

# ERITREA



The ICRC opened a delegation in Eritrea in 1998 in the context of the international armed conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia and continues to respond to the needs remaining from that two-year war. Its priorities are to help improve the resilience of the population concerned and to ensure compliance with IHL with regard to any persons still protected by the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The ICRC supports the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea”.

## YEARLY RESULTS

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action

**MEDIUM**

## KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS

In 2014:

- ▶ communities affected by past conflict worked towards self-sufficiency with ICRC livelihood assistance, and gained access to clean water through newly built/repared solar-powered water supply systems
- ▶ with ICRC financial assistance, vulnerable people of Ethiopian origin obtained social benefits by renewing their residence permits, or returned to Ethiopia after covering their repatriation costs
- ▶ beneficiary communities, local leaders, military/police personnel, academics and students learnt about IHL through joint activities of the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students and the ICRC
- ▶ despite the easing of certain restrictions after dialogue with the authorities, activities to benefit conflict-affected people remained limited, and the ICRC remained without access to people detained in Eritrea

PROTECTION	Total
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>	
Red Cross messages (RCMs)	
RCMs collected	932
RCMs distributed	1,020
Phone calls facilitated between family members	1
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	7

EXPENDITURE (in KCHF)	
Protection	797
Assistance	2,383
Prevention	307
Cooperation with National Societies	48
General	-
	<b>3,534</b>
	<i>of which: Overheads 216</i>

IMPLEMENTATION RATE	
Expenditure/yearly budget	<b>84%</b>

PERSONNEL	
Mobile staff	3
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	40

ASSISTANCE		2014 Targets (up to)	Achieved
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>			
Economic security, water and habitat (in some cases provided within a protection or cooperation programme)			
Essential household items	Beneficiaries	10,000	
Productive inputs	Beneficiaries	226,500	424,295
Cash	Beneficiaries	5,300	4,327
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	27,085	44,691

## CONTEXT

Tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia persisted, but no direct confrontations took place in border regions. The physical demarcation of the sealed Eritrea-Ethiopia border remained stalled; both countries maintained a military presence in disputed areas.

No progress was made towards the demarcation of the Djibouti-Eritrea border or in the implementation of the mediation agreement signed by the two countries in 2010. Qatar, which served as a mediator, maintained troops in the disputed region.

The effects of past conflicts on livelihoods and public services continued to be felt. Eritrean migrants and asylum seekers continued to flee the country to avoid conscription and seek better educational and economic opportunities elsewhere.

While humanitarian assistance from foreign/international organizations remained limited after the authorities requested them to reduce or terminate their activities in the country in 2011, Eritrea signed a number of cooperation agreements with foreign governments and regional/international bodies.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

Given the restrictions on the operations of foreign/international organizations in Eritrea (see *Context*), the ICRC endeavoured to strengthen the authorities' acceptance of its humanitarian mandate and its work in behalf of vulnerable populations, including detainees and civilians affected by past armed conflicts. Some of the constraints on ICRC activities were eased; for example, mobile ICRC staff were able to obtain travel permits, allowing them to meet with authorities outside the capital and assess the needs of vulnerable populations.

The ICRC sought to persuade the authorities that it was in their interest to recognize the applicability of the 1949 Geneva Conventions to the Eritrean context. It held dissemination sessions for local authorities and beneficiary communities, participated in public events organized by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) to generate wider support for IHL and the Movement, and supported government officials' participation in regional seminars on IHL implementation.

The ICRC pursued its dialogue with the authorities, with a view to resuming visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs and former POWs, and to people held for security-related reasons; the authorities had withdrawn access for such visits in 2009. On behalf of the families concerned, the ICRC also continued to appeal to the authorities for information on 17 Djiboutian soldiers reported missing by their government after the Djibouti-Eritrea hostilities in June 2008.

The ICRC continued to monitor the situation of the Ethiopian community in Eritrea, with a view to ensuring that their rights under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, including those relating to voluntary repatriation, were respected; the Eritrean authorities had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian civilians in 2009. The ICRC covered the administrative and transport expenses of Ethiopians who wished to be repatriated and the cost of residence permits and medical care for Ethiopians who wished to stay in Eritrea. It also provided some financial assistance to newly released detainees of Ethiopian origin.

In areas to which it had access, the ICRC helped separated family members restore contact through RCMs. For the first time since 2010, it was able to offer family-links services to people in Debub, after notifying the authorities. The ICRC continued to pursue dialogue with the pertinent authorities to follow up requests for information from the families of people reported missing in relation to the 1998–2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict.

Vulnerable households – including those in communities close to the Ethiopian border and those headed by women whose husbands had been killed or disabled in the war or had been called up for military service – received support to rebuild their livelihoods. For example, the ICRC distributed tools and vegetable seed to farming households in Anseba and Debub and helped pastoralists in Anseba, Debub, Gash Barka and Northern Red Sea maintain their herds by providing anti-parasite treatment and constructing livestock ponds.

The ICRC also worked with the Eritrean authorities and communities to improve access to potable water, especially in border communities affected by past conflict. It helped local authorities build or repair solar-powered water-supply systems and train technicians and engineers in operating and maintaining water infrastructure.

The absence of a legal framework recognizing its status limited the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea’s” ability to carry out humanitarian activities. Continued dialogue between it and the ICRC led to preliminary discussions on resuming cooperation on capacity-building initiatives in 2015.

## CIVILIANS

The ICRC continued to pursue dialogue with the Eritrean authorities to gain acceptance and support for its mandate and activities in the country. Owing to existing restrictions on the operations of foreign/international organizations, the ICRC’s activities in favour of conflict-affected people remained limited. Some restrictions were lifted, however: for example, for the first time since 2010, mobile ICRC staff obtained permits to travel outside the capital, Asmara, enabling them to visit a national agricultural facility in Halale to explore possibilities for support to farmers, and to assess the water-supply needs of conflict-affected people in Debub.

### Vulnerable households work towards self-sufficiency

People affected by past conflict and facing economic hardship – including those living near the Ethiopian border, and households headed by women whose husbands were killed or disabled during the war or called up for military service – restored their livelihoods with ICRC support. In less fertile areas of Anseba, Debub, Gash Barka and Northern Red Sea, where people relied on livestock for their survival, 80,227 pastoralist households (401,135 people) had healthier herds following anti-parasite treatment conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and the ICRC on 1.5 million animals twice a year. In Gash Barka, 7,500 households (22,500 people) had more water for their herds after the construction of three livestock ponds, in addition to two others built in 2013. Some 150 heads of households contributed to these projects, thereby also earning additional income for their families.

In Anseba and Debub, 132 farming households (660 people) increased their crop yield with vegetable seed, hoes and foot-operated irrigation pumps provided by the ICRC as part of an agreement signed with the Ministry of Agriculture in 2013. After

closer assessment and analysis of needs, this assistance was given to fewer families than initially planned.

### **Rural communities get sustainable water supply**

Working with the ICRC, the authorities set up new solar-powered water supply systems, and repaired and maintained existing systems. These environmentally friendly systems kept running costs to a minimum, as fuel was scarce and expensive in Eritrea. Over 44,600 people, including those in Debub, Gash Barka and Southern Red Sea, gained or improved their access to clean water through these initiatives. The Eritrean water authorities and the ICRC conducted a workshop that enabled 19 regional technicians from the Water Resources Department, six engineers from the Ministry of Agriculture and one engineer from the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea” to strengthen their ability to operate and maintain water infrastructure throughout the country.

In Southern Red Sea, 1,400 children from displaced families benefited from an elementary school constructed with materials provided by the ICRC at the request of the local authorities and in consultation with the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea”.

### **People of Ethiopian origin cope with their difficult situation**

People of Ethiopian origin continued to be repatriated through Sudan by the Eritrean authorities. The government had withdrawn authorization for the ICRC to assist in the voluntary repatriation of civilians across the sealed Eritrea-Ethiopia border in 2009. Operating within these constraints, the ICRC continued to monitor the situation of the Ethiopian community living in Eritrea to ensure that their rights under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, including voluntary repatriation in humane conditions, were respected.

Particularly vulnerable Ethiopians – women, minors, elderly people and former detainees – coped with their situation with some financial assistance from the ICRC. Among them were 3,766 people who renewed their residence permits, 497 people who covered administrative and transport costs related to repatriation, and 60 people who paid for medical expenses. Some newly released detainees received assistance to cover their food and accommodation costs, and the transport expenses of relatives who visited them.

People who had studied in Eritrea had their academic transcripts sent to Ethiopia or elsewhere, enabling them to pursue employment opportunities or further studies. Attestations of detention issued by the ICRC enabled former detainees to address administrative or legal concerns.

### **People in Debub regain access to family-links services**

Family-links services run by the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea” (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*) had been suspended in Debub in 2010, and across Eritrea in 2012; since then, these services had been provided by the ICRC in areas where it had access. Using RCMs, people restored contact with relatives separated from them by conflict or other circumstances, such as migration. In October, after notifying the authorities, the ICRC was able to resume offering family-links services to people in Debub.

The ICRC continued to follow up with the pertinent authorities on requests from families for news of their relatives missing in relation to the 1998–2000 Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict; no new information was made available. It engaged in dialogue with the Eritrean and the Ethiopian authorities, with a view to helping unaccompanied

Eritrean minors in Ethiopia restore contact with their families and, where appropriate, reunite with their relatives (see *Ethiopia*).

The families of 19 Eritrean POWs held in Djibouti received news of their detained relatives through family-links services (see *Nairobi*). The ICRC stood ready to repatriate the POWs, if they so wished.

Using travel documents provided by the ICRC at the request of UNHCR, 168 Somali refugees travelled to Slovakia for eventual resettlement in the United States of America. Two Eritreans, one of them a minor, joined their families abroad after receiving plane tickets and other pertinent documents delivered by the ICRC at the request of IOM.

## **PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM**

### **Dialogue pursued with authorities to regain access to detainees**

The ICRC continued discussions with the authorities with a view to resuming visits to detainees of Ethiopian origin, including POWs or former POWs, and to people held for security-related reasons. The authorities had withdrawn access for such visits in 2009.

Requests to the Eritrean government for information on the whereabouts of the 17 Djiboutian soldiers reported by their government as missing after the 2008 Djibouti-Eritrea conflict remained unanswered.

In December, the ICRC donated clothing and educational materials to three prisons in Asmara, including a women’s prison, for distribution to the neediest detainees.

## **ACTORS OF INFLUENCE**

### **Dialogue with national and local authorities emphasizes the ICRC’s humanitarian mandate**

Because of the restrictions imposed on the ICRC, dialogue with the authorities continued to focus on strengthening their trust and persuading them that it was in their interest to recognize the applicability of the 1949 Geneva Conventions to the Eritrean context. Meetings with government officials enabled the ICRC to discuss humanitarian concerns and appeal for wider access to the population, including detainees (see *People deprived of their freedom*). For example, during the UN General Assembly (see *New York*) in September, the ICRC president met with an adviser to the Eritrean president to discuss possibilities for working together on humanitarian issues.

The planning and implementation of ICRC assistance activities (see *Civilians*) also created opportunities for briefing local and national officials on the nature of the organization and its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action.

### **Authorities and journalists enrich their understanding of IHL implementation**

With ICRC support, the head of the Eritrean Police Patrol strengthened his knowledge about the process towards ratification and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty at a regional seminar in the United Republic of Tanzania (see *Nairobi*). An official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as two journalists, learnt more about national IHL implementation at a regional seminar in Kenya (see *Nairobi*).

### **Community leaders and future decision-makers learn more about IHL**

Cooperation with the NUEYS enabled the ICRC to promote knowledge of and support for IHL and the Movement’s work among

beneficiary communities. Some 4,000 people – including local authorities, military and police personnel, academics, students, religious leaders and village elders – increased their familiarity with IHL through dissemination sessions in Anseba, Debub, Gash Barka and Northern Red Sea. Local leaders and community members learnt about the ICRC’s mandate and work during briefings at book fairs, which were conducted in five regions of the country and attended by over 100,000 people.

Some 300 young people attending a youth festival at the Sawa Vocational Training Centre learnt the basics of IHL during an ICRC presentation. Youth festivals in Anseba and Northern Red Sea, and at other educational institutions, also featured ICRC participation.

At an information session jointly organized by the NUEYS and the ICRC, 40 medical students learnt about the legal protection afforded by IHL to health-care workers during armed conflict. Forty more students enriched their knowledge of IHL at an ICRC-conducted training series at Asmara Law School. The ICRC continued discussions with the school’s administrators, with a view to supporting the integration of IHL into their international law curriculum.

The general public learnt more about IHL through articles in local languages published by the ICRC in the NUEYS magazine. The population had access to more IHL-related information from the public library in Massawa, Northern Red Sea, to which the ICRC had donated publications.

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The absence of a legal framework recognizing the status of the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea” hampered its ability to carry out humanitarian activities and obtain funding. Standing ready to resume cooperation, the ICRC pursued dialogue with the organization and the relevant authorities. These efforts led to preliminary discussions on resuming cooperation between the “Red Cross Society of Eritrea” and the ICRC, beginning in 2015, with a view to rebuilding the former’s operational capacities, notably in the areas of restoring family links, emergency preparedness and response, and operational communication.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: PROTECTION		Total			
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>					
<b>Red Cross messages (RCMs)</b>			<b>UAMs/SCs*</b>		
RCMs collected		932	26		
RCMs distributed		1,020	6		
Phone calls facilitated between family members		1			
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</b>			<b>Women</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		46	11	7	4
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	18			
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		7			
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		433	82	14	23
	<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	333			
<b>Documents</b>					
People to whom travel documents were issued		168			
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines		9			
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>					
<b>Restoring family links</b>					
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		2			

\* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: ASSISTANCE		Total	Women	Children
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
<b>Economic security, water and habitat (in some cases provided within a protection or cooperation programme)</b>				
Productive inputs	Beneficiaries	424,295	74%	2%
Cash	Beneficiaries	4,327	69%	10%
Water and habitat activities	Beneficiaries	44,691	30%	40%