

ICRC Mobile Surgical Teams: bringing emergency medical care across South Sudan

In June and July this year the ICRC Mobile Surgical Teams (MST) performed more than 600 emergency surgeries in South Sudan and over 6,000 since the beginning of the crisis in December 2013.

As the conflict continues, the ICRC is continuously facilitating the evacuation of the wounded and providing them with emergency medical and surgical attention on both sides of the front line. Kerry Page, ICRC's Health Coordinator in South Sudan, gives an update on the MST's work and talks about the challenges faced by health professionals.

"At the moment, we have five mobile surgical teams working across the country. Composed of a general surgeon, an anaesthetist, 3 nurses and often supported by a physiotherapist, the MSTs have a wide range of skills and are able to perform all kinds of surgical procedures from caesarean sections to complex chest or abdominal surgeries".

"One of the biggest challenges we have in South Sudan at the moment is the lack of local medical capacities. The patients cannot be referred to other health structures or specialists in the country, so our teams need to be able to diagnose and treat on-site all sort of pathologies, with limited means" explained Kerry Page.

In Juba, the ICRC mobile surgical teams have been working in the Military Hospital since the onset of the conflict, running an operating theatre, a 40 bed ward and providing training for the staff, surgical materials and medicines. The ICRC has also supported the opening of a blood bank.

Our medical teams have also carried out paediatric and surgical activities in the Malakal Teaching Hospital, until February 2014, when, due intensified fighting, the Hospital was forced to close.

In Maiwut, an MST began working at the County Hospital in December last year. As the only functioning health facility in southern Upper Nile State, the structure allows nearly 120,000 people to gain access to medical and surgical care. An additional surgical team is often deployed in Old Fangak, while another will be sent to Waat in the coming weeks.

However, logistics, weather conditions and the worsening security situation in some areas remain major constraints for the work of the MSTs. The transport of staff, patients and materials is primarily done by aircraft, which is even more difficult during the rainy season. Between the medical equipment and living items, a mobile team's equipment weighs around 1,500 kg.

Recent attacks have also forced the ICRC to suspend the deployment of MSTs in several field locations such as Leer and Kodok hospitals. "We are hoping to go back to these areas as soon as the situation allows it, but medical evacuations and assistance have to be safe both for the patients and the staff", said Ms Page.

Over the past two months, 86 people have been evacuated by the ICRC, while many other wounded are still on the ground, waiting for urgent medical assistance. On a number of occasions healthcare facilities in South Sudan have been damaged, while health workers and patients have been injured or killed. The ICRC continues to remind all warring parties that under International Humanitarian Law, medical personnel, facilities and transports must be respected and protected in all circumstances, while carrying out their humanitarian function.



Since the beginning of the current crisis in December 2013, the ICRC has carried out the following activities:

In the area of **health** our medical and surgical teams have:

- performed nearly **6,200 surgeries** in 15 local health facilities;
- assisted more than **3,300 people with disabilities** in three physical rehabilitation centres run or supported by the ICRC;
- conducted over **30,300 outpatient consultations**; provided antenatal care for more than 2,200 women and safe deliveries for 188 women; administered more than 3,500 vaccine doses to children under 1 year old.
- provided **medical materials to 54 first-aid and other healthcare facilities**. The South Sudan Red Cross teams complemented this work by assisting patients with nearly **21,000 dressings**.
- **trained 321 weapon bearers**, police and fire fighters in basic first aid with emphasis on safe access to health care.

To assist **displaced** and other populations affected by the conflict, the ICRC, together with the South Sudan Red Cross, has:

- distributed over **1,200,000 monthly food rations** in Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Jonglei, Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western and Central Equatoria states and assisted on a regular basis over 150,000 people;
- provided **household essentials for over 520,000 people** across the country, with 115,000 served more than once;
- ensured access to **safe drinking water for over 437,000 residents** and displaced people through the rehabilitation of **434 water infrastructures** such as hand pumps and water yards in conflict affected areas including Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity, Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr el Ghazal;
- built **sanitation facilities for 22,000 people in Mingkaman and Fashoda County** and installed emergency water treatment units in Torit, Lul and Kodok for further 120,000. Additional latrines are under construction in Kodok for nearly 3,300 residents to increase access to sanitation and limit the risk of outbreaks of water borne diseases such as cholera.

To help **build the resilience of communities** and cope with serious food insecurity the ICRC has:

- provided nearly **650,000 people with seeds and tools** for farming activities, and more than 190,500 with fishing kits;
- **vaccinated 740,634 heads of livestock** and treated over 107,000 animals, benefitting nearly 330,000 people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes, Upper Nile, Unity, Jonglei, and Central Equatoria states;
- **trained 363 community animal health workers** and equipped 276 of them with drugs and working tools.



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Through **visits to places of detention**, the ICRC supports the detaining authorities to adhere to international standards:

- visited over 9,400 people in various places of detention;
- carried out renovation works in Juba, Aweil, and Wau central prisons to **improve the living conditions of up to 1,000 detainees**.

To help **reconnect families** separated by the violence, the ICRC and the South Sudan Red Cross have:

- facilitated over **23,000 successful phone calls** between family members, and distributed more than 3,300 Red Cross messages to exchange family news;
- registered **120 unaccompanied children** within the country
- reunited more than 70 children and vulnerable people with their families.

To promote knowledge and **respect for International Humanitarian Law**, the ICRC has:

- delivered training and **dissemination sessions to nearly 2,300 members of the armed forces**, armed groups and other weapon bearers.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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