



ICRC delegation

syria

The ICRC has been present in Syria since 1967. It acts as a neutral intermediary regarding matters of humanitarian concern for the Syrian inhabitants of the part of the Golan occupied by Israel; they are protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention. It facilitates the passage of Syrian nationals, mainly students and pilgrims who have to cross the area of separation for educational or religious purposes, and helps family members separated as a result of the conflict with Israel to keep in contact. It works to spread knowledge of IHL in government, military, academic and media circles and cooperates closely with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

EXPENDITURE (IN CHF ,000)

Protection	188
Assistance	288
Prevention	455
Cooperation with National Societies	155
General	-

► **1,086**

of which: Overheads **66**

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	77.4%
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PERSONNEL

2 expatriates
7 national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2005, the ICRC:

- helped Syrian inhabitants of the Israeli-occupied Golan preserve a minimum of contact with their families in Syria and arranged for students and pilgrims from the Golan to travel to Syria for educational or religious purposes;
- handled tracing requests from people in Syria seeking to locate and re-establish contact with family members unaccounted for in Syria or detained/interned abroad, mainly in Iraq;
- expanded contacts with government and academic circles to promote the integration of IHL into national legislation, school and university curricula and the doctrine and training programmes of the Syrian armed forces;
- carried out field visits to Syrian Arab Red Crescent branches nationwide to identify ways of reinforcing mutual cooperation;
- transported to Syria, at the request of the Syrian and Israeli authorities, more than 4,000 tonnes of apples produced by farmers in the occupied Golan;
- introduced the Exploring Humanitarian Law education programme in secondary schools on a trial basis.

CONTEXT

At the end of April, Syria withdrew the last of its troops from Lebanon where they had been stationed since entering the country as a peace-keeping force in 1976 during the Lebanese civil war. The pull-out was in compliance with UN Security Council resolution 1559, adopted in September 2004, which called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and the disbandment of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

Syria nevertheless remained under international scrutiny through an investigation commission established by the UN Security Council to find out who was behind the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut in February. In its two preliminary reports, the commission directly implicated the Syrian security services, prompting strong denials from the Syrian government. This and other issues led to a progressive deterioration of political and economic relations between Syria and Lebanon over the year.

Syria also refuted accusations by certain countries, particularly the United States, that it had allowed fighters of various nationalities to transit its territory to join the insurgency in Iraq. It was furthermore criticized by the United States and a number of other countries for its alleged support for various Palestinian militant organizations.

At its 10th national congress in June, the ruling Baath party asserted that democratic reforms in Syria should be implemented without foreign interference. It also encouraged the government to accelerate the

transition of the economy to a free market system and to take measures to attract foreign investment.

The economy was severely stretched by the increasing number of young people entering the workplace, particularly after Syria reduced compulsory military service from 30 to 24 months and following the return of tens of thousands of Syrian workers from Lebanon.

According to Kurdish parties, around 225,000 Kurds living in Syria had not been granted Syrian nationality and a further 75,000 had no official papers at all. The Syrian authorities reiterated that they were working on the problem and intended to grant Syrian nationality to some 100,000 Kurds.

In May, a prominent Kurdish sheikh, Mohammad Maashouk al-Khaznawi, was assassinated in unclear circumstances. The Syrian authorities blamed a criminal group for the killing, which led to large demonstrations and clashes with security forces and a number of arrests in areas populated mainly by Kurds.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS		WOUNDED AND SICK	
<i>Red Cross messages (RCMs) and reunifications</i>		<i>Physical rehabilitation</i>	
RCMs collected	323	Patients receiving services	Patients 777
RCMs distributed	278	Prostheses delivered	Pieces 351
<i>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</i>		Orthoses delivered	Pieces 268
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	34		
Tracing requests closed positively (persons located)	9		
Tracing requests still being handled at 31 December 2005	65		
DOCUMENTS ISSUED			
People to whom travel documents were issued	131		

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC continued, in close cooperation with the Israeli and Syrian authorities, to enable people in Syria to keep in some form of contact with their families living in the Israeli-occupied Golan.

ICRC tracing and RCM services helped Syrian nationals and Iraqi refugees in Syria to locate and re-establish contact with family members detained/interned or unaccounted for abroad, mainly in Iraq. These services also enabled Palestinian refugees in Syria to restore and maintain contact with relatives imprisoned in Israel.

Recognized Iraqi and other refugees in Syria without valid identification papers were provided with travel documents to facilitate their resettlement in third countries.

The ICRC strengthened its partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and reinforced its capacity to deliver humanitarian services in the fields of tracing, emergency response in situations of conflict and violence, mine-risk education and the promotion of IHL at community level.

ICRC support was maintained to a physical rehabilitation centre run by the Syrian branch of the Palestine Red Crescent Society treating Palestinian and Syrian amputees.

In accordance with a core element of its mandate, the ICRC continued to promote the integration of IHL into national legislation, school and university curricula and the training programmes of the Syrian armed forces.

Acting as a neutral intermediary, at the request of the Israeli and Syrian authorities and of Golan and Syrian farmers, the ICRC transported to Syria more than 4,000 tonnes of apples produced by farmers in the

occupied Golan. Six ICRC trucks transported the cargo between March and April in an operation coordinated with the UN Disengagement Observer Force, which monitors the demarcation line between Syria and the occupied Golan. The operation was an economic boost for the Golan population, which depends largely on the sale of apples for its livelihood.

CIVILIANS

Restoring family links

The ICRC enabled a minimum level of contact to be preserved between Syrians who fled or were expelled from the part of the Golan occupied by Israel in 1967 and family members who remained in the region. This mainly involved arranging travel by pilgrims and students from the occupied Golan to Syria for religious or study purposes and the exchange of official papers such as power-of-attorney documents and marriage, birth and death certificates between members of the two communities.

Medical evacuations between Syria and the occupied Golan were also arranged under ICRC auspices, as were weddings between engaged couples separated by the demarcation line.

Consultations with the authorities concerned aimed at resuming regular meetings between family members in Syria and the occupied Golan, particularly the young and the elderly, failed to produce any tangible results.

The ICRC continued to issue travel documents to refugees and asylum seekers in Syria without valid identification papers to facilitate their resettlement in third countries.

The ICRC processed tracing requests from families in Syria seeking to locate

and re-establish contact with relatives either detained/interned or unaccounted for in Iraq. Not all such requests could be dealt with successfully owing to security conditions in Iraq, which prevented the ICRC from visiting places of detention where some people's relatives were believed to be detained/interned.

Insofar as security conditions allowed, the ICRC offered to repatriate the bodies of Syrians killed in Iraq, in cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and to organize family visits to Syrian detainees held in Camp Bucca in Iraq.

- travel for 302 students and 463 pilgrims facilitated between the occupied Golan and Syria
- 2 medical evacuations carried out between Syria and the occupied Golan
- 1 wedding ceremony arranged in the separation zone under ICRC auspices
- 35 official documents exchanged between families in Syria and the occupied Golan
- 131 people received ICRC travel documents
- 323 RCMs collected and 278 delivered to and from families in Syria and relatives detained/interned abroad
- 34 new tracing requests opened for families in Syria seeking news of relatives unaccounted for in Iraq; 9 tracing requests resolved, 65 cases remained pending

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

The ICRC maintained a capacity to restore links between people in Syria and their family members detained/interned abroad through its tracing and RCM services (see *Civilians*).

WOUNDED AND SICK

The ICRC started to provide assistance to a physical rehabilitation centre run by the Syrian branch of the Palestine Red Crescent Society in 2003 through the provision of materials purchased locally and of prosthetic/orthotic equipment and appliances.

In the first part of 2005, the ICRC posted a regional prosthetic/orthotic expert to Damascus to support the staff of the centre and to review ICRC cooperation related to the physical rehabilitation programme. ICRC support focused on enhancing the quality of services provided and orthopaedic appliances produced by the centre and upgrading its management and stock-control systems. The ICRC also sponsored training courses for Palestinian Red Crescent technicians working at the centre.

- ▶ 777 patients received at ICRC-supported rehabilitation centre
- ▶ 178 new patients fitted with prostheses and 144 with orthoses
- ▶ 351 prostheses (42 for mine victims), 268 orthoses and 53 crutches delivered

AUTHORITIES

The creation in June 2004 of a national committee for the implementation of IHL, composed of representatives of all key Syrian ministries and the president of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, led to the establishment of various sub-committees and the formulation of a plan of action to accelerate the adoption and implementation of IHL treaties in Syria. In 2005, the committee continued to work on the drafting of a law on the protection of the emblem, which was finally adopted by parliament in November.

A four-day seminar was held for national IHL committee members to review a plan of action to advance the IHL implementation process and to undertake a study on the compatibility of current Syrian legislation with IHL.

In addition, 250 parliamentarians from 12 Arab countries adopted a plan of action to speed up national implementation of IHL at a three-day conference organized by the ICRC in conjunction with the Syrian People's Assembly and the Damascus-based Arab Parliamentary Union.

- ▶ 60 future Syrian judges attended a presentation on IHL organized jointly

with the Ministry of Justice and the Syrian Judicial Institute

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

In 2005:

- ▶ 37 senior military instructors attended courses on IHL organized by the ICRC, in conjunction with the training directorate of the Syrian armed forces, and had gained sufficient knowledge of the subject to teach it to military personnel;
- ▶ IHL courses were held for members of the UN Truce Supervision Organization stationed in the Golan Heights.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Efforts were pursued to raise the media's awareness of the ICRC and IHL. The ICRC sponsored the participation of a Syrian website editor in a two-day regional workshop organized in Dubai to discuss, in particular, how media reporting can contribute to the protection of civilians and to preventing IHL violations.

Although implementation of the Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) programme was relatively slow during the 2005 school year, the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Red Crescent Affairs nevertheless confirmed their willingness to integrate it progressively into secondary-school curricula.

The EHL programme was introduced for the first time in Syria on a trial basis for 306 students in four schools in the Aleppo region.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

ICRC support to and cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in 2005 included:

- ▶ carrying out visits to nearly all 14 Red Crescent branches nationwide to evaluate their activities and most urgent needs and to seek ways of broadening cooperation in fields of mutual interest;
- ▶ providing material support to the National Society to reopen branch offices in Hassakeh and Qamishli;
- ▶ holding a two-day tracing seminar for branch directors;

- ▶ organizing a joint National Society/ICRC mine-risk workshop in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence and the association for landmines in Kuneitra governorate, which is still affected by mines and other explosive remnants of war left over from past conflicts in the region;
- ▶ conducting a refresher course on IHL for branch office volunteers, who also received documentation to help them carry out dissemination sessions at community level.