



ICRC delegation

syria

Present in Syria since 1967, the ICRC acts as a neutral intermediary in matters of humanitarian concern affecting the Syrian inhabitants of the Israeli-occupied Golan protected by the Fourth Geneva Convention. In particular, the ICRC facilitates the passage of Syrian nationals, mainly students and pilgrims, who have to cross the area of separation to complete their studies at Syrian universities or perform their religious duties, and it restores and maintains links between family members separated by the demarcation line. The delegation also works to spread knowledge of IHL and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in close cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

EXPENDITURE IN CHF

Protection

157,523

Assistance

86,431

Preventive action

614,334

Cooperation with National Societies

155,912

General

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► **1,014,199**

of which: Overheads **61,899**

PERSONNEL

1 expatriate

7 national staff

KEY POINTS IN 2004

- ▶ The ICRC helped restore contact between people in Syria and family members interned/detained in Israel and Iraq, oversaw the repatriation of Syrians following their release from detention in Iraq and processed tracing requests for Syrians unaccounted for in Iraq and Syria.
- ▶ Travel was facilitated between the Israeli-occupied Golan and Syria proper for pilgrims and students, and for prospective marriage partners from opposite sides of the demarcation line to wed in the demilitarized zone.
- ▶ The Exploring Humanitarian Law programme was pilot-tested for the first time in Syrian secondary schools.
- ▶ ICRC travel documents were issued to asylum seekers, mainly Iraqis, to facilitate their resettlement in third countries or their family reunification.
- ▶ Financial, technical and material support was maintained for a rehabilitation centre caring for the disabled.

CONTEXT

In 2004 domestic political debate was dominated by the turmoil in neighbouring Iraq, Syrian offers to resume peace talks with Israel, and the controversy over Syria's continuing military presence in Lebanon.

In September the UN Security Council called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon. However, the Syrian and Lebanese authorities maintained that the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon was necessary to ensure stability there. Thousands of Syrian troops had been stationed in Lebanon since they deployed there as a peace-keeping force during Lebanon's 1975–91 civil war.

Syria tightened security along its borders with Iraq, and it refuted accusations by the United States that it was allowing militants to cross into Iraq from its territory to join the insurgency there. As part of its security measures, Syria started to build a 130-km wall along its border with Iraq and deployed some 12,000 troops to control cross-border movements.

Israel rejected renewed proposals by the Syrian authorities to resume peace negotiations. The peace talks had broken down in 2000 over disagreement about the future status of the part of the Golan that Israel captured from Syria in 1967 and annexed 14 years later. Tension between the two countries mounted in October when a Hamas leader was killed in a car-bomb attack in Damascus allegedly carried out by Israel.

In the most serious incidence of internal violence for several years, Kurdish riots erupted in several cities in March after a football match brawl between rival fans in the north-eastern town of Kamishli. Further violence was reported when Syrian security forces killed two gunmen and arrested two others after they had bombed an empty building in Damascus formerly occupied by the United Nations.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC registered increased demand for its tracing services from families in Syria seeking information about relatives either unaccounted for or deprived of their freedom in Iraq. For the first time, tracing requests were also received concerning people reported as missing or held in detention in Syria.

Many Syrians and Iraqi refugees were able to restore contact with family members in Iraq through the Red Cross message (RCM) service, and a number of Syrian nationals were repatriated under ICRC auspices after their release from detention in Iraq.

Travel documents were issued to Iraqi and other refugees to facilitate their resettlement in third countries, in close cooperation with the local authorities, UNHCR and the embassies of destination countries.

The ICRC arranged for Syrian students and pilgrims in the occupied Golan to travel to Syria proper for study or religious purposes, and for engaged couples from opposite sides of the demarcation line to marry in the demilitarized zone. The ICRC also assisted in the exchange of official documents between family members living in the occupied Golan and in Syria proper.

Progress was made towards introducing the teaching of international humanitarian law (IHL) in Syrian universities and the integration of the ICRC's Exploring Humanitarian Law course into secondary-school curricula.

The ICRC's Children and War campaign, designed to raise awareness of the plight of children caught up in armed conflicts, was launched in Syria.

Financial, technical and material support was maintained for a physical rehabilitation centre caring for disabled Palestinians and Syrians.

CIVILIANS

ICRC action focused on providing assistance and protection to Syrian nationals living in the Israeli-occupied Golan, and on serving the tracing needs of Syrian families and Iraqi refugees arising from the conflict in neighbouring Iraq.

Many families in Syria were able to re-establish contact with loved ones in Iraq through the ICRC tracing and RCM service.

Syrian nationals held in Iraq were traced during ICRC visits to places of detention there. The ICRC repatriated a number of Syrians following their release from detention in Iraq after interviewing them to ensure they were returning home of their own free will.

The ICRC endeavoured to safeguard a minimum of contact between family members cut off from one another for decades by the area of separation between Syria proper and the Israeli-occupied Golan. Specifically, the ICRC pursued efforts to bring about a resumption of regular meetings between the approximately 19,000 Syrians living in the occupied Golan and family members who fled to Syria proper when the region was overrun by Israeli forces in 1967. However, although the authorities concerned agreed in 2002 on a mutually acceptable location in the area of separation for such meetings, none had yet taken place by the end of 2004.

In coordination with the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the Israeli and Syrian authorities, the ICRC arranged for students and pilgrims from the occupied Golan to travel to Syria for limited periods to pursue their studies or to visit holy sites. Similar coordination enabled wedding ceremonies for couples separated by the demarcation line to take place in the demilitarized zone.

Syrian nationals in the occupied Golan and in Syria proper continued to rely on the ICRC to exchange official papers such as power-of-attorney documents, and birth, death and marriage certificates. These documents often enabled recipients to qualify for pensions or to settle personal issues such as inheritance or property rights.

The ICRC was requested by a number of families in the occupied Golan to act as an intermediary to transmit documents to the Syrian authorities in support of claims to property in the town of Kuneitra. The town, located in the occupied Golan, was completely destroyed by Israeli forces before being handed back to Syria in 1973. Syria announced that it intended to rebuild it.

Following Israel's decision to authorize the sale to Syria proper of apples grown in the occupied Golan, the ICRC was asked to act as an intermediary in submitting a request to the Syrian authorities and to UNDOF regarding the logistical arrangements for the transport of the apples to Syria.

- ▶ 475 RCMs relayed between families in Syria and relatives either detained or located in Iraq or living in the Israeli-occupied Golan
- ▶ 104 Syrian nationals repatriated under ICRC auspices after their release from detention/internment in Iraq
- ▶ 431 pilgrims and students from the Israeli-occupied Golan travelled to Syria for religious or study purposes under arrangements facilitated by the ICRC
- ▶ 4 couples separated by the demarcation line wed in the demilitarized zone

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

A number of former Iraqi prisoners of war travelled to Damascus to obtain ICRC certificates of detention which they were unable to obtain in Iraq because of the ICRC's limited presence there. The certificates qualified them to receive allowances from the Iraqi Ministries of Defence and Human Rights upon their return home. Certificates of detention were also issued to Syrian nationals following their release from detention in Iraq and repatriation under ICRC auspices.

Families in Syria continued to rely on the RCM network to re-establish or maintain contact with relatives held captive in Iraq and Israel. The ICRC also facilitated the transfer of Syrian government aid and family financial support to Syrian nationals detained in Israel.

For the first time the ICRC received tracing requests from Syrians seeking news of the fate or whereabouts of family members reported missing and presumed to be held in detention in Syria. These cases were brought to the attention of the Syrian authorities.

In March the remains of a Palestinian militant who died while in detention in Iraq were transferred under ICRC auspices to Syria for burial. The man was one of several Palestinian militants who carried out the 1985 attack on the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship off the coast of Egypt.

WOUNDED AND SICK

The ICRC maintained technical, financial and material support for a prosthetic/orthotic centre run by the Syrian branch of the Palestine Red Crescent Society caring for disabled Palestinians and Syrians. Many of the centre's patients lost limbs in

accidents caused by mines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) that still contaminate some parts of the country.

- 70 patients treated at an ICRC-supported physical rehabilitation centre caring for the disabled

AUTHORITIES

In June the Syrian prime minister published a decree establishing a national committee for the implementation of IHL, presided over by the minister of state for Red Crescent affairs and maritime law. The minister and senior members of the IHL committee were invited to ICRC headquarters in Geneva in October, where they held talks with the ICRC president and other representatives of the organization. The Syrian delegation was accompanied by the president of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society, senior officials of the Syrian Ministries of Defence, of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs and a Syrian parliamentary responsible for the creation of a parliamentary commission on IHL. Discussions centred on various measures to accelerate and expand the harmonization of Syrian legislation with IHL.

In its first extensive contacts with the Syrian parliament, the ICRC held a seminar on IHL for members of the parliamentary commissions for Arab and foreign affairs. Participants recommended the establishment of an interministerial committee for the implementation of IHL, and welcomed the development of relations between the Syrian parliament and the ICRC.

As part of a programme to integrate the teaching of IHL into training programmes for members of the judiciary at regional and national levels, an initial introductory course on the subject was given to trainees at the Syrian Judicial Institute under the authority of the Ministry of Justice.

- Syria established a national committee for the implementation of IHL
- 20 members of the Syrian parliamentary commissions for Arab and foreign affairs participated in an ICRC seminar on IHL
- 25 trainee judges at the Syrian Judicial Institute followed an introductory course in IHL

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Following the appointment of a Syrian army brigadier to act as the ICRC's main channel of communication with the Ministry of Defence, the ICRC gave its first course in IHL in nine years to senior officers of the armed forces, and further courses were scheduled for 2005.

Plans also progressed to produce an Arabic version of the ICRC's manual, *The Law of War for Armed Forces*.

Close cooperation was maintained with the UNDOF and the UN Truce Supervision Organization, which provided logistical support for ICRC operations to transfer civilians across the separation zone between the occupied Golan and Syria proper and to unite prospective marriage partners from opposite sides of the demarcation line (see *Civilians*).

CIVIL SOCIETY

The ICRC reinforced its relations with key sectors of Syrian civil society to promote knowledge and understanding of IHL and the organization's mandate and activities.

Following extensive preparatory work undertaken with the Syrian education authorities, the ICRC's Exploring Humanitarian Law programme was introduced as a pilot project in four secondary schools. The move followed an ICRC workshop on the programme, organized jointly with the Ministry of Education, for national educators and teachers from the pilot schools, as well as for representatives of the UN Relief and Works Agency and Red Crescent volunteers.

At the request of the Syrian Ministry of Education, a workshop was held for members of its technical commission and school inspectors to study ways to integrate the Exploring Humanitarian Law modules into various study areas, including Arabic, English and French language courses and social and religious studies. Ministry officials participated in the regional meeting on the implementation of Exploring Humanitarian Law in Cairo in November (see *Egypt*).

To advance the introduction of the teaching of IHL at university level, a seminar on the subject was held for professors and postgraduates from the law faculties of the universities of Damascus and Aleppo. Participating professors and university deans

pledged to increase the teaching of IHL as a separate subject in their faculties of law.

The ICRC's Children and War campaign launched in Syria in April culminated in December in a ceremony attended by the wife of the Syrian president. The campaign, conducted with the Syrian Red Crescent, aimed to raise public awareness of the plight of children in armed conflict. In August Syria's First Lady presented prizes to the winners of an ICRC-sponsored painting and short story competition on the theme, in which students from 6,000 schools across the country participated.

A book on a symposium held in Damascus in late 2003 entitled *The International Criminal Court and Enlarging the Scope of IHL* was published in Arabic and English and distributed to university professors and students.

- 679 students in 4 secondary schools took part in a pilot test of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme
- 13 law professors and 8 postgraduate students from the universities of Damascus and Aleppo participated in an IHL seminar

NATIONAL SOCIETY

The ICRC assisted National Society branches in processing tracing requests for Syrian nationals unaccounted for abroad and in Syria and in relaying RCMs between Syrian families and relatives deprived of their freedom in other countries such as Iraq.

Syrian Red Crescent volunteers received training in tracing techniques, and computer equipment was provided to upgrade the National Society's tracing infrastructure. First-aid kits were also supplied to boost the National Society's capacity to respond to natural disasters and mass-casualty incidents.

The ICRC enjoyed the support of the National Society in promoting its Exploring Humanitarian Law programme. Red Crescent volunteers attended workshops to improve their knowledge of the subject and contributed to its introduction on an experimental basis in Syrian schools (see *Civil society*).

The Syrian Red Crescent also played a prominent role in helping to promote the ICRC's Children and War campaign. The

campaign included an exhibition on the theme in Damascus, which attracted thousands of visitors. A workshop on the impact of war on children was organized at one of the National Society's youth summer camps, and Red Crescent volunteers helped organize the painting competition on the theme for children throughout Syria. To mark World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May), the Aleppo branch of the Syrian Red Crescent organized a painting exhibition depicting "Childhood and war" under the patronage of the governor of Aleppo. In another event marking the same occasion, the ICRC and the Syrian Red Crescent organized a basketball match under the campaign's slogan "Let us play".

A joint Syrian Red Crescent/ICRC mine-risk education programme was proposed targeting communities in Kuneitra governorate, which was still affected by mines and other ERW left over from past conflicts in the region.

The ICRC kept up its financial and technical assistance to a physical rehabilitation centre in Damascus run by the Syrian branch of the Palestine Red Crescent Society using ICRC technology and materials to produce artificial limbs and other orthopaedic appliances for the disabled. Computer equipment and software were supplied to the centre to enable it to improve patient care and stock inventory management. Furthermore, ICRC experts identified where further assistance could raise the quality of production of prostheses while keeping prices affordable for amputees.

- ▶ 150 first-aid kits supplied to the Syrian Red Crescent
- ▶ Syrian Red Cross volunteers trained in tracing and attended workshops on the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme
- ▶ Syrian and Palestinian amputees fitted with artificial limbs at an ICRC-assisted physical rehabilitation centre
- ▶ 13 professors and 8 post-graduate students from the law faculties of the universities in Damascus and Aleppo participated in an IHL seminar
- ▶ 25 trainee magistrates at the Syrian Judicial Institute participated in an introductory course in IHL