



african union

The ICRC's mission to the African Union (AU) aims to achieve better understanding and wider acceptance of the ICRC within the AU Commission and other AU bodies. It works with AU member States to draw attention to problems requiring humanitarian action, to promote greater recognition and much wider implementation of IHL throughout Africa and to raise awareness of the ICRC's role and activities. It also endeavours to build strong relations with AU-accredited intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and UN agencies.

The ICRC's official observer status to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), granted in 1992, has continued under the AU, the OAU's successor.

EXPENDITURE (IN KCHF)

see Ethiopia

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

see Ethiopia

PERSONNEL

see Ethiopia

KEY POINTS

In 2007, the ICRC:

- ▶ lent its expertise to the African Union (AU), together with other international agencies, to draft a convention on IDPs and prepare for a special summit on refugees, returnees and IDPs, scheduled for 2008
- ▶ updated the AU Peace and Security Council on ICRC humanitarian concerns and activities during monthly meetings and through the ICRC president's first ever address to the council
- ▶ reviewed with the AU Peace and Security Department the status of implementation of the Ottawa Convention in Africa and offered its expertise to support the convention's application on the continent
- ▶ agreed in a meeting with the Peace and Security Department on guidelines for ICRC input to AU initiatives concerning conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction
- ▶ stressed the need to safeguard the neutrality and independence of humanitarian action during bilateral meetings with AU officials and at meetings attended by AU representatives
- ▶ made recommendations relating to AU member States' implementation of IHL, which were adopted by the Pan-African Parliament

CONTEXT

Conflict resolution remained high on the agenda of the African Union (AU) throughout 2007, with the organization repeatedly calling for additional support from its member States and the international community to meet the challenges.

The largest AU peacekeeping missions were in Somalia and Sudan's Darfur region. In Darfur, the AU and the UN were in the process of setting up their first ever joint mission, a 26,000-strong hybrid force which would replace the 7,000 AU peacekeepers present in the region. The AU also played a prominent role in 2007 in initiatives to restore political stability in the Comoros and carried out several missions to assess the situation in conflict-affected countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

At the policy level, the two AU summits in 2007 addressed various issues pertaining to conflict prevention.

The January summit adopted the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, aimed at averting unconstitutional changes of government and preventing election fraud, and appointed the five members of the Panel of the Wise, a new AU body established to advise on conflict prevention. The summit also urged member States to consider the environment in their development plans, noting that climate change could trigger population displacements, fighting over resources and political instability.

At the July summit, member States agreed on the need for pan-African political and economic integration but were divided on the process and timeframe. The summit also promoted greater cross-border cooperation as a means to reduce conflict and boost economic growth.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC pursued its efforts to spread knowledge of IHL among AU Commission staff and representatives of member States and to draw attention to humanitarian issues, focusing on the need to protect and assist people affected by armed conflict. Its permanent mission to the AU worked to ensure that AU policies and programmes featured IHL, where relevant, and encouraged the AU to draw on the ICRC's specific expertise in IHL. To this end, the ICRC continued to strengthen its relations with the AU Commission and its departments, as well as AU and AU-associated bodies, and, when requested, participated in meetings and lent technical assistance in integrating IHL into relevant policy documents.

During 2007, the AU, with ICRC input, began drafting a Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa. The ICRC was also helping the AU prepare for its first Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs, scheduled for 2008.

In November, ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger addressed the AU Peace and Security Council for the first time. President Kellenberger emphasized the need for greater respect for IHL by all parties to conflict on the African continent, both to protect civilians and to allow aid workers to help people in need. Shortly after, at a round-table, the ICRC and the AU Peace and Security Department defined areas of mutual cooperation, thus allowing the ICRC to contribute more systematically to AU initiatives related to conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction. In another meeting with department officials, the ICRC reviewed the status of implementation of the Ottawa Convention by AU member States and offered its legal expertise in this field.

The ICRC also participated in conferences in Addis Ababa that were not convened by the AU but drew a large number of AU officials and representatives of AU member States. At two such meetings on the theme of peacekeeping, the ICRC expressed its concern about the blurring of lines between political and military mandates and the delivery of humanitarian aid, stressing the need to safeguard the neutrality and independence of humanitarian action. President Kellenberger underlined the same message during his two-day visit to the AU.

In parallel, the ICRC endeavoured to forge closer links with African NGOs, both to deepen its understanding of humanitarian issues in Africa and to promote IHL. It also maintained contact with UN agencies and international organizations based in Addis Ababa to spread knowledge of IHL and coordinate activities in areas of common interest.

Through its network of delegations in Africa, the ICRC strove to consolidate and coordinate its efforts to promote IHL both among AU member States and African regional economic communities, which, in coordination with the AU, played an increasing role in promoting peace and security on the continent.

AUTHORITIES

Protecting and assisting IDPs

The AU, with input from the ICRC and other international organizations, began drafting a Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa to submit for adoption at its first ever Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs, scheduled for 2008.

To help draft the convention, the ICRC submitted a detailed report on the rights of IDPs under IHL to a consultative meeting convened by the AU Department of Political Affairs. Legal experts of AU member States then considered the draft convention at a three-day meeting, soliciting further comment from the ICRC, which attended as an observer.

The Department of Political Affairs also invited the ICRC to consultative and task force meetings convened to prepare the 2008 special summit. Taking into account ICRC suggestions, the AU selected five main themes for the event, asking the ICRC to help draft the policy papers on "Preventing forced displacement" and "Meeting the specific needs of displaced women and children". The AU also accepted ICRC proposals to involve the International Federation in drafting the paper on "Meeting the specific needs of victims displaced by natural disasters" and to include a table of African States party to the main IHL treaties in the summit documents.

In addition, at the Department of Political Affairs' request, the ICRC provided a report on its activities on behalf of IDPs in Africa covering June–November 2007. The information would accompany a report by the Permanent Representatives Committee's Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and IDPs to be submitted to the AU Executive Council in January 2008.

ICRC president's address to the AU Peace and Security Council

On 9 November, ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger gave his first address to the AU Peace and Security Council. He outlined the ICRC's activities on behalf of IDPs and highlighted the difficulties faced by humanitarian organizations in accessing conflict victims and the challenges posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. President Kellenberger called on all parties to conflict to show greater respect for IHL. He stressed the importance of safeguarding neutral and independent humanitarian action in conflict situations.

During his two-day visit, the ICRC president also discussed the relevance of IHL in today's armed conflicts and ways of enhancing its application during meetings with the AU Commission chairperson, Alpha Oumar Konaré, and other high-ranking AU officials.

Implementing the Ottawa Convention

The AU was working on unifying its policies on disarmament, small arms and light weapons and landmines. To assist with this process, the ICRC organized a meeting with members of the AU Peace and Security Department and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining to review the status of implementation of the Ottawa Convention by AU member States. The ICRC also offered its expertise to help member States implement the convention and apply its provisions.

Working with the AU to promote IHL

The AU Peace and Security Department and the ICRC held their first joint meeting outside Addis Ababa on 10 November to define areas of mutual cooperation in promoting IHL. The department invited the ICRC to help ensure that IHL was integrated into the doctrine, operations and training of African standby forces. They agreed to work with the ICRC to encourage AU member States to implement IHL treaties and to establish AU guidelines on the application of IHL in post-conflict situations. The participants also acknowledged the need for mechanisms that allowed the ICRC to systematically provide input for AU initiatives addressing humanitarian issues linked to armed conflict.

On 13 November, the ICRC convened a meeting of the informal group of AU-accredited ambassadors to discuss various topics pertaining to conflict prevention, IHL promotion and humanitarian action. The ambassadors called on the ICRC to reinforce its efforts to ensure that IHL was integrated into policies and laws adopted by African governments and regional economic communities.

In parallel, AU Commission members and AU-accredited ambassadors regularly met the ICRC to share analyses of humanitarian issues and received IHL materials and updates on ICRC activities. In addition, the rotating presidency of the Peace and Security Council and the ICRC had monthly meetings to exchange views on conflict and post-conflict situations.

To further strengthen cooperation with the AU in the promotion of IHL, the ICRC attended the two AU summits held in 2007 and other relevant AU meetings. At the 9th and 10th meetings of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the ICRC stressed its readiness to share its expertise and field experience in issues relating to IHL and children affected by armed conflict.

To better coordinate humanitarian diplomacy and IHL-promotion activities across Africa, the ICRC's permanent mission to the AU kept ICRC delegations abreast of AU activities through meetings, newsletters and bilateral discussions. This led, for example, to the 8th Ordinary Session of the Pan-African Parliament adopting a recommendation by the ICRC's Pretoria regional delegation that governments establish, with ICRC support, national committees tasked to ratify and implement IHL treaties.

The ICRC also participated in various conferences in Addis Ababa that were not convened by the AU but drew a large number of AU officials and representatives of AU member States. The need to make a clear distinction between political and military mandates and the delivery of humanitarian aid was underlined by the ICRC at a workshop held by the organizers of the Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capabilities (RECAMP) V exercise. Similarly, the ICRC emphasized the importance of safeguarding neutral and independent humanitarian action at a seminar on UN multi-dimensional and integrated peace operations, hosted by the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Ministry.

African Parliamentary Union

During the annual Conference of the African Parliamentary Union (APU), the Union's secretary general assured the ICRC that measures would be taken both to encourage its member States to accede to and implement IHL treaties and to reactivate the APU committee established to monitor their progress. Both initiatives pertained to the APU's Niamey and Cotonou declarations, adopted in 2002 and 2004 respectively.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The ICRC and UN agencies and NGOs represented at the AU maintained regular contact to broaden their expertise and coordinate humanitarian diplomacy on issues of common interest. During UNHCR's meeting on the "Sub-cluster on Post-conflict Reconstruction and Development", the ICRC confirmed its offer to assist the AU in drafting humanitarian guidelines pertaining to countries emerging from conflict. It also participated in a workshop organized by the pan-African NGO African Humanitarian Action and Oxfam on "The AU and the responsibility to protect".