

# CARACAS (regional)

**COVERING:** Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM): Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago



ICRC regional delegation

The Caracas regional delegation was established in 1971. It reinforces the capacities of the region's National Societies in the fields of IHL promotion, restoring family links, emergency response and assistance to victims of violence. It visits security detainees in the region and monitors the humanitarian situation along the Venezuelan border with Colombia. It promotes the incorporation of IHL into national legislation and into the operational procedures and training of the region's armed forces, as well as the inclusion of human rights standards in police manuals and training.

## KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS

### In 2013:

- ▶ people fleeing the Colombian conflict received orientation and medical assistance from the Venezuelan Red Cross/ICRC on arrival in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereafter Venezuela)
- ▶ residents of 10 border communities in Venezuela that were affected by the Colombian conflict, and/or that hosted vulnerable Colombians, benefited from basic medical services and first-aid training for emergency responders
- ▶ the region's National Societies enhanced their emergency response capacities with ICRC support, such as technical advice for a contingency plan in Venezuela, training in the Safer Access Framework and first-aid/safety equipment
- ▶ the ICRC unsuccessfully tried to regain access to detainees in Venezuela, following the discontinuation of visits after its contacts with the authorities were disrupted by changes in prison administration
- ▶ armed/police forces in the region, including Venezuelan army instructors and units deployed to border areas, continued reinforcing their knowledge of IHL and other pertinent norms, and their capacities to conduct related training
- ▶ in line with ICRC mobilization efforts, 12 member States of the Caribbean Community supported the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty, with 4 ratifying and 8 signing it

## YEARLY RESULT

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action

**MEDIUM**

### EXPENDITURE (in KCHF)

Protection	392
Assistance	-
Prevention	1,201
Cooperation with National Societies	490
General	-

**2,083**

of which: Overheads 127

### IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	<b>93%</b>
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### PERSONNEL

Mobile staff	3
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	9

## CONTEXT

President Hugo Chávez was re-elected in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereafter Venezuela), but was unable to begin his fourth term owing to illness, and passed away on 5 March. Nicolás Maduro won the presidential election held on 14 April; the opposition contested the results, and the ensuing protests led to casualties and arrests.

Despite some reforms initiated by Maduro's administration and the holding of municipal elections in December, economic and social instability persisted. The Venezuelan armed forces, particularly the National Guard, were increasingly involved in law enforcement operations alongside the police.

Residents of Venezuela's border states continued to feel the spillover effects of the Colombian conflict (see *Colombia*). Many of these communities also hosted Colombians who had crossed over from conflict-affected areas.

The States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) continued to cope with high crime rates, violence in urban areas and the effects of the global economic crisis. In an effort to curb crime, Trinidad and Tobago announced plans to grant the military powers similar to those of the police; the proposed legislation did not pass the Senate vote.

Migration remained an important concern, particularly in the Bahamas and Belize, which were key transit countries for migrants bound for the United States of America.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

Tensions and violence having increased, particularly in Venezuela, the Caracas regional delegation focused on supporting the region's National Societies in boosting their emergency response capacities. Training in first aid and the Safer Access Framework prepared them to respond to the humanitarian consequences of social unrest and violent protests and, in Venezuela, to help residents of border communities cope with the spillover effects of the Colombian conflict. The Venezuelan Red Cross organized medical brigades with material/financial/logistical support from the ICRC, providing basic health care to Colombian nationals who had fled fighting in their home regions and to inhabitants of remote communities with limited access to essential services.

In Venezuela, dialogue and coordination with civilian and military authorities proved challenging owing to changes related to the political situation, but progress was made in disseminating IHL and other applicable legal norms among the armed and police forces. The ICRC conducted training in these norms for armed forces and militia units stationed in border states and equipped Venezuelan army instructors to teach IHL. Such training also made headway in the CARICOM countries, particularly Belize and Trinidad and Tobago.

Contacts with Venezuelan detention authorities were disrupted following administrative changes at facilities previously visited by ICRC delegates; as a result, visits to people held in these places were discontinued. Efforts to regain access to detainees have not succeeded as of year-end.

The ICRC's efforts to promote the ratification and implementation of key IHL treaties contributed to four CARICOM member

States ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty and eight others signing it. During a meeting in Trinidad and Tobago of national IHL committees from the Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth), representatives of participating CARICOM States discussed the domestic implementation of IHL.

By fostering greater interest in and understanding of IHL-related and humanitarian issues among journalists and academics, the ICRC helped to raise public awareness of these matters and of its own role and activities. Coordination among Movement partners enabled them to share operational experiences and mutual concerns, ensuring a coherent humanitarian response.

## CIVILIANS

On arrival in Venezuela, people who had fled the conflict in Colombia received primary health care services and orientation to help them cope with their cross-border displacement. Those with critical health conditions or in need of specialized treatment were evacuated/referred to medical facilities. Around 300 people who fled fighting in the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander, Colombia, and took refuge in the Venezuelan state of Zulia for three weeks, and other Colombians who crossed the border into the Alto Apure and Guajira districts were among those who benefited from such assistance, which was provided by local branches of the Venezuelan Red Cross with material/financial support from the ICRC.

A total of 10 communities in the districts of Guasualito (Apure state) and Maracaibo (Zulia state), which hosted many Colombian nationals, boosted their capacities to deal with outbreaks of violence or other emergencies through first-aid training for 29 residents; they were also provided first-aid kits and medical supplies. Some 300 people living in remote areas in Apure, whose access to basic services was restricted by the presence of armed groups, received medical consultations from health brigades organized by the local Venezuelan Red Cross branch with ICRC logistical support.

Joint National Society/ICRC field missions to the border states of Amazonas, Apure, Táchira and Zulia identified the humanitarian needs of the people living there, including those arising from the spillover effects of the Colombian conflict; the findings served as a basis to plan further humanitarian activities. In parallel, dialogue with armed/security forces units deployed along the border with Colombia emphasized internationally recognized standards on the use of force, thus helping prevent/minimize humanitarian consequences during violent incidents (see *Authorities, armed forces and other bearers of weapons, and civil society*).

In Jamaica, 86 children living in violence-affected Kingston neighbourhoods continued to have opportunities for informal/alternative education at the Jamaica Red Cross School, which started receiving ICRC funding in 2012. The school's administration conducted a baseline survey of students' and parents' attitudes to violence, with a view to strengthening the violence-mitigation components of its curriculum.

## PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

In Venezuela, visits to monitor detainees' treatment and living conditions were discontinued, owing to the disruption of established contacts following administrative changes at detention facilities previously visited by the ICRC. Through meetings with the authorities concerned and written representations to them, the ICRC sought to regain access to people held in these places. Its efforts did not succeed during the year, but the authorities remained open to further discussions on this matter.

## AUTHORITIES, ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

### Armed forces and police enhance application of IHL and other relevant norms

Organizational changes in Venezuela's armed forces, police and militia hampered dialogue on integrating IHL in their doctrine, training and operations, but their personnel continued to receive training in IHL and other applicable norms.

At an international course held in the border state of Zulia, 60 Venezuelan armed forces and militia officers refreshed their knowledge of and sharpened their skills in applying internationally recognized law enforcement standards. In separate training sessions, 28 Belizean police/defence forces personnel and 31 police/military officers from Trinidad and Tobago did the same.

During two train-the-trainers courses in the border states of Falcon and Táchira, 80 instructors from all branches of the Venezuelan army equipped themselves to teach IHL. A Venezuelan officer, from the army's Human Rights and IHL Directorate, attended the IHL course in San Remo.

Senior military officers from Belize and Trinidad and Tobago were briefed on the relevance of integrating internationally recognized standards on the use of force into their standard operating procedures. Military officials from both countries participated in advanced IHL training abroad.

At the annual conference of the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police, high-ranking police officials from CARICOM States became better acquainted with the ICRC's working procedures through a presentation on the use of micro-economic initiatives to respond to the humanitarian consequences of gang violence in Jamaica.

### States support IHL-related treaties and legislation

Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago ratified the Arms Trade Treaty; the other eight CARICOM member States signed it. Suriname ratified Additional Protocol III, while Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made a declaration recognizing the competence of the International Humanitarian Fact-finding Commission.

Venezuela's legislature passed laws mandating disarmament and prohibiting torture, and discussed the creation of a national IHL committee. In Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Venezuela, the revision/drafting of laws implementing key IHL treaties remained pending.

Trinidad and Tobago hosted a meeting of national IHL committees from Commonwealth member States, which gave participating Caribbean States an opportunity to discuss domestic implementation of IHL.

Owing to logistical difficulties and certain internal constraints for CARICOM, dialogue with CARICOM bodies on legal frameworks applicable to situations of violence and the use of force made no significant progress.

### Journalists hone their skills in reporting on armed conflicts and other situations of violence

Senior officials from the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States expanded their IHL knowledge through an ICRC presentation at a workshop in Saint Lucia, organized by the University of the West Indies and the UNDP. Similarly, 50 Venezuelan government/judicial officials and academics secured their grasp of IHL during a study cycle at the Catholic University of Táchira taught by ICRC legal experts. Contacts with other Venezuelan universities and military educational institutions aimed to create similar opportunities for studying IHL.

At a workshop in Venezuela, 32 media professionals honed their skills in reporting on armed conflicts and other situations of violence. The workshop highlighted: the applicable legal frameworks; proper terminology to be employed in characterizing such situations; proper use of the Movement's emblems; measures to minimize risks in connection with their duties; and protection for medical personnel, vehicles, facilities and patients during emergencies. At year's end, the Defence Ministry had not yet responded to a proposal to conduct similar training for military communication specialists.

Members of civil society working in Venezuela's border states clarified their understanding of the Movement's mandate and action at various briefings. Media coverage of National Society/ICRC activities helped broaden public awareness of humanitarian issues. Dialogue with international organizations and NGOs working on migration-related issues expanded through regular contacts and the ICRC's participation in regional events.

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

### Movement partners bolster their response to the humanitarian consequences of violence

In response to growing social unrest, the Venezuelan Red Cross, with ICRC support, prepared a contingency plan for providing emergency care and conducting medical evacuations. First-aid kits, protective gear and communications equipment for its staff/volunteers were pre-positioned at six regional relief operations centres across the country, enabling them to respond rapidly to humanitarian needs.

Likewise, the Belize Red Cross Society and the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society, through training in the Safer Access Framework, boosted their capacities to respond to the consequences of violence.

Joint field missions to Venezuelan border states enabled National Society branches and the ICRC to gain a better understanding of current needs and plan their response accordingly (see *Civilians*). The National Societies of Belize, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela contributed to training courses for the armed forces/police (see *Authorities, armed forces and other bearers of weapons, and civil society*) by conducting first-aid drills and familiarizing the participants with Movement activities.

Venezuelan Red Cross communication staff bolstered their skills in disseminating information on the Movement's humanitarian

action, including through social media. The Health Care in Danger project was given special emphasis during these workshops, spurring the National Society to start collecting data on incidents affecting the safety of health personnel and facilities as a basis for future action.

### National Societies strengthen their family-links, legal and management capacities

The National Societies of the Bahamas and Belize sent representatives to a regional family-links meeting in Cuba (see *Mexico City*), where they strengthened their capacities to provide assistance, particularly to migrants, in maintaining/re-establishing family contact. The Bahamas Red Cross Society, which received a significant number of tracing requests in relation to Cuban migrants, took

steps to incorporate family-links activities in its national plan of action.

Legal advisers from the Red Cross Societies of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela – seeking to strengthen the legal bases of their National Societies – refined their knowledge of IHL at a meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Leaders from National Societies in the region enhanced their management capacities by attending a cooperation meeting in Trinidad and Tobago and a course in Geneva.

Coordination among Movement partners enabled them to share operational experiences and mutual concerns, thus ensuring a coherent humanitarian response.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS <sup>1</sup>		Total		
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</b>				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		3	1	2
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		1		1
<b>Documents</b>				
People to whom travel documents were issued		5		
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>				
<b>Restoring family links</b>				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		1		

<sup>1</sup> Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela