

ERITREA



ICRC delegation

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	1,194
Assistance	3,093
Prevention	383
Cooperation with National Societies	251
General	-

▶ **4,922**

of which: Overheads 300

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	104%
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PERSONNEL

Expatriates	7
National staff (daily workers not included)	43

KEY POINTS

In 2010, the ICRC:

- ▶ helped some 94,000 struggling people living in communities along the border with Ethiopia bolster their livelihoods by hiring tractors to plough their fields, providing them with the means to grow vegetables, and treating livestock
- ▶ in cooperation with the Eritrean water authorities, built and repaired solar-powered water supply systems, improving access to clean water for 23,471 villagers
- ▶ assisted people of Ethiopian origin in renewing their Eritrean residence permits, or in paying administration fees prior to repatriation
- ▶ through dialogue, sought to persuade the authorities to lift government restrictions on ICRC visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs and former POWs
- ▶ with the Red Cross Society of Eritrea, enabled relatives separated by the sealed Eritrea-Ethiopia border to exchange news through the family-links network

The ICRC opened a delegation in Eritrea in 1998 in the context of the international armed conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia and is responding to the needs remaining from the two-year war. Its priority is to protect and assist the population displaced, detained or otherwise affected by the conflict, ensuring compliance with IHL with regard to any persons still protected by the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The ICRC also supports the development of the Red Cross Society of Eritrea.

CONTEXT

During June, Eritrea withdrew its troops from the disputed border region with Djibouti after the two countries signed an accord seeking to normalize relations and establish a mechanism for resolving the dispute. Troops from Qatar, which had mediated talks leading to the accord, were subsequently stationed in the disputed region.

The Eritrean government subscribed to the Istanbul Declaration, reaffirming the commitment of the international community to work closely with Somalia's transitional federal government.

Tensions remained between Eritrea and Ethiopia over their common border, which had still to be physically demarcated some 10 years after the end of the two-year international armed conflict. Both countries maintained a strong military presence at the border. In regions adjoining Ethiopia, where thousands of civilians had returned or been resettled by Eritrea's authorities since the end of the conflict, the effects of the past hostilities on infrastructure and livelihoods continued to be felt.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

PROTECTION

CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)			
Red Cross messages	Total	UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs collected	4,701		
RCMs distributed	5,209		
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons	Total	Women	Minors
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	33	10	11
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	28		
<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	12		
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2010 (people)	119	15	18
UAMs/SCs,* including unaccompanied demobilized child soldiers	Total	Girls	Demobilized children
UAMs/SCs newly registered by the ICRC/National Society	5	4	
UAM/SC cases still being handled by the ICRC/National Society at 31 December 2010	3	2	
Documents			
People to whom travel documents were issued	3		
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines	13		

* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

ASSISTANCE

CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Economic security, water and habitat		Total	Women	Children
Food	Beneficiaries	98	20%	60%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	98		
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	11,735	20%	60%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	60		
Agricultural, veterinary and other micro-economic initiatives	Beneficiaries	94,305	20%	60%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	20,747		
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	23,471	55%	51%

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

Amid restrictions on movement, access and fuel imposed by the Eritrean government in recent years, the ICRC pursued dialogue with the authorities on maintaining its access to vulnerable communities and individuals. Resources were focused, as far as possible, on assisting communities in southern border regions most affected by past armed conflict, although from March the ICRC suspended activities in one of these regions, Debub, following the imposition of further restrictions by the local authorities.

In Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea State, meanwhile, the ICRC continued throughout the year to help struggling rural communities rebuild their livelihoods and access dependable supplies of clean water. From April, ICRC expatriate staff, who had been

restricted in their movements beyond Asmara for more than a year, received a total of eight travel permits from the authorities to visit these two regions. The permits enabled the ICRC to monitor ongoing projects – implemented by national field officers – and to assess the need for and develop new ones.

The majority of beneficiaries of ICRC assistance were households headed by women, as large numbers of men had been killed or disabled during the war with Ethiopia or called up for military service. The ICRC helped families hire tractors to plough fields, treated thousands of livestock against parasite infestation, and gave the worst-off households the resources to plant and maintain their own market gardens. Communities, local authorities and the ICRC also worked together to install or renovate 15 solar-powered water supply systems. Local authorities were trained to maintain them.

The Eritrean authorities had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of civilians in March 2009. Within the constraints, the ICRC did its best to continue monitoring the situation of the Ethiopian community living in Eritrea to ensure that their rights under the 1949 Geneva Conventions were respected, including voluntary repatriation in humane conditions. The ICRC also reminded the Eritrean government of these obligations. People of Ethiopian origin received ICRC assistance to pay fees prior to repatriation, or to renew residence permits. Meanwhile, relatives separated by the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border were still able to communicate through the family-links service, operated by the Red Cross Society of Eritrea with ICRC support. ICRC national staff on the ground followed up tracing requests.

Despite repeated requests to the authorities, the ICRC was not allowed to resume visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs and former POWs. The authorities had withdrawn authorization for such visits in 2009. The ICRC was also awaiting a reply from the Eritrean government to requests for any information it had about 19 Djiboutian soldiers reported by their government as missing after the Djibouti-Eritrea hostilities in June 2008.

Given the restrictions on its activities introduced by the Eritrean government, the ICRC made every effort to strengthen dialogue with the authorities. It sought to persuade them that it was in Eritrea's interest to recognize that the 1949 Geneva Conventions applied to the Eritrean context. The ICRC worked to garner interest in IHL and the Movement among the general public, including young people associated with the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, journalists and academics.

The Eritrean Red Cross, with ICRC funding, training and expertise, continued to develop its family-links network, first-aid programme, and the promotion of IHL and the Fundamental Principles. Implementation of activities was delayed, however, as the Eritrean Red Cross had still not recovered its human resources capacities following the 2007–08 suspension of its activities.

CIVILIANS

Villagers draw water from solar-powered systems

Women and children in rural villages no longer had to walk long distances to fetch clean water, after the local authorities, communities and the ICRC together installed five new solar-powered water supply systems, completed the installation of four others begun in previous years, and repaired/maintained six more. The systems, which provided 23,471 people with 20 litres of water per person per day, ensured a reliable water supply in a country where fuel shortages remained widespread. The installation of new systems – three in Southern Red Sea State and two in Gash Barka – had not been foreseen in the original 2010 budget. However, the opportunity to construct these facilities arose after the Eritrean authorities granted an ICRC engineer access to both regions (see *ICRC action and results*).

To ensure the sustainability of the systems, some 80 water authority employees learnt how to tackle potential technical problems during five training courses in hydrology, hydraulics and solar technology. In September, after completion of the final session, the water system that had been used for demonstration purposes was donated to the health centre in Asmara where training had taken place. Materials and spare parts from training sessions were donated to five water authorities.

Rural families secure livelihoods and shelter

In regions adjoining Ethiopia, rural families whose livelihoods had been disrupted by past armed conflict and ongoing border tensions gained a more secure economic future with ICRC support.

In Gash Barka, 14,840 people (2,968 households) who had been resettled or returned to their villages used tractors and drivers hired by the ICRC to plough fields prior to the planting season. The project was designed to compensate for the lack of potential labourers in the region, arising mainly from the absence of adult males in many households (see *ICRC action and results*). The assistance, combined with abundant rains, contributed to a good harvest, with average production of sorghum per hectare more than doubling in comparison with the previous two years.

In Gash Barka and, for the first time, the Southern Red Sea State, 78,240 vulnerable pastoralists (15,648 households) raised stronger herds of livestock following an ICRC parasite-control campaign. Following the suspension of ICRC operations in Debub, resources that had been allocated for the campaign in this region were transferred to Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea State, resulting in the treatment of some 500,000 livestock. Before and after the rainy season, livestock received treatment to protect them against internal and external parasites. Infestation rates subsequently dropped from more than 76% to just over 1%, according to laboratory tests. By increasing resistance to disease, treatment improved livestock fertility and productivity. With fewer sick grazing animals, contamination of pasture from parasite eggs also decreased.

A total of 800 struggling people (160 families) in Gash Barka enjoyed a more varied diet and a surplus of food to sell at market after creating their own vegetable gardens. They did so with the aid of seed, jerrycans, hoes, and pedal-operated water pumps enabling them to irrigate plots in a region where fuel shortages precluded the use of machine-operated pumps. Limited access to certain areas, combined with staff shortages and difficulties in mobilizing interest within some target communities, meant that distributions did not take place on the scale originally planned. However, a number of other rural communities expressed interest in participating in future projects of this kind.

In an ongoing project started in 2006, 425 people (85 households) received donkeys or goats to improve their economic security. Households with donkeys used the time and energy saved fetching water for other productive activities and earned income transporting goods. The goats provided milk and meat and could be sold for cash.

Families in Gash Barka, who had been resettled in areas with insufficient housing, completed their own permanent homes, with the ICRC providing construction materials, technical expertise and funds to hire workers. Construction was originally scheduled for completion by the end of 2009, but delayed mainly because of access restrictions. At the request of the authorities in Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea State, 11,675 people (2,335 households), resettled or relocated in remote areas, received essential items such as tarpaulins and blankets to sustain them in the absence of more permanent forms of shelter.

Struggling Ethiopians receive financial assistance

The ICRC monitored the situation of the Ethiopian community living in Eritrea to ensure that their rights were respected in accordance with IHL.

People of Ethiopian origin continued to be repatriated through Sudan by the Eritrean authorities. The government had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of civilians across the border in March 2009. The authorities were reminded by the ICRC of their obligation under IHL to ensure that repatriations were voluntary and carried out in humane conditions.

Especially vulnerable community members – including elderly people, women with children, former detainees, or people with illnesses – received financial assistance from the ICRC in paying administrative and/or transport costs (if they wished to repatriate) or in obtaining residence permits, paying medical bills and meeting accommodation costs (if they wished to remain in Eritrea). Those facing immediate hardship (98 people) received food, and 60 got essential household items.

The issue of Eritrean children who had crossed the border and were living in refugee camps in Ethiopia was discussed by the Eritrean authorities and the ICRC in order to address the possibility of repatriation. Meanwhile, family members separated by the sealed Eritrea-Ethiopia border continued to exchange news through the family-links service, run by the Eritrean Red Cross with ICRC support (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*). People also had their official documents, usually education certificates, sent across the border by the ICRC so that they could apply for further studies or jobs.

Families still had no news about relatives missing in relation to the 1998–2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia. The ICRC continued to seek clarification of their fate.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Despite repeated written and oral requests, the authorities did not give the ICRC the green light to resume visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs and former POWs (see *ICRC action and results*).

Following the border accord between Djibouti and Eritrea (see *Context*), the ICRC renewed requests to the Eritrean authorities

for any information they had about 19 Djiboutian soldiers reported as missing in action by their government after the Eritrea-Djibouti hostilities in June 2008. By year-end, the authorities had still to respond to an ICRC proposal regarding the possible repatriation of a sick Eritrean POW held in Djibouti.

AUTHORITIES

Given the restrictions placed on ICRC activities by the Eritrean government, talks with the authorities were held with the aim of reinforcing trust. Government officials were informed of the neutral, impartial and independent nature of the Movement, its work and mandate. The organization sought to convince the authorities that it was in Eritrea's interest to recognize that the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which the country acceded in 2000, applied to the Eritrean context, and that the ICRC was therefore mandated, whenever required, to act on behalf of people still affected by the 1998–2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia and by the border issue with Djibouti.

National authorities, and local officials based in areas where the ICRC was working, including representatives of 40 local authorities in the Southern Red Sea State, learnt more about the Movement's activities through Eritrean Red Cross/ICRC presentations and bulletins.

On World Water Day (22 March), senior government officials, including the Minister of Energy, Water and the Environment, visited an ICRC photo exhibition staged in Asmara, which explained more about the work of the ICRC in providing solar-powered water systems to rural communities in conflict-affected areas.

The delegation maintained regular contacts with international organizations, including UN agencies and the diplomatic community, informing them of ICRC activities via briefings and publications.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Youth organizations, media representatives and academics attended ICRC briefings and read ICRC literature as the organization worked to raise awareness of its mandate and activities and to garner support for the basic principles of IHL.

Some 2,000 people discussed Movement activities and humanitarian issues during a series of presentations organized by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students and the ICRC. The Union's magazine, read countrywide, published articles on IHL written by ICRC staff. Around 7,000 newly graduated national service members and their families visited the ICRC stand during a four-day youth festival, staged in Sawa Defence Training Centre in July.

With ICRC sponsorship, a radio journalist from the Eritrean Youth Association travelled to Nairobi, Kenya, for a four-day seminar to learn more about researching and covering humanitarian issues and IHL.

The dean of the College of Arts and Social Sciences and an instructor from the Faculty of Law in Asmara attended briefings on ICRC activities as the delegation sought to restart IHL teaching for higher-education students after a six-year gap.

Wider efforts to raise awareness among the Eritrean public of the Movement's humanitarian work took place on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May), when photos illustrating Red Cross activities were displayed on the streets of Asmara. An estimated 10,000 people visited the ICRC stand during the 10-day National Book Fair, staged in the capital.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The Eritrean Red Cross, backed by ICRC funds, materials, training and expertise, continued to build its capacities in restoring family links, first aid, and the promotion of IHL and the Fundamental Principles. However, it had still not recovered its full capacities, especially in terms of human resources, following the suspension of its activities in 2007–08.

Some 150 staff enhanced their expertise in restoring family links, a service for which the Eritrean Red Cross resumed responsibility in 2009, during eight ICRC-run training sessions. To boost their emergency response skills, 177 Red Cross volunteers participated in a relief-management course. Eritrean Red Cross personnel conducted first-aid courses for 983 people, mainly police officers, industrial workers, transport drivers and students, and held briefings on the Movement, its Fundamental Principles and activities for nearly 600 people, including police officers, students and teachers.

With ICRC support, volunteers briefed more than 500 people in local communities, including schoolchildren, on the dangers posed by unexploded mines. During a workshop in December, Eritrean Red Cross and ICRC staff were briefed by representatives of the Eritrean Demining Agency on its activities. Meanwhile, talks continued between the ICRC and the Eritrean Demining Agency with a view to further developing community-based mine-risk education projects in cooperation with the Red Cross Society.