

Congo



⊕ ICRC delegation
 ⊕ ICRC sub-delegation
 + ICRC office

The ICRC has worked in the Republic of the Congo since 1994, first through the Kinshasa regional delegation and since 1998 as a separate delegation. It promotes respect for IHL and human rights law by the authorities in their treatment of civilians and detainees and encourages the inclusion of IHL in the instruction of the armed forces, police and *gendarmierie*. The ICRC also provides civilians affected by the conflict with agricultural tools and seeds, improves water, sanitation and health-care facilities and restores contact between separated relatives, where necessary reuniting children with their families. It also helps strengthen the operational capacity of the Congolese Red Cross.

EXPENDITURE (IN CHF ,000)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Protection | 1,028 |
| Assistance | 4,602 |
| Prevention | 1,402 |
| Cooperation with National Societies | 419 |
| General | - |

▶ **7,451**

of which: Overheads 454

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Expenditure/yearly budget | 82.0% |
|---------------------------|--------------|

PERSONNEL

| |
|--|
| 15 expatriates |
| 127 national staff (daily workers not included) |

KEY POINTS

In 2005, the ICRC:

- ▶ continued to provide protection to civilians in sensitive areas of the Pool region (an estimated 120,000 people) through its presence and assistance programmes;
- ▶ working closely with the authorities, improved access to safe drinking water for some 66,000 people in Pool;
- ▶ provided material and training support to 10 integrated health centres (serving 65,000 people) in Pool; completed repairs on 5 centres, began work on 5 others;
- ▶ provided some 55,000 people in Pool with agricultural and essential household items, mosaic-resistant cassava cuttings and breeding fish;
- ▶ gave lectures on its mandate and IHL to some 300 government officials, 2,600 army personnel, 1,450 police and security personnel and some 200 armed elements of the National Resistance Council;
- ▶ started a gradual withdrawal from Pool by closing its office in Dolisie and announcing the closure of a sub-office in the region in 2006, while focusing more on other activities and encouraging the authorities to assume their rightful role in meeting the population's needs.

CONTEXT

The Republic of the Congo remained in a period of transition characterized by relative stability and calm, with robberies and other criminal activity still taking place in Pool. President Sassou-Nguesso unexpectedly pardoned his political archrival, Bernard Kolélas, an emblematic figure in Congolese politics who had been sentenced to death *in absentia*, who subsequently returned from exile.

In May, the opposition National Resistance Council began a unilateral "Operation restore order and security" in Pool, which included the regular presence of the movement's leader, Reverend Ntumi, in the region and helped restore some semblance of calm and security. However, the proliferation of small arms, compounded by the frustrations of arms carriers, posed a constant threat. The Ninja militias were perceived to be committing robberies and other acts of violence with impunity. They were becoming increasingly impatient with delays in the promised far-ranging State investment in the region and the allocation of benefits to which they felt entitled. The expulsion of the military wing of the Ninjas from Brazzaville in October exacerbated their resentment, leading to an increase in robberies and other forms of violence and exposing the National Resistance Council's limitations in controlling all its armed elements.

In December, the International Monetary Fund postponed its decision to give Congo access to its Heavily Indebted Poor Countries programme, a reflection of its doubts about the government's determination to revise the management of State revenues. The postponement of further debt relief made additional budget allocations to the social and public welfare sectors unlikely.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

| PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses) | | CIVILIANS AND PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM | | |
|---|-------|--|---------------|--------|
| Detainees visited | 794 | <i>Economic security, water and habitat</i> | | |
| Detainees visited and monitored individually | 53 | Food | Beneficiaries | 1,334 |
| Number of visits carried out | 63 | Essential household items | Beneficiaries | 38,065 |
| Number of places of detention visited | 23 | Agricultural inputs and micro-economic initiatives | Beneficiaries | 55,221 |
| RESTORING FAMILY LINKS | | Water-supply schemes and sanitation systems (completed projects) | Beneficiaries | 66,052 |
| <i>Red Cross messages (RCMs) and reunifications</i> | | Habitat structures | Beneficiaries | 5,000 |
| RCMs collected | 1,629 | Health | | |
| RCMs distributed | 2,259 | Health centres supported | Structures | 10 |
| People reunited with their families | 9 | Consultations | Patients | 50,260 |
| <i>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</i> | | Immunizations | Activities | 14,230 |
| People for whom a tracing request was newly registered | 53 | WOUNDED AND SICK | | |
| Tracing requests closed positively (persons located) | 42 | Hospital supported | Structure | 1 |
| Tracing requests still being handled at 31 December 2005 | 31 | | | |
| <i>Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and separated children (SCs), including unaccompanied demobilized child soldiers</i> | | | | |
| UAMs/SCs newly registered by the ICRC | 11 | | | |
| UAMs/SCs reunited with their families by the ICRC | 9 | | | |
| UAMs/SCs cases still being handled at 31 December 2005 | 20 | | | |
| DOCUMENTS ISSUED | | | | |
| People to whom travel documents were issued | 8 | | | |
| People to whom a detention attestation was issued | 6 | | | |

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC maintained a permanent presence in the Pool region, with expatriate and national staff operating from offices in Kinkala, Mindouli and Kindamba. Although the ICRC considered the situation in Pool to be no longer a crisis in humanitarian terms, the absence of a political settlement to the conflict, the number of arms still circulating and delays in setting up a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme continued to create an environment of uncertainty. Consequently, reconstruction and economic recovery remained painfully slow, and few international humanitarian organizations were around to fill the gap.

Assistance programmes, conceived and implemented as part of a protection strategy, allowed the ICRC to remain close to the population in sensitive areas and to get a clear understanding of their security concerns and living conditions. From this vantage point, the organization remained poised to respond promptly in the event the situation worsened and to provide civilians with assistance and protection. Concurrently, the organization sought to impress upon the political authorities and decision-makers the need to meet their obligations to the population.

The ICRC concentrated its activities in the region where the humanitarian situation remained a concern. It continued to

address civilians' lingering needs occasioned by previous conflicts, by the government's limited involvement in restoring local public infrastructure and services and by political uncertainty. Through its assistance programmes, the organization ensured better access of an estimated 120,000 people, including IDPs who had returned to their places of origin, to essential services such as basic health care, safe drinking water, food and economic security.

The ICRC regularly visited detainees, particularly those held for State security reasons, to monitor their treatment and living conditions. It provided advisory services to the authorities on the implementation of IHL and adherence to relevant international treaties. To spread knowledge of IHL and improve compliance with it, the ICRC carried on supporting the teaching of this body of law among armed forces, security and law-enforcement forces, other weapon bearers, academic circles and the media.

The ICRC pursued contacts with arms carriers, both on the government and opposition sides, to secure understanding and acceptance of its mandate and working methods at all times. Its efforts helped ensure the safety of ICRC field operations and staff. Nonetheless, a few minor security incidents did occur.

The ICRC kept up regular contact with the Congolese Red Cross and the International

Federation and continued to implement a few projects with the National Society.

Working relations were maintained with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other organizations providing humanitarian aid or engaged in development work in Pool.

CIVILIANS

Protecting civilians

Civilians in Pool remained vulnerable to extortion, looting, theft and intimidation by arms carriers. Security conditions improved following the launch in May of Reverend Ntumi's initiative to reinforce security and order in Pool but deteriorated significantly after the expulsion of armed Ninja elements from Brazzaville in October.

The proliferation of small arms and the presence of arms carriers continued to create an insecure environment, which translated into hardship for civilians, particularly the vulnerable, who remained cut off from basic services and markets in Brazzaville.

In response, the ICRC focused on remaining close to the population in sensitive areas to gain a better understanding of the security situation and living conditions. It maintained a dialogue with all parties at various levels and with arms carriers on their obligations to the civilian population, including civilians' right of access to basic

services and humanitarian aid. The organization developed and implemented assistance programmes in sensitive areas as a part of a protection-driven strategy.

Restoring family links and family reunification

The ICRC monitored 36 unaccompanied children from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help them restore links with their families and, with the consent of all concerned, to reunite them with their families. With the exception of three cases, the children's families were located and they were able to correspond through RCMs. Bearing in mind the children's best interests, the ICRC discussed the possibility of family reunification with the children whose families had been located.

- 11 new unaccompanied children registered
- 16 unaccompanied, separated children reunited with their families (9 by the ICRC)

Some cases were closed for failing to fulfill ICRC criteria – mainly because the minors concerned were already living with direct family members in Congo and thus considered to be separated from their families but not unaccompanied, or because they had turned adult and did not wish to be reunited with their relatives.

Regular contact with UNHCR facilitated the exchange of information and enabled the two organizations to complement each other through activities related to their respective mandates. The ICRC concentrated on unaccompanied minors and referred children separated from their families to UNHCR.

Together with the UNHCR and refugee representatives, the ICRC continued to put refugees back in touch with family through the RCM network. In remote areas without public communication, RCMs enabled civilians to maintain contact with relatives abroad.

- 1,562 RCMs collected from and 2,217 RCMs delivered to civilians, including refugees
- individuals arrested in relation to armed confrontations in October located and/or contact restored with their loved ones
- 8 travel documents delivered

Although the majority of former IDPs returned to their places of origin in 2004, a number of concerns still needed addressing:

the plight of returnees who were having to rebuild their lives and the difficulties facing communities affected by the lack of reconstruction compounded by the burden of absorbing returnees. The unstable security environment in Pool militated against sustainable long-term rebuilding. There were few, poorly implemented economic-recovery programmes.

The ICRC maintained a presence in Pool, improving access to essential services, notably the supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

Ensuring a safe water supply

The ICRC provided structural support to water-supply systems and encouraged the authorities to take action and allocate sufficient funds to improve water supply. It intensified contacts with the relevant authorities and sought to consolidate their cooperation and to define a common approach to sustaining water-supply projects in Pool. However, the authorities' expression of intention did not always translate into action.

Assessments carried out in Pool in early 2005 enabled the ICRC to identify where improvements in water supply were needed. These included taking into account security constraints that hindered the population's access to potable water. The ICRC then defined its priorities based on the magnitude of the needs and protection considerations. In spite of logistic and staff constraints, the ICRC undertook several projects, involving the relevant authorities to ensure their durability.

- 14 water-supply projects (some 66,000 beneficiaries) initiated/completed in 5 districts
- upkeep of 20 water points handed over to a vocational centre in Pool, following the closure of the ICRC office in Dolisie in May
- 6 vocational-centre workers trained and supplied with repair/maintenance materials
- Mossendjo water-treatment plant in Nyari (some 15,000 beneficiaries) renovated and inaugurated
- two-week course organized for 20 staff operating 9 water-treatment plants rehabilitated by the ICRC since 1998
- emergency stock of potable water maintained to supply new IDPs if necessary

Improving civilians' health care and living conditions

The ICRC continued to support integrated health centres in sensitive areas of Pool. It launched a hygiene-promotion programme to involve the communities concerned in water projects, thereby building a sense of ownership of projects. It also established village committees to manage the water projects.

- 5 integrated health centres rehabilitated/constructed; construction begun on 5 others

Assisting residents and returnees

In May, the ICRC concluded the distribution of essential household and agricultural items to residents and returnees in the Mindouli district of Pool. It carried out two assessments in remote parts north-west of Kimba, leading to a decision to assist destitute communities in these areas (e.g. Mindouli and Kimba districts).

Enhancing food and economic security

The ICRC played a leading role in the implementation of a programme undertaken jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Breeding and Fishing, the Food and Agriculture Organization and WFP to combat the mosaic disease in cassava plants, a nationwide problem. The ICRC, alongside ministry representatives acting mostly on their own initiative, continued efforts to tackle the disease that affected cassava production throughout Congo. Over 1,300 members of 95 associations attended information sessions on the disease and ways of combating it by using healthy cassava cuttings and improved methods of cultivation. The results were mixed, partly because of a severe shortage of virus-resistant cassava varieties.

- 5 local cassava varieties multiplied in 3 districts; 225,500 healthy cuttings, together with basic agricultural tools, distributed to associations; beneficiaries monitored in implementing joint ICRC/Ministry of Agriculture recommendations
- 6 plots planted with 12 local/improved cuttings to help identify virus-resistant varieties
- household items and vegetable kits for use in market gardening distributed to 94 farmers' associations; 1,102 vegetable-seed kits, 628 machetes, 628 hoes and 1,864 brochures containing farming recommendations distributed to the same beneficiaries

The fishing rehabilitation project was implemented successfully with a local fisheries specialist, who contributed materials to and shared his expertise and experience with 30 associations with over 3,100 members.

The ICRC donated breeding fish to associations in remote areas. It distributed tools and fishing materials to 30 associations, thereby helping revive micro-economic activities halted by conflict. Some 64% of purchased fish initially survived both the transport and their release into newly rehabilitated ponds.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

The ICRC continued visiting detainees held in temporary and permanent detention places under the jurisdiction of the Defence or Justice Ministries or the police in Brazzaville or Pointe Noire. It registered detainees accused of endangering State security in order to provide them with protection and monitor them until their release.

- ▶ 794 people visited (53 monitored individually; 48 registered for the first time) during 63 visits made to 23 detention places
- ▶ 67 RCMs collected from detainees and 42 RCMs from their relatives delivered to them

The ICRC encouraged the authorities to comply with minimum international standards for the treatment of detainees, including by making recommendations for improvements to their living conditions. It provided structural support to strengthen and supplement the authorities' efforts in this regard.

- ▶ 2 market-gardening projects established in prisons
- ▶ a round-table on hygiene in detention places organized for representatives of 13 police stations
- ▶ repairs to water-supply and sanitation facilities begun in 12 police stations; similar work in 5 police stations completed

WOUNDED AND SICK

ICRC activities in Pool included remaining close to civilians to offer them better protection and improve access to basic health care. While maintaining direct support to certain integrated health centres, the ICRC continued to concentrate on providing structural support to the regional and central health authorities, in order to reinforce their capacities to cover the population's health needs. However, despite their pledges to do so, the authorities followed up with little specific action.

- ▶ 10 integrated health centres (providing preventive and curative health care to 65,000 people monthly in 4 districts) supported with drugs, dressing materials, furniture and stationery; petrol supplied to 5 centres with cold storage; health personnel supervised and trained
- ▶ the Extended Programme on Immunization and national polio vaccination campaign supported
- ▶ seminars held for 3 village health committees in Mindouli district
- ▶ an emergency kit maintained to cover the basic health needs of 10,000 IDPs for three months
- ▶ drugs and surgical material provided for the treatment of 30 war-wounded at a military hospital in Brazzaville; 2 wounded arms carriers evacuated to hospital
- ▶ emergency medical/surgical stock maintained for the treatment of 150 war-wounded

AUTHORITIES

A meeting on progress in the implementation of IHL was held in Brazzaville for 21 legal advisers of relevant ministries to raise awareness of the need to set up a national IHL committee. A seminar was also organized to raise senators' awareness of their responsibility to push for the national implementation of treaties already ratified by Congo.

The ICRC held information sessions on its work in four districts of Pool for some 220 officials and public servants and traditional leaders. It also expanded its network of contacts among regional economic communities, international organizations, NGOs and various government ministries.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

To promote knowledge of and compliance with IHL among all arms bearers, the ICRC:

- ▶ held a first-ever IHL train-the-trainer seminar for members of the Republican Guard and Directorate of Presidential Security in May; sponsored the participation of 2 colonels responsible for training in these units and the Defence Ministry's training adviser in courses in San Remo; drew up a schedule with the Republican Guard for sessions on IHL and the ICRC;
- ▶ conducted dissemination sessions on its mission, activities and IHL for some 3,350 rank and file of the armed forces, particularly in training centres and special units;
- ▶ helped create a permanent committee and sub-committees to supervise the dissemination of IHL in the armed, security and police forces;
- ▶ helped the permanent committee organize training for 28 army trainers;
- ▶ conducted several dissemination sessions on the ICRC, IHL and humanitarian principles for 1,456 rookie *gendarmes*/NCOs/officers, police officers and members of special security units;
- ▶ organized 4 workshops on human rights and humanitarian principles for 76 high-ranking police and security officers;
- ▶ conducted 10 sessions on its mandate and activities and IHL for 207 Ninjas in Pool.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The ICRC maintained constructive relations with the media, which reported regularly on its work in Congo. Activities involving the media included:

- ▶ a press conference on IHL in Brazzaville, attended by 34 journalists;
- ▶ press releases sent out to 42 media outlets, which used them extensively in reporting on ICRC activities;
- ▶ a workshop on IHL and the ICRC attended by 28 participants from the media;
- ▶ a documentary film on ICRC activities in the Congo, shot and broadcast by 2 television stations and used in dissemination sessions;
- ▶ 3 interviews given to local media to explain the ICRC's presence in the Congo and to present its activities.

An agreement was signed with the Education Ministry on the launch of the first phase of the pilot project of the Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) school programme. A series of events – including the selection of three schools in Pool for the pilot project, the selection of a steering committee to coordinate the project, the organization of a workshop on EHL for committee members and the integration of the programme into certain courses and the training of 38 teachers working in the three schools – culminated in an EHL course for around 800 schoolchildren. A comic book developed by the ICRC, *Battle in the village*, was used to supplement the EHL programme.

The ICRC revived ties with the Université libre du Congo, the country's only private university. This brought the number of institutions of higher education teaching IHL to three, including the National School of Administration and Magistracy and the Marien Ngouabi University. All three institutions had a trained IHL lecturer.

- 2 international law lecturers sponsored to attend the pan-African IHL course in Yaoundé
- a competition organized to select 4 student representatives to participate in a moot-court competition in Dakar and their travel to Dakar financed
- a round-table on IHL organized mainly for law lecturers at 3 academic institutions

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The year saw the launch of a pilot project on the collection and distribution of RCMs with the Pointe-Noire branch of the Congolese Red Cross, and the handover of ICRC tracing activities to the National Society. The ICRC regularly monitored and supported the work of the project coordinator and four volunteers. The pilot project was considered a success.

- 272 RCMs handed over to the Pointe-Noire branch of the Red Cross for distribution to refugees and 148 RCMs collected by the branch
- 1 tracing coordinator and 12 volunteers trained

The ICRC and the Congolese Red Cross jointly organized activities to mark World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on 8 May. The activities, which successfully profiled the National Society, brought the two partners closer together and enhanced public knowledge of the Movement, included:

- sessions on the Movement and Fundamental Principles, attended by over 160 Red Cross volunteers;
- a presentation on first-aid principles for 120 first-aid workers;
- a session for Red Cross staff and volunteers on the promotion of IHL;
- 3 workshops for 75 volunteers on the transmission and prevention of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS;
- repairs to the headquarters of a Red Cross branch and preparations to repair another.