled their homes, and several thousand have found refuge in Bunia. The ICRC, which already distributed food and supplies to 5,750 people earlier this month, plans to assist 25,000 people in the coming weeks.

Two delegates are currently on the spot to assess the needs of the displaced and start up protection activities. They have thus visited people detained in connection with the conflict. Earlier this week an ICRC team travelled to Rethy, where other displaced people were reportedly sheltering in camps. New distributions for 3,500 people are underway.

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

EAST TIMOR

FIRST HELICOPTER-ASSISTED RELIEF DISTRIBUTION

The ICRC has begun its emergency relief distributions to isolated villages in the mountains of East Timor. On 26 October an ICRC-chartered helicopter flew 12.5 tonnes of food and other items from the town of Aileu to the village of Hato Builico, which lies at an altitude of 2,000 metres in the central district of Ainaro. The operation required 15 helicopter rotations at a pace of three rotations per hour. The supplies were distributed to some 1,000 persons (200 families) in Hato Builico, which has a total of 3,286 inhabitants.

Although initial nutritional assessments have not revealed any cases of starvation, there is an urgent need for food in East Timor, where the chronic shortages that occur during the rainy season have been exacerbated by the recent violence. The food items being distributed are rice, pulses, oil, sugar, salt and high-protein biscuits. This is being supplemented with essential supplies such as cooking pots, jerrycans, soap, plastic basins, sarongs, candles, tarpaulins and blankets.
In Hato Builico, the schoolteacher was recently appointed head of the village. He said that the former rulers of East Timor only allowed the villagers to cultivate enough land to feed themselves, for fear that any excess food would go to the guerillas hiding in the mountains. Since the village has no reserves, it has been hard hit by the recent violence and people have been eating up their seed supplies. The ICRC will return to the village as soon as its shipment of seed and tools has arrived in Dili harbour.

The villages chosen for this helicopter-assisted relief operation are particularly difficult to reach since mountain roads have either collapsed or are too narrow for ICRC trucks. Even if the roads were wider, they would not be able to withstand the load and would require maintenance and repairs which, in the absence of civilian authorities, cannot be provided at this time in East Timor. "The only other solution would have been by horseback, but that would have taken months", said Gian Luca Thorimbert, ICRC relief delegate, as he watched the supplies being flown in under the helicopter in large nets.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Dili, tel. ++62 390 321 448; satellite tel. ++872 76 184 42 95 / ++872 76 184 39 55

EAST TIMOR

ICRC COLLECTS 10,000 MESSAGES FROM SEPARATED RELATIVES

"I am in good health", read the printed cards, on which senders write down their own names and list any family members who are with them. The message is brief and simple, but for people who lost touch with their relatives during the events that took place in East Timor in early September, these cards are of the utmost importance.

As of late October, over 10,000 cards have been collected from people trying to contact their relatives. "As word spreads on both sides of the island, more and more people are making use of them", said Francisco Otero, who coordinates ICRC tracing activities in Indonesia. "Last week alone we collected over 2,500 cards, both from East Timor and from the western half of the island," he adds.

The cards are collected and distributed by the ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross. Lists of people to whom cards have been sent are posted at ICRC and Red Cross offices, in camps for displaced persons and in public places. Using the return address on the cards, the recipients can easily send a reply and keep in contact.

These cards are not the only means used by the ICRC to help people get back in touch with their relatives. A satellite telephone is available in the ICRC office in Dili and over 850 calls have been made by East Timor residents to family members on other islands in Indonesia or overseas, in countries such as Portugal and Australia.

Once contact has been restored, the ICRC may be asked to reunite families living on different sides of the East Timor border. Close to 150 people have benefited from this service since early September, with the ICRC carrying relatives from West Timor to East Timor or in the opposite direction, according to the family's wishes.
A particularly tragic aspect of such situations is the plight of young children who suddenly find themselves alone, not knowing what has become of their families. The ICRC is coordinating the registration of all unaccompanied children in Timor. A total of 96 children have been registered to date.

"So far we have managed to reunite five children with their families," said Francisco Otero. "But half the registrations and all the reunions took place last week, so we expect these numbers to increase as our resources develop and our service becomes more widely known to the people concerned."

Further information: Bernard Barrett or Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 62 21 720 72 52

COLOMBIA
WOUNDED POLICEMEN HANDED OVER TO ICRC

On Saturday 23 October the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the principal guerrilla group in the country, handed over two policemen wounded in an armed incident to ICRC delegates and Colombian Red Cross volunteers. The two men, who had been given first aid by their captors, were evacuated to medical facilities after their condition had been assessed by the Red Cross team. The handover took place in Santander de Quilichao, in the southern department of Cauca.

This operation was an important sign of respect for international humanitarian law in a country like Colombia, where organizations such as the ICRC strive on a daily basis to ensure that those bearing weapons show greater compliance with the humanitarian rules.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC, Geneva, tel.: ++4122 730 22 24

During the weekend of 30 - 31 October 1999, for all information please call the spokesman on duty Urs Boegli, on (mobile) 41 79 203 94 05
INDONESIA

ICRC VISITS 18 EAST TIMORESE PRISONERS

On 28 October an ICRC team visited 18 East Timorese prisoners held in Cipinang prison in Jakarta. The prisoners, who had recently been transferred from Kedung Pane prison in Semarang, Central Java, are among the 80 who are being considered for release by President Abdurrahman Wahid as his first move to promote national reconciliation. Clemency is to be granted once the House of Representatives has given its approval.

"If they wish to go back to East Timor, the ICRC could facilitate their return," said ICRC Deputy Head of Delegation Philippe Guinand, who led the team.

The visit was carried out in accordance with standard ICRC procedures, including private interviews with prisoners and a tour of the entire prison premises.

All 18 prisoners but one had been without news of their families since violence erupted in East Timor in early September. To help them get back in touch with their relatives, ICRC delegates asked them to fill in cards with the words "I am in good health" printed on them. The cards will soon be sent to their addressees.

Besides these prisoners, the ICRC has visited all people detained by the INTERFET forces in East Timor for more than 96 hours. So far 70 people have received at least one such visit. The ICRC also visited an Indonesian officer detained by the Falintil movement. The officer was subsequently released and handed over to the Indonesian military.

Further information: Bernard Barrett or Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 62 21 720 72 52

During the weekend of
6 - 7 November 1999, for all information please call the
press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 22 779 33 22
or
++ 41 79 217 32 31
EAST TIMOR

DILI GENERAL HOSPITAL - MORE THAN FREE MEDICAL CARE

The ICRC-supported General Hospital in Dili receives up to 150 patients every day. Besides providing free emergency health care for the city’s population, it serves as a referral hospital for all of East Timor. It also provides medical assistance for those returning to East Timor from their places of refuge, mainly West Timor.

Long after dark the ferries of the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees docked at Dili harbour continue to let off hundreds of returnees from the camps in West Timor. And every night up to 15 patients are admitted to the General Hospital’s emergency room.

Medical care is extremely difficult to obtain in the camps, and after a long and harrowing journey by road and by sea the returnees show signs of exhaustion. Many come with old wounds and chronic illnesses. Each patient is immediately seen by a doctor, given medical care and kept under observation until the morning.

Those who come seeking medical attention are generally accompanied by similarly exhausted family members. As is the custom here, once the patient is admitted the relatives settle down for the night in the hospital compound, where they meet people who remained in East Timor during the recent turmoil or who returned earlier. They swap stories about their struggle to survive in the forests and their search for safety in West Timor. They also obtain information concerning those who arrived in Dili before them and have left for their home towns.

Some returnees bear precious news of relatives and friends who are still in the camps for the displaced in West Timor. At the ICRC tracing office, which is situated in the hospital compound, such news helps people determine where their loved ones are and thus speeds up the delivery of Red Cross messages.

Over 14,000 messages have been collected so far, mainly in East and West Timor, and are being delivered to people separated by the events which followed East Timor’s vote for independence. The local network for the collection and distribution of Red Cross messages has also been reactivated in the towns of Baucau, Liquica, Los Palos, Viqueque, Ainaro and Same (East Timor) and in Kupang and Atambua (West Timor).

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Dili, tel. ++62 390 321 448;
satellite tel. ++872 76 184 42 95 / ++872 76 184 39 55
RUSSIAN FEDERATION/NORTHERN CAUCASUS

RED CROSS STEPS UP RELIEF FOR DISPLACED IN INGUSHETIA

The ICRC and the Russian Red Cross, which have helped tens of thousands of people since the latest outbreak of hostilities in the northern Caucasus, will step up their activities so as to provide assistance for 100,000 displaced people a month in Ingushetia. This has already begun with the dispatch of 3,000 tonnes of aid to the region.

According to official figures, more than 180,000 people have been displaced as a result of renewed violence in the region. In Ingushetia, where most of them have fled, and where living conditions have deteriorated in the last few days as temperatures have fallen below zero, the ICRC and the Russian Red Cross have distributed relief items such as family food parcels, bread (5,000 loaves daily), hygiene kits, stoves, kitchen sets, plastic sheeting and jerry cans to more than 30,000 people in 40 different locations. Last week alone, seven ICRC trucks brought aid to 10,000 people in Nazran. A water and sanitation programme has also started with the installation of bladder tanks in places where the displaced are gathered and where poor sanitation conditions prevail.

As humanitarian needs continue to grow in Chechnya, the ICRC is seeking to determine the best way to carry out its activities there. Its priority is to obtain safe and unhindered access to all those in need throughout Chechen territory. Another urgent need is to ensure that medical assistance reaches hospitals so that they can continue to function. Owing to the precarious security conditions and to the theft of nearly all the equipment in the ICRC office in Grozny, ICRC staff have been temporarily relocated to Ingushetia.

On 1 November, on behalf of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC launched an appeal for more than 18 million Swiss francs to increase its activities in the region. A plan of action drawn up by the Russian Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC provides for the distribution of aid to some 150,000 victims of the conflict in the region over the coming five months.

Further information: Suzanne Berger, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++ 4122 730 23 07;
Victoria Catliff, ICRC Moscow, tel. ++ 7095 926 54 26.

SUDAN

ICRC DISTRIBUTES FISHING EQUIPMENT AND MOSQUITO NETS IN WESTERN UPPER NILE

During the first week of November an ICRC team conducted a four-day mission to Bow, 40 kilometres south of Bentiu in western Upper Nile. Having assessed the economic security situation, it distributed fishing equipment and mosquito nets to 6,000 households belonging to 13 different Nuer sub-clans scattered throughout the area.

Last April, before the start of the rainy season, the ICRC had already distributed seed and tools in various parts of western Upper Nile. In May fighting resumed between the military factions present in the region, and the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations were denied access to the area between Bentiu and Leer.

The ICRC team discovered that despite the intense fighting of the past months the local inhabitants had been able to stay in their villages and cultivate their fields. Moreover, thanks to this year’s abundant rainfall the coming harvest is expected to be a good one and
economic security has generally improved since April. This may not reflect the situation in the entire Upper Nile region.

As is their custom, with the onset of the dry season the population of the areas visited will move to the nearby swamps with their cattle and remain there for four to five months. Besides milk, game and whatever they can find growing wild, fish is the main source of food for these people during the dry season, and fishing hooks and twine were what they needed most to ensure an adequate diet. Since mosquitoes are a serious health hazard near the swamps, netting was distributed as well.

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

ARGENTINA

SEMINAR ON HUMANITARIAN LAW
FOR HIGH-LEVEL MILITARY PERSONNEL

On 2 and 3 November the ICRC regional delegation and the Argentine Joint Chiefs of Staff organized a seminar in Buenos Aires on the subject "Conduct of military operations and international protection of the individual". The seminar, held under the watchword "Even wars have limits", was attended by about 200 people, comprising senior officers of the three branches of the armed forces and military attachés from several countries. During the two days of discussions the participants were able to update their knowledge of the international responsibilities involved in the command of military operations.

Talks were given by the ICRC and by Argentine university professors and military experts on topics such as the convergence of the systems of protection afforded by human rights law and international humanitarian law, the application of humanitarian law in internal conflicts, the responsibility of commanders in military operations, the repression of grave breaches, the latest developments in the rules governing the conduct of hostilities, and the role of the ICRC in the implementation of this body of law.

At the closing session, which was chaired by the Minister of Defence, addresses were given by the ICRC regional delegate, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the official responsible for national defence. The participation of these senior military authorities demonstrates the importance accorded by the Argentine armed forces to instruction in international humanitarian law, which over the years has become an integral part of military training and has been placed on a professional footing.

Further information: Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224
Steven Andersen, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++5411 4312 1713

During the weekend of 13 - 14 November 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile) 41 79 202 36 80
Unfortunately, the text in the image is not clear enough to be transcribed into a natural text representation.
SIERRA LEONE

SURGICAL TEAM AT WORK IN KENEMA

Since it returned to Kenema in eastern Sierra Leone last July the ICRC has been helping the government hospital there to meet medical needs in the area. A team consisting of a surgeon, an anaesthetist and two specialized nurses are treating mainly people maimed during the fighting in the country in 1998. About 130 operations involving reconstructive and/or corrective surgery have been performed so far, and an average of 15 surgical operations are now taking place every week.

Local surgeons will be receiving training, as needed, in war surgery techniques. Major supplies of medicines and various types of medical equipment have been delivered to the hospital, and the plan is to build a wing with a 40-bed capacity, an operating theatre, and outpatient consultation and physiotherapy facilities.

Medical assistance to the country's hospitals and health centres is a significant component of the ICRC's activities in Sierra Leone. The ICRC plays a key role in the primary health care system, providing support for four health centres in some of the most poverty-stricken sections of Freetown. A delegate is supervising assistance to the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital in the capital, Sierra Leone having one of the highest child mortality rates in the world.

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

WEST TIMOR

RED CROSS IMPROVES CAMP CONDITIONS

The ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross Society are operating 12 health-care posts in the camps for displaced people in the Atambua area near the border with East Timor. The posts, staffed by Indonesian Red Cross nurses, are open around the clock and each treats some 100 patients a day.

Four doctors work in shifts to cover the 12 posts. Dr Ilham Chaidin of the Indonesian Red Cross says that the most prevalent diseases are respiratory infections, malaria and bloody diarrhoea. He adds that many of those treated for diarrhoea are under five years of age. The posts will therefore be augmented by rehydration clinics in the coming days. These clinics will provide clean drinking water and oral rehydration solution, and their staff will teach preventive hygiene methods and sound community-health practices. They will also travel throughout the camps encouraging people to adopt practices that limit the spread of disease.
"The local health facilities were completely overwhelmed by the influx of displaced people", says Mr Iyang Sukandar, Under-Secretary-General of the Indonesian Red Cross, who has been working in Atambua since early September. "We are convinced that the health-care posts have helped keep down the level of disease."

Dr Jens Amlie, ICRC medical coordinator for Indonesia, confirms that refugee camps can be very unhealthy places to live. "We know from our experience elsewhere in the world that the conditions in such camps can lead to a high incidence of potentially fatal diseases", he says. "Overcrowding prompts the spread of upper respiratory infections such as pneumonia; stagnant water and makeshift shelters increase the chances of malaria; and improper sanitation and insufficient drinking water causes a high incidence of diarrhoea. To make matters worse, the meagre diet and the stress of being forced from their homes and having to live in overcrowded camps have the effect of weakening people's immune systems and making them more disease-prone." Dr Amlie notes that medical care is a mere palliative and that preventive measures are needed to reduce the level of illness. The ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross are therefore building additional latrines in the camps and providing chlorine tablets to purify water for drinking. The Red Cross will also be trucking additional water into the camps and is looking into the possibility of drilling boreholes to increase the supply.

Dr Amlie emphasizes that physical and psychological well-being are closely related. The stress being endured by many of the people in the camps is reaching critical levels. "They have been through a lot," he says. "And their future remains uncertain. However, the mere presence of medical services is comforting to the population of the camps and that alone helps reduce the level of stress."

Further information: Bernard Barrett or Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 62 21 720 72 52

WEST TIMOR
SANITATION BOOSTS HEALTH IN CAMPS

"The sanitation here is not great," says Dr Ilham Chaidin as he stands outside the tent serving as the Red Cross health-care post in the Haliulun camp for displaced people near Atambua. The camp houses over 1,000 people, their homes constructed of leaves and bamboo for the walls, while the roofs consist of orange or blue plastic sheeting. "But there is little point", Dr Chaidin goes on, "in lecturing people about washing their hands and keeping their children clean when in any case there is not enough water to go around."

Here and there behind the makeshift shelters are small cubicles: three walls of plastic sheeting, cardboard or leaves. These are the latrines dug by the camp residents. Inside there is usually no more than a hole in the ground, one and two metres deep. Up to 10 families use a single latrine.

Not far from Dr Chaidin's tent is a large blue portable tank: the camp's water supply. It can hold 4,000 litres, but now the lid is propped against the wall of a nearby house, with a bucket abandoned on the ground nearby. Both items make clear that there will be no water until the next daily visit by the tanker truck. ICRC engineers calculate the camp's daily water requirement at about 24,000 litres.
After food and shelter, drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities are the most important problems," says Mr Iyang Sukandar of the Indonesian Red Cross, adding that there are some 60 camps in the area, many of them in worse condition than Haliulun.

Sanitation facilities must be properly constructed to prevent the spread of disease," explains Muziel Alzwar, the engineer in charge of the project. "In some of the camps the latrines are too close to wells; in most cases the latrines are not deep enough." At Haliulun camp the Red Cross recruited volunteers from among the younger men to dig the latrines. "It's a boost for their self-esteem to be able to do something like this, rather than just sit around the camp all day."

Further information: Bernard Barrett or Sri R. Wahyu Endah, ICRC Jakarta, tel. ++ 62 21 720 72 52

EAST TIMOR

SEED DISTRIBUTED IN TIME FOR PLANTING SEASON

Between 11 and 13 November, the ICRC distributed 44 tonnes of seed to 11,000 families in the easternmost district of Lautem. The supplies were delivered in 20-kg parcels to groups of five families, from the main town of Los Palos to the most remote villages in the area. The distribution was carried out in time for the sowing season and should ensure the production of sufficient food and seed for the East Timorese until the next planting season.

In addition, ICRC delegates are supplying maize grain for immediate consumption. The purpose of "seed protection" distributions is to feed the farmers and thus ensure that the seeds are used for planting and not eaten; so to clearly differentiate the food grain from the seed for planting, the latter has been treated with natural purple colouring.

"The seed distribution is designed to ensure food security as quickly as possible, using the area's agricultural production potential", said ICRC agronomist Peter Schimann. With the beginning of the rainy season, seed is becoming the most urgent item the population needs to regain self-sufficiency. "In one of the villages, our distribution coincided with a heavy shower of rain, so the farmers set off to plant the seeds straight away", added ICRC delegate Grégoire Crettaz.

The next step will be to ensure a full production of rice through the distribution of seed before the rice planting season in December and January, which are usually the wettest months. Humanitarian agencies engaged in agronomy have agreed to provide local farmers with bags of milled rice in exchange for surplus rice seed. This is a coordinated effort aimed at re-activating the local economy. The ICRC agronomist has been designated as coordinator by all the agencies concerned.

So far, in East Timor the ICRC has distributed over 100 tonnes of seed in the districts of Lautem, Ainaro, Aileu, Baucau, Bobonaro and Ermera, and around the main city of Dili.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Dili, tel. ++62 390 321 448; satellite tel. ++872 76 184 42 95 / ++872 76 184 39 55

During the weekend of 20 - 21 November 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
MORE THAN 9,000 DISPLACED PERSONS RECEIVE ASSISTANCE

In recent weeks the ICRC and the Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire have provided emergency assistance for more than 9,000 displaced persons gathered in four locations in the region of Bas-Cavally (south-west). In early November a land dispute sparked clashes between communities of indigenous Kroumen, who are in the majority in this region, and ethnic Lobi and Dangaré immigrants. Over 15,000 farmers and agricultural labourers, mainly from Burkina Faso, were forced to flee their homes. Nearly two thirds of the those receiving assistance are children.

The assistance is being distributed on the spot by the Côte d'Ivoire Red Cross. It includes tarpaulins, mats and blankets and is meant to provide shelter, one of the most pressing needs. Five tonnes of food have been delivered as well. The food aid, which is sufficient to last 10 days, will be renewed if necessary.

A large number of displaced persons have sought refuge in Tabou and Grabo, the region's main cities. In the absence of any official arrangements for receiving these people, the local branches of the Côte d'Ivoire Red Cross have established a presence in four locations. From these transit centres, several thousand people have already returned to Burkina Faso. Other displaced persons are currently concentrated in the region's urban areas.

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

JORDAN
HUMANITARIAN LAW WEEK FOR THE ARMED FORCES

From 1 to 8 November, in coordination with the General Headquarters of the Jordanian Armed Forces, the ICRC delegation in Amman held a series of seminars on international humanitarian law for about 400 commanders, officers and NCOs from Jordan and other Arab, Asian and European countries. The seminars, which took place at several military colleges and institutes, included presentations on the responsibilities of commanders in times of armed conflict and on how officers should apply the Code of Conduct for Combatants when preparing for and conducting military operations.
The first seminar, which was held at the Royal Staff and Command College, lasted two
days. Others were subsequently held at the Royal War College, the highest military
institution for staff commanders, and at Martyr King Abdallah Bin Al Hussein Infantry School.
Talks were also given to a group of female recruits of various ranks and to officers from the
General Intelligence Directorate.

The General Headquarters of the Jordanian Armed Forces provided its full support to
ensure the success of these activities, in accordance with its wish to further enhance its
cooperation with the ICRC so as to incorporate the Code of Conduct and the principles of
humanitarian law into training programmes at all levels of the Jordanian Armed Forces.

Further information: Mu’in Kassis, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2547
Hassan Abaza, ICRC Amman, tel. ++96 26 5688 645

During the weekend of
27 - 28 November 1999, for all information please call the press
officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 22 779 33 22
or
++ 41 79 217 32 31
ALGERIA

ICRC COMPLETES FIRST SERIES OF VISITS TO DETAINEES

Following an agreement with the Algerian government, the ICRC carried out a first round of visits between 10 October and 15 November 1999 to all places of detention under the responsibility of the Algiers, Annaba and Oran courts of justice.

The visits were conducted by five ICRC delegates, including a doctor. The delegates were given full access to all premises and all detainees in each location. During this first series of visits in Algeria they visited 11 places of detention holding a total of 6,980 inmates (figure provided by the directors of the facilities visited), and held private interviews with 457 detainees.

The ICRC's findings concerning conditions of detention and the problems raised by the detainees were discussed with the detaining authorities.

The ICRC will submit a report to the Algerian government in due course, and the dates for the next round of visits will be set by mutual agreement.

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

NIGERIA

ICRC AND NIGERIAN RED CROSS AID VICTIMS OF CLASHES

On 25 November violent clashes erupted between Yoruba and Hausa communities in the densely populated Ketu area of Lagos over control of the market and the collection of levies. Many houses, shops and vehicles were burnt, paralysing the economic activity of thousands of traders and residents. According to the city police, between 80 and 90 people were killed and the toll could rise still further.

The Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) was prompt to respond, mobilizing 52 volunteers to help provide first aid. They also evacuated 150 casualties to two hospitals in the area. Cooperation between the NRCS and the police has been very good, and the authorities are offering the victims of the clashes free medical treatment.

The ICRC has provided the NRCS with support by supplying eight boxes of dressing materials for two hospitals treating the wounded plus 20 jerrycans and 500 cups for the distribution of safe water to 700 displaced persons who have taken refuge at the Ketu police station.

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

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
SRI LANKA

CAPTURED SOLDIERS RELEASED UNDER ICRC AUSPICES

On 27 November the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) released seven Sri Lankan army soldiers under the auspices of the ICRC. The soldiers were handed over to the Sri Lankan military authorities by ICRC delegates in Vavuniya the same day.

Because of this month's escalation in clashes between the LTTE and government armed forces in the northern Vanni region of the island and the subsequent closing of land routes, the delegates had to escort the soldiers in an eight-hour journey from the Vanni to the west coast, then south by fishing boat to Mannar, and finally overland to Vavuniya.

The ICRC has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989, and currently has 50 expatriate staff and 300 Sri Lankan employees working out of its delegation in Colombo and eleven other offices in the north and east of the country.

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

PHILIPPINES/MINDANAO

MORE THAN 3,000 DISPLACED FAMILIES RECEIVE AID FROM RED CROSS

Between 17 and 24 November the ICRC, working in cooperation with the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), provided emergency assistance for more than 3,150 families displaced by clashes between the Philippine armed forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the island of Mindanao.

Some 2,430 of the families are currently housed in 12 evacuation centres in Carmen and Kabacan municipalities (North Cotabato province), while more than 720 others are in eight centres in Kadingilan, Kibawe and Damulog municipalities (Bukidnon province).

Sufficient food and hygiene products for about two weeks were distributed directly to the displaced people, while some evacuation centres were provided with mats and water containers for the most needy. The ICRC and the PNRC are closely following developments in the humanitarian situation.

When fighting broke out on 7 November 1999 emergency food distributions were started immediately by the local authorities and the PNRC.

Further information: Jean Wenker, ICRC Manila, tel. ++632 892 8901

EAST TIMOR

SHELTER FROM THE RAIN

Maria's temporary two-room house is 6 metres long, 4 metres wide and 2 metres high, and is made of planks of wood covered with plastic sheeting. It took the three-member ICRC team who built it as a demonstration unit for other villagers receiving the same basic materials six hours, 500 nails, three hammers, a saw, a knife and a tape measure to finish it in accordance with the plans.
The makeshift dwelling has been set up next to the charred remains of a house burned down during the violence that followed East Timor's vote for independence on 30 August 1999. In the Aileu district, high in the hills south of Dili, the rains began two weeks ago and now rain can be expected every day until the end of January.

Maria is a schoolteacher like her husband. They have three children and are also caring for Maria's younger brother. The couple have lost everything: the house they lived in was totally destroyed and all their belongings were burned. However, Maria and her husband are working again in the Aileu primary school, which recently reopened, and the ICRC shelter will protect them from the rain and help them to gradually rebuild their lives.

"We planned to supply the materials for 2,000 such shelters for the most destitute families", explains ICRC constructor Herbert Wiekenberg, the designer of the temporary house. "But requests are pouring in from communities where up to 90% of homes have been destroyed, and we are now looking at double or triple the original figure." As the rain begins to fall on the ruins all around him, Herbert watches the villagers carefully following the plans and starting to build their own shelters.

Further information: Michael Kleiner, ICRC Dili, tel. ++62 390 321 448
Satellite phone: ++872 76 184 42 95/++872 76 184 39 55

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update 99/05 on ICRC activities in Indonesia/East Timor, dated 29.11.99

During the weekend of
4 - 5 December 1999, for all information please call the
press officer on duty Corinne Adam, on (mobile)
41 79 202 36 80
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ICRC STEPS UP MEDICAL AID IN INGUSHETIA

With more and more people fleeing the fighting in Chechnya, hospitals in Ingushetia are having some difficulty in coping with the increasing number of patients, most of whom are referred to the maternity and paediatric wards.

ICRC doctor Gérard Bise returned to Geneva last week from an assessment mission to the northern Caucasus, where he visited a hospital in Ingushetia that had more than twice as many patients as it could normally handle. "The hospital is still functioning despite the crowded conditions and the shortage of medicines", he said. "The wards are full and some of the patients are being placed in the hallways." The hospital had admitted some 40 war-wounded since early October, he added.

The ICRC has been aiding five hospitals in Ingushetia according to needs. In view of the latest developments in Chechnya, these facilities will from now on receive assistance on a monthly basis so as to ensure that they can deal with the most urgent cases.

The ICRC has also begun to deliver drinking water to displaced people living in camps and in isolated areas. Starting this week six tanker trucks will be used for this purpose.

Meanwhile, distributions of food parcels, hygiene kits, candles and blankets have continued in Ingushetia, where the ICRC and the local branch of the Russian Red Cross have so far come to the aid of nearly 90,000 people.

Further information: Amanda Williamson, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 26 78; mobile phone: ++41 79 217 32 16

SRI LANKA

ASSISTANCE FOR 30,000 DISPLACED

During the month of November the ICRC assisted 30,000 Sri Lankan civilians displaced within the northern part of the island as a result of the offensive launched on 1 November by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Altogether, 1,900 families from the region of Welli Oya east of Vavuniya and 5,600 families from Mannar district and Vavuniya and its surrounding area were provided with mats, plastic buckets, water containers and soap. Some of the displaced persons who had not found shelter in public buildings also received plastic sheeting.
Cases of bloody diarrhoea reported among the displaced also prompted ICRC water and sanitation engineers to set up 70 pit latrines, six rubbish pits and four kitchens in three schools around Vavuniya.

All these operations were carried out by the ICRC team based in Vavuniya with the support of delegates from Batticaloa and Colombo.

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

SRI LANKA

LAND ROUTE TO VANNI REOPENS

On 9 December a convoy under ICRC protection entered the Vanni through a newly opened checkpoint. The convoy was carrying 42 discharged patients injured in the Madhu church bombing, one Education Department officer, ICRC staff, four truckloads of medicine, question papers for students, UNHCR plastic sheeting and 300 bags of mail. Two Education Department officers, ICRC staff and 30 bags of mail were then carried out of the region.

As a result of the military operations in the north, the road to and from the Vanni had been closed since 1 November. Acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC had been facilitating the exchange of proposals between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) with a view to finding a solution to this problem. The two parties agreed to reopen the road so that food, medical supplies and other essential items could be delivered to civilians living in the region.

Since the closure of the road, both parties had agreed to open it temporarily on two previous occasions for humanitarian purposes: on 4 December for the evacuation of eight patients from the Vanni and the return of 13 patients discharged from the Vavuniya hospital, and on 6 December for the release of two soldiers detained by the LTTE.

After the road was closed the ICRC used boats to fulfil its humanitarian mandate. During the month of November three operations were carried out in order to transfer mortal remains, return soldiers released by the LTTE, bring in and take out question papers for students living in the Vanni and transport NGO personnel.

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

AFGHANISTAN

ICRC OPENS ORTHOPAEDIC CENTRE IN GULBAHAR

The ICRC has opened an orthopaedic centre in Gulbahar, 80 kilometres north of Kabul, for the treatment of landmine victims and war-wounded in the north-eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Shifting front lines have prevented residents of these provinces from reaching other orthopaedic centres.

The ICRC is currently running five orthopaedic centres in Afghanistan. The main one, in Kabul, produces all the prostheses and orthoses for the other centres, which are situated in Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat and Jalalabad. All five centres provide financial assistance and accommodation for people from remote areas who cannot afford to travel and have no place to stay.
The orthopaedic programme constitutes a main part of the ICRC's activities in Afghanistan, which are aimed at addressing the lasting consequences of the conflict, compensating for weaknesses in the social safety net and reinforcing local community structures. Among other things, the ICRC provides support for medical facilities, assists the most vulnerable, collects and distributes Red Cross messages, visits prisoners, promotes humanitarian law and values and cooperates with the Afghan Red Crescent Society.

Further information: Jon-Hans Coetzer, ICRC Kabul, tel. ++ 873 761 242 260

SYRIA

ART IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

An art exhibition was held from 17 October to 4 November at the ICRC delegation in Damascus as one of various events organized to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. The opening ceremony was held in the presence of the Syrian Minister of Culture, Dr Najah al Attar.

Eighteen Syrian painters and sculptors displayed works especially produced for the occasion to express their views of war and peace, of pain and suffering and of the ICRC's work to help war victims. In a language common to all, the artists reached out to the world to say that even wars have limits.

The ICRC delegations in Syria and Jordan later arranged to have the works displayed at an art gallery in Amman under the patronage of Princess Wijdan Ali – herself an artist – from 30 November to 5 December. Hundreds of people visited the two exhibitions.

Further information, Tamara Rifai, ICRC Damascus, tel. +963 11 3310476
Mu'in Kassis, ICRC Amman, tel. ++962 6 5688645

GAMBIA

IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

On 30 November and 1 December, in cooperation with the Gambia Red Cross Society and the Gambian Department of State for Justice, the ICRC held a seminar - the first of its kind in Gambia - on the implementation of humanitarian law. The seminar, which brought together around 40 people from the main Gambian Departments of State and from civil society, provided the ICRC with an opportunity to meet all the members of the Interministerial Committee on International Humanitarian Law set up on 12 August 1999, the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

The purpose of the seminar was to take stock of the situation regarding implementation of humanitarian law, to assess the measures that had already been adopted and to determine what measures should be taken in the future. The following recommendations were approved by the participants: the adoption of a new Geneva Conventions Act aimed at incorporating these treaties into national legislation; the amendment of current criminal legislation so as to make it easier to bring suspected war criminals to justice (whether the crimes involved are committed during international or internal conflicts); the ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court (only six States, including Senegal and Ghana in Africa, have ratified the treaty so far) and adherence to the United Nations 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its four annexed Protocols.
At the end of the seminar, Isabelle Daoust, coordinator for West Africa of the ICRC Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, reminded those present that the ICRC remained at the disposal of States to provide assistance and advice in all national implementation efforts. For many of the participants, the swiftest and most effective way of preventing, putting an end to and repressing violations of humanitarian law was to strengthen national legislation.

Since the ICRC Advisory Service was set up in 1966 the ICRC has organized more than 50 seminars of this kind in a great many countries, including 16 in Africa.

Further information: Gilbert Deléchat, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++ 221 824 12 93

New on the ICRC Public Server - http://www.icrc.org:
- Update No. 99/02 on ICRC activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, dated 8.12.99
- Update 99/04 on ICRC activities in Sierra Leone, dated 2.12.99

During the weekend of 11 - 12 December 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Chris Bowers, on ++ 41 22 779 33 22
or ++ 41 79 217 32 31
AT THE DAWN OF THE YEAR 2000, ARMED CONFLICT AND OUTBREAKS OF VIOLENCE ARE ON THE INCREASE WORLDWIDE

The current year has been marked by a series of crises which, although mostly foreseeable, were nonetheless surprising on account of their magnitude or timing. One can now speak of the "globalization of warfare".

This observation was made by Jean-Daniel Tauxe, ICRC Director of Operations, during a presentation to the press of the ICRC's budget for its operations in the year 2000. The press conference, which followed a similar session held for representatives of the permanent missions in Geneva, offered the opportunity to give a comprehensive overview of humanitarian problems worldwide. Today's conflict situations exhibit certain specific characteristics, as shown by the examples outlined below:

- Their unpredictable nature: the explosion of violence in the northern Caucasus region, for instance, and the extreme difficulty for the ICRC to bring protection and assistance to the victims. Then there are the very severe consequences of the conflict which sporadically flares up in the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), amid the general indifference of the international community.
- Escalation of crises: the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia/Kosovo has seen a mass exodus of civilians and NATO's first offensive mission. In East Timor too, violence which had been anticipated reached unforeseen levels. The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has also taken a heavy toll among the military.
- Resurgence of fighting: the most striking example is Angola, where armed violence has once again given rise to vast needs among the civilian population.
- Stagnation: as in Somalia, where the warlords are still locked in combat; Iraq, where the population is suffering increasingly severe hardship from the effects of the embargo; Colombia, where the civil war has become almost an accepted fact of life for a population with no memory of peace; and Afghanistan, where 20 years of war have left the international community discouraged.

This list, which is far from exhaustive, means that the ICRC had to be present in some 60 countries in 1999. Of these, 21 were in a state of open conflict, that is, conflict that obliged the organization to deploy the full range of its protection and assistance programmes. As the year draws to an end, there is no reason to believe that this tide of violence will recede in the year 2000.

Given the number and complexity of conflict situations, the ICRC has defined the following strategic priorities to guide its work next year.

- The general deterioration of security conditions for humanitarian personnel as well as for the victims of violence represents a constant challenge for the ICRC, which reaffirms its determination to remain close to the victims whom it is its duty to protect and assist. There is every indication that this challenge will remain a major factor in the conduct of operations next year.
• the ICRC intends to maintain and develop contacts with all the players involved in situations of violence. This entails seeking a dialogue also with players whom part of the international community considers to be paramilitaries, terrorists, or even criminals.
• In the context of operations encompassing military, political and humanitarian action, such as the NATO intervention in Kosovo, the ICRC wants to pursue independent humanitarian activities. It will endeavour increasingly to emphasize its specific mandate based on the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. In operational terms, fulfilling this specific mandate means, among other things, developing activities aimed at protecting displaced persons and detainees and at restoring family links.
• In a world marked by a proliferation of humanitarian players, the ICRC undertakes to pursue a policy of openness towards all of them. Consultation and coordination must be strengthened at all levels; first of all with the members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement but also with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations.

The total amount requested in the ICRC’s appeal for its operations in the year 2000 comes to 837,722,576 Swiss francs.
Of this sum, Sfr 347,918,616 are destined for Africa, the top priorities being Central Africa (Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda), Angola, the Horn of Africa and West Africa (Sierra Leone in particular).
The budget for Europe (mainly the Balkans) amounts to Sfr 209,288,679. In Asia, Sfr 102,234,963 are earmarked for operations in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Myanmar and others. Operations in the Middle East and North Africa, in particular Iraq and Algeria, will account for Sfr 59,467,472.
Finally, the budget for Latin America (priority being given to Colombia and Peru) amounts to Sfr 52,596,771.

It should be pointed out that this appeal does not include the funds needed for operations conducted by the Moscow and Jakarta regional delegations, nor by the new delegation in East Timor. These will be the subject of an additional appeal of about 70 million Swiss francs to be launched early next year.
Finally, the total requested in the appeal, that is, over 837 million Swiss francs, may seem very large in comparison with the initial appeal for 1999, which amounted to Sfr 660,169,500. However, the successive crises that occurred during the year obliged the ICRC to revise its budget on 11 occasions, and the final revised budget for 1999 finally totalled more than 911 million Swiss francs.

Further information: Françoise Derron, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2915

SENEGAL

FOOD AID FOR MORE THAN 4,600 DISPLACED IN CASAMANCE

On 13 December, in cooperation with the regional branch of the Senegalese Red Cross in Ziguinchor (Casamance), the ICRC began distributing food aid to 4,614 displaced people (435 families) from nine villages in the region.

This is the fourth emergency distribution that has been made this year to people displaced on account of poor security conditions. In 1999 the Red Cross has distributed 237 tonnes of food aid in the Ziguinchor region. The ICRC launched this programme in the summer of 1997.
The current distribution began 10 days after the outskirts of Ziguinchor were attacked by around a hundred armed men who (according to a communiqué issued by the Senegalese army) belonged to the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC). The last distribution of the year, it is being carried out at a time when the whole population has placed its hopes in the negotiations scheduled to open on 26 December between the MFDC and the government.

Further information: Gilbert Deléchat, ICRC Dakar, tel. ++221 8 241 293
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT AIDS FLOOD VICTIMS IN KINSHASA

Owing to heavy rainfall, the river Congo and one of its tributaries, the Ndjili, have burst their banks, causing extensive flooding in Kinshasa. According to the government, around 40,000 people have had to be displaced and gathered in 20 different locations situated mainly in the north-eastern part of the city. It is possible that new flooding may occur in the coming weeks.

The International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement (comprising the ICRC, which is coordinating the relief operation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Congolese and Belgian National Societies) immediately mobilized to assist the flood victims.

Material assistance is being provided in the form of pumps, spare parts and chemical products for the water authority. However, the bulk of the work involves clearing the silt out of three water intake systems so as to ensure that the city has drinking water, rebuilding an urgently needed dyke on the Ndjili that has been destroyed by erosion and rehabilitating a ward in which to treat cholera patients at the Kinshasa general hospital. In addition, the ICRC has installed showers, toilets and water points in four camps for the displaced and distributed hygiene items (containers, soap, etc.).

Most of the flood victims are currently repairing the damage to their homes but have not gone back to live in them yet for fear of further flooding. About a third of them have found temporary shelter in nearby camps, most of which have been set up in abandoned buildings (factories, covered markets). The other two thirds have been taken in by host families.

Further information: ICRC Kinshasa, tel. ++243 12 34 191/2
Juan Martinez, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2281

BOLIVIA
SUPREME COURT HOLDS SPECIAL SESSION IN HONOUR OF GENEVA CONVENTIONS

The Bolivian Supreme Court, which sits in the capital, Sucre, recently held a special session to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. This solemn event brought together all the members of the Court, representatives of the lower courts and of the local civilian and military authorities and the members of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate representing the department of Chuquisaca.
The representative of the President of the Supreme Court, the President of the Bolivian Red Cross and the ICRC regional delegate in Buenos Aires each spoke in turn. The representative of the President of the Court praised the role of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement regarding the application of international humanitarian law, the President of the National Society explained the main conclusions of the 27th International Conference and the regional delegate stressed the special responsibility of national and international courts in implementing the law.

The session was followed by the inauguration of a travelling photo exhibition called "Man in a War-Torn World". The exhibition, which was produced by the ICRC regional delegation, has already been presented in several countries in the region. It will travel to half a dozen Bolivian cities in the coming months, thus enabling local Red Cross branches to make themselves better known in their communities by organizing special events.

Further information: Gérard Peytrignet, ICRC Buenos Aires, tel. ++ 5411 4312 1713
Corinne Adam, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2224

NEW BOOK ON ICRC'S ROLE DURING SECOND WORLD WAR

The ICRC welcomes the publication of Serge Klarsfeld's latest book, Recueil de documents des archives du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge sur le sort de Juifs de France internés et déportés (1939-1945) – a collection of documents from the ICRC archives detailing the internment of Jews in France during the Second World War.

Mr Klarsfeld and the association which he heads, Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France, were among the first to express interest in conducting extensive research in the ICRC archives after the organization decided to open its files in 1996. The ICRC and Mr Klarsfeld's association have since developed a close working relationship.

This new publication launched on 15 December is part of Mr Klarsfeld's life work of providing a comprehensive record of what happened to Jews in France during the war. More than 76,000 French Jews were deported to Nazi concentration camps and the vast majority of them were killed.

ICRC delegates made numerous visits to internment camps in France between 1939 and 1945, and their reports, published in this book for the first time, provide a valuable insight into the conditions in which Jews were held. After repeated approaches to the French authorities, the ICRC was able to provide the internees with food, medicine and clothing, undoubtedly saving many lives.

The ICRC is grateful for the research which Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France has conducted in its archives and looks forward to further collaborative work with Mr Klarsfeld, his associates and other researchers.

Further information: Chris Bowers, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++4122 730 2061

During the weekend of
18 - 19 December 1999, for all information please call the press officer on duty Juan Martinez, on (mobile) 41 79 217 32 17
RUSSIAN FEDERATION / NORTHERN CAUCASUS

ASSISTANCE CONTINUES IN INGUSHETIA

The Red Cross is pursuing the humanitarian operations it has been carrying out in the northern Caucasus for the victims of the conflict in Chechnya and the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Working together with the local committees of the Russian Red Cross, the 185 ICRC local staff members present in the region are conducting the operations under the supervision of five expatriate delegates based in Nalchik (republic of Kabardino-Balkaria).

Ingushetia is the main beneficiary of the aid being provided. According to official sources, the republic, which borders on Chechnya, has taken in some 200,000 displaced people. From October to mid-December the ICRC distributed essential supplies (food and hygiene parcels, blankets, flour, kitchen utensils, jerrycans, etc.) to more than 100,000 people there. Thanks to the oven set up in cooperation with the Ingush committee of the Russian Red Cross, 10,000 loaves of bread are being distributed every day to the displaced. Several reception centres have also been equipped to store the drinking water brought in by tanker trucks.

Over two thirds of the displaced in Ingushetia have found shelter with local residents. Others are staying in reception centres (eight camps for 25,000 people) and about 30,000 more are living in makeshift shelters that are often unfit for human habitation. All these people depend largely for their survival on the assistance provided by the Red Cross, which has had to increase the rations.

Further information: ICRC Moscow, tel. ++ 70 95 926 54 26

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

ICRC VISITS POOL REGION

On 9 and 10 December an ICRC team visited the conflict-affected areas of the southern Pool region, 70 kilometres south-west of Brazzaville. This is the first time that the ICRC has been able to travel to these areas since renewed fighting broke out in the country in late December 1998. The main purpose of the trip was to assess the general security situation in the two districts of Kinkala and Boko and evaluate the needs of the civilian population.

While the security situation has improved in some parts of the southern Pool in recent months, in other parts civilians are still caught up in the conflict. This remains a major concern for the ICRC.
The most urgent needs reflect the complete breakdown of administrative and health services in the area. Since late July, insecurity, food shortages and lack of medicine and proper medical care have forced up to 10,000 people a week to leave the Pool for Brazzaville. And every week hundreds more pour into the main towns, Kinkala and Boko, in search of assistance. Some of these people come from the forests, where they fled, others from surrounding villages. Most of them, both children and adults, are malnourished and in urgent need of medical treatment. The ICRC team was told that many had been left behind because they were too weak to walk.

In Kinkala, the destruction of the water treatment plant has made the situation particularly critical: 80 per cent of the water needs are covered by rainfall and the rainy season is due to end in early January.

The programmes recently set up in Boko and Kinkala by humanitarian agencies are still insufficient to cover the population’s needs. Unless increased assistance is provided, the displacement of malnourished and sick civilians will continue.

Further information: Laurent Colassis, ICRC Brazzaville, tel. ++ 242 81 12 08 / ++243 880 30 73
Roland Sidler, ICRC Geneva, tel. ++41 22 730 20 45

CAMBODIA

NEWS OF A SON AFTER 25 YEARS

Aun (all names have been changed to protect the people involved) had never lost hope that her son Meth was still alive, even though she had not heard from him for 25 years. Together with her husband and four other children, she prayed for some news of Meth, a former monk who left his native Kompot province with the Khmer Rouge guerrilla fighters in 1975.

Years of war and hardship went by. After the fighting died down, the postal service remained disrupted in most areas and many Cambodians simply lacked the means to go searching for their relatives.

In 1995 Aun asked the Red Cross to help her trace her missing son. Since 1989 the ICRC has been actively supporting the efforts of the Cambodian Red Cross tracing agency to reunite relatives separated by long years of conflict. The agency has so far managed to trace 20,767 persons in the country and abroad but it has had difficulty gaining access to certain areas: those that used to be controlled by the Khmer Rouge were off-limits and many areas are still mined.

In December 1999 the Red Cross finally tracked down Aun’s son in Samlot province, in western Cambodia. Now 44 years old, he was living there with his wife and three children, whose photos he attached to the message which the Red Cross workers took back to his family:

"Dear father, mother and siblings,

I miss all of you very much. For many years I had no news of you and could not tell you anything about myself. I did not know whether you were alive and well."
Knowing how anxious people are to find their missing relatives, he added:

"Please tell your neighbour Em that I have not seen her brother, my good friend Kem, since 1973. I have been looking for him everywhere, but in vain."

Nearly 8,000 Cambodians are still searching for their loved ones through the Red Cross. Many of them were separated from their relatives more than 20 years ago. Aun's story shows how important it is to keep hope alive.

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

During the weekend of 24 - 26 December, for all information please call the press officer on duty, Roland Sidler, on (mobile) ++ 41 79 217 32 58,

or

from the 30 December to the 3 January, please call duty press officer Urs Boegli on (mobile) ++ 41 79 203 94 05.

As 1999 draws to a close, we send our readers the season's greetings and our very best wishes for the New Year.
