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The ICRC opened a delegation in Iran in 1978, was active in the country during the Iran-Iraq war and, after a nine-year suspension, resumed its humanitarian work there in 2001. Its activities include logistical support for ICRC operations in Iraq from its supply base in Kermanshah. The ICRC is also working to clarify the fate of prisoners of war registered during the 1980–88 war with Iraq and in this respect acts as a neutral intermediary between the parties. It also focuses on strengthening its partnership with the Iranian Red Crescent Society, in particular in the fields of tracing, dissemination of IHL and raising public awareness of the dangers of mines and other explosive remnants of war.

EXPENDITURE IN CHF

Protection

829,534

Assistance

-

Preventive action

837,504

Cooperation with National Societies

440,067

General

-

► **2,107,105**

of which: Overheads **128,603**

PERSONNEL

7 expatriates

43 national staff

KEY POINTS IN 2004

- ▶ With the Iranian Red Crescent, the ICRC carried out tracing activities in the wake of the Bam earthquake and provided victims of the disaster with emergency aid.
- ▶ An extensive mine-risk education programme was launched, which included several training sessions for National Society volunteers involved in raising public awareness of the dangers posed by explosive remnants of war.
- ▶ The Exploring Humanitarian Law programme was initiated, with the participation of the Ministry of Education and the Iranian Red Crescent.
- ▶ The ICRC tracing and RCM service enabled Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran to re-establish contact with family members in their home countries and Iranian families to get in touch with relatives detained in conflict-affected countries.
- ▶ The ICRC signed an agreement with the Iranian authorities on a mechanism to resolve issues outstanding from the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war.
- ▶ The ICRC developed contacts with the Iranian military and education authorities to promote the teaching and implementation of IHL.

CONTEXT

Final casualty figures released by Iran showed that the earthquake which struck the city of Bam in south-eastern Iran on 26 December 2003 had claimed more than 40,000 lives, left thousands homeless and destroyed more than 85% of the historic city's buildings. On 28 May some 40 people were killed and more than 400 injured in another powerful earthquake in the northern town of Baladeh.

The Iranian authorities announced that all Afghan refugees should be repatriated by March 2006. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2004 the number of Afghan refugees in the country had dropped to less than one million for the first time in 25 years. A decrease was also registered in the number of Iraqi refugees in Iran after many returned home voluntarily in 2004.

ICRC ACTION

Acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC sought to address issues outstanding from the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq war, particularly the fate of prisoners of war (POWs) still unaccounted for. In February the ICRC and the Iranian authorities reached an agreement on a formal mechanism for exchanging information in order to settle the cases of Iraqi POWs released by Iran who had not yet contacted the ICRC. The ICRC also encouraged Iran and Iraq to work together on resolving the cases of persons who went missing during the conflict.

After an earthquake devastated the town of Bam, the ICRC joined forces with the Iranian Red Crescent to offer tracing services to families trying to locate loved ones. Shelter and medical aid were distributed to the earthquake victims through the National Society, and tracing training was organized for Red Crescent staff and volunteers.

ICRC tracing activities, conducted in close cooperation with the Iranian Red Crescent, also enabled Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Iran to locate and re-establish links with family members in their home countries through the Red Cross message (RCM) network. In the same way, families in Iran were able to use RCMs to re-establish ties with relatives detained/interned abroad and visited by ICRC delegates.

The ICRC developed contacts with the national committee for the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL) to encourage Iran to accede to IHL treaties it had not yet ratified and to enact implementing legislation for those already ratified. It was also active in promoting the incorporation of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme into secondary-school education and the teaching of IHL in universities, as well as its integration into the theoretical and practical training programmes of the armed forces.

The Iranian Red Crescent and the ICRC initiated a joint mine-risk education programme, following which several training sessions were conducted for National Society volunteers in the worst-affected provinces bordering Iraq and Afghanistan.

CIVILIANS

Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran restored and maintained contact with family members in their home countries by means of RCMs collected and distributed in con-

junction with the Iranian Red Crescent. Beneficiaries of this service included families in Iran wishing to trace and re-establish links with relatives detained/interned abroad.

ICRC tracing experts also helped the Iranian Red Crescent to reunite family members separated by the Bam earthquake. Many of the tracing requests concerned emergency medical cases transferred from the Bam region to hospitals in other parts of the country. ICRC telephone facilities were made available to destitute Bam inhabitants to enable them to contact family members in other cities. A Farsi version of the ICRC publication *Restoring Family Links* was completed and was used as a tracing tool by Red Crescent staff and volunteers.

Substantial ICRC stocks of shelter and medical supplies were distributed by the National Society to earthquake victims.

- 212 RCMs relayed between Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran and relatives in their home countries
- family members separated by the Bam earthquake disaster re-established contact through joint ICRC and Iranian Red Crescent tracing activities

The ICRC maintained its logistical supply base at Kermanshah, one of two opened in western Iran early in 2003 in support of its operations in Iraq. Several relief convoys were dispatched to various Iraqi cities from the base throughout the year.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Talks with the Iranian authorities focused on issues related to POWs captured during the 1980–88 Iran–Iraq war, particularly the cases of Iraqi POWs previously released in Iran and whose fate and whereabouts remained unknown. The Iranian authorities and the ICRC formally agreed to exchange any information obtained about these cases after week-long talks in February. A follow-up working session was held later in the year in Tehran involving representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Iranian POW Commission and the ICRC, during which lists of pending cases of POWs unaccounted for in relation to the Iran–Iraq war were exchanged.

The preparation of more than 18,000 certificates of detention (in addition to more than 2,000 certificates issued by the

ICRC offices in Tehran, Kermanshah and Mashad) got under way for former Iraqi POWs who had already been repatriated to Iraq. The certificates were intended to help former POWs obtain pensions and to be presented as official documents to various offices in Iraq. Similar certificates were requested by a number of Afghan nationals, who had come to Iran after being released from internment in Afghanistan, in order to facilitate their resettlement in third countries or for family reunifications.

On 19 and 20 December, acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC repatriated 28 Iranian nationals from Iraq, where they had been staying in the Ashraf camp under the authority of the Multinational Forces in Iraq. Prior to the operation, ICRC delegates held private interviews with the men to make sure that they were returning home of their own free will. It conducted a similar operation on 14 September for an Iranian who had been in US custody at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station and in Afghanistan.

Throughout 2004 families in Iran were able to restore and maintain contact with relatives detained/interned in Iraq through the RCM network.

- formal agreement reached between the Iranian authorities and the ICRC on a mechanism to exchange information on Iraqi POWs released in Iran who remained unaccounted for
- 1,243 certificates of detention issued to former Iraqi POWs
- 28 Iranian nationals repatriated from Iraq by the ICRC, as well as 1 released from US custody at Guantanamo Bay

AUTHORITIES

A dialogue with the Iranian political authorities on the humanitarian environment and ICRC activities and perspectives was further developed during the year. New contacts were established with members of parliament and community and religious leaders.

The ICRC continued to work closely with the Iranian IHL committee on the promotion and implementation of IHL in Iran, including the translation into Farsi of international treaties and texts. It participated in several meetings of the committee, including a seminar organized at Tehran University on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the application of IHL in times of armed conflict and other

situations of violence. Documentation on IHL was provided to the committee, and the ICRC agreed to finance the translation into Farsi and publication of books on IHL to assist the committee in its work.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

A round-table and several meetings with representatives of the military authorities were held to discuss introducing the teaching of IHL for members of the Iranian armed forces. The military authorities indicated an interest in cooperating with the ICRC in this field.

CIVIL SOCIETY

In December the ICRC signed a cooperation agreement with the national IHL committee and the education authorities to introduce the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme as an extracurricular subject in secondary schools. The agreement followed a presentation of the programme at a plenary session of the committee attended by representatives of six ministries, the judicial authorities and the Iranian Red Crescent. A steering committee was established to coordinate the implementation of the programme.

The ICRC pursued efforts to familiarize students at the main Iranian universities, in particular in the law faculties, with IHL and the Movement and to encourage the media to play a more prominent role in relaying information on IHL-related issues to the general public. In order to facilitate these efforts, several books and publications on IHL and the ICRC's humanitarian activities were translated into Farsi and distributed.

Contacts were established with professors of law in several leading Iranian universities, and a number of areas of potential collaboration were identified, including the provision of books and documentation on IHL to university libraries, ICRC participation in postgraduate courses in IHL, the joint promotion of IHL among external audiences and advanced training in IHL for law professors.

NATIONAL SOCIETY

The Iranian Red Crescent Society and the ICRC engaged in joint tracing activities following the Bam earthquake in December 2003, and Red Crescent staff received training in tracing techniques. Tracing was also

carried out in cooperation with the National Society for families in Iran wishing to restore contact with relatives living or detained in conflict-affected countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Iranian Red Crescent distributed ICRC relief, including medical supplies for up to 10,000 wounded, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. The ICRC also provided computer equipment to the National Society to help centralize data on the victims and facilitate tracing activities.

Both the ICRC and the Iranian Red Crescent confirmed their commitment to work together on a programme to convey basic safety messages to people in regions worst affected by the threat of explosive remnants of war (ERW), including Iraqi and Afghan refugees crossing ERW-infested border areas and Iranians living close to the Afghan and Iraqi borders. Mine-risk education workshops were held for Iranian Red Crescent volunteers from provinces where the ERW threat is greatest, and mine-awareness leaflets and posters were printed for distribution to local communities. Assessment missions were also carried out with National Society staff in some of the affected areas. Contacts were developed with local non-governmental organizations and UN agencies involved in mine action in Iran.

A special Farsi edition of the ICRC magazine *Al Insani* (The Humanitarian) entirely dedicated to Iran was published in collaboration with the national IHL committee and the Iranian Red Crescent. Copies were sent to all Red Crescent branches and distributed among academic and media circles.

- ▶ more than 200 Red Crescent volunteers took part in 6 training workshops on mine-risk education