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## Action in the field

With some 600 staff working at the Geneva headquarters, an average of 500 other staff in 44 delegations, sub-delegations and offices (including about 60 posts occupied by staff seconded by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) and nearly 2,500 locally recruited employees, in 1987 the ICRC was active in almost 80 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East — taking into account the countries covered from its various regional delegations — providing protection and assistance for the victims of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

In 1987 ICRC delegates visited people who had been deprived of their freedom (prisoners of war and so-called "security detainees") in 522 places of detention in 27 countries (*for details, see the countries/conflicts concerned later in this chapter*). The purpose of these visits is purely humanitarian; ICRC delegates inspect the material and psychological conditions of detention and the treatment accorded to prisoners, provide detainees with relief if required (medicines, clothing, toilet articles) and, if necessary, ask the authorities to take steps to improve the detainees' treatment and living conditions. In the course of repeated visits, delegates talk to whichever prisoners they please for as long as they wish, without witnesses.

Before and after these visits, discussions at various levels are held with the people in charge of the detention centres. Confidential reports are then drawn up. In the case of internal disturbances or tension, these reports are sent only to the detaining authorities, while in the case of international armed conflict they are sent both to the Detaining Power and to the prisoners' Power of Origin. These reports are not intended for publication. The ICRC, for its part, confines itself to publishing the number and names of the places visited, the dates of the visits and the number of people seen. It also mentions the fact that its delegates were able to talk to the prisoners without witnesses. It does not express an opinion on the grounds for detention and does not publicly comment on the material or psychological conditions it finds. If a government should publish incomplete or inaccurate versions of ICRC reports, the ICRC reserves the right to publish and circulate them in full.

The ICRC visits places of detention providing its delegates are allowed:

- to see all the detainees and talk freely to them without witnesses;

- to have access to all premises used for detention;
- to repeat their visits.

In addition, the ICRC generally asks for a list of the persons to be visited or for permission to draw up such a list during the visit and to distribute material assistance to needy detainees and their families.

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\* \*

The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) of the ICRC continued to carry out its tasks arising both from its treaty obligations towards civilian and military victims of armed conflicts and from the exercise by the ICRC of its right to take the humanitarian initiative.

It will be recalled that the CTA and its delegates in the field are mainly concerned with the following tasks:

- obtaining, registering, collating and, when necessary, forwarding information about people helped by the ICRC, such as prisoners of war, civilian internees, detainees, displaced persons and refugees;
- forwarding family messages when normal means of communication are non-existent or interrupted by the conflict;
- tracing persons reported missing or whose relatives are without news;
- arranging for family reunifications, transfer (of particularly vulnerable groups, for example) to safe places, and repatriations;
- issuing, on request, written attestations for former detainees and prisoners of war certifying that they were held, or were sick, wounded or hospitalized while in captivity; drawing up death certificates so that family entitlements to pensions or compensation can be claimed;
- issuing ICRC travel documents on the basis of statements made by applicants, who, owing to the upheavals caused by conflict, have no identity papers or passports. Such documents are valid for one journey only.

All these activities undertaken in Geneva and in the field are carried out in co-operation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a large number of which have

their own tracing services.

Statistics for the overall activities of the CTA in 1987, both at Geneva headquarters and in the field, are as follows:

- 2,357,519 Red Cross messages were exchanged, 2,286,850 of them in relation to the conflict between Iraq and Iran;
- 52,744 requests for tracing missing persons were processed;
- 11,871 capture cards for prisoners of war or civilian internees were received and 5,664 registration cards for security detainees were drawn up;
- 2,827 certificates of captivity, sickness, death, etc. were issued;
- 396 family reunifications were organized, as well as 656 repatriations;
- 2,550 travel documents were provided.

The CTA continued to handle cases relating to previous conflicts, in particular the Second World War.

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\* \*

Turning to relief operations, in 1987 the ICRC purchased and sent directly to the scene of action 13,876 tonnes of relief supplies for a value of 12 million Swiss francs. In addition, 15,005 tonnes (worth 20 million Swiss francs) were sent by donors under ICRC supervision, some of it under food aid agreements concluded with several governments. A total of 28,881 tonnes of relief (not counting medical supplies), worth 32 million Swiss francs, was thus dispatched by the ICRC to 38 countries in 1987. Out of this total, and including what was stockpiled in the field at the end of 1986, an overall amount of 44,198 tonnes, worth 44.3 million Swiss francs, was actually distributed during 1987. Medical assistance came to 8.1 million Swiss francs. Throughout the year, moreover, the ICRC sent a total of 384 medical and ancillary personnel (doctors,

surgeons, male and female nurses, physiotherapists, prosthetists, nutritionists, public health specialists and medical administrators) to take part in activities in different regions in the world. Of these, 167 were seconded to the ICRC by the National Red Cross Societies of 17 countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom).

The total value of the medical and other supplies dispatched by the ICRC in 1987 was distributed geographically as follows:

	(Swiss francs)	
Africa	32,354,475	61.72%
Latin America	11,053,545	21.09%
Asia	5,384,394	10.27%
Middle East and North Africa	3,627,362	6.92%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52,419,776</b>	<b>100%</b>

(See pages 38, 54, 74, 88 for detailed tables.)

Assistance for detainees and their families, included in the above figures, cost 5,677,535 Swiss francs and amounted to more than 2,784 tonnes of relief supplies.

It should be remembered that the ICRC undertakes material and medical aid programmes only in cases of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension, and only providing it can

- carry out on-the-spot checks on the urgency of the victims' needs;
- make local surveys to identify the categories and numbers of people requiring assistance;
- organize and supervise relief distributions.

*(The figures quoted above represent only part of the cost of aid programmes as they appear in the budgets and financial reports for each operation. Such operations also involve very substantial expenditure on personnel, equipment, vehicles, transport, storage, etc.)*

#### AFRICA

1. South Africa
2. Angola
3. Ethiopia
4. Kenya  
*Regional delegation covering Kenya, Comoros, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tanzania.*
5. Mozambique
6. Namibia/South West Africa
7. Nigeria  
*Regional delegation covering Nigeria, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.*
8. Uganda
9. Somalia
10. Sudan
11. Chad
12. Togo  
*Regional delegation covering Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger and Senegal.*
13. Zaire  
*Regional delegation covering Zaire, Burundi, the Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe.*
14. Zimbabwe  
*Regional delegation covering Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia.*

#### LATIN AMERICA

15. Argentina  
*Regional delegation covering Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.*
16. Chile
17. Colombia  
*Regional delegation covering Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana and Venezuela.*
18. Costa Rica  
*Regional delegation covering Costa Rica, Belize, Grenada, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Dominican Republic and the other countries of the Caribbean.*
19. Guatemala
20. Haiti
21. Honduras
22. Nicaragua
23. Peru
24. El Salvador
25. Suriname

#### ASIA/PACIFIC

26. Afghanistan
27. Burma
28. Hong Kong  
*Regional delegation covering Hong Kong, Japan, Macao, Republic of Korea, People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Taiwan.*
29. India  
*Regional delegation covering India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.*
30. Indonesia  
*Regional delegation covering Indonesia/East Timor, Australia, Brunei,*
31. Kampuchea
32. Pakistan
33. Philippines
34. Thailand
35. Viet Nam  
*Regional delegation covering Viet Nam and Laos.*

#### EUROPE/NORTH AMERICA

36. United States

#### MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA

37. Egypt
38. Iraq
39. Iran
40. Israel and the occupied territories
41. Jordan
42. Lebanon
43. Syria
44. Tunisia  
*Regional delegation covering Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Mauritania.*  
(The delegation for the Arabian Peninsula is based in Geneva.)



