

Middle East and North Africa

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ICRC/H. Sleilati

In April 1997 the ICRC facilitated the simultaneous release of three detainees held at Khiam detention centre in Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon and one member of the South Lebanon Army. The ICRC, whose role as a neutral intermediary is recognized by all the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict, has often been called upon to help ascertain the fate of missing combatants and to assist in the handing over of mortal remains. At the same time it strives to obtain authorization to visit all those held in connection with the events.

The Near East

ICRC delegations:

Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

The Gulf

ICRC delegation:

Iraq

ICRC regional delegation:

Kuwait

North Africa

ICRC delegation:

Egypt

ICRC regional delegation:

Tunis

Staff

ICRC expatriates: ¹ 77

National Societies: ¹ 4

Local employees: ² 368

Total expenditure

Sfr 36,360,351

Expenditure breakdown

Sfr

Protection/tracing: 18,444,629

Relief: 1,064,501

Health activities: 8,093,981

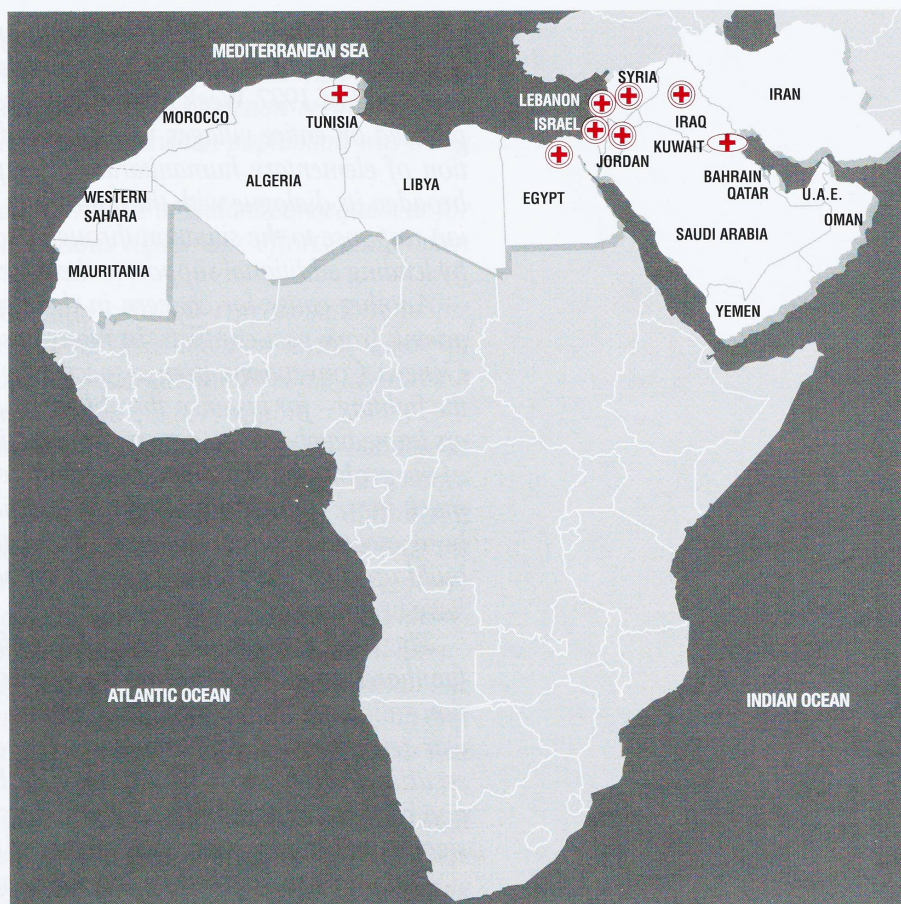
Cooperation with

National Societies: 2,017,968

Promotion/dissemination: 2,095,876

Operational support: 2,532,967

Overheads: 2,110,429



ICRC / AR 12/97

⊕ ICRC regional delegation ⊕ ICRC delegation

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

¹ Average figures calculated on an annual basis.

² Under ICRC contract, as at December 1997.

Heading the list of the ICRC's major concerns in the Middle East and North Africa was undoubtedly the violence in Algeria, which reached new heights at the end of 1997. Week after week, savage and indiscriminate attacks were perpetrated on entire villages, with hundreds reported slaughtered in flagrant violation of elementary humanitarian principles. The ICRC sought to intensify and broaden its dialogue with the authorities so as to be able to provide a humanitarian response to the situation through protection and dissemination activities and by lending additional support to the Algerian Red Crescent.

Another cause for concern in the region was the failure to resolve problems arising from past conflicts. In many cases, had even the most basic rules of the Geneva Conventions been respected by the belligerent States or groups during the fighting – for instance, the obligation to register fallen combatants and prisoners immediately and to pass on information about them to the other party – many of the problems subsequently encountered could have been avoided or dealt with much more quickly and easily. In addition, a measure of confidence could have been created between the parties and the painstaking efforts now required to build up such confidence before even partial solutions can be found would not have been necessary.

The ICRC was thus once again confronted with challenges that were all too familiar. Its main tasks during the year consisted in protecting the civilian population still living under Israeli occupation, endeavouring to repatriate prisoners of war remaining in captivity nearly 10 years after the end of the Iran/Iraq war, securing the release of Moroccans held by the Polisario Front for up to 20 years and continuing the search for those missing in connection with the Gulf war. No significant progress was made on any of these fronts in 1997.

The year was marked by the 30th anniversary of both the Israeli occupation and a strong ICRC presence in the area. For three decades the organization had been striving to ensure full respect for humanitarian law by the authorities. This law provides for the protection of populations under military occupation, essentially for a limited period of time only. The ICRC nevertheless believes that systematic compliance with the rules of the Geneva Conventions relating to occupied territories would help to create a climate more conducive to resolving the underlying political issues.

Special mention should be made of the situation of the Iraqi people as their country entered its seventh year under UN embargo. As early as October 1991, the ICRC had submitted to the members of the Security Council a report on the risks that such a measure was likely to entail. In 1997 the organization, already present in Iraq for 18 years, was able to bear witness to the slow but steady deterioration in the living conditions there, mainly with regard to such basic services as health care and water supply. On several occasions the ICRC drew the attention of the international community to the situation. In the meantime, it endeavoured

to alleviate the consequences of the embargo by pursuing its sanitation and prosthetic/orthotic programmes. Although the organization did not wish to become embroiled in the controversy relating to the future of the sanction regime, its duty was to underscore the increasing extent to which the civilian population was being left to its fate.

The conflict in northern Iraq dragged on, with its attendant consequences for civilians and no solution in sight, despite various diplomatic efforts undertaken by the international community.

Regarding all these issues, the ICRC made constant representations to the States party to the Geneva Conventions, calling their attention to the failure of certain parties to respect the provisions of humanitarian law. In some instances, it could have hoped for a more positive response and greater support.

On the basis of its right of initiative in situations falling outside its mandate as defined by the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC was able to develop its detention-related activities in Bahrain and pursue them in Yemen and Jordan, although it encountered some problems regarding access to detainees in Jordan towards the end of the year. In several countries where internal disturbances occurred or were a potential threat, the organization was able to step up its work to spread knowledge of humanitarian law among the armed forces and on a more general level.

As part of its global efforts to promote the incorporation of humanitarian law into national legislation, the ICRC organized several seminars in the region and built on the groundwork already laid in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen to this end.

As in other areas of the world, the ICRC vigorously pursued its campaign against landmines, endeavouring to make people aware of the dangers of these weapons and urging governments to sign the Ottawa Convention³ prohibiting their use, stockpiling, production and transfer. In December, five of the region's countries signed the treaty.

Overall, however, the year's achievements failed to meet the expectations of all those entitled to protection and assistance under humanitarian law. The ICRC remained convinced that respect for humanitarian principles would contribute significantly towards calming the violence that prevailed in many of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

³ See *Promotion and development of international humanitarian law*, pp. 295-297.

The Near East

ISRAEL, THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIES

Although Israeli troops in Hebron were redeployed in January, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process reached a stalemate in 1997 as a result of two events in March: the Israeli decision to build the Har Homa settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim and indiscriminate suicide attacks committed against Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv. The stalemate persisted despite diplomatic efforts at international level, especially in the second half of the year. Bilateral discussions between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government nevertheless got timidly under way once more towards the end of 1997.

The Israeli decision on Har Homa/Jebel Abu Ghneim was followed by an outbreak of violence in the occupied territories, and more clashes took place there in the summer. In addition to the attack in Tel Aviv in March, further attacks were committed against Israeli civilians in July and September in Jerusalem, contributing to the mutual feeling of frustration at the peace process. In all, 24 people were killed and hundreds wounded. The situation remained potentially explosive throughout the year.

The ICRC was deeply concerned by such acts as the suicide attacks and by the rise in tension, both of which gave reason to fear an escalation of the violence. It strongly condemned the attacks on civilians and appealed for respect for the most elementary principles of humanity, stressing that such indiscriminate acts were a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

Measures taken by the Israeli authorities in response to the violence included the complete closure of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with additional restrictions placed on movement within them and the imposition of curfews. These territories were already subject to chronic closure at the best of times, making it very difficult



peace process deadlocked

attacks on Israeli civilians

consequences for civilians under occupation

for people to go back and forth across the green line. The expansion of settlements – in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention – continued. More than 100 houses belonging to Palestinians were destroyed, mostly for lack of permits. The identity cards of many Palestinians from East Jerusalem were confiscated and Bedouin families were forcibly displaced and had their property destroyed or taken away from them. The consequences in humanitarian terms for Palestinian civilians were manifold, and included long-term economic problems due to unemployment and non-access to the Israeli market, and the splitting-up of families across the lines.

In view of the situation, the ICRC considered that humanitarian law still had a major role to play in facilitating relations between Israel and the Palestinians and creating the conditions conducive to the quest for peace.

The ICRC delegation in Tel Aviv therefore continued to promote compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention by calling on the Israeli government to respect its provisions and, at the same time, took practical steps to help the civilians whom the Convention protects. It acted as a neutral intermediary between the Israeli authorities and civilians living under occupation, making representations on their behalf. However, once again, despite years of approaches to the Israeli authorities and the latter's response, the ICRC did not succeed in obtaining full respect for humanitarian law. In 1997 it reported scores of violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the authorities, a significant increase over the preceding period.

During clashes in the Gaza Strip and West Bank the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary to facilitate urgent medical transfers. It provided strong support to the PRCS* Emergency Medical Service (see below), which gave on-the-spot first aid and evacuated the wounded.

The ICRC continued to act as a neutral intermediary between Israel and countries with which the latter had not signed peace agreements.

The ICRC delegations in Israel and Lebanon worked closely together, offering the parties to the conflict in southern Lebanon⁴ an efficient channel of communication through which matters of humanitarian concern could be resolved. At the request of the Israeli authorities and the Lebanese government, the ICRC acted as a neutral intermediary between them with a view to repatriating the mortal remains of an Israeli soldier killed in an operation in southern Lebanon in September. It remained available in the same capacity to ascertain the fate of Arab combatants and Israeli servicemen reported missing in action in Lebanon.

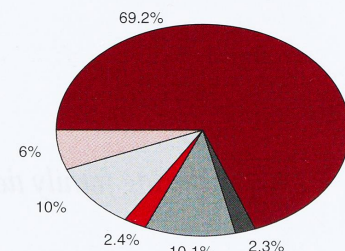
⁴ See *Lebanon*, pp. 254-256.

* PRCS: "Palestinian Red Crescent Society"

ICRC response

ISRAEL, THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND THE AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIES

Total expenditure in 1997:
Sfr 11,788,831



- Protection/tracing
- Relief
- Health activities
- Cooperation with the National Societies
- Promotion/dissemination
- Operational support
- Overheads

*detainees in Israel and the
occupied territories*

The ICRC delegations in Israel and Syria continued their combined efforts to enable people to cross the demarcation line between the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syria for humanitarian reasons.⁵

Throughout 1997 an average of 3,650 Palestinians were held by Israel and arrests continued at an average rate of over 300 per month. Virtually all Palestinian detainees were imprisoned in places of detention on Israeli soil, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The ICRC was concerned to note an increase in the number of detainees held for administrative reasons. In addition, contrary to the provisions of the Convention, it was still denied access to three Lebanese nationals detained by Israel since 1989, 1994 and 1996, respectively.

The ICRC pursued its activities for all Palestinian detainees, closely monitoring the situation in the various detention facilities and paying particular attention to the treatment of detainees under interrogation, who were visited on a regular basis. The ICRC reported its findings to the Israeli authorities and made representations with a view to improving treatment and conditions of detention, especially in investigation sections.

Running the family visits programme was a challenge for the delegation in the face of tight security restrictions and heavy administrative procedures. Nevertheless, despite some interruptions, more people were able to see their detained relatives than in the previous year, and in August there was a change of policy that improved the conditions under which the visits took place.

*detainees held by the
Palestinian Authority*

Delegates visited detainees in dozens of facilities located throughout the Gaza Strip and West Bank. These were administered by several separate detention services with different areas of responsibility, under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. The ICRC's findings and recommendations based on the first 11 months of visits conducted in accordance with the revised Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 1996 were the subject of a report handed over to the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority in December 1997.

restoring family ties

The ICRC kept up its extensive activities to restore and maintain family links for those affected by the consequences of the Arab-Israeli conflict, using its network of local offices throughout the occupied and the autonomous territories. It registered and monitored the situation of detainees protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention and forwarded Red Cross messages between detainees and their families. On behalf of people in the occupied and the autonomous territories, it issued detention certificates facilitating certain administrative procedures and enabling them to obtain various benefits.

dissemination/information

Delegates endeavoured to increase awareness of humanitarian law and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement by organizing information

⁵ See *Syria*, pp. 258-259.

sessions for various target audiences, both in Israel and in the occupied and the autonomous territories.

In a new development, an ICRC legal adviser held a term-long course on humanitarian law at the Hebrew University and an Israeli doctor of law was trained to hold such courses in the future. The IDF* Chief of Staff agreed in principle that the ICRC could organize dissemination sessions at the Command and Staff College. Otherwise, the delegation held its usual sessions for IDF legal staff.

Considerable progress was made towards ensuring that teaching on the Movement and humanitarian law was included in the curricula of the seven Palestinian universities in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. In addition, several presentations were held for the Palestinian Preventive Security Service.

The ICRC continued to assume the general direction of the Movement's activities in the occupied and the autonomous territories, where the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies pursued its support for the PRCS programme in institutional development and primary and secondary health care.

In particular, the ICRC provided the logistics for bilateral programmes run by National Societies: the Netherlands Red Cross programme to provide medical assistance to seven hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Australian Red Cross "women's development" programme in Gaza.

As in previous years, the ICRC lent financial and professional assistance to the PRCS Emergency Medical Service. In February, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the ICRC and the PRCS concerning the service, which provided urgent care and transport to hospitals, especially during the clashes. Kits for use in major medical emergencies were produced locally and handed over to the PRCS. The German Red Cross provided training to PRCS staff and the ICRC sponsored a course for PRCS ambulance drivers, with the technical assistance of the MDA,* to licence them to work, drive and practise in Israel, an essential requirement when transferring patients between the occupied and the autonomous territories and Israel.

The PRCS dissemination department, which coordinated the efforts of the 18 Red Crescent branches to spread knowledge of humanitarian law, was also supported by the ICRC. It concentrated on internal training, dissemination to young people and the media, and the production of information on the correct use of the emblem and on the Emergency Medical Service.

Regular contact was maintained with the MDA. The ICRC purchased medical equipment for its blood bank in order to replace old material and facilitated interaction between representatives of the MDA and the PRCS. The MDA was involved in the course for PRCS ambulance drivers (see above).

*cooperation within
the Movement*

*"Palestinian Red
Crescent Society"*

"Magen David Adom"

* IDF: Israel Defence Forces

* MDA: "Magen David Adom"

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



- regularly visited Palestinians held in Israeli-run places of detention: in all, carried out 266 visits in 24 facilities, where it registered 933 detainees for the first time and held private talks with over 1,500 persons under interrogation;
- distributed 115 parcels of winter clothing to all foreign detainees held in Israel;
- in cooperation with the "Palestinian Red Crescent Society", ran the family visits programme, enabling almost 90,000 people to visit their relatives detained by the Israeli authorities;
- delivered 9,715 detention certificates, authenticated or copied thousands more and issued 257 powers of attorney;
- restored and maintained contact between detainees held in Israeli facilities and their families by forwarding 4,391 Red Cross messages, kept track of individual detainees protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention and informed their families of their whereabouts;

- monitored the detainees' medical situation during 27 visits to 8 Israeli detention centres;
- provided detainees with educational and recreational items;
- repatriated 1 Israeli national from Saudi Arabia to Israel;



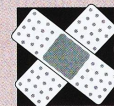
- restored and maintained contact between residents of Israel, the occupied and the autonomous territories and their families living in countries without official relations with Israel by passing on 7,616 Red Cross messages and radio messages and dealing with 33 tracing requests;
- arranged for transfers between Damascus and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights;⁶



- made representations to the appropriate authorities when the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention were not respected during or after incidents between Palestinian civilians and Israeli security forces or settlers;



- supplied 44 tents to people whose houses in the occupied territories had been destroyed (6 for security reasons) by the Israeli security forces;



- when the Gaza Strip and West Bank were completely closed and during clashes there, facilitated emergency medical evacuations for people in Gaza who required hospital treatment in Israel and transported urgently needed medicines from Israel and the West Bank to the main hospital in the Gaza Strip;
- purchased medical equipment for the blood bank of the "Magen David Adom" in order to replace old material;



- held a term-long course on humanitarian law at the Hebrew University;
- held its regular yearly session to introduce humanitarian law to IDF trainee legal officers.

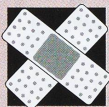
⁶ See Syria, pp. 258-259.



- saw 2,791 detainees held by the Palestinian security services during 293 visits, to 35 places of detention;
- monitored the detainees' medical situation during 6 visits to 6 places of detention under the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority;
- provided detainees with educational and recreational items;



- through its mission in the autonomous territories, distributed 701 Red Cross messages;



- supported and strengthened the PRCS Emergency Medical Service by paying for running costs and equipment and providing technical expertise via a representative from the German Red Cross;



- organized dissemination sessions in Gaza and Hebron for 50 members of the Palestinian Preventive Security Service;

- gave support to the PRCS dissemination department and was involved in dissemination programmes in Palestinian schools and various World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day activities.

JORDAN

Delegates based in Jordan kept up their regular activities to protect detainees, restore and maintain links between families in Jordan and their relatives living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, promote international humanitarian law among various target groups and support the Jordan National Red Crescent Society.

The ICRC paid twice-monthly visits to security detainees held under interrogation at the GID.* As from 13 October, however, the delegation had to suspend these visits because the authorities had refused to grant access to all detainees. At the end of the year, representations were still being undertaken at the highest level with a view to resuming them as soon as possible, in conformity with the ICRC's standard requirements. Delegates nevertheless continued to have access to detainees in facilities under the responsibility of the Public Security Directorate and the Military Intelligence Department.

The ICRC ensured links between families living in Jordan and their relatives detained in Jordan and Israel, or in Kuwait as a result of the Gulf war. It forwarded official personal documents and urgent messages between Palestinians in the occupied and the autonomous territories and their families in Jordan. It also facilitated ambulance transfers of urgent medical cases between the West Bank and Jordan. Such activities were more numerous when the occupied and the autonomous territories were sealed off following suicide bomb attacks in Israel. In cooperation with UNHCR, the ICRC issued travel documents to expedite the resettlement of refugees in third countries.

In order to promote humanitarian law, the ICRC maintained contacts with and gave courses or presentations at military and police academies, the GID, universities, schools, research and documentation institutes, the Institute of Diplomacy and cultural associations. Delegates started to cooperate closely with the Civil Defence Directorate, which had decided that humanitarian law should be included in its training curriculum.

The ICRC supported the dissemination activities of the Jordan National Red Crescent Society, providing training and financial assistance. Under a cooperation protocol signed with the Red Crescent, the ICRC provided assistance to launch a periodical for the Jordanian public summarizing topics of humanitarian concern and explaining the role of the National Society and its branches.

The delegation continued to act as the logistical base for the ICRC's assistance programmes in Iraq.

* GID: General Intelligence Directorate



– carried out 40 visits to 468 security detainees in 8 places of detention, registering 409 for the first time, and exchanged 106 Red Cross messages on their behalf;



- restored and maintained contact between families living in Jordan and their relatives detained in Israel and Kuwait by forwarding 2,357 Red Cross messages;
- arranged for 51 Jordanians, including 17 children, to pay a two-day visit to their relatives detained in Kuwait;
- restored and maintained contact between Jordanian families separated as a result of various conflicts by forwarding 79 Red Cross messages;
- forwarded 97 official and 136 urgent documents for families in Jordan who were separated from their relatives in Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, and assisted in special hardship cases;
- issued 312 travel documents for Arabs who had been granted refugee status in third countries;



- in cooperation with the Jordan National Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Education, gave regular courses on humanitarian law and principles to schoolchildren, teachers and National Society members, reaching nearly 2,000 people;
- in cooperation with the Red Crescent, facilitated ambulance transfers of urgent medical cases between the West Bank and Jordan;
- strengthened the National Society's dissemination capacities by training volunteers in the local branches and sponsored a drawing competition run by the Red Crescent for school pupils countrywide;



- ran a two-day workshop, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, attended by over 40 participants from academic and government circles, which adopted resolutions aimed

at promoting national measures to implement humanitarian law;

- under the auspices of the Crown Prince and the Honorary Vice-President of the Jordan Red Crescent, organized a regional round table for representatives from Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen on the same subject, with the aim of encouraging an exchange of views and experiences;
- held courses or one-off sessions on humanitarian law at the Institute of Diplomacy and the Civil Defence Directorate, for senior officers of the Jordanian armed forces and military students;
- continued dissemination programmes for Jordanian military and police contingents being sent on UN missions;
- produced a leaflet entitled *Seeds of Hope* to outline its humanitarian activities for detainees.

LEBANON

The year 1997 saw an increase in military operations in southern Lebanon, resulting in considerable tension and a spiral of violence. Indiscriminate attacks took place against civilians, who had largely been spared at first after the signing of agreements to end Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996. However, such incidents as the shelling of Sidon and Beit Lif showed that they were more and more vulnerable, and in both absolute and proportional terms increasingly subject to attacks. The regular confrontations between the occupying power and Lebanese armed groups caused a total of 40 dead and more than 100 wounded among the civilian population.

In addition, people living in or near the Israeli-occupied zone were often caught in the crossfire of military operations and many fell victim to explosive devices placed on roadsides. Thousands had abandoned their homes in the area over the years, leaving some villages to be run only by the elderly and the most vulnerable who were unable to start up their lives again elsewhere. The economy of the region had suffered considerably and those who remained behind were often prevented from working their fields as a result of military activity.

helping civilians

The ICRC kept up its protection work for civilians. Delegates in the field collected information on alleged violations of humanitarian law and representations were made to the parties to the conflict urging them to spare civilian lives and property. The delegation negotiated security guarantees with all the parties in order to carry out its humanitarian activities and intervened when access to villages was blocked owing to the fighting.

Medical and material assistance were given to conflict victims: those deported from the occupied zone, people whose homes had been destroyed by shelling, others living in particularly difficult circumstances on the front line and inhabitants of villages cut off because of military operations. The ICRC ran mobile clinics in eight villages in or close to the occupied zone where medical facilities were non-existent or the people could not reach them. The number of consultations given there increased steadily over the year owing to the worsening economic situation of the population concerned. An emergency surgical stock sufficient to treat 500 war-wounded was set up, ready to deliver to hospitals in case of an escalation in the violence.

A broken pipeline located along the front line caused an interruption to the water supply in the region of Habouch, near Nabatiyeh. At the beginning of November, initial repairs were carried out under ICRC auspices. Some additional work was required, but the necessary security guarantees from all the parties active in the area had not been given to the organization by the end of the year.

An important part of the ICRC's work in Lebanon was to act as a neutral intermediary in ascertaining the fate of Arab combatants and Israeli servicemen reported missing in action. During the year it oversaw various operations to release and repatriate detainees, and retrieve mortal remains from combat zones. In particular, it passed on messages between the Israeli authorities and the Lebanese government concerning the return of the mortal remains of an Israeli soldier killed in southern Lebanon in September.

a neutral intermediary

The ICRC had been visiting the Khiam detention centre at frequent and regular intervals since gaining access to it in 1995 after ten years of efforts. On behalf of the detainees, it forwarded Red Cross messages and family parcels, issued certificates of detention, arranged transport for family members visiting their relatives in captivity and organized visits by a prosthetic technician and a dermatologist.

detention-related activities

On 10 September the ICRC was informed by the relevant authorities that its access to Khiam and its family visits programme had been suspended. At the end of 1997 the organization was still striving to regain access, in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to all people held in Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon. In the meantime, it was authorized to provide the detainees with material assistance. Following a request by the ICRC for the release of five sick detainees on humanitarian grounds, two were freed and transferred directly to a hospital in Sidon under the organization's auspices on 12 December.

Despite repeated representations, the ICRC had not received authorization to organize family visits to Lebanese detained in Israeli prisons.

A Palestinian ex-detainee from the occupied territories who had been deported by Israel to southern Lebanon in April 1995 received authorization to go to Jordan on 6 March 1997. During his stay in the UNIFIL* compound in Naqoura, the ICRC had visited him regularly to pass on Red Cross messages and to provide assistance.

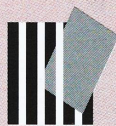
The ICRC succeeded in conveying Red Cross messages and delivering family parcels for a couple of detainees held by a militia group, without however gaining direct access to them.

Palestinian refugees

The organization was concerned to note that the Palestinian refugees living in camps in Lebanon, many for the last 50 years, still had to endure very precarious conditions, with no political solution in sight as regarded their future. The conditions and general mood of despair, coupled with the fact that there were many weapons in circulation, meant that there was a potential for violence. The ICRC supported a number of medical facilities in the camps and provided artificial limbs.

* UNIFIL: United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



- carried out 30 visits to 190 detainees in the Khiam detention centre, including 73 who were newly registered, and provided them with family parcels, blankets and wooden boards for their beds;
- arranged for 10 released detainees to be transferred out of the Israeli-occupied zone, organized visits by 712 people to their relatives held in Khiam, forwarded 5,683 Red Cross messages to or from detainees and issued 347 certificates of detention;
- repatriated to Lebanon 1 Palestinian and 2 Lebanese nationals who had been held in an Israeli prison;
- provided needy families of detainees held in Israel and the Khiam detention centre with ad hoc assistance (1,610 food parcels and 1,537 blankets);



- repatriated to Israel an Israeli Arab who had been considered as "missing" by his family for more than 10 years;

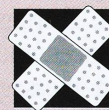
- acted as a neutral intermediary in the simultaneous hand-over of the mortal remains of 2 Hezbollah combatants and 2 SLA* fighters (the latter killed in 1986), in the simultaneous release of an SLA member detained by Hezbollah and 3 prisoners from Khiam and in the recovery of a body from the front line, and forwarded messages between the parties with a view to the repatriation of the mortal remains of an Israeli soldier killed in an operation in southern Lebanon;
- restored and maintained links between family members separated as a result of the conflict by forwarding 986 Red Cross messages;



- made representations to the parties to the conflict when the rules of humanitarian law protecting civilians were not respected;



- provided ad hoc assistance to victims of the conflict, handing out in all 1,139 food parcels and 3,186 blankets;



- provided ad hoc surgical and other medical supplies to hospitals, dispensaries and first-aid posts along the front line between the Israeli-occupied zone and the rest of the country, and ran mobile clinics in the area, serving first 7, then 8 villages, which gave 3,548 consultations;
- provided Palestinian hospitals and dispensaries in refugee camps with emergency assistance;



- helped to maintain the operational capacity of the Lebanese Red Cross Society in the occupied zone by providing financial and material support for its first-aid services, a mobile clinic and 12 community health centres in areas affected by the conflict;
- held a session on ICRC activities in general and the organization's mandate in Lebanon in particular for 150 National Society first-aiders in East Beirut;
- supported the Lebanese Red Cross' dissemination, volunteer training and communication activities;

* SLA: South Lebanon Army



- started dissemination activities for Hezbollah members and handed out to them 2,000 first-aid kits containing the ICRC brochure *Code of conduct for combatants* and the 1997 pocket calendar about the worldwide campaign to ban landmines;
- in coordination with its Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law and in cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross,

organized a round table on the implementation of humanitarian law at national level, under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, for government, army, university and National Society representatives;⁷

- maintained and developed contacts with the media and organized courses for officers and other members of the armed forces, UNIFIL and combatants from various armed groups;

- for the first time, participated in the Arab Book Fair in Beirut, displaying a wide range of publications and showing films on its main activities;



- produced and distributed 50,000 pocket calendars and 300 wall calendars in support of the landmines campaign.

⁷ For regional follow-up, see *Jordan*, pp. 252-253.

SYRIA

The main *raison d'être* for the delegation in Syria continued to be the presence of some 13,000 Syrian nationals living in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. These people, protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention, were not allowed to cross the demarcation line into Syria, where many of them had families they had not seen for over 30 years. The exceptions to this rule – mainly pilgrims and students – crossed the line under ICRC auspices, with the delegations of Damascus and Tel Aviv working closely together.

The ICRC, as before, restored and maintained links between family members separated as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict – both Syrian nationals and Palestinian refugees – by ensuring the exchange of Red Cross messages. It also issued travel documents for refugees who had been accepted by third countries. Towards the end of the year the delegation carried out a field mission to Al Houli camp in the north-east of Syria near the city of Hassakeh to provide travel documents to Iraqi refugees accepted for resettlement in Canada. This operation, organized jointly with UNHCR, was aimed at sparing the refugees the time and expense of a long trip to Damascus to carry out the necessary administrative procedures.

The delegation in Damascus maintained regular contact with the Syrian authorities in order to carry out the above activities. It was also in constant touch with representatives of several Palestinian groups based in the capital.

As part of its dissemination efforts in Syria, the ICRC held a course on the law of armed conflict for Syrian officers and a lecture for UNTSO* observers stationed on both sides of the Golan (Damascus and Tiberias). For the first time, three generals from the Syrian armed forces took part in a course at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy. The ICRC also lent support to the dissemination activities of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society.

Under a tripartite agreement, which was extended to 31 December 1998, the German Red Cross financed the material needed to run a PRCS prosthetic/orthotic centre in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus and the ICRC lent administrative, logistical and technical support. An ICRC technician made two visits to the centre to assess the production of artificial limbs and supervise the installation of a new hydraulic press donated by the organization's Special Fund for the Disabled, which was to make the production of components cheaper and faster. Three local technicians attended an ICRC training course in Addis Ababa.

* UNTSO: United Nations Truce Supervision Organization

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



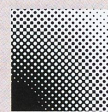
- organized the repatriation of 2 released detainees formerly held in Israel;



- arranged for 23 transfers between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights to enable hundreds of people to cross the demarcation line and, in cooperation with UNDOF*/UNTSO, arranged for a wedding to be held in the no man's land on the Golan Heights;
- forwarded 724 Red Cross messages and 25 official documents, organized 1 family reunification and issued travel documents for 328 people;



- financed the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society's stand at the Damascus International Book Fair, its publications for the occasion and other dissemination material;
- in cooperation with the National Society, organized 2 seminars on humanitarian law, 1 in Damascus and 1 in Sweida, each for 30 people, including representatives from the civilian, military and judicial authorities, and members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent;
- financed the purchase of materials for use in a first-aid training programme in the National Society branches;
- provided technical back-up for the "Palestinian Red Crescent Society" prosthetic/orthotic centre in Damascus financed partly by the German Red Cross;



- organized a session on the law of war for 14 high-ranking officers of the Syrian armed forces and for UNTSO observers;
- in collaboration with the Cairo delegation, worked with Syrian producers to make TV spots and video films on various topics of relevance to the ICRC.

* UNDOF: United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

The Gulf

IRAN

The ICRC kept up an office in Tehran, staffed by locally hired employees. Relations with the Iranian authorities concerning the humanitarian issues unresolved since the Iran/Iraq war were maintained from its Geneva headquarters.⁸

IRAQ

For the seventh consecutive year, the embargo imposed on Iraq in connection with the Gulf war remained in force. UN Resolution 986, adopted on 20 May 1996, authorized the country to sell a limited amount of oil so that it could purchase certain vital goods, in particular food and medical supplies. The resolution was renewed for six months in June and again in December 1997. However, its implementa-

tion was plagued by delays, and although food started reaching the country in March and some medical supplies in May, further medical items and equipment for electrical installations, agriculture, water purification systems and places of education were slow to arrive. Throughout the year, in order to alleviate some of the humanitarian consequences of the embargo, the ICRC maintained its water-supply and sanitation programmes and its efforts to rehabilitate the war-disabled.

water and sanitation

Iraq's water boards received assistance aimed at helping them to improve the quality and quantity of water supplied to the population and to ensure better evacuation of waste water. These efforts, under way without interruption since 1995, helped significantly to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases, thereby contributing towards the public health of millions.

During the year, 34 Iraqi engineers and technicians, split into seven teams, implemented 28 rehabilitation projects under the ICRC programme. Their work



⁸ See *Aftermath of the Iran/Iraq war*, p. 264.

entailed the installation of imported equipment and a general overhaul of treatment plants. Equipment and materials for another 18 stations were provided to the water boards concerned, with the ICRC subsequently monitoring their correct use. Five of the 46 projects were intended to improve sewage systems and for the first time, in Diwaniyah, the programme included the rehabilitation of a sewage treatment station. Between 1995 and the end of 1997, the ICRC's water-supply and sanitation programme covered a total of 155 stations.

The ICRC programme for the war-disabled provided assistance to the many amputees from the Iran/Iraq war, the Gulf war and the fighting in the north, and also to civilian mine victims. Iraq either could not afford, or was unable to import, the materials required for the proper technology to be used. Between the launching of the programme in 1994 and the end of 1997, the ICRC fitted 3,651 amputees with 3,944 prostheses and 654 patients with 799 orthoses.

During the year the ICRC continued to run a components workshop in Baghdad and lent technical and financial support to five prosthetic/orthotic centres, three under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, in Baghdad, Basra and Najaf, and one operated by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society in Mosul. It also ran a centre in Arbil, opened in 1996, for amputees from all of northern Iraq. The production of components began there in January 1997 and the technique for manufacturing above-knee prostheses was introduced and taught to local technicians from all the centres, in addition to the regular training provided by the ICRC. To accommodate the increased output, new staff were hired in Basra, Mosul and Najaf, and the Arbil centre was extended.

Cooperation between the ICRC and government centres was also stepped up in 1997. Agreements on ICRC support to centres in Baghdad, Basra and Najaf were signed between the ICRC and the Ministry of Health in October, and in December an agreement was concluded with the Ministry of Defence on ICRC assistance to the only military prosthetic centre operating in Iraq, Ibn Al-Kuff.

It was again a turbulent year for the people of northern Iraq, with no prospect of a lasting peace. Despite the cease-fire of October 1996, the rift deepened between the two main Kurdish parties, the KDP* and the PUK.* In March a peace-monitoring force of Turkmen and Assyrians was deployed to monitor breaches of the cease-fire, but the situation remained highly volatile with sporadic fighting between the parties and fierce clashes occurring in October and November. All too frequently, civilians suspected of sympathizing with one of the parties were expelled across the lines drawn between the two adversaries.

On 14 May the Turkish army, in alliance with the KDP, launched a military operation with the aim of dismantling PKK* bases. They withdrew – though only

assisting the war-disabled

northern Iraq

* KDP: Kurdish Democratic Party

* PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

partially – in June, returning on 22 September. During this period, clashes between KDP and PKK forces intensified. Also in May, fighting erupted between the PUK and the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan in the Halabja region.

The hostilities gave rise to constant civilian displacements and arrests. The ICRC visited detainees held by the KDP and the PUK and gathered information on alleged violations of the basic principles of humanitarian law. In July it handed over to the leaders of both parties its annual report on these visits, which contained its main findings, concerns and recommendations. Throughout the year the ICRC also made constant representations to the parties with a view to ensuring that the detainees were being treated humanely and that the rules of humanitarian law were being respected during combat.

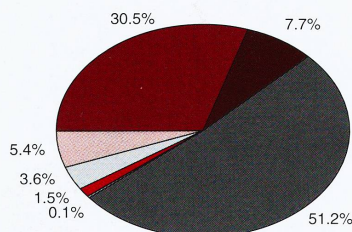
In cooperation with the Iraqi Red Crescent, the ICRC provided relief for tens of thousands of displaced people and delivered medical assistance to more than 20 hospitals treating the war-wounded. Its presence was especially necessary as, apart from its own staff, only the UN agencies, the National Society and a few international non-governmental organizations had remained in northern Iraq on a permanent basis since the heavy fighting in September 1996.

This part of the country was also covered by the ICRC's programmes to improve water-supply and sanitation facilities and rehabilitate the war-disabled.

Disappointingly, a seminar on humanitarian law planned for senior officers of the Iraqi armed forces in October was cancelled by the authorities without any explanation. The ICRC nevertheless continued to support the activities of the Iraqi Red Crescent dissemination teams in nine governorates in northern Iraq by providing training and financial assistance.

IRAQ

Total expenditure in 1997:
Sfr 13,797,392



- Protection/tracing
- Relief
- Health activities
- Cooperation with the National Society
- Promotion/dissemination
- Operational support
- Overheads

* PKK: Kurdish Workers' Party

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



- carried out 2 visits to 64 Iranian servicemen captured in 1991 and 1992 and detained in Ramadi camp; supervised the release and repatriation of two of them in December and handled 7,211 Red Cross messages between them and their relatives;
- carried out 156 visits to 3,114 detainees (2,655 of them for the first time) held in 39 places of detention in the northern governorates for security reasons or in connection with factional fighting among the Kurds and the Turkish invasion; handed over some 5,000 blankets, 4 tonnes of soap, 287 jerrycans and 134 tarpaulins;
- obtained the release on humanitarian grounds of an elderly detainee held by the PKK;
- provided 125 certificates of detention;



- issued 1,406 travel documents for Iranian refugees seeking resettlement in a third country and forwarded personal official documents for 69 people who were unable to contact their diplomatic missions directly;
- repatriated 8 Iraqis who had been living in Lebanon;



- provided ad hoc material assistance to people displaced internally as a result of the fighting in northern Iraq; in all, assisted some 45,000 people;

- when people were displaced near the Turkish border as a result of incursions and shelling by the Turkish army, distributed blankets, tents, cooking utensils and other items in cooperation with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, particularly in readiness for the winter;



- distributed emergency medical supplies to facilities in northern Iraq to treat several thousand casualties of the fighting;



- continued to support 3 government-run prosthetic/orthotic centres in Baghdad, Basra and Najaf, a centre run by the National Society in Mosul (see below) and its own centre in Arbil (northern Iraq) by training technicians and providing materials and polypropylene components manufactured in its workshop in the capital;
- supported the government school for Iraqi technicians by helping with training and supplying imported materials and held two training sessions at the Ministry of Health's Medical Rehabilitation Centre;
- fitted 1,909 new amputees, manufactured 2,132 prostheses (including 1,177 for mine victims), produced 482 orthoses and fitted 350 new patients with them at the 5 ICRC-supported prosthetic/orthotic centres;



- throughout Iraq, rehabilitated 28 water stations and provided 18 others with the materials required for maintenance and repair work to be carried out by the respective water boards;



- assisted the Iraqi Red Crescent in carrying out dissemination activities for students, trade unions, women's associations, villagers and other groups, took part in camps for young people, provided financial and technical assistance for the production of a monthly periodical, and prepared a joint campaign on the dangers of landmines;
- signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Society regarding activities to restore and maintain family links;
- supported the Red Crescent prosthetic/orthotic centre in Mosul by providing materials and components and by training technicians;
- gave lectures on international humanitarian law at the University of Baghdad for 90 students;
- in northern Iraq, held sessions for a total of 145 unit commanders, 277 peshmerga officers, 45 officers of the armed forces, 170 students and officers at military and police academies, 46 police officers, 54 civil servants and 32 security officers.

AFTERMATH OF THE IRAN/IRAQ WAR

On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the end of the Iran/Iraq war, the problem posed by thousands of Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs) held under the responsibility of the Iranian authorities and that of hundreds of Iranians missing in action on whom the ICRC had gathered information during the war remained unresolved, despite a trickle of releases. The repatriation of 722 Iraqi POWs in December 1996 under ICRC auspices had raised hopes that an overall solution might be found, but this proved not to be the case. A further 46 Iraqis were repatriated in September and 496 in November 1997.

The ICRC had regular access to an Iranian POW held in Iraq who was first visited in 1995 but who had been in detention in Iraq for 17 years.

High-level contacts aimed at finding a solution to the issue were kept up, notably through missions by the ICRC Director of Operations and the Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa to Baghdad in May and Tehran in July. In Baghdad the ICRC officials met, in particular, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in Tehran the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Commission on POWs and Missing Persons. During the summit meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Tehran, the Delegate General also made representations to several high-ranking Iranian officials, including the President of the Commission, concerning POWs and missing persons from the Iran/Iraq war.

AFTERMATH OF THE IRAN/IRAQ WAR



– in all, supervised the repatriation of 542 Iraqi POWs after holding private talks with them to ascertain their wish to return home;

IN 1997 THE ICRC:

– carried out 5 visits to an Iranian POW held in Iraq, conveyed Red Cross messages to and from his next of kin and urged the authorities to allow his repatriation;

– handled 247 tracing requests and issued 369 certificates of detention.

AFTERMATH OF THE GULF WAR

In an effort to settle the humanitarian issues still unresolved after the Gulf war, representatives from Iraq and the Coalition States (France, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States) attended three meetings of the Tripartite Commission chaired by the ICRC. The organization also chaired eight Technical Sub-Committee meetings held in the demilitarized zone on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border. The purpose of these meetings was to help ascertain the whereabouts and fate of persons reported missing in connection with the hostilities. No significant headway was made, although the parties did affirm their willingness to continue using the existing mechanism with a view to resolving the issue.

High-level contacts aimed at finding a solution were kept up, notably through a mission by the ICRC Director of Operations and the Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa to Baghdad and Kuwait in May. In Kuwait City the ICRC officials met, in particular, the acting Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defence.

In Kuwait, ICRC delegates monitored the conditions of detention and treatment of people who were being held in connection with the Gulf war and who had been without diplomatic representation since then. Visits were made to Iraqi, Jordanian, Yemeni and Sudanese nationals, Palestinians possessing only travel documents and stateless persons. The ICRC had access to prisoners in places of detention under the jurisdiction of the Ministries of the Interior, Defence and Social Affairs.

Delegates also paid regular visits to detainees under expulsion order. The aim of these visits, apart from monitoring conditions of detention, was to ensure that families were not split up and that detainees were not expelled to a country where they had reason to fear persecution. Delegates ascertained that those facing expulsion had the opportunity to settle their personal affairs and were allowed to take their belongings with them.

The regional delegation continued to restore and maintain links between family members separated by the Gulf war. In particular, it forwarded Red Cross messages between people living in Kuwait and their relatives in countries with no diplomatic relations with Kuwait. Travel documents were issued on a regular basis to people who had received entry visas for resettlement in a third country but were unable to obtain passports.

*detention-related
activities in Kuwait*



- in Iraq, carried out 2 visits to 119 civilians (14 of them registered for the first time) from countries without diplomatic representation there and held in the Abu Ghraib detention centre near Baghdad;
- in Kuwait, visited 794 detainees (261 of them registered for the first time) in 14 places of detention;
- arranged for 51 family members to visit 34 Jordanian detainees in Kuwait;



IN 1997 THE ICRC:

- restored and maintained contact between family members separated as a result of the Gulf war by forwarding 19,019 Red Cross messages between people in Kuwait and their relatives in countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Kuwait and 8,154 messages between people in Iraq and their relatives abroad;
- issued 50 travel documents to people leaving for resettlement in another country and 226 certificates of detention.

KUWAIT

Regional delegation

(Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen)

The regional delegation focused its efforts on helping to ascertain the whereabouts and fate of persons reported missing in connection with the Gulf war⁹ and visiting detainees in Bahrain. It also carried out dissemination and information activities in the Gulf region.

Various means were used to spread knowledge of humanitarian law and of the ICRC's mandate among target groups such as decision-makers, National Society staff, school pupils and the general public. The aim was to promote the ICRC's role as a neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict and internal strife and as a significant player on the humanitarian scene.

A seminar and a workshop for officers of the armed and security forces were held in Kuwait and Yemen, respectively. Two similar courses were organized for the armed forces of Qatar.

The ICRC continued to develop contacts with the region's National Societies in order to promote understanding and acceptance of its work and proposed various forms of cooperation, especially in the field of dissemination. The Kuwait Red Crescent Society supported the ICRC's landmines campaign through a week of promotional activities in May and, as a result of a letter written by the National Society's President, the issue was debated in the National Assembly. Joint events for the 8 May celebrations also provided opportunities for such contacts.

Visits to persons arrested and detained for security reasons in Bahrain had started on 9 November 1996, in accordance with standard ICRC procedures, on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the ICRC and the country's authorities in October of that year. These visits proceeded throughout 1997. In November the ICRC submitted to the Bahraini authorities its first summary report on the visits and talks were held with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the Interior.

The innovative psychiatric care project launched in the Sana'a central prison in 1995 and in Taiz and Ibb in late 1996 and early 1997¹⁰ had considerably improved the lot of mentally ill detainees in Yemen and was pursued throughout the year. The project was delegated to the Netherlands Red Cross, thus ensuring an expatriate presence in Yemen's prisons, and was supported by the Yemen Red Crescent Society.

visits to detainees in Bahrain

programmes for detainees in Yemen

⁹ See *Aftermath of the Gulf war*, p. 265-266.

¹⁰ See the ICRC's 1995 and 1996 *Annual Report*, pp. 249 and 253, respectively.

During its visits to the central prisons of Aden, Hodeidah, Ibb, Sana'a and Taiz, where some 6,000 people were detained in all, the ICRC followed up on the water-supply and sanitation work carried out there and noted improvements.

The ICRC maintained its contacts with the OIC,* based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in accordance with the cooperation agreement between the two organizations.

* OIC: Organisation of the Islamic Conference

KUWAIT Regional delegation



- in Bahrain, carried out 33 visits to 23 places of detention and saw 2,111 detainees;
- in Yemen, carried out 5 visits to 5 places of detention housing 5,832 detainees;
- in Yemen, ensured that sanitary conditions for detainees were adequate by visiting places of detention and encouraging the authorities to take requisite measures, completed repair work on water tanks in the Sana'a central prison and provided technical support to prison sanitation engineers;



- in Yemen, handled 3,452 Red Cross messages, mainly between Somali refugees living in Yemen and their families abroad;



- cooperated with the Yemen Red Crescent on assistance to detainees, the psychiatric care project in prisons – delegated to the Netherlands Red Cross – and dissemination of humanitarian law and principles to the civilian population;



- organized seminars for 30 officers of the Kuwaiti armed forces, some 25 of the Yemeni armed forces and 26 of the Qatar armed forces, and held a lecture on the law of war for 30 UNIKOM* officers;
- in cooperation with the Yemen Red Crescent Society, held a round table in Sana'a for government officials and academics on the incorporation of humanitarian law into the national legislation of Yemen.¹¹

¹¹ For regional follow-up, see *Jordan*, pp. 252-253.

* UNIKOM: UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission

North Africa

EGYPT

During the year dozens of people, including many civilians, were killed or wounded in violent attacks, notably in central Egypt and Cairo, highlighting the country's vulnerability to such incidents. The ICRC expressed its concern at unacceptable acts of this kind, in particular during a meeting between the organization's Vice-President and the Egyptian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs during the OIC* summit meeting held in Tehran.

The Cairo delegation maintained and developed contacts with the Egyptian authorities, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the armed forces, the Egyptian Red Crescent, eminent law professors and the media. It spread information on the ICRC's mandate under the Geneva Conventions and the organization's right of initiative as laid down in the Movement's 1986 Statutes, with a view to promoting acceptance of the ICRC in situations of internal disturbances.

Activities to increase understanding and acceptance of the ICRC's mandate and role were stepped up and expanded to cover the entire Middle East. The delegation produced specially adapted dissemination material and coordinated the ICRC's approach, ensuring that the message was appropriate for local target groups and lending technical support to the dissemination efforts of other ICRC delegations. Missions were conducted to Jordan, Qatar, Syria and the United Arab Emirates to meet representatives from information ministries and directors of TV and radio stations and satellite channels. As a direct result, the ICRC was immediately granted air time on the Dubai satellite channel, the most powerful in the region.

The delegation produced and distributed radio programmes and serials, material for TV and cartoon strips for publication in young people's magazines. By the end of the year, a number of productions had been broadcast by the BBC and Radio Monte Carlo and taken up by local channels in other countries, while others had appeared on the satellite channels Nile TV and Dubai TV. The cartoon strips had also been published in Jordan.

The regional delegate to the armed and security forces stepped up contacts with the Egyptian army.

The ICRC continued to work with the Egyptian Red Crescent, which supported the organization's campaign against landmines and its Advisory Service on

* OIC: Organisation of the Islamic Conference

International Humanitarian Law¹² set up to assist States in implementing the law at national level.

The camp for displaced Palestinians on the Libyan side of the Egyptian-Libyan border was dismantled by the Libyan authorities and its population transferred to temporary premises with the promise that they would be resettled in Libya.

¹² See *Promotion and development of international humanitarian law*, pp. 288-290.

EGYPT



- maintained and re-stored contact between separated family members by forwarding 1,167 Red Cross messages and issuing travel documents for 509 refugees granted asylum in third countries;



- on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, organized interactive audiovisual conferences involving Red Crescent branches in 26 governorates and using technology made available by the Ministry of Education;
- cooperated with the Egyptian Red Crescent Society in setting up an advisory service on humanitarian law to support the country's efforts to implement the law at national level;



- for the sixth year running, issued an illustrated calendar in Arabic, this time tracing the history of Arab cinema over a century through images reflecting humanitarian values;
- produced cartoon strips dealing with the rights of individuals in wartime, TV spots about prisoners of war, landmines and children in war, a video film on ICRC dissemination activities and Arabic translations and voice-overs for ICRC publications and productions;
- gave courses and lectures on humanitarian law and related ICRC activities for media, academic, legal and cultural target audiences;

- held the first-ever seminar at the Nasser Academy to train 30 senior officers in methods of teaching humanitarian law, organized a two-day seminar for 35 legal advisers to the armed forces, held a course for instructors at the National Defence College, chaired a seminar on humanitarian law and how to report on it for war correspondents and journalists at the same college; and gave two presentations on the ICRC and humanitarian law at the Military Management School in Cairo, aimed mainly at officers responsible for planning and conducting military operations.

TUNIS

Regional delegation

(Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco/Western Sahara, Tunisia)

The regional delegation in Tunis continued to follow up on the serious humanitarian issues arising from the aftermath of the Western Sahara conflict. At the same time, it was deeply concerned by the tragic developments in Algeria and stepped up its attempts to resume protection activities there.

In order to make humanitarian law and the ICRC's mandate and role under the Geneva Conventions and the Movement's Statutes better known and understood in the Maghreb countries, the delegation pursued its contacts with governments, National Societies, the media and academic circles. It encouraged States to incorporate humanitarian law into their national legislation and to recognize the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission set up under Article 90 of Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions.

Considerable effort was devoted to developing the activities and raising the profile of the region's National Societies with a view to improving their visibility and operational capacity. The delegation helped them to carry out projects aimed at improving local knowledge of the ICRC, the Movement and humanitarian law.

In April the ICRC Vice-President and the Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa attended the Seventh Mediterranean Regional Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies held in Tunis and presented the organization's activities in the Mediterranean area. The Vice-President and the Tunisian Minister of Defence discussed plans to disseminate humanitarian law in cooperation with the country's armed forces.

A delegate based in Tunis carried out three missions to Mauritania, where she met government and Red Crescent representatives and conducted dissemination sessions. In addition, through various contacts and in coordination with the ICRC delegation in Bamako, she kept an eye on developments in northern Mali. The situation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal was also discussed by the delegate with the people directly concerned.

In Algeria, the horrific attacks on civilians increased. Each month, the grim toll mounted as men, women and children, mainly in Algiers and south-west of the capital, were deliberately targeted in mass killings.

The ICRC, deeply shocked and concerned by these events, stressed the intolerable nature of the situation and the urgent need to spare civilians the effects of the internal violence. However, despite four missions to Algiers by the regional del-

*horrific attacks on
civilians in Algeria*

egate to hold talks with the authorities, the organization's efforts to start up work in the country were unsuccessful. In May the ICRC President and the Delegate General for the Middle East and North Africa met the Algerian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, formerly the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at ICRC headquarters. Their discussions centred on the following areas: which officials should be contacted about resuming ICRC activities in Algeria, the ICRC's procedures for visits and the categories of detainees to be seen, and whether dissemination activities could be carried out in the country. It was nevertheless clear that security problems would severely limit the possibilities for humanitarian action.

In the summer, for the first time, the Algerian Red Crescent organized a holiday camp for children traumatized by the violence. It also continued to provide needy families with free meals during Ramadan and school supplies. The latter two programmes were supported by the ICRC. In addition, the National Society helped transport to the Tindouf area family parcels for Moroccan prisoners held by the Polisario Front and medical supplies for health-care facilities treating these prisoners and Sahrawi civilians.

According to ICRC records, in 1997 the Polisario Front was still holding 1,887 Moroccans prisoner, nearly all of whom were visited by the ICRC during the year. ICRC doctors noted an increase in the number of cases requiring treatment and repatriation as a matter of priority, and in March and November a list of 362 of the most vulnerable prisoners – invalids, those over 60 years of age, those who had been in detention for 20 years or more and medical cases – was submitted to the Polisario Front, with copies to the Moroccan authorities for their information.

Following the UN Special Envoy's visit to Tindouf in March, the Front freed 85 prisoners. At the year's end, they were still waiting to be repatriated by the Moroccan authorities, who maintained their opposition in principle to any repatriations that did not concern all the detainees.

Despite the fresh momentum given to the Western Sahara issue by the resumption of negotiations and the new Houston agreement on the 1988 UN settlement plan, the ICRC continued to express its utmost concern for the captives. The organization stressed that all of them should be released in conformity with humanitarian law and reiterated its readiness to implement any agreement to repatriate them. The issue was raised at meetings between ICRC representatives and the UN Special Envoy; Polisario Front representatives in Algiers, Geneva and at the UN in New York; and Moroccan representatives of the Foreign Ministry and Royal Armed Forces. In addition, the head of delegation in Washington DC discussed the subject with the President of the US Institute for Peace in that city. These steps nevertheless failed to produce the desired outcome. In addition, more than 100,000 Sahrawi civilians were still living in precarious conditions, dependent on assistance from UNHCR and other organizations.



- saw nearly 1,969 Moroccan prisoners in the hands of the Polisario Front during two visits, in March and November;
- restored and maintained contact between Moroccan prisoners and their families by forwarding 51,841 Red Cross messages, and sent 2,000 family parcels to Moroccan prisoners via the Algerian Red Crescent;
- improved health care for Moroccan prisoners and the Sahrawi population by providing ad hoc assistance to local medical facilities;
- conducted a follow-up visit to 6 Moroccan prisoners in Rabat who had been repatriated from Algeria under ICRC auspices in December 1996;



- in Algeria, helped fund the National Society's programmes for vulnerable sectors of the population, which provided over one million hot meals to needy families during Ramadan, and books, overalls and satchels to over 600,000 schoolchildren from deprived families;
- in Libya, in cooperation with the National Society, held a dissemination session for 10 officials and 30 social science students, a tracing seminar for members of 30 Red Crescent branches and a

IN 1997 THE ICRC:

- training course on relief activities for over 50 young volunteers, and provided articles for the National Society's magazine;
- in Mauritania, cooperated with the Red Crescent on a programme introduced in May to explain humanitarian law to National Society volunteers and pupils and teachers from two secondary schools (nearly 400 people in all) in the south and south-west of the country;
- in Tunisia, took part in a seminar held in July to train young first-aid volunteers from several Mediterranean countries;
- supplied recent publications to the humanitarian law libraries run by the National Societies of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Morocco, and supplied publications to five law faculty libraries in Morocco via the country's Red Crescent Society;
- in Mauritania, worked with the Ministry of Defence to draft a training manual on humanitarian law adapted to the local context for distribution in 1998 to military units throughout the country;
- arranged for high-ranking officers from Mauritania and Morocco to attend courses at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy;

- in Morocco, organized a press conference for 20 members of the media; took part in a round table on the teaching of humanitarian law and human rights law in universities organized by the University of Casablanca for some 70 representatives of academic circles, the government and the National Society, and cooperated closely with the Moroccan Human Rights Department;
- in Tunisia, attended and gave presentations on humanitarian law, the ICRC and the Movement at sessions organized by the Association for International Studies, the Arab Institute of Human Rights and the Institute for Press and Sciences Information for audiences from the academic, media and diplomatic worlds and produced a brochure specially designed for the region on the development of humanitarian law and the contributions made to it by key personalities from the Maghreb region.