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ICRC/B.Heger

En 1998, the ICRC visited over 10,000 detainees in Latin America, notably in Peru and Colombia. Delegates interviewed them in private and offered to deliver Red Cross messages to and from their families. In both countries close relatives were also given travel vouchers to visit them. Worldwide, the ICRC visited 212,076 detainees.

The Americas

ICRC delegations:

Colombia, Mexico, Peru

ICRC regional delegations:

Brasilia, Buenos Aires,
Guatemala City, Washington

Staff

ICRC expatriates: ¹	85
National Societies: ¹	7
Local employees: ²	277

Total expenditure:	Sfr
	35,916,999

Expenditure breakdown:

Protection/tracing:	17,784,148
Relief:	4,332,978
Health activities:	2,100,528
Cooperation with National Societies:	3,107,958
Promotion/dissemination:	3,864,653
Operational support:	2,605,631
Overheads:	2,121,103



ICRC / AR 12.98

⊕ ICRC regional delegation ⊕ ICRC delegation + ICRC mission

¹ Average figures calculated on an annual basis.

² Under ICRC contract, as at December 1998.

THE AMERICAS

The year under review saw an expansion of ICRC operational activities in the Americas, especially in Colombia and Mexico.

Humanitarian problems became ever more acute in Colombia, where the internal conflict escalated despite attempts to initiate a negotiating process. The violence, which in past years was attributable to clashes between the armed forces and a number of guerrilla forces, was further complicated by the increasing activity of auto-defensas (self-defence groups). The ranks of displaced people swelled throughout the country. The frequency and proportions of massacres grew steadily throughout the year; hostage-taking and threats remained commonplace, and at year's end more soldiers and policemen were held in captivity by the armed opposition than ever before. Against this background the ICRC stepped up its presence in Colombia, bringing the number of towns with a delegation, sub-delegation or local office from 12 in January to 15 in December, and the number of expatriates from 43 to 50.

Thanks to an agreement reached with the Mexican authorities, the ICRC also increased its presence in Chiapas, Mexico, where by the end of the year there were 11 expatriate staff working with the National Society to provide protection and assistance to people and communities affected by local tensions.

In Peru, although the internal violence was still on the wane, sporadic incidents were reported in the central regions designated as emergency zones. In the course of the year the delegation was able to resume visits to all categories of security detainees. The Peruvian government also asked the ICRC for its cooperation in giving Peruvian military and police forces systematic training in humanitarian law.

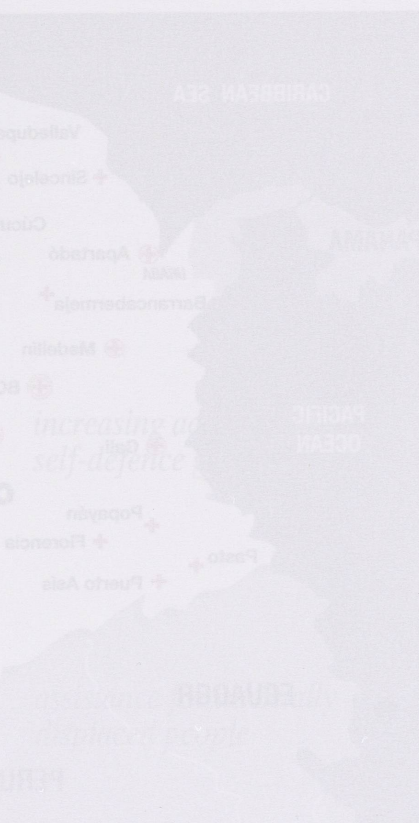
The border dispute between Ecuador and Peru, which had led to armed confrontations between the two countries on numerous occasions over several decades, was resolved by a peace agreement reached through diplomatic means.

In Guatemala, implementation of the peace accords which brought the internal conflict to an end after three decades of violence proved to be extremely difficult. Many of the problems at the root of the conflict remained unresolved.

Staff specializing in the dissemination of humanitarian law among the armed and security forces were stationed in Guatemala City and Buenos Aires and worked throughout the continent to develop such activities, often with the help of National Societies. Among the largest national programmes of this type was the one carried out for the security forces in Brazil. At the regional level, the ICRC encouraged the armed forces of all the countries covered to incorporate humanitarian law in courses of military instruction. It held regional seminars on the subject for the military of the entire continent, and also specifically for those in certain sub-regions (such as the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean and Central America), with a view to encouraging exchanges and cooperation in this field.

The delegations in the Americas pursued their efforts to ensure that humanitarian law was given effect in practice, notably by supporting the establishment and operation of national committees for implementation of this body of law. Thanks to the

adoption by the OAS* of resolutions in support of humanitarian law at its General Assembly held in Venezuela in June, this subject was given pride of place throughout the continent. With the assistance of legal advisers, the ICRC delegations in Guatemala City, Buenos Aires and Bogotá continued to urge ratification of all the humanitarian treaties, encouraged the creation of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law and gave them follow-up support. Delegates throughout the Americas campaigned for acceptance of the idea of declaring the Americas a mine-free hemisphere, a concept which had been put forward by the OAS. For practical reasons, this continent-wide effort concentrated first on establishing a mine-free zone in Central America.



* OAS: Organization of American States

COLOMBIA

The election in June of a Presidential candidate who had peace talks high on his agenda did much to raise hopes, but did little to alleviate the internal violence. The new President took the unprecedented initiative of holding a meeting with the leadership of the FARC* in the hope of setting a negotiating process in motion. The FARC and the ELN,* the other major armed opposition group, stepped up attacks on government forces throughout the year, while at the same time seeking ways to initiate a dialogue. The *autodefensas*, or self-defence groups, increased their activities in the north and in coastal areas and extended them to other regions which had previously been spared.

Many observers saw the very tenuous beginnings of direct dialogue between the government and the FARC and the ongoing broad discussions between the ELN and representatives of civil society as moves towards a peace process. But that process was both fragile and difficult, and there



⊕ ICRC delegation ⊕ ICRC sub-delegation + ICRC office

were numerous setbacks and delays.

The election of the new President also made it necessary for the ICRC to renew its contacts with government officials. In August, the Delegate-General for the Americas and the head of delegation met the new head of State and cabinet ministers in Bogotá, and discussed the ICRC's relations with the Colombian government.

Meanwhile, the political violence grew worse. As previously, it took the form of assassinations, hostage-taking, threats and massacres. Mass killings were nothing new, but they increased in intensity and frequency throughout the year. In Puerto Elvira, some 20 people were massacred on 4 May; in mid-May, another 20 were

* FARC: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces)

* ELN: *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army)

summarily executed in Barrancabermeja; in Mitu, a department capital near the Brazilian border, 10 civilians and 25 policemen were killed during a major FARC attack on 1 November; in Machuca, Antioquia, 70 perished and another 60 were badly burnt as a result of an attack on an oil pipeline in October. Apart from the worst massacres, there were scores of attacks on civilians and the number of direct victims of the violence rose steadily. The ICRC remained in touch with both main guerrilla groups, for the first time meeting face to face with the leadership of the FARC, and further developed its contacts with self-defence units at all levels and in all regions of the country in order to remind them of their obligation not to target civilians.

The self-defence groups continued to consolidate, notably through a national umbrella body, the AUC,* and to develop their operations, for example by increasing attacks on civilians in zones reputed to be under the influence of the armed opposition. These attacks, which became more systematic during the year, prompted the displacement, for the first time, of tens of thousands of people from those areas. Late in the year, as the army started to try to curb such activities, clashes were reported for the first time between the armed forces and certain self-defence groups.

The insecurity resulting not only from massacres but also from constant hostage-taking, threats, harassment and isolated killings created a climate of fear which caused tens of thousands of people to leave their homes. Some left en masse, while others simply set out on their own. As the phenomenon grew throughout the year, displacement of Colombians became a very serious problem in humanitarian terms.

Following the National Society's suspension of its own programme of aid for individual displaced persons, in October the delegation increased its activities for them. All told, some 130,000 displaced people received assistance, nearly 90,000 of whom had been part of mass population displacements (defined as displacements in groups of 50 or more). The presence of delegates in the field also represented a unique and impartial source of moral support for victims of the violence – be they displaced or not – and for their families.

Owing to the general climate of insecurity, certain regions lacked basic services, including medical care. Through projects delegated to the German and Norwegian National Societies, and working with the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC ensured that mobile health teams were able to provide medical care on a monthly basis in some of these areas, including the Riosucio region of Chocó department in Urabá, and along the Caguán river in Caquetá.

*increasing activities of
self-defence groups*

*assistance for internally
displaced people*

* AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-defence Groups of Colombia)

*visits to people deprived
of their freedom*

Visits continued to people detained by the government for security reasons. In January the ICRC handed over to the Ministry of Justice and the INPEC* a summary report on visits carried out to places of detention in 1996 and 1997. The situation in the prisons remained extremely difficult owing to overcrowding, violence and lack of personnel and resources.

As the main guerrilla force, the FARC, increased attacks on military and police outposts, it captured hundreds of men. By year's end the group reportedly held some 320 soldiers and policemen. It never made available a comprehensive list of those captured, thus leaving many families unaware of whether their relatives were in captivity or had died. The ICRC, for its part, constantly called on the FARC to produce a comprehensive list of names of the people it had captured and to allow visits by delegates, but to no avail. Delegates were, however, able to forward Red Cross messages between a few of the captives and their family members.

*coordination of activities with
other organizations*

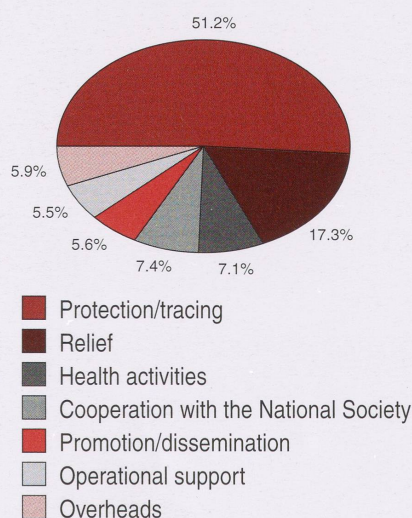
There was a very large number of Colombian and international non-governmental organizations active in fields such as human rights, material assistance for conflict victims and aid for the displaced. During the year the ICRC completed a study of the various agencies and their responses to the problem of the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people, in order to take stock of needs and assess the resources available to cover them.

The delegation made several studies available to the parties to the conflict with the aim of facilitating negotiations or helping to find solutions to problems of humanitarian concern. For example, in September the ICRC presented the government and the FARC with a working paper on the the ICRC's experience with the release of prisoners in countries such as El Salvador and Croatia, which had recently undergone peace processes and had faced problems similar to those in Colombia. Other ICRC studies addressed the question of judicial guarantees and the protection of personnel and facilities involved in providing medical care. Together with the Javeriana University in Bogotá, the delegation also took part in the production of a brochure entitled "*La Paz sobre la Mesa*" (Peace on the table), which outlined the positions of the parties to the conflict and was distributed widely as a supplement in a national weekly magazine.

COLOMBIA

Total expenditure in 1998:

Sfr 18,889,792



* INPEC: National Penitentiaries and Prisons Institute

IN 1998 THE ICRC:



- saw 2,527 security detainees, including 1,273 for the first time, in the course of 419 visits

to 185 places of detention;

- during visits, provided clothing, personal hygiene articles and recreational items for detainees;
- paid 2,603 travel fares for family members to visit their relatives in prison;
- paid for the return to their homes of 139 people after their release from captivity;



- documented 1,119 cases (concerning 2,163 people) involving allegations of violations of humanitarian law;

- made representations to the authorities, to the armed opposition and to self-defence groups concerning the cases of 1,816 people;
- paid for the transport to safer areas of 16,126 people;
- provided its services for the release of 158 civilians and 25 policemen and members of the armed services who had been captured by armed groups and were freed under ICRC auspices;



- handled over 1,200 Red Cross messages sent by or to detainees, displaced people and

others who had lost contact with their families, including a number of soldiers captured by the ELN;



- in the regions most severely affected by the conflict, distributed food parcels, cooking utensils, hygiene kits and mats to 137,431 displaced people;



- covered the cost of medical care for 111 people wounded as a result of the conflict;
- provided basic medical supplies and assistance to displaced persons and to hospitals;
- through a project delegated to the National Societies of Germany and Norway, and working with staff from the Colombian Red Cross, provided medical supplies for mobile health teams, along with logistic support and funding, thus providing basic care for about 18,362 people in Urabá and along the Caguán river;



- under a cooperation agreement concluded in February with the Colombian Red Cross and covering 11 projects, worked closely with the National Society on subjects such as training for its staff, dissemination for the armed forces, security during field operations, communication, fundraising and strengthening of the National Society's administrative structure;



- together with the Colombian Red Cross, regularly held courses and seminars on humanitarian law for the military;
- in mid-year, at the time of the World Cup football competition, carried out a large-scale campaign entitled "Juego limpio" (Play fair), using media spots, posters and other means to relate the message of fair play in sports to respect for the law of war;
- with the help of the delegation's legal specialist, continued to provide the authorities with legal and technical support for the adoption of national measures for the implementation of humanitarian law, notably in relation to the protection of the emblem, the repression of violations of the law and measures to avoid recruitment of children into the armed forces;
- held some 654 dissemination sessions and events reaching over 37,000 people, including members of the military, the armed opposition, self-defence groups, government officials and civilians.

MEXICO

*increasing the ICRC's
presence in Chiapas*

While no armed clashes occurred in 1998, the tension in the southern state of Chiapas, which had culminated in the killing of 45 peasants in Acteal in December 1997, prompted the ICRC to seek to increase its presence in the region.

On 26 May, the Mexican government and the ICRC finally reached an agreement whereby the ICRC was allowed to increase its presence in Chiapas. A survey carried out with the Mexican Red Cross from 12 June to 5 July determined the needs to be met until the end of the year and the programmes to be implemented; these included food aid for people affected by the prevailing insecurity, water and sanitation work, an agricultural programme and continuing support for the health activities of the Mexican Red Cross in the region. In September the ICRC delegation in Mexico City opened a sub-delegation in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, with a staff of nine expatriates and 12 local employees. This enabled the ICRC to monitor the situation of civilians in areas affected by tension.

*cooperation with the
National Society*

Following the survey conducted in June and July, the Mexican Red Cross and the ICRC signed a cooperation agreement on 31 July to establish the framework for Red Cross action in Chiapas, in accordance with the Seville Agreement.³ Consequently, the ICRC allocated additional funds for cooperation projects and assistance for displaced persons was increased.

*visits to people deprived of
their freedom*

Delegates visited prisoners falling within the ICRC's mandate throughout Mexico, including persons detained in connection with the situation in Chiapas.

The ICRC transported EZLN* representatives to a four-day meeting in San Cristóbal de las Casas in mid-November with the COCOPA,* a body comprising members of the main political parties represented in the federal legislature and having the aim of encouraging the reconciliation process.

³ See the ICRC's 1997 Annual Report, p. 19.

* EZLN: *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista National Liberation Army)

* COCOPA: *Comisión de Concordancia y Pacificación* (Commission for Concordance and Pacification)

IN 1998 THE ICRC:



- visited 100 security detainees, including 57 for the first time, in 10 places of detention;



- monitored the situation of civilians and displaced people in Chiapas, and in particular in the Los Altos region;



- beginning in October, temporarily assumed responsibility for a food aid programme run since March by the German Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross for about 10,500 people affected by the insecurity in Chiapas;
- started a programme for the construction of agricultural silos and the cultivation of vegetable plots in Chiapas;



- provided financial and logistic support for 3 first-aid posts run by the Mexican Red Cross and for medical teams in Chiapas, and continued to support the development of dissemination activities by holding 4 seminars for National Society dissemination officers;



- together with UNHCR and the National Human Rights Commission, conducted or took part in university seminars on humanitarian law, refugee rights and human rights attended by professors from 16 universities;
- organized a seminar on humanitarian law for Mexican non-governmental organizations.

PERU

Ecuador and Peru succeeded in resolving their border dispute through diplomatic means. There were, however, a few incidents, including mine explosions, during the year.

The remnants of the two opposition groups were active only in certain regions, such as the Huallaga valley and the central part of Peru around Ayacucho. Once again, there were fewer clashes and hence fewer victims, but the internal conflict continued to affect civilians in those regions. An important part of the delegation's work consisted in visiting communities and meeting the authorities to monitor the situation of civilians, handling Red Cross messages and providing victims of the violence with medical and relief supplies, but the ICRC's main activities in Peru remained visits to places of detention and the dissemination of international humanitarian law.

Peru was hard hit by the effects of both the *El Niño* climatic phenomenon and the Asian financial crisis. While *El Niño* adversely affected agriculture and fishing

and battered the country's infrastructure, the collapse of Peru's Asian trading partners sapped the manufacturing and raw-materials sectors. For the government, the resulting increased costs and lost tax revenue led to cutbacks in funding for social services and for the country's prisons, a development which left many people in dire straits. For example, there was an increasing need for assistance for detainees, as in some cases little or no funds were available for medical treatment, hygiene articles and other basic necessities. The ICRC responded by broadening the scope of its assistance to include ophthalmological care for inmates, increased distributions of hygiene articles and the funding of treatment for prisoners in hospitals, along with other forms of medical care and assistance.

The delegation continued its dialogue with the authorities concerning the harsh conditions of detention of security prisoners, and recommended the transfer of such prisoners to facilities closer to their homes, as some were held in places at



El Niño and budget constraints

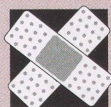
IN 1998 THE ICRC:



- visited 3,788 people detained in connection with the internal conflict, including 794 who were seen for the first time, in 171 places of detention;
- supplied 22 prison clinics with medicine and other medical supplies;
- paid 25,217 travel fares, allowing 2,251 people to visit detained relatives up to 12 times during the year;
- carried out eye-tests on 1,312 detainees and donated 433 pairs of spectacles;



- located 13 people sought by their relatives;
- handled 722 Red Cross messages;



- provided medical supplies and medicines to hospitals which admitted 101 detainees and cared for 895 on an outpatient basis;
- covered the cost of medical care and hospitalization for 182 people who had been wounded in the conflict and were being treated in hospitals run by the Ministry of Health;



- distributed food, clothing, blankets and cooking utensils to 3,903 civilians affected by the internal violence;



- supported the activities and development of the Peruvian Red Cross by providing logistic back-up for a water purification programme implemented by the Peruvian and German Red Cross Societies in Mancora, giving the Peruvian Red Cross a vehicle for transporting sick and wounded, and financing training seminars for volunteers of the National Society;



- held 141 dissemination sessions on the basic standards of humanitarian law, ICRC activities and the Red Cross principles for some 7,000 people, including members of the military, the police, students, medical staff and civilians.

resumption of visits

great distances from their families. Travel fares were paid for 12 family visits instead of eight as previously.

Visits to people detained in connection with the internal conflict, which had been virtually suspended until December 1997 as a consequence of the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence, resumed fully in 1998 thanks to a decision of the President of the Republic. However, the ICRC was not able to resume its activities in places of detention run by the Ministry of the Interior (i.e. in DINCOTE* facilities) until October, when the authorities there once again agreed to the organization's standard visiting procedures. Specifically, as from October delegates were allowed to interview inmates with no witnesses present.

spreading knowledge of humanitarian law

For the first time, courses on human rights and international humanitarian law were included in the regular training programmes for the Peruvian armed forces and police. The ICRC helped draw up the programme and assisted in teaching these courses, the first of which began in November. The delegation also continued its activities to spread knowledge of humanitarian law among other target groups throughout the country.

BRASILIA

Regional delegation (Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela)

In Brazil, the ICRC once again focused on spreading knowledge of humanitarian law among the military police and the armed forces and on information activities. With the assistance of the Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, the ICRC regional delegation offered legal advice to the authorities of Ecuador and Venezuela with a view to establishing national committees and plans of action for the implementation of humanitarian law in those countries.

Brazilian military police

The ICRC, together with the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, initiated a major programme for the dissemination of humanitarian law and knowledge of human rights among the ranks of the 400,000-strong military police, the largest security force in Brazil. The training programme, which first focused on a core group of about 20 instructors and eventually reached over 300 trainers from nearly all the Brazilian states, also addressed techniques and tactics to minimize the use of force and ensure that when force had to be used it was not excessive.

The delegation assisted in the training of navy instructors specializing in humanitarian law, sent a Brazilian army legal expert to attend a course on

* DINCOTE: *Dirección Nacional contra el Terrorismo* (anti-terrorist unit)

humanitarian law in San Remo, Italy, and took part in numerous national and international seminars on peace-keeping organized by the Brazilian military.

The holding of presidential and legislative elections increased political stability in Ecuador, and the conclusion of a peace agreement concerning the border dispute with Peru did much to reduce regional tensions. The delegation urged the government to establish an interministerial committee for the implementation of humanitarian law and worked closely with the Ecuadorean Red Cross, which was entrusted by the Ministry of Defence with the task of spreading knowledge of the law of war among the military.

During the election period at the end of the year the ICRC based a delegate in the capital and helped prepare the Venezuelan Red Cross to take action in the event of election-related violence. The ICRC also developed dissemination activities for the armed forces, in particular by attending seminars held by the newly established human rights and humanitarian law service of the Ministry of Defence and by providing support and training for the service's staff. The government still did not reply to the ICRC's offer of services, submitted in June 1996 and relating to the possibility of visiting people detained in the region near the Colombian border and of giving instruction in humanitarian law to military units stationed there.

On 23 July Venezuela acceded to the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions.

Brazilian armed forces

Ecuador/Peru peace agreement

elections in Venezuela

BRASILIA
regional delegation



– helped the Venezuelan Red Cross improve its members' knowledge of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Fundamental Principles and humanitarian law;



- IN 1998 THE ICRC:
- held 21 3-week courses for instructors of the Brazilian military police, with a total of 320 officers attending;
 - provided material and financial support for the Ecuadorean Red Cross, which held approximately 20 courses on the law of war for members of the Ecuadorean military;
 - provided advice to the Venezuelan authorities with a view to extending the mandate of the National Human Rights Commission to include national implementation of humanitarian law.

BUENOS AIRES

Regional delegation

(Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay)

As in previous years, most of the delegation's work consisted in spreading knowledge of humanitarian law in military and academic circles, encouraging the adoption of national implementation measures, notably by supporting the activities of committees for the implementation of humanitarian law, and urging ratification of various instruments. On 30 January Paraguay filed a declaration recognizing the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission to enquire into alleged violations of humanitarian law treaties, as provided for in Article 90 of Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions.

In accordance with an agreement concluded with the Bolivian government in 1997, the delegation carried out visits to people detained for security reasons in La Paz and El Alto. In December, it conducted visits to security detainees in Chile.

The ICRC took part in military exercises and seminars organized by the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Argentine Training Center for Peacekeeping Forces to prepare troops for peace-keeping operations. The delegation also participated in courses on peace-keeping and international observer missions throughout the region.

peace-keeping exercises

IN 1998 THE ICRC:



- in March, visited 11 prisoners held in 3 places of detention in Bolivia;
- in December, visited 65 prisoners held in 3 places of detention in Chile;



- trained staff of the Argentine Red Cross, the Chilean Red Cross and the Uruguayan Red Cross in dissemination techniques and other subjects related to the Movement, and concluded 5 cooperation agreements with the Bolivian Red Cross covering areas such as dissemination and information;
- took part, with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Chilean Red Cross, in the international Scouts jamboree held near Santiago at the end of December, organizing interactive presentations on landmines, children in armed conflict, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and the use of modern technology in disaster preparedness;



- took part in the work of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay;
- held seminars for legislators and members of the judiciary and other high-ranking officials in Argentina and Bolivia;
- organized seminars, gave presentations and provided instruction for military and police instructors, officers and staff in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay;
- took part in the 10-day United Forces '98 military exercise, held in Paraguay, which brought together some 300 members of the armed forces of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela;
- participated in the Southern Cross military exercise which included the armed forces of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay;

- took part in the Blue Condor military peace-keeping exercise organized jointly near Buenos Aires by the British and Argentine governments and attended by members of the military, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and police forces of many countries of the Americas, France and Spain;
- held seminars and gave presentations at universities and other educational establishments in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay;
- mounted photo exhibitions on the theme "Man in a World of Conflict" and on ICRC activities in Argentina, Chile and Paraguay.

GUATEMALA CITY

Regional delegation

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

hurricane Mitch

When hurricane Mitch, the worst storm to hit Central America for decades, wrought havoc in the region in November, the ICRC, under the coordination of the Federation (the lead agency for the Movement's international activities in the event of natural disaster), worked closely with the National Societies concerned. The regional delegation sent a tracing delegate to help in the search for family members who had gone missing. Above and beyond the thousands of lives it claimed, the storm caused severe damage to infrastructure in Honduras and Nicaragua and greatly set back mine-clearance efforts in the latter, as many landmines were unearthed and washed away to new, unmarked locations.

The security situation stabilized somewhat in Nicaragua and El Salvador, which had been affected by internal conflicts until the early 1990s. In Guatemala, too, the peace process continued, but the political and security situation remained more uncertain, as many of the social problems at the root of the conflict remained to be addressed. In Panama, the spillover effect of the internal conflict in Colombia caused hardship for inhabitants of the eastern region of Darién.

In Haiti a poor security situation became worse at year's end, as the government was all but paralysed by a political stand-off.

The delegation's main activities in the region were related to dissemination and implementation of humanitarian law, cooperation with National Societies, and visits and assistance in prisons in Haiti. One of its major achievements was the adoption, by eight Spanish-speaking countries of Central America and the Caribbean, of a common strategy for the instruction of the international law of armed conflict in their standard training programmes for military and security forces. This was the first time a common commitment had been made at regional level to teach the law of war to such personnel on a permanent basis.

promoting humanitarian law

In February the regional delegation, together with the ICRC Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law and the Panamanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held a regional seminar on the implementation of humanitarian law for government representatives, members of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law and university staff from eight countries in the region.

Throughout the year the ICRC maintained contact with government officials in Guatemala, and conducted missions to Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean in order to encourage ratification of the 1980 Weapons Convention, the 1998 Ottawa treaty and the 1977 Additional Protocols and to provide technical advice concerning the adoption of legislation to protect the emblem, repress war crimes and prohibit anti-personnel mines. The delegation actively supported the work of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law in El Salvador and Panama, and provided advice on the establishment of similar bodies in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago.

The ICRC also maintained contact throughout the year with universities with a view to including courses on humanitarian law in their curricula, and with the armed forces and security services of the countries of the region. Two police instructors, from Jamaica and Panama, were recruited by the delegation to spread knowledge of humanitarian law and humanitarian principles among police forces throughout the region.

The delegation carried on with the Maya project, a dissemination and information programme designed to spread the message of humanitarian law in indigenous languages and to relate it to the history and experiences of the Maya population of Guatemala.

The delegation kept up regular contacts with parliamentarians, government leaders and other officials to promote acceptance of the International Fact-Finding Commission, ratification of the 1977 Additional Protocols, the 1998 Ottawa treaty and the Statute of the International Criminal Court, to encourage the establishment of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law and to urge the adoption of implementing legislation, especially in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago.

Under ICRC auspices, the directors of the dissemination and communication services of the National Societies of Spanish-speaking countries in the region held a six-day meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, in June to share experiences and discuss strategies. In September a similar meeting was held in Saint Kitts for dissemination directors from the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean.

The ICRC concluded a cooperation agreement with the Canadian and the Nicaraguan National Societies for the implementation of a mines-awareness campaign in Nicaragua. The agreement also covered Red Cross activities aimed at marking mined areas and a programme whereby the Nicaraguan Red Cross received ambulances so that it could provide a first-aid service for army mine-clearance operations.

In Panama, the ICRC initiated a cooperation programme to help the National Society establish a branch in the Darién region, and launched a relief programme

humanitarian diplomacy

cooperation with National Societies

for several hundred people suffering from the spillover effects of the internal conflict in Colombia.

On 23 September Grenada acceded to the two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions.

ICRC mission in Haiti

Haiti remained hamstrung by a severe political crisis in 1998, with no Prime Minister until the very end of the year and a number of ministries left with no one in charge. In this context of political instability, the economy continued to flounder. The justice system, too, remained paralysed. Four-fifths of the country's prisoners were awaiting trial, and generally faced a wait of more than two years before their cases would be brought before a court.

The ICRC's activities in Haiti chiefly comprised work in prisons and jails and the dissemination of international humanitarian law.

activities for prisoners

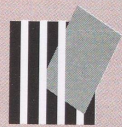
Overcrowding, poor nutrition, lack of clean water and inadequate sanitation facilities were among the main problems which continued to plague places of detention. The ICRC carried out regular visits to the country's prisons and jails to assess conditions of detention and to provide medical care and material assistance. When major problems were observed specific projects were carried out, generally with local health and sanitation specialists.

The delegation played a coordinating role, bringing together the Haitian authorities and representatives of NGOs and international organizations to discuss the various problems facing the prison system. For example, it immediately called for consultation when, in November, the ICRC was notified that a Dutch NGO which had provided up to 70 per cent of the food consumed in the country's prisons intended to phase out its assistance programme at the end of September 1999.

summary report on visits to prisons in 1997

In early March the ICRC handed over to the authorities a summary report on visits it had carried out in 1997 in 18 places of detention throughout the country. The report was the fourth in a series submitted to the authorities since 1994.

As a follow-up to the report, on 19 August the ICRC sent a formal letter to the Minister of Justice, with copies to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Police and the National Penitentiary Administration, reminding them of their obligations.



- in Panama, conducted 2 visits to 1 place of detention, where delegates saw 5 detainees held in connection with the armed intervention of 1989;
- in Haiti, monitored the health status and conditions of detention of over 3,700 prisoners held in 20 places of detention, followed the cases of 26 individual security detainees, carried out water and sanitation work and took other measures to remedy the hygiene situation;



- assisted the National Societies of Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Panama in conducting training programmes for their staff, and in particular for dissemination officers;
- in Nicaragua, with the Canadian Red Cross and the Nicaraguan Red Cross, implemented a mine-awareness programme, and provided ambulances for the National Society's first-aid service for army mine-clearance teams;
- together with the Federation, helped the National Society of the Dominican Republic to draw up new statutes conforming more closely to the principles of the Movement;
- in Haiti, supported the Haitian National Red Cross Society's dissemination service by working closely with its dissemination

IN 1998 THE ICRC:

- officer, and gave presentations on numerous occasions to a wide variety of target groups, including police officers, municipal authorities, future diplomats and others;
- in Cuba, continued to support the work of the International Humanitarian Law Study Centre run by the Cuban Red Cross in Havana, mainly targeting members of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, and supported specific National Society dissemination activities;



- in El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Panama, carried out dissemination activities for the armed forces and the police and/or encouraged incorporation of humanitarian law in their training programmes, and gave a 5-day course on humanitarian law and dissemination for instructors from the defence and police forces of Barbados, Antigua, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica.

WASHINGTON

Regional delegation (Canada, United States)

Activities focused on promoting humanitarian law, maintaining contact with the authorities of Canada and the United States and liaising with international organizations, and in particular the OAS. For example, in March the ICRC presented a report to the OAS Permanent Council's Committee on Political and Juridical Affairs regarding measures taken by member States to implement humanitarian law.

The delegation urged the United States government to adhere to numerous instruments of humanitarian law, including the 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions and the Ottawa treaty banning landmines. It also encouraged the authorities to support the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Late in the year the ICRC Director of Operations visited Washington, where he met officials of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the United States Agency for International Development and the American Red Cross and discussed the ICRC's activities and programmes worldwide. ICRC delegates also had meetings with high-ranking officers of the United States military, including the Southern Command in Miami, to discuss the humanitarian situation in countries of the Americas where the ICRC was active.

In Canada, the ICRC assisted in the creation of a national committee for the implementation of humanitarian law, which was established on 18 March. An ICRC delegate specializing in dissemination and communication techniques was seconded to the Canadian Red Cross for the year.

The delegation took part in numerous seminars, conferences and discussions held by the United States military, academic institutions and various international and regional organizations (including those in the OAS and UN systems) on humanitarian law, the International Criminal Court, peace-keeping operations, the humanitarian situation in countries where the ICRC was operating, the problem of landmines and other matters. Specifically, delegates gave presentations or took part in courses on ICRC activities and the law of armed conflict at the Naval War College, the army School of the Americas, the National Defense University and the Inter-American Defense College.

As in previous years, in February the ICRC visited one Panamanian prisoner of war captured during the United States intervention of 1989.



ICRC K 250

Fresh water and proper sanitation go a long way to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases. In war-torn areas, water supply systems are often damaged or non-existent. The ICRC, along with Swiss teams of water and sanitation experts, is helping to restore these systems. In 1993, many of these systems were damaged by the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under ICRC contract, as in the past, the ICRC is helping to restore these systems.

ASIA
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