

Action in the field

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Action in the field

During 1984, the ICRC was active in more than 80 countries of Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East covered by its various regional delegations. On average, 411 delegates per month (including about 60 people made available by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), 36 delegations and 15 sub-delegations or offices, endeavoured to provide protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts, internal tension and unrest, helped by 1,140 locally recruited staff.

ICRC delegates visited nearly 58,000 persons (prisoners of war and so-called security detainees) in the course of 3,000 visits carried out in 700 places of detention in 34 countries, namely: some 4,500 people in Africa, 7,500 in Latin America, a thousand in Asia, 400 in Europe and 44,000 in the Middle East (for details, see under the countries or conflicts concerned, later in this chapter).

The purpose of the visits is purely humanitarian: the ICRC delegates inspect the material and psychological conditions of detention, provide detainees with relief if required (medicines, clothing, toilet articles) and, if necessary, ask the authorities to take steps to improve these conditions. In the course of repeated visits, delegates talk to whichever prisoners they please for as long as they like without witnesses.

Before and after these visits, discussions are held with those in charge of the detention centres. Confidential reports are then drawn up. In the case of internal tension and unrest, these reports are sent only to the detaining authorities while in the case of international armed conflicts they are sent both to the detaining authorities and to the authorities of the detainees' own countries. These reports are not intended for publication. The ICRC, for its part, confines itself to publishing the number and names of the places visited, the date of these visits and the number of people seen. It also mentions the fact that its delegates were able to talk to the prisoners without witnesses. It does not express an opinion on the reasons for detention and does not publicly comment on the material or psychological conditions it finds. If a government should publish incomplete or inaccurate versions of the ICRC reports, the ICRC reserves the right to publish and circulate such reports in full.

The ICRC visits places of detention providing its delegates are allowed:

- to see all the prisoners and talk freely to them without witnesses;
- access to all places of detention;
- to repeat their visits.

In addition, the ICRC generally asks for a list of the persons to be visited or for permission to draw up such a list during the visit and to distribute material assistance to detainees and their families in need of help.

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The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) of the ICRC continued to carry out its tasks arising both from its treaty obligations towards civilian and military victims of armed conflicts, and from the exercise by the ICRC of its right to take humanitarian initiative.

The traditional tasks of the CTA are as follows:

- obtaining, centralizing and communicating all information on civilian and military victims of war, both living and dead (prisoners of war, interned civilians, etc.) in enemy hands;
- ensuring the transmission of correspondence between prisoners and their families, as well as maintaining contact, through the mail or Red Cross messages, between non-interned civilians and their relatives from whom they have been separated;
- responding to tracing requests and undertaking the necessary investigations;
- issuing certificates of captivity, sickness or death;
- transmitting legal documents, such as powers of attorney and wills.

Matching the development of ICRC activities, the CTA has extended its own activities to so-called security detainees and displaced persons (inquiries, transmitting news and reuniting dispersed families). In addition, it issues ICRC travel documents for refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons who, having no proper identification papers, cannot go back to their own country or to that where they normally reside, or to any other country of their choice willing to receive them.

Statistics for the overall activities of the CTA in 1984, both at headquarters and in the field, are as follows:

- 2,023,831 Red Cross messages were exchanged, about 1,733,500 of these relating to the conflict between Iraq and Iran;
- 60,043 requests for tracing missing persons were processed; the fate of 30,118 of these missing persons was ascertained;
- 12,052 capture cards for prisoners of war or civilian internees were received and 8,711 registration cards for security detainees were drawn up;
- 10,124 certificates of captivity, sickness, death, etc. were issued;
- 1,924 travel documents were provided for 2,585 persons.

The CTA continued to handle cases relating to previous conflicts: 40 years after the end of the Second World War, almost 20% of its work at the headquarters in Geneva is still concerned with the consequences of that war.

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In relief operations for 1984, the ICRC purchased and sent directly to the scene of the action 22,478 tonnes of relief supplies valued at 26.3 million Swiss francs. In addition, 46,884 tonnes (worth 56.4 million Swiss francs) was sent by donors under ICRC supervision, some of it under food aid agreements concluded with various governments. A total of 69,362 tonnes of relief supplies (excluding medical material), worth 82.7 million Swiss francs, was thus dispatched by the ICRC to 37 countries in 1984. Out of this total, 50,627 tonnes worth 67.1 million Swiss francs was distributed in 1984, leaving over sufficient relief to continue aid programmes during the first few months of 1985.

Medical assistance totalled 18.3 million Swiss francs. Throughout the year, moreover, the ICRC sent 394 doctors, nurses and ancillary medical personnel (chemists, physiotherapists, prosthetists, nutritionists and sanitation technicians) to take part in activities in different parts of the world. Almost half this personnel, 182 people, were made available to the ICRC by the National Societies of twenty countries (Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States).

The total material and medical assistance distributed by the ICRC in 1984 was divided geographically as follows:

Africa	42,583,107	49.8%
Latin America	13,845,497	16.2%
Asia	9,036,166	10.6%
Europe	9,117,323	10.7%
Middle East	10,836,355	12.7%
Total (Sw. Fr.)	<u>85,418,448</u>	<u>100 %</u>

Assistance for detainees and their families, included in the above figures, cost 3,702,339 Swiss francs, and amounted to 2,198 tonnes of relief supplies of all kinds.

It should be remembered that the ICRC undertakes aid programmes, for supplying both material and medical aid, only in cases of conflicts, internal tension and unrest and only providing it is enabled to:

- determine the urgency of the victims' vital needs;
- carry out missions of assessment locally, enabling it to identify the categories and numbers of people who should benefit from assistance;
- organize and supervise the distribution of relief.

(The figures quoted above represent only part of the cost of aid programmes as they appear in the budgets and financial reports for each operation: these include also the cost of personnel, equipment, vehicles, transport, etc.)

Finally we would mention that, in 1984, the ICRC telecommunication network comprised 17 base stations in direct radio contact with Geneva, and 25 local stations ensuring radio liaison in the field between delegations, sub-delegations and ICRC offices (*see diagram on page 84*). The number of radio messages exchanged between ICRC headquarters and delegations in the field rose to 10,169, an increase of 23.9% compared to 1983. Radio traffic between the different delegations totalled 16,356 messages. Taking telex messages into account, the ICRC Telecommunication Service dealt with a total of 46,717 messages transmitted or received, an increase of 8.05% over 1983.