In 2005, the ICRC:
- provided aid, together with the Colombian Red Cross, to almost 33,000 newly displaced people and residents affected by the conflict; completed 55 small-scale infrastructure projects and started 24 new ones, benefiting some 44,000 residents in conflict-affected areas; together with WFP, initiated the third phase of a joint programme aimed at improving the situation of IDPs through advocacy; established a pilot project for IDPs in Bogotá involving the distribution of vouchers instead of food and commodities; documented 990 alleged IHL violations, made 231 oral and written representations to threats, weapon bearers, assisted some 1,000 victims of threats, redacted the handover of 10 hostages and 6 members of the armed forces to their families or the authorities; monitored individually some 7,600 security detainees and conducted, together with the national penitentiary authorities, a survey of health services in 57 places of permanent detention; provided 207 disabled detainees with ortho-prosthetic appliances;
- continued to provide the armed forces with technical support in achieving the full integration of IHL into their doctrine, training and operating procedures and assisted police contingents involved in military operations in incorporating IHL into training curricula; carried out 47 joint missions with local mobile medical teams to facilitate their access to residents in remote rural areas.

The ICRC has been working in Colombia since 1969, striving to secure greater compliance with IHL by all armed groups — particularly regarding the protection of persons not taking part in the conflict — and promoting its integration into the doctrine, training and operating procedures of the Colombian armed forces. The ICRC also visits security detainees, assists IDPs and other victims of the conflict and implements public health programmes and small-scale infrastructure rehabilitation projects in conflict-affected areas.

It works with the Colombian Red Cross Society and other members of the Movement to coordinate humanitarian activities in Colombia’s conflict-affected regions.

**CONTEXT**

After a two-year lull, the conflict between the Colombian government and the country’s main insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), intensified in 2005. The FARC’s announcement in February that it was bringing to an end its policy of “tactical withdrawal” was immediately followed by major attacks, mainly in the departments of Cauca, Putumayo, Chocó and Meta. Armed clashes also increased in frequency in the south and in the departments of Arauca, Meta and Norte de Santander. As a result, the number of mass displacements rose in 2005.

In a trend observed over the past few years, armed groups continued to use mines, leading to a growing number of casualties. In 2005, all of the country’s departments, except the Caribbean islands of San Andrés y Providencia, were affected by anti-personnel mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), making Colombia the only country in the Americas where mines and IEDs continued to be used daily.

An initiative launched by France, Spain and Switzerland aimed at facilitating a direct dialogue between the Colombian government and the FARC concerning the exchange of hostages against detained members of the FARC did not bear fruit. Although the Colombian government publicly accepted the proposal, the FARC declined to give an explicit response, while ruling out an agreement with the government of President Alvaro Uribe.

The second largest insurgent group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), started preliminary talks with the Colombian government in Havana, Cuba. Negotiations were scheduled to resume in January 2006.

The controversial Justice and Peace Law, a legal framework for the demobilization of paramilitary forces, was approved by Congress in June and ratified by the government in July. It had been heavily criticized by national and international observers for offering a blanket amnesty to perpetrators of serious IHL violations, while ignoring the subject of reparations to victims. Major international stakeholders nevertheless decided to support the process, provided the implementation of the new law proved effective.

In October, the demobilization of paramilitary groups was temporarily suspended when one of their leaders was transferred to a high security prison. Tensions increased when the government publicly insisted on sticking to the agreed demobilization deadline of end 2005, but following protests from paramilitary leaders, it agreed to extend the deadline.

The Constitutional Court approved a hotly debated new law permitting the re-election of the president, who subsequently announced he would be a contender in the April 2006 presidential elections.

**EXPENDITURE (IN CHF ,000)**

| Protection | 4,975 |
| Assistance | 13,855 |
| Prevention | 3,617 |
| Cooperation with National Societies | 1,219 |
| General | - |

**IMPLEMENTATION RATE**

Expenditure/yearly budget 91.0%

**PERSONNEL**

53 expatriates

225 national staff (daily workers not included)
ICRC ACTION

The ICRC continued to focus its field activities on about 20 priority zones where humanitarian needs were greatest. In line with this new orientation, and without modifying the scope of its programmes, it continued to streamline its operational structure, retaining five sub-delegations and six offices by the end of the year. By favouring a multidisciplinary approach to humanitarian issues, the ICRC was able to improve, among other things, the collection of information on IHL violations, leading to the documentation of many more cases.

ICRC medical teams stopped replacing local health authorities, which became increasingly able to reach remote areas, but they still accompanied mobile health units whenever the security situation warranted it. To ensure populations affected by the conflict had access to sustainable health services, the ICRC started to support the reopening of health posts, in close cooperation with local health authorities and communities.

In detention centres, the ICRC’s strategy of gradually reducing and ultimately ending its involvement in health issues, was successfully implemented, with the national penitentiary authorities (INPEC) taking on full responsibility for the community health care programme in the first half of 2005. The ICRC and INPEC also undertook a survey of health services provided to detainees, to be completed early in 2006, on the basis of which recommendations were to be made to the Colombian authorities.

Communication strategies designed to reinforce acceptance by all actors of the ICRC’s humanitarian work were streamlined and adapted to local contexts and audiences, with the aim of improving access to people affected by the armed conflict.

After eight years of distributing food rations to displaced populations, the ICRC developed a pilot voucher programme in Bogotá as part of a strategy to better address the needs of newly arrived IDPs. In April, the ICRC sent the Colombian government a written notification confirming that the situation in Colombia qualified as a non-international armed conflict. The Colombian government replied by thanking the ICRC for its role in Colombia and recognizing that the provisions of IHL were indeed applicable to the Colombian situation.

CIVILIANS

Protection

The delegation documented 990 cases of alleged IHL violations in 2005, with disappearances (323) and targeted executions (152) representing the bulk of the cases. The delegation also documented 21 violations of medical facilities and/or staff. Intimidation of and threats against resident populations continued, often leading to forced displacement. During the year, the ICRC provided material assistance to 991 victims of threats, helping them reach other regions of the country to avoid imminent danger. It also helped 433 families with the burial costs of civilian family members killed as a result of the conflict. Armed actors continued to control access to certain areas to monitor population movements and the circulation of goods. The murder of IDPs who had sought refuge in cities remained a concern. The delegation acted as a facilitator for the release of eight civilian hostages.

990 allegations of IHL violations collected
441 new tracing cases for people unaccounted for opened, 146 persons located and 433 cases still being handled by the end of 2005
231 representations made to the armed parties allegedly responsible for IHL violations
172 RCMs collected from and 154 delivered to civilians

Persons unaccounted for in connection with the conflict

When the Justice and Peace Law came into force in July, the ICRC met members of the National Commission on Reparation and Reconciliation, set up to defend victims’ interests, to follow up on the issue of persons unaccounted for in connection with the conflict.

In September, the ICRC participated in a regional conference of the Latin American Forensic Anthropology Association (ALAF), held in Bogotá, where it shared the main findings of its 2003 International Conference on Missing Persons and their Families. It also facilitated the presence of European experts, who shared their experience in the identification of human remains. Follow-up meetings were held in Bogotá to identify specific measures that could lead to relevant information for the families of victims.

In the field, the ICRC obtained information from armed groups regarding the fate of missing persons, leading to the recovery of human remains.
Emergency relief for IDPs
In 2005, mass displacements increased, while the displacement of individuals or families remained stable. The total number of IDPs officially registered with the government was 1.7 million.

The emergency needs of IDPs (consisting of food rations for up to three months – up to six months for households headed by women – and essential household items) were covered by the government’s Social Solidarity Network (Red de Solidaridad Social – RSS) and the ICRC through a working agreement concluded in 2001. In the cities of Villavicencio, Bucaramanga, Sincelejo and Pereira, the Colombian Red Cross, in coordination with the ICRC, provided assistance to displaced individuals. In 2005, more than 31,500 people displaced individually and over 19,500 displaced en masse received emergency aid. In October, the ICRC launched a pilot project for IDPs in Bogotá involving the distribution of vouchers instead of food and commodities. The vouchers could be redeemed in selected markets and shops, enabling beneficiaries to reduce their transportation costs. If successful, the programme would be extended to other cities.

With WFP, the ICRC initiated the third phase of a joint programme aimed at improving the situation of IDPs. Although the mid and long-term needs of IDPs remained largely unmet, the government and humanitarian organizations shifted their attention to helping IDPs recover their self-sufficiency, and the government’s overall budget for IDPs significantly increased.

The ICRC, the RSS, the IOM and UNHCR set up an interagency committee, improving 10 IDP reception centres through better infrastructure, staff training and standardized procedures.

Meanwhile, the RSS continued to pay more attention to the security concerns of affected populations, insisting less on their return home. Although assistance for those returning was yet to be standardized, there was improved coordination on planned returns between local authorities and the RSS.

Community infrastructure and agricultural projects
Resident populations living in remote areas remained exposed to threats and intimidation by armed groups. Security constraints prevented relevant State institutions from providing services, such as medical care. Moreover, residents sometimes faced restrictions in their movements and in the circulation of goods, such as food, fuel and building materials, making living conditions precarious.

In 2005, the ICRC, in its priority zones:
- provided 1,540 residents with food and/or essential household items on an ad hoc basis;
- approved 14 agricultural projects for 2,068 beneficiaries;
- ensured the provision of basic health services to a monthly average of 81,000 residents by facilitating, through 47 joint missions, access of mobile medical teams to remote rural areas affected by the conflict;
- completed minor infrastructure and rehabilitation projects for 10,183 beneficiaries, water and sanitation projects for 10,327 beneficiaries and initiated water and habitat projects for another 36,960 beneficiaries.

Recruitment of minors
In 2005, the ICRC documented 10 cases of forced recruitment of minors. Allegations of collective recruitment of minors in urban centres, a worrying issue at the beginning of the year, diminished during the second half of the year. National and international NGOs, together with local authorities, continued to work on prevention and information. The ICRC also conducted 20 visits to centres run by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), collecting information to restore contact between former child soldiers and their families, sometimes successfully.

People deprived of their freedom
In 2005, further to ICRC representations to this effect, the authorities notified the ICRC more systematically of people detained in connection with the conflict.

Delegates spoke in private with 2,938 newly arrested detainees to assess their conditions of detention and provided material assistance to the more vulnerable ones. Owing to the gradual implementation of judicial reforms, which accelerated legal proceedings, overcrowding decreased significantly in places of temporary detention.

The ICRC facilitated the release of three policemen and a young soldier held by armed opposition groups and continued its efforts to gain access to army and police personnel, as well as civilians, still held. On three separate occasions, armed groups spontaneously handed over a soldier to the ICRC. The ICRC also continued to press the US authorities for access to two Colombian security detainees belonging to the FARC who had been extradited to the United States.

In cooperation with INPEC, the ICRC carried out a survey in 57 detention centres to enable the penitentiary authorities to improve the planning and delivery of health services.

As planned, the ICRC discontinued the joint delivery of community health care and the running of health brigades in prisons, encouraging INPEC to take over these programmes early in the year. INPEC thus conducted eight training courses for health promoters and another 14 on HIV/AIDS; it also performed some 10,000 HIV tests.

The ICRC facilitated the signing of an agreement between INPEC and three Colombian universities to implement a pilot community health programme pioneered by the medical faculty of Pereira Technical University and the ICRC for some 6,000 detainees. The ICRC and INPEC signed a framework agreement on the rehabilitation of three prison health facilities, which were near completion at the end of 2005.

- 7,614 detainees visited, 5,170 monitored individually (including 2,938 newly registered, of whom 245 were women) during 641 visits to 338 places of detention
- 1,911 detainees received a family visit funded by the ICRC
- 40 RCMs delivered and 78 collected
- 207 detainees received ortho-prosthetic appliances based on a cost-sharing agreement between INPEC and the ICRC

Wounded and sick
The number of civilians affected by antipersonnel mines kept rising in 2005. According to the Landmine Monitor, by 1 August 2005, the government’s Antipersonnel Mine Observatory had registered 510 new casualties from mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).

In 2005, the ICRC continued to provide medical assistance to the war-wounded and to sick civilians living in conflict zones, including victims of mines and ERW. When necessary, it also lobbied national and local authorities to ensure the delivery of appropriate medical care. It directed beneficiaries to the services provided by the national
health system, offering financial help if needed, and accompanied local medical teams or health brigades to remote areas. It also ran mobile health units in partnership with the Red Cross Societies of Canada, Norway and Sweden.

The ICRC obtained authorization from armed groups for mobile health units run by the Ministry of Social Protection to gain access to all the priority zones it had identified. In rural areas where security constraints prevented the deployment of national medical staff, the ICRC conducted dissemination sessions for armed groups, stressing the need to respect health facilities, vehicles and personnel.

To maximize efficiency during field missions, each ICRC sub-delegation developed a plan of action to increase community awareness of HIV/AIDS, in cooperation, whenever possible, with the Colombian Red Cross.

With ICRC support, government health personnel and mobile health units:
- administered 5,138 vaccinations;
- gave 11,279 curative consultations;
- gave talks on health promotion and disease prevention to over 16,000 people.

Assistance to the war-wounded and mine/ERW victims
In 2005, the ICRC began to develop, with the Ministry of Health, workshops for national health staff on the clinical management of the war-wounded. The organization and financing of these workshops was to be shared by the ICRC and the Ministry of Health.

The ICRC provided financial support for specialized medical care to:
- 102 victims of mines and 28 victims of ERW;
- 108 civilian war-wounded;
- 275 IDPs.

AUTHORITIES
Colombia was party to most IHL treaties and was in the process of adopting national implementing measures. Owing to procedural errors, the ratification of the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention on Cultural Property had to be started again. Congress was discussing a draft law on the ratification of Amended Article 1 of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The ICRC met often with a study group on IHL, launched at the beginning of the year within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss IHL-related issues, such as the continued applicability to the Colombian situation of Article 3 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocol II (which extends to non-international armed conflicts the principal rules of Protocol I relating to the protection of civilian populations against the effects of hostilities). The ICRC also met officials of the Ministry of Culture to promote the ratification of the Hague Convention’s Second Protocol.

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS
The ICRC continued to provide the armed forces with technical support in making IHL an integral and permanent part of their doctrine, training and standing operating procedures. It met the minister of defence and the command structure of the armed forces to promote the revision of the IHL content of instruction manuals pertaining to military doctrine and to conduct “after action reviews” to evaluate specific military operations from the perspective of compliance with IHL.

In cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC worked closely with the national police to complete the first draft of an instructor’s reference guide integrating IHL principles, which would be widely used among police special forces participating in military operations.

- 85 dissemination sessions organized throughout the country to raise awareness of the ICRC’s mandate and activities among some 6,500 members of the armed forces and police units engaged in military operations
- 15 dissemination sessions on basic humanitarian principles and the ICRC’s role and mandate conducted for some 500 members of armed opposition groups

CIVIL SOCIETY
In order to enhance knowledge and acceptance of IHL among a range of civil society audiences, the ICRC:
- held a seminar on basic IHL principles for more than 25 journalists;
- organized a photo exhibition in 22 cities and towns highlighting the plight of civilians affected by the conflict;
- continued networking with influential members of the private sector to raise awareness of IHL and the ICRC’s mandate and activities;
- conducted a workshop on IHL for 25 representatives of oil companies.

IHL and future decision-makers
For several years, IHL had been incorporated into the academic programmes of Colombia’s leading universities and was widely discussed in academic circles, especially within the framework of Colombia’s armed conflict.

The ICRC organized IHL seminars for 85 lecturers and students from 15 universities providing legal and psychological assistance to victims of Colombia’s conflict. In these seminars, the ICRC also discussed its study on customary international humanitarian law and the issue of missing persons.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT
Restoring family links
With ICRC support, the Colombian Red Cross completed an assessment of its tracing capacity and the revision of its training material on psychological support to victims of the conflict, producing some 10,000 new training manuals for its volunteers.

“Safer Access” approach
The ICRC conducted seven security workshops throughout the country, emphasizing the “Safer Access” approach, which prompted Red Cross branches to revise existing security contingency plans or to establish new ones. These workshops complemented monthly security meetings held by the Movement at both headquarter and branch levels. The participation of ICRC sub-delegation staff in the branch committee meetings helped identify security risks and reduce security incidents.
Cooperation with the National Society and other Movement partners
The ICRC and the International Federation helped the Colombian Red Cross revise its national development plan. It paid for the transport and accommodation of branch staff and volunteers travelling to meetings to give their input, thus ensuring that the finalized plan would be relevant to each local context. Colombian Red Cross activities carried out in cooperation with partner National Societies were coordinated under tripartite security and cooperation agreements, which were being replaced by new, multilateral agreements.

Agreements between the various partners enabled the Movement to coordinate its response to the humanitarian consequences of specific armed clashes. Similarly, the ICRC’s contacts with armed groups paved the way for partner National Societies to work in areas that would otherwise have been off-limits for security reasons.

Promoting IHL and the Fundamental Principles
The Colombian Red Cross, with financial support and technical input from the ICRC, strengthened the dissemination/communication departments in all its branches. The ICRC supported the development of a distance-learning module on IHL for a National Society programme designed to ensure a coherent approach to IHL dissemination. It also:
- contributed to the salaries of staff working in the newly established doctrine and protection departments;
- provided financial support to Colombian Red Cross micro-projects;
- gave technical support to the National Society in launching a public information campaign on protection of the emblem.

Mine action
To prepare for the extension of the mine-risk education project to three new departments (Arauca, Meta and Norte de Santander), the Colombian Red Cross trained mine-action monitors in each of these branches. Once fully implemented, the project would bring the number of departments covered to five, including Antioquia and Cauca. The Colombian Red Cross started mine-risk education in four communities in Meta and Norte de Santander and revised its mine-risk education materials.