

tunis (regional)



The regional delegation based in Tunis, which has been operating since 1987, regularly visits people deprived of their freedom in Mauritania and Tunisia to monitor their treatment and conditions of detention. Acting as a neutral intermediary, it is also involved in efforts to resolve issues of humanitarian concern arising from the aftermath of the Western Sahara conflict. It works to promote implementation of IHL by the authorities and its integration into school and university curricula and into training programmes for the armed forces. National Societies and the media in the region are essential partners in this process.

COVERING
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco/Western Sahara, Tunisia

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	3,030
Assistance	647
Prevention	1,316
Cooperation with National Societies	312
General	-

► **5,304**
of which: Overheads 324

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	97%
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PERSONNEL

19	expatriates
26	national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- continued to visit people deprived of their freedom in Mauritania and Tunisia
- re-established or maintained links between families in Maghreb countries and relatives detained/interned abroad
- set up a physical rehabilitation centre in Rabouni (south-western Algeria) to treat disabled Sahrawis
- signed a cooperation agreement with the Moroccan Ministry of Education with a view to implementing the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in Morocco
- held for the first time in Libya a series of seminars on IHL for the Libyan armed forces
- signed a cooperation agreement with the Moroccan Red Crescent on the dissemination of IHL

CONTEXT

Security forces throughout the region remained on high alert following several car-bomb and suicide attacks in Algeria (see *Algeria*), Mauritania and Morocco against government and Western targets, and violent clashes between security forces and armed militants in Tunisia. The al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, previously known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. An undisclosed number of arrests were made in various countries of the region as they sought to contain Islamist radicalism.

Morocco and the Polisario Front remained divided on the future status of the Western Sahara. In April, Morocco submitted an autonomy plan for the Western Sahara to the UN. The Polisario Front rejected the plan, insisting on the holding of a referendum on the territory's independence. Direct talks between the two parties, held in New York, United States, failed to break the deadlock.

In March, presidential elections took place in Mauritania in what observers described as the first fully democratic ballot in the country since it became independent in 1960. The new president confirmed his commitment to promote national unity. In Morocco, the conservative Istiqlal Party formed a new coalition government with three other parties after winning the most votes in parliamentary elections in September.

Mauritania, Morocco and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya remained preferred transit countries for many sub-Saharan nationals and others seeking irregular entry to Europe.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)¹	
Detainees visited	21,851
Detainees visited and monitored individually	617
Number of visits carried out	97
Number of places of detention visited	58
RESTORING FAMILY LINKS	
<i>Red Cross messages (RCMs) and reunifications</i>	
RCMs collected	237
RCMs distributed	221
<i>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</i>	
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	20
<i>of whom females</i>	7
<i>of whom minors at the time of disappearance</i>	1
Tracing cases closed positively (persons located)	16
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2007 (people)	631
<i>of which for females</i>	37
<i>of which for minors at the time of disappearance</i>	24

1. Mauritania and Tunisia

ICRC ACTION

ICRC action focused on visits to people deprived of their freedom in Mauritania and Tunisia and on addressing humanitarian issues stemming from the 1975–91 Western Sahara conflict.

Acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC worked with the Moroccan authorities and the Polisario Front to resolve the cases of combatants and civilians from both sides still missing in connection with the Western Sahara conflict.

The cooperation agreement signed in November 2006 with the Polisario Front health administration paved the way for the construction of a physical rehabilitation centre for disabled Sahrawis, particularly mine victims, in the Tindouf region of Algeria.

Another ongoing priority for the ICRC in the region was to help accelerate the national implementation of IHL and its integration into military teaching and training programmes and academic curricula, in conjunction with the national authorities, implementation bodies and the National Societies.

Particular importance was attached to developing relations and cooperation with key sectors of civil society in the region, such as the media, the Tunis-based Arab Institute for Human Rights, human rights organizations, professional lawyers' associations, NGOs and influential religious and academic institutions.

The ICRC continued to monitor the growing problem of irregular migration, particularly in Mauritania and Morocco.

As in past years, people in the region were able, through the RCM network, to restore or maintain contact with family members detained/interned in Afghanistan, Iraq and the US detention facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba.

CIVILIANS

Families in North Africa continued to rely on ICRC tracing and family-links services to restore contact with close relatives detained/interned abroad or present in countries where armed conflict or other situations of violence had made communications difficult.

The Moroccan authorities and the Polisario Front cooperated with the ICRC in continuing efforts to clarify the fate of both civilians and former combatants unaccounted for in connection with the 1975–91 Western Sahara conflict. The immediate aim of the talks was to establish consolidated lists of people unaccounted for as the basis for further steps toward the resolution of missing cases.

In the region:

- 203 RCMs collected from and 207 RCMs distributed to civilians
- new tracing requests registered for 20 people (including 7 females and 1 minor at the time of disappearance); 16 people located; 631 people (including 37 females and 24 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought
- 5 Tunisian nationals repatriated under ICRC auspices after their release from detention in Iraq

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

People deprived of their freedom in Mauritania and Tunisia were visited regularly by ICRC delegates, in accordance with agreements signed with the respective authorities in 2005. Emphasis was placed on visits to people convicted of acts endangering State security, as well as particularly vulnerable groups such as foreign detainees, destitute detainees and people sentenced to death. Following the visits, representations and recommendations on detainees' treatment and conditions of detention were made to the detaining authorities.

In addition to regular visits to places of detention in Mauritania, the ICRC gave advice to the Mauritanian penitentiary authorities in its efforts to improve the prison system. Nouakchott central prison was fully disinfected, with ICRC support.

Tunisia

- ▶ 20,073 detainees visited, of whom 605 monitored individually (including 1 minor) and 446 newly registered (including 1 minor), during 21 visits to 13 places of detention
- ▶ 31 RCMs collected from and 12 RCMs distributed to detainees and 29 phone calls made to families to inform them of the whereabouts of a detained relative

Mauritania

- ▶ 1,777 detainees visited, of whom 11 monitored individually and 4 newly registered, during 75 visits to 44 places of detention
- ▶ 3 RCMs collected from and 2 RCMs distributed to detainees

Morocco

- ▶ 1 follow-up visit to a former Guantanamo detainee, currently held in detention in Morocco

WOUNDED AND SICK

In accordance with an agreement concluded with the Polisario Front in 2006, the ICRC established an orthopaedic workshop at the Martyr Chreif Sherif centre in Noukhaila, in the Sahrawi refugee camps of south-western Algeria. The workshop, due to become operational early next year, will produce prostheses and orthoses for disabled Sahrawis.

AUTHORITIES

Members of the Moroccan national IHL committee and the ICRC worked closely to promote the inclusion of IHL teaching in university law faculties, and parliamentarians were briefed on the challenges facing IHL in today's world and international criminal jurisdiction.

The Tunisian national IHL committee, with ICRC support, conducted a training workshop on IHL for judges selected as future trainers. For the first time, two conferences were organized for students of the Diplomatic Institute of Tunis.

Representatives of the national IHL committees of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco and Tunisia took part in the Second Universal Meeting of National IHL Committees in Geneva, Switzerland, which focused on legal measures and mechanisms to prevent disappearances, clarify the fate of missing persons and assist their families.

Representatives of the armed forces and of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the five countries of the Maghreb participated in a preparatory seminar to the international conference held in Amman, Jordan, in November on the implementation of the Ottawa Convention.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

At year-end, the armed forces of countries of the Maghreb were at various stages of progress in integrating IHL into their doctrine and basic training programmes.

- ▶ 18 training instructors of the Mauritanian armed forces participated in a refresher course on IHL
- ▶ in Tunisia: armed forces personnel at the Military Academy in Tunis attended presentations on IHL and peacekeeping operations; military judges attended IHL sessions; 150 students at the National School for Prisons and Rehabilitation attended lectures on IHL provisions governing the protection of civilians during conflict and peacetime
- ▶ in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya: 24 senior officers from the navy and air force participated in a five-day course on IHL; some 100 students from several military schools attended lectures on the basic principles and rules of IHL; an IHL session held for the military judiciary directorate
- ▶ in Morocco: 31 officers from the army, navy and air force participated in a five-day course on IHL

CIVIL SOCIETY

Networking was reinforced with influential members of civil society, including Islamic scholars, human rights organizations, professional, cultural and youth associations, and the media to enlist their support in the promotion and implementation of IHL and for ICRC activities.

- ▶ the Moroccan Ministry of Education, via its Human Rights and Citizenship Committee, and the ICRC revived the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme by signing a new cooperation agreement, convening a national meeting and organizing two workshops for members of curricula commissions
- ▶ a study on IHL teaching in Moroccan universities carried out in cooperation with IHL experts and law faculties, with ICRC support
- ▶ 14 Moroccan law faculties received documentation and books on IHL
- ▶ the sharia faculty of Al-Qarawiyyin University in Agadir, Morocco, with ICRC support, organized a two-day workshop on the protection of civilians afforded by Islamic law and IHL
- ▶ experts in international law attended a session on the International Criminal Court organized by the Tunis Bar Association and the ICRC
- ▶ students of Tunis-based film and multimedia schools took part in a project launched by the ICRC to produce documentaries and other works on the protection of victims of armed conflict, with the best productions being shown at the European film festival in Tunis and presented during a public event organized by the ICRC
- ▶ representatives of human rights groups from North African countries participated in a seminar on IHL, human rights and detention issues, organized by the ICRC with the support of the Arab Institute for Human Rights
- ▶ Tunis-based media briefed on ICRC action in the region and worldwide

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The region's National Societies received support from the ICRC, in cooperation with the International Federation, in developing their capacities to carry out tracing activities and to promote IHL and the Fundamental Principles.

A cooperation agreement was signed by the ICRC and the Moroccan Red Crescent on the modernization of its IHL documentation centre in Rabat and the establishment of similar centres in other cities in the country. Red Crescent volunteers in charge of the centres received ICRC training.