

# IRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF



◆ ICRC mission + ICRC office/presence

The ICRC has been in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with some interruptions, since 1977. It seeks to clarify the fate of POWs registered during the Iran-Iraq war or identified through RCMs. It works in partnership with the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the fields of tracing, physical rehabilitation, international relief efforts and IHL promotion, for which the national IHL committee is also an important partner. It is engaged in a dialogue about IHL and Islam. The ICRC supports mine-risk education.

## KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS

### In 2014:

- ▶ Iranian and Iraqi authorities recovered over 380 sets of human remains, but made little progress in standardizing procedures for clarifying the fate of persons missing in relation to the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war
- ▶ the Centre for Comparative Studies on Islam and IHL in Qom engaged scholars in dialogue on the similarities between IHL and Islamic jurisprudence, at events and via publications on the topic
- ▶ the authorities and influential religious leaders discussed humanitarian issues and cooperation with the ICRC, notably during the ICRC president's visit in May
- ▶ the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the ICRC developed their cooperation, notably by jointly organizing a Health Emergencies in Large Populations (H.E.L.P.) course
- ▶ thousands of vulnerable Afghan migrants in the country received vaccinations and other basic health services through a joint project of the National Society, a local NGO and the ICRC
- ▶ difficulties in securing authorization from the national authorities set back the implementation of certain ICRC-proposed humanitarian initiatives to assist vulnerable people

EXPENDITURE (in KCHF)	
Protection	1,713
Assistance	-
Prevention	1,856
Cooperation with National Societies	642
General	-
	<b>4,210</b>

of which: Overheads 257

IMPLEMENTATION RATE	
Expenditure/yearly budget	<b>93%</b>

PERSONNEL	
Mobile staff	8
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	41

## YEARLY RESULTS

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action

**MEDIUM**

PROTECTION	Total
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>	
Red Cross messages (RCMs)	
RCMs collected	74
RCMs distributed	83
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	48
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>	
Restoring family links	
RCMs collected	8
RCMs distributed	21

## CONTEXT

The Islamic Republic of Iran enjoyed relief from certain international economic and other sanctions after it suspended some activities related to its nuclear programme. This was in line with an interim deal reached by the country and members of the international community in 2013; talks on a comprehensive agreement were ongoing. However, despite this and various government measures, Iranians continued to endure economic difficulties.

Thousands of Iranian families remained without information about the fate of relatives missing in relation to the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war. People in provinces along the borders with Afghanistan and Iraq were exposed to risks associated with weapon contamination. Afghan refugees and irregular migrants living in the Islamic Republic of Iran found it difficult to obtain social services.

The country maintained its international profile, which included its duties as head of the Non-Aligned Movement, and sought to ease relations with the member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council and other countries. It followed the security situations in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic closely.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the ICRC continued to: help address the humanitarian consequences of the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war in relation to the issue of missing persons; develop its partnership with the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran; promote IHL and its compatibility with Islamic jurisprudence; support local efforts to reduce people's exposure to the effects of weapon contamination; and restore family links. Challenges related to securing authorization from the national authorities set back the implementation of some ICRC-proposed humanitarian initiatives.

As a neutral intermediary, the ICRC supported Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran in ascertaining the fate of persons still missing in relation to the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war. It chaired a meeting of the tripartite committee on missing persons and three meetings of the joint technical working group tasked by the committee to facilitate joint exhumations and the return of human remains. Hundreds of sets of human remains were recovered and repatriated as a result of these efforts. With a view to advancing the recovery and identification process, the ICRC helped Iranian forensic experts hone their skills; for example, it organized workshops jointly with the Legal Medical Organization (LMO).

Within the framework of their 2012 partnership agreement, the National Society and the ICRC continued working together to restore family links, help people become less vulnerable to the effects of weapon contamination, offer physical rehabilitation services and promote IHL and the Movement. With ICRC support, the National Society organized the first Health Emergencies in Large Populations (H.E.L.P.) course in the Islamic Republic of Iran and participated in local/international events. This contributed to enhancing its application of Movement mechanisms and boosting its staff's understanding of the Fundamental Principles.

Cooperation with and support for the national IHL committee, the National Society and the Centre for Comparative Studies on Islam and IHL in Qom (hereafter Qom Centre) helped build acceptance for the ICRC and promote IHL and its common points with Islamic jurisprudence. Activities undertaken with these organizations facilitated contact with the authorities and influential religious

leaders. Dialogue with Iranian officials, particularly during the ICRC president's visit in May, also covered humanitarian issues and cooperation. More generally, events jointly organized with local institutions – as well as media reports on ICRC activities and the distribution of multimedia resources in local languages – helped broaden awareness of IHL, humanitarian principles and the Movement among civil society and the wider public. Contact with the Ministry of Defence on IHL-related matters was established; no progress was made in formalizing the ICRC's legal status in the country.

Through the concerted efforts of the Iranian Mine Action Centre (IRMAC), the National Society and the ICRC, thousands of people learnt about safe behaviour to adopt to mitigate mine-related risks. Civilian mine victims not covered by national assistance programmes received physical rehabilitation services through a joint project of the National Society and the ICRC. With ICRC support, IRMAC continued to develop as the focal point for mine-related activities.

Vulnerable Afghan migrants in Khorasan province received basic health-care services and hygiene education through an ICRC-supported project implemented by a local NGO and the National Society. Through Movement family-links services, Iranian families, Afghan detainees and Afghan and Iraqi refugees restored/maintained contact with relatives living or detained abroad.

## CIVILIANS

### Over 380 sets of human remains recovered in joint Iranian-Iraqi exhumations

The Iranian and Iraqi governments maintained their joint efforts to ascertain the fate of persons still unaccounted for from the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war. The ICRC continued to chair the tripartite committee on missing persons that was formed in 2013 after the merging of the two committees that had been tackling the issue.

Over 380 sets of human remains were recovered during five Iranian-Iraqi excavations, facilitated by the joint technical working group of the tripartite committee, in the Al Fao peninsula and Majnoon oil fields in Iraq. Through the efforts of both countries and under ICRC auspices, 369 sets of human remains were repatriated to the Islamic Republic of Iran; 18 sets of human remains exhumed in Iranian sites were handed over to the Iraqi authorities.

During one ICRC-chaired meeting of the tripartite committee and three of the working group, experts and authorities from both countries exchanged information on exhumations and discussed challenges they had encountered. The tripartite committee agreed on a plan of action for 2015, but made little progress in standardizing working procedures.

### Iranians build their forensic capacities

Institutions involved in the identification of human remains improved their services, partly by drawing on ICRC expertise/support. LMO staff and other local experts, as well as forensic professionals from neighbouring countries, honed their forensic skills through workshops/courses organized by the LMO/ICRC; an LMO staff member attended a course on human remains management. Officials and technicians from Iranian forensic/genetic laboratories discussed professional challenges at an ICRC-facilitated round-table. One laboratory received financial support for purchasing equipment as per an agreement between the authorities, the laboratory and the ICRC. Efforts were pursued to foster regional cooperation in forensic matters.

Within the framework of a mechanism agreed on by the Iranian authorities and the ICRC in 2004, Iranian officials received an updated list of Iraqi POWs still unaccounted for. Over 500 Iraqi ex-POWs could apply for State benefits after receiving attestations of captivity.

An assessment of the needs of the families of missing persons – planned in cooperation with the Janbazan Medical and Engineering Research Centre – remained on hold, owing to the lack of approval from the authorities.

### **Families contact their relatives abroad**

Iranian families exchanged news with their relatives detained in Afghanistan, Iraq or the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba (see *Afghanistan, Iraq and Washington*) through RCMs, parcels and short oral messages relayed by ICRC delegates. Afghan and Iraqi refugees, and Afghans detained in the Islamic Republic of Iran, contacted their families using Movement family-links services. Some Afghan minors were assisted to contact the Swedish embassy in Tehran, which reunited them with their relatives in Sweden.

Six former members of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) were voluntarily repatriated from Iraq, under ICRC auspices and with the Iranian authorities' approval. Monitoring of the situation of repatriated former PMOI members and planned provision of psychosocial support, through a local NGO, remained on hold, pending the agreement of Iranian authorities.

In coordination with the ICRC, the National Society strengthened its family-links services, especially for migrants. Staff/volunteers of a branch bolstered their capacities at a training conducted during a joint visit by National Society/ICRC staff. The National Society also helped further the authorities' understanding of these services, at a workshop it hosted with the ICRC; this followed up the recommendations of a 2013 international conference. Preparations were ongoing for another international conference, and a regional meeting, involving other National Societies.

### **Vulnerable migrants obtain health services**

Through a project of a local NGO, the National Society and the ICRC, thousands of vulnerable Afghan migrants in Mashhad, in Khorasan, received basic health services – including vaccinations – during home visits by the NGO's staff; some were referred to other providers, for free medical services/supplies. The women and children among them learnt good health practices at information sessions.

### **Mine victims receive physical rehabilitation services**

Hundreds of thousands of people coped with the consequences of weapon contamination, through the efforts of IRMAC and the National Society. In accordance with existing cooperation agreements, both organizations received ICRC support for their activities.

Iranians living in weapon-contaminated provinces in the west, and Afghan refugees passing through the eastern provinces, reduced their exposure to mine-related risks through dissemination sessions led by ICRC-supported National Society staff/volunteers. In Kurdistan province, 39 civilian mine victims not covered by national assistance programmes availed themselves of physical rehabilitation services through a National Society/ICRC project. They were among 100 mine victims who participated in a needs assessment led by IRMAC, which also bolstered its data-collection capacity.

With ICRC support, IRMAC sustained its role as central coordinator of mine-related activities. It promoted its activities, and engaged with other actors, through workshops/events.

In line with the National Society's initiatives to improve its capacities in mine-risk education, senior officials and trainers discussed their work and challenges, and received technical advice, during workshops.

## **ACTORS OF INFLUENCE**

Dialogue with the authorities and members of civil society helped foster acceptance and support for humanitarian principles, IHL and the ICRC, although no progress was made in formalizing the organization's legal status in the country. The National Society, the national IHL committee and the Qom Centre remained crucial partners in facilitating contact with the authorities and civil society, and in promoting IHL and its compatibility with Islamic jurisprudence. The national IHL committee invited the ICRC to its meetings, at which accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and completion of a draft law on the emblem were discussed.

Cooperation with Defence Ministry officials on the issue of missing persons (see *Civilians*) continued. Some progress was made in efforts to implement IHL-related activities with them, although a draft agreement on joint activities was still awaiting approval. Armed forces personnel attended IHL workshops organized by the National Society/ICRC.

### **Authorities increase their understanding of IHL and ICRC activities**

Senior government officials and prominent religious/academic leaders discussed humanitarian issues and cooperation with the ICRC during its president's visit. Bilateral meetings, in the country and abroad, with the authorities, parliamentarians and religious leaders/scholars also covered these subjects. Contact with the authorities on humanitarian issues related to detention was being developed.

The authorities and members of civil society enriched their understanding of IHL and related norms during local/international events. For example, government officials, national IHL committee members and scholars contributed to discussions at: an international conference on sexual violence in armed conflict (see *Nepal*); an experts' workshop on the Health Care in Danger project (see *Brussels*); a meeting on the "Strengthening IHL" process (see *International law and policy*); and other events abroad (see *Lebanon, New Delhi and Sri Lanka*).

### **Scholars consider similarities between Islamic jurisprudence and IHL**

Prominent Islamic leaders and scholars contributed to the dialogue on the common points between Islamic jurisprudence and IHL through initiatives undertaken by the Qom Centre, the ICRC-supported focal point for studies in this subject. The centre participated in, among others, an international conference on Islamic unity and a book fair, and published/translated a magazine and other materials. With the centre's support, a scholar discussed about the Health Care in Danger project at an international conference (see *Pakistan*). Preparations were in progress for an international conference on Islam and IHL hosted by the Qom Centre.

Students/researchers made use of the centre's well-stocked library for their studies on the subject; four of these were completed with

ICRC support. Scholars in the region received publications in Arabic, English and Persian.

### Civil society raises awareness of IHL and humanitarian issues

Academics, NGOs, journalists and other members of civil society discussed IHL and humanitarian issues at events organized with/by local institutions, including those who had signed cooperation agreements with the ICRC. Topics covered included violence and extremism, nuclear weapons, sexual violence, the environmental consequences of armed conflict and the role of non-State actors in armed conflicts.

The media's coverage of IHL-related events and ICRC activities helped broaden public awareness of IHL and humanitarian principles. Participation in a film festival and distribution of written/ audiovisual materials in local languages also contributed to this end. To strengthen the ICRC's relations with the media, an agreement was concluded with the country's official news agency to coordinate on capacity-building activities.

### Students demonstrate competence in IHL

Iranian university students, and their counterparts in the region, tested their grasp of IHL at a moot court organized by the National Society, two local organizations and the ICRC. Students also competed internationally (see *Beijing* and *Europe*); their universities received reference materials on IHL.

Selected modules of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme had been adapted for inclusion in textbooks. The national IHL committee explored ways to include the programme in cultural events and to promote it among youth/cultural groups, with a view to cultivating young people's awareness of IHL.

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

### National Society hosts emergency preparedness course

In line with their 2012 partnership agreement, the National Society and the ICRC worked to restore family links, raise mine-risk awareness and promote IHL and humanitarian principles (see above). Cooperation in accordance with a separate agreement on physical rehabilitation continued, in the form of joint activities (see *Civilians*).

The National Society organized, with a local medical university and the ICRC, the first H.E.L.P. course in the country, which helped advance its application of the Movement's operational mechanisms. The course's 30 participants – health and humanitarian professionals – strengthened their emergency preparedness and added to their knowledge of IHL.

The National Society further incorporated the Health Care in Danger project in its staff training and promoted it to various audiences. Staff/volunteers broadened their understanding of humanitarian issues, and their capacity to assist vulnerable people, through ICRC-hosted events on disability inclusion, disaster response, the Movement's Fundamental Principles and other topics.

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	74			
RCMs distributed	83			
<b>Reunifications, transfers and repatriations</b>				
Human remains transferred/repatriated	18			
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons</b>				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered	119	Women	Girls	Boys
<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	13	26	33	20
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	48			
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people) <sup>1</sup>	242	52	52	40
<i>including people for whom tracing requests were registered by another delegation</i>	17			
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>				
<b>Restoring family links</b>				
RCMs collected	8			
RCMs distributed	21			
People to whom a detention attestation was issued	522			

\* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

1. not including people missing as a consequence of the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war