

Iraq: Civilians still enduring undue hardship

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) HAS BEEN WORKING IN IRAQ CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1980 RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARMED CONFLICTS

Overview

Over the past year, the lives of many Iraqi civilians have not changed for the better. Civilians continue to carry the heaviest burden amid the widespread violence. They are still the main victims of the indiscriminate attacks and mass explosions that have taken place in Baghdad, Ninewa, Diyala, Anbar, Najaf, Kerbala and Basra, and that have left, on average, hundreds of people wounded or dead each month this year.

"Indiscriminate attacks against civilians inflict tremendous suffering. They are clearly unacceptable. They are contrary to international humanitarian law and to the most basic principles of humanity," said Magne Barth, head of the ICRC delegation in Iraq. "Civilians must be protected against violence, as must be medical personnel and facilities".

The humanitarian situation in Iraq remains serious. Many Iraqis are filled with anxiety and uncertainty about what the future holds. Vulnerable people, such as women heading households, disabled people and detainees, continue to be dependant on outside help.

The lack of security and wanton violence of the past months have had a considerable effect on the feasibility of providing essential services for the population. The ICRC is doing its utmost to help meet the most pressing needs, especially in rural areas and in the places hardest hit by the conflict and other forms of violence. ICRC activities aim primarily at ensuring that people have access to adequate health, water and sanitation services, and at helping people in dire need.

Visits to detainees held under the Iraqi, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the United States Forces (USF-I) authority remain a priority for the ICRC. "Ensuring that detainees are treated humanely and are held in conditions that respect their dignity has been our constant concern since we started working in Iraq 30 years ago," said Mr Barth.

The ICRC continues to raise the plight of victims caught in today's Iraq. It does so in dialogue with as many parties as possible that can influence the situation on the ground. Its aim is to bring about greater respect for civilians and detainees, and to ensure that unimpeded access is granted for humanitarian action to help the people in greatest need throughout the country.

"The role of the ICRC, as an impartial humanitarian organization, is crucial to efforts in protecting civilians from harm and that detainees are treated properly" said Mr Barth.

During the months of September and October 2010, in response to the unstable and often-times challenging security environment, the ICRC further adjusted its activities in the aim of providing assistance to those most in need.



Mosul, Ninawa, An Iraqi grieving after losing members of his family after two car bombs were detonated

Bringing aid to vulnerable people



Baaj district, Ninawa, ICRC distribution of livestock to support vulnerable communities.

The ICRC has maintained its support for people facing hardship earning a living and supporting their families, such as women heading households, people with disabilities and displaced people. During the months of September and October:

- over 5,600 people were provided with hygiene kits and food parcels in the governorate of Ninawa;
- emergency aid was provided to more than 170 displaced people in Sulaimaniya governorate;
- 95 grants were delivered in Kirkuk, Ninawa, Dohuk, Sulaimaniya and Erbil governorates to enable disabled people to start small businesses and regain economic self-sufficiency. Around 700 disabled people have received such aid since 2008;
- the livestock of 731 farmers in need in Kifri district of Diyala governorate were vaccinated;
- around 950 metric tons of wheat seeds were delivered to almost 3,800 farmers in the governorates of Diyala, Anbar, Salah Al-Din, Baghdad and Babil to help the farmers restore their food production;
- over 7,000 people are expected to benefit from the rehabilitation and cleaning of almost 50km of irrigation canals that were carried out in Khalis and Kifri districts of Diyala governorate;
- 600 sheep and 38 metric tons of fodder were distributed to 200 farmers in Baaj district of Ninawa governorate in assistance to farmers seeking to restore their respective livelihood.

Assisting hospitals and physical rehabilitation centres

In some rural and conflict-prone areas, health-care services are still struggling to meet the needs of the civilian population. The ICRC continues to help renovate the premises of health-care facilities and train staff. Limb-fitting and physical rehabilitation services are provided by the ICRC to help disabled people reintegrate into the community. In September and October:

- 10 doctors and 28 nurses successfully took part in a course given in Al Sadr Teaching Hospital in Najaf intended to strengthen emergency services;
- 273 new patients were fitted with prostheses and 1,148 new patients with orthoses at 10 ICRC-supported centres throughout Iraq.

Since mid 2010, the ICRC provides on-site support to 10 Primary Health Care Centres in Diyala, Ninawa, Kirkuk Babil and Diwaniya, through regular visits carried out in agreement with local authorities. The support extended includes:



Al Sadr hospital, Najaf, An amputee going through physical rehabilitation.

- structural rehabilitation and maintenance of water supply networks
- problem-solving in the delivery of emergency stabilisation and referral services, vaccinations and preventive consultations for pregnant women.
- ongoing exchange of information with relevant authorities in the aim mobilising adequate human resources and to guarantee regular stock availability of medicine and vaccines.

Providing clean water and sanitation



Baghdad, ICRC rehabilitation project at Qadissiya water treatment plant.

Access to clean water remains difficult in much of Iraq. ICRC engineers continue to repair and upgrade water, electrical and sanitary facilities, especially in places where violence remains a concern and in rural areas, to improve the quality of services provided in communities and health-care facilities. In September and October, these activities included:

Emergency assistance

The ICRC delivered water by truck:

- in Zharawa district, Sadr City, Husseinia and Maamal to 6,384 internally displaced people;
- to Al Imam Ali General Hospital (385 bed capacity);
- to Al Kindy General Hospital in Baghdad (400 bed capacity), which was struggling to cope with summer water shortages.

Support for health-care facilities

The ICRC completed the following works:

- upgrading Tarmiya General Hospital, which serves between 250 and 300 outpatients daily, in Baghdad governorate.
- rehabilitation of Tamour primary health-care centre (50 patients per day), in Kirkuk.

Water supply in hospitals

- the ICRC completed the installation of drinking-water purification units in four hospitals in Diyala governorate (Baquba General Hospital, Muqdadiya General Hospital, Baladrooz General Hospital, Al Zahraa Maternity Hospital, for an overall capacity of 600 beds).

Drinking-water supply

The ICRC completed five main projects benefiting around 725,000 people throughout the country:

- Al Suwayra Water Treatment Plant in Wassit governorate, 157,000 beneficiaries
- Al-Hamdaniya Boosting Station, 60,000 beneficiaries
- Old Baquba Water Treatment Plant in Diyala governorate, 128,426 beneficiaries
- Al-Qaim Water Treatment Plant in Anbar governorate, 170,000 beneficiaries
- Al-Qa'qaa Water Treatment Plant in Baghdad governorate, 179,574 beneficiaries

Visiting detainees

ICRC delegates visit detainees in order to monitor the conditions in which they are held and the treatment they receive from the detaining authorities. In all cases, the ICRC shares its findings and recommendations confidentially with the detaining authorities, with the aim of obtaining improvements in conditions and treatment where necessary.

In September and October, the ICRC visited detainees in places of detention in Basra, Thi Qar/Nasiriya, Baghdad, Babil, Kirkuk, Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimaniya governorates held by the



Fort Suse prison, Sulaimaniya, ICRC delegate distributing Red Cross Messages.

following detaining authorities:

- the Iraqi Correctional Service, under the Ministry of Justice;
- the Ministry of the Interior;
- the Ministry of Defence; and
- various Kurdish Regional Government authorities.

In some of these places, detainees were given mattresses, blankets and recreational items such as books and games in order to assist the detaining authority concerned to improve the conditions of detention.

The ICRC makes a special effort to restore and maintain ties between detainees and their families. In September and October, over 1,000 Red Cross messages were exchanged between detainees and their families in Iraq and abroad. The ICRC also responded to around 800 enquiries from families seeking information on detained relatives. In addition, it issued 249 certificates of detention to former detainees. The ICRC facilitated the voluntary repatriation of two released detainees under its auspices, and it issued two travel documents to refugees to enable them to resettle abroad.

Clarifying what happened to missing people

In its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC continues to chair the mechanisms set up to address the cases of people who went missing also in connection with the 1990-1991 Gulf War. On 28 of September, the 67th Technical Sub-Committee (TSC) meeting took place in Kuwait, during which its members re-confirmed their commitments to join the efforts in clarifying the fate of missing persons whose whereabouts remain unknown since 1990-1991.

Representatives of Iran and Iraq held a high-level meeting in Geneva under the auspices of the ICRC, on 27 and 28 October, marking further progress in

determining what happened to people missing in connection with the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. The meeting was the first of its kind following the signature in October 2008 of a memorandum of understanding between Iran, Iraq and the ICRC aimed at expediting the search for information on people previously registered as, or presumed to be, prisoners of war and on others who have gone missing, and at identifying human remains.

Relieving the suffering of the families of missing persons by clarifying what happened to their loved ones is one of ICRC's priorities. The ICRC continues to provide the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and Baghdad's Medical-Legal Institute with the technical support they require to exchange information and build up their capacity in the area of forensics.

Promoting international humanitarian law

Reminding parties to a conflict of their obligation to protect civilians is a fundamental part of ICRC's work. The organization also endeavours to promote international humanitarian law (IHL) within civil society. In this framework, it organizes presentations for various audiences, which include military personnel, prison staff, students and professors.

During the period under review, information sessions on international humanitarian law were organized for members of the Iraqi Army, the Peshmerga forces and Assayesh security forces. In October, a Train the Trainers Course was organized for 14 members of the Iraqi Centre for Military Values, Principles and Leadership Development. An officer of the Iraqi Armed Forces attended the Advanced Course on IHL at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy, while another attended a Rules of Engagement Workshop with the same institution.

ICRC Mission The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.