



ENSURING RESPECT FOR THE LIFE AND DIGNITY OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY



ICRC

IN BRIEF



Marko Kokic/ICRC



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BEHIND BARS

Each day men, women and children are deprived of their liberty and exposed to dangers such as summary execution, forced disappearance and torture. They may lose contact with their families and be subjected to inhumane living conditions, including inadequate food, water and health services.

SINCE 1870

Since 1870, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has endeavoured to improve the humanitarian situation of people deprived of their liberty.

The ICRC is well known for its work on behalf of people held in connection with international and non-international armed conflicts and other situations of violence. In other circumstances too, the ICRC takes action whenever it can to improve the treatment and conditions of people deprived of their liberty.

In 2010 the ICRC was engaged in detention-related activities in 71 countries and on behalf of people held under the authority of five international tribunals. Its delegates conducted 5,027 visits to 1,783 places of detention, enabling them to reach 500,928 people deprived of their liberty.

OUR AIMS

The ICRC aims to secure humane treatment and conditions of detention for all those deprived of their liberty, regardless of the reasons for their arrest and detention. It also seeks to alleviate the suffering of their families, particularly by restoring communication between detainees and their relatives.

The ICRC endeavours, as a priority, to prevent torture and other forms of ill-treatment, to prevent and resolve disappearances, to improve conditions of detention (for example, access to food, water and health services), to restore and maintain family contacts, and to ensure respect for legal safeguards. In some cases, the ICRC also supports former detainees, facilitating their return to society.

OUR APPROACH

The ICRC's detention-related work is based upon a comprehensive assessment of the situation both inside and outside places of detention. This assessment is facilitated by constructive dialogue with the detaining authorities and visits to detainees, which are subject to five basic conditions. The ICRC must be given:

- access to all detainees within its field of interest;
- access to all premises and facilities used by and for the detainees;
- authorization to repeat its visits;
- the possibility to speak freely and in private with the detainees of its choice;
- assurance that the authorities will provide the ICRC with a list of all detainees within its field of interest or authorize it to compile such a list.

A subsequent analysis of the information gathered enables the ICRC to identify the key risks faced by the detainees and other factors influencing their situation, including the challenges that confront the detaining authorities in attempting to address humanitarian concerns.



Jon Björgvinsson/ICRC

OUR ACTION

In all situations, the ICRC works with the detaining authorities and expects them to take the necessary steps to ensure humane treatment and conditions of detention. To that end, it undertakes confidential, bilateral dialogue with them concerning its findings, relevant national and international standards, and the action and resources required to improve the situation of persons deprived of their liberty.

On the basis of its assessment and analysis of each situation, the ICRC develops a specific strategy to meet the needs of the detainees most effectively. The strategy may include ICRC action regarding individual detainees, structures, institutions and regulatory frameworks, as well as various material or technical interventions to help meet humanitarian needs. Throughout its implementation, the ICRC monitors and amends the strategy to ensure that its actions have a tangible impact on the situation of the detainees.



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