

republic of the Congo



⊕ ICRC delegation
 ⊕ ICRC sub-delegation
 + ICRC office
 + ICRC antenna

The ICRC has been operating in the Republic of the Congo since 1994, first as part of the Kinshasa regional delegation and from 1998 onwards as a separate delegation. Through regular dialogue with the authorities, the ICRC aims to improve respect for civilians and detainees and to ensure that basic human rights and other international standards are maintained in the treatment of detainees. The delegation promotes the formal inclusion of IHL in the instruction of the armed forces, police and *gendarmérie*, and spreads knowledge of IHL among all armed groups. The ICRC provides displaced people, returnees and residents affected by the conflict with essential household items and agricultural assistance. It improves water, sanitation and health facilities and raises hygiene awareness. It also restores contact between relatives separated by conflict, reuniting children with their families where possible.

EXPENDITURE IN CHF

Protection

1,425,031

Assistance

6,013,798

Preventive action

1,574,157

Cooperation with National Societies

149,599

General

10,235

▶ **9,172,819**

of which: Overheads **558,818**

PERSONNEL

15 expatriates

117 national staff

KEY POINTS IN 2004

- ▶ The ICRC improved drinking-water supply and sanitary conditions for some 95,000 people and provided essential household items, seeds and tools to 64,900 people.
- ▶ It rehabilitated 8 integrated health centres in the Pool region and provided them with medical assistance to ensure adequate care for residents in the aftermath of the conflict.
- ▶ The ICRC visited 2,370 detainees to monitor their living conditions and treatment.
- ▶ It reunited 9 children with their families and delivered some 4,300 RCMs for civilians seeking to maintain contact with their families.
- ▶ The government was encouraged to accede to and implement IHL treaties; during the year it ratified the ICC Statute and adopted national legislation implementing the Ottawa Convention; parliament also discussed a law on the red cross emblem.
- ▶ The ICRC supported the armed forces, police and *gendarmérie* in their efforts to integrate IHL or human rights standards and humanitarian principles into their training programmes.

CONTEXT

In 2004 the situation in the Republic of the Congo remained at a stalemate – neither peace nor war. The ceasefire agreement of March 2003 between the government and the National Resistance Council (NRC) held, with both sides making the effort to avoid an outbreak of fighting. However, the process to disarm and integrate the Ninja militia fighters into the army or civilian life did not get under way, nor did the political process to integrate their leader, Pasteur Ntumi, and his close associates in the NRC into the government.

An uneasy peace prevailed in the Pool region, with armed fighters from both sides co-existing pending progress on a political level. There were various acts of banditry, including the looting of merchandise on trains, although both sides did clamp down on the actions of their forces to try and improve security. However, in the last two months of the year, the security situation deteriorated again in the countryside and around the towns of Kinkala and Mindouli.

The uncertainty made it difficult for thousands of former internally displaced people (IDPs), who had returned to their homes amid a climate of relative stability in Pool, to resume normal life. Weapon bearers were still present in the areas where they lived, hindering activities such as farming and trade, and checkpoints remained in operation in the region. Most of the population continued to be heavily dependent on outside aid to keep dilapidated social services running.

While the IDP camps in the capital had been dismantled, many refugees were scattered throughout the major cities and towns, including Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, or were living in camps and villages along the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Some 60,000 refugees had come from the DRC, while a further 6,000 were from Rwanda and other African countries, including Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC urged the authorities and NRC leaders to prevent harassment of and acts of violence against the civilian population by members of the security forces and the Ninja militias. It continued operating its Red Cross message (RCM) service for refugees to enable them to maintain ties with their families back home. Most of the IDPs had resettled and had no further need of the service. The tracing network remained, however, a key means of locating the relatives of children separated from their families.

The ICRC remained one of the few humanitarian organizations carrying out assistance activities on a large scale in Pool. It continued its water-supply rehabilitation programme, started in 1998, to provide tens of thousands of residents, long-term displaced people and returnees with access to safe drinking water. It rehabilitated eight health centres and gave them the supplies necessary to offer free health care. It provided essential household items, seeds and tools to tens of thousands of people and developed a programme to multiply cassava plants resistant to the mosaic virus.

ICRC delegates continued to visit detainees to monitor their treatment and living conditions. They held extensive information sessions on international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights standards and humanitarian principles for the armed forces, police and Ninja militias and supported the integration of these concepts into the training of the armed and security forces.

The ICRC worked with the government to promote the ratification and implementation of IHL treaties. During the year the government ratified the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and adopted national legislation implementing the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines. The National Assembly also discussed a law to protect the red cross emblem.

CIVILIANS

Ensuring protection of civilians

In general, the security problems faced by civilians in Pool increased in 2004. There was a rise in acts of looting, pillage and rape, while checkpoints were often an opportunity for armed groups to practise extortion, given the traffic of merchandise. The ICRC urged the Ministry of Defence and Pasteur Ntumi's representatives to instil restraint

among forces loyal to them in their dealings with the civilian population.

Restoring family links

The use of the RCM service fell significantly during the year owing to a decrease in demand. The service was mostly used by Rwandan and Congolese refugees seeking to maintain contact with their families in their home countries; very few RCMs were distributed in Pool or areas covered by the Dolisie office.

With the support of the Episcopal Commission for Migrants and Refugees, the ICRC continued to operate its tracing service for children separated from their families both in Brazzaville and in other regions. As part of these efforts, it registered children separated from their families and living in refugee communities in the north of the country and followed up on active tracing cases concerning minors.

- ▶ 9 children reunited with their families
- ▶ 23 children separated from their families registered
- ▶ 46 cases of children separated from their families pending
- ▶ 4,300 RCMs delivered and 2,526 collected
- ▶ 38 tracing requests received and 30 cases pending, 29 people sought by their relatives located

Ensuring safe drinking water, sanitation and basic hygiene

The ICRC's water unit worked with the urban and rural water boards, the Société Nationale de Distribution d'Eau (SNDE) and the Direction de l'Hydraulique et de l'Assainissement (DHA), to improve the drinking-water supply for the population without access to clean water. It also worked closely with the ICRC's health, economic security, protection and cooperation units to ensure activities were mutually supportive and that the basic needs of the population were met.

The majority of the ICRC's water projects were conducted in the Pool region. They ranged from upgrading latrines or spring-catchment systems in hospitals, integrated health centres and a school in Kinkala to maintaining springs, pumps and wells in the districts of Kindamba, Mindouli and Kinkala. It also finished the second stage of a large water-network project in Mindouli.

Outside Pool, the ICRC rehabilitated rain-water-collection systems and hand pumps for wells in the departments of Lékoumou and Bouenza. In cooperation with the SNDE

in Mossendjo (Niari), it started the rehabilitation of a water-treatment plant (to benefit 23,000 people) and a dyke. In Plateaux and Cuvette in the north, it worked with the DHA on a pilot project to repair hand pumps installed on 100 deep wells.

The ICRC launched an education programme in mid-2004 to improve hygiene and sanitation practices and the maintenance of water sources and pumps. In the departments of Bouenza, Lékoumou and Niari, it also organized information sessions for the public and helped set up local water committees; information leaflets were widely distributed.

To ensure that earlier projects were being maintained, the ICRC delivered water-analysis equipment to rehabilitated water-treatment plants in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Dolisie, Nkayi, Madingou and Owando and trained SNDE agents to check the water quality.

- ▶ 2,000 people provided with access to latrines
- ▶ 76 rural clean-water points constructed or rehabilitated (deep well with hand pump, spring catchment or gravity system)
- ▶ 4 rainwater-catchment systems repaired or constructed
- ▶ 8 health centres in Pool rehabilitated
- ▶ 90,000 residents and 3,000 IDPs provided with access to clean water
- ▶ emergency supplies of equipment and chemicals maintained in Brazzaville

Improving the economic situation of conflict-affected civilians

The ICRC kept up a programme started in late 2003 to assist families living in Pool. Families in the districts of Kimba, Kindamba, Kinkala, Mindouli and Vinza received essential household items and other assistance with which to generate an income. The programme was due to be completed in February 2005.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agricultural Organization, the ICRC initiated a project to help farmers in Kindamba, Kinkala, Lékana and Mindouli produce cassava plants resistant to the mosaic virus. The ICRC supervised the project and transported cassava cuttings from the multiplication fields to the plantations. One of the aims of the project was to supply the Ministry of Agriculture with 40,000 cuttings of the mosaic-resistant variety of cassava so it could continue to multiply them and perpetuate the production process.

- ▶ 64,900 individuals provided with kitchen sets, buckets, hoes, machetes, vegetable-seed kits, items of clothing, blankets, mosquito nets, mats, soap, lengths of cloth for use as sarongs, and booklets containing agricultural advice
- ▶ 4 plantations planted with cassava cuttings to benefit some 4,500 families
- ▶ 600 people involved in the development of the cassava project given hoes, machetes, axes, shovels, files, forks, rakes, wheelbarrows, split peas and rice

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Monitoring conditions of detention

In line with an agreement signed in 1999 granting it access to all places of detention in the Republic of the Congo (including prisons, police stations/posts and special unit centres), the ICRC assessed the treatment and living conditions of detainees. Where necessary, it urged the detaining authorities to make improvements. It also submitted a report to the authorities on visits carried out to police stations and posts in Brazzaville in 2002 and 2003.

Following the reactivation of the country's criminal justice system and the reopening of abandoned prison facilities, the ICRC met the minister of justice in March to discuss the capacity of places of detention. It continued agricultural projects (initiated in September 2003) in places of detention to ensure detainees had access to more nutritious food. It also continued to conduct ad hoc repairs to sanitation facilities wherever the authorities were unable to do so themselves.

- ▶ 127 visits carried out to 52 places of detention
- ▶ 2,370 detainees (mostly in prisons in Brazzaville, Dolisie and Pointe-Noire) visited
- ▶ sanitation projects undertaken for the benefit of numerous detainees

WOUNDED AND SICK

Basic health care for civilians in Pool

With the health infrastructure now in place, the ICRC was able to support eight health centres in Pool, supplying them with medicines, medical materials, weekly supervision and on-the-spot training and monitoring to ensure that civilians received basic preventive and curative health care. It also rehabilitated the centres in collaboration with the local authorities. Malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, sexually transmitted

diseases and dermatosis were the main health problems encountered in the region.

The ICRC facilitated the establishment of health committees to ensure community participation in the management of the health centres. It provided financial and technical support for the training of committee members. It also gave logistical support to the Expanded Programme on Immunization so that children and pregnant women could be vaccinated at the centres, and organized outreach immunization campaigns to combat diseases such as measles and polio.

To ensure that former fighters and other war-wounded patients received medical care, the ICRC provided ad hoc medical supplies to the Central Military Hospital in Brazzaville. It also maintained emergency medical stocks to cover the needs of up to 10,000 newly displaced people for a period of three months.

- ▶ 8 integrated health centres in Pool renovated (Kimba, Kibouendi, Kinkasa, Kinkembo, Madzia, Massembou-Loubaki, Matoumbou, Missafou) and supplied them with medicines and medical materials
- ▶ 5 days of training organized for about 30 members of health committees in Kinkala

AUTHORITIES

Accession to and implementation of IHL instruments

During the year, the government formally acceded to the ICC Statute and deposited its instruments with the UN Secretary-General in May. It also took steps to implement some of the treaties to which it was already party, for example, adopting national legislation for the Ottawa treaty.

A key event in the year was a discussion in the National Assembly on a law to protect the red cross emblem that had been put forward by the Congolese Red Cross Society (CRCS). The ICRC encouraged the government to accede to other major IHL instruments such as the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, while it also submitted further comments on the draft Code of Military Justice.

Awareness of and support for the ICRC

To keep the authorities informed of its activities and IHL, the ICRC held information sessions for leading parliamentarians and

government officials, including members of the Comité de Suivi pour la Paix et la Reconstruction du Congo, the High Commission for Civic Instruction and Moral Education (HCICEM) and local prefectures, and distributed a quarterly newsletter detailing its activities and giving information on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and IHL. It also maintained contacts with local civilian and military authorities.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Integration of IHL or human rights standards into military and police training

Since 2002, following an order from the chief of general staff, the Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) had included IHL in their training programmes, even though a formal decree had not yet been adopted. The major training centres at Makola, Moulendé, Loutété and the military academies had incorporated IHL into their programmes, and the ICRC was often invited to give presentations to armed forces personnel. By the end of 2004 almost 40% of all FAC personnel had received some form of training in IHL.

At the request of the national police force and the command of the specialized units (COMUS), the ICRC held a number of sessions on international human rights standards and humanitarian principles, the ICRC and its mandate for police officers in Brazzaville, Lékoumou, Niari, Pointe-Noire and Pool. It also held sessions at the *gendarmérie* school and the anti-crime brigade in Pointe-Noire.

- ▶ over 3,400 members of the armed forces, including senior and junior officers and those at the academies, attended sessions on IHL and the ICRC
- ▶ over 4,300 members of the police and *gendarmérie* took part in sessions on IHL/human rights and the ICRC
- ▶ communication equipment (projector, screen, videos, films and other support materials) supplied for the instruction of COMUS police officers

Promoting IHL and the ICRC among former opposition militias

The ICRC conducted information sessions on IHL for some 420 former Ninja fighters in the districts of Kindamba, Kinkala and Mindouli.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Informing the media and the general public

The delegation maintained contacts with journalists and distributed documentation to keep them informed of its activities. It was regularly quoted in the press and received coverage of its assistance activities, its family-links programme and its IHL seminars for the political and legal establishment (particularly university lecturers). It also held presentations on its mandate and activities for people who had directly benefited from its assistance programmes in Pool and elsewhere in the country.

Promoting humanitarian principles in schools and universities

The HCICEM and the National Institute for Pedagogical Research and Action entered into a partnership and presented the ICRC with a draft of a pilot project for introducing the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in civic instruction in primary, secondary and technical schools. Two representatives, one from each institution, participated in the Pan-African Seminar on Exploring Humanitarian Law in South Africa in July (see *Pretoria*).

To promote IHL at university level, the ICRC fostered contacts with various academic bodies. It held IHL seminars for professors and students at the faculty of law of the Université de Brazzaville and the National School for Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) where IHL was being taught as an optional course for fourth-year students of international law. The HCICEM said it wanted IHL to be taught in all three of the country's universities.

NATIONAL SOCIETY

Promoting IHL and the Fundamental Principles

The ICRC supported the Congolese Red Cross in reinforcing its capacity to disseminate IHL and the Fundamental Principles. It sponsored the National Society's activities marking World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May), many of which highlighted efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. The ICRC provided the Dolisie branch with a vehicle for the occasion and contributed money for food, drinks and the hire of a venue. In Kindamba, representatives of the military and administrative authorities and 100 other dignitaries attended a presentation on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and IHL.

The ICRC supported the National Society in promoting the adoption of a law on the red cross emblem, including the submission of a draft law to the National Assembly for discussion. It worked with the Red Cross branches to disseminate IHL and inform the public of the need to respect the emblem and provided each branch with a mini IHL library. It also organized training in IHL and the Movement for volunteers.

Operational cooperation

The Congolese Red Cross continued to work with the ICRC in Pool, participating in the distribution of assistance (see *Civilians*) and providing training in basic hygiene through its local committees. These joint efforts were also designed to enhance the National Society's visibility. The ICRC provided the local committees of Kinkala and Mindouli with materials for sanitation/hygiene-promotion activities.