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# LATIN AMERICA

*The 1980s took a severe toll in Latin America. The imbalance in North-South relations, the foreign debt burden, widespread social injustice, unchecked corruption and a flourishing drug trade all contributed to a further undermining of the region's already fragile institutions. With few exceptions, the standard of living in the countries south of the Rio Grande declined steadily and the gap between social classes continued to widen.*

*In this context, throughout 1990 the ICRC strove to fulfil its humanitarian mandate on behalf of the most needy categories of the population (civilians, prisoners of war, security detainees and the missing).*



*Over the past years Latin America has been a home for political upheaval and change. On the one hand, encouraging prospects for dialogue in El Salvador and new governments in Chile, Nicaragua and Paraguay, and on the other hand, mounting violence in Colombia and Peru, have made it necessary for the ICRC to redeploy its staff and reorganize its logistics in the field.*

*The regional delegations worked, often in cooperation with the respective National Societies, to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross. In addition they maintained and strengthened ICRC contacts with governments with a view to encouraging ratification of the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions, promoting implementation of international humanitarian law through national legislation and raising financial support for ICRC work worldwide. Finally, with the agreement of the governments concerned, they continued to carry out protection and assistance activities for security detainees and, in some cases, for civilians affected by violence, such as displaced persons.*

*The ICRC maintained an average of 76 delegates in Latin America during 1990, as well as 249 local employees. They were assigned to five delegations: Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru, and three regional delegations in Bogotá, Buenos Aires and San José.*

*The total budget for Latin America in 1990 came to 29,755,300 Swiss francs. Expenditure stood at 21,826,500 francs.*

## ***Central America and the Caribbean***

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### **EL SALVADOR**

The ICRC carried out its protection and assistance work in El Salvador in 1990, in accordance with the provisions of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and with Additional Protocol II. After the major offensive launched by the FMLN<sup>1</sup> in November 1989, plans for the coming year had to be postponed, as immediate needs for emergency medical care, evacuation of the wounded and protection and registration of security detainees took priority. This emergency period continued into 1990, until the curfew was lifted on 1 February. Despite the obvious extra workload resulting from this violent period, projects originally planned for 1990 picked up again after this date, alongside efforts to deal with the aftermath of the fighting.

In July 1990 a major breakthrough was witnessed when both parties to the conflict signed a human rights agreement. Nevertheless, despite an immediate fall in the number of captures and cases of ill-treatment of the civilian population, offensives picked up again in the last quarter of 1990. In the context of renewed tension throughout the country, once again civilians bore the brunt of recurring violence in built-up areas. The ICRC repeatedly reminded the parties to the conflict to

show greater respect for the civilian population.

#### **Activities for persons detained in connection with the conflict**

In 1990 ICRC delegates paid regular visits to places of detention under the control of the armed forces and the security corps, as well as penal centres under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. On average 150 to 200 visits were made every month, and about 1,000 new security detainees were registered over the year, most of them being released a few weeks after their arrest.

Throughout the year, whenever contact was established with the FMLN, a number of matters were discussed, including the notification of capture of civilians and members of the armed forces. In 1990 the FMLN handed over 56 captured persons to the ICRC.

#### **Protection of the civilian population**

A considerable number of field missions carried out by ICRC delegates in El Salvador last year were made in order to monitor abuses against the civilian population. This reflected the ICRC's growing concern for civilians, who were increasingly caught in the crossfire between the armed forces and the opposition in 1990. The ICRC regularly submitted to both the government and the FMLN

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<sup>1</sup> Farabundo Marti Liberation Front.

delegates' findings and suggestions for improving the situation of civilians.

### **Tracing Agency**

Following the reduction in the number of people arrested for security reasons, the number of requests from family members for information also fell. Apart from these requests for news of disappeared persons or persons allegedly arrested by government forces or the FMLN, the ICRC Tracing Agency received other conflict-related allegations and issued hand-over certificates for 79 wounded persons evacuated from conflict areas and 58 soldiers and civilians released by the opposition. Financial assistance was also given to families wishing to visit a detained relative. Additional work included the exchange of over 2,300 Red Cross messages and the resolution of over 1,000 tracing requests.

### **Medical and sanitation activities**

Following the violence in November 1989, ICRC delegates conducted a complete survey of hospitals which were receiving a large influx of wounded in San Salvador and other major cities. The ICRC organized the delivery of some 18.5 tonnes of medical supplies straight away, and continued distributions to 17 hospitals, 7 health centres, 8 penal centres, clinics and mobile units of the National Society on through 1990, in order to replenish their depleted stocks and to enable them to be better equipped to confront any similar crisis situation in the future.

Traditional ICRC medical activities were carried out throughout 1990 by two medical teams. Field visits allowed the ICRC to give over 23,500 medical and dental consultations to people in conflict areas or displaced people with no other access to medical services; to supervise and supply five health posts in conflict

areas; to carry out a vaccination programme (over 22,500 vaccinations) with the Ministry of Health, treating people in remote areas; and to evacuate wounded civilians and combatants in remote areas to hospitals.

In addition to the medical activities above, the ICRC supervised the construction and operation of latrine and water projects in areas affected by the conflict. In 1990 visits to 118 existing latrine projects and 177 water projects were conducted, while a further 44 visits were made to new sites for evaluation purposes.

### **Relief programme**

Material assistance was provided to detainees (articles of personal hygiene, medication, mattresses and clothing), released detainees (travel costs to their homes, food and shelter) and the families of detainees (travel costs to visit detained relatives). In addition, the ICRC occasionally provided hospitals, homes for the elderly, orphanages and civilians living in areas affected by the conflict with food, blankets and other basic items. In all, 106 tonnes of assistance were distributed at a cost of around 290,000 Swiss francs.

### **Cooperation with the National Society**

In 1990 the ICRC continued its financial and material support to the Salvadoran Red Cross Society in order to enable it to maintain and develop its traditional activities, including ambulance and first-aid services and a blood transfusion centre. Support to the National Society was especially important last year in the light of needs brought about by the events of November 1989.

### **Dissemination**

The ICRC made a large number of presentations on international humani-

tarian law, stressing the importance of respect for the civilian population and the Red Cross emblem. During field missions to conflict areas, members of the opposition and the general public were major targets of dissemination work. Courses and conferences were mainly given to the armed forces and the police, and efforts were also carried out through the mass media.

Another popular method of dissemination in El Salvador last year was through the medium of theatre. Specially conceived plays with audience participation explained very clearly exactly what goes on when, for example, ICRC delegates visit security detainees. The plays were by and large presented to members of the armed forces, and set in a Salvadoran context.

## **GUATEMALA**

Cooperation with the Guatemalan Red Cross was a priority in 1990 and many facets of National Society work were touched upon, the ICRC offering assistance in the following ways: training staff; setting up a dissemination department within the National Society, which would eventually take over the training of their own staff; determining the needs of civilian victims of the conflict by conducting thorough surveys with the National Society to evaluate those needs and the best ways of meeting them.

In addition, a course on the law of war was given from 8 to 12 January to 26 future officers of the general staff of the Guatemalan Armed Forces.

## **NICARAGUA**

Following the elections in March, the cease-fire agreement of April 1990 and

the subsequent end of the conflict in Nicaragua, the situation in the country no longer came under the ICRC's mandate. For this reason, the network of ICRC sub-delegations and offices, which was set up over the years to offer protection and assistance to the direct and indirect victims of the conflict, was dismantled in the course of the year and the delegation's expatriate staff was reduced from 20 to 8 by December.

### **Visits to detainees**

Roughly 1,300 security detainees who had been registered by the ICRC were still behind bars in February 1990, but by the end of April none of these people were being held for reasons related to the conflict. Upon the request of the authorities, the ICRC was actively involved during the release of those detainees in locating their families, monitoring their health and their transportation back to their places of origin, as well as providing food and clothing.

### **Tracing Agency**

On 15 November the delegation submitted a list of 997 missing persons from the 10 years of conflict to the new authorities. In addition, the delegation continued to check tracing requests still pending against information regarding returning refugees and demobilized contras obtained from lists drawn up by UNHCR and CIAV/OAS/ONUCA<sup>1</sup>.

Over 8,400 Red Cross messages were exchanged throughout the year and 925 tracing requests were resolved. The ICRC also issued 177 certificates for former detainees visited by the ICRC, as evidence that they had been held captive.

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<sup>1</sup> "Comisión Interamericana de Averiguación y Verificación," Organization of American States and ONU Centro America.



## **Medical activities**

Throughout most of the year ICRC medical personnel carried out evaluations of medical services in areas where large numbers of demobilized contras and civilian refugees were arriving for resettlement. Thirteen hospitals received material assistance and medical supplies at a value of over 67,500 Swiss francs, while in the south Atlantic region the delegation carried out a vaccination programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. Medical assistance to detainees was terminated in April.

## **Orthopaedic activities**

On 27 June an agreement was signed providing for continued cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the ICRC regarding the Erasmo Paredes Herrera Orthopaedic Centre in Managua. The agreement will remain in effect until June 1992. In 1990, 492 prostheses were produced and fitted to 229 patients, while 1,229 orthoses were manufactured and fitted to 684 patients.

## **Relief**

During the first quarter of 1990 basic medical supplies and articles of hygiene were distributed to penal institutions. The ICRC also monitored health care of detainees in prisons and hospitals. Food and non-food assistance to detainees and their families was valued at just under 88,500 Swiss francs.

Throughout the rest of the year assistance was directed at demobilized contras and resettling returnees. In particular, tools and construction materials were provided, along with kitchen sets, blankets, clothing, soap and food, especially in

the River Coco area and the RAAS (the Atlantic autonomous southern region). In all, almost 55,000 beneficiaries received 175.4 tonnes of food aid and 87.6 tonnes of non-food assistance. The assistance programme in the River Coco area, initiated in 1985, was terminated in July, and the ICRC sub-delegation in Puerto Cabezas was subsequently closed, as was the warehouse in Waspán.

Over the last quarter of 1990 the offices in Rosita, Juigalpa and Matagalpa were also closed, as was the sub-delegation in Bluefields. A large amount of material was given to the British Red Cross in Bluefields to help it continue its ambulance-boat project. This material consisted mainly of vehicles, boats, office equipment, VHF radios and building materials.

## **Dissemination and information**

In 1990 ICRC seminars, presentations and conferences on international humanitarian law and the work of the ICRC were aimed at a broad spectrum of the population in Nicaragua. Main groups targeted were the military, the police, university students, secondary school-children and members of National Society branches. For the first time ever, members of the Sandinista police force and the rural police forces, composed of ex-contras, participated together in ICRC dissemination seminars.

The first course ever given to high-ranking officers in the Nicaraguan army took place over five days from 29 October to 2 November, and in cooperation with the ICRC, the army produced and distributed a new Soldiers' Manual outlining basic rules of conduct in time of conflict.

## ***South America***

### **CHILE**

Visits were made to security detainees in 29 prisons run by the *Gendarmeria nacional* (Ministry of Justice), and to detainees under interrogation at the *Policía de Investigaciones* and the *Carabineros*. Negotiations with the new government which came into power in March resulted in permission to continue these visits.

In total, 193 visits were made and 530 detainees visited. 69 of these 530 were registered for the first time.

Food aid, medical assistance and other assistance in the areas of housing, hygiene, education, clothing and leisure were given to security detainees at a cost of 78,259 Swiss francs. Families of detainees and released detainees also received food aid valued at 232,512 francs and assistance with costs of family visits and other financial aid totalling 10,173 francs. Limited medical assistance was also provided to released detainees.

### **COLOMBIA**

Over the year ICRC delegates made 66 visits to 34 places of detention in Colombia, all of which were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. During these visits 810 security detainees were seen and 217 new detainees were registered. In spite of repeated attempts, ICRC delegates were not granted access to detainees being interrogated by the armed forces and the police. Nonetheless, in December 1990 the *Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad* (DAS), which comes under the direct control of the Presidency, gave formal authorization for ICRC delegates to visit its detainees.

Last year the ICRC also assisted in the release of 13 persons captured by opposition movements. Those freed included members of the national police force and the armed forces, as well as seven civilians, two of Swiss nationality.

In order to try to put an end to forced disappearances, the ICRC made constant efforts to obtain access to persons detained for interrogation by the army and the police. At the end of the year the outlook for access appeared positive.

In addition to tracing work, which involved the handling of 39 tracing requests, transport costs were paid to 243 families so that they could visit their detained relatives. On December 24 the ICRC paid for 100 children to visit their incarcerated parents at Medellín.

#### **Relief and medical activities**

Throughout 1990 the ICRC provided detention centres and penitentiary infirmaries with medicines, cleaning materials, mattresses, cooking utensils, clothing and sport and leisure equipment at a total value of 5,609 Swiss francs (medical assistance not included). The ICRC also footed the bill for repairs to several odontological units in detention centres and a reserve of medical supplies purchased in view of an anticipated substantial rise in prices. The civilian population also received mattresses, blankets, food and medical supplies at a cost of 8,868 Swiss francs (medical assistance not included), after families were displaced by the violence, especially in the departments of Cesar, Santander and Aranca. Medical supplies distributed amounted to 33,913 francs.

## Dissemination activities

Owing to the climate of violence in the country, throughout the year the ICRC continued to work alongside the National Society within the context of its vast programme of dissemination. Major target groups were university students and staff, the national police force, government officials, lawyers, members of the armed forces, the National Society and non-governmental organizations.

## PERU

The delegation in Lima, which was opened in 1984, has expanded over the years, to keep pace with the mounting violence throughout the country, in its efforts to assist security detainees and civilians affected by the internal conflict. The expatriate staff was increased to 31 by the end of the year and after numerous field surveys, operations were extended into areas previously cut off to any aid whatsoever. The ICRC therefore played a key role in bringing assistance and protection to victims of the conflict where no one else could.

At the beginning of June the ICRC's Director General carried out a mission to Peru, where he met with the newly-elected President Alberto Fujimori, together with the Delegate General for Latin America and the head of delegation in Lima. The ICRC representatives explained the role of the institution and its activities in Peru.

Travel in the country being particularly precarious, the delegates moving around in the emergency zones were obliged to follow very strict security regulations and, although acceptance of the ICRC and hence its security improved considerably over the year, efforts continued to develop dissemination activities among the armed forces and the opposition, in an

attempt to forestall any future security problems.

With the opening of a new office in Huanayo the ICRC consolidated its presence in the emergency zones. The institution thereby increased public awareness of what the ICRC actually does and as a result became more effective in carrying out its work. By the end of the year, apart from its main delegation in Lima, the ICRC had offices in Ayacucho, Abancay, Tingo María and Huancayo.

## Protection activities for detainees

In 1990 a rise in the number of security detainees was noted. Visits to the DIRCOTE (*Dirección contra el terrorismo*) anti-terrorist unit in Lima were resumed on 19 October, after 56 days of denied access.

Visits in 1990 were made to 77 centres of detention under the Ministry of Justice (*carceletas*, penitentiaries in the capital and detention centres in emergency zones) as well as 6 transit centres under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior in Lima and Tingo María. A total of 762 visits were made and 1,967 security detainees were registered, 1,097 for the first time.

Visits to detention centres meant that delegates were able to carry out interviews without witnesses with detainees. Visits also allowed the ICRC to bring medical and material assistance to security detainees, and facilitated the fumigation of several detention centres. Total medical assistance was valued at 63,525 Swiss francs, while material assistance totalled 42,829 francs.

Numerous high-level discussions were held with a view to obtaining access to detainees held for interrogation in places under the army and the police. In this way the ICRC hoped to see an end to



the cases of forced disappearances so often denounced in Peru. By the end of 1990, however, access had still not been given.

### **Tracing Agency**

Efforts were concentrated on registering security detainees and informing their relatives. Transport was also paid for families to visit detained relatives.

### **Medical activities for the civilian population**

Besides traditional ICRC medical work such as medical consultations and caring for the wounded, vaccination programmes formed an integral part of medical operations in 1990.

As the ICRC was firmly rooted in the emergency zones of Apurímac, Ayacucho, Huanuco and Junín, its medical teams were able to make regular visits to health centres in regions most affected by the fighting, bringing medical supplies and basic medicines and providing training for health workers located in these regions. These visits allowed the ICRC to carry out an average of between 200 and 300 medical consultations per month and also facilitated a programme for prevention of diarrhoea among children, with the help of material supplied by UNICEF.

Additional medical assistance was brought to civilians wounded in the fighting. The ICRC ensured medical attention for 425 such civilians in public hospitals throughout the country.

### **Relief assistance**

1990 relief targets were principally people who had been displaced or made homeless because of the violence, and security detainees and their families. In the first group, orphans and families whose

homes had been destroyed or damaged accounted for a large proportion of the beneficiaries, while in the second group assistance was directed at newly-released security detainees with no means of self-support, as well as those still interned and living under difficult conditions engendered by the critical economic situation in the country. In all, assistance was provided to over 19,000 persons.

Assistance came in many forms such as blankets, second-hand clothes, shoes, mattresses, canvas, kerosene, cleaning products, kitchen sets, tools and food. A special project in Peru involved providing meals in school canteens for over 2,000 children who were affected by the disturbances, most of whom had been orphaned as a result of the violence in the country, particularly in Ayacucho and in Abancay.

### **Cooperation with the National Society**

Working with some of the National Society's branches throughout the country was effective during the whole year. In particular, in December after the flooding of the River Shullcas which runs through the town of Huancayo, the ICRC provided vehicles and material aid to the local branch of the Peruvian Red Cross (PRC) to help it to cope with the damage. Other aid for 1990 came in the form of material assistance for social programmes run by the PRC in emergency zones, and in the form of HF radios to link up the National Society's headquarters with local branches.

### **Dissemination**

In 1990 special efforts were made to widen people's understanding of the movement and of international humanitarian law in remote areas previously inaccessible to the ICRC. Presentations were made both inside and outside the emergency zones

to audiences including high-ranking members of the armed forces and police and academics. In addition, interviews were given in the press, on radio and on television. Puppet theatres were also used to spread information among more than 5,000 school children aged 14 to 17 last year in schools in Lima and in the emergency zones.

## REGIONAL DELEGATIONS

**SAN JOSÉ** — (*Costa Rica, Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, the Lesser Antilles*)

**HAITI** — The National Society received technical and financial assistance from the ICRC which enabled it to continue its programme of dissemination to members of its individual branches within the country, as well as to other sectors of the population, especially law students.

**MEXICO** — The President of the ICRC visited Mexico on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Mexican Red Cross. While there, he met with the highest authorities and discussed with them the question of opening a regional delegation in Mexico. The ICRC President met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and with the Minister of the Navy and raised questions related to the Additional Protocols with them.

**PANAMA** — In 1990, two series of visits were carried out to 52 detainees in Panama, and four prisoners of war (POWs) incarcerated in the United States, at the Metropolitan Correctional Centre in Miami (Florida), all being held for reasons related to the events of December 1989. In January and February 1990 ICRC delegates visited 1,021 POWs and

331 civilian internees under United States administration in Panama, in accordance with the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO** — The ICRC took steps to obtain access to persons being held in connection with the attempted *coup d'état* of 27 July, carrying out two missions to discuss this matter with the authorities, in July and again in September. However, by the end of the year, access had still not been obtained.

**BOGOTÁ**: (*Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela*)

**ECUADOR** — On 24-26 April delegates visited 13 detainees in two detention centres in Quito. This was followed by a visit to a further two detainees in Guayaquil. Eight of these security detainees were registered for the first time, and some medical and material assistance was given to all 15.

An agreement between the Ecuadorean Red Cross and the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the Police, which was signed in 1989, was fully implemented in 1990. The agreement established a formal link between the National Society and the above-mentioned bodies, and allowed the ICRC to lend its support to a specific programme of courses and conferences aimed at members of the police and armed forces. Seventeen such courses were given by ICRC delegates to audiences totalling 775, mostly made up of army and naval officers, as well as air-force cadets and other groups.

**SURINAME** — Missions were carried out in April, July, September and November to Suriname from the regional delegation in Bogotá to evaluate the situation and

needs of civilians affected by the violence in the region along the borders with Brazil and French Guyana. The isolation of many small pockets of Amerindians and their increasingly limited access to medical care and other supplies was a major preoccupation of the governments of countries concerned.

It was decided that the situation in the region did not meet the ICRC's criteria for intervention, although it was also made clear that the ICRC would continue to survey the situation by sending a delegate from Bogotá at regular intervals.

***BUENOS AIRES: (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay)***

In addition to keeping very close contact with authorities of the countries it covers, and pursuing both intensive and important dissemination work, the regional delegation put a considerable amount of time and effort into preparations for projects in 1991, including the opening of the regional delegation in Brasilia.

At the joint request of the British and Argentine governments, the ICRC, in its capacity as a neutral humanitarian institution, carried out a mission to the Falkland Islands from 26 to 30 August. The purpose of this mission was to study practical arrangements for visits by Argentine families to the graves of members of the armed forces buried there according to the Geneva Conventions, the two governments intending to entrust this mandate to the ICRC. In a joint press release issued on 15 February 1990 in Madrid, the two governments expressed their wish for the visits to take place under ICRC auspices.

***BRAZIL*** — At the invitation of the Brazilian government, an ICRC delegate made a visit in November to the Brazilian Indian reserve along the border with Suriname, where 503 Surinamese Indians had taken refuge after violent clashes in southern Suriname. The situation of these people, who were being taken care of by the Brazilian authorities, did not require ICRC assistance.

**RELIEF SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTED BY THE ICRC IN 1990**  
*LATIN AMERICA*

Country (in French alphabetical order)	Medical assistance	Relief		Total
	Value in Sw. fr.	Value in Sw. fr.	(Tonnes)	Sw. fr.
Chile .....	26,200	851,204	258	877,404
Colombia .....	33,913	14,477	4.2	48,390
El Salvador .....	760,102	278,788	106.9	1,038,890
Haiti .....	1,260			1,260
Honduras .....		97,324	30.6	97,324
Nicaragua .....	123,477	1,316,514	786.5	1,439,991
Panama .....		10,147	0.6	10,147
Paraguay .....		430,715	40	430,715
Peru .....	147,509	449,201	94.9	596,710
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>1,092,461</b>	<b>3,448,370</b>	<b>1,321.7</b>	<b>4,540,831</b>



