

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1996)

Rubrik: The Americas

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: 10.01.2026

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



Hostage crisis in Lima: the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary between the government and the Tupac Amaru (MRTA). Recognition of its ability to intervene in such volatile situations is the result of its absolute commitment to neutrality and impartiality in assisting victims of conflict. The ICRC also took in relief supplies for the hostages to ease their plight and facilitated the release of a number of them.

ICRC

The Americas

ICRC delegations or missions:

Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Peru

ICRC regional delegations:

Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Guatemala City, Washington

Staff

ICRC expatriates¹ : 67

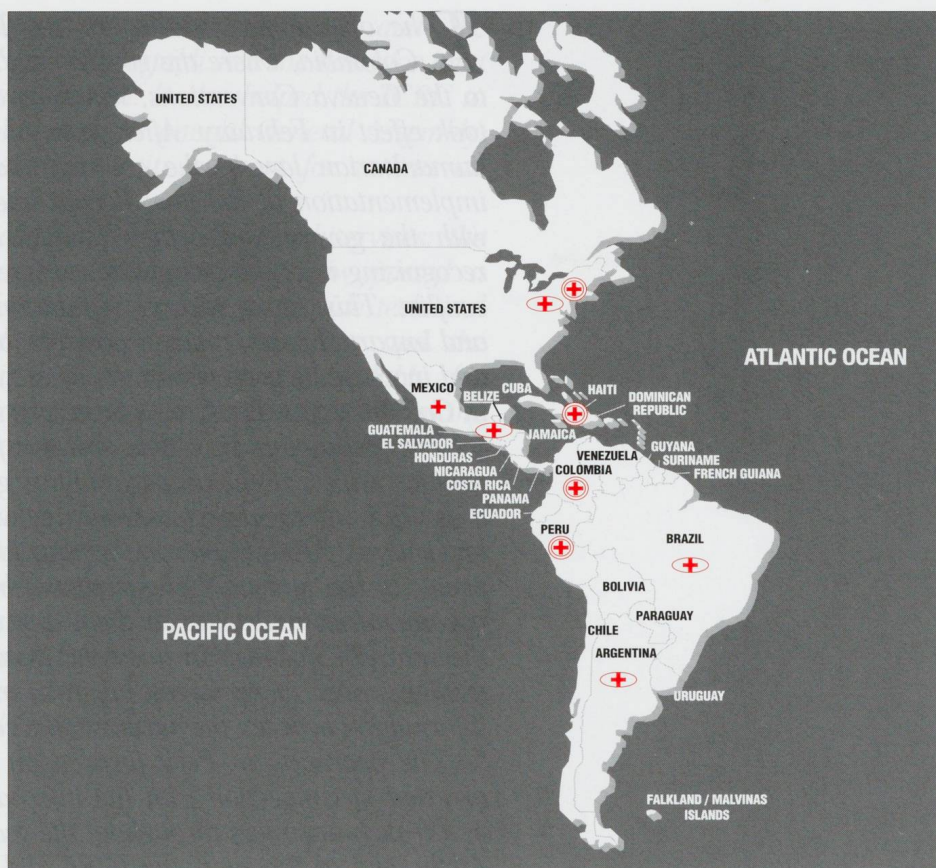
National Societies¹ : 6

Local employees² : 184

Total expenditure

Sfr 23,109,351

Expenditure breakdown	Sfr
Protection/tracing:	13,289,280
Relief:	708,650
Health activities:	1,743,982
Cooperation with	
National Societies:	1,791,179
Dissemination/promotion:	2,132,318
Operational support:	2,060,968
Overheads:	1,382,974



⊕ ICRC regional delegation ⊕ ICRC delegation + ICRC mission

ICRC / AR 12.96

¹ Average figures calculated on an annual basis.

² Under ICRC contract, as at December 1996.

THE AMERICAS

The operational priority for the ICRC in the Americas in 1996 was Colombia, where the government's ratification of Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions, which covers non-international armed conflicts, took effect in February. After years of spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law in the country, the ICRC began concentrating on the implementation of the law. It concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the government, which facilitated its work in the field by officially recognizing it as the acknowledged interlocutor for all parties to the internal conflict. This, along with its reputation among all Colombians as a neutral and impartial party, made it possible for the delegation to extend its activities and increase its presence in the country. By the end of the year the operation in Colombia was the ICRC's biggest in the Americas.

The delegation was able for the first time to establish and maintain contacts with Colombian paramilitary groups, and thus to perform its role as a neutral intermediary not only between the government and the armed opposition (for example, by helping to arrange for the release of abducted people or the surrender of guerrillas), but also directly between guerrillas and paramilitaries and between them and civilian groups that felt threatened by the spiral of violence. In this role, it was successful in particular at defusing tensions, once in April and again in mid-year, by passing on messages and information between the parties to the conflict.

The operation in Peru focused on the situation of thousands of people arrested in connection with the internal conflict. The delegation visited over 4,200 such prisoners throughout the year, monitoring their health and status. At the end of the year, the ICRC did its utmost to lessen tensions and to improve the situation of the many hostages seized by an armed opposition group at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima.

In Haiti, conditions at the prisons visited by the delegation remained a serious concern for the ICRC, prompting the delegation to postpone handing over its programmes to the local authorities and to stay on in the country. Its presence in Mexico facilitated contacts between the authorities and the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

To support the ICRC's continuing campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines, all ICRC delegations worked throughout the year to increase awareness of this problem. The Guatemala regional delegation held a seminar on the landmines issue in Managua in May. A special ICRC delegation travelled to Ottawa in October to take part in the conference convened by the Canadian government on the same subject.¹

¹ See *The law and legal considerations* pp. 274-276.




A cooperation agreement concluded between the ICRC and the Organization of American States (OAS) in May established the basis for joint activities, especially in the field of dissemination. It also helped the ICRC to urge the organization to adopt a resolution at its annual General Assembly, which was held in Panama City, expressing its support for a ban on landmines.²

The Bogotá delegation was the base for two decentralized services: the ICRC's Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law posted a delegate there to cover the whole of Latin America and to provide technical assistance to States taking national implementation measures, and the Canadian Red Cross made a retired Canadian colonel available for assignments with the ICRC's delegations throughout the continent. Working under ICRC coordination, he gave humanitarian law courses for the armed forces of South America.

One way to ensure that humanitarian law is observed in practice is through the establishment of national committees for its implementation. In previous years the ICRC worked for the establishment of such bodies and met with some success, especially in South America. In 1996 new committees were set up with ICRC help in Colombia and Panama, and the ICRC's newly established Advisory Service also assisted in preparations to set up others, notably in El Salvador, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

² See *Operational Activities* p. 33.



 ICRC delegation
  ICRC sub-delegation
  ICRC office

COLOMBIA

With tens of thousands of violent deaths, hundreds of abductions and thousands wounded, Colombia remained one of the most violent places in the world in 1996. The violence between the main armed opposition groups and government forces was still further complicated by the growing emergence of paramilitary groups. There were very few encouraging signs that a negotiated settlement could be reached between the government and the armed opposition.

The direct effects of the internal conflict in humanitarian terms were serious. The fighting left hundreds of thousands of people displaced within the country, including about 75,000 in 1996 alone. According to official sources, some 27,000 people were killed in violent incidents, but the actual figure was probably much higher; many of these were victims of the conflict. There were about 1,100 abductions, half of which were directly attributable to the conflict, and some 2,700 people were arrested on charges related to it.

*heightened awareness
of humanitarian law*

Colombians' awareness of international humanitarian law was among the highest in the world after years of debate over accession to the Additional Protocols and extensive coverage in the national press concerning the applicability of humanitarian law in internal conflicts (the country's accession to Protocol II came into force on 14 February). The government continued to take measures in support of humanitarian law. On 17 April Colombia recognized the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission established pursuant to Article 90 of Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions, and on 11 October the President of the Republic signed a decree instituting a governmental commission for the implementation of international humanitarian law and to render the conflict more humane,³ a body which was

³ See *The law and legal considerations* pp. 265-267.

to include representatives of the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Health and presidential advisors, with the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross as observers.

Despite the fact that both the government and the armed opposition acknowledged the need to decrease the level of violence, and notwithstanding some progress in spreading knowledge of humanitarian rules, serious and repeated violations persisted. These were attributable to all the groups taking part in the conflict and included extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances, ill-treatment, threats and hostage-taking.

The ICRC and the Colombian government concluded a Memorandum of Understanding on 16 February, which confirmed the government's authorization for the ICRC to conduct its humanitarian activities, and in particular to have contact with all groups taking part in the conflict.

The ICRC subsequently concluded a number of agreements with government ministries and departments, which were annexed to the Memorandum. For example, during the mission of the Delegate General for the Americas in April the ICRC signed an agreement with the *Fiscalía General de la Nación* (the Attorney General's Office, an autonomous body established as part of the judicial branch under the 1991 Constitution), and other agreements were later concluded with the Ministry of Defence and the DAS.* These agreements mainly addressed the question of procedures for ICRC visits to detainees and the arrest notification system, which had previously been set up with the assistance of the ICRC and which operated throughout the year. In 1996 the ICRC continued to monitor the effectiveness of this notification system.

With no let-up in the conflict in sight, the ICRC stepped up its activities, increasing its expatriate presence in Colombia from 27 at the beginning of the year to 43 by the end of December, and the number of its offices and sub-delegations from seven to eight (at the end of the year the ICRC had sub-delegations in Apartadó, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cali, Medellín and Villavicencio and offices in Florencia and Saravena, in addition to its delegation in Bogotá). In May the delegation increased its presence in the field, and in the Urabá region in particular. By so doing it was able to have more contact with victims, as well as with all armed groups and the military, and thus to intensify its activities.

The delegation's main activities included dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law, documenting and confidentially reporting on violations of this law, visiting detainees, assisting people directly affected by the internal conflict (providing medical and material assistance, paying for travel

*increased ICRC
presence in the field*

* DAS: Administrative Department of Security

IN 1996 THE ICRC:



- visited 2,240 security detainees, 1,183 of them for the first time, in 773 visits to 345 places of detention;
- visited 20 people detained by the armed opposition or by paramilitary groups, and facilitated the release of 25 people held under such circumstances;
- paid for the return home of 125 people after their release from detention;
- paid travel costs covering a total of 2,220 fares for travel tickets to enable family members to visit their relatives in prison.



- documented 365 cases (concerning 731 people) involving allegations of violations of humanitarian law, and in 248 cases submitted this information to the authorities or to armed groups;

- paid for the transport to safer areas of 2,194 people whose lives were in serious danger.



- covered the cost of medical care for some 120 people wounded as a result of the conflict and for 34 detainees, and provided basic medical supplies and assistance for displaced people and hospitals in need.



- together with the Colombian Red Cross (CRC), held regional meetings and seminars for directors of youth services, dissemination departments and first-aid services of the National Societies of Colombia and neighbouring countries;
- supported the institutional development and telecommunications infrastructure of the CRC, and held

courses to prepare first-aid and relief workers for activities in conflict situations.



- together with the CRC, held dozens of dissemination sessions, reaching over 36,000 people, including members of the military, the police, the armed opposition, paramilitary groups, civil servants, journalists, church officials, non-governmental organizations and civilians.

to allow families of detainees to visit their relatives in prison and to enable people whose lives or well-being were in jeopardy to move to safer areas), and acting as a neutral intermediary for the release of people held by armed groups.

A summary report on ICRC visits to penitentiaries and prisons was handed over to the authorities. Early in the year the ICRC handed over to the FARC* a summary report on violations of humanitarian law committed against civilians, covering the period from January 1994 to March 1995 (in November 1995 a similar report had been submitted to the ELN,* another armed opposition group). The delegation constantly reminded the armed opposition and the paramilitary groups of the need to allow people detained by them to communicate with their families, and repeatedly obtained permission for its delegates to visit such people.

The ICRC maintained contact with all these and other armed groups so as to encourage full compliance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

Throughout the year the ICRC continued its efforts to get or keep in touch with the newly formed paramilitary groups. The largest of these groups, the ACCU,* had established contact with the delegation in 1995. Thanks to these efforts, the ICRC was able for the first time to step in where certain paramilitary groups, including some associated with the ACCU, either were continuing to detain people (transmission of Red Cross messages) or wished to release them (assistance in organizing the release). At the end of the year prospects for developing contacts with some of the other paramilitary groups were good.

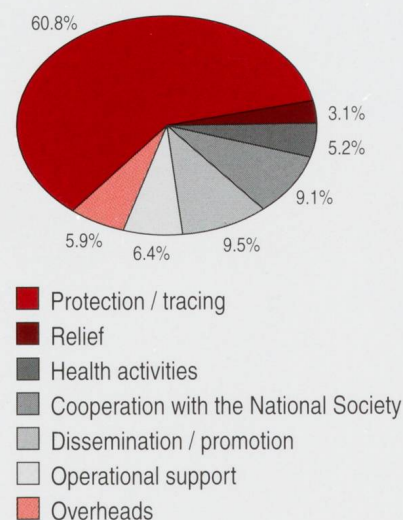
The delegation also kept up contact with the armed opposition so as to provide the same services and report violations of humanitarian law perpetrated by their forces. On numerous occasions the delegation assisted in the release of people detained by the guerrillas or forwarded Red Cross messages to people held by them.

In August, September and October the armed opposition carried out a number of attacks against army posts. One assault in August resulted in dozens of casualties, and the FARC captured some 60 soldiers. With humanitarian law high on the national agenda, and many Colombians from various circles placing a great deal of hope in the implementation of the law, the ICRC was asked to help seek solutions to problems such as this. The ICRC immediately requested a list of the soldiers captured (which the delegation

contacts with all groups involved in the conflict

COLOMBIA

Total expenditure in 1996:
Sfr 10,420,125



* FARC: Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces

* ELN: National Liberation Army

* ACCU: Rural Self-Defence Groups of Córdoba and Urabá (*Autodefensas campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*)

*joint programmes with
the Colombian Red Cross*

received in mid-October) and permission for its delegates to visit them. It also offered its services to help arrange their release, reminding the FARC of its obligation to observe the provisions of international humanitarian law, and in particular those relating to the rights of the soldiers to be treated humanely, to be visited by delegates and to correspond with their families. Unfortunately, the delegation was still unable to visit these people or to forward Red Cross messages to them by the end of the year.

In May the ICRC launched two assistance programmes which were carried out with the Colombian Red Cross (CRC): one which provided material assistance to victims of the conflict not receiving any help from the government or from other agencies, and another which sent CRC health brigades to provide medical assistance in regions of Urabá which, owing to the conflict, had become off-limits to other health workers. At the end of the year the ICRC concluded an agreement with the Spanish Red Cross under which the latter seconded staff to the ICRC-CRC programme in Urabá. The delegation also cooperated with the Colombian National Society in dissemination activities, a mine-awareness campaign and various training programmes. A cooperation agreement between the ICRC and the CRC, signed on 14 August, and an annex to it, concluded on 24 December, strengthened this cooperation still further.

The delegation also continued its activities to promote knowledge of international humanitarian law. In October an agreement on the teaching of humanitarian law at university level was reached with the University of Antioquia in Medellín; it was the first such agreement to be concluded in Colombia.

HAITI

The ICRC once again concentrated on activities in prisons and jails, with the aim of obtaining a general improvement in conditions of detention and individually following the cases of security detainees. Delegates regularly visited places of detention in and around Port-au-Prince, including the National Penitentiary, which housed almost half of the prison population in Haiti. They also visited and carried out repair work in about 20 jails and prisons in other towns in Haiti. ICRC medical staff kept track of the health of detainees in premises visited by delegates.

The delegation kept in contact with representatives of various government ministries, including via meetings with the Ministers of Justice and Foreign Affairs and representatives of the Ministry of Health, the National Police and the APENA (the national prison service), and also played a role as a liaison between the Haitian government and numerous assistance agencies, pointing out needs in the Haitian prison system. When other organizations were unable to help, direct assistance was also provided.

In the light of the serious and continuing need for humanitarian assistance in Haitian prisons, and especially at the National Penitentiary, the ICRC in May decided to expand its health and water and sanitation activities, adding two more staff and undertaking additional repairs at places of detention.

On 3 July the ICRC's head of delegation met the Prime Minister and handed over a summary report on detention-related activities. They also discussed the possibility of concluding a new agreement to govern ICRC visits to Haitian places of detention (the last official agreement with the Haitian authorities dated from the weeks prior to the international intervention of October 1994).

The Haitian authorities arrested a number of people for security reasons in 1996, including some who had been members of former governments. In mid-year a series of armed attacks on civilians, policemen, the television station and government buildings prompted the authorities to arrest some of the members of the MDN.* The ICRC visited these prisoners at the National Penitentiary and at the jail in Pétiön-Ville. The number of security detainees whose cases were followed individually thus rose to 44 by the end of the year.

In late October a group of six prisoners at the National Penitentiary commenced a hunger strike to protest against their continuing detention. Delegates visited them daily until the end of their strike one week later.

The ICRC supported the Haitian National Red Cross Society's reorganization efforts, and also assisted the National Society in developing its activities to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Red Cross principles.

*serious need
for assistance
in Haitian prisons*

* MDN: Mobilization for National Development

IN 1996 THE ICRC:



- visited and individually followed the cases of 67 people who were arrested or remained incarcerated in connection with the intervention of October 1994 or who were detained for reasons of State security;
- provided cleaning materials and other assistance to 20 prisons and jails throughout the country;
- built a 110,000 litre clean-water tank at the National Penitentiary and drained

septic tanks, repaired latrines, renovated buildings, improved kitchen hygiene and established or supported dispensaries at numerous places of detention;

- continuously monitored the health and nutritional situation of some 1,000 prisoners held in the National Penitentiary, and helped the APENA train health and food services staff.



- on 11 January concluded a dissemination programme under which every member of the new police force was given information on international humanitarian law (in all, 4,920 policemen attended such courses in 1995 and 1996).

PERU

The intensity of the internal conflict remained relatively low in comparison with the late 1980s. Fighting occurred in a few regions of the interior, including the upper Huallaga valley. Armed opposition groups also perpetrated bomb attacks in the capital. As in 1995, with the fighting in the countryside generally on the wane, activities for the over 4,200 people detained in connection with the conflict were the main thrust of the delegation's work in Peru. Delegates visited these detainees regularly.

In August the Peruvian parliament adopted a law which made it possible to release people held in connection with the internal conflict who had meanwhile been cleared of the charges brought against them. By the end of the year approximately 110 people had benefited from this law. Notwithstanding this, the ICRC's concern about the conditions of detention of over 2,000 detainees sentenced to long terms of incarceration and held in high-security prisons remained undiminished.

The ICRC on numerous occasions drew the attention of the Peruvian authorities to the need to bring the conditions of detention into line with international humanitarian law, and made representations at all levels, including the very highest. For example, this issue was broached when the ICRC President met the President of Peru in Davos, Switzerland on 2 February, and was one of the main points in the summary report on conditions of detention submitted by the ICRC in June to the Ministry of Justice. The delegation also handed over to the authorities summary reports on the situation of detainees held by the Ministries of the Interior and Defence. The ICRC furthermore reported to the Ministry of Defence on the problems faced by civilians in regions affected by the conflict. All these summary reports were likewise discussed with the President of the Republic.

The material assistance provided by the ICRC to people directly affected by the conflict went to widows, orphans, displaced people and those whose



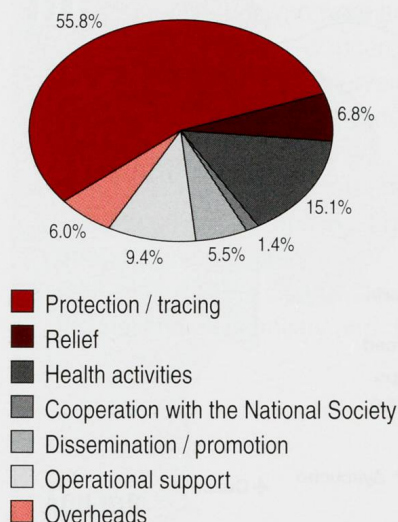
⊕ ICRC delegation
 ⊕ ICRC sub-delegation
 + ICRC office or other presence

*representations
concerning conditions
of detention*

PERU

Total expenditure in 1996:

Sfr 5,610,532



property had been destroyed, as well as to *recuperados*, or people who had previously lived in areas controlled by the armed opposition. The delegation also paid for medical assistance for people injured in incidents related to the conflict, including prosthetic and orthotic care, and provided medical supplies to hospitals and health posts in affected areas.

The delegation continued to carry out activities aimed at spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law. It developed dissemination activities in the Huallaga region and at various universities throughout the country and initiated a campaign at the end of the year to improve awareness of the neutrality of medical personnel, using radio, seminars and posters.

In August the President of the Republic approved the new statutes of the Peruvian Red Cross, which continued the restructuring process begun in 1994 with the joint help of the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

PERU

IN 1996 THE ICRC:



— visited 4,247 prisoners, 1,324 of them for the first time, in 1,112 visits to 167 places of detention;

— covered the cost of transport for family members to visit their relatives in prison eight times in the course of the year (issuing a total of 26,139 travel tickets, and enabling the families of 1,844 prisoners to visit their relatives);

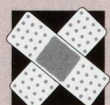
— funded training courses throughout the year for prison doctors with a view to improving care in the country's major prisons.



— helped to organize 18 family reunifications;



— distributed food, building materials, cooking utensils and clothes to approximately 3,500 people directly affected by the internal conflict.



— covered the cost of medical care for more than 310 victims of the conflict;
— evacuated 40 people requiring special treatment to health facilities in major towns.



— provided logistical support for local branches of the Peruvian Red Cross in Piura and Arequipa and repaired facilities belonging to the National Society in Piura and Lima.



— held 224 dissemination sessions to promote knowledge of and compliance with international humanitarian law, reaching over 17,500 people, including members of the military, the police, self-defence groups and civilians.

On 17 December members of the MRTA* occupied the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima during a diplomatic gathering and took hundreds of hostages. The ICRC's head of delegation, who was among those attending the event, immediately offered the organization's services to act as a neutral intermediary and was instrumental in securing the release of approximately 250 women and elderly people, as well as service staff and a number of children. The ICRC subsequently helped in securing further releases, arranging for the exchange of Red Cross messages between the hostages and their families and providing supplies to meet the hostages' basic needs. ICRC medical teams also visited the compound every day as from 19 December.

hostage crisis in Lima

In its role as a neutral intermediary the ICRC facilitated contacts between the MRTA rebels and the government and intervened on questions of a strictly humanitarian nature, but assumed no responsibility with regard to proposals passed on, decisions made or action taken. In the interest of clarity, it explicitly stated that it could provide no guarantees that decisions made or conditions set by the parties would be observed by them.

At the end of 1996, 81 hostages were still being held in the residence.

BRASILIA

Regional delegation

(Brazil, Ecuador, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela)

The delegation continued to encourage the region's governments to become party to the instruments of international humanitarian law. Specifically it raised with the various authorities the questions of Venezuela's accession to the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions, the accession by Guyana and Suriname to the 1980 Weapons Convention, ratification by Ecuador of the Protocols additional to the Weapons Convention which deal with blinding laser weapons and mines, recognition of the International Fact-Finding Commission by the Ecuadorean government and the possible establishment of a national committee for the implementation of humanitarian law by Ecuador.

*promoting instruments
of humanitarian law*

The ICRC held a number of courses on humanitarian law for Brazilian military schools and academies, contingents and observers leaving on UN peace-keeping assignments, and for the military police. Similar activities were conducted for the military in Guyana and Suriname. In Ecuador the ICRC

* MRTA: Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement

supported dissemination activities for the armed forces carried out by the Ecuadorean Red Cross, in accordance with a cooperation agreement between the two institutions, and held a seminar together with it for leaders of local National Society branches. It also supported various training seminars for staff of the Ecuadorean National Society, including one for presidents of its local branches.

Seminars and presentations of humanitarian law were also organized in Brazil for university staff and students (at the Universities of Brasilia and São Paulo), at academic institutions such as the Institute for Strategic Studies, and for government authorities.

The question of land distribution and relocation in Brazil was of concern to the delegation because of the violence it spawned. In certain places it was the centre of serious social tensions in rural areas, sometimes resulting in clashes between landless people and the police. While awaiting land distributions, a number of landless agricultural workers and their families occupied properties and established camps where the living conditions were harsh. The delegation contacted the government body in charge of land reform, the INCRA,* and the main organization representing landless peasants, and at the end of the year visited one such camp to take stock of the situation.

* INCRA: National Institute for Land Settlement and Reform

BRASILIA Regional delegation



- visited 6 security detainees held at 2 places of detention in Ecuador.



- supported activities of the Venezuelan Red Cross aimed at training staff responsible for dissemination, and supported similar activities of the Red Cross Society of Suriname.



- in Brazil, gave courses on humanitarian law at various military schools and academies and to two contingents leaving on United Nations peace-keeping missions, as well as to numerous observers;
- organized a one-week course on humanitarian law and human rights for officers of the military police from 12 Brazilian states;

- in November held courses on humanitarian law for instructors of the armed forces of Guyana and Suriname;
- throughout the year supported dissemination activities of the Ecuadorean Red Cross, which held 38 courses on humanitarian law attended by some 4,400 members of the armed forces.

In Venezuela, the ICRC was concerned about the situation in the border region near Colombia, and conducted a three-week survey in April and May in Apure, Táchira and Zulia states. The survey showed that there was a need for visits to people detained in connection with the conflict in Colombia and for instruction in humanitarian law for the armed forces stationed in the region. The delegation presented a report on the mission and offered its services to the Ministry of Foreign Relations in June. In September, as no reply was forthcoming, the ICRC followed up on this offer with an official communication from its headquarters to the Ministry. This topic was raised at a meeting between the ICRC Vice-President and the Venezuelan Foreign Minister which took place on the occasion of the Ibero-American Summit, held in Santiago, Chile in November. The Venezuelan Foreign Minister responded positively to the ICRC's offer and indicated that a written reply would be forthcoming in the near future.

As in previous years the ICRC visited a group of Colombian nationals detained in Ecuadorean prisons who had been arrested following an incident near the Putumayo river, on the Colombian border, in December 1993. They were visited by delegates in April, and although they had been sentenced earlier in the year to long periods in detention, they were eventually released in September.

BUENOS AIRES

Regional delegation

(Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay)

The regional delegation followed and participated in the work of national committees for the implementation of international humanitarian law⁴ whenever possible and took further steps to encourage implementation of the law, *inter alia* by urging ratification of the various instruments. Paraguay was the fifth of the region's countries to establish such a committee, which held its first meeting in April. In October the Argentine government filed the declaration recognizing the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission as provided for in Article 90 of Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions.

The delegation continued its efforts to spread knowledge of humanitarian law. It took part in various seminars and conferences, including those

*committees
for the implementation
of international
humanitarian law*

⁴ See *The law and legal considerations* pp. 266-267.

organized by the governments or National Societies of the region, UNHCR* (on refugee law) and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (on human rights and the military). The ICRC was also present during a number of events or activities devoted to peace-keeping operations, including a seminar organized by the governments of Argentina and Canada which was attended by representatives of 10 countries, the UN and the OAS, and the “*Fuerzas Unidas* peace-keeping operations — 96 SOUTHAM” military exercise, which was held in August in Uruguay and involved about 300 soldiers from four South American countries and the United States.

In April the Vice-President of Bolivia visited ICRC headquarters in Geneva and had talks with the ICRC President. They discussed the possibility of extending dissemination activities and also Bolivia’s position regarding the

* UNHCR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

BUENOS AIRES Regional delegation



- visited 96 security detainees at 2 places of detention in Chile in November, including 6 who were seen for the first time;
- visited 5 Peruvian nationals arrested on criminal charges (3 in Bolivia and 2 in Uruguay) and who were suspected of involvement with a Peruvian armed opposition group.



- concluded a cooperation agreement with the Chilean Red Cross in September which will govern joint efforts for the next three years, in particular in dissemination, information and tracing activities;

IN 1996 THE ICRC:

- together with the Federation, held a training seminar on the Red Cross principles and humanitarian law for the leadership of the National Societies of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay at the end of May and beginning of June.



- gave courses and lectures on international humanitarian law at numerous universities and academic associations, including the Austral University in Buenos Aires, the University of Buenos Aires, the College of Lawyers of Bolivia, the Catholic Universities in Asunción and Montevideo and the University of the Republic in

- Uruguay, and concluded a cooperation agreement with the Bolivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, under which the Bolivian diplomatic academy will introduce humanitarian law into its syllabus;
- gave instruction and training in humanitarian law to the military services of all five countries covered, including courses at army, air force and naval academies, and organized or assisted in the organization of seminars for the army in Argentina, the Cochabamba military academy in Bolivia, the police forces and Ministries of the Interior and Justice in Chile, the army and air force in Paraguay and the naval academy in Uruguay.

1980 Conventional Weapons Convention, as well as a possible anti-personnel mines ban.

In November the ICRC sent a delegation consisting of its permanent Vice-President, the Delegate General for the Americas and the regional delegate based in Buenos Aires to take part in the Ibero-American Summit, which was held in Santiago, Chile. During the summit the Vice-President held discussions with the President of Colombia and the Venezuelan Foreign Minister.⁵

As in previous years, the delegation visited security detainees in Chile. In May a number of detainees began a hunger strike, and the ICRC delegation visited them a few days later, shortly after their strike was suspended. Early in the year the delegation also visited three Peruvians arrested in Bolivia and two Peruvians arrested in Uruguay, all of whom were suspected of being involved with a Peruvian armed opposition group.

In 1996 the regional delegation initiated a campaign to raise awareness of the problems posed by anti-personnel landmines, and developed cooperation programmes with the region's National Societies in the field of communications.

The delegation worked closely with the Argentine Red Cross with a view to concluding a cooperation agreement. The agreement was in preparation at the end of the year.

GUATEMALA CITY

Regional delegation

(Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and other countries in the Caribbean)

The delegation continued to promote international humanitarian law throughout the region, and conducted operational activities as well. Detention-related activities were carried out in Guatemala (where the government authorized ICRC visits, beginning in January, to all places of detention run by the penitentiary system and the national police) and in Panama. The ICRC also played an important role as a neutral intermediary in Chiapas, Mexico.

*visits to detainees
in Guatemala*

⁵ See also *Brasilia regional delegation, Venezuela* p. 119.

IN 1996 THE ICRC:



- in Guatemala, the ICRC made 13 visits to 6 places of detention and registered 6 security detainees;
- in Panama, the ICRC made 2 visits to 6 people detained since the United States military intervention of 1989 and 1990. (See also *Washington regional delegation*.)



- supported the medical programme of the Mexican Red Cross in the Chiapas mountains, which held thousands of consultations, intervened in hundreds of medical emergencies, carried out tens of thousands of vaccinations and evacuated hundreds of patients to major health centres.



- continued carrying out joint dissemination activities for the armed forces with the National Societies of Nicaragua and Panama, and supported the dissemination services of the region's National Societies, and in particular that of the Jamaican Red Cross.



- supported training programmes in international humanitarian law which had previously been set up with the help of the ICRC and were run on an independent basis by the armed and police forces of Guatemala

(at all the military academies and the police academy), Honduras and Nicaragua;

- continued the round of dissemination sessions begun in late 1995 for members of the Guatemalan military in the north, including Quiché, reaching about 3,000 soldiers in the first two months of the year (thus bringing the total to about 6,000);
- in September held two dissemination sessions for members of the URNG* for the first time;
- held dissemination sessions for members of civil defence groups in Guatemala;
- continued to finance and materially and technically assist the International Humanitarian Law Study Centre in Havana, which held 12 one-week courses for over 300 officers of the armed forces and officials of the Ministry of the Interior;
- supported instruction in humanitarian law for the police force in the Dominican Republic and initiated similar programmes for the public forces in Costa Rica and the armed and police forces in Jamaica, Belize and the Bahamas;
- gave seminars or courses on international humanitarian law for government representatives in Honduras, Panama and the Bahamas, for university staff and students in Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic and for the press in Honduras and Cuba.



- jointly with the Nicaraguan Red Cross, held a seminar on anti-personnel landmines in Managua on 30 and 31 May attended by over 70 representatives of government ministries and the armed forces of Central American countries and Mexico.

* URNG: Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

The ICRC once again called upon those governments that had not already done so to ratify instruments of humanitarian law, and emphasized the importance of the 1980 United Nations Weapons Convention, especially in the light of the ICRC's campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines. Dominica acceded to Protocol II additional to the Geneva Conventions on 25 April.

The delegation further promoted the adoption of national measures aimed at implementing international humanitarian law, and toward this end encouraged the establishment of interministerial committees for the implementation of this law.⁶ The ICRC gave guidance in the work of the first such committee to be set up in the region, in the Dominican Republic, helped establish another in Panama in July and assisted the governments of El Salvador, Costa Rica and Guatemala in preparing to create others.

Activities at the regional level in 1996 included a seminar on anti-personnel landmines, which was attended by over 70 participants representing the countries of Central America and Mexico. The event was organized by the ICRC and the Nicaraguan Red Cross, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua.

In April the ICRC and the Federation invited the presidents of the region's National Societies to discuss the role and future of the Red Cross in the region at a meeting held in San José, Costa Rica.

A combined regional seminar and workshop on dissemination and cooperation projects was held in Guatemala City at the end of June, with the participation of heads of dissemination departments of the National Societies of Cuba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama and representatives of the Federation. This attendance was consistent with the general trend towards greater cooperation among components of the Movement in the Spanish-speaking part of the region. To try to establish the same type of momentum among English-speaking and other National Societies, the ICRC held a similar event in Jamaica in December, with the participation of representatives from the National Societies of the CARICOM* member States, Haiti, Suriname and Guyana.

The delegation paid particular attention to the development of dissemination services in English-speaking countries in the region. It helped the Jamaican Red Cross become the first such National Society to set up a dissemination department.

regional Red Cross seminars

⁶ See *The law and legal considerations* pp. 266-267.

* CARICOM: Caribbean Community

ICRC role in Chiapas

In Mexico, negotiations continued early in the year between the government and the EZLN.* On ten occasions the ICRC, acting as a neutral and impartial intermediary, provided transport for and ensured the safety of EZLN delegates travelling to and from peace talks and meetings preparatory to them held in San Andrés and San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

The delegation continued to monitor the situation of people held in connection with the uprising in Chiapas. At the end of the year there were still 15 such people in custody.

The Red Cross was the only organization able, thanks to its reputation as a neutral institution, to conduct medical activities in Chiapas throughout the year. Responsibility for this programme and for running the two health posts established in Chiapas had been handed over by the ICRC to the Mexican Red Cross in 1995. In 1996 the ICRC monitored the National Society's activities and concluded a cooperation agreement on financial assistance to Mexican Red Cross programmes, including dissemination.

WASHINGTON

Regional delegation (Canada, United States)

The regional delegation maintained contact with members of the Canadian and United States governments throughout the year. In addition, numerous ICRC officials, including the President, the Director of Operations and the Delegates General for Africa, the Americas and the Middle East and North Africa travelled on mission to Washington and Ottawa to exchange views with the two countries' governments, parliamentarians, assistance agencies and National Societies on ICRC activities in the various regions of the world.

The ICRC President went on mission twice to the US capital and once to Ottawa. In January he travelled to Washington and met the Secretary-General of the OAS, with whom he prepared a cooperation agreement that was subsequently signed in May. He also met the President of the World Bank to discuss possible forms of cooperation between the two organizations, as well as a number of high-ranking United States officials, including the Secretaries

* EZLN: Zapatista National Liberation Army

of Defense and State, the National Security Advisor and representatives of USAID.*

In October the ICRC President went to Ottawa to participate in the International Strategy Conference⁷ and to attend the ceremonies to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Canadian Red Cross. He held talks with officials of the National Society and also with leading members of the Movement.

An ICRC doctor with extensive experience in treating victims of anti-personnel landmines travelled to Washington in March to take part in the meeting of the OAS Hemispheric Security Committee, which was discussing the problem of landmines. The ICRC's Delegate General for the Americas and the Head of the Division for Relations with Armed and Security Forces took part in a conference held by the United States Southern Command in Miami and devoted to the role of the armed forces in the protection of human rights.

As part of its efforts to provide technical assistance to States as they take national measures to implement international humanitarian law, the ICRC, together with a legal adviser from the American Red Cross, offered advice to the US Congress on proposed legislation aimed at imposing legal penalties in the event of violations of the Geneva Conventions and other war crimes.

Throughout the year delegates took part in various debates and round-table discussions on topics such as landmines, humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law, at universities, seminars for the armed forces and events organized by non-governmental organizations.

In addition one Panamanian prisoner of war, captured during the United States intervention in Panama, was visited in January.

* USAID: United States Agency for International Development

⁷ See *The Law and legal considerations*, pp. 274-276.