



mexico city (regional)

The Mexico delegation opened in 1998, becoming a regional delegation in 2002. It strengthens the capacities of the region's National Societies, mainly in the areas of dissemination and tracing, assists Colombian refugees in Panama's Darién region and the local populations hosting them, monitors the conditions of detainees in Mexico and Panama, and endeavours to ascertain the fate of missing persons, particularly in Guatemala. The delegation hosts the Advisory Service on IHL for Latin America and the Caribbean. It also seeks to integrate IHL into academic curricula and the doctrine and training of the armed forces (human rights norms applicable to the use of force in the case of the police).

COVERING

Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	568
Assistance	52
Prevention	2,595
Cooperation with National Societies	842
General	-

► **4,058**

of which: Overheads 248

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	82%
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PERSONNEL

7	expatriates
24	national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- ▶ organized jointly with a Guatemalan NGO the First International Conference on Psychosocial Work in the Exhumation Process, Forced Disappearance, Justice and Truth
- ▶ pursued its visits to detainees in Mexico, especially in the state of Oaxaca, and its efforts to conclude a comprehensive agreement on prison visits with the Mexican authorities
- ▶ promoted the inclusion of the repression of war crimes in national legislation throughout the region
- ▶ welcomed the enactment of a new criminal code in Panama incorporating a comprehensive chapter on the repression of war crimes
- ▶ completed the training phase of a programme enabling more than 100 university lecturers to teach IHL
- ▶ assisted the Mexican Red Cross in tracing people affected by floods in the states of Tabasco and Chiapas

CONTEXT

In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, violence linked to the expansion of organized crime gangs or *maras*, made up of juvenile delinquents, continued to take its toll. Governments treated the problem primarily as a threat to national security, rather than as a social issue.

In El Salvador, people participating in street demonstrations or social protests risked arrest under new anti-terrorist legislation. The region's armed forces established military police battalions to support traditional police units in fighting organized crime.

Social unrest continued to simmer in the impoverished Mexican state of Oaxaca, and student protests flared up at the end of the year in the state of Guerrero. The Mexican Supreme Court ordered an investigation into human rights violations alleged to have taken place after the federal police were sent in to deal with the protests. President Felipe Calderón created a special force within the army, answerable directly to the Office of the Presidency, to support the police in law enforcement operations.

To stem the tide of Central American and Mexican migrants crossing into the United States of America, the US government went ahead with plans to build a 1,100-km fence along the US-Mexican border and to deploy National Guard troops to support border patrols. Although these measures did not deter would-be migrants from attempting the crossing, it led to an increasing number of them dying in the desert or being deported to their countries of origin, with many languishing in border towns between Guatemala and Mexico.

In Mexico, the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) claimed responsibility for a series of explosions which damaged pipelines belonging to the State oil and gas company.

In Guatemala, some 8,000 of an estimated 45,000 families had received compensation for the death or disappearance of a relative during the non-international armed conflict that had spanned more than 30 years. In August, Congress approved the creation of an independent International Commission against Impunity in response to concerns that clandestine security organizations had continued to operate with impunity since the signing of the peace accords in 1996. Also in Guatemala, more than 50 candidates and campaign aides were murdered in the run-up to general elections held in September 2007 – the worst spate of political violence the country had seen since the end of the conflict.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)¹	
Detainees visited	34
Detainees visited and monitored individually	34
<i>of whom females</i>	2
Number of visits carried out	9
Number of places of detention visited	7

1. Mexico only

At the end of October, heavy flooding in south-eastern Mexico affected close to 1 million people in the state of Tabasco and another 100,000 in Chiapas.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC continued to visit people detained at the end of 2006 as a result of violent clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement agencies in the Mexican state of Oaxaca and offered to visit people arrested at the end of the year during clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement agencies in the state of Guerrero. It also continued to monitor the conditions of detention of people detained for alleged links with armed groups and pursued its dialogue with the Mexican authorities with a view to signing a comprehensive agreement on prison visits.

The ICRC upgraded its office in Guatemala City to a mission with a view to supporting government authorities and relevant NGOs in efforts to address the issue of persons unaccounted for in connection with Guatemala's 36-year conflict and to assist their families.

High-level discussions with armed and police forces throughout the region and the organization of workshops on IHL and international human rights law contributed to raising awareness of the need to respect the rules applicable to the use of force during law enforcement operations.

The ICRC continued to encourage all governments in the region to integrate IHL instruments in general, and the Rome Statute in particular, into their national legislation.

Work continued with the Red Cross Society of Panama to ensure that Colombian refugees in the Darién region received adequate assistance and protection. The ICRC cooperated with National Societies in the region, supporting programmes to restore family links, particularly during the flooding in Mexico, to promote IHL and the Fundamental Principles, and to implement the Safer Access approach. The ICRC laid the groundwork for projects aimed at supporting the Mexican Red Cross in assisting migrants and the Honduran Red Cross in deterring children and teenagers from joining street gangs.

The ICRC completed the training of 110 university lecturers in IHL, a programme initiated in 2004 to create a pool of experts capable of promoting the integration of IHL into university courses and its dissemination among the armed forces, the authorities, National Societies, the media and academic circles.

An agreement signed with Honduras's education authorities paved the way for the implementation of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme aimed at secondary school children.

Health professionals and humanitarian aid workers from government agencies, NGOs and the Movement throughout Latin America participated in the fifth Health Emergencies in Large Populations (H.E.L.P.) course organized by the ICRC in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in November.

CIVILIANS

Assistance to refugees and residents in the Darién region, Panama

Colombian refugees and indigenous families displaced by the spillover from the Colombian conflict, who were living in Panama's remote jungle region of Darién, were better equipped to survive in their difficult surroundings after receiving assistance from the Panamanian Red Cross. The assistance programme was supported by the ICRC. Families settled in eight communities in the upper Río Tuira received medical and dental care, food and household items. Some 150 families improved their diets after they set up vegetable gardens with seed and agricultural tools brought in by the Panamanian Red Cross. Following an assessment, several families received building materials (zinc sheeting, cement and PVC pipes), as needed, to upgrade their dwellings and/or their latrines. In addition:

- ▶ 5 children air-lifted to Panama City for specialized medical treatment or corrective surgery
- ▶ 28 health promoters from 7 communities in the upper Río Tuira upgraded their first-aid skills and received supplies to restock community first-aid kits
- ▶ 3 RCMs collected from and 6 RCMs distributed to civilians, including 1 to an unaccompanied/separated child
- ▶ new tracing requests registered for 6 people (including 5 females and 3 minors at the time of disappearance); 1 person located; 5 people (including 4 females and 4 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought

Addressing migrants' needs and youth violence

Contacts with the Mexican Red Cross and with NGOs working in border regions with Central American and Mexican migrants attempting or having failed to reach the United States enabled the ICRC to lay the groundwork for a project, to be implemented in 2008, to help Mexican Red Cross branches take a more proactive role in addressing migrants' emergency needs.

In Honduras, the ICRC sought to address the issue of youth violence, prevalent in many Central American countries, by supporting a programme implemented by the Honduran Red Cross in a deprived neighbourhood of the capital, Tegucigalpa, to deter young people from joining street gangs. Over 250 families benefited from the programme, with training materials supplied by the ICRC.

Weapon contamination in Nicaragua

Following a review of its support to the Nicaraguan Red Cross's mine-action programme, the ICRC decided to discontinue its involvement owing to a marked reduction in the threat posed to civilians by weapon contamination in affected regions.

Clarifying the fate of missing persons in Guatemala

Draft laws on the establishment of permanent commissions for the tracing of persons unaccounted for in connection with the 36-year non-international armed conflict and compensation for their families were pending final approval in Congress.

Some 130 specialists, and government and NGO representatives from around the world, participated in February in the First International Conference on Psychosocial Work in the Exhumation Process, Forced Disappearance, Justice and Truth, co-organized by the Guatemalan Community Studies and Psychosocial Action Team, the leading Guatemalan NGO in this field, and the ICRC. Participants were briefed on the ICRC's recommendations on forensic science and data management as well as counselling for family members of missing persons. Forensic experts from the region shared best practices, established common criteria and methodologies for the identification of human remains, and forged stronger links with each other by attending several regional conferences on the subject. Ten forensic science students from El Salvador received further training at the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), an NGO that conducted the majority of exhumations of victims of the armed conflict. The head of the FAFG was trained in DNA identification with a view to developing, together with the government, a DNA testing capacity in Guatemala.

With ICRC technical assistance, NGOs and national institutions working on the issue of missing persons set up a technical working group to standardize the management of forensic data. Guatemala's two major forensic NGOs, FAFG and the Centre for Forensic Anthropology and Applied Sciences, were testing software developed by the ICRC for the management of ante- and post-mortem data.

- 170 families from 23 Mayan communities buried the remains of their relatives, with ICRC support

With ICRC financial assistance, the National Commission for the Search for Disappeared Children located people who had been subjected to enforced disappearance as children during the armed conflict.

Restoring family links

Following severe flooding in the Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas, an ICRC team travelled to the affected area to assist the Mexican Red Cross in setting up a family-links programme (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*).

- 574 names placed on the ICRC family-links website, www.familylinks.icrc.org, in connection with the flooding in Tabasco and Chiapas

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

In Mexico, ICRC delegates continued to monitor the conditions of detention of people detained for alleged links with armed groups, as well as of people arrested as a result of clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement agencies in several Mexican states, notably Oaxaca. The ICRC continued to seek a comprehensive

agreement on prison visits to facilitate its work in the country's five high-security prisons under the authority of the federal government.

- 34 detainees visited, all of whom monitored individually (including 2 females) and 7 newly registered, during 9 visits to 7 places of detention
- 9 detainees visited by their relatives with the support of the ICRC; 1 detainee received eyeglasses

The delegation kept abreast of developments in El Salvador, where scores of people participating in street protests were arrested under recent anti-terrorist legislation.

In May 2007, the Cuban authorities informed the ICRC orally that it was still too early to consider the organization's renewed offer, made in December 2006, to visit security detainees.

AUTHORITIES

The ICRC contributed to guidelines incorporating IHL criteria into the Central American Integration System's code of conduct relative to the transfer of arms, ammunition, explosives and related materials.

At a meeting in Mexico City on IHL implementation in the Americas, jointly organized by the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Organization of American States and the ICRC, participants agreed to push for the national implementation of IHL instruments, particularly with regard to the inclusion of the repression of war crimes in criminal codes, the prohibition/restriction of certain weapons and the issue of missing persons.

The ICRC submitted recommendations to the Panamanian government relating to legislation on missing persons, based on a comparative study to determine whether existing legislation met international norms applicable to enforced disappearance.

Countries in the region made progress in the implementation of the Rome Statute. Nicaragua and Panama included a comprehensive chapter on the repression of war crimes in their revised criminal codes, adopted by Panama in May and approved by Nicaragua's parliament in November.

With ICRC support, the national IHL committees of El Salvador and Guatemala helped Honduras set up an IHL committee and trained its members. El Salvador's IHL committee completed the first phase of a plan to protect cultural property in the event of an armed conflict.

The Cuban authorities indicated a willingness to work more closely with the ICRC on IHL implementation in the near future.

With ICRC technical support:

- Cuba ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Nicaragua signed, and Cuba and El Salvador ratified amended Article 1 to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
- Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- the Dominican Republic and Mexico passed a law protecting the emblem
- El Salvador ratified Additional Protocol III

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

The integration of IHL into the training programmes of the armed forces of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua intensified following the renewal of a cooperation agreement with the Conference of Central American Armed Forces and closer ties with the military in the Dominican Republic. The armed forces in the region, who participated increasingly in law enforcement operations with the police or acted in their place, were keen to learn about human rights norms relevant to policing and the appropriate use of force in law enforcement operations.

Police forces in Mexico and Nicaragua pursued training in human rights norms applicable to policing. A cooperation agreement between the Mexico City Human Rights Commission and the ICRC paved the way for police in the capital to attend courses on international human rights law. Relevant authorities in Mexico City were examining a draft memorandum of understanding submitted by the ICRC on the integration of international human rights law into police manuals, training and procedures.

- ▶ over 2,150 senior army and military police officers from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua attended workshops on the appropriate use of force and on assistance owed to victims of violence during law enforcement operations
- ▶ army instructors from Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua attended 7 IHL train-the-trainer courses
- ▶ army personnel in Guatemala and Mexico participated in exercises simulating conflict situations in which IHL was applied
- ▶ military legal advisers from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Nicaragua deepened their understanding of IHL during a course in Nicaragua
- ▶ 3 high-ranking officers from Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua attended the Senior Workshop on International Rules governing Military Operations (SWIRMO) in Geneva, Switzerland

CIVIL SOCIETY

A cooperation agreement between the Mexico City Human Rights Commission and the ICRC (see *Armed forces and other bearers of weapons*) enabled members of civil society, including journalists, to attend workshops on IHL and basic humanitarian principles.

Following the signing of a cooperation agreement with the Honduran education authorities on implementing the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme, 55 teachers were trained in the programme and began teaching it to secondary school children.

By year-end, 110 university lecturers in the region had been trained in teaching IHL, thus completing the teacher-training stage of the process; 19 universities had integrated IHL into their curricula.

- ▶ 25 journalists attended a regional seminar in Costa Rica on reporting in situations of violence
- ▶ participants in an annual seminar of the National Union of Cuban Jurists learned about current challenges facing IHL
- ▶ 26 ICRC-trained lecturers participated in IHL dissemination sessions for the armed forces, national authorities, National Societies, the media and universities

- ▶ 9 university students from Costa Rica and Mexico participated in the Jean Pictet IHL competition in El Escorial, Spain

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The region's National Societies strengthened their capacities to promote IHL and the Fundamental Principles, restore family links and respond safely to the consequences of humanitarian emergencies.

Senior management from five National Societies participated in workshops on emblem protection, the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures, the Safer Access approach and the restoring family links strategy. The Guatemalan and Honduran National Societies developed their 2008–11 strategic plans with ICRC support.

A regional database developed by the ICRC facilitated the tracing by National Societies of people affected by flooding in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico and Nicaragua.

The National Societies of Costa Rica, El Salvador and Mexico prepared a safety manual for staff working in emergencies. Opinion surveys undertaken by the Panamanian and Salvadoran National Societies in 2006 enabled them to launch a campaign promoting respect for the emblem and the Fundamental Principles, in line with Safer Access guidelines, and to fine-tune their communication strategies. The Guatemalan and Honduran National Societies undertook similar surveys in 2007.

With ICRC support, the Honduran Red Cross implemented a project to prevent youth violence (see *Civilians*).

- ▶ 300 volunteers trained in the Safer Access approach during 6 workshops organized by the Mexican Red Cross
- ▶ 8,800 people in the region received basic training in IHL and the Fundamental Principles