

# 2001: shocks, prospects and expectations

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## 2001: Shocks, prospects and expectations

The tragic events of 11 September caused shock and concern for the ICRC which, right from the start, condemned these acts as violating all principles of humanity. It stressed the international nature of the ensuing conflict, affirmed the applicability of international humanitarian law (IHL), and drew attention accordingly to the prisoner-of-war status of those captured in connection with the conflict. The applicability of the provisions of IHL remained a bone of contention between the ICRC and the United States. The ICRC remains firmly convinced, however, that compliance with IHL in no way constitutes an obstacle to the struggle against terror and crime. For example, IHL grants the detaining power the legal right to prosecute prisoners of war suspected of having committed war crimes or any other criminal offence prior to or during the hostilities.

Reactions to the 11 September tragedy obliged the ICRC to withdraw its expatriate staff from Afghanistan for almost two months. This withdrawal on 16 September was the first time that ICRC expatriate presence in Afghanistan had been interrupted since the Kabul delegation opened in 1987. Detention-related activities and large-scale food aid for drought victims in remote areas were suspended. However, thanks to the continuity provided by over 1,000 Afghan employees who remained at work in ICRC offices around the country and the trust of local and national leaders gained over years of working with all warring parties, the ICRC was able to resume its activities rapidly. Upon its return, the ICRC gained access to the people detained in connection with the conflict, including the prisoners of war held by the United States at Guantanamo Bay. Access to these prisoners is crucial for the ICRC as it enables the organization to play its role as a neutral intermediary and to offer the protection provided for by IHL.

In general, ICRC operations in 2001 did not always achieve the level of success they had known in 2000 in terms of access to beneficiaries in the field; grave security concerns were the main reason for this. Following the murder in April of six of its staff in the eastern Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ICRC closed its Bunia sub-delegation and suspended all operations in the region controlled by the Congo Liberation Front and the Uganda People's Defence Force. The same incident led the ICRC to curtail drastically its presence in Uganda, recalling its delegates from field units and suspending all field activities. Security concerns also limited access to victims of the violence in Burundi. Since 1999, for reasons of security, the ICRC had often been restricted to air transport for its movements around the country, so its activities were limited to areas with landing strips, and the large aid programme for drought victims launched in early 2001 had to be halted prematurely because of mounting tension and non-acceptance of the way in which the programme was implemented. Similarly, in Chechnya, serious incidents in May and again in September obliged the ICRC to suspend its programmes, for about a month each time. However, despite major security constraints, the ICRC managed to keep aid programmes going for most of the year thanks to its dedicated local staff and the support of the Chechen branch of the Russian Red Cross.

Despite these setbacks, there were favourable developments for the ICRC and its activities in other countries, such as Colombia, Myanmar, Nepal and Indonesia. Efforts to promote knowledge of IHL among armed forces, police forces and other bearers of weapons, and to encourage incorporation of its provisions into training programmes for armed forces, remained an important part of the ICRC's activities. The ICRC continued to contribute to the instruction of such forces in IHL, stressing the importance of compliance with its provisions, while at the same time promoting understanding of and respect for its own mandate and activities so as to facilitate its operations. While activities aimed at the military and the police are intended to have a direct impact, other programmes to promote IHL are expected to pay



off in the long term. The latter include educational programmes designed to raise awareness of IHL and related issues among the general public, especially young people. The ICRC's "Exploring Humanitarian Law" (EHL) project for pupils of secondary school age aroused a great deal of interest, with over 50 countries receiving ICRC support to implement the programme, and a major step was taken in this respect when several governments incorporated EHL into the national school curriculum as a compulsory module. Advanced instruction in IHL at universities continued to raise similar interest and to make steady progress, with an increasing number of university students and professors acquiring a solid grounding in the relevance, rules and application of IHL. All these activities are of utmost importance as they enhance acceptance of the ICRC and thus facilitate its access to victims.

Activities in more specific areas such as mine awareness also made good progress. The ICRC conducted awareness-raising programmes in mine-affected communities, specifically targeting groups at risk. Community-based projects, information campaigns, theatrical productions and interactive sessions were often designed for children, to encourage them to adopt safe habits which they would then pass on to their families. The ICRC thereby contributed to reducing the number of casualties from mines in the areas covered by such programmes. However, as the world will remain riddled with mines for many years to come, this is likely to remain a long-term task.

Given the growth of the ICRC over recent years, close attention was paid to the risk that the bureaucratic weight of its Geneva headquarters might have a detrimental effect on operations. A policy of decentralization had been introduced to avoid this and to allow the field delegations to flourish with a sufficient degree of autonomy. During the year the decentralization process continued, with emphasis on the decision-making powers and authority of the field. After all, the delegations are best placed to make informed decisions about the needs and security situation in their host countries. This strong operational decentralization is backed up by centralized administrative support from Geneva. Throughout year the ICRC attached great importance to training for its delegates, both in general and at management level in particular. The number of delegates increased as compared with the previous year, and the shortage of middle-management staff was remedied. This increased focus on training did not result in neglect of field operations; a balance was maintained between training of staff and maintenance of field presence, thereby maximizing staff potential.

The "Planning for Results" (PfR) methodology – a management tool first introduced at the ICRC in 1999 with the aim of systematizing and strengthening the organization's planning, monitoring and evaluation capabilities – has simplified and standardized the planning and management of ICRC activities. Introduced first for field operations, in 2001 the PfR methodology was systematically applied throughout headquarters and used by all divisions, while the next step – evaluation – was gradually being implemented for selected field activities.

Cooperation with the Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was not only close but also highly productive. Efforts to harmonize procedures and systems between the two organizations were made freely and willingly by both sides in a spirit of confidence and trust. An example of this harmonization was the establishment of a standardized list of relief items. Furthermore, the approach to the issue of a new protective emblem was coordinated, and the two organizations' solidarity in this respect can only be conducive to a long-overdue resolution of this issue.





Cooperation with National Societies participating in ICRC activities was enhanced by the prevailing atmosphere of openness and transparency both in the field and at the meeting of these National Societies in January. This meeting offered an opportunity for both the ICRC and the National Societies to place all their cards on the table and clarify operational, financial and personnel issues, so as to give future cooperation a more solid basis. Over and above institutional matters, National Society volunteers, particularly in the African countries, again demonstrated exemplary motivation and proved to be an invaluable asset in terms of both operational activities and promotion of the image of the Movement as a whole. These volunteers, as members of the communities they serve, give the Movement a firm footing in the societies where the ICRC operates.

The end of 2001 saw the completion of the ICRC's "Avenir" project and implementation of its four main strategies:

- increased presence and proximity to victims;
- the opening-up of dialogue with other humanitarian actors;
- strengthening of IHL; and
- more efficient management.

These main strategic features of the ICRC's policy are today applied throughout the organization and form an integral part of all institutional and operational planning. In 2001 the ICRC also took a major step towards increased transparency and accountability when it satisfied the conditions required to comply with the International Accounting Standards (IAS). The accounts presented in this *Annual Report* therefore conform to the criteria set by the IAS.

In conclusion, looking back over the successes and failures of 2001, the ICRC managed to adapt to circumstances and to move forward, and succeeded in strengthening its institutional management and improve its transparency and accountability, while continuing to strive to meet the needs of victims of armed conflict and internal tension. What we want is an organization that is not unduly weighed down by bureaucracy and that is staffed by highly motivated professionals who manage to keep the human element of their commitment alive and focused on the *raison d'être* of the ICRC, that is, alleviating the plight and meeting the needs of people caught up in conflict.

The Directorate