

## HUMANITARIAN REPORT 2024 HONDURAS





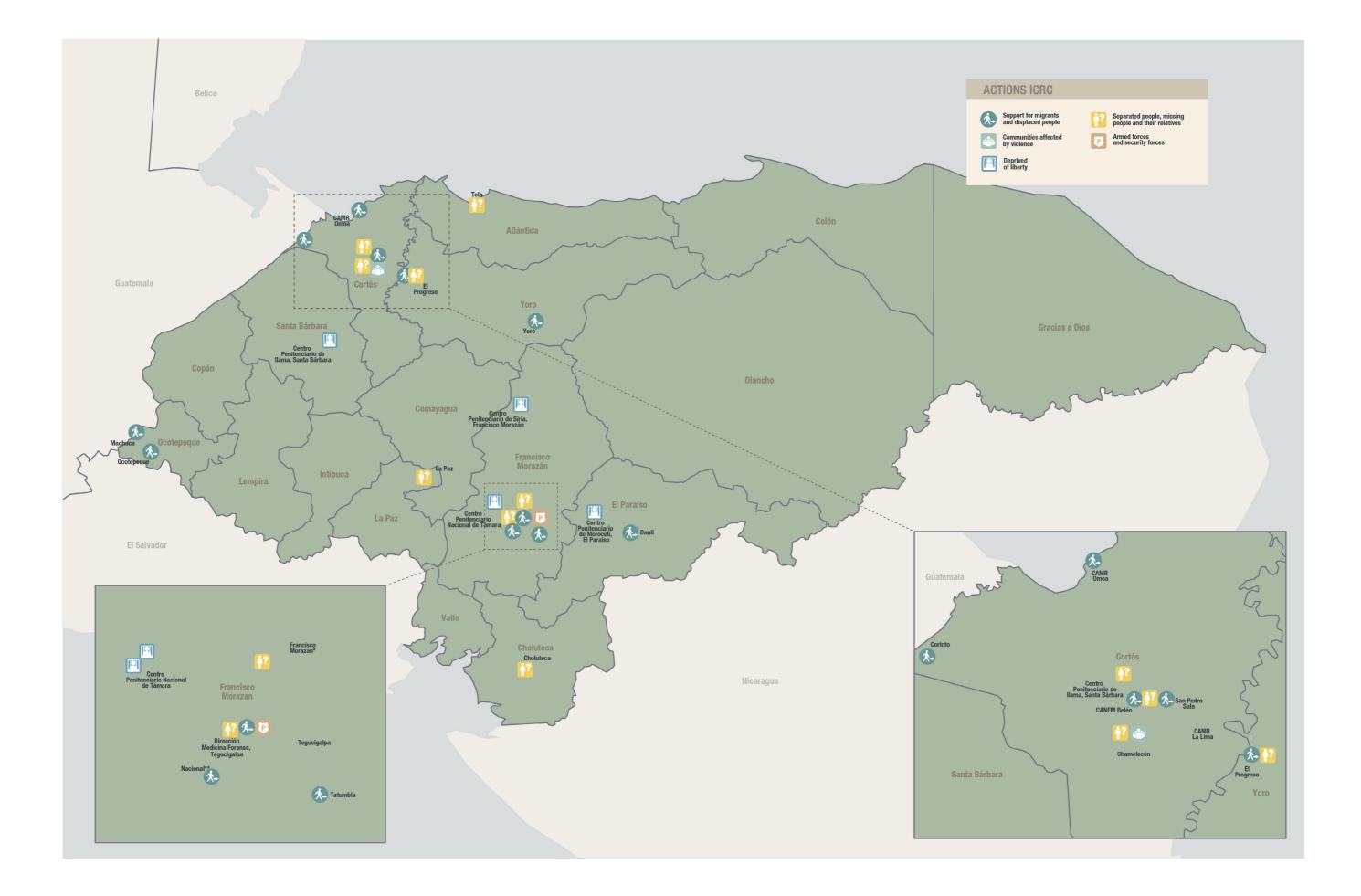
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### INTRODUCTION **MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA: THE URGENT NEED** FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE TO SILENT VIOLENCE



By Olivier Dubois, head of the ICRC's regional delegation for Mexico and Central America

A young man disappears on the migration route almost without a trace. A teenage girl survives a sexual assault and is too afraid to seek help. A family suddenly decides to leave their home to flee from violence. The common denominator: silence.

It is this silent violence that worries us the most, because whole families and communities are no longer able to live in peace and follow their dreams, but this violence may go unnoticed. Only those who sit at a comfortable distance can act like nothing is happening and convince themselves that this silence is peaceful rather than fearful.

In Mexico and Central America, where thousands of people suffer every day from the visible and invisible consequences of constant violence, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) strives to listen to and support victims of this violence and work with them to best respond to their needs and ultimately protect them. Our mission is unwavering: to do everything in our power to alleviate and prevent human suffering.

We know that to be effective in supporting people affected by violence, the humanitarian response must be coordinated. It is the obligation of governments, the international community and society as a whole to try to understand what these people go through, to recognize and make their needs visible, and to make every effort to alleviate their suffering. Regardless of their origin, gender, sexual orientation or migration status, all those affected by the human consequences of violence must be protected and treated with respect.

Diplomacy and international cooperation are key to putting effective measures in place to protect these people. The human cost of violence must not go unnoticed, and the stories of thousands of people must not be forgotten. The region must raise awareness of this violence, rather than becoming indifferent to or accustomed to violence and its consequences. Treating victims with respect is one way of helping to find solutions to the humanitarian problems affecting the region; problems such as migration, disappearances, forced displacement and deprivation of liberty.

As a neutral party, we get involved by promoting and supporting humanitarian actions that allow us to address key issues of protection and we encourage regional cooperation to respond to them.

We work with the region's governments to develop or strengthen protection mechanisms, build and implement regulatory frameworks in accordance with international law and standards, and promote international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In a turbulent, increasingly fragmented world, it is crucial that we protect these actions, because in doing so we are protecting humanity itself.

We get involved in initiatives that bring hope. In 2023, alongside the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Search Commission and Mexican, Honduran, Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Panamanian authorities, we held a regional forum to explore how information could be legally exchanged to support the work of searching for, locating and identifying missing migrants.

The systematic exchange of standardized information is a step forwards in the search for missing people, and gives us a better chance of locating and identifying them if they have passed away. We are convinced that this significant regional effort is a big step in supporting the thousands of families who are searching for their loved ones.

These actions are key to continued protection of the rights of missing and deceased people and their relatives.

The suffering of all those affected by violence should not be ignored. We cannot afford to be indifferent to the pain and uncertainty faced by those who are deprived of their loved ones, their homes, their safety and their peace of mind.

### EDITORIAL HONDURAS: A DECADE OF PROMOTING HUMANITY IN DETENTION



### By Guela Sekhniachvili, head of the ICRC mission in Honduras

Humanity should know no bounds. Even in prisons, people must be treated with dignity, regardless of the reason they were incarcerated.

The Nelson Mandela Rules<sup>1</sup> state that because imprisonment is afflictive by the very fact of taking the right of self-determination from prisoners by depriving them of their liberty, the prison system should not aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation. Any additional suffering is unjustified and does not contribute to the social rehabilitation of prisoners.

Prison systems must therefore ensure that all detainees have access to essential services, such as water, food and health care, and that their fundamental rights are respected. Inmates must be allowed to keep in touch with their families and have access to effective rehabilitation programmes, and those who are particularly vulnerable or have special needs must receive differential treatment.

In a world where detention often entails a loss of rights and dignity and where people deprived of their liberty are out of sight and out of mind, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – whose mission is to protect human life and dignity – works with the authorities in different countries to promote more humane prison systems, an increasingly necessary task that requires determined and long-term efforts.

We have been carrying out detention work in Honduras since 2015. We monitor living conditions in prisons and are constantly attentive to the needs and concerns of detainees. We engage in bilateral confidential dialogue with the authorities to support them in ensuring that detainees are treated with dignity and in improving prison management. Their open, receptive and collaborative attitude is highly commendable and greatly facilitates our work.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to contribute to building a safe and humane prison system by supporting long-lasting structural improvements consistent with international standards in this field.

Our humanitarian work in prisons over almost ten years has involved promoting projects that have had a positive impact for both detainees and prison staff and authorities, including infrastructure improvements to ensure access to safe drinking water and risk prevention measures. We are, however, under no illusion as to the extent of the challenges involved.

In June 2023, the death of 46 women in a riot at the PNFAS women's prison highlighted the pressing challenge of ensuring the safety of detainees and prison staff, a major concern for prison authorities the world over. We are fully aware of the safety and security issues faced by prison authorities. Our confidential dialogue with them is based on an understanding of the complex situation and seeks to promote continuous improvement, with the focus always on the importance of protecting people's lives and safety.

The government must also ensure that other rights are upheld, such as timely access to health care, judicial guarantees enabling detainees to know what their legal situation is and access to prison privileges where applicable. This requires coordinated efforts and commitment from the authorities.

Working with representatives of the Judiciary, the Honduran Prison Service (INP), the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Solicitor General, we promoted the reform of the special law concerning the compassionate release of terminally ill detainees to enable them to spend what time they have left in dignified and humane conditions with their loved ones by their side.

The next step is for the Supreme Court of Justice to introduce the bill into Congress. The debate of the bill and its enactment would be tangible proof that humanity in detention is not only possible but achievable.

Prisons are mirrors that reflect a nation's commitment to ensuring people's rights and dignity. We reiterate our willingness to continue working jointly with the Honduran authorities and other humanitarian organizations with a view to protecting the lives and dignity of people in places of detention.

Humanity in prisons matters and must be protected.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Nelson Mandela Rules are the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

### **MIGRANTS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE**

Honduras saw an exponential increase in the number of migrants in transit in 2023. According to the <u>National Migration Institute (INM</u>), over 545,000 people entered the country irregularly, almost tripling the previous year's figure of 188,858.

As the number of people on the move increases, so do assistance and protection needs, including access to essential services – such as water, food and health care – reliable, verified information and international protection mechanisms. During their journey, migrants are in a particularly vulnerable situation and risk losing contact with their family, falling victim to a crime, suffering an accident, becoming ill or even going missing or dying.

There is a humanitarian imperative to protect the lives and dignity of all migrants, regardless of their immigration status. As a neutral humanitarian organization, we do not encourage or discourage migration; our aim is to prevent and mitigate the humanitarian consequences faced by people on the move.

In partnership with the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) and in collaboration with other organizations as well as in the bilateral dialogue we maintain with the authorities, we advocated for an immigration amnesty to be granted so that vulnerable migrants do not have to pay fines stipulated in the Migration and Immigration Act. The amnesty helps avoid the concentration of migrants in border towns, thereby lessening the strain on services and reducing potential risks, such as crime and violence in areas with large numbers of migrants.

We work to keep migrants in touch with their family and ensure that they have access to basic health-care services. In cooperation with the HRC, in 2023 we provided free phone calls, battery charging and access to wi-fi in the south-east of the country. We also delivered hygiene kits, clothes and water and provided vulnerable migrants with advice on seeking government assistance.

We launched <u>RedSafe</u>, a digital humanitarian platform for the region that provides information for migrants to help prevent and mitigate the risks they face during their journey. It also provides safe and secure digital services, such as a messaging service and a digital vault for storing important documents. We set up four physical RedSafe assistance points in the country, where people can get direct guidance on the platform and how to download and use it. Operated with the support of the HRC, they are located in areas where there are large numbers of people on the move, including migrants in transit and returning migrants.

Migrants returning to Honduras also have special protection needs, particularly when their lives are in danger at home or when they have been the victim of a crime. In 2023, more than 56,000 migrants, 45.9% of them children (11.31% girls and 16.32% boys) and 18.32% women, were returned to Honduras from the United States and Mexico, according to INM figures.

Our response involved collaborating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (SRECI) to develop a protection protocol for assistance centres for returning migrants. The protocol is a tool that facilitates the identification of people with protection needs and people internally displaced by violence so that appropriate referrals can be made to address their needs.

Together with SRECI's Directorate for the Protection of Honduran Migrants, we opened an office to deal with protection cases which provides a variety of services, including social work and mental health care, aimed at helping migrants and missing people and their families.

Another humanitarian challenge that concerns the ICRC in Honduras is internal displacement due to violence, which every day creates new victims who need comprehensive assistance to keep safe and make a new start. In March 2023, Honduras passed a landmark law on the prevention of internal displacement and assistance and protection for internally displaced people.

This is the most important step taken by the government to assist and protect the more than 247,000 internally displaced people in Honduras although regulations establishing procedures and guidelines for its implementation have yet to be adopted.

The ICRC supported the development and adoption of the law, in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Rights and other international organizations, with a view to strengthening the government's response to internal displacement. We remain committed to supporting its full and effective implementation.



Together with the HRC, we provided self-care information to migrants to help them avoid and reduce the risks they face during their journey.

# THE SEPARATED, MISSING AND DEAD AND THEIR FAMILIES

Among the array of humanitarian challenges facing the country is the disappearance of hundreds of Hondurans on migration routes and of over 9,000 people inside the country in the past decade, largely due to violence, according to official police figures.<sup>2</sup> There are also unresolved cases of people who went missing during the 1990s and whose fate and whereabouts have still not been established.

Thousands of Honduran families endure the agonizing uncertainty of not knowing where their loved ones are, and there are no institutional mechanisms with clear responsibilities to help them in their search. The fact that there is no legal framework that recognizes and guarantees their rights – particularly the right to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing loved ones – poses a serious challenge.

Other challenges that impede the delivery of a more efficient government response to find and identify missing people include the absence of protocols to facilitate the management, coordination and exchange of information between the authorities responsible for this matter and the lack of sufficient human and financial resources.

There is therefore an urgent need for concrete measures to prevent people from going missing and to resolve missing persons cases. In July 2023, the members of committees of families of the missing submitted a bill on legal protection for missing people and their families to Congress. This bill, currently awaiting enactment, was developed with the active involvement of the families. It provides hope and is a step in the right direction to address this issue. As part of our humanitarian work, we supported families and the authorities in this process, and we reaffirm our commitment to provide technical guidance for the implementation of the law once passed.

In 2023, we worked with committees of families of the missing to strengthen their capacity to engage in dialogue with the authorities. We also provided guidance on channels for seeking government assistance and accompanied them at commemorative events for their loved ones and in psychosocial support processes.

We provided technical and financial support to SRECI's Office for the Protection of Honduran Migrants (OPROHM) to enable families to receive mental health and psychosocial support during the search process.

Identifying human remains is crucial in order to give families answers about what happened to their missing loved ones. In 2023, we promoted the creation of the first forensic anthropology lab, an essential step in improving identification processes. We also promoted coordination between the National Registry Office and the Forensic Medicine Directorate and advised the authorities on best practices in forensics for the dignified treatment of the dead.

Our organization has contributed to strengthening the medico-legal system in Honduras by promoting and supporting the development of a law for a national DNA database system. The law, enacted in August, establishes a data system under the administration of the Office of the Attorney General, through the Forensic Medicine Directorate.

The aim of this system is to facilitate procedures for identifying the dead and establishing the circumstances of their death for legal purposes and to honour their memory.



We supported the families of missing people in their search and in implementing initiatives to raise awareness about the humanitarian consequences they face.

### **PEOPLE FROM COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE**

The violence in Honduras has serious consequences that affect the daily lives of people, families and communities, often silently and inexorably. Our neutral and impartial humanitarian work aims to help and protect them.

In collaboration with the HRC and local partners, we work with communities to meet their mental health and psychosocial support needs and provide protection in the most critical cases.

Health-care services in Honduras are often exposed to violence, and this puts health-care workers at risk and directly affects the communities that rely on them. Threats and verbal and physical assaults are some of the most common forms of violence they experience day after day.

In order to address this problem, we collaborated with the Ministry of Health and the HRC to update protection protocols and launch a campaign to raise community awareness about the importance of respecting health-care staff and facilities.

In Chamelecón (San Pedro Sula), we worked with health-care workers to strengthen selfhelp measures under the Caring for Carers programme and trained community leaders to provide basic psychosocial support and refer people to specialist services when necessary.

The year 2023 was a milestone in our humanitarian work in the country, as our collaboration with the Tegucigalpa University Hospital, which formally began in 2017, drew to an end. Over six years, we worked with the hospital and the HRC to improve its infrastructure – including emergency units for adults – and enhance the quality of care and rehabilitation for injured patients, pre-hospital care and community-based health care.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). <u>Análisis de personas desaparecidas</u> <u>2022 – Honduras (nd)</u>, UNDP.

### PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

In June, various security incidents that led to the deaths of detainees highlighted the urgent need to address security issues in prisons to ensure the safety of detainees and prison staff as a matter of priority.

The ICRC carried out humanitarian activities in five Honduran prisons, with a view to monitoring conditions of detention and improving them by engaging in bilateral confidential dialogue with the authorities and detainees. Over the past ten years, we have continued to work steadfastly to ensure that detainees are treated with dignity, thanks to an agreement with the authorities allowing us to visit places of detention that has remained in place through changes in prison administrations.

A noteworthy initiative undertaken by the ICRC in 2023 was the organization of six working group meetings on judicial guarantees with justice officials and institutions to examine processes for implementing such guarantees for detainees. One of the conclusions reached at these meetings was the need to reform the special law concerning detainees who are terminally ill or have a degenerative disease of the nervous system in order to allow their release on humanitarian grounds. The participants agreed on a text which was submitted to the Supreme Court of Justice to be introduced via the appropriate channels for debate and enactment in Congress.

In coordination with the HRC, the Tegucigalpa University Hospital and the fire service, we supported the INP in developing contingency and emergency protocols and providing basic health-care and first-aid training for their personnel. The hospital referral mechanism was improved, and efforts were undertaken to promote respect for the dignity and fundamental rights of detainees, including visits, communication with their families, health-care services, judicial guarantees and humane treatment.

We are able to carry out this work thanks to the dialogue we maintain with prison, health and justice institutions and the support they provide in essential areas in a constantly changing environment where we seek to achieve a sustained impact.

In 2023, we promoted regional training on design models that ensure adequate and functional facilities and decent conditions for detainees as part of the ICRC project <u>Criteria for Technical Standards for Prison Infrastructure (CETIP)</u>, which aims to ensure that prison facilities are suitably and efficiently adapted to the needs and capacities of each specific context. The CETIP cover key aspects such as procedures, workflows and staff management in prisons.

In 2023, the debate stage was completed with eight regional workshops. The other countries involved, in addition to Honduras, were Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru. Work started in 2023 to disseminate and implement the outcomes, which have been compiled to produce a guide on technical criteria for prison infrastructure.

# ACTIONS TO PROMOTE AN ENVIORNMENT THAT IS MORE RESPECTFUL OF LIFE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

The ICRC works with armed forces and security forces to strengthen their knowledge of international standards applicable to their work in contexts of detention, migration, internal displacement, and disappearance, where they play a fundamental role in protecting people affected by these humanitarian situations.

With the police, the army, and justice operators, we engage in dialogue about international standards applicable to the use of force and the rights of migrants. We conduct sessions with the Missing Persons Unit registered with the Interpol Police Directorate of Police Investigations (DPI) on the protocol for searching for missing persons.



We work with law enforcement officials (FEHCL) to promote knowledge and application of international standards governing the use of force.

### **COOPERATION WITH THE HONDURAN RED CROSS** (HRC)

In a context marked by violence, migration, internal displacement and the onslaught of natural disasters, meeting the humanitarian needs of affected people is an increasingly pressing issue in Honduras.

In this environment, the Honduran Red Cross (HRC), as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, plays a key role in assisting people.

The components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement present in the country join forces to support the HRC and strengthen its capacities.

Priority areas where the ICRC and the HRC take joint action include assisting migrants returning to Honduras and in transit and supporting detainees We work closely with the HRC to restore and maintain contact between family members, a vital service in complex situations where family separation is a painful reality.

In view of the large numbers of migrants in transit in the south-eastern part of the country, we supported the HRC in El Paraíso with water and sanitation infrastructure to strengthen its capacity to deliver humanitarian aid to migrants going to the centre in operation there to seek assistance.

We provided the HRC with comprehensive support to improve safe access to communities through operational communication tools.

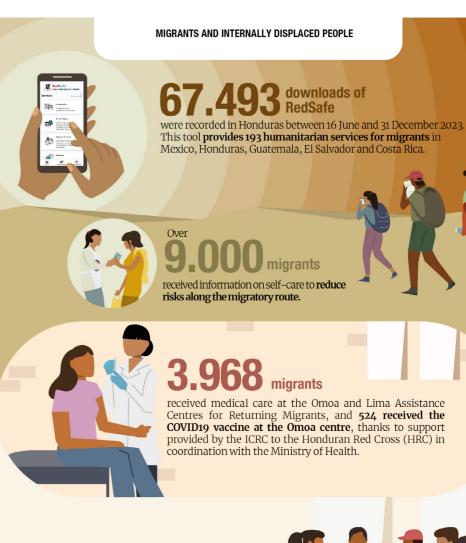
Prioritized branch committees were provided with the resources required to deliver an effective response in emergencies. This strengthening of logistical and technical capacities enables the HRC to provide a faster and more effective response in crisis situations, ensuring timely humanitarian assistance for those most in need across the country.

Collaboration between the ICRC and the HRC extends to health activities as well as emergency response. The two organizations coordinate efforts to facilitate people's access to vital medical services, for example, by training personnel responsible for prehospital services.



The ICRC and the HRC together launched RedSafe, a digital humanitarian platform that provides safe and secure services for people on the move.

### **OUR WORK IN NUMBERS**



internally displaced people and returning migrants (59 families) received support through the assistance mechanism implemented by the ICRC to help such people exercise their rights and access essential services, including support for income-generating projects.

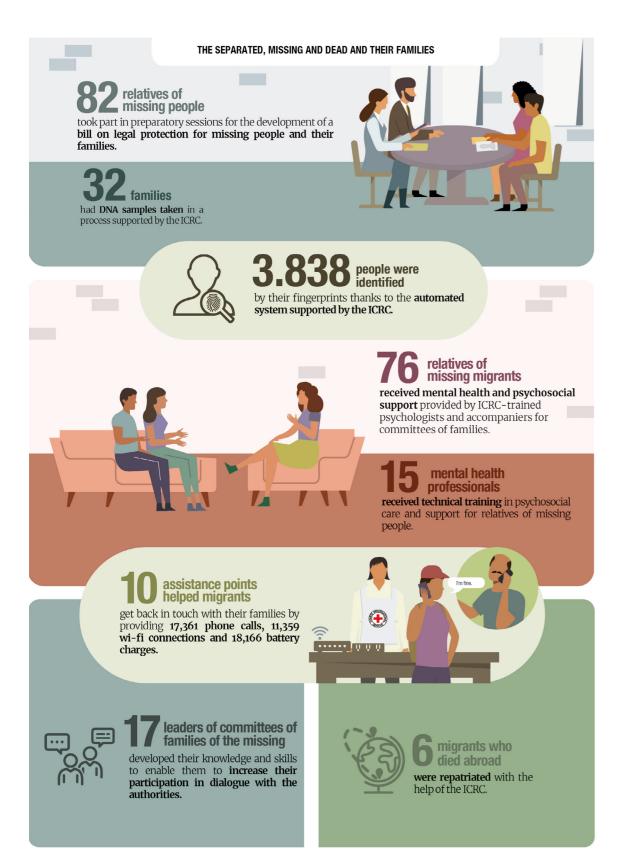


internally displaced people received mental health and psychosocial support from ICRC-trained psycholo

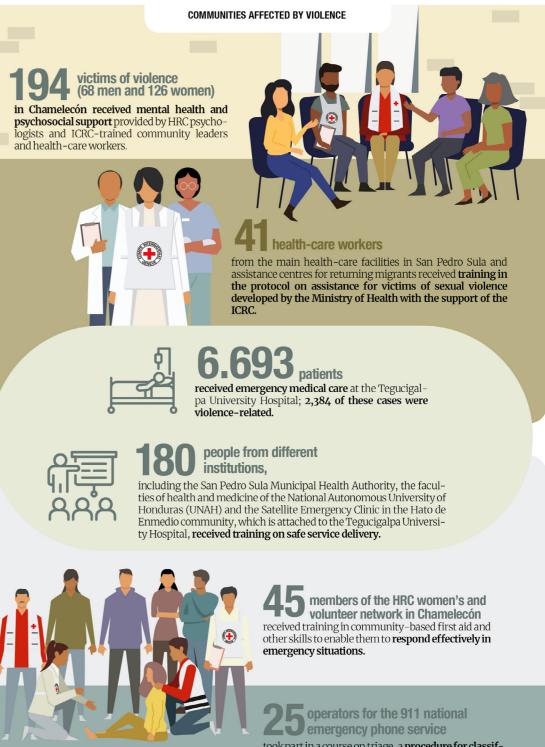




### **OUR WORK IN NUMBERS**



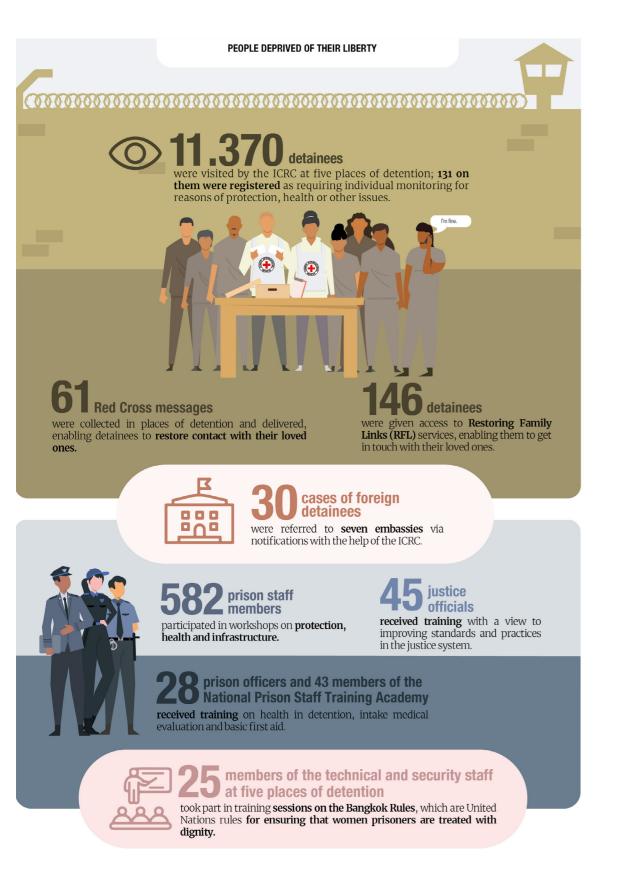




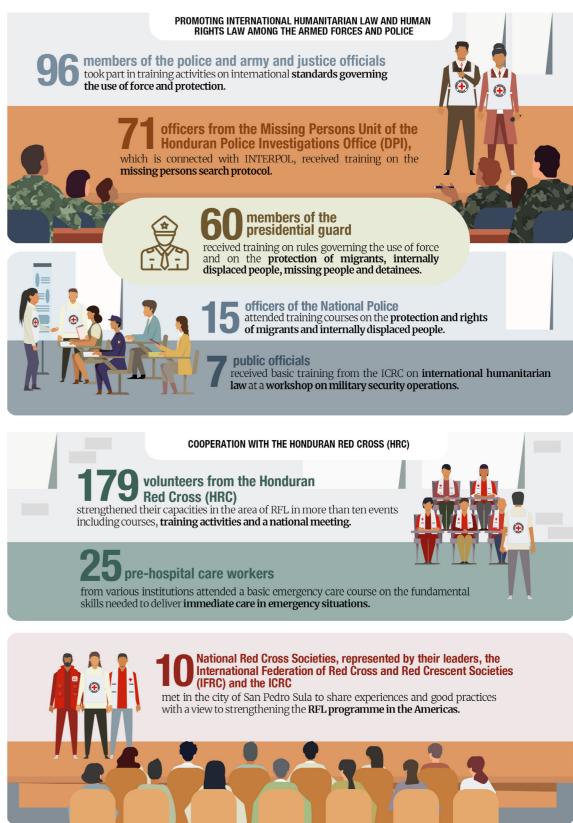


took part in a course on triage, a **procedure for classif-ying patients in order to prioritize** treatment according to urgency and need for care.

### **OUR WORK IN NUMBERS**



## **OUR WORK IN NUMBERS**





### **PERSONAL STORIES**

### Mercedes Guillén

has been searching for her husband, Secundino Torres, since November 2018

"We have not lost hope of one day finding our loved ones.

We have faith that this law will be implemented and provide us with support and assistance to continue our fight for our missing family members ... that the government will fulfil its provisions to help the families of missing people."

Complete testimonial in QR code







### Dhairantis, migrant

"The RedSafe platform is really useful because it provides us with information about points where we can gain access to shelters, Red Cross health-care centres and other resources. Sometimes you get ill, and you don't know where to turn."

### MISSION

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

People know they can count on us to carry out a range of lifesaving activities in conflict zones and to work closely with the communities there to understand and meet their needs. Our experience and expertise enable us to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.





in @cicrmx



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