



Caracas (regional)

The Caracas regional delegation was first established in 1971. Throughout the region, it focuses on promoting the incorporation of IHL into national legislation, into the operational procedures, manuals and training programmes of the armed forces and into the curricula of academic institutions, as well as the inclusion of human rights standards in police manuals and training programmes. It also reinforces the capacities of the region’s National Societies, particularly in the fields of IHL promotion and restoring family links.

COVERING

Suriname, Venezuela and the English-speaking Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	184
Assistance	-
Prevention	1,421
Cooperation with National Societies	202
General	-

► **1,807**

of which: Overheads 110

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	84%
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PERSONNEL

2	expatriates
10	national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- was able to visit people deprived of their freedom in all relevant places of detention in Grenada and Venezuela
- continued to promote IHL/human rights law among the armed/police forces in several Caribbean States and in Venezuela, in spite of difficulties linked to repeated staff turnover in Venezuelan government ministries
- signed a Cooperation and Consultation Arrangement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat to help member States promote, ratify and implement major IHL instruments
- cooperated with the Venezuelan Red Cross, particularly with branches working in areas bordering Colombia, emphasizing the Safer Access approach
- laid the groundwork for a joint operation conducted by ICRC delegations in Colombia and Venezuela, which eventually led to the release of two “high-profile” female hostages held in Colombia by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)

CONTEXT

Having won the December 2006 presidential elections, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez embarked on socialist reforms and a revision of the constitution, along with a major reshuffle within all ministries. In January, parliament passed an “enabling law” allowing the president to rule by decree for 18 months. The government’s decision in May not to renew the broadcasting licence of Venezuela’s oldest private television station and sole opposition-led channel, Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), sparked week-long protests in the streets of Caracas and drew condemnation from members of the international community.

University students, who played a prominent role in the demonstrations against the shutting down of RCTV, were again instrumental in the defeat in December of a referendum on a constitutional reform package. The proposed reforms would have, among other measures, abolished limits on the terms a president can serve and allowed the president to declare an unlimited state of emergency and to control Venezuela’s foreign currency reserves. The rejection of the constitutional changes was the first major defeat President Chávez had suffered since he came to power in 1999.

President Chávez played a decisive role in the release of “high-profile” hostages held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He had already been mediating with FARC for several months before his mandate was withdrawn by the Colombian authorities in November, sparking fresh tensions between the two countries.

Thousands of Colombians continued to cross into Venezuela to flee the armed conflict in their home country. The security situation in the regions bordering Colombia remained tense owing to the spillover of the Colombian conflict.

Spiralling levels of violent crime, which had prompted the government to appoint a special commission for police reform, persisted. The special commission was dissolved after it had presented its findings to the government. Progress on the introduction of a bill on police reform was slow, as responsibility for the drafting shifted between the legislative and executive powers. A final version of the bill had yet to be adopted by the government.

In the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), national parliamentary elections took place in several countries. Violent crime linked to illicit drug and arms trafficking remained major challenges for governments in the region.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses) ¹	
Detainees visited	74
Detainees visited and monitored individually	74
Number of visits carried out	12
Number of places of detention visited	6
DOCUMENTS ISSUED	
People to whom travel documents were issued	38

1. Grenada and Venezuela

In June, four people, three of them Guyanan nationals and the fourth from Trinidad and Tobago, were arrested for allegedly planning a “terrorist” attack on the John F. Kennedy airport in New York. Three of them were detained in Port of Spain, pending extradition to the United States.

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, affected various CARICOM States, causing infrastructural damage and some loss of life. Organizations dealing with natural disasters were strengthened, with the greater involvement of National Red Cross Societies and increased donor support.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC regional delegation in Caracas focused mainly on promoting IHL among political, military and police authorities and civil society throughout the region, on visiting security detainees and on addressing issues related to the armed conflict in neighbouring Colombia. In Venezuela, activities planned by the ICRC, including the integration of IHL and human rights law into the doctrine, training and operating procedures of the police and the armed forces, were hampered by substantive and repeated staff turnover in government ministries following presidential elections in December 2006. However, constructive meetings were held towards the end of the year with members of the president’s staff, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and high-ranking members of the armed forces, pointing towards a renewed dynamic in ICRC’s working relationship with these institutions.

In the second half of the year, to improve its response to the humanitarian consequences of the Colombian conflict in border regions, the ICRC began supporting Venezuelan Red Cross branches working in those regions and established contacts with local authorities, universities and NGOs in the area.

ICRC delegates continued to visit and monitor the living conditions of people detained for security reasons in Grenada and Venezuela.

In March 2007, the CARICOM Secretariat and the ICRC signed a Cooperation and Consultation Arrangement to enhance the promotion and implementation of humanitarian norms and principles in the region. Lecturers trained previously by the ICRC integrated IHL into courses in Venezuelan and Caribbean universities. In Trinidad and Tobago, the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the ICRC consolidated the prospects of integrating the ICRC’s Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in secondary school curricula. The media in the region were kept informed of ICRC activities.

The ICRC continued to work with the International Federation to strengthen the capacities of the region’s National Societies. It supported several programmes of the Venezuelan Red Cross and organized two CARICOM regional workshops for senior National Society staff.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

ICRC delegates continued to have unhindered access to detainees in Grenada and Venezuela.

Towards the end of the year, 27 Colombian detainees held in Venezuela, and monitored by the ICRC since 2004, were released. High staff turnover in relevant ministries in Venezuela continued to impede progress on negotiations to secure a formal agreement on visits to people deprived of their freedom.

- in Venezuela, 64 detainees visited and monitored individually (including 1 female), of whom 6 newly registered (including 1 female), during 11 visits to 5 places of detention
- in Grenada, 10 detainees visited and monitored individually during 1 visit to 1 place of detention

AUTHORITIES

The Venezuelan authorities were encouraged to ratify international instruments, such as Protocols IV and V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its amended Article 1 and the two Protocols to the Hague Convention on Cultural Property, and to enact implementing legislation. The attorney general, the general prosecutor and members of parliament were offered support in working towards the inclusion of the repression of war crimes in domestic legislation. The Venezuelan authorities, meanwhile, came up with an initiative to approve a special law on international crimes as a way of implementing the Rome Statute. The Ministry of Defence was finalizing a draft law on emblem protection before presenting it to parliament. Government officials participated in a workshop on the CCW and the issue of cluster munitions.

In the CARICOM region, Belize ratified and Jamaica signed Additional Protocol III. Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago progressed towards the enacting of legislation on the 1949 Geneva Conventions. In Suriname, the Ministry of Justice and Police was examining a draft revision of the criminal justice code.

In order to support CARICOM member States in the promotion, ratification and implementation of major IHL instruments, the

CARICOM Secretariat and the ICRC signed, on 1 March 2007, a Cooperation and Consultation Arrangement, which created mechanisms for greater cooperation between the ICRC and the CARICOM sub-committees on legal affairs, national security and foreign affairs.

- ▶ representatives of CARICOM States, the CARICOM Secretariat and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States attended the Regional Meeting on National Implementation of IHL in the Americas organized by the ICRC in Mexico City, Mexico, in August (see *Mexico City regional*)

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

A workshop organized by the ICRC and the human rights/IHL department of the Venezuelan armed forces examined the extent to which IHL still needed to be integrated into military doctrine, training and operations. The participating army officers agreed to recommend to their hierarchy the holding of a train-the-trainer course for IHL instructors, which would include a review of existing instruction and training curricula. They also committed to organize a second workshop focusing on the further integration of IHL into military doctrine. In November, Ministry of Defence officials indicated their willingness to step up IHL integration.

In Venezuela, efforts to incorporate relevant international human rights norms into all new police legislation were hampered by sweeping changes within the Ministry of Interior and Justice following the presidential elections in December 2006. However, at the end of the year, discussions with officials in charge of drawing up the curriculum for the new national police force pointed the way to the organization of workshops to further integrate international human rights law into police manuals, training and procedures.

Meetings with the chiefs of defence and government officials of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago led to the organization in September, in Trinidad and Tobago, of a one-day follow-up workshop for G-3 staff officers of the CARICOM region on the integration of IHL into the training and operations of the armed forces.

At a conference of the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police, participants were briefed on the ICRC's mandate and activities and on human rights norms related to policing in a regional context. In a workshop organized in October in Trinidad and Tobago, assistant police commissioners in charge of training improved their knowledge of applicable human rights norms.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The media in Venezuela and the CARICOM States covered humanitarian issues and ICRC activities thanks to: several media workshops; dissemination events targeting the media; and reinforced contacts with a network of journalists and radio and television professionals previously trained in IHL. During international efforts to secure the release of "high-profile" hostages held in Colombia, contacts with the Venezuelan media were intensified to foster a greater understanding of the ICRC's role.

To help address the humanitarian consequences of the Colombian conflict in border regions, a network of contacts was established with local NGOs, the media and academic circles in the troubled area.

Lecturers and students from academic establishments in Venezuela and Suriname, including lecturers attached to the Venezuelan Ministry of Defence and the Attorney General's Office, learned about the ICRC and IHL through workshops and briefings. Law faculties in the Bahamas and Jamaica were contacted by the delegation to promote the inclusion of IHL in their curricula.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago and the ICRC paved the way for the launching of an Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in secondary schools. Teachers and technical staff were introduced to the programme in an initial training workshop held in July.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The Venezuelan Red Cross was completing the revision of its statutes with support from the ICRC and the International Federation. Three Red Cross branches working in the regions bordering Colombia benefited from workshops on the Safer Access approach to facilitate their access to communities and individuals affected by the spillover of the Colombian conflict.

In March, staff and volunteers of the National Societies of Jamaica and Saint Lucia attended two workshops on the Safer Access approach. In April and May, senior staff of the Venezuelan Red Cross and 11 National Societies in the CARICOM region received training on the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures.