



eritrea

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

EXPENDITURE IN CHF

Protection

1,599,217

Assistance

3,731,661

Preventive action

476,589

Cooperation with National Societies

708,245

General

13,572

► **6,529,285**

of which: Overheads **398,501**

PERSONNEL

16 expatriates

71 national staff

KEY POINTS IN 2004

- ▶ The ICRC was the main organization providing water, shelter and essential household items to some 60,000 IDPs in 22 camps.
- ▶ To make up for a lack of wood and prevent further deforestation, the ICRC installed 1,500 fuel-saving ovens in IDP camps.
- ▶ In former war zones, the ICRC stepped up its programme to improve access to water, delivered seed to over 46,000 returnees whose crops had failed, and rebuilt homes for returning families.
- ▶ The ICRC assisted in the voluntary repatriation of 798 civilians of Eritrean or Ethiopian origin and, together with the Eritrean Red Cross, increased the efficiency of the tracing and RCM network (some 23,600 messages relayed between relatives across the closed border).
- ▶ The ICRC regularly visited detainees of Ethiopian origin, including prisoners of war who had declined repatriation, and held IHL briefings for personnel in prisons and police stations.
- ▶ The Eritrean armed forces agreed in principle to integrate IHL into their training.

CONTEXT

The physical mapping out of the new border between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained on hold for the second consecutive year. As a result, more than 60,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) were still living in camps in or near the UN-patrolled buffer zone (Temporary Security Zone or TSZ), the majority of them unable to return home until the border issue was settled. Villagers in former war zones also faced economic hardship. Farmland and pasture were mine-infested, infrastructure damaged by the war, and cross-border trade suspended. Owing to poor rainfall, Eritrea's crop production was below average in 2002 and 2003 and almost two million people – over half the population – received international food aid during 2004. Rains were erratic in 2004 and the prospects for the harvest were again poor.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC continued to focus on addressing the needs of people still affected by the 1998–2000 war with Ethiopia.

ICRC delegates regularly visited the remaining few prisoners of war (POWs) of Ethiopian origin who had declined repatriation in 2002 in order to monitor their situation until a permanent solution was found regarding their status. It also followed up any other individual cases of POWs with the Eritrean authorities, as required by the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC pursued its efforts to ensure that the rights of civilians of Ethiopian origin living in Eritrea, including detainees, were respected regarding their living conditions and repatriation, in accordance with humanitarian norms and, where applicable, provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It visited detainees and, for the first time, gave briefings on international humanitarian law (IHL) to personnel in prisons and police stations countrywide. The ICRC continued to assist in the voluntary repatriation of people of Eritrean and Ethiopian origin. The tracing and Red Cross message (RCM) services enabled tens of thousands of relatives separated as a result of the war to communicate across the closed border. The ICRC and the Eritrean Red Cross restructured the services, and the flow of messages increased. At their request, vulnerable people were reunited with their families across the border.

The ICRC was the main organization providing more than 60,000 IDPs in 22 camps with shelter, water and essential household items. It also installed 1,500 fuel-saving ovens in camps in regions where wood was scarce because of years of foraging by IDPs.

To assist resident communities in former war zones, the ICRC stepped up its programme to build or upgrade water systems, working closely with the State water authorities. It also distributed seeds ahead of the planting season to around 46,000 returnees whose crops had failed and was rebuilding war-damaged homes for families returning to their villages.

The Eritrean armed forces agreed in principle to integrate IHL into their training curricula. As support, the ICRC trained 30 military IHL instructors. It also maintained its other programmes to promote IHL, targeting the authorities, the UN

Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and opinion-leaders in civil society.

The ICRC gave the Eritrean Red Cross substantial support in developing its capacities to run the tracing and RCM network, respond to emergencies, carry out mine-action activities and disseminate IHL.

CIVILIANS

Protecting civilians

The ICRC maintained regular contact with civilians in the border area, as well as with the authorities, armed forces and UNMEE. It collected and documented allegations of violations of international law committed against civilians and where necessary made confidential representations to the parties involved in order to prevent further abuses.

Restoring contact between relatives

The Eritrea-Ethiopia border was still closed, and telecommunications and postal services were not yet functioning between the two countries. The tracing and RCM network was the only means of communication for thousands of relatives separated by the border. The ICRC and the Eritrean Red Cross restructured the network (see *National Society*). As a result, the flow of cross-border messages increased. The ICRC also reunited vulnerable people, such as children, the elderly, sick or destitute, with relatives across the border who could care for them.

Repatriating civilians

The ICRC, with local Red Cross support, assisted in the voluntary repatriation of civilians to Eritrea and Ethiopia, organizing transport and providing basic supplies for the trip and short stay in a transit camp. It also helped those who were being repatriated to contact their families and retrieved and forwarded their official documents, mainly education certificates, so that they could continue their studies or apply for work.

- ▶ 11,910 RCMs delivered in Eritrea and 11,724 collected
- ▶ under the Eritrea-Ethiopia family reunification programme, 63 people, including 53 children, reunited with relatives in Eritrea and 47, including 35 children, with relatives in Ethiopia
- ▶ 174 civilians voluntarily repatriated from Ethiopia to Eritrea and 624 from Eritrea to Ethiopia
- ▶ 44 people whose families had filed tracing requests located in Eritrea and 22 in Ethiopia

- ▶ 18 official documents forwarded from Eritrea and 93 from Ethiopia

Key aid for IDPs

The ICRC was the main organization providing water, shelter materials and essential household items to some 60,000 IDPs living in 22 camps in or near the TSZ in the Debub, Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea regions, while the World Food Programme (WFP) and Eritrean authorities provided food. Most of the IDPs, around 85% of whom were women and children, had been in the camps since the war broke out over six years previously and could not return home until the border issue was resolved, mines cleared and infrastructure rebuilt. The ICRC maintained and upgraded water systems in the camps, replaced weather-beaten tents and other forms of shelter, distributed jerrycans, kitchenware and soap, and supplied blankets in highland areas and insecticide-treated mosquito nets to families with young children.

Having installed 1,900 new fuel-saving ovens in four camps in 2003, the ICRC phased out its temporary kerosene distributions in the camps in early 2004. During 2004 it built another 1,500 of the ovens in five camps in Debub and Gash Barka. The ovens, which burned up to 50% less wood, helped to slow down deforestation around the camps and saved the women and girls time and energy otherwise spent foraging for increasingly scarce wood. The project was carried out with the Eritrean Women's Association and the Ministries of Agriculture and Energy.

- ▶ water-supply systems maintained/ upgraded for some 60,000 IDPs in 22 camps
- ▶ some 63,000 IDPs received a combination of 17,801 water containers, 20,547 tarpaulins, 6 tents, 742,436 bars (200 g) of soap, 3,042 mosquito nets, 9,470 litres of kerosene, 37,310 blankets and 18 kitchen sets
- ▶ 1,500 fuel-saving ovens installed in 5 IDP camps

Assisting residents and returnees

Less than 50% of people in rural areas of Eritrea had access to clean water, while ICRC monitoring of dams and wells in the TSZ showed that groundwater levels were dropping. In cooperation with the water authorities, the ICRC decided to step up its programme to improve access to water in the war-torn Senafe region of Debub, mainly by drilling new boreholes and building

water-storage facilities in 2004 and 2005. Work started in June but was hampered by the fuel shortages in Eritrea, lack of construction materials and rising cost of goods. Despite the problems, the ICRC, with the participation of the communities, drilled two boreholes, built two solar-powered water-distribution networks and a large reservoir, rehabilitated village wells and hand pumps and was upgrading water systems in the towns of Mai Dima and Senafe.

An evaluation of the six health centres the ICRC had rehabilitated in Debub and Gash Barka since the cessation of hostilities in 2000 found that, in general, the centres were being underused and some needed repair work. With Ministry of Health approval, the ICRC therefore shelved plans to rebuild the Serha health centre and instead upgraded the water and sanitation systems in the six centres (Antore, Awgaro and Forto in Debub and Shambiko, Shilao and Tokombia in Gash Barka).

In May, just ahead of the planting season, the ICRC distributed 290 tonnes of seed to 9,122 families who had returned to their villages in former war zones (60 tonnes to 2,950 families in Gash Barka and 230 tonnes to 6,172 families in Debub). The beneficiaries were among some 20,000 families who had received ICRC seed and food rations early in 2003 following the 2002 drought, but were hit again by erratic rainfall and were thus not able to set aside enough seed for planting in 2004. The distribution was coordinated with the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture and the WFP.

The ICRC completed a project begun in 2003 to rebuild 97 war-damaged homes belonging to returning families, most headed by women, in four villages in the Senafe region of Debub. It was rebuilding another 200 dwellings in three other villages for IDPs in camps who wanted to return home but lacked housing.

As part of a pilot project started in September 2003, the ICRC continued to pay some 200 resident families in Adi Kesh (Gash Barka) to produce palm mats that were distributed free of charge to IDPs in Adi Kesh and Dembedoran camps. The project provided residents with income and IDPs with shelter material that was more culturally acceptable than tents, and helped foster relations between the two communities.

▶ 30 water projects completed or ongoing, benefiting some 105,000 residents and returnees in the TSZ

- ▶ water and sanitation systems upgraded in 6 health centres
- ▶ 46,328 drought-affected returnees received 290 tonnes of seed
- ▶ 238 homes rebuilt/being rebuilt for returnees
- ▶ in an income-generating project, some 1,000 residents produced over 12,000 palm mats for around 15,000 IDPs in 2 camps

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Prisoners of war

In August 2002 Eritrea released the last POWs of Ethiopian origin regularly visited by the ICRC, and the majority were repatriated under ICRC auspices. In accordance with the Third Geneva Convention, the ICRC regularly visited the remaining few POWs, who had declined repatriation, in order to monitor their situation until a permanent solution was found to their status. It also continued to follow up with the authorities other pending, presumed or alleged cases of POWs.

Visiting civilian detainees

The ICRC visited detainees of Ethiopian origin in detention facilities countrywide, mainly prisons and police stations, to ensure that their rights were being respected in accordance with international humanitarian norms. After the visits, it reported its findings, in confidence, to the authorities. During visits, the ICRC distributed items such as clothing, cleaning agents, buckets and brushes, as needed, and relayed RCMs between the detainees and their families. For the first time, the ICRC also held briefings for prison guards and police officers on the basic principles of IHL and the rationale and standard procedures for ICRC detention activities.

- ▶ 326 detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs, visited in 42 places of detention during 89 visits
- ▶ 48 former detainees of Ethiopian origin repatriated under ICRC auspices
- ▶ 248 RCMs distributed to detainees and 384 collected for forwarding to relatives
- ▶ 31 certificates of detention issued to former detainees

AUTHORITIES

Promoting IHL implementation

In a positive development, on 6 August Eritrea acceded to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

During the year, the ICRC continued to encourage the Eritrean authorities to officially recognize the Tigrinya translation of the Geneva Conventions, provided by the ICRC in 2003, as a step towards incorporating the Conventions' provisions into national law. Eritrea acceded to the Conventions in 2000.

The ICRC also discussed a variety of issues with the national and regional authorities related to protecting and assisting civilians affected by armed conflict. It gave a presentation on IHL and the ICRC's mandate and activities to 30 officials of the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, the government body that coordinated aid.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Integrating IHL into military training

The Eritrean armed forces agreed in principle to integrate IHL into their training programme. The decision followed a series of meetings and a round-table between the ICRC and officials from the Ministry of Defence, the head of the Sawa military academy and high-ranking officers. To support the integration process, the ICRC conducted a 10-day course for 30 military IHL instructors and a week-long introductory course on IHL for three senior officers. It also produced Tigrinya translations of the ICRC's *Essentials of the law of war* and *Behaviour in combat* for use as teaching tools.

IHL for UN peace-keepers

On 15 September the UN Security Council renewed UNMEE's mandate, authorizing the peace-keepers to patrol the TSZ for another six months. The ICRC regularly met senior UNMEE officials to discuss humanitarian issues and gave presentations on IHL during induction courses for newly arrived UNMEE staff officers and battalions.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Raising public awareness of IHL

To draw the attention of opinion-leaders and the general public to humanitarian concerns and IHL, the ICRC:

- ▶ kept the national and international media informed of its activities through press releases, quarterly written updates and briefings;
- ▶ donated books and audio-visual material on IHL and the ICRC to Asmara's public libraries;
- ▶ gave presentations on IHL at Asmara University to law, journalism and communications students;
- ▶ distributed Tigrinya versions of its *ICRC in action* leaflet and *Battle of the villages* comic book;
- ▶ met a leader of Eritrea's Muslim community to discuss the ICRC's mandate, activities and level of acceptance of the organization and red cross emblem among Muslims.

Coordinating humanitarian efforts

The ICRC coordinated its activities with UN agencies and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Eritrea, as well as with the diplomatic community in Asmara. To strengthen this exchange, the ICRC joined the inter-agency information officers' forum, whose members included UNMEE, UN agencies, the European Union and NGOs such as CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee and OXFAM. It gave a presentation on its activities to forum members and contributed articles to the fortnightly OCHA-run *Humanitarian Update*, which was distributed to the authorities, the international community and civil society.

NATIONAL SOCIETY

The Eritrean Red Cross assisted the ICRC in distributing aid, delivering RCMs and repatriating civilians. The ICRC provided the Red Cross with funds, supplies, training and technical expertise to strengthen its capacities to respond to emergencies, run the tracing and RCM network and disseminate IHL. On the basis of assessments of the capacity of the Eritrean Red Cross carried out jointly, ICRC support focused on developing knowledge and skills and standardizing procedures for assessing needs and implementing and reporting on programmes.

Restoring family links

The ICRC and the Eritrean Red Cross restructured the tracing and RCM network to make it more efficient and accessible. Some 120 volunteers were trained and became the key contacts in their communities for people seeking information on sending or receiving RCMs. The ICRC financed the salaries of eight headquarters and branch tracing staff, donated 10 bicycles for tracing volunteers to use in the field and, with the Red Cross, was producing new tracing guidelines.

Responding to emergencies

An ICRC consultant spent three months working with the Eritrean Red Cross on upgrading its countrywide ambulance service and making it self-supporting. A new ambulance-management manual was completed and sent to branches, and the ICRC donated three new ambulances, bringing the fleet to 15. It also financed the running costs of the service and salaries for 18 drivers, while the consultant and an Eritrean Red Cross representative visited all the ambulance sites, soliciting municipal support for the fleet.

To strengthen the Red Cross relief programme, the ICRC produced a draft emergency-response manual and provided the six regional and two new branches (Dekemhare in Debub and Akordat in Gash Barka) with tents, tarpaulins, stretchers, first-aid kits and jerrycans. It helped organize a five-day course on relief management and first aid for 17 Red Cross action team volunteers in the two new branches and a basic first-aid course for 170 volunteers of the Asmara branch. With ICRC support, the Southern Red Sea branch installed a solar-powered water system for the 1,800 people in the village of Ayumen.

Promoting IHL and the Movement

To assist the Eritrean Red Cross in promoting IHL and the role and Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC provided copies of the dissemination manual, translated into Tigrinya, for the headquarters and six regional branches. It also helped organize a seven-day train-the-trainer dissemination course for 25 Red Cross members, five of whom then trained some 120 Red Cross action team volunteers countrywide as disseminators. New communication tools were developed to use during talks, and quarterly newsletters on Red Cross activities were distributed to stakeholders. With ICRC support, the Eritrean Red Cross also staged a three-day event in Asmara to mark World Red Cross

and Red Crescent Day (8 May) and had an information tent at the Youth Festival in Sawa (23–29 July) and a pavilion that attracted some 23,500 visitors at the nine-day Eritrea Festival in August in Asmara.

Mine action

With ICRC support, the Eritrean Red Cross ran a small-scale mine-action project, launched in 2003 in coordination with the Eritrea Demining Authority (EDA). Volunteers collected and forwarded data on mine injuries to the EDA and UNMEE's Mine Action Coordination Centre and held mine-risk education sessions for communities in contaminated areas. The ICRC, the Eritrean Red Cross and the EDA organized a week-long training course for 11 new volunteers.