

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC



ICRC / AR_2010

ICRC delegation

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	315
Assistance	617
Prevention	585
Cooperation with National Societies	476
General	-

▶ **1,993**

of which: Overheads 122

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	80%
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PERSONNEL

Expatriates	4
National staff (daily workers not included)	10

KEY POINTS

In 2010, the ICRC:

- ▶ facilitated contacts between family members and travel by students and pilgrims across the demarcation line separating the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic
- ▶ helped boost Golan farmers' livelihoods by arranging the transport of 8,100 tonnes of apples to markets in the Syrian Arab Republic
- ▶ implemented water projects with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to help some 21,050 people sustain their livelihoods in drought-ridden north-eastern provinces
- ▶ co-organized with the Ministries of Defence and Interior respectively 2 courses on IHL for 75 Syrian armed forces officers and 2 courses on IHL/international human rights law for 60 Syrian police and security forces officers
- ▶ co-organized with the national IHL committee IHL workshops for 50 parliamentarians and 35 Syrian journalists, and an IHL train-the-trainer course for 11 representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Interior
- ▶ welcomed the success of mine-risk education programmes developed in Kuneitra by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent

The ICRC has been present in the Syrian Arab Republic since 1967. It acts as a neutral intermediary on issues of humanitarian concern for Syrian inhabitants of the part of the Golan occupied by Israel. It facilitates travel for certain categories of people, such as students and pilgrims, between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic, and maintains links between separated family members. It works to spread knowledge of IHL in government, military, academic and media circles, and cooperates closely with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The ICRC also seeks to visit people detained in the Syrian Arab Republic.

CONTEXT

The Syrian Arab Republic continued to develop relations with many Western and regional States and was widely recognized as a key player in efforts to stabilize the region.

Visits to Damascus by political leaders and senior officials from France, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Spain, Turkey and the United States of America and by the king of Saudi Arabia were generally perceived as an illustration of the importance they attached to enlisting Syrian support in reducing tensions in the region.

The Syrian Arab Republic offered its mediation to help defuse tensions in Lebanon over the outcome of the investigation by the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which was expected to issue indictments for the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. It was also involved in regional deliberations on the formation of a new government in Iraq. As relations with Iraq improved, the two countries normalized their diplomatic relations in November.

Despite renewed US-Syrian dialogue and the likely nomination of a new US ambassador to Damascus after a five-year hiatus,

US sanctions against the country, in place since 2004 and due to expire in May 2010, were extended.

Israel's continuing occupation of the part of the Golan Heights it seized in 1967 remained the major issue of contention between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel. The Syrian government expressed its willingness to resume Turkish-mediated peace talks with Israel, suspended since 2008, but only on condition that peace would be based on Israel's full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The deadlock continued to leave some 22,000 inhabitants of the occupied Golan cut off from their families in the Syrian Arab Republic. In April, Israel accused the Syrian government of transferring Scud missiles over the Lebanese border to Hezbollah, which Damascus denied.

The government faced major economic and social challenges, notably declining oil production, high rates of unemployment linked to rapid population growth swelled by the presence of Iraqi refugees, and a protracted drought in the north-east. The drought was in its fourth year and had seriously disrupted agricultural production and forced thousands of farmers to migrate to urban centres.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

PROTECTION

CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)			
Red Cross messages	Total	UAMs/SCs*	
RCMs collected	449		
RCMs distributed	494		
Phone calls facilitated between family members	10		
Reunifications, transfers and repatriations	Total		
People transferred/repatriated	944		
Human remains transferred/repatriated	1		
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons	Total	Women	Minors
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	7		
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	1		
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2010 (people)	19		
Documents			
People to whom travel documents were issued	168		
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines	38		

* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

ASSISTANCE

CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)				
Economic security, water and habitat		Total	Women	Children
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	21,050	30%	10%

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

Family members cut off from one another for decades by the demarcation line between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic were able to maintain a minimum of contact through the ICRC acting as a neutral intermediary with the authorities concerned. No progress was made in efforts to enable inhabitants of the occupied Golan to visit their families in the Syrian Arab Republic. Such visits were discontinued by the Israeli authorities in 1992.

For the fifth consecutive year, the ICRC facilitated the transport of the apple harvest from the occupied Golan to Syrian markets.

Action was taken to help address the drought emergency in the north-east, in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the central and local authorities. Some 20,000 drought-affected people in Al Hassakeh and Deir Ez Zor provinces had improved access to safe drinking water delivered free of charge by five trucks donated by the ICRC to the National Society. Farming communities

in remote areas of Al Hassakeh province, not easily accessible by road for water-trucking operations, benefited from the installation of three water treatment plants making clean water available to them cost-free.

Demand remained steady for ICRC tracing and RCM services, which sought to help Syrian nationals and Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic locate and re-establish contact with family members detained/interned or unaccounted for abroad, mainly in Iraq but also in the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba, and in Lebanon. In close cooperation with the Syrian authorities, organizations such as UNHCR and the embassies of host countries, the ICRC issued travel documents to Iraqi and other refugees accepted for resettlement.

Further IHL training events, organized jointly with the authorities concerned and generally with the participation of the National Society, were held for government officials, parliamentarians, journalists and members of the armed and police forces. Meetings with members of the national IHL committee, the training units of the Ministries of Defence and Interior, and university lecturers provided opportunities to discuss how to integrate IHL systematically into training and teaching curricula. For the first time, Syrian officials attended regional seminars on IHL. Public communication was also reinforced, resulting in wider media coverage of ICRC activities and IHL issues.

The ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent extended their partnership, with the ICRC helping boost the National Society's capacities in the fields of family links, emergency preparedness, first aid, communication and mine-risk education.

CIVILIANS

Inhabitants of the occupied Golan benefit from humanitarian services

Movements between the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be restricted, preventing people in the occupied Golan from visiting relatives living on the other side of the demarcation line. The restrictions remained in place despite ongoing ICRC diplomatic efforts to resume such visits, discontinued by the Israeli authorities in 1992.

Notwithstanding the restrictions, inhabitants of the occupied Golan and their families in the Syrian Arab Republic were able to maintain limited links facilitated by the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary. Thus, 262 students and 665 pilgrims living in the occupied Golan travelled to Damascus and back home with the help of the ICRC, in coordination with the UN Disengagement Observer Force and the Israeli and Syrian authorities. The evacuation of eight emergency medical cases from the occupied Golan to Damascus and nine humanitarian cases from Damascus to the occupied Golan was also facilitated by the ICRC.

Syrian nationals in the occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic also relied on the ICRC to convey official papers, such as

power-of-attorney documents, property claims and birth, death and marriage certificates, back and forth between them, enabling recipients to qualify for pensions or to settle personal issues such as inheritance or property rights.

For the fifth consecutive year, Golan farmers boosted their livelihoods by sending their apple harvest (more than 8,000 tonnes) to Syrian markets via transportation provided by the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary at their request and that of the Israeli and Syrian authorities.

Family contacts severed by conflict re-established

Through the ICRC family-links network, families were able to locate and maintain contact with relatives either detained/interned or previously unaccounted for abroad. Such contacts included the exchange of news between Syrian families and their relatives held in the Guantanamo Bay internment facility via six telephone calls facilitated by the ICRC. Families also used ICRC services to send parcels to their detained/interned relatives in Iraq and Lebanon. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that Syrian nationals released from the Guantanamo Bay internment facility and transferred to and detained in European countries were able to stay in touch with their families.

Establishing contact between families in the Syrian Arab Republic and their relatives detained/interned in Iraq remained difficult owing to the irregular rhythm of ICRC visits to Iraqi places of detention arising mainly from security constraints.

Families in Israel and Lebanon, as well as in the Syrian Arab Republic, remained without information on the fate of close relatives presumed missing in the Syrian Arab Republic or in Israel in relation to past conflicts. As in previous years, the ICRC remained available to act as a neutral intermediary in resolving these cases.

In total, 168 refugees, primarily Iraqi and stateless persons without valid identification papers, resettled in third countries thanks to travel documents issued by the ICRC in coordination with the Syrian authorities, organizations such as UNHCR and the embassies concerned.

Drought-affected rural farming communities receive livelihood assistance

Based on joint Syrian Arab Red Crescent/ICRC assessments carried out during the second half of 2009, the Syrian authorities at all levels, the National Society and the ICRC agreed on activities to improve farmers' access to water in drought-ridden rural areas of Al Hassakeh province in the north-east of the country.

Additional field visits in and around Al Hassakeh enabled the collection of baseline data, further assessments, and exchanges of information on planned activities between the local authorities (including water boards), future beneficiaries and National Society/ICRC teams. On the basis of the information gathered, projects were redesigned with the authorities concerned and the area of intervention expanded to Deir Ez Zor and Homs provinces.

To help sustain the livelihoods of some 1,050 farmers in remote areas not easily accessible by water-trucking, three water treatment plants were installed in Al Hassakeh province. Plans were also made to build a water treatment plant in Homs province and two underground rainwater catchment reservoirs in Deir Ez Zor province. To help the local water authorities increase the supply of safe drinking water to people in rural communities in Al Hassakeh and Deir Ez Zor provinces, five cistern trucks were donated by the ICRC to the National Society. Used with the local water board, they provided 20,000 beneficiaries living in the two provinces with drinking water free of charge, helping them to sustain their livelihoods and use the money thus saved to buy other essential commodities.

By year-end, delays had prevented completion of the design work to rehabilitate the micro-dams along the Al Khabour river bed and the natural water ponds, while authorizations for low-cost irrigation projects had still to be provided on the basis of proposals made by ICRC experts. Planned hygiene-promotion work by Syrian Arab Red Crescent teams was cancelled.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

Efforts to develop a constructive dialogue on detention with the Syrian authorities did not produce any tangible results. However, the response to ICRC requests to the authorities concerned for information on individuals detained in the Syrian Arab Republic improved, resulting in better feedback to their families.

An ICRC proposal to organize a discussion forum on water and habitat issues in places of detention was turned down by the authorities.

AUTHORITIES

Following an agreement reached between the ICRC and the president of the national IHL committee, who was also the minister of State for Red Crescent affairs, two IHL courses for government officials and parliamentarians were organized. Members of the national IHL committee and ICRC representatives met after a five-year hiatus to explore ways to promote the ratification and implementation of IHL instruments and to reactivate the committee's work. Syrian Arab Red Crescent staff, who participated in most of these meetings, gave presentations on the National Society's activities and the Movement. Syrian officials for the first time attended regional seminars on IHL.

- ▶ 11 representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Interior participated in a five-day train-the-trainer course on IHL
- ▶ around 50 parliamentarians attended an IHL workshop
- ▶ 7 Syrian officials, including 2 law lecturers, participated in the annual IHL course for Arab government officials (see *Lebanon*)
- ▶ 3 Syrian representatives participated in the second IHL seminar for Arab country parliamentarians (see *Egypt*)

During a meeting with the head of the Damascus-based Hamas political bureau, the ICRC presented its confidential report on the conduct of Hamas security forces in the Gaza Strip between 28 December 2008 and 27 February 2009. It also reiterated its demand that the Israeli soldier held by Hamas be allowed to have family contacts and to receive ICRC visits, so far to no avail.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

Representatives of the training units of the Ministries of Defence and Interior and the ICRC held several meetings to organize training events, to explore ways to integrate IHL more systematically into military doctrine, training and operations, and to introduce international human rights law and internationally recognized standards related to policing into police training programmes.

- ▶ 75 Syrian armed forces officers participated in 2 three-day IHL courses
- ▶ some 150 officers from the Syrian armed forces and from other Arab and non-Arab States participating in courses at the Syrian Command and Staff College attended a presentation on IHL
- ▶ 60 Syrian police and security force officers attended 2 three-day courses on IHL/international human rights law

CIVIL SOCIETY

Networking with the media and religious/traditional leaders was reinforced to broaden their knowledge and understanding of IHL and ICRC activities. Some 35 Syrian journalists from the public and private sectors attended two one-day round-tables on IHL, the ICRC and the Movement. Heightened interest of national and international media resulted in increased coverage of the ICRC and its mandate and activities drawn from information provided regularly by the delegation. For example, the press reported extensively on the apple harvest operation (see *Civilians*) and on courses organized for the police and security forces (see *Armed forces and other bearers of weapons*); Syrian national television broadcast a 30-minute programme on the ICRC and IHL.

Law lecturers from Damascus University and the ICRC discussed the status of IHL teaching in Syrian universities and worked on a strategy to promote teaching of the subject at university level.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent continued to receive ICRC training, material and financial support to help strengthen its emergency preparedness, first aid, dissemination, mine-risk education and tracing capacities, to promote its new logo, designed to reinforce its public image and visibility, and to protect its emblem from misuse.

Mine-risk education progressed successfully in Kuneitra, with 25 additional volunteers and school teachers trained during a two-day course and six schools participating in awareness

activities. Authorities and international organizations showed interest in contributing to the programme.

Movement components operating in the country met on a regular basis to share information and ensure coordination of programmes and organized joint events to mark International Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May).

National Society board members from all 14 branches, including newly elected ones, attended a two-day introductory course organized by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the International Federation, the Danish Red Cross, the British Red Cross and the ICRC on the history of the Movement, the mandate and activities of its components, the Fundamental Principles, the emblem, and the International Federation's Strategy 2020.

With ICRC support:

- ▶ 14 volunteers attended a two-day workshop on the protection of the emblem
- ▶ 17 first-aid instructors participated in a ten-day training course, integrating the Safer Access approach
- ▶ 5,000 posters and 10,000 leaflets produced and distributed to complement mine-risk education activities
- ▶ 26 National Society volunteers participated in a four-day workshop on tracing/family links, and needs assessments were carried out in 9 of the 14 branches
- ▶ first-aid personnel received field uniforms
- ▶ 26 volunteers representing 9 branches attended an IHL "Training of Facilitators" workshop