

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an independent, private, non-political institution that seeks to preserve a measure of humanity in the midst of war. Its guiding principle is that even in war there are limits: limits on how warfare is conducted and limits on how combatants behave. It endeavors to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. The President of the ICRC is Jacob Kellenberger of Switzerland.

The ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary between parties in wars, civil wars, and internal conflicts. It endeavors to ensure that civilian and military victims of conflict are afforded protection and assistance and that the humanitarian rules set out in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are observed. ICRC action can take the form of visits to prisoners of war, internees, and detainees; supervision of the release and repatriation of prisoners or the internment in a neutral country of captured persons; programs to extend relief to the victims of armed conflict; and the tracing of missing persons and reuniting of separated families. The ICRC also plays a leading role in distributing humanitarian assistance such as medical aid, foodstuffs, and other relief supplies, especially in places where other humanitarian organizations cannot operate. It is often the only international organization allowed to move freely within occupied territories, to cross combatant lines, to access prisoners or detention centers, and to act as an intermediary in activities related to prisoners of war. The ICRC can set up neutralized zones, under its supervision, after negotiations with warring factions, to afford special protection to the wounded and sick. Because the ICRC often operates in insecure areas, ICRC delegates have been killed trying to bring assistance to others.



Repatriation of Congolese refugees from Kinshasa to Brazzaville.

GENEVA CONVENTIONS

The work of the ICRC is based on the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977, which are designed to minimize human suffering in times of armed conflict. The 429 articles of the 1949 Conventions guarantee the protection of the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field (First Convention); of wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea (Second Convention); of prisoners of war (Third Convention); and of civilians in time of war (Fourth Convention). The Additional Protocols were drafted because the original conventions were deemed to inadequately address elements of modern warfare. Protocol I man-

dates greater protection to civilians in international conflicts. Protocol II extends protection to civilians during civil wars and other non-international armed conflicts. By September 2003, 191 states were party to the Geneva Conventions, 161 were party to Protocol I of 1977, and 156 were party to Protocol II of 1977.

PRISON VISITS

The Geneva Conventions stipulate that the ICRC should be allowed access to prisoners of war, particularly in places of internment, imprisonment, and forced labor. ICRC visits are intended to help prevent or end disappearances, summary executions, and torture and to restore contact between detainees and their families. During 2002, ICRC delegates visited more than 448,000 detainees in 75 countries and ICRC helped over 50,000 people to visit a detained relative.



*Kosovo —
Under the auspices of the ICRC, a woman
is reunited with her husband who she has
not seen for two years.*

CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY (CTA)

The ICRC's Central Tracing Agency is the preeminent service of its kind in the world for locating missing persons, reuniting families, and transmitting correspondence between members of families separated by international armed conflict. (In non-international armed conflicts, it is national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, together with ICRC, that collect and distribute Red Cross messages and try to locate missing persons.) ICRC transmits over a million messages annually. The CTA represents for many the best hope of receiving messages from close relatives and finding family members cut off by international or civil conflict. The CTA, established more than one hundred years ago, has a central register containing over

60 million personal descriptions. CTA's activities extend to every continent. They are carried out by teams of specialists permanently in the field and by a network that includes national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. In the mid-nineties, for example, the CTA strove to reunite thousands of people separated from families during conflicts in the Great Lakes region in Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania). The ICRC was heavily involved in the former Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Dayton Accords, particularly regarding missing persons, prisoner exchanges, and detainee visits. Within the last year, CTA has been very active in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Concerned by the increasing hazards facing journalists on professional missions, in 1985 the ICRC made available its tracing services to editors, professional associations, and journalists' families in cases of disappearance, capture, arrest, or detention of journalists. ICRC assistance includes inquiries into the whereabouts of missing journalists; transmission of information concerning the capture, arrest or death of journalists when such information is provided by those detaining them (whether

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW?

International humanitarian law is a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects in particular persons who are not participating in hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict.

International humanitarian law is part of international law, which is generally understood as the body of rules governing relations between states. International law is contained in agreements between states, such as treaties or conventions; in customary rules, which consist of state practice considered by them to be legally binding; and in general principles.

International humanitarian law applies to the conduct of armed conflicts. International humanitarian law is also a distinct body of law from international human rights law, which declares the fundamental freedoms and human rights of all people and is typified by the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

government or armed group); visits to detained journalists, including with doctors; exchange of family messages; and eventual repatriation of released journalists.

THE DEBATE OVER THE RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT EMBLEM

The issue of which emblem or emblems may be used to offer protection to civilians and wounded in time of war is over a century old. When the symbol of the Red Cross was adopted in the second half of the 19th century, it was modeled on a reversal of the colors of the Swiss flag, and was not meant to indicate a religious symbol, although the perception by some of its potential religious connotation rapidly became evident. During its 1876-1878 war with Russia, the Ottoman Empire adopted the red crescent to mark its own ambulances, while respecting the red cross sign protecting enemy ambulances. After several decades of debate, a 1929 diplomatic conference agreed to recognize the red crescent emblem. Other countries continued to have difficulty working with one or the other official emblems codified by the Geneva Conventions. Israel's Magen David Adom ("Red Shield of David") society, which has existed since 1930, wanted to use its own symbol, and Kazakhstan and several other countries expressed an interest in using emblems other than the single red cross or red crescent. In November 1999, a Joint Working Group composed of sixteen government and eight Red Cross/Crescent movement experts was established to find a comprehensive solution. In 2000, a Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions was drafted to create an additional emblem free of any national, religious or political connotation, but it has not yet been adopted.

THE ICRC AND THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION

One of the functions of the ICRC is to grant official recognition to new national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, after satisfying itself that their bylaws and struc-

tures conform to the seven fundamental Red Cross principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. Once recognized, national societies may join the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MUSEUM

The museum next to ICRC headquarters was built by an independent foundation to tell the story of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, encourage donations to support the Red Cross' humanitarian work, and motivate young people to place themselves at the service of humankind. The museum's message is "Man's Humanity to Man." Contributions from the American private sector — approaching \$1 million — helped build the museum, which was financed entirely by non-Red Cross funds. Buried in the museum's foundations is a time capsule containing a peace message — placed there in November 1985 by the First Ladies of the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Switzerland.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE ICRC

The United States has the highest regard for the difficult and often dangerous work done by ICRC's staff of close to 12,000 people. U.S. contributions reflect that support. The U.S. remains the ICRC's largest donor, accounting for 25.5 percent (201.37 million Swiss francs or \$145 million) of all contributions received in 2002 and 27.9 percent (186.4 million Swiss francs or \$134 million) of contributions received for field operations. To safeguard ICRC's operational flexibility, the U.S. endeavors to provide indications of the likely level of funding early in the year and does not earmark contributions as specifically as other donors.

BUDGET

ICRC's final field budget for 2002 was 920.15 million Swiss francs (approximately \$665 million at current exchange rates) in cash, kind, and services.

INTERNET

www.icrc.org

Description of ICRC and its programs, texts of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, and other international treaties.

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