

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1975)

Rubrik: Africa

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 11.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

I. OPERATIONS

AFRICA

Angola

On 31 January 1975, a quadripartite transitional government was set up in Luanda pending the accession of Angola to independence on 11 November. It comprised representatives of Portugal and of the three liberation movements which had previously been fighting the Portuguese, i.e. the *MPLA* (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the *FNLA* (Angolan National Liberation Front) and the *UNITA* (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).

On 11 June 1975, an ICRC delegation was officially set up in Luanda as a forerunner to the more substantial base which was to follow.

In the meanwhile a new conflict flared up, no longer between the liberation fighters and the Portuguese troops but between the three national factions—the *MPLA*, the *FNLA* and the *UNITA*.

Early assessments

On 20 May, two delegates and a doctor set to work in Angola. They found that:

- the medical situation was deteriorating as most of the Portuguese doctors had left the country;
- civilians, the main victims of the clashes, were in a permanent state of flight to escape the combat areas;
- basic foodstuffs were becoming unobtainable in some parts of the country owing to the paralysis of road transport;
- combatants were being captured and imprisoned by all parties;
- the Europeans were taking fright and converging on the capital from the provinces in order to be evacuated to Lisbon;
- Angolans who had taken refuge abroad (mainly in Zaire) were beginning to return, thus creating even further needs.

The ICRC called in

This situation prompted the transitional Government to ask the ICRC to help. All of the liberation movements, the Portuguese representative and the Lisbon Government gave the ICRC their full support and offered all necessary guarantees and facilities to enable the delegates to move about and transport supplies.

The ICRC delegation proposed an initial operational plan involving a budget of 2 million Swiss francs. This plan—limited in time and scope (3 months)—provided for three medico-surgical teams, medical supplies and food supplies, the food being

mainly for the civilian victims in the greatest need; young children, the sick, expectant mothers and the aged.

In accordance with the Conventions, the ICRC aimed at obtaining the permission of all parties to visit prisoners. Its other prime concerns were to ensure respect for the Red Cross emblem and for hospitals and clinics.

Medical and surgical assistance

Several National Societies and governments, by providing support in response to a fund-raising appeal launched on 1 July, enabled the first medico-surgical team to leave Europe on 10 July to set up base in Carmona (*FNLA* zone)—renamed Uige after independence.

On 12 July, this team split into two, the surgeon and the anesthetist returning to Luanda to help the doctors and surgeons of the Maria-Pia Hospital which had been overwhelmed by the sudden influx of wounded. This team, which was of mixed nationality, was later replaced by an all-Swiss team.

At the beginning of August, as fighting spread throughout the country, two more medico-surgical teams left for Angola. One, provided by the French Red Cross, set up base in Nova Lisboa (which was to become Huambo) in the *UNITA* zone. The second, made available to the ICRC by the Danish Red Cross, was posted to Dalatando, under *MPLA* control. This Danish team was later relieved by a Swedish team.

Now that the ICRC had moved into the three zones controlled by the three opposing movements, each of which placed their confidence in it, its medical and surgical work was more evenly distributed. The teams spread out from their bases, and one surgeon and a nurse from Huambo set up at Vouga, near Silva Porto.

The doctors and surgeons did not concentrate their efforts solely on caring for the war wounded. There were many public health problems to be dealt with also. In one district alone, the Red Cross doctors diagnosed measles, malaria, sleeping sickness, diarrhoea, various types of anaemia and malnutrition. In order to combat these diseases, the ICRC doctors spent some of their time moving around the bush, regularly visiting regional hospitals and clinics and renewing their stocks of drugs and medical supplies.

Relief supplies

The ICRC was not idle when it came to supplying relief foodstuffs but, on this occasion, this aspect of its work did not attain the proportions that it had done in other conflicts.

Firstly, the unforeseeable and haphazard population flows to the momentarily calmer areas made any precise assessment of needs impossible. Secondly, there was not a disastrous food shortage despite the temporary stoppage of agricultural production and activities. The ICRC therefore made its priority the relief of the people worst affected, as explained above.

On 12 June, the first relief supplies, 15 tons of milk powder and 30,000 Swiss francs worth of medical supplies, arrived in Luanda. By the end of the year, some sixty consign-

ments had been sent, totalling 710 tons of foodstuff including donations by the EEC and the Swiss Confederation (see p. 26). The ICRC also forwarded drugs and medical supplies, 20,000 blankets and five vehicles, four of them ambulances. The overall value came to 2.8 million Swiss francs.

Until the end of October, most of the supplies were carried free of charge by the returning planes of the Portuguese evacuation air-lift.

Protection

Although the ICRC started relief work in Angola in June, and medical and surgical work in July, with the help of a number of National Red Cross Societies, it did not start its protection activities until August.

The problems were manifold. Each of the parties to the conflict had taken prisoners among the combatants. And then there were the civilians—Africans and Europeans alike—who were trying to flee the fighting.

POW camp visits started on 17 August. The *MPLA* and the *UNITA* made no difficulties about letting delegates approach their prisoners, talk to them without witnesses and distribute relief supplies to them. The *FNLA*, however, repeatedly claimed that it held no prisoners and maintained that it released any men it captured after relieving them of their weapons. However, on 2 October, the *FNLA* presented the ICRC delegates with 25 *MPLA* captives. This was the first of several visits.

Benguela, Cambambé, Dalatando, Dondo, Huambo (Nova Lisboa), Luanda, Lubango (Sá da Bandeira), Moçamedes, São Salvador, Sapu, Saurimo (Henrique de Carvalho) and Uíge (Carmona) were some of the places where the ICRC delegates visited prisoners. They saw about 1,640 soldiers and civilians during 65 visits to 29 places of detention.

However, in view of the fluidity of the military situation, it was not possible to repeat prison visits with any regularity. Several groups of prisoners were seen only once and so the ICRC delegates had no idea what became of them.

The ICRC, with the approval of all the parties to the conflict, evacuated a large number of persons as part of its protection activities. The ICRC plane alone carried 567 civilians and 460 soldiers, totalling 1,027 persons in all.

Finally, the delegates also set up *Central Tracing Agency* facilities (see p. 30).

Logistic problems

In view of the problems which the delegates had in moving round the country and transporting relief supplies (the roads were too dangerous and the domestic airlines were irregular and overburdened), the ICRC had to charter a DC-6 plane which was financed by the Swiss Confederation.

Before it went into service on 7 September, all the parties to the conflict signed an agreement which authorised the plane to

overfly the whole of Angola and granted it permanent landing rights at all the country's airports. The signatories of the agreement also undertook to instruct their fighting units to respect the neutrality of the ICRC plane, its crew and its passengers and to facilitate the humanitarian mission of ICRC delegates on board and of the crew.

The assignment of the plane painted in the ICRC colours covered:

- the transport of ICRC delegates and medical teams to where their humanitarian help was needed;
- the transport of the sick and wounded whose evacuation was required by an ICRC medical delegate;
- the transport of the most urgent medical and other relief supplies for distressed or isolated communities wherever they might be;
- the transfer of released civilian and military prisoners and detainees;
- the evacuation from the combat areas of non-combatants (especially children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and the infirm) regardless of their origins or affiliations.

This was the first time in the annals of ICRC air operations that such a precise and extensive agreement had been signed by the parties to a conflict. This text, which was respected to the letter, enabled the ICRC to develop its activities in a most satisfactory manner until 11 November, despite the difficult situation. On that day, the plane returned to Switzerland and the continuation of air operations had to be renegotiated with all the parties to the conflict.

Despite all the efforts of the ICRC representatives, it had not been possible by the end of the year to reach any formal agreement for the return to Angola of a plane authorised to fly from one zone to another.

After independence

Medical activities obviously continued after independence as did various localised relief activities and visits to certain places of detention, especially at Luanda where some 140 prisoners of war were utterly dependent on the ICRC delegates, and at Huambo and Uíge.

But independence and particularly the departure of the DC-6 brought several problems, the greatest of which was the replacing of relief supplies and the drug stocks of the various medico-surgical teams. The lack of a plane also made it hard for the delegates to get about which meant that their traditional activities were limited. By force of circumstance, some places of detention could no longer be visited.

With the ICRC DC-6 no longer available, the odd short-term charter enabled delegations to receive new relief and medical supplies, but the problem of travel from one zone to the other within the country was still unsolved at the end of 1975.

Ethiopia

The events in Eritrea

At the beginning of 1975, the ICRC planned to send a joint ICRC-Ethiopian Red Cross medical team to Eritrea to help the population and visit the prisons of the area where sporadic outbreaks of violence were occurring. A 230-ton shipment of flour, a gift from the Swiss Confederation, was on the way to Massawa, where it was expected to arrive by the end of January.

As soon as the ICRC regional delegate for East Africa, accompanied by a medical delegate, arrived in Asmara around 20 January, he set about preparing this relief campaign in collaboration with the Ethiopian Red Cross and with the agreement of the national authorities when, on the evening of 31 January, the fighting broke out. At that precise moment, the two ICRC delegates were only a few hours away from Asmara on their way back to Addis Ababa.

The following day they pleaded with the authorities to be allowed to return, but in vain. In any case both land and air routes remained cut for several weeks.

The offer that the two delegates in Addis Ababa had made to the authorities was officially reiterated on 9 February in a telegram bearing the signature of the President of the ICRC Executive Board and addressed to Brigadier-General Tefferi Bante, President of the Provisional Military Administrative Council. The offer was based on article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions concerning the protection of victims in armed conflicts not of an international character.

During the following weeks many approaches were made in Addis Ababa, especially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On May 6, the ICRC sent another note to Brigadier-General Tefferi Bante again offering to collaborate with the Ethiopian Red Cross to protect and help the victims of the clashes, but still in vain.

As the ICRC could operate, from Addis Ababa, only with the agreement of the national authorities, it was not possible to send aid to Eritrea from Ethiopian territory.

However, through the representatives of the Eritrean liberation movements who, for their part, had asked the ICRC to help, it was possible to send some consignments of medical supplies into Eritrea.

Something else drew the attention of the ICRC to Eritrea during the closing months of the year. The combatants of the liberation movements, *Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF)* and *People's Liberation Front (PLF)*, had taken as hostages:

- two American employees from the Kagnew Base (taken by the ELF),
- two other employees from the same base (PLF),
- two British subjects of Chinese origin (PLF), and
- the British Honorary Consul at Asmara (PLF).

With the representatives of the liberation movements outside Ethiopia arrangements were made for an exchange of correspondence between the captives and their families and for relief supplies to be sent to them.

Western Sahara

Just before Christmas, 1975, an ICRC mission consisting of a delegate and a medical delegate made an on-the-spot survey of the humanitarian needs arising from the events in the Western Sahara.

The decision to send the delegation arose from press reports about developments in the area and was also in response to an invitation from the *Polisario Front* to visit Moroccan prisoners who were in their hands.

Between 17 and 23 December, the two ICRC representatives visited Sahraoui refugees in Algeria and also saw displaced persons in the Western Sahara.

Their observations and the information they received, together with the results of missions carried out at about the same time in Algeria by delegates of the League of Red Cross Societies and of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, made it possible to estimate the needs of several tens of thousands of Sahraouis—refugees in Algeria or displaced in the Western Sahara. The situation of these people with regard to food and medical care was especially serious and was greatly aggravated by the bad climatic conditions.

This assessment of the deeply disturbing situation served as the basis, at the beginning of 1976, of a joint appeal by the League and the ICRC to finance a programme of assistance both to the Sahraoui refugees in Algeria—carried out by the League—and to those displaced in the Western Sahara—carried out by the ICRC.

During their mission, the ICRC representatives, pursuant to the agreement by the *Polisario Front* to respect the Geneva Conventions, visited eight Moroccan nationals held by this group and four Mauritanian policemen who had been captured a few days before the visit. In conformity with the Convention, the interviews took place without witnesses.

The ICRC has regularly informed the Spanish Red Cross, the Moroccan and Mauritanian Red Crescent Societies, and the Spanish, Moroccan and Mauritanian authorities, of its activities and proposals. Its delegates have had the full co-operation of the Algerian Red Crescent, which has been active in helping Sahraoui refugees in Algeria.

LATIN AMERICA

Chile

In 1975, the ICRC continued the protection and assistance activities carried out since the events of 11 September 1973.

It was however necessary to adapt these activities to the evolution of the situation within Chile, which had resulted in a drop in the number of detainees, and to the finance made available to the ICRC. As a result, the size of the delegation was progressively reduced so that, by the end of December, there