

CARACAS (regional)

COVERING: Suriname, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the English-speaking 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, Trinidad and Tobago



 ICRC regional delegation

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	170
Assistance	-
Prevention	1,210
Cooperation with National Societies	471
General	-

► **1,851**

of which: Overheads 113

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	86%
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PERSONNEL

Expatriates	4
National staff (daily workers not included)	8

KEY POINTS

In 2010, the ICRC:

- supported the region's National Societies in boosting their emergency preparedness by honing their first-aid and Safer Access skills
- supported the Jamaica Red Cross in assisting over 1,000 families affected by unrest in Kingston
- offered technical advice in the integration of international human rights norms into the new training curriculum of Venezuela's Bolivarian National Police
- welcomed the ratification of IHL treaties by Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The Caracas regional delegation was established in 1971. 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. It reinforces the capacities of the region's National Societies in the fields of IHL promotion, restoring family links, emergency response capacity and assistance to victims of violence. It visits security detainees in the region and monitors the humanitarian situation along the Venezuelan border with Colombia.

CONTEXT

For the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereafter Venezuela), 2010 was a year of hardship, with enduring recession and heavy rain and floods towards year-end. The country's economic problems in turn contributed to the growing crime rate, which posed a challenge for the newly created Bolivarian National Police. Legislative elections on 26 September returned the opposition to the National Assembly. A few days before the inauguration of the new Assembly, the outgoing members voted in a law entitling the president to rule by decree for a period of 18 months.

The spillover of the conflict in Colombia continued to fuel tensions in the border states of Tachira and Zulia. Relations between

the two countries improved, however, following the Colombian presidential elections in August when the two countries began to discuss confidence-building mechanisms. These aimed to solve economic disputes and improve cooperation on border security and transnational issues.

The countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) also felt the effects of the global economic crisis. Gang and community violence was on the rise, driven by drug and small arms trafficking. In May, violence erupted in Kingston and other parts of Jamaica following the government's decision to extradite an alleged drug trader to the United States of America. The armed forces were sent in alongside police to quell the unrest. Over 75 people were reportedly killed.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

PROTECTION

CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)			
Red Cross messages	Total	UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs collected	1		
RCMs distributed	1		
Phone calls facilitated between family members	2		
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)			
ICRC visits	Total	Women	Minors
Detainees visited and monitored individually	32		
Detainees newly registered	10		
Number of visits carried out	5		
Number of places of detention visited	2		

* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

ASSISTANCE

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)				
Economic security, water and habitat		Total	Women	Children
Essential household items ¹	Beneficiaries	2		

1. Venezuela only

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

The ICRC continued to act as the principal reference in the region for IHL matters. The constructive working relationship resulting from the 2007 cooperation agreement between the CARICOM Secretariat and the ICRC continued to bear fruit. The ICRC offered the various bodies and member States its expertise in the ratification and implementation of IHL treaties. During the year, Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines all became party to additional IHL instruments.

Given the tensions in Venezuelan regions bordering Colombia and in the Caribbean, it remained crucial for the military, which often backed up police personnel during law-enforcement operations, and the police themselves to raise awareness among their ranks of IHL and international human rights law applicable to the use of force. Through dissemination sessions and other training events, along with advice in the development of training curricula and manuals, the ICRC sought to support the armed and police forces' efforts in this regard. The smooth working relationship

with the Jamaica Defence Force allowed the ICRC to discuss with it the use of force in security operations relating to the violence in May.

In light of the general volatility in the region, the ICRC assisted the National Societies in upgrading their emergency response skills. It provided financial, material and technical support to enable them to hone their skills in first aid and applying the Safer Access approach. During the turmoil in Kingston, the ICRC assisted the Jamaica Red Cross in distributing emergency supplies.

In Venezuela, ICRC delegates visited and monitored the treatment and living conditions of security detainees, sharing their observations confidentially with the authorities.

In February, the ICRC closed its office in Port of Spain, Trinidad, ending its 10-year presence there. It had earlier informed the authorities and the diplomatic community that ICRC activities for the English-speaking countries of CARICOM would be covered by its delegation in Caracas.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

In Venezuela, arrests were reportedly on the rise. Despite a five-year plan to reform the penitentiary system launched in 2010, the situation in prisons remained worrying, with severe overcrowding, high levels of violence and frequent hunger strikes.

A total of 32 security detainees in 2 places of detention received visits from delegates carried out according to standard ICRC procedures. Their treatment and living conditions were checked in relation to internationally recognized standards, and the authorities were informed of delegates' observations and recommendations in a confidential dialogue. All detainees were offered the RCM service to contact their families. A Colombian boy whose mother was detained was able to return to his family thanks to a coordinated effort involving the authorities, the Colombian consulate, the boy's relatives and the ICRC's delegations in Bogotá and Caracas.

During ICRC visits, two vulnerable individuals received telephone cards, underwear and hygiene items. To boost the capacities of the prison administration in meeting the needs of detainees, the authorities were invited to send a representative to the fourth Latin American seminar on health in prisons held in Peru (see *Lima*). Unfortunately, however, Venezuela was not represented.

In Jamaica, in the immediate aftermath of the unrest in May, six detainees held in a temporary holding facility talked informally to ICRC delegates prior to their release.

AUTHORITIES

CARICOM member States, supported by the CARICOM Secretariat and drawing on ICRC legal resources and expertise, continued their work on ratifying and implementing IHL treaties. To keep up the momentum, a high-level representative of the CARICOM Secretariat attended the third Universal Meeting of National IHL Committees in Geneva, Switzerland (see *International Law and Cooperation*). CARICOM States supported resolutions promoted by the ICRC at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (see *Washington*).

The CARICOM Secretariat and the ICRC focused on a number of humanitarian issues, such as the proliferation of small arms/light weapons. To regulate the use of a variety of weapons, Antigua and Barbuda ratified the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, along with Protocols I, III and IV to that instrument, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines ratified the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, along with all five Protocols. Both countries became party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Progress was made elsewhere in the region, with Guyana ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Saint Lucia ratifying the Rome Statute. Suriname's Ministry of Justice and Police continued, with ICRC support, to revise its criminal code to outlaw war crimes.

Furthermore, CARICOM's Implementation Agency for Crime and Security discussed with delegates the possibility of the ICRC familiarizing the Councils for Foreign and Community Relations and for National Security and Law Enforcement with IHL and humanitarian norms and their application in security operations.

In Venezuela, IHL implementation was slow owing to the political situation. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence amended the draft emblem law to strengthen penalties for abuse and sent it for approval to the Attorney General's Office. Dialogue initiated with the National Assembly's international relations director led to lawmakers being briefed on the ICRC and its IHL advisory services. Authorities were informed of the ICRC's activities for detainees and armed and police forces and of ICRC/National Society activities along the border with Colombia.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Rising urban violence and the growing involvement of the military in law enforcement, as exemplified during the Kingston unrest, highlighted the need for armed and police forces to integrate IHL and human rights norms into their doctrine, training and operations. This was the main topic at numerous bilateral and multi-lateral meetings between CARICOM chiefs of defence and police commissioners and the ICRC.

Thanks to high-level contacts, the ICRC was able to share its concerns with the Jamaica Defence Force and Constabulary Force regarding actions during the Kingston unrest. To improve compliance with IHL, the Jamaica Defence Force developed an abridged manual on the use of force and trained with regional military officers at the Caribbean Junior Command and Staff Course, which used various teaching modules drawn from ICRC resources. A high-ranking officer was sent to the Senior Workshop on International Rules governing Military Operations held in Lucerne, Switzerland (see *International Law and Cooperation*).

Elsewhere in the Caribbean, the armed forces of Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago revised their education and training orders to comply with IHL norms, while some 50 military and police officers in Belize learnt basic IHL rules during an ICRC presentation.

In Venezuela, the armed forces continued to raise awareness of IHL among troops. Given the potential for increased tension along the border with Colombia, some 60 officers in Tachira and Zulia learnt more about IHL and the ICRC's neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. In addition, 880 cadets at military schools attended courses to familiarize them with those topics, although efforts to access senior military personnel in charge of policy and writing doctrine were so far unsuccessful.

Similarly, the Bolivarian National Police General Council welcomed continuing ICRC expertise in incorporating international human rights norms into new policing standards and training. Although no police representative was able to attend

an international seminar on human rights norms, key officials discussed the integration of such standards into the new police curriculum at an ICRC-facilitated seminar at the National Experimental Security University in Caracas. During other events, the university's teachers and trainers and police advisers refreshed their knowledge of human rights norms and those governing the use of force.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Escalating volatility in the region, combined with growing public demand for information on humanitarian issues affecting the region and the wider world, increased the need to reinforce the media's capacity to give greater and more accurate coverage to such matters, including respect for the emblem and support for National Society/ICRC work. With this aim, journalists were given briefings, interviews, and resource materials and participated in workshops on conflict reporting. One of the main TV stations in Caracas, with an estimated audience of five million, received audiovisual material.

Likewise, law and journalism lecturers and students used ICRC reference materials and expertise on IHL and weapon contamination for specialized courses and research.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

National Societies in the region worked to strengthen their legal bases and capacities with financial, material and technical support from the International Federation and the ICRC. Progress was made towards approval of a draft emblem law in Venezuela (see *Authorities*). Heads of the CARICOM National Societies discussed best management and governance practices at the annual cooperation meeting co-organized by the International Federation and the ICRC.

In light of increasing violence, the region's National Societies worked to strengthen their emergency response capacities. The Jamaica Red Cross and the ICRC collaborated to bring food, water and medication to some 1,000 families during the unrest in May, and offered psychological support to some 200 people. In the aftermath, all branches held Safer Access training as a prelude to formulating security and operational guidelines. In Venezuela, volunteers also honed their Safer Access skills and went on to share their knowledge of first aid with violence-affected communities, including those affected by the spillover of the Colombian conflict. In Trinidad and Tobago, the National Society used the Safer Access approach to bring first aid to one of Port of Spain's most dangerous neighbourhoods. In Guyana and Suriname, the National Societies upgraded their communication units.