



eritrea

The ICRC opened a delegation in Eritrea in 1998 in the context of the international armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and is responding to the humanitarian needs remaining from the two-year war. Its priority is to protect and assist the population displaced, detained or otherwise affected by the conflict, ensuring compliance with IHL in respect of any persons still protected by the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The ICRC also supports the development of the Red Cross Society of Eritrea.

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

Protection	1,739
Assistance	6,664
Prevention	395
Cooperation with National Societies	257
General	-

► **9,055**

of which: Overheads 553

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	100%
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PERSONNEL

17	expatriates
98	national staff (daily workers not included)

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- ▶ assisted over 100,000 border residents and returnees in boosting their economic security through livelihood-support projects
- ▶ improved access to water for more than 42,000 border residents, favouring solar-powered water systems, which needed no fuel and less maintenance
- ▶ distributed shelter materials and essential household items to some 41,000 IDPs and recent returnees in the border region
- ▶ restored and maintained family links across the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border by collecting and distributing RCMs and, at their request, repatriating people to Ethiopia or Eritrea
- ▶ monitored the situation of detainees and former POWs of Ethiopian origin, visiting 40 detention facilities
- ▶ helped boost surgical capacities in border region hospitals and assisted physical rehabilitation centres in meeting demand

CONTEXT

Ethiopia and Eritrea remained deadlocked over issues that had now stalled the physical pegging out of their new border for five years. On 30 November, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission in The Hague said that it considered the line it had drawn in its 2002 ruling as the official border and its own mandate fulfilled. The UN further reduced its Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), leaving 1,700 peacekeepers from January 2007 to monitor the buffer zone, known as the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), along the border. UNMEE's mandate was extended until 31 January 2008.

Relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia remained tense, with both sides increasing their military presence in the border area.

By year-end, the vast majority of people displaced by the 1998–2000 international armed conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia had returned home or been resettled in or near the TSZ as part of a government programme. Some 4,600 were still living in camps.

Harvests had been fair to good in most parts of Eritrea since 2005, and the government pursued its policy of promoting self-reliance and building infrastructure. However, daily life remained a struggle for families living along the isolated southern border, their chances of economic recovery hampered by past conflicts and drought and the boundary stalemate, which stifled trade.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS

	Total		Total	Women	Children	
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)			CIVILIANS			
Detainees visited and monitored individually	443	<i>Economic security, water and habitat</i>				
		Essential household items	Beneficiaries	41,061	60%	25%
	37					
	36	Agricultural inputs and micro-economic initiatives	Beneficiaries	108,045	61%	24%
	36					
Number of visits carried out	72	Water, sanitation and habitat projects	Beneficiaries	49,032	29%	51%
Number of places of detention visited	40					
RESTORING FAMILY LINKS		WOUNDED AND SICK				
<i>Red Cross messages (RCMs) and reunifications</i>		Hospitals supported	Structures	3		
RCMs collected	6,467	Admissions	Patients	401	113	114
RCMs distributed	7,200	Operations	Operations performed	403		
People reunited with their families	90					
<i>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</i>						
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	26					
	12					
	5					
Tracing cases closed positively (persons located)	24					
Tracing cases still being handled at 31 December 2007 (people)	253					
	77					
	72					
<i>Unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and separated children (SCs), including unaccompanied demobilized child soldiers</i>						
UAMs/SCs newly registered by the ICRC	24					
UAMs/SCs reunited with their families by the ICRC	40					
UAM/SC cases still being handled at 31 December 2007	3					
DOCUMENTS ISSUED						
People to whom a detention attestation was issued	4					

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC, in accordance with its mandate, remained focused in 2007 on meeting the needs of people still affected by the 1998–2000 international armed conflict with Ethiopia. It worked mainly in the southern border regions of Debub and Gash Barka, where it was the only international aid organization with a permanent field presence.

As more displaced people returned home or resettled in the TSZ, the ICRC shifted from relief distributions to carrying out livelihood-support projects designed to improve the economic situation of border communities. Eighty-five percent of the beneficiaries were women and children, owing to the number of men either killed or disabled during the war or fulfilling their national service requirement. The projects included treating livestock against disease, hiring tractors to plough fields, and helping resettled families build homes. The worst-off families received donkeys to help transport water and goods, or goats or treadle-operated irrigation pumps to generate income. More beneficiaries than planned were included in the tractor-ploughing programme after evaluations confirmed that this initiative had helped boost food security in 2006. The delegation also worked with the authorities to improve access to water for communities, favouring solar-powered systems because they needed no fuel and less maintenance.

In parallel, the delegation provided over 40,000 IDPs in camps or returnees with any shelter materials and essential household items they lacked.

Delegates followed the situation in the border area, ready to document any alleged incidents of violence against civilians. The ICRC also visited detainees of Ethiopian origin and the few remaining

former POWs who declined repatriation in 2002, and monitored the situation of the Ethiopian community in Eritrea. The aim was to ensure that the rights of those populations regarding living conditions and repatriation were respected, in accordance with international humanitarian standards and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The ICRC helped complete clearance procedures for those who wished to return to Ethiopia, assisted in their voluntary repatriation and, when requested, reunited children and other vulnerable people with their families across the border. It also maintained the tracing and RCM services so that relatives could communicate across the closed border.

The surgical training programme for general practitioners and anaesthetists in three Gash Barka hospitals was expanded to include nurses. The initiative helped increase surgical capacity, improve patient care and reduce the number of costly referrals to Asmara. In close coordination with the authorities, the ICRC also began providing materials, equipment and training to help Eritrea's three physical rehabilitation centres meet demand.

Small-scale programmes to raise awareness of IHL progressed as planned with the Eritrean armed forces and UNMEE. The ICRC also staged some well-attended events that drew public attention to IHL, the work of the Movement and related humanitarian issues.

At the government's request, the Red Cross Society of Eritrea suspended its activities from early February, pending the outcome of an investigation into its internal affairs. All Movement partners active in Eritrea offered support to clarify the situation. Tracing and RCM services were disrupted until May, when the ICRC stepped in to take over the tasks previously carried out by the Society.

The ICRC coordinated its activities with those of UN agencies and other humanitarian actors in fields of common interest, in order to maximize impact, fill gaps and avoid duplication.

CIVILIANS

Protecting civilians

The ICRC followed the situation in the border area, maintaining relations with the Eritrean authorities and UNMEE staff, and stood ready to document any alleged incidents of violence against civilians.

Delegates also monitored the situation of civilians of Ethiopian origin living in Eritrea and made any necessary representations on their behalf to the authorities. Eighty-four such people obtained or renewed their Eritrean residence permits with ICRC financial assistance. These were the last beneficiaries promised this type of aid before it had to be discontinued in March 2006 owing to a change in government procedures.

Providing clean water

The lack of clean drinking water posed serious health risks for rural communities in the Debub and Gash Barka border regions, where water points had been damaged by past conflicts and the groundwater depleted by recurring drought.

To improve access to water, communities helped the ICRC upgrade 3 town water delivery systems (reservoirs and public fountains) and drill 8 boreholes and equip 12 wells with solar-powered pumps in rural areas. Each project was designed to provide the Eritrean standard of 20 litres of water a day per person. The use of solar-powered systems, which needed no fuel and reduced maintenance, combined with community training in hygiene and the management and maintenance of water sources, contributed to the long-term sustainability of the new facilities.

The amount of water available for livestock and crops was also increased, in cooperation with the Agriculture Ministry, by constructing three small dams or ponds to collect and store rainfall. The efficient use of rainwater also helped the water table recover.

To boost technical capacity, 24 Eritrean Water Resource Department engineers were trained by the ICRC either in the maintenance of solar-powered water systems or in the use of a geographic information system, known as GIS, to manage water sources. In addition, the department received 20 hand pumps and spare parts, which were unavailable in Eritrea, as well as tool kits.

► 42,057 people benefited from water projects

Restoring and improving livelihoods

Returning or resettled families set up home in the TSZ with shelter materials, blankets and soap provided by the ICRC. The assistance was coordinated with the authorities, UNDP, which financed the transport of the returnees, and UNICEF, which rehabilitated health posts and schools. The few thousand IDPs still in camps also received any shelter materials and essential household items they lacked.

Over 2,400 IDPs who had been resettled in regions with insufficient housing built new homes with the aid of ICRC materials, expertise, and funds to hire masons and carpenters.

Some 4,500 residents and returnees also received materials and training to replace their traditional cooking ovens with energy-saving ones promoted by the Agriculture Ministry. The new ovens were designed to burn up to 30% less wood. This helped to slow deforestation and saved women and children time and energy collecting firewood. The ovens also produced less smoke, which reduced health risks.

To boost crop production in the Debub region, struggling families, many of them headed by women, had their land ploughed by tractors hired by the ICRC. Lacking farm equipment or men to do the ploughing, the families would otherwise have had to leave their land fallow or share it with others, thereby reducing their already meagre income. It also saved the households from having to sell assets, usually livestock, to hire tractors. After assessments showed that the 2006 tractor-ploughing initiative had helped boost food security, 7,000 more beneficiaries than planned were added to the 2007 programme.

In targeted areas of the Debub and Gash Barka regions, residents' and returnees' livestock were inoculated against parasites, in cooperation with government veterinarians. The level of herd infestation subsequently dropped from 81% to 18%, which helped improve the productivity of livestock. Healthier animals were also more resistant to drought, so families would be better able to survive economically in difficult times.

Struggling rural families who lived far from a water point received donkeys and large water bags. This allowed women and children to fetch more water in a shorter time, which freed them up for other productive activities. The donkeys were also used to harvest crops, collect firewood and fodder, and transport produce to market.

Small animal husbandry and market gardens were common ways of generating income, especially for women, but many households had lost those assets through conflict, displacement and drought. A total of 48 families each received 5 goats, an asset which needed little upkeep and increased quickly in value as the herd multiplied. Another 100 villagers were provided with a total of 10 treadle-operated irrigation pumps to boost vegetable production. They had been using watering cans because they could not afford fuel.

- 41,061 IDPs (10,250 households), 36,485 of them returnees or resettled people, received essential household items
- 108,045 people (21,609 households) benefited from agricultural/veterinary/micro-economic initiatives, including:
 - 77,030 from the inoculation of 396,923 animals against parasites
 - 27,375 from the ploughing by tractors of 3,703 hectares
 - 3,300 from the provision of donkeys and water bags
- 6,975 people benefited from habitat projects, including:
 - 4,550 from the installation of 910 fuel-saving cooking ovens
 - 2,425 from the construction of 485 permanent housing units

Restoring family links

Thousands of people communicated with relatives on the other side of the closed Eritrea-Ethiopia border through the tracing and RCM services. At their request, people of Eritrean or Ethiopian origin were repatriated and children, the elderly and the sick reunited with relatives across the border, under ICRC auspices. This was their only legal means of returning to their country of origin. Their official documents were also forwarded so that they could apply for further studies or jobs. Prior to repatriation, 71 needy people obtained their exit visas from Eritrea with ICRC financial support.

The RCM service was disrupted between early February, when Eritrean Red Cross activities were suspended (see *ICRC action*), and May when the ICRC temporarily stepped in to take over the tasks previously carried out by the Society.

- ▶ 6,260 RCMs collected from and 6,966 RCMs distributed to civilians
- ▶ new tracing requests registered for 26 people (including 12 females and 5 minors at the time of disappearance); 24 people located; 253 people (including 77 females and 72 minors at the time of disappearance) still being sought
- ▶ 90 people in Eritrea reunited with family in Ethiopia (including 40 unaccompanied/separated children), and 72 people in Ethiopia reunited with family in Eritrea (including 61 unaccompanied/separated children)
- ▶ 24 unaccompanied/separated children registered; 3 cases of unaccompanied/separated children still being handled
- ▶ 2,360 people voluntarily repatriated from Eritrea to Ethiopia and 122 from Ethiopia to Eritrea
- ▶ 42 official documents relayed from Eritrea and 6 from Ethiopia across the border

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

The ICRC visited detainees of Ethiopian origin held in Eritrea and informed the local detaining authorities confidentially of its findings and recommendations, in accordance with humanitarian principles and the relevant provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Personnel in prisons and police stations were also briefed on IHL and the ICRC. Inmates received, where necessary, blankets, clothing, shoes and hygiene items and were offered the RCM service to communicate with their families.

In coordination with UNHCR, the ICRC also monitored the situation of the few remaining former POWs who had declined repatriation in 2002. During 2007, 24 former POWs resettled in a third country.

- ▶ 443 detainees of Ethiopian origin visited and monitored individually (including 37 females and 36 minors) and 343 newly registered (including 32 females and 31 minors), during 72 visits to 40 places of detention
- ▶ 207 RCMs collected from and 234 RCMs distributed to detainees

WOUNDED AND SICK

Boosting surgical capacity in hospitals

Decades of armed conflict had disrupted medical training, leaving Eritrea short of surgeons.

To boost surgical capacities, general practitioners and anaesthetists at three main hospitals in the Gash Barka border region (population 800,000) were improving their skills through a training programme initiated by an ICRC surgeon and anaesthetist in 2006, in cooperation with the Health Ministry. By mid-2007, patient care had improved, there were fewer costly transfers to Asmara, and the general practitioners in Agordat and Tesseney hospitals needed only supervisory visits. The 2007 programme, therefore, focused on Barentu hospital, the region's referral facility. With the arrival of 2 ICRC nurses in April, 15 operating theatre and ward nurses and some 150 students at Barentu Nursing School also began benefiting from courses and on-the-job supervision.

The hospitals received their drugs from Asmara central pharmacy, with the ICRC helping to organize transport and providing additional anaesthesia supplies. Agordat and Tesseney blood banks were also reinforced with solar-powered storage fridges, and Barentu hospital received surgical equipment.

In addition, a total of 49 personnel from various medical facilities took part in two one-week courses in trauma management, and 34 civil and military medical staff participated in a workshop on treating gunshot wounds and mine injuries.

In the 3 ICRC-supported hospitals:

- ▶ 403 surgical operations performed under ICRC supervision, involving 14 weapon-wounded patients (including 3 women, 5 children, and 8 people injured by mines or explosive remnants of war) and 387 other surgical cases (including 110 women and 109 children)

Supporting physical rehabilitation services

Eritrea's three physical rehabilitation centres (Asmara, Assab and Keren) lacked the materials to produce enough mobility devices to meet demand. According to government estimates, there were some 58,000 disabled people in the country, many of them war amputees.

In an ICRC programme initiated in late August with the Labour and Human Welfare Ministry, the centres received raw materials, components and physiotherapy equipment, and 12 staff participated in an eight-week prosthetics/orthotics course. Asmara centre's water system was also upgraded with a new reservoir and solar-powered pump. At year-end, the authorities and the ICRC were discussing plans for longer-term ICRC support.

AUTHORITIES

As in other countries, the ICRC's ability to protect and assist populations affected by conflict depended on the national and local authorities' support for IHL and the related mandate of the ICRC.

During 2007, the Justice Ministry received a standard set of IHL reference materials to use as a resource in drafting laws implementing key IHL provisions. Members of relevant ministries and the ICRC also discussed the need for the government to endorse the ICRC's Tigrinya translation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Eritrea acceded to the Conventions in 2000 but had not yet implemented their provisions.

At the local level, authorities in various regions received promotional materials on IHL and the ICRC. In addition, 60 civilian and military medics in the border regions of Debub and Gash Barka took part in a specialized session on IHL and medical care.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

As agreed, the Eritrean Defence Forces and the ICRC held three courses for armed forces personnel during 2007 as part of an ongoing, small-scale programme aimed at integrating IHL into all military training. The highlight was the participation of 24 high-ranking officers in an advanced course, which initiated discussions about appointing military legal advisers for army divisions.

A total of 41 armed forces instructors took part in the other two IHL events, an introductory and a refresher course. A Ministry of Defence official also attended the two-week Senior Workshop on International Rules governing Military Operations, hosted by the Swiss army and the ICRC in Geneva, Switzerland, in August.

In other positive developments, the military gave the ICRC the green light to distribute IHL publications to its main training centres and began translating the IHL instructor's manual into Tigrinya. In addition, an increasing number of officers approached the ICRC for information and documentation on IHL.

Contacts were also fostered with UNMEE, with 283 headquarters and field personnel taking part in briefings on IHL and the ICRC.

CIVIL SOCIETY

To raise general awareness of IHL, the ICRC staged or participated in various popular public events.

To mark World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May), over 200 invitees, including government, military and diplomatic officials, attended a screening in Asmara of a film on the Movement's history. In parallel, hundreds of members of the general public visited an exhibition of photographs and videos illustrating ICRC and Eritrean Red Cross activities. In addition, Eritrea's English-language newspaper published an extensive article on the Movement, the first

such press coverage since the ICRC opened its Eritrea delegation in 1998. Numerous visitors also stopped by to enquire about the Movement at the ICRC's stand at the 10-day National Book Fair in Asmara.

Following the closure of Asmara University in September 2006, the director of Eritrea's main college was offered ICRC assistance in teaching IHL. Teachers, students and members of the general public who walked into the ICRC's offices were also provided with IHL leaflets and publications.

Outside Asmara, community leaders and the general public, particularly in the border area, received a variety of promotional materials. Calendars conveying key IHL messages were especially popular.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

At the government's request, the Red Cross Society of Eritrea suspended its activities in early February, pending the outcome of an investigation into its internal affairs. The International Federation and the ICRC worked together to clarify the situation within the Eritrean Red Cross and with the authorities, and stood ready to resume planned activities with the Society when the suspension was lifted. Partner National Societies supporting the Eritrean Red Cross also expressed their readiness to help. The suspension was still in force at year-end.