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# OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

...relies. Its work is therefore not limited to the  
...and most visible — and for the ICRC, to  
...National Societies.

...contacts established at  
...in conflict-stricken par  
...national delegations covering  
...conflict. In addition, it  
...with the United N  
...regions.

The regional delegations have specific  
activities — on the one hand, and humanitarian

In the operational sphere, regional delegations  
countries they cover, such as outbreaks of  
tension or the onset of an armed conflict. They  
logistic support for operations in nearby countries,  
emergency operations, especially in the event of war.  
their responsibility they also visit security details  
designed to help restore family ties.

Regional delegations have a major role to play in  
diplomacy, particularly in establishing and maintaining  
governments, regional organizations, and so on.  
privileged position for sustained dialogue with the  
...in each of the countries concerned.  
delegations actively promote the dissemination of  
cooperation — which varies in form depending on  
the National Societies.

The cruel tide of war sweeps through, leaving countless men,  
women and children bereft and alone, far from their homes  
and families. The ICRC seeks to alleviate their suffering  
and restore hope. In 1996, it was working  
in more than 50 different countries.





*The past year was a tragic one for the ICRC — tragic because nine delegates died, cold-bloodedly killed while on mission to Burundi and Chechnya. They were committed to serving their fellow human beings, to helping the victims of extreme violence which threatened them too. A senseless violence which did not spare them.*

*Five of the slain staff members had been seconded by their respective National Societies (Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway) and the other four were delegates under contract to the ICRC. For all of them, their commitment was an expression of the solidarity of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement with the victims of conflict.*

*Although such violence is an integral part of the environment with which each and every ICRC delegate has to contend, owing to the very nature of their mission, the serious incidents in Burundi and Chechnya have left our institution deeply scarred. For those who lost their lives were more than colleagues and friends with whom we had shared our joys, our worries and our frustrations. They were also and above all delegates who had voluntarily placed their knowledge and experience at the ICRC's disposal to implement the first Fundamental Principle of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, namely: "...to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found".*

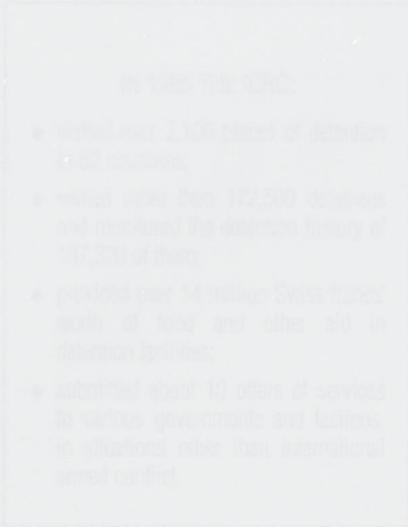
*Yet those events, tragic though they were, must not lead us to forget the wanton violence of which the civilian population and especially the most vulnerable groups — primarily women, children and the elderly — are the main victims in many present-day conflicts. The ICRC has seen for itself the suffering and humiliation inflicted on civilians. It has also often come up against the limits imposed on humanitarian action in situations such as those in Liberia and Kivu.*

*For there are indeed situations in which, for lack of a minimum of order and stability, effective humanitarian action on the victims' behalf is clearly no longer possible. Such is the case when the institutions of State are so disrupted by non-international armed conflict that it becomes extremely difficult to identify any authority. Moreover, in conflicts to assert group identity, the objectives pursued by the belligerents are inherently incompatible with the basic principles of international humanitarian law. Such conflicts tend to create a very unpredictable environment and call for continuous evaluation of the extent to which an institution such as the ICRC can take action; it may even require the suspension, though generally temporary, of activities.*

*The desperate plight of all too many victims of conflict cannot be ignored. We must heed their cry for help. Despite the setbacks experienced by the ICRC during the year, its determination to continue its work for all victims of conflicts is undiminished. Thorough consideration has therefore begun of all factors which have a bearing upon the security of humanitarian action. After its withdrawal from Liberia, the ICRC furthermore called upon the international community to examine*

ways of ensuring that scope for such action is preserved. It also followed and took part in discussions on the deployment of external armed forces in certain situations of conflict; in doing so, it saw what great difficulties of all kinds such interventions entailed. The implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution on the Great Lakes is only one illustration of their complexity.

Confronted by these new types of conflict, the ICRC is convinced that the role a specifically neutral and impartial institution can play as an intermediary between warring parties, whatever form that role may take, is as essential as ever to reduce the tragic consequences of conflict to a minimum. With the assistance of the States party to the Geneva Conventions and in cooperation with the other humanitarian agencies, it intends to help define courses of action that will enable it to continue to fulfil its mandate.



## Protection of the civilian population

Respect for the immunity of civilians and other people not, or no longer, taking direct part in hostilities is one of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and customary law. On the basis of observations made by its delegates in the field, the ICRC stepped up its confidential and public representations on this issue to the various parties.

In southern Lebanon, in connection with Operation Grapes of Wrath, the attention of the Israeli authorities and the Hezbollah leadership was drawn to problems concerning the conduct of hostilities. In Chechnya (Russian Federation), Afghanistan and northern Iraq, the ICRC repeatedly urged the forces involved not to use the general population as a pawn in their armed struggle, but to keep it clear of the fighting. Whenever the occasion arose, it called on the parties to take the necessary precautions to restrict as far as possible the effects of the hostilities upon civilians. In Sri Lanka, the ICRC monitored the situation of the civilian population closely throughout the year, especially during the government army and LTTE separatist movement offensives in the north of the Jaffna peninsula.

As well as the traditional type of military operation, the ICRC is increasingly faced with situations in which the obviously tenuous distinction between civilians and soldiers in internal armed conflicts is made even more complex by the emergence of new protagonists.

Violence of political origin or perpetrated by guerrilla movements or recognized groups is now often accompanied by lawlessness encouraged by the prevailing chaos and plunging the population into a permanent state of insecurity: hostage-taking, looting and murder have become routine methods of combat.

In Colombia, the civilian population is often caught in a vice between government or paramilitary forces, guerrilla movements and small groups connected with drug trafficking. Contacts consequently had to be built up on the spot and diverse steps taken there in order to curb the abuses committed by the various sides.

Lastly, the defenceless civilian population is all too often the declared target of those who are responsible for protecting it. The Great Lakes crisis and the plight of the many civilians who sought refuge in eastern Zaire are a clear reminder of this sorry state of affairs.

### *An increasingly difficult task*

The rules governing conflicts, particularly those relating to the treatment of prisoners, apply universally. Certain conflicts taking place outside the international community's field of vision are still going on, even though they no longer

hit the headlines. Only relatively few people are aware that thousands of people, civilians and soldiers, are held by one party or another, whether formally constituted governments or obscure guerrilla groups. These detainees, both men and women, are particularly at risk and must therefore be visited wherever they are held, and whatever efforts are required to reach them. Moreover, it is vital to remind anyone holding prisoners that even if they were captured bearing weapons, they have rights which must be observed. It is sometimes far from easy to ensure that those rights are respected, owing to the reluctance shown by the detaining authorities themselves during negotiations or to the very nature of the conflict, its geographical isolation or poor security conditions. Yet the ICRC considers that no effort should be spared to establish contact or start negotiations, even in the most remote places, so that the aforesaid principles are put into practice in the field. By adopting this approach it has been able, despite particularly difficult working conditions, to pursue its activities in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Iraqi Kurdistan.

However, indifference and the lack of media interest or political resolve all serve to undermine the universal humanitarian principles enshrined in international humanitarian law.

So that the law of the jungle does not prevail as the sole means of settling conflicts, it is imperative that standards be maintained and that the victims be protected in all circumstances. Unfortunately security problems or the unpredictable nature of certain fighting forces now make it impossible, in some cases, to envisage protection activities in acceptable conditions or collect reliable information on the situation of such population groups, whether or not they are in captivity. The ICRC must overcome that crucial challenge in order to carry out its impartial mission for all victims of conflict.

## Activities for people deprived of their freedom

### *Key examples*

The year 1996 brought a marked increase in the number of visits to prisoners throughout the world, due primarily to the continuing extensive arrests in Rwanda of people suspected of involvement in the 1994 genocide. By the end of the year, 89,000 people there were deprived of their freedom, about 30% more than in 1995. This exceptional situation forced the ICRC, in the absence of a truly functional judicial system, to maintain a very substantial apparatus and assistance programmes to ensure that they received decent treatment and material conditions of detention.

Besides Rwanda, the ICRC continued its activities wherever its presence was needed, and thus worked in 52 different conflict situations. This was particu-

#### IN 1996 THE ICRC:

- ◆ visited over 2,100 places of detention in 52 countries;
- ◆ visited more than 172,500 detainees and monitored the detention history of 137,320 of them;
- ◆ provided over 14 million Swiss francs' worth of food and other aid in detention facilities;
- ◆ submitted about 10 offers of services to various governments and factions, in situations other than international armed conflict.

larly the case on the Indian subcontinent where, under an agreement concluded with the Indian government in 1995, it ran a large-scale programme for people arrested in connection with the situation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Its continuing commitment in Sri Lanka, the turning point reached in some countries of the southern Caucasus where visits to security detainees became possible, and the watch it kept over people held by various factions in Colombia are only a few examples of the protection activities carried out by the ICRC in 1996.

These examples must not, however, obscure the very worrying reality in terms of the needs of people held in connection with situations of conflict, and the risks to which they are exposed.

An effective campaign against ill treatment, torture and forced disappearances requires not only the appropriate political will on the part of the authorities concerned, but also — for the ICRC — the possibility to have access to all detainees and monitor their situation individually until their release. To do so, it once again deployed very considerable human and material resources in the field. Apart from making visits and approaching the authorities concerned, the ICRC also registered and processed several hundred thousand items of information on people detained or presumed detained, and kept their situation under constant surveillance..

#### *Global strategy for a protection-friendly environment*

Besides responding to emergencies, the ICRC also takes action to avoid a repetition of violations of international humanitarian law or the fundamental humanitarian principles. Such action consists mainly of approaches to the authorities, on the basis of its observations. In detention-related work, prison visits constitute not only a means of preventing abuses but also an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the detaining authorities.

The complexity of conflicts and their effects is such that no factor likely to enhance the protection of conflict victims must be overlooked. The lack of understanding, scarcity of resources, penury and disorganization of certain States or parties, their occasional reluctance to take the necessary steps and the disintegration of the chain of command are all factors which compel the ICRC to diversify its approach, take up an ever-growing number of contacts and devise new ways of getting through to the potential perpetrators of violence or those who control them. Modern conflicts increasingly call for action taking all cultural and social aspects into account, together with the professional expertise which can modify inappropriate behaviour. To meet this constant challenge, the ICRC continued its efforts to create for each type of situation a whole range of activities and initiatives designed to support its work of monitoring

places of detention and its measures to ensure respect for the civilian population:

- ◆ special training for the police and the armed forces;
- ◆ assistance for the prison administrations;
- ◆ programmes to spread knowledge of humanitarian law and principles in civil society, and work in close cooperation with the local media;
- ◆ an increased presence at all structural and decision-making levels.

*Inability of certain States or parties to safeguard  
the physical integrity of people deprived of their freedom*

The conflict or violence rife in some States has profound and lasting economic effects upon their entire infrastructure, and particularly the prison system. Whereas people arrested in connection with a situation of violence run a number of specific risks, the conditions of detention of all prison inmates are clearly affected by it. Indeed, its repercussions are felt by many more prisoners than only those subjected to the direct effects of a repressive policy, for they no longer all receive the minimum humanitarian protection which they have the right to expect of the detaining authority.

More and more often, the ICRC comes up against the declared inability of certain States to maintain decent conditions of detention. Although by vocation and under the mandate conferred on it by the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC is not in principle concerned with penal law detainees, the magnitude of humanitarian needs in places of detention has induced it to widen its criteria for intervention considerably in countries where it was already carrying out its activities.

In order to respond to those needs, the ICRC took the weighty decision to act as a substitute, either partially or completely and on a lasting basis, for the detaining authorities. In order to ensure the survival of the prison population, it had to launch or maintain very extensive programmes in Zaire, Rwanda, Yemen and Haiti to provide food and medical assistance and to repair and renovate the existing facilities. In Azerbaijan, the ICRC set up an ambitious anti-tuberculosis campaign. In view of the disquieting situation in the southern Caucasus, this campaign should be extended to all the republics in that region.

The ICRC furthermore reached the conclusion that to avoid a higher mortality rate in places of detention, it had no alternative but to provide humanitarian aid on a large scale, even though negotiations for access to certain categories of detainees specifically covered by its mandate had not yet been successful. It did so particularly in Tajikistan, where it is still not authorized to visit security detainees in accordance with its customary procedures, by launching an emergency food aid programme for some 7,000 prison inmates, mostly

Prisoners in a Camp

- ◆ distributed nearly 1,000,000 Red Cross parcels and provided more than 1,000,000 rations, 177,354 clothing and 487,452 blankets for the former Yugoslavs and 1,110,132 rations and 1,412,000 blankets for Rwandans;
- ◆ supplied 10,500 medicines;
- ◆ facilitated 17,300 people being reunited by their relatives;
- ◆ received 36,183 new housing requests.

penal law prisoners, who were on the verge of starvation. But for the prompt action taken, several dozen of them would undoubtedly have died.

*Promising new developments*

Progress was made in 1996 in the ICRC's various theatres of operation. In response to the various steps it took and its work of humanitarian diplomacy, it was authorized to carry out its activities in five new contexts. Besides having access to people in detention, it also supervised the release and repatriation of hundreds of prisoners, some of whom had been held for many years. The main developments were as follows:

- ◆ in its capacity as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC was able to repatriate over 200 Sahrawi prisoners and Moroccan soldiers held by the Polisario Front and the Moroccan authorities;
- ◆ in Bosnia, the ICRC supervised the release of more than 1,100 civilians and combatants held by the various parties to the conflict. By mobilizing all the signatories and guarantors of the Dayton Agreement, the ICRC helped to prevent this simultaneous release from being hindered by the imposition of conditions of reciprocity;
- ◆ in Guatemala, access to certain security prisoners was finally made possible after more than 30 years of war between the opposition and the government;
- ◆ in Armenia, the ICRC was able to have access to all those arrested for participation in illegal political activities;
- ◆ in the context of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, the ICRC supervised, with Russian diplomatic support, the release and repatriation of the last remaining prisoners;
- ◆ in April, the ICRC signed an agreement on inspection of the conditions of detention of people awaiting trial and held under the authority of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda;
- ◆ in Senegal, after its first visits in June 1996 to prisoners arrested in 1994 in connection with clashes in the southern province of Casamance, the ICRC was able to discuss all questions concerning the prison system with the Senegalese government, particularly those relating to the treatment of the aforesaid prisoners;
- ◆ in October, the government of the State of Bahrain gave permission for visits to prisoners held in connection with the tension reigning there;
- ◆ after over a year's standstill with regard to the application of its visiting conditions, the ICRC concluded an agreement with the Palestinian Authority to resume visits to security detainees in the autonomous territories;
- ◆ in South Africa, the ICRC obtained an updated agreement on visits by it, allowing it to visit without delay all people held in prisons and to be notified of all arrests in connection with the political violence in KwaZulu/Natal.

### *Stalemate*

In accordance with its role as promoter of international humanitarian law and its right of initiative that entitles it to take up any humanitarian issue that it considers comes within its sphere of competence, the ICRC offered its services in a number of countries.

Despite its various attempts and approaches, the ICRC had difficulty in gaining acceptance for its offers, although needs are obvious. In the southern Caucasus, for instance, it is still awaiting the green light for visits to security detainees in Azerbaijan, although it has received the consent of the other neighbouring republics.

The ICRC has made no headway in its discussions with the Turkish government on the principle of visiting people deprived of their freedom or the possibility of assessing the situation of the civilian population in the east of the country.

Eight years after the end of hostilities in the Iran/Iraq war, and despite the ICRC's efforts to resolve the problem once and for all, between 18,000 and 19,000 prisoners of war registered by it during that conflict are still awaiting their release under Article 118 of the Third Geneva Convention.

The countries to which the ICRC offered its services to visit detainees, but did not receive a favourable reply in 1996, also include China, Cuba, Myanmar, Syria and Algeria.

### Restoration of family links

To restore contact between members of families split apart by armed conflicts is the main task of the Central Tracing Agency. It also keeps track, on an individual basis, of people deprived of their freedom whom the ICRC considers warrant special attention to ensure that they have the protection they need.

Other activities under this heading are those to facilitate the tracing of people whose fate and whereabouts are unknown, despite numerous attempts to locate them, and to help others to take up contact again with their families, particularly through the Red Cross message network and ICRC delegates' visits to places of detention.

The ICRC was particularly active in this respect, above all in connection with the former Yugoslavia.

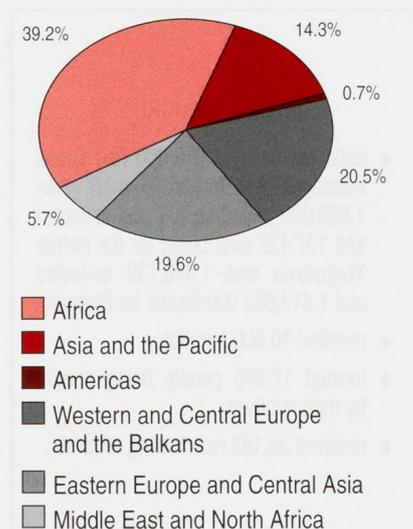
### *All-out efforts*

As early as 1995, during elaboration of the Dayton Agreement that was to end active hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ICRC took special care to see

#### IN 1996 THE ICRC:

- ◆ collected nearly 1,918,000 Red Cross messages and forwarded more than 1,908,000 including 177,354 collected and 197,422 distributed for the former Yugoslavia and 1,410,132 collected and 1,419,663 distributed for Rwanda;
- ◆ reunited 10,500 families;
- ◆ located 17,300 people being sought by their relatives;
- ◆ received 38,183 new tracing requests.

Geographical breakdown  
of ICRC relief supplies dispatched  
in 1996



that the question of persons unaccounted for was included as an integral part of the section relating to the civilian population.

In 1996, efforts were made to implement means of shedding light on the fate of the many missing people of whom their relatives had had no word for months, or even years.

Under international humanitarian law, States have the obligation to provide families with all information they possess about any civilians or soldiers in their power as the result of armed conflict. In recent conflicts, this treaty-based system has only rarely yielded the anticipated results.

In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the ICRC decided to focus on the family unit and to foster particularly close contacts with families. On the basis of information supplied by them, the ICRC drew up tracing requests which it then passed on to the party most likely to provide reliable replies.

A list of these requests was compiled and widely publicized. Anyone who could supply credible data about any missing persons was encouraged to do so. The tracing requests could also be consulted on the Internet, ensuring that they could be accessed by the largest possible number of people who might have useful information.

This threefold approach — transmission of requests to the parties concerned, compilation of a list of requests and publication of computerized data on the Web site — was a new venture for the ICRC, showing its determination to use the most efficient and up-to-date methods for families to obtain information about the fate of their missing relatives.

For that reason 1996 was a milestone in this very important sphere of ICRC activities.<sup>1</sup>

## Assistance and health

Faced with the manifold consequences of conflicts and the post-conflict phase, whose common denominator is the undermining of individual and general health, the ICRC had to provide very diverse forms of assistance in 1996 for a wide variety of groups, adapting its strategies to the different situations.

It should be noted that health protection also implies food security, protection against the elements, access to drinking water and the maintenance of a healthy environment, as well as medical and surgical services and rehabilitation of the disabled.

<sup>1</sup> See *Western and Central Europe and the Balkans*, pp. 172-180.

### *Food security for families*

Conflicts affect first and foremost the food security of families which have to flee from violence or which, even if they are not displaced, are all too often incapable of providing for their basic needs since the hostilities have destroyed or sharply reduced their means of production. Direct distributions in the form of food rations or through community kitchens enable them to survive in the short run. While this type of assistance is widely covered by the media, the ICRC's increasing efforts in the rehabilitation sector, which are often much less well known to the public, merit closer consideration.

The affected families sell their belongings and means of production (livestock, seed stocks, etc.) in order to survive; they thus become dependent on assistance. Support programmes to avoid this destitution are therefore essential. Their purpose is to restore a near-normal food supply and back up any steps taken to promote economic recovery. Agricultural, veterinary or fishing programmes (distribution of seed and farm implements, livestock vaccination campaigns and distribution of fishing tackle) make the families more self-sufficient in terms of food.

The ideal would be to launch such activities preventively, but owing to external constraints the ICRC can all too often act only once destitution has become a reality. Nonetheless, the methods and objectives remain the same, i.e. a detailed analysis of the evolution of all micro-economic parameters and active coordination with the target populations in order to set up programmes apt to restore as much self-sufficiency as possible. But more substantial resources over a longer period are then required, as one crop season will not be enough to redress the situation. It goes without saying that if the conflict persists (for example, arable land transformed into minefields, production impeded by the prevailing insecurity, continual destruction of productive resources), the initial objectives will be only partially attained.

Protracted conflicts, often at a low level of intensity or in the form of economic embargoes, have become more and more frequent. The ICRC has therefore diversified and adapted its rehabilitation programmes accordingly, with the consistent aim of stimulating economic production for the direct benefit of the individuals or households affected. In 1996, the following programmes were carried out: renovation of irrigation systems covering over 33,000 hectares and production of farm implements by local blacksmiths from the metal debris of weapons and military equipment in Afghanistan; the production of fishing nets, by displaced families, for distribution to fishermen in Somalia; and finally, in the transition from the former planned economy to liberalization (for example, in the southern Caucasus), relatively sophisticated activities such as granting peasant farmers small loans (repayable at harvest

#### IN 1996 THE ICRC:

- ◆ dispatched 78,000 tonnes of relief supplies worth 12 million Swiss francs to 45 countries (including 25,000 tonnes received as donations in kind);
- ◆ distributed 85,000 tonnes of relief supplies
- ◆ distributed 6,735 tonnes of seed and farm implements worth 6.5 million Swiss francs.

Tables showing details of relief supplies dispatched and distributed, contributions received in kind and purchases made by the ICRC in 1996 appear on pp. 344-347.

time in the form of flour for distribution to displaced families) and support for seed production at a regional level.

*Emergency shelter and heating: assistance strategies better adapted to environmental constraints*

Assistance operations for conflict victims can have serious side-effects, which can be kept to a minimum by appropriate strategies.

When food aid distributions in the form of dry rations are unsuitable, the ICRC sets up "kitchens". This type of food aid attracts large numbers of people, resulting in slow deforestation around the provisional facilities since wood is frequently the sole fuel available. In many cases the use of low-consumption cookers and stoves, which can be made cheaply in Switzerland or on the spot, reduces the amount of fuel needed by 90% as compared with the use of charcoal (Rwanda, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia), an energy source for which a substitute must certainly be found. The ICRC is trying to develop a new appreciation of energy sources such as physical effort by humans and animals, coal, firewood and water, to diversify mineral resources and to use often dual-purpose appliances with optimum energy yield for heating and cooking. Fuel oil, which is universally available for vehicles, is ideal for those purposes. Waste engine oil is an interesting proposition in more ways than one; research has led to the development of a combined stove and cooker entirely consuming the residue and providing high energy, which has been used in the Caucasus, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Natural gas, which is sometimes denigrated because of the technical facilities it requires, may for example also be used effectively and at a reasonable price in the northern Caucasus.

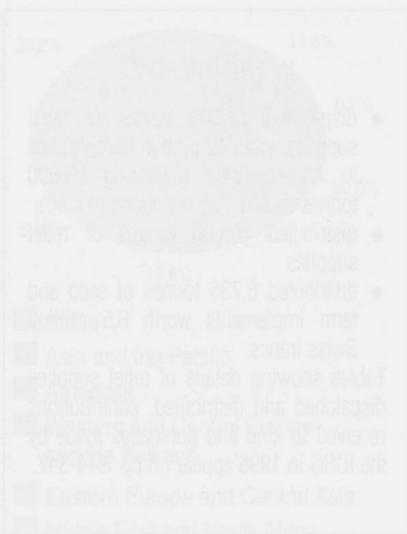
In supplying heating and cooking appliances, priority is given to hospitals, dispensaries and communal premises, as well as groups of displaced families.

The need to meet the emergency requirements of displaced people or refugees and to establish a logistical infrastructure often leads to camps being situated in places where their long-term environmental impact may be catastrophic. It is therefore important to take into account data such as that from a forest-survey register indicating the exact area in which wood cutting is permissible.

Whenever possible, the ICRC tries to use the existing infrastructure, concentrating mainly on access to usable or refurbishable local facilities. By respecting local cultural practice and regulations, installations which are not in keeping with traditional systems can be avoided (as in the southern Caucasus and Tajikistan). In this way, a moderate and suitably adapted boost is given to the economy.

Finally, when thousands of families return home to dwellings that are often over 80% destroyed and try above all to settle down there again, the

Geographical breakdown  
of ICRC relief supplies dispatched  
in 1992



appropriate assistance strategies will be determined by the rate of returns, the materials available, the economic conditions and the local logistical capacity.

#### *Access to water, and environmental sanitation*

For several years, the ICRC's activities in this field have been steadily increased and diversified. Several major water and sanitation programmes were carried out in 1996, especially in Iraq, Chechnya (southern Russia), Bosnia, Rwanda, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh, and Somalia.

In Iraq, owing to the international sanctions imposed since the Gulf War, there is a risk of water-treatment plants, drinking water storage and distribution systems and drainage systems breaking down for want of maintenance and spare parts. The ICRC imports the necessary parts and supervises repairs to the threatened facilities, in cooperation with the local technical services. In 1996, over 60 installations throughout the country were dealt with under this programme.

In Bosnia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh, the ICRC's sanitary engineers, sometimes with the help of participating National Societies and through projects delegated to them, are trying to repair the damage to water supply systems caused by the recent conflicts and to ensure that waterworks receive the chemicals needed for water purification.

In Rwanda, the ICRC's water and sanitation projects (also carried out with the help of participating National Societies taking on projects delegated to them) are centred on restoring drinking water distribution systems for displaced people and refugees who have returned to their home towns and villages. Prisons are another focal point for such work: since they are overcrowded, their supply of drinking water must be increased and stringent measures must be taken to improve hygiene and thus avoid epidemics. In Zaire, water supply and hygiene conditions in 25 prisons were improved under a similar programme.

In Chechnya, the fighting in Grozny, Gudermes and elsewhere deprived the townspeople of drinking water. Emergency distributions of water by tankers were organized, then emergency repairs to pumping stations were carried out. Similar work was effected in villages in the conflict zone and in neighbouring Daghestan for people displaced by the Chechen conflict.

#### *Support for medical services and care for the wounded and war-disabled*

Situations of conflict always disrupt medical and surgical services and reduce their operational capacity at the very time they are in greater demand. It is therefore not surprising that all the ICRC's assistance activities consist, to a greater or lesser extent, of support for local medical facilities. This support may range from supplying basic equipment and unavailable essential medicines to

#### IN 1996 THE ICRC:

- ◆ distributed medicines and other medical supplies worth 42 million Swiss francs;
- ◆ deployed sanitation teams in 17 countries to provide drinking water for displaced people and/or repair water treatment facilities and distribution systems in towns and regions affected by conflict;
- ◆ deployed medical teams in 7 hospitals in Africa and Asia which admitted a total of about 12,700 in-patients. Over 33,250 people received out-patient treatment;
- ◆ fitted 6,746 amputees with artificial limbs;
- ◆ supplied 1,407 orthopaedic aids (crutches, etc.) and 675 wheelchairs.

sending medical and surgical staff or setting up hospitals to treat the wounded. Medical assistance may also be provided for prisoners: the pilot programme for the treatment of tubercular detainees in Azerbaijan is a good example.

In 1996, the ICRC continued to provide substantial support in the form of medicines and other medical supplies to hospitals or health centres in many areas of conflict, particularly in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Somalia, the Sudan, Angola, Sierra Leone and Iraqi Kurdistan.

A surgical unit was opened at the Mirwais hospital in Kandahar (Afghanistan) in June, just in time to admit many casualties of the intensified fighting south of Kabul. This new transfer of surgical activities to Afghanistan enabled the ICRC hospital at Quetta (Pakistan) to be closed down in October, after 13 years of constant work during which almost 20,000 wounded were treated there.

In Chechnya (southern Russia), the ICRC opened a surgical hospital in Novye Atagi, to the south of Grozny, on 2 September. By taking over the treatment of war casualties, it was intended to ease the strain on the other hospitals and enable them to provide surgical services for the civilian population. It also set a tangible example of the neutrality that should prevail in a medical facility. In addition, Chechen doctors were to be given training there in war surgery. Unfortunately, the brutal murder of six members of the ICRC medical team forced the institution to withdraw its expatriate staff in December.

The Sudanese conflict resulted in a steady influx of casualties at the ICRC surgical hospital in Lokichokio (Kenya), which has worked non-stop since it was established in 1987, despite the difficulties encountered in evacuating them from the combat areas and repatriating them after treatment: the ICRC has to fly them out and many obstacles have to be overcome to do so, such as bad weather and problems in obtaining flight authorizations.

The provision of artificial limbs for war amputees, often victims of anti-personnel mines, is one of the long-term problems which the ICRC is trying to solve by setting up prosthetic/orthotic workshops in the countries affected by that scourge. Since 1979 no fewer than 46 projects have been carried out in 23 countries, allowing over 70,000 amputees to be fitted. Thirteen programmes have been handed over to various partners and are continuing their work. In 1996, the ICRC launched three new projects: in Arbil (in Iraqi Kurdistan), Grozny (Chechnya) and Gatagara (Rwanda).

But it is not enough to fit war amputees with artificial limbs; they must have further rehabilitation enabling them not only to walk again but to resume work as well. For the first time, the ICRC helped disabled youngsters with no family backing to learn a trade. Twenty young people treated at the Kabul limb-fitting centre were trained in various agricultural techniques such as grafting and

pruning fruit trees, skills which are in great demand by growers. Limited though it is, this project should serve as an example.

*Evaluation and training: the key to responsible humanitarian work*

The need for emergency action must not be invoked by the humanitarian organizations as a reason for intervening without considering and trying to assess the positive or negative consequences of the action they take. Similarly, good intentions must not take the place of professionalism. The ICRC has long been aware of these requirements and endeavours to evaluate the results of its activities, to structure the experience acquired and to pass it on by means of courses, seminars and publications, or by taking part in international congresses on the various problems of humanitarian action.

In 1996 the ICRC strengthened its evaluation and training capacity in health matters by creating a special unit for this work, under the authority of its Chief Medical Officer.

Thorough assessments were made of the functioning of ICRC-supported dispensaries in Angola and of public health needs in Bosnia.

A major publication by the ICRC entitled *Handbook on war and public health* presents the whole range of its assistance methods and strategies as taught since 1985 in the HELP\* courses. Intended as an aid in decision-making, it also includes chapters on development and humanitarian interventions (particularly the link between emergency and development), the protection of victims of armed conflict and an introduction to humanitarian ethics. Another more technical publication covers the treatment of war wounds with fractures. In addition, ICRC specialists participated, under WHO auspices, in drafting directives for donations of medicines and the standardization of medicines and other medical supplies intended for emergency humanitarian aid.

The ICRC again organized HELP courses in 1996, as it has done since 1985. They took place in Geneva, Brussels, Hawaii and Budapest. In addition, a seminar on war surgery was held in Geneva and a training seminar for prison medical staff in Georgia, to mention only the most important such events.

Lastly, to mobilize expert opinion on a major problem and examine its ethical implications, a symposium on the medical profession and the effects of weapons was held in Montreux in March 1996.

\* HELP: Health Emergencies in Large Populations

- In 1985, the ICRC signed a cooperation agreement with the Organization of American States.
- In 1984, the ICRC signed a cooperation agreement with the Organization of African States.
- In 1982, the ICRC signed a cooperation agreement with the Organization of Islamic Unity.
- In 1981, the ICRC was granted observer status at the United Nations.

## Operational cooperation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Throughout 1996, the ICRC and the National Societies continued to strengthen and extend their operational cooperation in various forms. The number of delegated projects and bilateral projects increased considerably and 52 projects were in progress in 1996, still under the ICRC's general coordination. This cooperation has proved very valuable both for the ICRC and for the National Societies carrying out such projects, but above all it allows greater assistance to be provided for conflict victims, particularly in fields requiring technical expertise. In addition, National Societies again made several hundred people available,<sup>2</sup> supplied equipment and food and supported the ICRC's work financially.<sup>3</sup> In 1996, the financial contributions enabled almost 10% of the ICRC's total expenditure to be covered.

Projects delegated to a National Society by the ICRC are an integral part of the objectives and budget set by the latter for the conflict region concerned and are generally based on the concept of continuity between emergency activities and development programmes. They consist mostly of medical, prosthetic/orthotic, sanitation or relief distribution programmes. Fourteen programmes for the construction or repair of drinking water sources or supply systems were thus taken on by National Societies, particularly in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. They are, however, progressively extending their scope to take on projects such as an information campaign on the dangers of anti-personnel mines in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the dissemination of humanitarian law to the armed forces in Latin America.

Bilateral projects help to improve the daily lives of victims in the post-conflict phase. They are not operational objectives for the ICRC, but they do meet real needs on the borderline of its traditional criteria for action. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, an old people's home, a psychiatric hospital and a school for children in difficulty were renovated, and in the occupied and the autonomous territories a development programme was set up for women victims of the *Intifada*.

All these projects enabled the ICRC and the National Societies to forge ever-closer links both between the various governing bodies and in the field, and to share their experience and know-how in the various areas of cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> See *External Resources*, pp. 319-320.

<sup>3</sup> See *Financial Tables*, pp. 329 and 333.

## Relations with the international organizations

Today, more than ever, humanitarian action is thought of in terms of dialogue, consistency and concerted action by the various players on the international scene in order to respond as effectively as possible to the needs of conflict victims for protection and assistance. Enhanced respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law are a *sine qua non* for that protection. The ICRC's relations with the international organizations (the United Nations and its agencies and specialized programmes), regional organizations and non-governmental organizations are of ever-increasing importance in accomplishing this dual objective. The International Organizations Division therefore intensified such contacts in 1996 and, from Geneva, New York and Addis Ababa, attended many international meetings and conferences in order to uphold the victims' cause and that of humanitarian law and to draw the ICRC's attention to any new developments. For this purpose, the Division also kept in close touch with the ICRC regional delegations in Washington and Kuwait to follow up relations with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) respectively.

The mobilization of support for humanitarian objectives continued: the ICRC's firm commitment to bring about a total ban on anti-personnel landmines was reflected in systematic attempts by delegates from the Division to ensure that progress was made on this subject in international and regional fora. The results are encouraging, to judge by the number of resolutions and declarations adopted in 1996. They include:

- ◆ the resolution adopted at the 26th OAS General Assembly in Panama (June 1996), entitled "The Western Hemisphere as an Anti-personnel-landmine-free Zone";
- ◆ the resolution adopted at the 64th session of the OAU Council of Ministers and at the 32nd OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in Yaoundé (July 1996);
- ◆ the joint action on anti-personnel landmines adopted by the Council of the European Union (September 1996);
- ◆ the resolution on anti-personnel mines adopted at the 96th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Beijing (September 1996);
- ◆ the resolution on an "International agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines", adopted at the Fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly (51/45S).

The ICRC also expressed its views for the first time on 15 August before the United Nations Security Council, which was holding a debate on mine clearance in the context of peace-keeping. The ICRC head of delegation in

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New York underscored the great human suffering and harm caused by these insidious weapons.

The ICRC's concerns with regard to landmines were likewise taken into account in the World Action Plan adopted at the close of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in June 1996, and in the Final Declaration of the 6th Ibero-American Summit (Santiago de Chile), at which the ICRC was represented.

Throughout the year, the ICRC took the opportunity at major multilateral gatherings to intensify its dialogue with States in order to defend the principle of independent and impartial humanitarian action and to obtain increased support for its field operations. To this end, the head of delegation in New York regularly informed successive Security Council Presidents about its activities and concerns.

During the year, the ICRC continued and stepped up the dialogue it had initiated with United Nations agencies and programmes. Some examples are:

- ◆ the fourth high-level meeting with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- ◆ the second high-level meeting with the World Food Programme (WFP), which ended with an exchange of letters laying down basic principles for relief operations in situations of conflict and defining terms of cooperation (Florence, 2 September);
- ◆ the first structured dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, accompanied by his senior staff, to clarify complementary working methods;
- ◆ the first meeting of the same kind with UNICEF;
- ◆ the fruitful contacts established with the World Bank in seeking practical forms of action linking emergency activities, rehabilitation and development.

The purpose of these bilateral steps was to enhance mutual understanding and to strengthen coordination and sectorial cooperation. This pragmatic approach is in no way prejudicial to the ICRC's participation as an "active observer" in United Nations coordination systems in order to help promote concerted and consistent action by the international community. This participation continued throughout the year.

The World Food Summit held from 13 to 17 November in Rome, at which the ICRC was also represented, was an opportunity for it to make known its approach and experience on the subject of food security in armed conflicts.

For the third time, the ICRC mission to the OAU organized a seminar on the subject "Water and armed conflicts" for the ambassadors accredited to that organization. The seminar gave rise to the "omnibus" resolution adopted by the OAU Council of Ministers in July 1996, in which it appeals to the member States for an absolute protection of water sanitary installations and personnel in charge of maintaining and repairing these installations in armed conflicts. It

also reaffirms the common African stance in support of a total ban on anti-personnel mines.

In the spring, the ICRC President addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during a debate on a report concerning the ICRC's activities. The debate led to a very firm resolution on respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law.

The year 1996 was also characterized by a strengthening of relations with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The ICRC President was invited to address its Permanent Council in February and the ICRC took part in the work of the OSCE Review Meeting held from 4 to 22 November in Vienna, at which its representative spoke on a number of occasions. For the first time, the ICRC was invited to attend an OSCE summit, which was held in Lisbon.

Contacts with non-governmental organizations were increased and strengthened in 1996, both at headquarters and in the field. So as to share in major deliberations on fields related to its own area of activity, the ICRC took part in many international fora which were devoted not only to a whole range of operational and legal matters, but also to consideration of issues such as ethical criteria for humanitarian action, the protection of displaced persons and the prevention of conflicts.

The ICRC itself held a workshop on international humanitarian law and protection (18 to 20 November) which was attended by 22 non-governmental organizations, and by UNHCR and UNICEF as observers. The participants discussed all aspects of the problem raised, with regard to the application of humanitarian law, by the proliferation of humanitarian agencies engaging in protection activities. Besides making a comparison of working methods, they considered *inter alia* the advisability of basing action on common ethical criteria, and ways of enhancing the implementation of humanitarian law and strategies to promote complementarity.