



# FAMILIES OF THE MISSING HELP EACH OTHER



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*“My son has been missing for 26 years. We didn’t talk about it with anyone outside our family until we joined this group. Before, even though we lived in the same village and saw each other often, we didn’t talk about our shared pain. We would just greet each other in passing. Now, we know each other well and talking about our missing children has relieved us all of a heavy burden we’ve carried for years.”*

*- Mother of a missing son*



## THE ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMME

Between October 2014 and November 2015, the ICRC carried out an island-wide assessment in Sri Lanka to understand the multifaceted needs of families of persons who went missing, including those of security forces personnel, as a consequence of the past armed conflict. In January 2016, the ICRC shared the findings from the assessment with the authorities along with recommendations on how to address the identified needs.

A public report of the assessment was also published in July 2016. This is available in English, Sinhala and Tamil at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/sri-lanka-families-missing-persons>

According to the assessment, what the families wanted most was to know what happened to their loved ones. They also needed emotional support to cope with the uncer-

tainty caused by their loved one's absence, economic assistance to regain and develop livelihood activities and support with legal and administrative matters.

To address these needs, the ICRC launched an island-wide Accompaniment Programme towards the end of 2015, implemented directly and through local organizations. The programme helps families of missing persons deal with emotional challenges as well as economic, legal and administrative issues.

The Accompaniment Programme has three components:

1. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): offering emotional support to help families of missing persons cope with the lack of information surrounding the loss of a loved one and the uncertainty they live

in, also known as ‘ambiguous loss’; awareness among authorities and mental health practitioners on the needs and difficulties of families of missing persons.

2. Referral services: supporting families of the missing to resolve legal, administrative and economic needs that are outside the scope of the programme by referring and guiding them to relevant service providers.

3. Economic security: supporting the most economically vulnerable families of missing persons to restart or expand their livelihoods when other resources are unavailable.

As part of its humanitarian action for missing persons, the ICRC has also provided technical support for a national search mechanism (Office on Missing Persons).

## 1. MHPSS FOR FAMILIES OF THE MISSING

The MHPSS component of the Accompaniment Programme is carried out by families of missing persons themselves or social workers, referred to as “accompaniers”. They work directly with other families of missing persons in their own communities. The ICRC trains accompaniers to assess psychosocial needs of families living in a given area and provide them with emotional support through home visits and peer support group sessions. These sessions enable families to share memories of the missing person with the group through poems, art and crafts, songs or by sharing the missing person’s favourite food.

Accompaniers also guide families to available services to resolve administrative and economic issues resulting from the absence of their loved one.

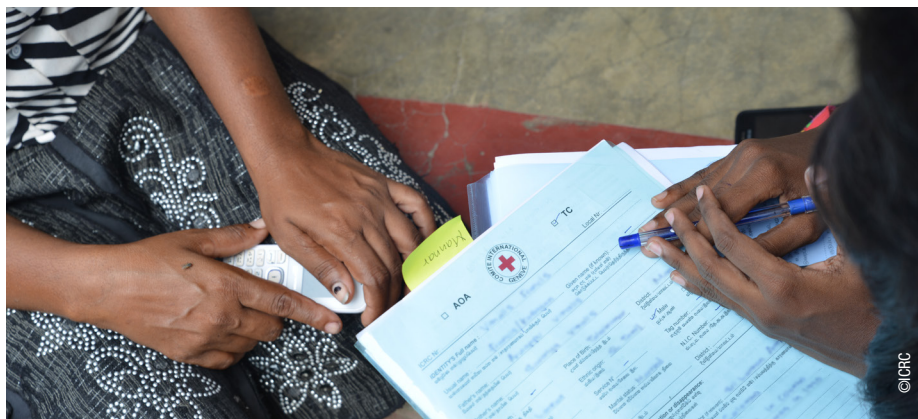
The ICRC partners with local organizations that are selected to work with accompaniers based on their experience in providing psychosocial support to people affected by conflict. The ICRC aims to ensure that the organizations have the necessary technical expertise and background knowledge to understand the families’ situation, promoting long-term sustainability of the programme.



“We share our sorrows and agony during the group sessions and go home with a lighter heart.”

- Wife of a missing person





## 2. PROVIDING REFERRAL SERVICES TO FAMILIES OF THE MISSING

Needs that cannot be directly addressed through the Accompaniment Programme are referred to existing service providers. These may be administrative needs or others that are of a more complex nature such as psychiatric support.

Accompaniers are trained to assess families' needs and identify locally available resources to connect families of missing persons with service providers. The ICRC ensures that requests are followed up in a timely manner.



“My husband and I make a living by growing and selling vegetables. At this age, it is hard to work every day. Our son is missing and we miss the happiness we felt when he was around. If he was still with us, we would be more comfortable. I spoke to our Accompanier about our difficulties and she helped me submit an application to the Social Services Department to receive the senior citizen's allowance. Now, I receive LKR 2000 every month and I use that money to buy medicine and food. I feel much relieved.”

- Mother of a missing son

### 3. PROMOTING ECONOMIC SECURITY OF FAMILIES OF THE MISSING

Families of missing persons are often faced with a variety of economic issues including reduced or lack of sustainable incomes, loss of or insufficient assets and absence of meaningful assistance. As a result, many families may sell their assets, reduce their food intake or borrow money to meet their urgent needs. The ICRC provides tailor-made livelihood support to families of missing persons, helping them to address these challenges in a sustainable manner.

Following household economic assessments and review of business proposals, the ICRC helps families of missing persons through a micro economic initiative (MEI) programme. Eligible families receive cash grants to invest in small businesses as outlined in their proposals. Families who are particularly destitute are

given unconditional cash grants to cover their immediate needs, helping them start simple livelihood projects to boost income and have an improved diet.

In coordination with government technical departments and other service providers, the ICRC helps families of missing persons improve their businesses through training in basic business management skills. They are also coached to expand their businesses and access financial service providers and community cooperatives through networking, which can contribute to improved community cohesion. In addition, families gain technical knowledge on recycling, waste management and organic farming so that their microeconomic initiatives can contribute to environmental sustainability.



“I work very hard every day as I see my daughter grow into the beautiful girl she is. Being able to provide her with the best education is my motivation and the ultimate source of my happiness. I am able to earn a sustainable income because of the ICRC’s livelihood support initiative. I want my daughter to have everything I did not have when I was her age. If it means staying up the entire night sewing bags and dresses, I am ready to do that.”


- Wife of a missing person



*“I feel lighter and happier after talking to other women in my group whose husbands are also missing. I have also been advising other women like me, based on my experience. Our group has a close bond now and we even talk to each other over the phone between our weekly meetings.”*

*– Wife of a missing person*

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The ICRC also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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