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# OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

## The context

Over the last decade, the world has seen a growing number of conflicts of interest that have been fought out in an increasingly "destructured" manner. During the Cold War, political and economic interests were the main reasons underlying armed conflict and internal violence. More recently ethnic, religious, and criminal motives have made their reappearance as reasons for war. In the post-Cold-War context, major military operations have been launched by individual powers or military alliances, often under United Nations responsibility, as in the case of peace-enforcement or peace-keeping operations.

The latter part of 2001 was marked by the 11 September attacks on symbolic targets in the United States and the subsequent response to them. Terrorism had been known on different continents in recent times, but it took on a new dimension with these attacks which were perceived as threats to the vital interests and security of the country targeted and to the global political and economic system. The community of States took urgent and decisive security measures in order to counter further strikes of this kind. In order to conduct the "global war against terror", the US in particular formed an alliance with a number of States, regional and international organizations. For the ICRC it was clear that international humanitarian law (IHL) was applicable in situations where efforts to fight terrorism took the form of armed conflict, as was the case in Afghanistan. In these contexts, IHL must not be considered as inadequate or as an obstacle to the struggle against terrorism, but as a basic safeguard for humanitarian values and principles. The legal and political aspects of this issue gave rise to an intense public debate.

## Operations

In the year 2001 the ICRC saw a considerable increase in its activities, but at the same time it suffered serious setbacks, mainly due to security concerns.

The ICRC conducted its operations out of 65 delegations and in 72 different contexts during the year. More than 340,000 prisoners were visited in their places of detention, over 160,000 operations were performed in hospitals run or supported by the ICRC, an average of 580,000 persons (resident and displaced) received monthly food aid and other essential supplies, and some 2.5 million people directly benefited from water projects run by the ICRC in war-affected areas of the world.

However, these operations were severely compromised by tragic security incidents in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in southern Sudan. Following these incidents activities continued in Sudan, whereas they were suspended in the Ituri region (DRC) and also partly in Uganda. In Burundi and the northern Caucasus, operations were also considerably hampered by precarious security conditions.

In Afghanistan, the ICRC had to temporarily withdraw its expatriate personnel during the period preceding the ousting of the Taliban and their loss of control of the capital. However, many of the ICRC's regular activities continued under the responsibility of local personnel. Whenever the security situation permitted, operations were stepped up in Afghanistan and this had an immediate positive impact on the situation of different categories of victims, in particular prisoners and the civilian population. An ad hoc regional logistic set-up proved efficient in channelling material aid to victims in different areas of the country. Access to prisoners, whether held by Afghan authorities or by members of the military coalition, was generally satisfactory.

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In Israel and the occupied and the autonomous Palestinian territories, the ICRC continued to conduct its activities within the framework of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As the violence linked to the "second *Intifada*" increased in intensity, claiming many innocent victims on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side, it became ever more challenging and difficult for the ICRC to run all its traditional operations. The delegation in the area had to shift its attention to the most urgent life-saving activities.

In other long-term situations, such as those in Iraq, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and the African Great Lakes region (apart from the areas mentioned above), the ICRC successfully pursued its main objectives. In the Balkans (with the exception of Macedonia), Angola, Tajikistan and East Timor the situation allowed a gradual scaling down of activities, owing to the changing nature of the conflicts affecting these areas. On the other hand, the ICRC substantially increased the level of its activities in West Africa, Nepal and Myanmar.

## Planning, monitoring and evaluation

In all contexts, the ICRC applied the planning and monitoring tools that enabled it to steer its activities and monitor their implementation over the course of the year. Several evaluations were conducted on operations in specific countries or on specific projects, to assess their impact and learn the lessons they had to offer.

## Networking and coordination

The ICRC continued its endeavours in the field and at headquarters to coordinate its approach and activities with those of other humanitarian organizations. It maintained its wide contacts with all relevant UN agencies and a large number of NGOs. In this context, the ICRC also contributed to the UN Consolidated Appeal Process. As far as relations with the military were concerned, the Operations Department maintained its dialogue with armed forces in order to study options for coordination with them in the field.

Furthermore, several of the ICRC's field delegations started to explore ways of communicating with the private sector, considering the increasing number of interests they have in common, such as understanding of a given context, security concerns or policy towards local staff. The ICRC also pursued this line in order to raise awareness among representatives of private companies of humanitarian issues and the way they are interrelated with economic interests.

Cooperation efforts within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement continued to be intensified in the field. The 1997 Seville Agreement on the organization of the international activities of the components of the Movement laid down guidelines for this coordination in assistance operations involving different Red Cross/Red Crescent partners under the leadership of the ICRC. The ICRC also established closer links with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in order to make an effective contribution to the development of National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and boost, in particular, their emergency preparedness.



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## Access under safe conditions

In terms of operational constraints, security and political acceptance continued to be the predominant causes for concern. The aim of the ICRC is to ensure maximum safety both for its staff and for its activities by gaining acceptance as an independent and neutral organization and securing recognition of the impartiality of its operations by the political and military actors in a given context. When these conditions are met, safe access to victims becomes possible and operational objectives can be reached under satisfactory security conditions.

It has been observed that in certain contexts security conditions may, ironically, deteriorate sharply at the beginning of the transition period, that is, immediately following a peace agreement. This is particularly true in "destructured" conflict situations or when a dissident faction of one of the parties to the conflict considers that the agreement is not binding on it.

## Civilians

To the ICRC, the legal framework of IHL covers all civilians, that is to say both resident populations and the internally displaced. The ICRC considers that addressing the urgent needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – where national authorities are unable to do so – is an integral part of its mandate to protect and assist the civilian population affected by armed conflict. In this regard, the ICRC concentrates on meeting the immediate needs of the recently displaced who require emergency assistance in order to survive.

In contexts where several humanitarian organizations are working, the ICRC's relief strategy focuses on isolated areas that other humanitarian organizations have difficulty in reaching. Its programmes are designed to prevent further displacement, facilitate the return of those who have fled their home communities, and help families meet basic needs. Economic rehabilitation concentrates on support for both IDPs and the resident population in order to restore their means of production, and where possible, allow them to regain their economic self-sufficiency.

The needs in terms of protection of various categories of civilians – and hence IDPs – are different and call for a humanitarian response tailored to each specific case. As for IDPs, the problems associated with internal displacement are of such magnitude and complexity that all organizations concerned must work together to maximize the impact of humanitarian action. As one of the major organizations working in the field of internal displacement, the ICRC is committed to the objective of cooperation among agencies.

The majority of IDPs are often women and children, so the ICRC makes a special effort in its programming to take their specific needs into account. It is currently adjusting its policies in respect of these particularly vulnerable groups, notably on the basis of the findings of its study entitled *Women Facing War*.

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## Women and war

As the ICRC's study on the situation of women in conflict drew to its conclusion, cooperation by field delegations in this project took on a new dimension. Whereas they had previously contributed to the collection of data and analysis of this information in the light of the context, they now became increasingly involved in acting on the findings in their operational activities, in particular through detention and assistance programmes, but also in terms of their approach to gender in communication. The project is thus having an additional impact on the ICRC in that it influences the way that gender issues are addressed within the organization.

## The missing: "The right to know"

The phenomenon of persons who go missing as a result of armed conflict causes prolonged suffering for their families and may be a major obstacle to the easing of tension between communities after a conflict has ended. Although this has been a humanitarian concern for a long time, current approaches seem inadequate to deal with the issue.

The ICRC therefore initiated a wide-ranging project in 2001 focusing on persons missing in connection with armed conflict or situations of internal tension and strife. The project examines humanitarian, legal and technical aspects that have been identified as capable of contributing to the resolution of the issue. The involvement of the field delegations in this project is considerable, since they can provide practical first-hand experience. This is the case, for example, for delegations in the Balkans where the ICRC has taken decisive action in this regard. Numerous other organizations and State institutions have responded favourably to this latest ICRC initiative and are being included in the study as it develops. The results will be presented at a conference to be held in early 2003, and the ICRC hopes subsequently to be in an even better position to help curb the phenomenon of missing persons and to bring support to people suffering its effects.

## Final balance sheet

In the year 2001 the primary objective of the Operations Department remained to offer a timely and appropriate response to the humanitarian needs of victims of armed conflict and internal strife. As the different contexts in which the ICRC was working evolved, and as operations were conducted and evaluated, new needs and challenges arose and were met. This response was made possible by the generous support provided to the ICRC by its donors. Parameters such as access, security, and means, foremost linked to human resources, were the main constraints limiting these activities.