

egypt



The ICRC has been in Egypt, with some interruptions, since the beginning of the Second World War. The delegation works primarily as a regional centre to promote the national implementation of IHL and its incorporation into military training and academic curricula in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. The Cairo-based regional legal advisory, communication and documentation centre, working in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, plays an important role in this process. The ICRC supports the work of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society. It has also expressed its interest in visiting people deprived of their freedom in Egypt.

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	251
Assistance	-
Prevention	831
Cooperation with National Societies	169
General	-

► **1,251**

of which: Overheads 76

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	92%
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PERSONNEL

4	expatriates
35	national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- launched the Arabic-language version of its study on customary IHL
- held its first regional IHL course for national armed forces and ran courses on IHL for military and police training institutions in 15 Arab countries
- organized a regional meeting of education officials from 12 Arab countries to advance implementation of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in schools throughout the region
- enhanced interaction with key civil society sectors in Egypt and throughout the region in order to promote increased acceptance of and support for IHL and ICRC activities in the Arab world
- pursued discussions with the Egyptian authorities on ICRC access to security detainees in Egypt
- cooperated with the Egyptian Red Crescent Society to provide assistance to Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the border with the Gaza Strip

CONTEXT

Egypt continued to play an important role in efforts to defuse tensions in the region, particularly in the contexts of Palestinian infighting and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In December, it pledged to send 1,200 troops to serve with a joint UN-African Union force in Sudan's Darfur region.

The closure of the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip on several occasions left thousands of Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the border. When that happened, the Egyptian Red Crescent Society was called upon to provide them with emergency assistance.

In March, the Egyptian government won approval for changes to the constitution in a referendum boycotted by opposition groups. The government presented them as part of a process to modernize the State and its institutions. The opposition and numerous international observers viewed them as a means of consolidating the ruling party's control of power and barring the Muslim Brotherhood movement from participating in political life in Egypt.

Hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and sympathizers, as well as journalists and bloggers critical of the government, were arrested and tried during the year, some by newly created military courts. At the same time, hundreds of other members of the Brotherhood were released from detention after pledging to renounce violence.

Human rights organizations issued reports condemning alleged abuses by the Egyptian security forces against people arrested and held in police stations and detention centres, some documented on video. The government rejected the accusations, stating that it was taking appropriate measures to curb abuses. To make the point, a few police officers were convicted on torture charges.

Large numbers of people fleeing war, internal violence and economic hardship continued to enter Egypt seeking asylum, refugee status or resettlement in third countries. Although primarily from Sudan, a significant proportion also came from other countries in the same region. Increasing numbers of Iraqi nationals also sought refuge in Egypt; by year-end, an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Iraqis had entered the country.

An increasing number of African refugees, asylum seekers and migrants tried to cross the Sinai desert and enter Israel illegally. Several individuals were

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total
RESTORING FAMILY LINKS	
<i>Red Cross messages (RCMs) and reunifications</i>	
RCMs collected	212
RCMs distributed	280
People reunited with their families	2
<i>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</i>	
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	26
<i>of whom females</i>	15
Tracing cases closed positively (persons located)	18
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2007 (people)	77
<i>of which for females</i>	28
<i>of which for minors at the time of disappearance</i>	10
DOCUMENTS ISSUED	
People to whom travel documents were issued	1,154

reportedly killed in the attempt by Egyptian border guards. Other people were deported from Israel to Egypt on the basis of a bilateral agreement, and cases of forced repatriation from Egypt to Sudan and other countries were registered.

ICRC ACTION

Egypt continued to be the regional focal point of ICRC activities to promote greater knowledge and acceptance of IHL and of neutral and independent humanitarian action in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the national implementation of IHL.

The ICRC continued to conduct studies in a number of Arab countries on the compatibility of their national legislation with IHL, as a means of helping governments to modify their respective laws, where appropriate. Some government and legislative bodies in the region requested and received legal advice in the drafting of model laws incorporating the main provisions of IHL.

Government officials, parliamentarians, judges, academics and diplomats of Arab League member States attended regional seminars on IHL to promote its integration into national legislation, university and school curricula, and the theoretical and operational training programmes of the armed forces. In support of these activities, governments and national implementation bodies received relevant material from the ICRC's regional documentation and promotion centre in Cairo, which continued to produce written and audiovisual materials on IHL, including Arabic translations of IHL treaties. The ICRC's Cairo-based Arabic-language website was also widely consulted as a key reference source on IHL-related issues.

Another ICRC priority was to promote IHL and knowledge of the organization's specific mandate among key civil society audiences, such as the media, human rights NGOs and faith-based Arab humanitarian organizations.

Egyptian nationals were able to restore and maintain contact with family members detained/interned abroad or living in countries affected by armed conflict through ICRC tracing and RCM services, and refugees in Egypt re-established family links by the same means. A number of refugees in Egypt – mainly nationals from countries in the Horn of Africa – received ICRC travel documents to facilitate their resettlement in third countries.

Cooperation with the Egyptian Red Crescent, undertaken in close coordination with the International Federation, helped to strengthen the National Society's capacity to deliver humanitarian services, particularly in the fields of emergency preparedness and response. Operational cooperation increased through joint Egyptian Red Crescent/ICRC assistance operations for thousands of Palestinians stranded at the Rafah crossing point between Egypt and the Gaza Strip following border closures by the Israeli authorities.

CIVILIANS

Restoring family links

Asylum seekers and refugees, particularly Sudanese nationals, continued to rely on ICRC tracing and RCM services to locate and restore contact with family members in their home countries. Families living in Egypt were able to trace and re-establish contact with relatives either detained/interned abroad or present in countries where communications had been disrupted by conflict or other situations of violence.

A number of unaccompanied minors received ICRC travel documents to enable them to join family members in other countries. Unaccompanied minors received psychological and vocational counselling provided by an NGO, with ICRC support.

Family-links activities were closely coordinated with international organizations, NGOs and the Egyptian Red Crescent, as well as with community-based associations of refugees and migrants from Africa and Iraq. Information sessions were held within these circles to raise awareness of ICRC tracing and RCM services.

- 212 RCMs collected from and 278 RCMs distributed to civilians, including 1 to an unaccompanied/separated child
- 13 phone calls made to families to inform them of the whereabouts of a relative
- new tracing requests registered for 26 people (including 15 females); 18 people located; 77 people (including 28 females and 10 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought
- 2 people reunited with their families
- 3 official documents relayed between family members in Egypt and abroad

Refugee resettlement in third countries

Large numbers of people fleeing their home countries for political or economic reasons continued to arrive in Egypt. The majority came from Sudan but also from other countries of the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and West Africa. Only a limited number were granted refugee status and accepted for resettlement in third countries. Those that were accepted but had no valid identification papers required travel documents issued by the ICRC. This process was coordinated with the embassies of destination countries, UNHCR, IOM, governmental agencies and NGOs. Most recipients of ICRC travel documents were from Somalia and Sudan.

- ▶ 1,154 people issued with an ICRC travel document to facilitate their resettlement in third countries

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Based on its right of initiative conferred on it by the Movement's Statutes, the ICRC engaged in further discussions, begun at the end of 2006, with the Egyptian authorities regarding visits to people held on charges of endangering State security or in connection with the fight against "terrorism". Similar discussions that took place in 2003–04 had failed to result in an agreement that would have complied with standard ICRC procedures for detention visits.

On the basis of an ad hoc accord, ICRC delegates were nevertheless authorized to visit detainees held in Egypt after their release and repatriation from the US detention facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba. One such detainee in administrative detention, who had been visited several times since 2003, was seen again in a Cairo prison in March 2007 prior to his release a month later.

- ▶ 1 detainee visited during 1 visit to 1 place of detention
- ▶ 2 RCMs distributed to 1 detainee

AUTHORITIES

At the regional level, the ICRC focused on encouraging the 22 members of the League of Arab States to accede to IHL instruments to which they were not yet party and to incorporate the relevant legal provisions into their national legislation. Countries that had not done so were encouraged to establish national IHL committees, as well as parliamentary commissions on IHL. Twelve countries in the region had created national IHL committees and two were in the process of doing so.

The ICRC legal advisory service provided expertise, IHL-related documentation and draft model laws to governments and IHL implementation bodies in the region, working in collaboration with the Arab League.

- ▶ several IHL instruments ratified in 2007: the Ottawa Convention by Iraq and Kuwait; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Egypt and Yemen; and the two protocols to the Hague Convention on Cultural Property by Saudi Arabia
- ▶ a new Military Act adopted by Sudan, incorporating the repression of war crimes and crimes against humanity into its military penal code
- ▶ a national IHL committee created by Saudi Arabia
- ▶ 50 experts from the region attended the launch in Cairo of the Arabic-language version of the ICRC's study on customary IHL

- ▶ officials in 12 countries of the region received direct legal advice on and training in IHL implementation through missions organized from Cairo
- ▶ 16 Arab League member States participated in the 6th regional meeting of government experts on IHL in Cairo, organized jointly with the Egyptian Ministry of Justice and the Arab League
- ▶ hundreds of civilian and military judges and public prosecutors in Egypt attended regular IHL dissemination sessions
- ▶ the 4th annual progress report on the status of IHL implementation in the Arab world published jointly with the Arab League

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

The Arab League's Military Affairs Department invited the ICRC to participate in discussions on IHL-related issues during periodic meetings of Arab military officials at its Cairo headquarters. A joint regional seminar was held, also at the League's Cairo headquarters, for high-ranking officers of 11 Arab States, to promote the integration of IHL into their military teaching and training programmes.

Senior military and security forces officials and the ICRC continued to meet throughout the region and to organize IHL teaching and training for armed forces personnel. Dissemination sessions were also held to promote the incorporation of humanitarian principles and human rights standards into the training programmes of national security forces.

Egyptian troops scheduled for deployment in Darfur were briefed on IHL, and military training instructors attended refresher courses on IHL.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Media and other civil society circles in the Arab world were provided with background material in Arabic on IHL and the ICRC, including the quarterly *Al-Insani* (The Humanitarian) magazine. The ICRC's Arabic-language website and publications designed to increase knowledge of IHL in the Arab world were further developed.

Senior journalists from 14 Arab countries attended a regional meeting in Cairo on covering IHL issues in their reporting on armed conflicts, and a competition was launched among the media in the region, with a prize for the best article on a humanitarian topic.

In Egypt, 22 media representatives participated in a workshop on IHL and the ICRC. Meetings were held with parliamentarians, Islamic religious leaders, and staff of human rights organizations and other NGOs to explain the ICRC's mandate and activities and to gain acceptance of its independent, neutral and impartial humanitarian action.

Work also continued to promote the teaching of the ICRC's Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in schools and the inclusion of IHL in university law curricula in Egypt and elsewhere in the region.

- ▶ professors and deans from universities in 17 Arab countries participated in the 4th regional seminar on IHL teaching held in Cairo
- ▶ representatives of the Ministries of Education of 6 Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) attended a two-day workshop in Cairo, organized by the ICRC and the Egyptian Ministry of Education, to discuss integration of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme into their respective curricula
- ▶ in Egypt, experts from the Centre for Curriculum Development of the Education Ministry finalized a practical guide to teaching the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme, which was extended to schools in the governorates of Aswan, Al-Bahr al-Ahmar, Marsa Matrouh, Minia, Sinai and Al-Wadi al-Jadid, as well as to various private schools in Cairo

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

On several occasions, Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side of the Rafah border with the Gaza Strip by Israeli closures received ICRC emergency assistance distributed through the National Society. This included mattresses, blankets and hygiene kits provided to pilgrims blocked at the border on their return from Mecca.

The Egyptian Red Crescent received relief supplies and equipment to boost its emergency response capacity, and preparations were made to build a new warehouse to store supplies near the Egyptian border with the Gaza Strip.

National Society staff and volunteers were given further training and material support by the ICRC in the fields of dissemination, tracing and communication, while Palestine Red Crescent Society staff in Egypt attended a workshop on IHL and the Movement. Close coordination with the International Federation continued, including in efforts to maximize Movement support to the Egyptian Red Crescent.