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ICRC/W. Torres

Far from the limelight, tens of thousands of people in Latin America are forced to flee their homes to escape the prevailing violence. ICRC delegates visit outlying villages to collect eyewitness accounts and make representations to the parties blamed for the events. In Colombia, together with the National Society, the ICRC set up mobile health brigades to distribute medicines, handed out food parcels to the most needy and arranged for families at risk to be taken to safer areas.

The Americas

ICRC delegations or missions:

Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Peru

ICRC regional delegations:

Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Guatemala City, Washington

Staff

ICRC expatriates:¹ 78

National Societies:¹ 7

Local employees:² 220

Total expenditure:

Sfr 31,514,829

Expenditure breakdown: Sfr

Protection/tracing: 17,692,826

Relief: 1,764,807

Health activities: 2,083,131

Cooperation with

National Societies: 2,116,428

Promotion/dissemination: 3,376,245

Operational support: 2,608,674

Overheads: 1,872,718



⊕ ICRC regional delegation ⊕ ICRC delegation + ICRC mission

ICRC / AR 12.97

¹ Average figures calculated on an annual basis.

² Under ICRC contract, as at December 1997.

THE AMERICAS

In 1997 the ICRC's work as a humanitarian neutral intermediary was the most prominent aspect of its presence in the Americas. In Colombia, where operational activities remained a high priority, the ICRC was called upon by the parties concerned to step in as a neutral intermediary when 70 members of the military were released by an armed opposition group after lengthy negotiations. In Peru too the organization acted as a neutral intermediary, assiduously fulfilling its humanitarian mandate during the hostage crisis.

In Colombia, the ICRC was highly concerned about the situation of civilians, who suffered from the effects of the internal conflict and were driven from their villages in large numbers. Working with the Colombian Red Cross, it saw to the welfare of people displaced by the violence. In order to respond better to the need for humanitarian assistance, it opened new offices and sub-delegations in affected regions throughout the country.

The ICRC continued to keep up contacts with all those involved in the conflict in Colombia. By the end of the year the organization's operation there was not only its largest in the Americas, but also the one involving the broadest spectrum of activities under its mandate.

In Peru, the hostage crisis came to an end in April. During the events, the ICRC performed the role of neutral intermediary, strictly limiting its work to humanitarian questions. Throughout 1997 the organization awaited the Peruvian government's authorization to resume visits to detainees held in prisons under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. The visits had been suspended by the government in December 1996 owing to the hostage crisis. After a year of constant efforts, including a mission to Peru by its President, the ICRC was authorized in December by the Peruvian President to begin again visiting detainees convicted of "terrorism and treason". As for the ICRC's other activities in the country, the delegation maintained its presence in the Huallaga region and continued to provide assistance to victims of the conflict.

In Brazil the ICRC kept a close watch on the growing tensions between the security forces and certain sectors of the population. It continued its activities aimed at promoting international humanitarian law and in December proposed a two-year nationwide programme to train instructors within the military police.

The Buenos Aires regional delegation worked constantly to spread knowledge of humanitarian law and to promote the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines among the countries making up the southern half of the continent.

In addition to the countries already covered, the regional delegation in Guatemala City in 1997 took over responsibility for ICRC activities in Haiti, where the delegation became a mission, Guyana and Suriname.

In light of the situation in Chiapas, the ICRC supported the activities of the Mexican Red Cross Society, keeping a close eye on the consequences in humanitarian terms of events in the area.

As for cooperation with National Societies, the Guatemala City regional delegation held two major meetings: one for English-speaking countries and another for Spanish-speaking ones.

Moreover, through its Geneva-based legal advisory service, the ICRC closely monitored the establishment and functioning of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law, with the help of a legal adviser based in Bogotá. The organization also followed the drafting of national legislation for the protection of the red cross emblem and the repression of violations of that body of law. In June 1997 the General Assembly of the OAS, meeting in Lima, adopted a resolution at its 27th regular session inviting all member States to consider the information submitted by the ICRC on the implementation of humanitarian law. In addition, the Seventh Ibero-American Summit, in its final declaration, echoed the need to promote and respect both that law and universally recognized humanitarian principles.*

* OAS: Organization of American States

COLOMBIA

In 1997, with the internal conflict intensifying, Colombia continued to be a top priority for operations in the Americas. Though Colombia was one of the countries where reference was most often made to humanitarian law, serious violations of the law persisted. Government forces, armed opposition groups and rural self-defence groups were the main parties to the conflict.

Despite the fact that an electoral initiative put forward by civilian groups in support of peace received the backing of some 10 million voters during the local elections on 26 October, the humanitarian outlook remained bleak. The civilian population was caught in the crossfire between those involved in the conflict, falling prey to threats and attacks by rural self-defence groups and members of the armed opposition alike. Tens of thousands were forced to leave their homes. In 1997 the ICRC, working with the Colombian Red Cross, dealt with 22,395 cases in which people had been displaced for reasons related to the conflict.

In order to respond to the need for humanitarian assistance, the ICRC opened new offices in the regions affected by the conflict, including Pasto, Cúcuta, Sincelejo and Valledupar, and increased the number of its staff in the field.

On 15 June the ICRC, acting as a neutral intermediary at the request of the government and the FARC,* assisted in the release of 60 government soldiers who had been captured by the armed opposition group in mid-1996 and of 10 marines who had been held since January 1997. This release took place after a long negotiation process in which the ICRC was invited by the government and the FARC to take part as a neutral intermediary, together with the National Reconciliation Commission.

role of neutral intermediary



* FARC: Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces

The captives were transported to a pre-determined location, where they were examined by a joint ICRC/National Society medical team. The ICRC then handed them over to the military authorities.

The ICRC also acted as a neutral intermediary in numerous cases involving the taking of hostages. For example, in November, at the request of the parties concerned, it assisted in the release of two OAS officials and the coordinator of the human rights programme of the department of Antioquia who had been taken captive by the ELN* in connection with the municipal elections, and in the later freeing of two foreign engineers. In 1997 the ICRC facilitated the release of some 300 people, including mayors, candidates standing for election and ordinary civilians.

Hostage-taking grew to alarming proportions in Colombia in 1997: by the end of the year the ICRC delegation in Bogotá had registered nearly 500 cases. Under Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions, the taking of hostages constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law. In such circumstances, action taken by the ICRC can be based only on humanitarian considerations. For example, the delegation in Colombia contacted the captors, made possible an exchange of Red Cross messages between the hostages and their families, visited the hostages, furnished material assistance and, where necessary, provided logistic support for the hostages' release. The ICRC did not intervene in negotiations relating to the conditions for release, nor was it in any way involved in the payment of ransoms.

By opening new offices in various regions, the ICRC strengthened its presence throughout the country. Delegates were thus able to establish new contacts with the authorities, the guerrilla forces and the rural self-defence groups. On several occasions the ICRC was called upon to facilitate contacts between these parties in order to make it possible to discuss matters of humanitarian concern.

Delegates also established contact with CONVIVIR* groups – legally recognized civilian intelligence and security associations whose members are authorized to carry small firearms.

In July public opinion was shaken by news of a massacre in Mapiripán. While the slaughter of civilians was not new to the Colombian conflict, the increased frequency and scope of such incidents were indicative of a worsening security situation.

Indeed, mass killings racked the entire country in 1997: they were reported in the north, in the south (Huila), in the centre (Cundinamarca) and particularly in the northern part of Antioquia (Urabá) and the department of Meta.

*ICRC presence
throughout the country*

massacres of civilians

* ELN: National Liberation Army

* CONVIVIR: Rural Security Community Cooperatives
(Cooperativas Comunitarias de Vigilancia Rural)

the problem of displaced people

In the midst of this tangle of armed groups and clashes between different forces, the civilian population was often the target of threats and attacks. This forced many civilians to seek safety in other regions.

Following the events in Mapiripán, a new surge of people moved on in search of more secure areas. In July and August ICRC delegates carried out three missions to assist civilians in Mapiripán, chartering DC-3s on four occasions to evacuate a total of 150 people to Villavicencio, in Meta.

The displaced were scattered across the entire country. The ICRC assisted thousands, including a relatively small number who congregated in camps in Turbo, Pavarando and Boca del Atrato (in Urabá). The sheer size of the problem was a cause of concern for international organizations such as UNHCR and for donors such as ECHO,* with whom the ICRC maintained contacts late in the year with a view to carrying out an overall assessment of the situation and to coordinating assistance.

prison riots

Throughout the year, various prisons in Colombia were the scene of violent rioting in protest against overcrowding and the inefficiency of the judicial system. The most serious incidents, involving killings, severe injury and hostage-taking, occurred in April, at the Valledupar district prison in the department of Cesar and at Popayán prison. In both cases, prisoners' representatives and the government requested the ICRC to take action. The delegation provided medical and material assistance to the hostages and conveyed Red Cross messages between them and their families. Together with the Colombian Red Cross, it also evacuated the wounded and the dead from the prisons.

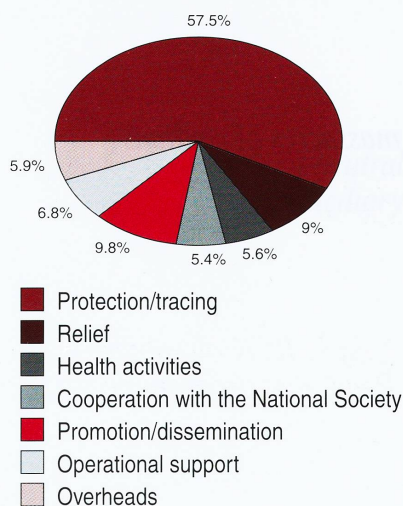
In December riots broke out in prisons throughout Colombia after the Congress failed to adopt an amnesty and sentence-reduction bill. During these events one person died, at La Picota prison in Bogotá. The ICRC closely followed the situation and took action only in the most serious cases.

As in previous years, the delegation visited prisoners falling under its mandate in places of detention. ICRC health staff regularly went to the country's main prisons and kept the INPEC* informed of the health problems encountered. The ICRC provided medical assistance to the prisoners and material support for their families, covering the travel costs of those who visited their detained relatives.

At the end of December the ICRC began a study of the application of judicial guarantees with respect to detainees, handing out a questionnaire to some 100 people in captivity in seven places of detention. Under Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and Article 6 of Additional Protocol II, any person held in connection with an armed conflict must be afforded all the elementary judicial

COLOMBIA

Total expenditure in 1997:
Sfr 16,132,584



* ECHO: European Community Humanitarian Office

* INPEC: National Penitentiaries and Prisons Institute

guarantees. In 1997 the organization also gave a legal adviser the task of studying Colombian legislation in order to verify that the provisions of humanitarian law were incorporated therein.

In 1997 the ICRC maintained or established contact with all the parties to the conflict so as to remind them of their obligations under humanitarian law and urge them, through constructive dialogue, to observe Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II. The organization also made written representations concerning alleged violations of humanitarian law.

Working with the Colombian Red Cross and the ICRC delegate for dissemination to the armed forces based in Bogotá, the delegation continued to hold courses and seminars on humanitarian law for the military, focusing on training high-ranking officers as instructors in this field. The protection of medical personnel in armed conflicts and the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants were especially emphasized.

Whenever possible, the ICRC held dissemination sessions for leaders and combatants of the armed opposition groups and members of the rural self-defence groups. It did the same for security detainees.

In 1997 the delegation did much to spread knowledge of humanitarian law in academic circles. Its programmes included a series of lectures on this body of law held for teachers and students, and an expert-level academic training course of 100 to 120 hours offered at universities in Bogotá, Barranquilla, Manizales, Popayán and Medellín.

In May 1997 a cooperation agreement was signed by the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC, the University of the Valle in Cali and its Graduate Institute of Legal and Political Studies and International Relations.

The ICRC advised the competent authorities on the adoption of legislative measures for the implementation of humanitarian law, particularly its rules on the protection of the red cross emblem and displaced people, and on the repression of violations. The delegation also held a workshop on subjects such as the provisions made in Colombian legislation for the repression of war crimes and other violations of the law.

On 31 October, responding to an initiative taken by the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ICRC invited Colombian ambassadors in Europe to its headquarters in Geneva for a one-day seminar on the Red Cross and humanitarian law.

In April a joint ICRC/Colombian Red Cross assistance programme was launched for victims of the internal violence who did not qualify for help from the government or non-governmental organizations. The programme included medical aid, distributions of food and other supplies, and support for displaced people as they settled in new areas. After a major population displacement took place in the Urabá region in March, the ICRC and the Colombian Red Cross conducted a joint survey in Mutatá, distributing food and other items to those displaced.

contact with all those involved in the conflict

spreading knowledge of humanitarian law in prisons

high-level seminar for Colombian diplomats

joint ICRC/Colombian Red Cross programme

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



- saw 2,141 security detainees, including 969 for the first time, in the course of 469 visits to 225 places of detention;
- during the visits, provided clothing, personal hygiene articles and recreational items for detainees;
- facilitated the release of 70 members of the military held by the FARC and 200 people held by the armed opposition or by rural self-defence groups;
- paid for 2,545 travel fares, allowing family members to visit their relatives in prison;
- paid for the return to their homes of 118 people after their release from captivity;



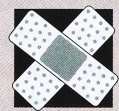
- handled over 1,300 Red Cross messages sent by or to detainees, displaced people and others who had lost contact with their families, including over 1,000 messages exchanged during the prison riots in April;



- documented 817 cases (concerning 1,847 people) involving allegations of violations of humanitarian law;
- made representations to the authorities or to armed groups concerning the cases of 850 people;
- paid for the transport to safer areas of 5,600 people;



- in the regions most affected by the conflict, distributed over 41,000 food parcels (containing rice, beans, sugar, coffee, chocolate and sugar cane), 12,500 hygiene kits and 11,700 mats;
- distributed cooking utensils to some 4,500 families;



- covered the cost of medical care for 82 people wounded as a result of the conflict and for 13 detainees;
- provided basic medical supplies and assistance to displaced persons and to hospitals;
- supported mobile health brigades by providing medical supplies, logistic backing and funding (in Urabá, in cooperation with the Colombian Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross, provided primary health care to some 6,850 people in 29 villages, and in Caquetá, provided medical care for 5,350 people in 8 villages along the Caguán river);



- worked closely with the Colombian Red Cross to spread knowledge of humanitarian law (for instance by holding workshops for military and police academies and for security agencies), to conduct health activities (through the mobile health brigades) and to provide relief to displaced people (by distributing food and other supplies);



- together with the Colombian Red Cross and the ICRC delegate for dissemination to the armed forces, regularly held courses and seminars on humanitarian law for the military;
- in its efforts to spread knowledge of humanitarian law among the armed forces, concentrated on the training of instructors in this field;
- held some 950 dissemination sessions and events, reaching over 47,000 people, including members of the military, the armed opposition, rural self-defence groups, government officials and civilians.

In 1997 a special effort was made to strengthen the National Society's operational capacity, especially in the fields of administration, staff training, telecommunications and emergency preparedness.

Together with the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC continued to support mobile health brigades which provided primary health care, including medical and dental consultations and vaccinations, for civilians in the Urabá region of northern Colombia. Beginning in March, more mobile teams were added, this time in Caquetá department, in the south. They worked along the Caguán river, travelling mainly by boat.

From 20 to 24 May the ICRC President carried out a mission to Colombia, during which he officially submitted to the President of the Republic a summary report on the organization's activities since it began working in the country in 1969. The document included sections on the ICRC's mandate and contained recommendations aimed at ensuring that the authorities fulfilled their obligations under international humanitarian law.

During his visit the ICRC President held talks with other high-ranking members of the government. They centred on the humanitarian situation in Colombia, the implementation of humanitarian law, ICRC approaches to international organizations such as the OAS and the Non-Aligned Movement requesting them to adopt resolutions devoted to this law, and international conferences on the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines.

The ICRC President also held a meeting with the members of the National Reconciliation Commission and was invited to speak at the Human Rights Institute of Javeriana University in Bogotá.



mobile health brigades

*mission by the
ICRC President*



 ICRC delegation
  ICRC sub-delegation
  ICRC office or other presence

PERU

In the first few months of 1997, international attention focused on Peru as the entire world waited for the outcome of the hostage crisis at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima. On 22 April armed forces commandos stormed the building, bringing to an end an ordeal that had begun when the MRTA* took control of the residence in December 1996.

The ICRC played the role of neutral intermediary throughout the events. As a member of the Guarantors Commission that was established to try to defuse the crisis, it exclusively addressed humanitarian issues. The Lima delegation provided material and medical assistance to the hostages on a daily basis and conveyed Red Cross messages between them and their families.

From the beginning of the crisis the ICRC secured the release of some 400 hostages, many of whom were set free for medical reasons. Until 19 April 1997 it monitored the health status of those who remained captive, providing medicines and, together with the

Ministry of Health, bringing the equipment necessary for medical examinations into the building.

during the hostage crisis

Every day the delegation provided food and other supplies, in accordance with its evaluations of the hostages' vital needs. From the outset of the siege to 22 April, delegates twice a week carried Red Cross messages back and forth between the hostages and their families. In all, 9,580 messages were exchanged.

When the Guarantors Commission was established on 15 January, the ICRC took part as a neutral intermediary, in accordance with its principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Although it did not join in the negotiations itself, it facilitated a direct dialogue between the parties and made available an office across from the Japanese ambassador's residence, which served as a meeting place for the various government and MRTA representatives and for the members of

* MRTA: Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement

the Commission. The organization also handled logistic matters to enable the MRTA to attend these meetings.

The authorities has discontinued ICRC visits to prisons under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice on 18 December 1996, in response to the MRTA's occupation of the Japanese ambassador's residence. The ICRC hoped to resume these visits shortly after the crisis was brought to an end, but it was not authorized to do so. After approaches were made at the highest level)in August the ICRC President went to Peru to discuss the matter with head of State and other government representatives, the Peruvian President announced that the ICRC would be allowed to visit detainees sentenced for "terrorism and treason" as from 8 December.

authorization to resume visits to prisons

On 11 December a team of ICRC delegates, including a doctor, conducted a visit to Santa Mónica de Chorrillos women's prison in Lima, which took place in conformity with the organization's customary criteria. The delegation drew up a new programme of visits to places of detention for 1998, with a view to fulfilling the ICRC's humanitarian obligations.

In 1997 there were some 4,000 prisoners who came within the ICRC's purview in the country.

The situation of civilians in the emergency areas continued to be a subject of concern for the ICRC. In order to meet the need for humanitarian assistance in the department of San Martín, the organization's office in Tocache was made into a sub-delegation. The ICRC relied on dialogue as a means of developing good relations with the military authorities and it noted an improvement in the treatment of detainees.

sub-delegation in Tocache

The presence of ICRC delegates in the field made it possible to collect information on violations of the basic standards of international humanitarian law. This information was then confidentially submitted to the appropriate authorities with the aim of halting such practices.

The ICRC continued to provide emergency assistance for civilians affected by the internal conflict, especially in the upper Huallaga valley and the jungle region of Junín department. Beneficiaries included civilians whose property or homes had been destroyed, displaced people and *recuperados* (people who had previously lived in areas controlled by the armed opposition), families whose breadwinners were incarcerated for more than three months and newly released detainees. The assistance consisted of food parcels, blankets, cooking utensils and clothing.

In late August and September there was a new rash of violence in the Huallaga region, with clashes breaking out between government troops and organized armed groups. Some 1,500 civilians fled their villages in search of safer areas. The ICRC office in Tingo María lent emergency assistance, providing food, clothing, blankets and cooking utensils to the displaced, who later returned to their homes.

The delegation covered the cost of medical treatment and hospitalization for people who were wounded as a result of the internal violence and continued to


PERU

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



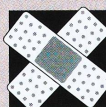
- made repeated representations to the government seeking authorization to resume visits to prisoners in permanent places of detention under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice;
- continued to visit detainees in temporary places of detention under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, paying 661 visits to 104 temporary places of detention and seeing 539 detainees, including 486 for the first time;
- paid for 24,657 travel fares, allowing 13,816 people to visit their detained relatives up to 8 times during the year;



- 
- located 9 people being sought by their relatives;
 - handled 8,171 Red Cross messages (including those exchanged during the hostage crisis);




- distributed food, clothing, blankets and cooking utensils to 5,800 civilians who were displaced owing to the internal violence:



- provided medical supplies and medicines to hospitals, which admitted 63 detainees, and cared for 233 others on an out-patient basis;
- covered the cost of medical care and hospitalization for 170 people who had been wounded in the conflict and were being treated in hos-

- evacuated 18 people requiring special treatment to health facilities in major towns;



-  – supported the renovation of the headquarters of the Peruvian Red Cross Piura branch and, with the Spanish Red Cross, helped refurbish the national headquarters in Lima;



- held 76 dissemination sessions on the basic standards of international humanitarian law, ICRC activities and the Red Cross principles, reaching 6,642 people, including members of the military, the police, students, medical staff and civilians.

took place at the Peruvian Military Academy, the National Police Academy and the National Criminology and Penitentiary Centre.

Thanks to an ICRC initiative, in August a regular course on humanitarian law was given for the first time at the faculty of law of the University of Lima.

In 1997 certificates were awarded to 90 volunteer relief workers from Peruvian Red Cross branches in Arequipa, Lima and Piura who had received training funded by the ICRC and dispensed by instructors from the Colombian Red Cross.

During his visit to Peru, the ICRC President held a meeting with the President of the Peruvian Red Cross. Their discussions centred on the status of the National Society, future cooperation and other matters of mutual interest.

*first humanitarian law course
at university*

BRASILIA

Regional delegation

(Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela)

The delegation continued to urge the region's governments to accede to the humanitarian law treaties, including Protocol IV (on blinding laser weapons) and amended Protocol II (on mines, booby-traps and other devices) to the 1980 UN Convention prohibiting or restricting the use of certain conventional weapons. In particular, it encouraged the government of Ecuador to recognize the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission set up under Article 90 of Protocol I additional to the Geneva Conventions and to establish an interministerial committee for the implementation of international humanitarian law, and it called upon the Venezuelan government to accede to the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions and to adopt legislation on the protection of the emblem. In December the governments of all three countries signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa treaty.

In Brazil the delegation held courses on humanitarian law throughout the year for legal advisers from the Army School of Administration, naval instructors and officers of the military police (the main force for ensuring law and order and security in the country, with some 600,000 members). In July, when the military police launched a strike that spread to 15 of the country's 27 states, the army was put on alert. An ICRC delegate travelled to Brazil in December to submit a major dissemination project to the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Relations. This nationwide initiative, drawn up in consultation with the military police of various states, called for some 300 military police instructors to receive training in humanitarian law and human rights over a period of two years.

courses for the military police

*contacts with the new
authorities in Ecuador*

After the President of Ecuador was removed from office in February, the regional delegate established contact with the new authorities – and with the Minister of the Interior in particular – so as to coordinate efforts to hold a course on humanitarian law and human rights for high-ranking police officers. The course took place in November. In accordance with the existing ICRC/Ecuadorean Red Cross cooperation agreement, the delegation supported the National Society's activities to spread knowledge of humanitarian law to the armed forces and held seminars for its dissemination instructors.

On various occasions the regional delegate travelled to Venezuela to discuss the ICRC's offer of services and the possibility of ICRC visits to detainees held there in connection with the conflict in Colombia. Despite its representations, the ICRC did not obtain access to these detainees, nor was it able to work in the border region. In July the organization began talks with the Venezuelan Red Cross aimed at developing a paramedic cooperation programme in the border area.

the Ibero-American Summit

On 8 and 9 November the Seventh Ibero-American Summit was held on Margarita Island, Venezuela. The meeting's main themes were ethics and democracy. The final declaration mentioned the need to promote and respect international humanitarian law and universally recognized humanitarian principles.

BRASILIA
Regional delegation



- together with the Venezuelan Red Cross, conducted seminars on the protection of the emblem for National Society branches;
- attended the meeting of the Inter-American Regional Committee of the Red Cross held in Quito in May;



- worked with the Ecuadorean Red Cross to hold seminars on humanitarian law for the armed forces, members of the diplomatic corps and government officials;
- in Brazil, continued presenting the *Victims of War* travelling photo exhibition;
- in Brazil, organized courses on humanitarian law for police and navy officers and instructors, held a course for legal advisers from

the Army School of Administration and paid for a military officer to attend a Canadian armed forces course held in Ottawa in May;

- took part, as the only civilian institution, in joint military manoeuvres carried out in October by the armed forces of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay;
- in December, gave a course on humanitarian law at the faculty of communication sciences of the University of São Paulo.

BUENOS AIRES

Regional delegation

(Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay)

Throughout the year the ICRC continued to support the work of the inter-ministerial committees for the implementation of humanitarian law in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

The campaign for the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines was a centre-piece of the delegation's work to promote humanitarian law in 1997 and enjoyed widespread coverage in the written press and other media. Radio and television stations devoted numerous programmes to the subject, each specifically relating to the country concerned.

*campaign to ban
landmines*

In Argentina the delegation helped conduct courses on humanitarian law given at the faculty of law of the University of Buenos Aires. These courses addressed subjects such as anti-personnel landmines, peace-keeping operations, environmental protection in wartime and international criminal tribunals. The ICRC continued to give courses on humanitarian law to the armed forces, both in the capital and in the provinces.

In June the delegation took part, together with the ICRC delegate for dissemination to the armed forces in South America, in joint manoeuvres carried out in Uruguay by the Argentine and Uruguayan armies. ICRC delegates demonstrated how the organization works during armed conflicts to assist in the exchange of prisoners and mortal remains.

On 13 March the ICRC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia signed an agreement granting the organization access to all security detainees in prisons and police detention centres. ICRC visits to detainees in the country had previously been carried out on an ad hoc basis, outside of any official framework. In January, when the regional delegate visited three places of detention in La Paz and its environs, some members of the Peruvian armed opposition group MRTA were among the detainees. With the agreement signed, the ICRC carried out a full series of visits to security detainees in La Paz in July.

*access to all security detainees
in Bolivia*

In April, after unrest broke out in the Chaparé region of Cochabamba department (one of the main coca-producing regions of Bolivia), the ICRC and the Bolivian Red Cross assessed the situation in the area. Delegates established contact with representatives of the groups concerned, including peasants and their unions, the local authorities, representatives of the government human rights commission and military police chiefs. Following this survey, the ICRC decided to focus on the promotion of humanitarian law among the security forces.

survey in Chaparé

*teaching the law of war at
Bolivian military academies*

*contacts with the new
Bolivian authorities*

*visits to detainees
in Chile*

In 1997 courses on the law of war were incorporated into the training programmes of Bolivian military academies. The ICRC, working closely with army officers responsible for human rights and humanitarian law questions, was entrusted with developing the academic aspects of the courses.

From 23 to 28 November the regional delegate in Buenos Aires carried out a mission to Bolivia in order to meet the new government authorities and high-ranking military leaders. During their talks they addressed topics such as ICRC activities, dissemination to the armed forces and police, the work of the national committee for the implementation of humanitarian law, cooperation with the National Society and visits to detainees.

In February ICRC delegates visited two places of detention in Chile where detainees had declared a hunger strike. From 28 July to 8 August a team of ICRC delegates, including a doctor, carried out a complete series of visits to security detainees for the first time since 1995, checking on their conditions of detention.

As part of its efforts to promote humanitarian law, at the end of October the ICRC held talks with the Chilean authorities on the question of anti-personnel landmines. The regional delegation continued to hold dissemination sessions for the armed forces.

The ICRC provided support for an international seminar on humanitarian law and tracing activities held in April by the Chilean Red Cross for all the National Societies of South America.



- visited 39 security detainees in 4 places of detention in Bolivia, in accordance with an agreement signed in March;
- in Chile, conducted a full series of visits for the first time since 1995, seeing 116 security detainees in 12 detention centres;



- concluded a cooperation agreement with the Argentine Red Cross covering dissemination, the restoration of family links and communication;
- took part in training workshops for Red Cross youth members in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay;
- in July and November participated in seminars on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Red Cross principles, humanitarian law and human rights, which were held for the heads of the Chilean Red Cross branches;

IN 1997 THE ICRC:



- in June took part in three days of joint manoeuvres held in Uruguay by the armed forces of Argentina and Uruguay, in which some 900 troops were trained for peace-keeping operations;
- gave courses in Argentina for armed forces contingents assigned to UN peace-keeping operations;
- provided training in humanitarian law to members of the army, air force and navy of the countries covered by the delegation, participated in Argentina in battalion-level military exercises, and gave courses at the Argentine Military Academy and the INDAE (the National Institute of Air and Space Law);
- held lectures on humanitarian law at various universities, including the faculty of law of the University of Buenos Aires, Belgrano University in Buenos Aires, law faculties in Córdoba and Rosario and the Institute of International Studies of the University of Chile;
- signed an agreement with the Diplomatic Academy of Bolivia providing for the teaching of humanitarian law as part of its curriculum;

- updated brochures on humanitarian law, which were distributed in the region covered by the delegation and were also sent to various other ICRC delegations in the Americas (Brasilia, Guatemala City and Washington);
- gave talks in academic circles in Chile, and in August took part as a member of the jury in a competition on humanitarian law at the Catholic University of Chile;
- in April, trained instructors at Chile's Military Academy, and in June, working with the Academy, held a seminar for teachers, ministerial representatives and members of the national committee for the implementation of humanitarian law;
- in March gave a course and in October held a seminar on humanitarian law for military officers in Paraguay;
- in August, at the Asunción book fair, held presentations on humanitarian law and anti-personnel landmines;
- gave a lecture on humanitarian law for students of public international law at the Catholic University in Asunción.

GUATEMALA CITY

Regional delegation

(Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname and other countries in the Caribbean)

The delegation continued to promote adherence to international humanitarian law and its treaties, urging the countries that had not already done so to accede to the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions, to recognize the competence of the International Fact-Finding Commission and to become party to the 1980 UN Convention prohibiting or restricting the use of certain conventional weapons and its Additional Protocol IV. With the support of the ICRC's Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, the delegation conducted missions to Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Jamaica and Panama to follow the work of national committees for the implementation of humanitarian law, and to support efforts to enact legislation protecting the emblem and to ban anti-personnel landmines. All of the region's States voted in favour of the resolutions adopted during the OAS General Assembly on respect for humanitarian law, the question of landmines and mine clearance.

With the active support of the delegate for dissemination to the armed and security forces, the ICRC also continued its work to spread knowledge of humanitarian law among the police and military forces.

five-year cooperation agreements

In February and March respectively, the organization signed five-year cooperation agreements with the Costa Rica Red Cross and the Cuban Red Cross, dealing in particular with dissemination activities and communication. In May and July similar agreements were concluded with the Red Cross Society of Panama and the Salvadorean Red Cross Society.

At the regional level, in August the Guatemala City delegation and the Port-au-Prince mission, working in cooperation with the Dominica Red Cross Society, held the third annual meeting of English-speaking National Societies of the region in Roseau, Dominica. Representatives from the National Societies of the CARICOM* States, and also of Guyana, Haiti and Suriname took part in the event, which mainly addressed themes related to dissemination.

* CARICOM: Caribbean Community

In June a similar meeting was held in Guatemala for the National Societies of the Spanish-speaking countries of the region.

International forces remained stationed in Haiti throughout the year. At the end of November the UNTMIH* (which had replaced the UNSMIH* in August) was itself succeeded by the MIPONUH.*

The delegation in Haiti concentrated on its detention-related work, conducting visits, providing medical assistance and carrying out sanitation work in prisons. Delegates saw detainees on a regular basis throughout the year, making oral and written representations on their behalf to the APENA (the national prison service) and closely following individual cases.

At the National Penitentiary in Haiti, the ICRC continued with its programme to support and train medical personnel, and in March began a general disinfection programme. The sanitation delegate kept in close contact with APENA staff and visited various prisons in the provinces during the first three months of the year, assessing the sanitation conditions and the running of dispensaries.

A health delegate acted as a liaison between the APENA and various non-governmental organizations, thus making it possible to improve the monitoring of the medical and health situation in places of detention.

Working closely with the technical services of the APENA, the ICRC carried out repairs to the water-supply systems in various places of detention. It also set up dispensaries, conducted training courses for nurses and built latrines and showers.

At the end of June an ICRC sanitation engineer carried out a mission to assess the sanitation conditions and water supply in prisons throughout Haiti.

The ICRC regularly held meetings with the chief medical officer of the APENA, with a view to exchanging information on the main health problems in detention centres.

In early September ICRC delegates met the head of the Haitian police to discuss the problem of overcrowding in prisons and the role of the APENA, which had been placed under the authority of the national police in June. The ICRC was concerned about the lack of means made available to the APENA, which it feared could jeopardize the gains made so far in improving detention conditions.

At the beginning of the year the ICRC and the Haitian National Red Cross Society signed a cooperation agreement for 1997 covering dissemination activities. The ICRC also assisted the National Society in its fund-raising campaign. On 8 May, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, the ICRC and the National Society organized an exhibition on Red Cross activities in Haiti, and in July train-

*medical assistance and
sanitation work in
Haitian prisons*

*cooperation with the
Haitian Red Cross*

* UNTMIH: United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti

* UNSMIH: United Nations Support Mission in Haiti

* MIPONUH: United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti

ing sessions were held for volunteer dissemination workers from various branches of the Haitian Red Cross. The ICRC also invited a representative of the National Society to take part in training courses held in Geneva.

At the beginning of 1997, with the dialogue between the Mexican government and the EZLN* suspended since September 1996, the ICRC maintained its presence in Mexico City. In January the organization visited the one remaining person who had been in detention since 1995 in connection with the EZLN uprising. Fifteen others had been released at the end of 1996 and in the first few weeks of 1997.

*visits to detainees
in Mexico*

In July, after the ICRC had approached the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior and Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the organization that it was authorized to visit detainees who were allegedly linked to an armed group calling itself the EPR.*

During the year ICRC delegates visited security detainees in places of detention throughout Mexico. On 18 December the ICRC submitted a confidential summary report to the authorities on these visits.

situation in Chiapas

In March, April and June the delegation, in close cooperation with the Mexican Red Cross, carried out surveys in Chiapas, which had been the scene of unrest. During the last two surveys, the ICRC was able to review the operation of two medical programmes run by the National Society in the southern part of the state.

In December the ICRC kept a close watch on the situation in Chiapas after 45 peasants, including a number of women and children, were massacred in Acteal. It stayed in touch with the Mexican Red Cross, offering to provide support for the National Society's activities in the region.

In Guatemala, the last security detainee falling under the ICRC's mandate was released in February, in accordance with the terms of the national reconciliation law.

*assistance for
demobilized
URNG members*

In March a demobilization process for members of the URNG* began, in accordance with the peace agreement signed in late December 1996 by the Guatemalan government and the four components of the opposition organization. The ICRC, working closely with the Spanish Red Cross, supported assistance operations for nearly 3,000 people grouped in eight demobilization camps.

After holding talks with the government and the URNG, the ICRC began a programme to help demobilized combatants to re-establish contact with their families.

* EZLN: Zapatista National Liberation Army

* EPR: Popular Revolutionary Army

* URNG: Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

The delegation kept up contacts with the various military academies in Guatemala, holding numerous working sessions with instructors in humanitarian law. It provided support for and took part in courses held for the army with the aim of explaining the ICRC's role and activities. It also organized courses for students and teachers at Guatemalan universities in the capital and in the departments, and continued to promote the main standards of humanitarian law among the police forces.

An ICRC project aimed at promoting knowledge of humanitarian law among the Maya and Ladino populations of Guatemala entered its second phase in 1997. Workshops and talks were held, and radio programmes, theatrical performances, videotapes, dances and other cultural events were employed as part of the dissemination effort.

In October the Guatemalan parliament adopted an act on the protection of the emblem and another on anti-personnel landmines after approaches were made by the ICRC.

From 27 May to 18 August an ICRC delegate carried out a survey in the northern and central parts of Nicaragua, where seven years after the end of the war a number of problems persisted. Despite the disarming of the EPS* and the Contra rebels, various armed groups remained active in these areas, some with Contra or Sandinista leanings, others established as self-defence forces, and still others consisting of criminal elements. In addition to stressing the need for protection and assistance, the survey also looked at the possibilities for dissemination activities among rebel groups and for cooperation with the Nicaraguan Red Cross.

The ICRC found that the main victim of the violence was still the civilian population, that the promotion of humanitarian law would only be possible for those armed groups which were organized, and that the operational capacity of the Nicaraguan Red Cross needed strengthening.

In September the delegation established contact with the FUAC,* reaching an agreement with the group to carry out dissemination sessions for its members.

*the Maya and
Ladino project*

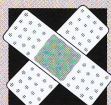
survey in Nicaragua

* EPS: Sandinista Popular Army

* FUAC: Andrés Castro United Front



- in Panama, conducted 2 visits to 1 place of detention, where delegates saw 7 detainees, including 1 for the first time;
- in Haiti, visited 32 people held in connection with the events of October 1994 or for security reasons;
- in Mexico, visited 135 security detainees, including 134 for the first time, at 23 places of detention;
- in Grenada, visited 17 prisoners;



- continued to support the medical programme of the Mexican Red Cross Society in Chiapas, which mainly benefited indigenous communities by providing consultations, treatment, vaccinations and obstetric services and by evacuating patients to medical facilities;



- signed cooperation agreements with the National Societies of Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador and Panama;
- helped the dissemination department of the Nicaraguan Red Cross prepare talks for National Society branches throughout the country;
- helped fund the monthly review *Humanidad* in Nicaragua;

IN 1997 THE ICRC:

- in February, presented the fundamental Red Cross principles at a Nicaraguan Red Cross youth camp;
- in February, held various working meetings with the Mexican Red Cross and the National Human Rights Commission in order to develop a programme on humanitarian law for their representatives;



- gave courses and held seminars on humanitarian law at San Carlos University and Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala, organized talks at the law faculties of 4 universities in Cuba (initiating a seminar at the University of Havana and helping to ensure that humanitarian law was included in the academic programmes of law faculties at universities in Havana, Santiago, Camagüey and Villa Clara), and signed a cooperation agreement with the University of Panama;

- held training seminars on humanitarian law for the Diplomatic Academy in Haiti;
- took an initiative under which the University of the West Indies in Jamaica included humanitarian law in its curriculum;
- organized and planned, with the support of the respective governments, dissemination programmes for the police and security

forces at police and officers' academies in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama;

- in cooperation with the Nicaraguan Red Cross, in October held a first national seminar on the implementation of humanitarian law in Managua for some 50 representatives of the respective ministries, the armed forces, the parliament and various universities;
- held a seminar in July covering introductory courses on humanitarian law for the armed forces and the police of Guatemala, with the participation of armed forces instructors from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, representatives of the police forces of Costa Rica and Panama, and the director of the International Humanitarian Law Study Centre in Havana;
- in Mexico, in cooperation with the country's Red Cross and at the request of the National Human Rights Commission, held dissemination sessions to promote humanitarian law among the armed forces.

WASHINGTON

Regional delegation (Canada, United States)

The Washington delegation maintained contact with the United States government authorities with a view to encouraging them to ratify the 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions and to expand the applicability of the War Crimes Act, which had been adopted by Congress in 1996 and was amended in November 1997.

The delegation contacted military academies in the United States and proposed that their training programmes include such subjects as the role of the ICRC, respect for the standards of humanitarian law and humanitarian operations in relation to military intervention.

The ICRC President carried out a mission to the United States from 5 to 11 April. At UN headquarters in New York he held meetings with various people, including members of the Secretariat and the Security Council. He also gave several press conferences and met the Chairman of the International Commission for Missing Persons in the former Yugoslavia.

*mission by the ICRC
President*

In Washington, the ICRC President met with United States government leaders, notably the Secretary of State and White House security advisers. He also held a meeting with a representative of the Defense Department, who acknowledged the specific role of the ICRC. The President appealed to all those concerned to ensure that peace-keeping operations allowed humanitarian organizations to conduct their activities unhindered. The United States authorities recognized the ICRC's difficult and often dangerous work of protecting and assisting conflict victims throughout the world. The ICRC President also visited the American Red Cross and held a meeting with its President on the need for cooperation with National Societies.

The delegation kept up a constant dialogue with international organizations such as the OAS and the World Bank, which have their headquarters in Washington. In June, delegates based in Washington, together with others from ICRC headquarters and from the ICRC Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, attended the OAS General Assembly in Lima, Peru. During this session, a resolution was adopted on the implementation of humanitarian law.

In January the ICRC and the OAS held a joint seminar in Washington on humanitarian law for diplomats accredited to the organization.

Throughout the year ICRC delegates helped prepare seminars and talks for military academies, universities and international fora, addressing such topics as the humanitarian situation in various regions, the role of police forces, humanitar-

ian emergencies, the coordination of humanitarian work and the problem of anti-personnel landmines.

As for cooperation with National Societies, in March the President of the American Red Cross visited ICRC headquarters in Geneva, and in June a member of the Committee, the ICRC's governing body, took part in a seminar held in Ottawa by the Canadian Red Cross and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs on humanitarian law for diplomats accredited to the Canadian government.

An ICRC doctor also assisted the American Red Cross during a press conference on the subject of anti-personnel landmines.

In December the ICRC President went to Ottawa to witness the signature of the Ottawa treaty for the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines.

