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ICRC convoys must often overcome difficulty and danger in order to bring essential supplies to those whose lives have been disrupted by conflict. In 1999, the ICRC provided about 160,000 tonnes of relief to an estimated 4.5 million people in 55 countries.

1999 – The end of an era?

The year under review will be remembered as a period of intense activity for the ICRC, which had to deal simultaneously with a number of major crises: those in Sierra Leone, Angola, the Balkans, East Timor and the northern Caucasus were all the subject of intense media coverage, but needs were no less great in the Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Great Lakes region of Africa, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The year was marked not only by a surge in the number of conflicts, of which only the main ones are listed above, but also by a series of natural disasters that worsened the toll paid in lost lives and material damage by countries and even entire regions that were already economically and socially deprived.

A discussion of 1999 that did not touch upon the form and magnitude of the international community's reactions to crises in various regions of the world would overlook an essential aspect of change in the international system. Indeed, how can one not see the contrast between the attention and resources devoted by some members of the international community to regions they consider strategic, such as the Balkans, and what they give to more distant lands where the humanitarian needs of men, women and children are quantitatively greater but largely ignored? How can one fail to be concerned about the decision to take action in one context as opposed to another? Why did the plight of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Republic of the Congo not stir the conscience of the international community, apart from humanitarian organizations? One thing is certain: as the century drew to a close, there was a long way to go on the path to universal responsibility for human rights and international humanitarian law and the punishment of violations of those rights.

The way in which a crisis is managed thus depends on the political and economic interests involved. In Sierra Leone, for example, it was an African intervention force, ECOMOG,* that regained control of the capital, Freetown, but it was the international community's express and sustained determination, coupled with pragmatism, that paved the way for the signing of a peace accord offering a share of power to the former rebels.

In Angola, the international community, wearied by more than 30 years of war, was unable to find a solution to the new episode in the crisis. The resumption of hostilities forced the UN to withdraw its observers, thus leaving the antagonists face to face.

The trench warfare between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which began in 1998, was characterized by an exceedingly high number of victims. Tens of thousands died, mostly military personnel, and hundreds of thousands were displaced or forced into exile, yet the conflict rated barely a mention in the Western media, and the peace emissaries were not given the means to accomplish their aims.

* ECOMOG: Economic Community Monitoring Group (of West African States)

Who did not foresee the crisis in East Timor? The parties involved had declared their intentions well before the referendum, but post-ballot violence could not be avoided. That the crisis was resolved is thanks to the rapidity with which general and concerted action was subsequently taken, from the Security Council resolution to the humanitarian deployment by way of the dispatch of international troops.

The hostilities in the northern Caucasus also forced thousands of civilians in urgent need of protection and assistance to take to the roads. The way the conflict was handled, in the heat of the media spotlight, revealed that the willingness to use coordinated intervention was limited.

The Kosovo crisis put the right to intervene back on the international political agenda, and re-opened the debate on State sovereignty and the notion of a "just war".

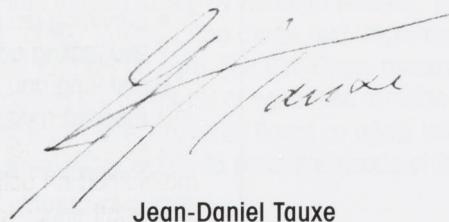
The year was exceptional in both the number and scale of conflicts. Whether the conflicts were long-lasting, had been re-ignited, were new or stagnating, it would seem that in most parts of the globe where there was reason to fear that the situation would deteriorate, a major crisis did indeed take place. For this reason, the ICRC maintained an active presence in 60 delegations, its 1,200 expatriates and 9,500 local staff endeavouring to meet the needs resulting from a score of active armed conflicts and thirty-odd situations of tension. It visited 228,000 persons deprived of their freedom for security reasons in 66 countries, and provided assistance to a total of about 5 million victims.

Throughout the year, the ICRC strove to respond to successive crises that often involved an element of unpredictability, such as their unexpected scale, or a sudden renewal of violence in the midst of a peace process, or the breakdown of the democratic process. In order to meet these challenges, the ICRC revised its objectives and extended its budgets ten times.

The nature of the ICRC's work did not change; the budget increases were attributable not to any modification in ICRC programmes but to their intensification, especially those involving food aid or protection. In Angola, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Somalia, in the Balkans and in the northern Caucasus especially, displaced persons or destitute residents numbered in the millions.

To be sure, circumstances did improve in some countries and in these the ICRC consequently reduced its operations; such was the case, for example, in Cambodia. In other places, doors were opened to the ICRC, prompting it to expand its activities; this happened in Myanmar, Algeria, Nepal and Venezuela, where visits to persons deprived of their freedom were allowed to begin.

As regards coordinated humanitarian activities, at least within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the year saw the Movement's components adopt an integrated approach during and after the Balkan crisis; the lessons of that approach remain to be drawn.



Jean-Daniel Tauxe
Director of Operations

One mission, with one aim and one approach

The ICRC's mission is to ensure respect for the spirit and the letter of international humanitarian law. Protecting people affected by conflicts or violence involves minimizing the dangers to which they are exposed, preventing or putting a stop to violations, safeguarding their rights and ensuring that their voices are heard, and providing them with support.

On the basis of information gathered in the field and analysed in the light of humanitarian law and its principles, ICRC delegates make representations to the authorities concerned with a view to improving the situation of the populations concerned. At the same time, they provide direct assistance in the form of food and agricultural aid, medical care and so on.

The ICRC works close to the victims of conflict and violence, giving preference to confidential dialogue with the authorities, whether these are States or unofficial bodies.

A multifaceted strategy

The ICRC first reminds the authorities, official or otherwise, of their responsibility to protect the individuals and populations under their control, i.e. first and foremost to ensure their physical integrity and dignity. It recommends specific improvements and preventive and/or corrective measures on the basis of its own, independent assessments.

At the same time, the ICRC takes action to meet the most pressing needs by:

- providing assistance to anticipate or meet needs;
- evacuating and/or transferring people in danger;
- restoring and maintaining family links and tracing people who have been reported missing or who have no news of their next-of-kin.

Respect for the rights of the individual can only be assured in an environment that is favourable to the prevention and repression of violations of humanitarian law and human rights. Such an environment can only exist if the competent authorities, civil society, the international community and the various international and intergovernmental organizations concerned are fired by the same motivation and determination and unite their efforts to that end. Certain ICRC activities contribute to the ongoing construction of just such an environment, namely:

- spreading knowledge of humanitarian principles and law among law enforcement bodies and the armed forces;
- educational programmes on humanitarian issues for civil society, in cooperation with the local media;
- technical and material cooperation with certain prison administrations;
- acting as a neutral intermediary.

The constant challenge of protecting civilians

Today, not only are civilian populations more seriously affected by hostilities, they are also deliberately targeted with increasing frequency. Massacres, hostage-taking, looting, rape, harassment, intimidation, displacement of populations and the deliberate denial of access to food and drinking water during armed conflicts are just some examples of acts that cause suffering and spread terror among the civilian population. Caught up in the fighting between rival factions, civilians are sometimes just as much at risk or even more so than detained combatants. Immunity for civilian populations is a basic principle of international humanitarian law; civilians not taking part in the fighting should on no account be subjected to attack and should be spared and protected. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and in particular their Additional Protocols of 1977 contain specific rules concerning the protection of civilians and civilian property. In situations that are not defined as international armed conflicts, the civilian population is entitled to protection under Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions. In the case of internal strife, civilians are protected by virtue of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and the inalienable core of international human rights law.

In order to implement the protection strategy described above, the ICRC also maintains a regular presence in high-risk areas. ICRC delegates remain in close contact with all potential perpetrators of acts of violence, including the armed forces, rebel combat units, the police and security forces.

In certain contexts in which the security situation is extremely precarious, the challenge is to act on behalf of the population even though no delegates can be deployed in the field. Chechnya is one such case: between 1997 and 1999, the ICRC worked with teams formed solely by national workers, promoting cooperation with the local branch of the Russian Red Cross and implementing programmes to provide food aid, water and health care. The Red Cross message network also continued to operate, enabling the members of separated families to remain in contact. In 1999, however, especially after hostilities flared up again late in the year, the ICRC was unable to take satisfactory action to meet the needs of the civilian population and detainees.

Consultation between humanitarian agencies to ensure effective protection

One of the most striking features of the contemporary humanitarian scene is the proliferation of agencies working in the field. This makes it possible to cover many protection needs more fully, but it also creates a growing risk of duplicate efforts and even contradictory action and interference. Consultation among all those involved is an ethical, legal and operational imperative dictated by the right of people to enjoy maximum protection, and the ICRC therefore established closer contacts with other humanitarian agencies in order to ensure enhanced protection.

The acute vulnerability of those deprived of their freedom

Ensuring respect for physical integrity and dignity is the main objective of ICRC activities on behalf of people deprived of their freedom. To be deprived of one's freedom is in itself to be in a vulnerable situation vis-à-vis the detaining authorities and the prison environment. This vulnerability is particularly acute in a context of conflict and violence, where excessive and illegal recourse to force may become commonplace and where the effects of structural deficiencies are exacerbated.

The ICRC acts to prevent or put a stop to disappearances and summary executions, torture, ill-treatment and the severing of family links, and to improve conditions of detention, taking the context into account.

Visits to detainees are carried out in accordance with the ICRC's particular modus operandi: delegates meet detainees in their places of detention in private. Each case is examined in relation to all other detainees in the same situation, to whom the ICRC must also have access, wherever they are held. Delegates take full details of the identity of the detainees, whose individual cases are then monitored until their release. The detainees talk to the delegates about the problems they face. The delegates take comprehensive measures on the basis of their evaluation and in accordance with the detainees' wishes. Depending on the circumstances, those measures may involve, for example, confidential talks with the authorities concerned, an assistance programme and/or action to restore family links.

While refraining from taking any stand on the reasons for the arrest or capture of detainees, the ICRC spares no effort to ensure that they enjoy the judicial guarantees enshrined in international humanitarian law and customary law.

First and foremost, the right to survive

In 1999, detained men, women and children continued to die or had to survive in inhumane and degrading conditions. Overcrowding due to a policy of mass arrests and/or the paralysis of the administration of justice, lack of resources, indifference and negligence were the most common causes of the inhumanity suffered in so many cases.

Because of the acknowledged inability of the authorities to shoulder their responsibilities, the entire prison population in numerous countries proved to be in such dire need in humanitarian terms that the ICRC was compelled to take action on a massive scale to save lives.

Rwanda was the most glaring example. The conditions of detention were inadequate for the high number of detainees (almost 125,000), prompting the ICRC to pursue its distributions of food, medicines and other basic necessities and to construct and maintain latrines, stoves and water supply systems in the country's prisons.

In Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, too, the ICRC provided emergency food aid to save the lives of particularly vulnerable detainees.

IN 1999 THE ICRC:

- visited 225,313 people deprived of their freedom – prisoners of war, civilian internees or detainees – in a situation of conflict or violence, and monitored 166,075 of them throughout their period of detention;
- visited 1,726 places of detention in more than 60 countries;
- provided detainees and their families with material and medical assistance worth 13 million Swiss francs.

Similarly, the ICRC distributed basic necessities in some places of detention in Afghanistan and was involved in work on infrastructure, enabling detainees to withstand extremely harsh weather conditions.

In the southern Caucasus, large-scale programmes to combat tuberculosis in prisons were maintained in Azerbaijan and Georgia and were in the process of being set up in Armenia.

Protecting family links: a top priority

The ICRC Central Tracing Agency endeavours to restore and maintain family links in all situations of conflict and violence. It has hundreds of thousands of displaced people, refugees, detainees and missing persons on its tracing files. Those who are successfully traced are put in touch with their families thanks to the worldwide network supported by the ICRC and comprising 176 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Cooperation between the ICRC and the National Societies was greatly extended in 1999, the former continuing its efforts to help the latter build their capacities in the areas of training, development and tracing services, and providing them with material and financial support. Seminars offering opportunities for the exchange of experiences and for training were also organized, as in previous years, in the Horn of Africa, Moscow and Geneva. In 1999, the ICRC extended its support for the development of tracing services and training to National Societies in southern Africa and South Asia.

New technology at the service of separated families

During the Balkans conflict, the ICRC set up a special Internet website, the "Family News Network", which enabled separated family members to find each other by consulting the lists of people posted at the site and to exchange family news by e-mail. This new tool was a useful addition to the other means used to help restore family links, namely Red Cross mobile telephones made available to displaced people and refugees, the broadcasting of lists of names over the radio and the collection and delivery of Red Cross messages.

While in Kosovo a tiny proportion of the displaced population had mobile phones, in most of the world, from Afghanistan to Sudan or in the southern Caucasus, the Red Cross message remains the simplest and most effective way of enabling separated families to keep in touch or to re-establish contact with one another.

IN 1999 THE ICRC:

- collected 337,776 Red Cross messages and distributed 304,291;
- reunited 4,236 families;
- issued 7,646 ICRC travel documents;
- found 3,154 people sought by their families;
- received 12,865 new tracing requests.

The Central Tracing Agency in the midst of conflict

In 1999 as in the past, the ICRC Central Tracing Agency played its treaty-based role in international conflicts, collecting, recording and forwarding information about protected people, particularly prisoners of war and civilian internees. For example, during the conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea and in central Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo/Rwanda), ICRC delegates visited prisoners of war and civilian internees and restored contact between separated family members.

For detainees and their families, receiving news from each other is always a major event. In many situations, the ICRC gave prisoners of war, civilian internees, security detainees and even penal law detainees the chance to communicate with their loved ones.

By the same token, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement works to restore links between separated family members once a conflict has come to an end. During the wave of violence that followed the announcement of the results of the independence vote in East Timor in early September 1999, more than 270,000 people fled their homes to take refuge in West Timor, on neighbouring Indonesian islands or in other countries such as Australia and the Philippines. In view of the systematic destruction of the communications networks in East Timor, the people remaining there were unable to keep in contact with members of their family outside the country. More than 2,000 families were able to telephone their loved ones from ICRC offices; these calls involved mainly people on other Indonesian islands and in Portugal and Australia.

In view of the success of the operation carried out between March and June 1999 for the Kosovar refugees, the names of people in East Timor were broadcast daily over several international radio stations covering the region.

Unaccompanied children and the principle of family reunification

The preservation of family unity is a universal principle guaranteed by law. The ICRC does everything in its power to reunite people who have been separated by events, actively searching for them and making arrangements for them to be brought together again.

In 1999, the ICRC continued to trace and reunite people who had lost touch with their families after being separated by front lines, as in Afghanistan and Kivu (in central Africa), or by national borders, as between Abkhazia and other Central Asian republics.

The issue of unaccompanied children has always been one of the ICRC's chief concerns. In Africa's Great Lakes region, activities begun in 1994 to help them find their families were continued. Many more refugee children living in Goma (Democratic Republic of the Congo) were reunited with their parents in Rwanda in 1999. In Rwanda itself, the ICRC initiated talks with the government authorities to discuss long-term social and legal arrangements for a number of unaccompanied children, the chances of their parents being found growing slimmer with the passing of time.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The ICRC also took action to help children in the Balkans and East Timor. It swiftly set up a programme to identify and register unaccompanied children; in many cases, the parents were found and the children reunited with their families.

In East Timor, more than 400 unaccompanied children were identified and registered in the wake of the disturbances that flared up in September. The majority of them were in camps in West Timor, although there were also 60 in Australia. Great efforts were made actively to trace the parents, with a view to speeding up the process of bringing families together again.

Dialogue with the main humanitarian organizations and institutions working to help children affected by conflict was intensified in 1999. Meetings aimed at promoting cooperation and coordination between humanitarian agencies were held on three occasions, in Geneva, New York and Paris. They resulted in a consensus on ethical principles and the formulation of draft guidelines concerning activities aimed at helping children. This process is expected to result in the production and distribution in 2000 of a guide on professional standards in this regard.

ICRC travel papers: a document that has proved its worth

Sometimes, only a travel document issued by the ICRC will allow a needy person with no identity papers to rejoin his or her family members who have settled in a third country or to return to his or her native country. As the ranks of refugees and asylum-seekers swell, the ICRC finds itself issuing a growing number of travel documents for people authorized to settle in host countries. In 1999, more than 7,600 documents were issued all over the world, including in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Pakistan and India.

The fate of missing people: a constant concern

Even when the guns fall silent, war continues to haunt the families of missing people, as they wonder - are they still alive? Are they wounded, or imprisoned? These families have the right to know. International humanitarian law requires all parties to a conflict to provide answers to their questions.

The experience of recent years has shown, however, how difficult it is to set in motion the mechanisms needed to find out what has happened to missing people.

In the former Yugoslavia, while the process established by the ICRC for collecting information from the authorities was considered indispensable, and everyone agreed that it was beginning to yield results, the number of replies given by the parties concerned has not been satisfactory. The numerous exchanges that continued to take place in 1999 with other partners involved in this undertaking, with a view to setting up a permanent national institution, did not bear fruit. The victims and their families being its chief concern, the ICRC also increased its support for the families of missing people and their associations, publishing, for example, a vade mecum of the laws and regulations relating to the legal status and rights of the families of missing persons.

In Kosovo, acting on the experience acquired in the former Yugoslavia, the ICRC immediately opened eight centres for the families of missing people. The centres had

three tasks: receiving requests to trace missing people with a view to ascertaining their whereabouts, giving legal and administrative advice to the families of missing people, and providing those families with psychological support.

In the Middle East, the Tripartite Commission chaired by the ICRC continued its work to shed light on the fate of people who disappeared during the Gulf War. So far, however, results have failed to meet expectations.

Access to detainees: a constantly changing picture

In 1999 the ICRC gained access to detainees it had never visited before. In other cases, though, little progress was made with regard to the protection of detainees and civilian populations, and in some instances the situation actually deteriorated.

In Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the ICRC had to deal with the influx of some 800,000 refugees fleeing Kosovo. Its tracing agency set up various programmes aimed at restoring family links and reuniting families.

When the fighting ended, the ICRC focused its efforts in this regard on Kosovo, collecting requests to trace people who went missing during the conflict and exchanging thousands of Red Cross messages, particularly between people belonging to minorities and their families living outside Kosovo.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the ICRC visited over 2,000 people detained in connection with the conflict in Kosovo. It also facilitated the release of about 230 people and arranged for them to travel home to Kosovo.

Around 40,000 Red Cross messages were exchanged between people still living in East Timor and those who had fled the violence and sought refuge, mainly on the western part of the island.

Under the agreement reached with the government of Nepal in 1998, the ICRC continued to visit people detained in connection with the situation of tension affecting the country and being held in district, regional and central prisons. It also gained access to people detained in police stations.

In the Caucasus, the ICRC acted on the authorities' oral permission to visit people detained in Abkhazia, including those imprisoned in connection with the conflict. In Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, it was still denied access to all persons detained on security grounds.

In the autonomous Palestinian territories, the ICRC was authorized to visit detainees being held by the military intelligence service. Throughout the year, delegates continued to visit people detained under the responsibility of the security forces.

The Myanmar authorities granted the ICRC permission to visit all people detained in the country. The visits began in May 1999 and continued throughout the year.

On the South American continent, the ICRC was granted access in Venezuela to 52 people charged under military law.

In Africa, many favourable developments helped the ICRC to fulfil its mandate more fully in relation to prisoners taken in international conflicts and people detained in connection with internal conflicts and strife.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The ICRC thus resumed its visits to prisons in Burundi after suspending its activities for almost three years following the June 1996 killing of three of its delegates. The visits began in April 1999 with the consent of the government. By the end of the year, delegates had visited eight Ministry of Justice prisons.

In November, Cameroon and Nigeria took the decision to release all prisoners of war and civilian internees captured during the border dispute over the Bakassi peninsula. Nigeria finally agreed to grant the ICRC access to Cameroonian prisoners with a view to a global repatriation. The repatriation operation, which was carried out under ICRC auspices, involved 124 Nigerian nationals and 88 Cameroonian, including the mortal remains of one prisoner who had died in captivity.

The ICRC expanded its treaty-based humanitarian work in relation to the international armed conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, its delegates visited Eritrean civilian internees and prisoners of war on a regular basis. In Eritrea, they were able to visit imprisoned Ethiopian civilians, although no progress was made on the question of access to prisoners of war. In both countries, the ICRC paid particular attention to the situation of civilian populations protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention. It considerably extended its services aimed at restoring family links through Red Cross messages in both Ethiopia and Eritrea and arranged for the first unaccompanied children to be reunited with their families.

With regard to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ICRC obtained permission from the government to visit various categories of detainees. Visits were made in Kinshasa and Katanga. An agreement permitting visits was also signed with the opposition movement, the RCD,* and the ICRC therefore visited people detained in Goma, Kindu and Kisangani. At the end of 1999, steps were being taken to obtain access to places of detention that had not yet been visited.

The ICRC also visited prisoners of war captured during the conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, delegates visited 98 Rwandan prisoners and one Ugandan prisoner held by the Zimbabwean authorities, as well as six Chadian prisoners of war held by the Ugandan authorities and moved to Uganda in November. In Rwanda, delegates visited 40 Zimbabwean prisoners of war and 11 Namibian detainees.

Four Zimbabwean prisoners of war and one Rwandan prisoner were repatriated on medical grounds in three operations carried out under ICRC auspices in April, July and October. In the Republic of the Congo, an agreement was signed on ICRC visits to detainees following negotiations with the authorities. In Equatorial Guinea, however, the ICRC was still unable to visit people arrested on security grounds according to its standard procedures.

In November, the authorities of the Republic of Guinea granted the ICRC permission to visit detainees arrested for belonging to opposition movements, specifically for their part in the 1996 riots. A first round of visits to the country's prisons began in December.

* RCD: "Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie"

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Following the latest wave of hostilities in Guinea-Bissau, the ICRC was rapidly granted access in May to more than 700 military and civilian loyalists who had surrendered or been arrested by the incoming authorities. The loyalists were provided with food and non-food aid.

In March 1999, the ICRC began a round of visits to places of detention in Cameroon (prisons, police stations), under an agreement reached with the authorities permitting delegates to monitor detainees arrested in relation to the people's secessionist movement of the English-speaking part of the country and the disturbances that occurred in March 1997.

In southern Africa, the ICRC visited people held in Namibia in connection with the events in the Caprivi Strip (August 1999), and monitored their conditions of detention.

In Angola, despite numerous representations, the authorities did not grant the ICRC permission to visit prisoners taken when the hostilities were renewed.

In the Middle East, in relation to the aftermath of the conflict between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), 724 Iraqi prisoners of war held in Iran were repatriated under ICRC auspices. The ICRC also visited a further 278 Iraqi prisoners of war held in Iran to find out if they wished to be repatriated or not. These visits formed part of ICRC activities aimed at the repatriation, pursuant to the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention of all the prisoners of war still held in Iraq.

With regard to the aftermath of the Western Sahara conflict, 1,800 Moroccan prisoners, most of whom had been imprisoned for over twenty years, were still being held by the Polisario Front in spite of the cease-fire signed in 1991. ICRC teams that included specialized medical personnel carried out several missions on the spot, with a view to monitoring the conditions in which the prisoners were being held and to providing them with the opportunity to keep in touch with their families. The ICRC has repeatedly reminded all the parties involved of the right of these prisoners to be repatriated.

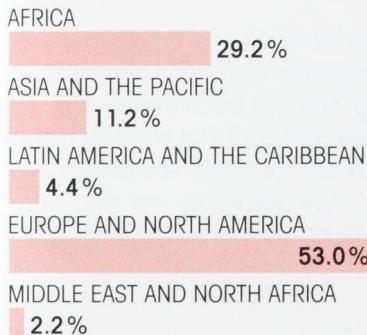
In 1999, the ICRC was granted access to people detained in Algeria. Visits were made to various Ministry of Justice prison facilities in different parts of the country.

Lastly, in November an ICRC team carried out a first round of visits to central prisons in Aden and Sana'a in Yemen, while in Qatar a first visit was made to security detainees.

IN 1999 THE ICRC:

- distributed 104,700 tonnes of food, 12,800 tonnes of seed and 42,000 tonnes of other relief supplies worth a total of 141 million Swiss francs in 55 countries.

GEOGRAPHICAL BREAKDOWN OF ICRC RELIEF SUPPLIES DISPATCHED IN 1999



Assistance: meeting the growing range of needs

As in previous years, the ICRC had to undertake a wide range of activities in 1999 to assist the hundreds of thousands of victims of the many conflicts being waged. Prisoners, the wounded, sick and maimed, the displaced and the besieged, received ICRC assistance irrespective of the nature of the conflict, the media coverage it was given or the culture of the inhabitants of the region or area concerned. The Health and Relief Division's mission is to maintain or restore acceptable living conditions for all the victims in all circumstances, so as to reduce their dependence on outside aid. That assistance is provided within the more general framework of activities to protect the fundamental rights and dignity of the individual, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

Activities on the ground are carried out in accordance with an order of priorities designed to reduce the incidence of disease and death among the victims of armed conflict, in particular the most vulnerable groups, as rapidly and effectively as possible. This essentially means giving precedence to access to water, food and basic necessities for survival, with due regard to local custom, before dealing with matters relating to hygiene and access to medical care. The ICRC carries out these activities in compliance with ethical rules such as those laid down in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs* in Disaster Relief, and with internationally recognized minimum standards.

In 1999 the ICRC also encountered a variety of situations which required the development of diversified strategies for providing assistance for victims, among them:

- the new crises in Kosovo (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and East Timor, which called for rapid action and greater coordination among humanitarian organizations;
- long-standing conflicts that flared anew or persisted (for example in Angola, Afghanistan and Sudan), thus creating or recreating extremely difficult conditions for civilians in particularly unstable environments;
- stagnating conflict situations, for example in Rwanda, Georgia, Abkhazia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, that required the ICRC to maintain operations undertaken in the heat of battle;
- particularly difficult security situations in which it was impossible to deploy expatriates and where "remote control" operations were conducted through local workers, as was the case in the northern Caucasus and Somalia.

In all these instances, integrated assistance models were used to alleviate the suffering of the victims while taking account of specific local conditions.

In 1998, internal restructuring had led to the establishment of the Health and Relief Division and the Logistics Division. In 1999, the new structures were put in place in Geneva and in the field, with almost all the delegations concerned adopting new working procedures at the same time. Within the Health and Relief Division, activities were grouped around three units which operate in concert: water and habitat, economic security and health services.

* NGO: non-governmental organization

Water and habitat

The Water and Habitat Unit deals with matters relating to shelter and the maintenance and restoration of water supply systems. Its activities include the distribution of drinking water to communities affected by war, the repair of water purification and supply systems (from family wells to the water systems of cities), the supply of water to establishments such as hospitals, clinics, orphanages and prisons, the construction and improvement of latrines, and the control of vectors of disease. It calls on expertise in hydraulics and hydrogeology, and civil, environmental and chemical engineering to implement its activities. The Unit is also responsible for the construction and maintenance of the security infrastructure at ICRC delegations.

In 1999, water and habitat programmes were implemented in some thirty contexts. For example:

- water was distributed and transit camps, health facilities and latrines built for refugees arriving from Kosovo at the border town of Kukes in Albania;
- an emergency programme was set up in Novi Sad (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) following the destruction of the bridges over the Danube which also carried the water distribution networks (initially water was distributed by tanker, then around thirty fixed distribution points and two small treatment plants were set up, enabling the local authorities simultaneously to repair the networks that had been destroyed);
- the water supply systems were repaired in the principal towns of East Timor;
- spare parts and chemical products were supplied to the water departments of a dozen towns in the region controlled by the RCD in the Democratic Republic of Congo, thus providing over two million people with access to drinking water;
- a programme was drawn up and launched to refurbish about twenty hospital establishments in Iraq;
- kitchens, latrines and water supply systems were repaired in many prisons, in particular in Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

Together with the Stockholm International Water Institute, the unit helped organize the Water Symposium held in the Swedish capital from 8 to 10 August.

Economic security

The Economic Security Unit analyses the economic situation of the communities affected by armed conflict. Its activities include in particular monitoring the resources to which communities have access, the existing survival mechanisms and the measures to be taken to make up for the deficiencies observed. The principal aim is to use the input of nutritionists, agronomists, veterinary surgeons, economists and relief distribution specialists to ensure that communities affected by war retain their economic self-sufficiency where it is under threat, or are able to survive and regain such self-sufficiency where it has been lost.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In 1999, the increase in the number of situations in which the Economic Security Unit's activities proved to be necessary resulted in a training drive to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of competent personnel. That drive will be continued in the coming years.

During the period under review, the Economic Security Unit implemented programmes in about twenty situations. For example:

- monthly half-rations of food were distributed to over 200,000 vulnerable persons among the displaced and resident communities of Huambo and Kuito in Angola;
- several dozen kilometres of karezes (underground irrigation channels) were repaired in Afghanistan;
- numerous programmes (community kitchens, distribution of heating material, agricultural rehabilitation, etc.) were planned and implemented in conjunction with other organizations in the field so as to allow tens of thousands of displaced persons to survive the rigours of the Balkan winter in dignity;
- seeds were distributed to 63,000 families who had been displaced in northern Uganda;
- food to supplement the rations supplied by the government authorities was distributed to roughly 86,000 people being held in Rwandan prisons.

IN 1999 THE ICRC:

- distributed medicines and medical supplies worth 25.6 million Swiss francs, to almost 200 hospitals in 54 countries;
- sent medical teams to and supplied most of the medicines, medical material and equipment for 11 hospitals in Africa and Asia, which admitted approximately 48,000 patients and where 200,000 people received outpatient treatment.

Community health

The aim of the Health Services Unit is to give communities access to basic preventive and curative health care that meets universally recognized standards of quality and provides an adequate level of cover. The Unit does this by offering four services: community health, surgery, prison health and rehabilitation for the disabled.

A medical service was started in 1999 to provide specialist support (planning, professional and technical) and guarantee best-practice standards in primary health and general medical programmes. This reflects a marked increase in the ICRC's involvement in programmes of this type in comparison with previous years.

In 1999, programmes of this kind were carried out in about twenty contexts. Examples are:

- assistance programmes for health centres and dispensaries in Colombia and Angola;
- tuberculosis-control programmes such as those carried out in prisons in Georgia and Azerbaijan;
- secondary medical care such as that dispensed by the medical services of the hospitals in Lokichokio (Kenya), southern Sudan and Dili (East Timor);
- programmes to support primary health care promotion policies in post-conflict situations, in particular in Mali and Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- new activities such as counselling programmes.

Surgical assistance

The aim of this service is to provide support for local health systems and, less frequently, temporarily to provide all surgical care in their stead. Generally speaking, the need for surgical services increases when an armed conflict breaks out, since all sectors of the population, both civilian and combatant, can be wounded.

The demands on the service were particularly heavy in 1999, not including its long-standing activities in Afghanistan and Sudan. For example:

- in East Timor the ICRC was able to keep Dili General Hospital, the only central hospital in the eastern part of the island, operating almost without interruption;
- in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the site of particularly bloody trench warfare, the ICRC set up an assistance programme to provide surgical material, equipment and medicines for hospitals on both sides of the front line, to help them cope with the influx of wounded, and launched a training programme on maxillofacial remedial surgery;
- in Sierra Leone the ICRC started a training and support programme at Kenema hospital when it returned to the country in July;
- a programme got under way in Iraq to reequip completely the operating theatres of around twenty hospitals.

Rehabilitation for the disabled

The aim of this service is to provide all disabled people in target communities with access to physical rehabilitation programmes and to quality prosthetic and orthotic material. The sophistication of the tasks involved, the complexity and cost of the means taken and the fact that the objectives are of necessity long term make it difficult to hand over responsibility for such programmes to another party. The ICRC therefore provides financial and material support, through the Special Fund for the Disabled, for certain programmes whose entire management has been handed over to the authorities.

In 1999, the 29 limb-fitting centres supported by the ICRC in 14 countries manufactured a total of 12,500 prostheses and 8,500 orthoses. These figures include the newly established centres in Sri Lanka, Sudan and Myanmar.

Three major projects were set up in 1999. They involved:

- the beginning of a process to improve the quality of mass-produced orthopaedic components by centralizing production units;
- an external evaluation of the quality of and the procedures used in the past twenty years in physical rehabilitation programmes;
- a conference, attended by all ICRC heads of project and several outside experts, on the approach to physical rehabilitation with regard to patients and partners.

IN 1999 THE ICRC:

- fitted 14,383 amputees in its 29 limb-fitting centres in 14 countries, including 8,896 victims of anti-personnel mines;
- made 14,445 components (artificial knees and feet and various appliances) for other organizations working with amputees;
- provided materials worth 1.9 million Swiss francs for its workshops' production of prosthetic/orthotic appliances.

Prison health

This service seeks, as part of its specific activities for protected detainees, to ensure that this particular category of victim also has access to care and enjoys acceptable conditions of detention. In this connection, the use of torture and the means of preventing it are given much careful consideration and are the subject of ICRC representations.

In 1999 the ICRC's activities in this respect were particularly significant in the following contexts:

- in Rwanda, where over 86,000 people were being held in difficult conditions;
- in the Western Sahara, where people who had been detained for over twenty years required care adapted to their situation and advanced years;
- in Burundi, when the ICRC resumed its activities in the spring.

Members of the service attended meetings and international conferences on prison health, medical ethics, torture and the victims of torture.

Preparing for health emergencies and training health professionals

The ICRC has been training professionals for many years to deal with health emergencies affecting large groups of people. The first HELP* course was held in 1986, in cooperation with WHO* and the University of Geneva. In 1999, the ICRC ran seven HELP courses in cooperation with various universities and tested a new module (HELP II) focusing on health, ethics, law and policies in armed conflicts. In such situations, health professionals are faced with hard choices and issues that go beyond caring for the wounded and sick. The purpose of HELP II is to provide ethical and practical guidelines for dealing with problems such as triage of the wounded, evidence of torture, the effects of economic sanctions on health, etc. It also aims to familiarize participants with the legal instruments and norms limiting the suffering that may be inflicted and punishing abuses. Ethical issues such as equitable treatment, gender sensitivity and respect for fundamental rights are also among the topics addressed in the new course.

War surgery is another field where ICRC experience is valued, and in 1999 the organization ran nine courses for military and civilian surgeons in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. In Kabul, it ran a course in hospital administration. Each course was attended by an average of 30 participants.

* HELP: Health Emergencies in Large Populations

* WHO: World Health Organization

The ICRC is also eager to share its expertise within the framework of university and other higher-education courses. It continued to give lectures at the University of Aix-en-Provence for students working towards the NOHA* diploma. It played an active part in setting up the University of Geneva's one year postgraduate course in humanitarian action, which was launched in the 1998-1999 academic year, and presented a two-week module at the beginning of the year.

Another aspect of the ICRC's involvement in academic activities in the medical sphere are the numerous scientific articles written on the basis of its field work, evaluations and analyses. In 1999, the British Medical Journal devoted its entire August issue to medicine and international humanitarian law. ICRC staff provided most of the articles and statistics. The ICRC uses such channels, in addition to its own medical publications, to help promote the results of its experience and research.

Logistics: streamlining the system

In 1999, all ICRC procurement, purchasing, warehousing and transport activities were combined into a single unit - the Logistics Division created in December 1998 - to provide comprehensive and more cost-effective support for operations, and the consequent structural changes were made both at headquarters and in the field. With regard to operations, these changes led to closer monitoring of lead times and deliveries to the field, greater complementarity between headquarters, regional logistic centres and delegations, and better use of regional emergency stocks. At the same time, procedures were tightened up with a view to standardizing items and specifications, streamlining ordering processes, defining purchasing policies and globalizing purchases. Finally, the Division implemented an integrated approach with respect to costing, reporting, training, documentation and other activities, together with the Finance and Administration Division.

Two main logistics centres for worldwide action

Two logistics centres provided back-up for operations worldwide. The one in Geneva specialized in medical and sanitation equipment, while the one in Nairobi specialized in relief supplies, with an emergency stock of food and non-food items sufficient to cover the needs of about 100,000 people for three months. Between them, the two centres enabled the ICRC to respond rapidly to large-scale humanitarian needs in 1999 in the Balkans, Angola and East Timor, to name but a few.

* NOHA: Network on humanitarian assistance

Swift response in times of trouble

During the Balkans crisis, the two logistics centres were reinforced by temporary back-up structures in Italy, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that managed the storage and dispatch of supplies to the Balkans for the Movement. The centres received goods by air and road and dispatched up to 25,000 metric tonnes of aid per month.

During the upheaval in East Timor, logistics operations were backed simultaneously by Geneva and Nairobi and managed from Surabaya (Indonesia) and Darwin (Australia) with Australian Red Cross support. This enabled the ICRC to airlift and ship all the equipment it needed to start operating in Dili: trucks, vehicles, hospital supplies, food and non-food items (450 metric tonnes were dispatched the first week and two ships were hired to get the food pipeline going).

In Angola, the ICRC assisted 250,000 people with an airlift operation of 2,400 metric tonnes of food per month.

Coordination is a must

The growing number of organizations involved in relief operations makes coordination a matter of paramount importance. More and more operations are conducted within the framework of the Movement, and the number of National Societies contributing to ICRC activities, especially in the form of delegated projects, is on the rise. To lead such joint operations effectively requires harmonized logistical procedures and standardized equipment. Telephone and radio systems, for example, must all be compatible, reporting formulas must be streamlined and, most importantly, the quality of relief goods distributed must be guaranteed.

In 1999, the ICRC acted as the Movement's lead agency for operations in the former Yugoslavia. This meant it was in charge of coordinating all projects carried out by the Movement's components. Twenty participating National Societies were active in the region in addition to the local Red Cross.

Key figures for 1999

In 1999, the number of expatriate logisticians in the field increased from 40 to 140, backed up by approximately 2,000 local staff. For its operations the ICRC used a worldwide fleet of 3,000 trucks and other vehicles and 950 warehouses. The National Societies played an important part in stocking supplies - an estimated 50% of the effective field logistics. In addition, 115 planes and two to five ships were operational at any one time. The value of ICRC field and emergency stocks amounted on average to 60 million Swiss francs, and its purchases for 1999 were worth some 350 million Swiss francs. The organization also received about 59 million Swiss francs worth of supplies as gifts in kind.

Reviewing ICRC performance: monitoring and evaluation

Finding ways to improve ICRC performance in situations of conflict is a priority for all ICRC management and staff, especially when considering the needs of target populations (persons deprived of their freedom, internally displaced persons, refugees, women, children, separated family members, the missing, sick and wounded).

To ensure that planning is both relevant and effective, the ICRC makes certain that performance assessment tools such as monitoring and evaluation are an integral part of the management process. To this end, it established a Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in February 1999 whose purpose is to develop policies, guidelines, tools and systems to make sure the ICRC has an efficient and co-ordinated planning, monitoring and evaluation capacity.

For example, when setting annual objectives for 2000, each field delegation and headquarters division was requested to draw up an annual global performance assessment with respect to 1999 objectives. This included reporting on major results, areas where achievements failed to meet expectations, identification of unexpected results, unforeseen constraints, areas of innovation and lessons learned. This data will form the basis of a global institutional analysis.

Monitoring health and assistance programmes

The ICRC carried out ten internal monitoring missions to assess the implementation of various programmes covering primary health care, surgery, prosthetic/orthotic activities, relief, water, shelter, and health and assistance in prisons. The reviews targeted programmes in Afghanistan, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Angola, Iraq and the former Yugoslavia (including Kosovo).

In addition, the ICRC launched four evaluations in 1999 involving outside experts. The evaluations will examine 10 years of ICRC support to Cambodia's CNTS,* the ICRC's prosthetic/orthotic programmes in Zimbabwe and Afghanistan, ICRC support for veterinary vaccines production by the Afghan Agriculture Ministry, and the impact of ICRC projects aimed at improving the nutritional status of persons detained in the penitentiaries of Madagascar.

* CNTS: "Centre national de transfusion sanguine" (National Blood Bank)

Monitoring tracing activities

The ICRC was very attentive to the conclusions of an internal study on its activities for unaccompanied children in the Great Lakes region between 1994 and 1997. Overall, the study concluded that the ICRC had an internationally recognized role in the field of tracing with respect to unaccompanied children in emergencies and had made significant contributions in terms of re-establishing family links and reuniting families. The study ascertained, for example, that the ICRC had registered 65,500 of the total 131,500 unaccompanied children registered in the region, or approximately 50%, and that it had carried out 13,000 out of a total 57,000 family reunifications by all channels, or 23%. The ICRC's overall success in such activities may be largely attributed to the fact that it is present worldwide, and has the required network of trained personnel, logistics, infrastructure and means of communication. The study also, however, highlighted aspects calling for attention, such as the need for more explicitly formulated protection objectives; the need to reconcile differing interpretations among international organizations with respect to unaccompanied children (definition of "child" in terms of age and of "unaccompanied"); and the need to ensure that initial activities are field-oriented and decentralized with later residual caseloads being handled via centralized systems.

External reviews and evaluations

The ICRC also accords high priority to external reviews and evaluations of its performance. It was greatly encouraged by the positive findings of two teams of donor representatives who reviewed ICRC programmes in Colombia and Georgia in April and by a March visit to Guinea and Sierra Leone by Canada;¹ all three reviews also made constructive suggestions for improving ICRC performance.

The conclusions and recommendations resulting from externally sponsored formal evaluations were also given close scrutiny. For example, Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specifically DANIDA,* evaluated Danish humanitarian assistance channelled through the UN, international NGOs and the ICRC from 1992 to 1998. Case studies examined assistance activities in Afghanistan, Angola, the Caucasus, the former Yugoslavia, the Great Lakes region and Sudan. Overall, DANIDA's findings with regard to the ICRC's humanitarian work were positive.

¹ The evaluations were conducted by government representatives dealing with refugee and migration matters, international humanitarian affairs and humanitarian aid, and international development. The review in Colombia was carried out by the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United States, and ECHO, and the evaluation in Georgia by Germany, Japan, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

* DANIDA: Danish International Development Assistance

The evaluation also made numerous recommendations of direct interest to the ICRC, including those which advocate that funding levels to humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC be maintained in recognition of their global responsibilities and core mandates; that donor partner selection be based on demonstrated core competencies with programmes and projects judged against objectives, not inputs; that efforts be intensified to promote international humanitarian law and a higher priority given to protection mandates; that humanitarian resources not become semi-permanent sources of welfare and social services that enable States, particularly those in conflict, to evade their responsibilities; and that ways be found to support local economic recovery via the use of local resources in protracted emergencies, thereby reducing the probability that continued aid will fuel continued conflict.

The vital connection to cooperation activities

In the light of the above findings, the ICRC's cooperation activities with National Societies remained vitally important. The ICRC continued to emphasize a structured planning process for the activities it supports, with the accent on results over the long term. It thus encouraged National Societies to implement more systematic review and monitoring systems. Indeed, a new model agreement for cooperation with National Societies makes explicit reference to the planning of mid-term reviews, evaluations and audits.

In 1999, the ICRC's Cooperation unit carried out assessment missions in Algeria, and, prior to initiating cooperation programmes, a review of activities with the Afghan Red Crescent, with which the organization has a close and long-standing association. Both reviews highlighted the positive contributions and the capacities of the National Societies, which mobilize significant staff resources and/or membership volunteers and provide a broad range of health, relief and social welfare services. The potential for greater cooperation with the ICRC was also identified, in particular the opportunities to further engage a broad range of ethnic groups and more effectively reach women and children, especially those traumatized by violence.

Evaluating the Movement's response to the Balkans crisis

Last but not least, a major initiative of the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit was the launch in September 1999 of an external evaluation of the first phase of the Movement's response to the Balkans crisis. The evaluation will build on the close cooperation between the ICRC, the International Federation and participating National Societies. It will underscore results, effectiveness and efficiency, and is scheduled to be completed in early 2000. It will be unique in that it will also highlight beneficiary feedback (i.e., the recipients, host families).

Cooperation with National Societies in the field

ICRC activities to provide assistance to the victims of conflict are carried out in close cooperation with the National Societies whenever the latter's network, structure and capacity permit. In 1999, the ICRC thus involved in its operations throughout the world over 40 National Societies conducting activities in their respective countries, in addition to making specific efforts to build National Society capacity.² About 35 National Societies from third countries³ wishing to participate directly in the Movement's international work for the victims of conflict worldwide were also associated in ICRC operations. Operational cooperation took on many forms, as illustrated below.

Working together in emergency situations

In Mexico, the Mexican Red Cross worked closely with the ICRC in Chiapas, where Mexican Red Cross doctors, nurses and health officers gave consultations to the local population in health posts to which the ICRC provided material and financial assistance. The ICRC and the Mexican Red Cross jointly travelled to many remote villages which did not have easy access to or refused government health services, and carried out joint vaccination campaigns. The Mexican Red Cross also helped distribute food and medical supplies to the people affected by the situation in Chiapas. Other National Societies, namely the Spanish and the German Red Cross, were also involved in this operation and worked closely with the ICRC in support of the Mexican Red Cross.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, National Society volunteers continued to take part in ICRC assistance activities. Hundreds of volunteers were trained by the Red Cross of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the ICRC to distribute relief supplies and do tracing work, mainly in the eastern part of the country. Emergency-preparedness workshops were organized in Kivu province, and first-aid equipment and material were given to local branches, enabling the National Society to act during outbursts of violence. The work of the National Society was praised on various occasions by the local population and in the press, heightening its visibility.

Thanks to its joint endeavours with the National Society, the ICRC was able to expand its tracing services, establishing 45 tracing offices in areas often off-limits to it. The volunteers at those offices collected and delivered Red Cross messages and located unaccompanied children. In Kinshasa, the ICRC provided routine infrastructure support for the National Society's dissemination, tracing and emergency-preparedness activities, and contributed to a project to clean and disinfect 16 hospitals, a task involving more than 2,000 volunteers.

² See p. 379.

³ Referred to as participating National Societies.

An innovative approach based on the Seville Agreement

In Albania, as in the other countries affected by the Balkans crisis, implementation of the Seville Agreement took on a new dimension as all the Movement's components responded to the crisis. The Albanian Red Cross played a crucial role as a fully operational partner, and some two thousand volunteers and staff were involved in relief operations, tracing activities and dissemination programmes such as the mine-awareness campaign launched in northern Albania. The Albanian Red Cross participated in the daily Red Cross/Red Crescent coordination meetings attended by the ICRC, the Federation and the National Societies of Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Finland and France. It was also represented at the UN coordination meetings and, together with the Movement's lead agency in Albania, the Federation, liaised with the provincial authorities. In order to back the efforts of its weaker branches, in particular in northern Albania, the Albanian Red Cross national headquarters posted two senior national staff permanently to Kukes. These liaison officers were instrumental in promoting the smooth implementation of the Seville Agreement and efficient coordination of the activities of the Movement's various components. They were also of great assistance to the ICRC in the more remote and insecure areas of northern Albania.

Red Cross and Red Crescent response to the crisis in Kosovo was both prompt and wideranging. At the end of the year, 20 participating National Societies were working on 18 delegated projects and 17 bilateral projects in Kosovo. Programmes included the running of soup kitchens, the rehabilitation and management of health facilities, the renovation of schools, the repair of tractors and distribution of seeds, the rebuilding of houses and the distribution of stoves and fuel. More than half of the projects delegated to National Societies benefited victims of conflict in the Balkans as did nearly all the bilateral projects (31 out of a total of 34).⁴

A wide array of services

The ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent Society joined forces to take effective action in response to the needs of people affected by the volatile situation reigning in Somalia for some years. The National Society, with ICRC support, was particularly active on the medical front, treating war-wounded patients from all over the country at Keysaney Hospital in Mogadishu, providing services at fourteen other medical facilities, and dispensing oral rehydration salts at four sites in South Mogadishu at the peak of a cholera outbreak. Joint cholera prevention programmes were started at the end of 1999. The Somali Red Crescent network of branches and offices continued to provide tracing services for people throughout Somalia. In these two areas of cooperation (medical and tracing), regular training sessions and coordination meetings were organized jointly by the ICRC and National Society staff. In addition, Somalia was one of the countries polled by the ICRC for the 1999 "People on War" campaign, and the National Society played a key role in activities related thereto.

⁴ See also pp. 255-256.

Humanitarian diplomacy

In addition to working in the theatres of armed conflict, the ICRC seeks to take preventive action whenever possible to safeguard the victims of international and non-international armed conflicts and of internal violence. Preventive action may consist in taking diplomatic initiatives aimed at establishing a constructive dialogue with the players present in the international arena, in spreading knowledge of humanitarian law and promoting its development, or in advocating the ICRC position on issues of humanitarian concern.

The ICRC maintains close relations with governments, international organizations, NGOs and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. It has set up a network for humanitarian diplomacy covering practically all countries, including those not directly affected by armed conflict. The network functions thanks to effective cooperation between ICRC regional delegations and offices around the world and its headquarters in Geneva.

The regional delegations have specific tasks with regard to operational activities on the one hand and humanitarian diplomacy on the other. In the sphere of humanitarian diplomacy, the regional delegations play a major role, particularly in establishing and maintaining regular contacts with governments and regional organizations. They are also in a privileged position for sustained dialogue with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

For routine contact with the United Nations and multilateral and regional organizations around the world, the ICRC relies on its delegations in New York, Brussels, Paris, Cairo and Addis Ababa, which act as multilateral liaison offices.

Humanitarian coordination faces new challenges

Today's humanitarian activities take place in a context of daunting challenge. This is to a large extent the result of broader developments in the international arena, such as the spread of globalization, the development of new types of armed conflict, namely ethnic conflicts, "destructured" conflicts and conflicts fuelled by private interests, and the emergence of new protagonists, in particular non-State players such as mercenaries and private security forces and armed groups.

In these contexts, humanitarian rules protecting persons not or no longer taking part in the hostilities are often ignored or deliberately flouted. This represents an enormous challenge to humanitarian work and poses a growing threat to the security of humanitarian personnel.

At the same time, the number of humanitarian actors in the field has risen sharply, not always for the benefit of the victims. In fact, humanitarian work in some contexts has been characterized by overlapping, insufficient coordination and the ill-defined mandates of the agencies involved. Also, multilateral and, in recent years, regional peacekeeping operations have become more numerous, complex and diverse. They encompass not only military but also political and humanitarian aspects. Since they are inherently political, these operations often undermine the ICRC's humanitarian action and its underlying principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

The ICRC cannot be expected to cope with these challenges on its own. In 1999, it worked with a wide range of international, regional and non-governmental organizations. Improved compliance with international humanitarian law and the preservation of its unique status as an impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian organization remained the focus of the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy. At the same time, it endeavoured to meet the need for coordination with other humanitarian and political players and to secure overall support for humanitarian action.

Harmonizing and improving humanitarian response

If their efforts on behalf of victims of armed conflict are to be as effective as possible, humanitarian practitioners must harmonize their responses. The ICRC therefore continued to support initiatives intended to improve consultation and coordination mechanisms among them.

On the multilateral level, the ICRC closely followed the work of the IASC,* the UN mechanism for coordination of humanitarian emergency response, which is chaired by OCHA* and is made up of UN agencies with humanitarian mandates, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGO consortia and the World Bank. In 1999, the ICRC participated in various IASC reference groups on operational and other matters, such as those on Humanitarian Action and Human Rights and on Post-Conflict Reintegration. It maintained close relations with the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group in both Geneva and New York, and continued to make a substantial contribution to UN efforts for efficient inter-agency coordination in the field.

* IASC: Inter-Agency Steering Committee

* OCHA: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

On the bilateral level, the ICRC fostered dialogue with key UN operational agencies with humanitarian mandates. In 1999, it held high-level meetings and consultations notably with UNHCR,* the WFP,* UNICEF,* FAO* and UNHCHR.*

The ICRC also actively pursued its exchanges with NGOs. One initiative of note was the holding of the third protection workshop for human rights and humanitarian organizations, the aim of which is to establish a common ethical frame of reference for protection work.

The ICRC also took an active part in NGO fora on various topics and continued its bilateral contacts with major NGOs working in the field. It paid particular attention to its relationship with the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, with a view to forging closer links in the future.

In the field, the ICRC continued to observe initiatives to formulate operational guidelines in different contexts, in particular in Africa. It also promoted, as in the past, the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, which had been endorsed by 196 NGOs by the end of 1999.

In May 1999, the ICRC convened the third annual Humanitarian Forum in Wolfsberg, Switzerland, on the theme of protection of the victims of armed conflicts.⁵ The Forum was attended by high-level representatives of donor governments, key UN humanitarian, political and economic agencies, other international organizations and NGOs.

* UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
* WFP: World Food Programme
* UNICEF: UN Children's Fund
* FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
* UNHCR: Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
⁵ See p. 405.

International fora: humanitarian issues on the agenda

The ICRC continued its efforts to raise awareness of humanitarian issues in international fora. While taking due account of the respective spheres of competence of political and humanitarian players, it endeavoured to promote mutual understanding of objectives and working methods, and thus to develop complementarity.

The year under review was marked by better understanding of the ICRC's specific mandate, the ICRC's growing participation in the work of intergovernmental organizations and the further incorporation of humanitarian considerations in political and military decision-making processes.

In fact, humanitarian issues occupied a prominent place on the 1999 agendas of political bodies such as the UN Security Council, the OAU,* the OAS,* the OIC,* the OSCE* and the Non-Aligned Movement. This is clearly reflected in the increasing openness and interest displayed by these organizations - with which the ICRC maintained regular contact - in direct interaction with humanitarian agencies. In November 1999, the ICRC signed a memorandum of understanding with the League of Arab States.

The ICRC has permanent observer status at the UN, and as such took part in debates on topics within its sphere of interest at the General Assembly and its committees. It closely followed the adoption of numerous resolutions expressing support for international humanitarian law and humanitarian activities.

The ICRC regularly followed up on the work of the UN Security Council, the UN Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities with regard to the humanitarian implications of all the crises and contexts of concern to the ICRC. It started to work with UNMAS,* particularly on the preparation of mine assessment missions, and the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Mine Action.

* OAU: Organization of African Unity

* OAS: Organization of American States

* OIC: Organization of the Islamic Conference

* OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

* UNMAS: UN Mine Action Service

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In 1999, the ICRC maintained regular working relations with the UN Department for Legal Affairs on a wide range of legal issues, such as the completion and adoption of the Bulletin on Observance by UN Forces of International Humanitarian Law, applicable since 12 August 1999, the promotion of the campaign to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, and the preparation of the first conference of States party to the Ottawa treaty banning the use of anti-personnel mines. The ICRC was actively involved in the preparation, meeting and follow-up of the first and second sessions of the Preparatory Commission for the Establishment of an International Criminal Court. It also participated as an observer in the negotiations on the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (drafted and adopted in 1999). The ICRC took part in these fora as an expert, in line with its internationally recognized mandate as the promoter and guardian of international humanitarian law.

In view of the pressing need to bridge the gap between emergency assistance, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, the ICRC continued to strengthen its dialogue with development-oriented organizations such as UNDP* and the World Bank.

In the context of regional organizations, the ICRC developed constructive dialogue with the OAU and close links with several sub-regional organizations on the African continent, including ECOWAS,* the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Southern African Development Community. The ICRC also endeavoured to develop closer relations with regional organizations dealing with security matters, such as the OSCE, NATO* and the Western European Union.

It has become an essential dimension of the ICRC's work to promote international humanitarian law and ensure its effective implementation. Throughout 1999, the ICRC therefore continued to cooperate with the legislative authorities of a large number of countries. It took part in IPU* conferences and in regional parliamentary associations, drawing the attention of parliamentarians - who play a key role in the ratification process - to humanitarian issues and the practical implementation of humanitarian law instruments under domestic legislation. In close cooperation with parliamentarians and the IPU, the ICRC published a handbook for parliamentarians on humanitarian law, entitled Respect for International Humanitarian Law.

* UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

* ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

* NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

* IPU: Inter-Parliamentary Union