

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC



ICRC delegation + ICRC office/presence

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	2,323
Assistance	31,342
Prevention	1,701
Cooperation with National Societies	3,251
General	-

► **38,619**

of which: Overheads 2,357

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	103%
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PERSONNEL

Expatriates	25
National staff (daily workers not included)	42

KEY POINTS

In 2012, the ICRC:

- pursued dialogue with all relevant actors regarding respect for medical services, Movement emblems and the principle of distinction between civilian objects and military targets, urging them to respect their IHL obligations
- supported the casualty care chain by reinforcing the Syrian Arab Red Crescent's first-aid capacities and providing emergency/surgical supplies and consumables to National Society, Health Ministry and other medical facilities
- with the National Society, provided food parcels to some 1.53 million people, hundreds of thousands of whom also benefited from blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits and the rehabilitation/upgrade of buildings hosting IDPs
- facilitated the provision of water to over 14.88 million people through projects implemented with the Ministry of Water Resources and its local water boards
- issued nearly 40 public documents and several web-based video interviews detailing the humanitarian needs/situation in the country and reminding those involved in the conflict of the IHL rules to be observed
- did not carry out further visits to detainees after those conducted in May in Aleppo central prison

The ICRC has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It works with the National Society to assist people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence and to improve water supply/sanitation. The ICRC has also visited, on two separate occasions, people detained under the authority of the Interior Ministry. The ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary in issues of humanitarian concern for Syrian inhabitants of the Golan occupied by Israel and facilitates travel for certain categories of persons between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic. It helps separated relatives maintain contact.

CONTEXT

While President Bashar al-Assad remained in office and the international community continued to be disunited over its response to the armed conflict, the scope and intensity of the fighting and its humanitarian consequences in the Syrian Arab Republic (hereafter Syria) reached unprecedented levels, with fighting reaching Damascus and surrounding areas. What had started out as localized clashes between the Syrian government and armed groups in 2011 gradually evolved into a non-international armed conflict in 2012. Fighting in and around Syria's economic capital, Aleppo, led to some cross-border incidents, prompting neighbouring Turkey to call for NATO support. Incidents were also reported along the Israeli, Jordanian and Lebanese borders.

Engaged in asymmetric warfare, the opposing parties employed escalating means and methods that challenged respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities, with government forces using heavy weaponry, and armed groups, generally entrenched in neighbourhoods/villages, often using guerrilla tactics.

Concerns about the humanitarian situation of civilians and those not or no longer participating in the conflict grew. Reports of rising casualties, displacement and people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries proliferated, as did allegations of mass arrests, hostage-taking, extrajudicial killings, torture, obstruction of patients' access to medical services, and abuses against medical/humanitarian workers. Insecurity made humanitarian action difficult.

The conflict crippled industries and livelihoods, rendering several thousand people completely dependent on aid. Economic sanctions and high inflation further exacerbated the near-absence of basic goods and services. North-eastern Syria continued to suffer drought.

Israel's ongoing occupation of part of the Golan Heights continued to be a major issue of contention between Syria and Israel. Owing to the deadlock, Syrian nationals living in the occupied Golan remained cut off from their families in Syria proper.

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

Humanitarian needs grew along with the expansion and intensification of the fighting. Amid restrictions and insecurity – too often limiting humanitarian action – the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the ICRC worked in close partnership to respond accordingly.

Main figures and indicators	PROTECTION	Total		
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Red Cross messages (RCMs)				
RCMs collected		25	UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs distributed		3		
Phone calls facilitated between family members		2		
Reunifications, transfers and repatriations				
People transferred/repatriated		203		
Human remains transferred/repatriated		3		
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		469	Women	Minors
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		246	55	76
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	58		
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		309	31	35
Documents				
People to whom travel documents were issued		151		
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines		30		
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)				
ICRC visits				
Detainees visited		113	Women	Minors
Detainees visited and monitored individually		90	8	4
Detainees newly registered		90	8	4
Number of visits carried out		1		
Number of places of detention visited		1		
Restoring family links				
RCMs collected		7	Women	Minors
RCMs distributed		1		

* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

Multiplying contacts with the Syrian authorities at all levels and networking with all actors on the ground, the two organizations progressively gained respect for their neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and expanded their scope of action and access to victims. In September, the fourth visit to Damascus by an ICRC president since the start of the current crisis provided a further opportunity for the authorities to confirm their acceptance of the roles of both organizations.

The ICRC informed the Syrian authorities and armed groups that, in its view, the type and intensity of the armed confrontations and their humanitarian consequences had reached a level where the rules of IHL and customary law applicable to non-international armed conflict needed to be respected. It urged all parties to take constant care to spare civilians and ensure their safe access to medical care, and to respect and protect medical and humanitarian workers and the red cross and red crescent emblems.

Widening their operational reach countrywide, National Society/ICRC teams assessed the humanitarian needs on the ground and organized the appropriate emergency response as far as the security situation allowed. Food, essential household items and medical supplies, pre-positioned in strategic locations to ensure timely delivery, reached those in need. Together with the central/local water authorities, National Society/ICRC teams undertook emergency and longer-term measures to ensure IDPs and residents alike had access to clean water.

Wounded/sick people received first aid and medical care from National Society teams using ICRC-donated medical supplies and equipment. Drugs and consumables for triage and treatment of weapon injuries boosted the capacity of health facilities to deliver life-saving care in a timely manner.

Following its visit to detainees in Aleppo in May, the ICRC submitted to the authorities a report compiling its findings and recommendations. On this basis, it held discussions with the Syrian authorities aimed at obtaining their consent for further ICRC visits

and other activities for detainees held in all other detention facilities – to no avail by the end of the year. The ICRC also expressed its willingness to visit detainees reportedly held by armed groups and to facilitate contact between them and their families.

Movement family-links services facilitated contact between separated family members, including people with relatives detained in Syria or abroad or living in the Israeli-occupied Golan.

Media, embassies and international organizations kept abreast of developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria through ICRC news releases and updates. Media reporting and seminars for journalists and law/sharia law lecturers contributed to greater awareness of and support for IHL, universal humanitarian norms and Movement action. Insecurity impeded most training activities.

The National Society received extensive ICRC support to bolster its emergency preparedness and response capacities. While affirming their independence, the two organizations coordinated their activities with those of other Movement partners and organizations present on the ground.

In May, the ICRC appealed for additional donor funding to sustain its increased humanitarian operations in the country.

CIVILIANS

In communities affected by the armed conflict, residents and IDPs alike found it difficult to obtain food and other essentials and to receive emergency medical treatment/health care, even as health workers, including National Society volunteers, risked their lives to deliver such care amid obstructions to their work (see *Wounded and sick*). Through confidential/bilateral representations and public communication, the ICRC repeatedly urged all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations towards people protected under IHL, including granting humanitarian/medical workers safe and unhindered access to those in need and taking all feasible precautions to avoid incidental harm to civilians.

Main figures and indicators	ASSISTANCE	Total	Women	Children
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Economic security, water and habitat (in some cases provided within a protection or cooperation programme)				
Food commodities	Beneficiaries	1,529,135	30%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
		1,529,135		
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	419,272	30%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
		419,272		
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	14,877,157	32%	40%
	<i>of whom IDPs</i>	Beneficiaries		
		88,514		

In general, contact with all authorities and armed groups in Syria and abroad facilitated National Society/ICRC access to people residing or trapped in violence-stricken areas, such as in Douma (Rural Damascus) in April following an agreed humanitarian pause in the fighting (see *Authorities*). In other cases, however, such as in Homs in June, a temporary cessation of the fighting could not be obtained, obstructing aid delivery and medical evacuations.

Abuses observed directly by delegates or reported by people in Syria and abroad, following extensive documentation, formed the basis of the ICRC's confidential dialogue with the authorities and armed groups concerned. In this regard, a report on conduct of hostilities, two reports on respect for health services and one on misuse of the red cross and red crescent emblems were submitted to the relevant authorities.

People receive some emergency assistance

People benefited from the ICRC's stronger presence in the country and the respect gained for the National Society's/ICRC's neutral, impartial and independent approach (see *Authorities*). Widening their operational reach countrywide, including in some areas controlled by armed groups, joint teams assessed people's needs as comprehensively as the security situation permitted. They expanded their capacity to deliver appropriate aid in a timely manner, notably through the positioning of contingency stocks in National Society branches.

Thanks to distributions of ICRC-supplied food parcels carried out with the National Society, some 1.53 million IDPs and vulnerable residents enhanced their daily diet. Over 400,000 of them also received essential household items such as blankets, mattresses and hygiene kits to ease their living conditions. Some 30,000 vulnerable children received school kits in addition to these items.

In total, 14.88 million people benefited from operations ensuring water supply and adequate sanitation conditions.

They included more than 88,000 IDPs in 291 hosting centres (e.g. schools, public buildings) who benefited from the rehabilitation or upgrade of housing and water/sanitation facilities carried out with the National Society. In Al-Hassakeh, Al-Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus, some 135,000 IDPs and drought-affected people received water delivered by trucks operated or contracted by the National Society. During the first days of their displacement, over 80,000 people received drinking water in 10-litre bottles; 133,300 litres of drinking water were distributed this way.

People also benefited from emergency support to the Ministry of Water Resources and its local water boards. Some 12.42 million people in 12 governorates enjoyed access to clean water after the ICRC supplied the consumable chemicals – 250 tonnes of aluminium sulphate and 740,000 litres of sodium hypochlorite – required to operate water treatment systems for three months. Desalination

units supplied water to over 17,500 people after receiving spare parts and consumable chemicals. In Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor and Homs, over 3.2 million people benefited from emergency repairs to water supply infrastructure. In Deir Ez-Zor, for example, some 650,000 people regained their water supply after 13 water treatment plants damaged or affected by the fighting were repaired.

At the beginning of the year, longer-term initiatives to boost sustainable water supplies in drought-affected areas were implemented with the local water boards. Some 132,000 people accessed water for household and farming/livestock use following the completion of various projects to rehabilitate boreholes/ponds and construct underground reservoirs.

The constantly deteriorating security situation prevented the launch of livelihood-support programmes.

Relatives stay in touch through family-links services, including with those living in the occupied Golan

Travel between the Israeli-occupied Golan and Syria proper continued to be restricted, preventing family visits between people living on either side of the demarcation line. Owing to the prevailing security climate, no progress was made in obtaining the agreement of the Israeli and Syrian authorities to resume such visits. Nevertheless, Golan residents maintained limited contact facilitated by the ICRC acting as a neutral intermediary. Under ICRC auspices, and in coordination with the relevant authorities, two wedding ceremonies were organized in the demilitarized zone and some 200 students and other humanitarian cases travelled both ways across the demarcation line. Syrian families separated by the demarcation line transmitted 54 official papers (30 on basis of requests made in Syria), such as power-of-attorney documents, property claims, and birth, death and marriage certificates, back and forth, enabling some to receive inheritances or State allowances. Unlike in the previous years, Golanese apples were not transported to Syrian markets in 2012 owing to the absence of Israeli authorization. They were instead diverted to alternative markets.

Through the Movement family-links network, people located and maintained contact with relatives detained/interned abroad, notably in Iraq, Lebanon and the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba, by means of RCMs, telephone calls and subsidized family visits. The remains of a Syrian national killed in Iraq were repatriated in coordination with the Iraqi and Syrian authorities; 151 refugees/stateless persons without valid identification papers resettled in third countries with ICRC travel documents issued in coordination with the authorities concerned and UNHCR. People also sought help in confirming the whereabouts of arrested/detained relatives (see *People deprived of their freedom*). The prevailing situation hindered dialogue with the authorities regarding foreigners unaccounted for and presumed to have gone missing in Syria and regarding Syrian nationals missing in Israel and Lebanon.

Owing to the situation on the ground, efforts to boost the National Society's family-links capacities were minimal, and the training of a forensics specialist could not be organized. Nevertheless, in accordance with the previous year's capacity-building agreement with the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC, National Society staff/volunteers honed their skills in tracing or reconnecting separated family members during two workshops. National Society branches in Homs, Idlib and Rural Damascus received locally assembled kits for the better management of human remains and a related ICRC manual.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

People in Syria and abroad requested the ICRC's help in ascertaining the whereabouts of relatives allegedly arrested or detained. In response to requests for information submitted to the authorities, for the first time, in March, a few families received information through delegates about relatives arrested in 2011. Since then, however, no response was received to some 370 other requests regarding alleged arrests, despite numerous reminders sent to the Syrian authorities.

Following the ICRC's visit to detainees in Damascus central prison in September 2011, the authorities and the ICRC pursued a dialogue aimed at reaching a common understanding of the ICRC's standard procedures for such visits. This included meetings between the foreign and interior ministers and the ICRC president in April (see *Authorities*).

As a result, in May, ICRC delegates visited detainees held in Aleppo central prison in accordance with the organization's standard procedures. During the visit, detainees interacted freely with ICRC delegates; some spoke with delegates individually during private interviews. ICRC experts on prison health/sanitation were allowed unrestricted access to appraise the facilities used by inmates. At the visit's conclusion, delegates shared and discussed their findings and recommendations confidentially with the detaining authorities. They further conveyed the organization's willingness to support their efforts in improving detainees' treatment and living conditions and to provide family-links services to detainees.

At end-May, based on the experience of the Aleppo visit, the Syrian authorities and the ICRC continued discussing a general agreement that would allow ICRC visits to all other detainees in the country. However, aside from one meeting with representatives of the Foreign Affairs and Interior Ministries in October, no progress was made regarding such visits or other ICRC activities for detainees, such as family-links services.

In response to reports that some people were being held by armed groups, the ICRC expressed its willingness to visit the detainees and to facilitate contact between them and their families.

WOUNDED AND SICK

In January, the Syrian Red Crescent secretary general was killed while travelling from Damascus to Aleppo aboard a vehicle clearly marked with a red crescent. In 2012 seven National Society volunteers were killed while on duty. Incidents such as these, as well as systematically collected and cross-checked information on allegations of abuses against patients and medical staff/facilities, formed the basis of specific representations to the relevant actors on respect for medical personnel/infrastructure and people's right to safe and unimpeded access to health care. Media releases, while seeking support for the goals of the Health Care in Danger project, conveyed general reminders of these obligations

to as wide an audience as possible. After repeated calls to allow the evacuation of wounded people trapped in fighting-affected areas, the ICRC requested all those involved to halt the fighting for a few hours a day to facilitate urgently needed health services, particularly the work of National Society first-aid teams (see *Authorities*).

National Society volunteers continued to administer first aid to the wounded and, when necessary, evacuate them by ambulance to referral health facilities. To boost people's chances of obtaining medical care in areas most affected by fighting, State-managed and private hospitals and Syrian Red Crescent health facilities in particular received ICRC-donated emergency medical supplies and equipment. For example, the National Society's Aleppo branch received five weapon-wounded kits and other surgical/medical items in August, while the Health Ministry received weapon-wounded/triage kits. Such ICRC supplies helped health facilities treat thousands of wounded and sick patients, with weapon-wounded/emergency-care kits allowing for the full treatment of some 6,000 weapon-wounded patients, mainly in Damascus, Homs and Rural Damascus. To improve their teams' response capacities, the National Society/ICRC maintained contingency stocks in strategic locations countrywide. These were reinforced once import restrictions on ICRC medical goods were lifted.

Conditions on the ground prevented the organization of war-surgery seminars and the deployment of a mobile surgical team.

People who, owing to insecurity, could not seek treatment at the government facilities that remained open relied mainly on ICRC-supported/reinforced National Society emergency health facilities. In Damascus, for example, people were treated at the National Society's Zahera clinic, which received support in setting up and equipping four emergency rooms and one operating theatre. In Homs, the Syrian Red Crescent clinic enhanced its services with the completion of an emergency room furnished with ICRC-donated supplies and equipment. Patients unable to travel benefited from the new services provided by four mobile health units, fully equipped for first aid, triage, patient stabilization and minor surgery, and operated by National Society branches in the Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Tartous governorates. To expand these services, five additional units were being readied for delivery.

With ICRC support, the Syrian Red Crescent strengthened its first-aid capacities. It increased the number of first-responders and first-aid instructors, who received ICRC-donated first-aid kits, medical supplies, vehicles, and winter uniforms for 790 first-aiders. In total, 200 volunteers trained in the Safer Access approach, and an additional 70 also trained in advanced first aid. Aiming to standardize procedures, the National Society updated and circulated its first-aid manual, while similar work started on its training manual for first-aid trainers.

AUTHORITIES

Expanded contacts with the Syrian authorities and representatives of armed groups in Syria and abroad helped the National Society/ICRC implement their humanitarian activities on the ground, in coordination with the local authorities and community leaders. Meetings with governors and networking with all parties in control of the various areas visited provided National Society/ICRC teams with opportunities to explain their mandate, mission and working procedures, share concerns about humanitarian issues and seek support for their activities (see *Civilians, People deprived of their freedom* and *Wounded and sick*).

The ICRC informed the Syrian authorities and armed groups that, in its view, the type and intensity of the armed confrontations had reached a level where IHL and customary law applicable to non-international armed conflict needed to be respected, particularly Article 3 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

In September, the ICRC's newly appointed president visited Syria and conducted field visits to several affected areas in Rural Damascus. His visit was also an opportunity to reiterate the ICRC's request to visit all places of detention in Syria and, among other things, to push for speedier importation procedures for humanitarian supplies. Earlier in April, the former ICRC president, on his third visit to Syria since June 2011, had secured the government's agreement to the expansion of the ICRC's presence and scope of activities in the country. Furthermore, agreement was obtained on its proposal for "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting to facilitate the delivery of emergency aid; the proposal, also supported by the relevant armed groups, was successfully tested that same month in Douma.

The authorities had welcomed ICRC-suggested workshops for various civil society sectors, but these were postponed indefinitely owing to the security situation.

The National Society/ICRC affirmed their independence, while maintaining working relations, particularly in terms of coordination, with all major humanitarian actors (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*).

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Because of the situation, all training sessions with the Syrian armed, police and security forces were postponed indefinitely.

Through confidential dialogue and public communication, the ICRC reminded the Syrian government forces and other weapon bearers of their obligations under IHL. It drew their attention to internationally recognized standards relating to law enforcement and to universal humanitarian norms (see *Authorities* and *Civil society*). National Society/ICRC teams explained the purely humanitarian nature of their activities to contacts made at field level.

In November, a first direct contact was established with a Defence Ministry focal point regarding dialogue on conduct of hostilities.

CIVIL SOCIETY

ICRC communication efforts, together with networking with key civil society sectors, enhanced awareness of and support for the Movement.

People in Syria and abroad accessed nearly 40 public documents and several web-based video interviews detailing the humanitarian needs/situation and reminding those involved in the conflict of the IHL rules to be observed. Media and international organizations monitoring the situation in Syria reported on these. In response to media requests, the ICRC gave hundreds of interviews throughout the year, including during press conferences held by the ICRC president. Government representatives often quoted the ICRC, notably regarding its legal classification of the armed conflict in Syria (see *Authorities*).

To enhance the quality of reporting on contexts where the ICRC worked, journalists participated in events geared to increasing their technical knowledge of IHL and international human rights

law. In July, for example, some 35 journalists representing international and Syrian private/governmental media agencies attended two such seminars co-organized with the Information Ministry.

Similarly, some 15 law/sharia lecturers attended a two-day seminar, the first of its kind in Syria, organized in coordination with the University of Aleppo and the Syrian Red Crescent's Aleppo branch, on IHL and the ICRC's role as its guardian.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Acting in partnership with the ICRC, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent continued to play an instrumental role in providing a humanitarian response to the needs in Syria (see *Civilians* and *Wounded and sick*), for which it received ICRC material, financial and technical support. This included vehicles and funding to hire additional personnel, cover branches' running costs and establish operations centres and new premises, such as in the branches in Zahera (Damascus), Homs and Idlib and in the head office in Damascus.

The National Society also received financial support for a communication officer position, a presentation on the Fundamental Principles and the ICRC, and radio equipment to enhance its communication and dissemination capacities. Mine-risk education activities and work on emblem legislation and on the revision of the National Society's statutes were put on hold in favour of emergency/operational priorities.

Movement components coordinated their activities through regular meetings and Movement-wide conferences. In June, they signed a letter of understanding clarifying each component's role and mandate in the Syrian context. This coordination ensured best use was made of complementary capacities and maximized the Movement's overall action. The National Society also received support to maintain its independence, neutrality and accountability, particularly in relation to organizations outside the Movement.