



ICRC delegation ICRC sub-delegation

sierra leone

Since the end of the conflict in January 2002, the ICRC has adapted its operations in Sierra Leone. Its protection priorities are to: register and follow up Liberian children separated from their families; restore contact between family members dispersed by the conflict; reunite Sierra Leonean children with their families; and visit people deprived of their freedom. While the ICRC continues its housing, water and sanitation projects for vulnerable civilians in remote communities in the eastern part of the country, other types of emergency aid have all but ceased. The ICRC has maintained a continuous presence in Sierra Leone since 1991. It co-operates with the Sierra Leonean Red Cross in tracing, the promotion of IHL and emergency preparedness. It also supports the National Society's Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation programme, which helps children affected by conflict to reintegrate into their communities.

EXPENDITURE IN CHF

Protection

3,410,351

Assistance

952,847

Preventive action

770,971

Cooperation with National Societies

1,181,382

General

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► **6,315,550**

of which: Overheads **385,456**

PERSONNEL

15 expatriates

121 national staff

KEY POINTS IN 2004

- ▶ 189 children registered in Sierra Leone were reunited with their families in Guinea and Liberia.
- ▶ 96 Sierra Leonean children, mostly registered in Guinea, were reunited with their families in Sierra Leone.
- ▶ 7,109 RCMs were collected and 3,882 delivered in cooperation with the Sierra Leonean Red Cross.
- ▶ Housing conditions were improved for over 100 destitute households headed by women. Water-supply and sanitation systems were improved in 27 villages.
- ▶ Sierra Leone ratified the CCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and its cabinet approved 11 other IHL treaties for ratification.
- ▶ The ICRC assisted the National Society in rebuilding its branches and training its staff in tracing and communication activities. It also participated in the Movement's cooperation mechanisms in place in Sierra Leone.

CONTEXT

In 2004 Sierra Leone enjoyed its third consecutive year of peace. The political and security situation remained generally stable, aided by the continued presence of troops of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and international support to local civil and military structures. Significantly, the UN Security Council reversed its earlier decision to withdraw gradually all UN forces from the country by the end of 2004. Instead, it passed a resolution to retain a residual force to oversee security and stability at least until late 2005.

In June the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone began the trials of individuals charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). The 13 indicted included Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, Johnny Paul Koroma, former head of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, and Chief Sam Hinga Norman, interior minister at the time of his arrest.

The dispute between Sierra Leone and Guinea over the Yenga territory remained unresolved. This narrow strip of land on the Sierra Leonean side of the border, controlled by the Guinean armed forces since 1998 at the request of the then Sierra Leonean government, had been a bone of contention between the two countries but had remained out of the public eye. In 2004 concerns were raised about the security of civilians in the area. Towards the end of the year the two countries signed a memorandum of

understanding stipulating that the disputed territory belonged to Sierra Leone.

The deployment of a United Nations (UN) peace-keeping force along the Sierra Leone-Liberia border set off a wave of activity in the area, as some Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone returned home to gauge the situation. Some of them remained in Liberia, while others moved back and forth. Reductions in food rations in the refugee camps prompted a number of Liberian children separated from their families to leave the camps in search of jobs in mining areas or elsewhere or to return on their own to Liberia.

The security situation in Sierra Leone remained relatively stable, although isolated incidents were reported, such as cases of violence in refugee camps.

ICRC ACTION

The ICRC continued to focus on areas in which it remained a reference: activities for detainees, the protection of civilians and the reunification of children with their families. It also coordinated the restoration of family links in Sierra Leone and throughout the sub-region.

Through its tracing service, the ICRC sought to ensure that children separated from their parents and living mostly in refugee camps in Guinea were reunited with their families in Sierra Leone. Similarly, the ICRC identified and assisted Liberian refugee children in Sierra Leone requiring reunification with their parents in Liberia.

The ICRC pursued efforts to improve basic living conditions for households headed by women, and access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation in several remote areas in the east.

The ICRC carried on working with its partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to strengthen the Sierra Leonean Red Cross and to help it develop sustainable community-based activities.

The UN, its mission and its agencies, such as UNHCR and UNICEF, were among the large number of international organizations operating in Sierra Leone. The ICRC maintained regular contact with these agencies and with numerous international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), among them Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee. The general trend in the country was away from emergency relief towards development activities, such as micro-credit schemes and community-based programmes.

CIVILIANS

Protecting civilians

The ICRC continued to monitor the situation of civilians in the sensitive border districts of Kailahun, Pujehun and Kono. It regularly visited Yenga, in Kailahun, where a territorial dispute between Guinea and Sierra Leone, combined with the presence of military personnel, had reportedly undermined civilians' welfare and security. In Kono, where diamond-mining companies had hired private security companies, the ICRC took steps to ensure they were aware of their obligation to respect the physical integrity and dignity of civilians.

Regular participation in meetings of the various organizations concerned with human rights issues enabled the ICRC to raise their awareness of IHL in general and child protection in particular.

There was a flurry of activity in border regions as some Liberian refugees went back to Liberia to assess the prospects of returning to their homes and farms. The ICRC closely monitored the situation of Liberian refugees in Kailahun and Pujehun, particularly that of children separated from their families. In camps, the situation had deteriorated, notably for children formerly associated with fighting forces. The cessation of supplementary food rations had compelled some of them to leave the camps in search of employment. ICRC tracing teams visited mining areas where some of the children were employed to determine their needs in terms of protection and assistance.

Through regular contacts with UN and child-protection agencies, the ICRC raised its concerns about the welfare of refugee children separated from their families and shared with them its observations from the follow-up of such children. It also provided the children with material assistance to prevent them from resorting to methods of coping with their difficulties that could be detrimental to their well-being.

Restoring family links

The past conflict in Liberia drove tens of thousands of Liberians, including many children, to seek refuge in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Some Sierra Leoneans also remained in neighbouring countries.

Through regular meetings and workshops, the ICRC coordinated tracing activities with the Sierra Leonean Red Cross and helped it improve the services provided by its nationwide Red Cross message (RCM) network. The network enabled children and adults separated from their families to re-establish contact with them in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and elsewhere. The ICRC frequently visited border communities and refugee camps with the National Society and provided technical, logistic, material and other assistance in carrying out its activities. ICRC tracing work involved processing tracing requests received from other National Societies.

The ICRC registered children separated from their families and reunited them with their relatives in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Among the children benefiting from tracing and family reunification services were

Liberian children associated with former Liberian fighting forces who had sought refuge in Sierra Leone. The ICRC kept a close eye on children reunited with their families and provided them with the protection and support necessary for effective reintegration.

The intermittent repatriation, by UNHCR, of Sierra Leonean refugees included children in foster care who were separated from their families. The ICRC ensured that, where possible, those children repatriated were reunited with their families in Sierra Leone. ICRC follow-up of the children continued, regardless of who had facilitated their repatriation and whether or not they had been reunited with their families.

The ICRC's cooperation with traditional and community leaders, particularly in border areas, boosted tracing efforts, such as the registration of children separated from their families.

The ICRC and the National Societies of the West African sub-region conducted wide-ranging poster campaigns and placed radio announcements to locate the parents of children separated from their families. The campaigns served to raise awareness among all civilians of tracing services, prompting the ICRC to extend its tracing criteria within Sierra Leone to cover not only children separated from their families but adults as well.

- ▶ 7,109 RCMs, including 1,905 from children separated from their families, collected and 3,882 delivered for civilians, including refugees
- ▶ 181 children, including 22 associated with fighting forces, registered
- ▶ 189 children, including 62 associated with fighting forces, reunited with their families
- ▶ 378 children reunited with their families in Sierra Leone followed up

Improving civilians' living conditions

The project to improve housing for vulnerable households headed by women in two remote locations in Kailahun district was completed, with 100 houses constructed for 600 beneficiaries. The ICRC's contribution involved providing locally unavailable materials, such as nails and corrugated-iron sheets for roofing, and technical support to local carpenters. The communities helped by building the houses for the women.

In September the ICRC completed its water and sanitation programme in 27 villages in

Kailahun district. By the end of the year the 10 wells (in 10 villages) and 300 latrines (in 14 villages) planned for 2004 were completed and in use.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

The ICRC visited prisons to monitor the treatment and living conditions of detainees held in connection with the past conflict or for security reasons, and began visiting juvenile detention centres. Through meetings with the minister for internal affairs and other government representatives, the ICRC continued to reiterate the need to ensure that the treatment of prisoners and their conditions of detention complied with IHL and international standards and that their judicial guarantees were safeguarded. Reports on these visits, with recommendations for improvements, were submitted to the detaining authorities. Although detainees were allowed family visits and telephone contact with relatives, their need for the RCM service remained significant, particularly for up-country or distant destinations.

In support of efforts to improve detention conditions, the ICRC supplied medicines and carried out repairs to showers and latrines.

The ICRC made monthly visits to a large group of Liberian soldiers held at the Mape and Mafanta internment camps. Through bimonthly discussions with the Internment Task Force, it advised the authorities on their obligation to ensure that the treatment of internees and their conditions of detention were consistent with IHL and international standards. Throughout the year the organization lobbied the government, UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other agencies to hasten the repatriation of the internees to Liberia now that the conflict there had ended. By the end of 2004 plans to repatriate them were at an advanced stage.

- 1,535 detainees visited, including those held by the Special Court and 10 minors, during 37 visits to 10 places of detention
- 56 detainees/internees received family visits with ICRC support
- 2,071 RCMs collected from detainees/internees and 1,579 delivered

- clothes, blankets and sleeping mats distributed to internees; water and sanitation facilities in internment camps maintained

AUTHORITIES

ICRC efforts to promote IHL in Sierra Leone bore fruit, namely with the ratification of 8 IHL treaties: the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention and the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), including the 2001 Amendment to the Convention and the five Protocols. Sierra Leone had signed nearly all the major IHL treaties. Through discussions with the relevant authorities, the ICRC learned that the implementation of these treaties lagged behind primarily because of lack of financial and human resources.

The ICRC held bilateral meetings with various international organizations, including the UN and its agencies, and regularly attended other meetings at which they were present. The organization was invited to participate in briefings organized by the UNAMSIL headquarters for its senior staff, and provided them with documentation on IHL and the ICRC and its activities.

The ICRC used regular meetings with representatives of key ministries (interior, finance and agriculture), to keep the authorities informed of its operations in Sierra Leone. Through its tracing activities in the field, it kept the local authorities abreast of its programmes. It also organized or participated in workshops or information sessions on IHL and the ICRC for local and national leaders. One of the workshops developed model legislation to facilitate the drafting of a law on the implementation of the Ottawa Convention, which received the support of the relevant ministries and was submitted to the cabinet for approval.

- 5 workshops held for 130 local and national officials
- 1 information session held for community leaders in Kailahun

ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS

The ICRC continued to support the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) in further integrating IHL into their training. It gave advice on the development of an IHL instructor's manual and provided materials for use in the training of recruits. It participated in briefings and IHL courses organized by an RSLAF officer

previously trained at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (IIHL) in San Remo, Italy, and approached instructors in the field to encourage them to organize IHL courses at unit level.

The ICRC participated regularly in briefings of incoming UNAMSIL contingents to raise their awareness of the organization's mandate and activities and to draw their attention to the 1999 UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on observance by UN forces of IHL. These briefings were an opportunity to interact with officers from a broad range of countries.

- 1 RSLAF officer sponsored on a course at the IIHL in San Remo
- IHL library donated to the Armed Forces Education Centre in Freetown

CIVIL SOCIETY

Overall, the ICRC enjoyed fruitful relations with the media, with which it worked to draw the public's attention to humanitarian issues and Red Cross activities in Sierra Leone. A campaign, Protect Children in War, launched by the ICRC and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), was an excellent opportunity to turn the spotlight on humanitarian issues. Three UEFA referees who were roving ambassadors for the campaign visited the country. The campaign and the high point of the visit – a football game officiated by the referees in a camp for Liberian refugees – were widely covered by the media. The media, including Radio UNAMSIL, also assisted the ICRC by running campaigns to trace family members sought by children in refugee camps in Guinea. To relay information on the Fundamental Principles and ICRC and Red Cross activities, the ICRC and the National Society relied increasingly on radio programmes and workshops for journalists.

A working group, comprising representatives of the ICRC, the Sierra Leonean Red Cross and the National Curriculum Development and Research Centre and three teachers, was set up to gain a better understanding of the Sierra Leonean school system, to assess the existing curriculum and to define a strategy for the implementation of the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in secondary schools. The working group met twice, identified suitable subjects in the secondary-school curriculum, analysed stakeholders and made recommendations on the way forward. In October the ICRC discussed with the minister for education,

science and technology the possibility of integrating some of the Exploring Humanitarian Law modules into subjects already in the school curriculum. Members of the National Society and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology attended the Pan-African Education Leadership Seminar on Exploring Humanitarian Law in July in South Africa (see *Pretoria*).

Contacts were consolidated with the departments of international public law and mass communication at Fourah Bay College. The ICRC conducted an information session on its mandate and activities and IHL for the college's students and lecturers and paid for the head of the mass communication department to attend the 4th All Africa Course on IHL in Pretoria, South Africa, in November. Together with the Sierra Leonean Red Cross, the ICRC gave a presentation on its mandate and activities and IHL at the Milton Margai College of Education and Technology for staff and students. Students doing research on IHL, the ICRC's mandate and role or more specific topics such as children in war received support in the form of briefings and documentation.

NATIONAL SOCIETY

The ICRC supported the National Society in conducting tracing activities and running its RCM network. It organized meetings attended by heads of the tracing departments of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian Red Cross Societies so that they could exchange experiences on tracing and improve their cooperation in collecting and delivering RCMs.

The ICRC continued to support the Sierra Leonean Red Cross in running a transit centre in Kenema accommodating children awaiting reunification with their families. In addition, the organization supported the Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation Programme through which the National Society addressed the needs of communities and of children traumatized by war, providing the children with training and skills.

ICRC-supported community-based programmes run by the National Society in the Bo and Moyamba districts progressed. The construction of wells and latrines in 10 communities affected by the conflict was completed and the building of an income-generating guesthouse for the Kenema Red Cross branch advanced.

The Sierra Leonean Red Cross resumed, through ICRC support, its previously suspended national radio programme, *Red Cross na Salone* (Red Cross in Sierra Leone). The programme reached a wide audience, particularly in the countryside, and provided a perfect opportunity for the National Society to raise public awareness of its activities. The ICRC continued supporting the National Society in its other efforts throughout the country to enhance knowledge of the Fundamental Principles and the Movement and to advocate respect for the red cross emblem. The campaign, Protect Children in War, was implemented in all branches.