



ICRC IN SRI LANKA





OUR ACTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been present in Sri Lanka since 1989, initially responding to humanitarian needs resulting from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna uprising, and later from the armed conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Today, the ICRC focuses on addressing the remaining humanitarian needs from the past conflict.

The ICRC in Sri Lanka:

- implements an island-wide support programme that addresses the psychosocial, economic, legal and administrative needs of families of missing persons; and advocates for a mechanism that provides answers on the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones;
- provides technical support to the medicolegal community to strengthen its capacity, and contributes to the dialogue on forensic-related policy issues, thereby facilitating the professional and dignified management of the remains of people who die during armed conflict, natural or technical disasters or migration;
- visits detention facilities to help authorities improve the living conditions and treatment of detainees, including their access to health care and their right to due process;
- promotes and strengthens knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) among the armed forces, national authorities, civil society and academic and religious circles, and conducts training programmes for the police in applicable international legal standards on search, arrest and detention procedures;
- supports the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) in its efforts to address humanitarian needs and promote universal humanitarian principles that are central to the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

The ICRC helps families trace their loved ones who have gone missing due to armed conflict and other situations of violence, disasters or migration. During the armed conflict in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 2009, the ICRC received approximately 35,000 tracing requests from families whose relatives had gone missing. The ICRC has remained in contact with these families, updating them on their case. Currently, the ICRC has a caseload of over 15,000 remaining tracing requests, some of which date back to 1990.

From 2014 to 2015, the ICRC carried out an island-wide needs assessment of families of missing persons. The findings were shared with the authorities concerned, along with recommendations on how to address these needs, including the right of these families to know what happened to their loved ones. To this end, the ICRC has provided technical support to the Office

on Missing Persons (OMP) through legal and forensic expertise, as well as advice on data protection and data management. The ICRC also worked with the authorities to introduce a “Certificate of Absence”, an alternative to the death certificate in Sri Lanka, for people still missing. The ICRC initiated a comprehensive support programme in collaboration with local organizations to help families of missing persons. The programme provides families of missing persons with livelihood assistance, emotional support and administrative and legal support on documentation through a system of referrals while they wait for answers.

Families of missing persons receive economic assistance in the form of cash, in-kind and technical assistance to build livelihoods and secure a sustainable income to meet essential needs and improve food consumption.

Through the ICRC's various livelihood support programmes, these vulnerable families develop business management skills and establish linkages with market and service providers, allowing them to expand their businesses.

Families of missing persons live in a state of uncertainty, which is defined by the lack

of facts surrounding the loss of a loved one. This experience is known as "ambiguous loss". The ICRC conducts workshops and organizes lectures at universities to raise awareness on the concept of ambiguous loss, with the aim of having it added to psychology and counselling curricula.



STRENGTHENING FORENSIC CAPACITY

The ICRC's forensic programme works to ensure the dignified and professional management of remains of people who die during armed conflict, disasters or migration.

In Sri Lanka, the ICRC provides support to the medicolegal community to strengthen capacities to recover, examine and identify human remains and in the application of forensic archaeology and anthropology. This includes strengthening technical expertise to collect, centralize and manage forensic-related data within a systematic framework.

Working with national stakeholders, the ICRC supports small-scale infrastructure upgrades to address infection prevention-control within mortuary settings to enhance occupational safety measures.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICRC provided assistance to mortuaries and the Ministry of Health with personal protective equipment (PPE) and body bags.

The ICRC organizes national workshops and international seminars on humanitarian forensics with the aim of enhancing knowledge, fostering the exchange of best practices and facilitating professional networks throughout the Asia-Pacific.



HELPING IMPROVE TREATMENT AND CONDITIONS FOR PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

In Sri Lanka, the ICRC has been visiting people arrested and held in connection with armed conflict and other situations of violence since 1989. Today, the ICRC visits detention facilities including prisons, immigration detention centres and police stations to help authorities improve the treatment, living conditions and respect for the judicial guarantees of persons deprived of their liberty.

Findings and recommendations from the ICRC's visits are shared confidentially with detaining authorities, with the aim of supporting their efforts to address the legal and judicial causes of prison overcrowding, improve living conditions and ensure that persons deprived of their liberty are treated humanely. The ICRC also helps detainees stay in touch with their families through the exchange of Red Cross messages and by giving families a

travel allowance to visit their detained loved ones.

The ICRC carries out small-scale infrastructure projects in prisons and works with authorities to improve prison health-care services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICRC assisted detaining authorities in controlling the spread of the virus in detention facilities by providing technical recommendations and material assistance. The ICRC also supported the video visitation facility initiated by the Department of Prisons to help those in prison connect with their loved ones.

The ICRC organizes local workshops and international seminars on detention standards with the aim of building the technical capacity of detaining authorities, while enabling the exchange of best practices.



PROMOTING RESPECT FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

As part of our global endeavour to alleviate suffering and harm in armed conflict and other situations of violence, we promote and strengthen knowledge of IHL and relevant aspects of international human rights law (IHRL) among armed and security forces, national authorities, civil society and academia. We help these bodies integrate IHL principles into their training programmes and curricula and sponsor their members' participation in IHL seminars, workshops and conferences overseas to enhance their understanding of the subject. We also work with scholars of different faiths to explore the convergence of IHL principles and their respective religions.

In view of Sri Lanka's role as contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, we conduct briefings on IHL and IHRL for members of the armed forces deployed on peacekeeping missions abroad. We continue to work with the Sri

Lanka Navy to promote IHL and the law of armed conflict at sea while building their capacities on humanitarian issues at sea. We also provide training sessions on IHRL, the correct use of force and firearms, and international standards in search, seizure, arrest and detention procedures for several divisions of the Sri Lanka Police, including the Terrorist Investigation Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Police Narcotics Bureau.

Through our advisory services on IHL, we provide technical support to the national authorities on the national implementation of IHL, while advocating for accession to international treaties related to IHL. In order to give law undergraduates, the opportunity to understand the practical application of IHL, we organize an annual national moot court competition, testing IHL application in an international criminal court setting.



WORKING IN COOPERATION WITH THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY




The ICRC works closely with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) and provides financial, technical and material support for its humanitarian work.

This includes restoring contact between family members separated by the past conflict, natural disasters or migration, as well as raising awareness on and promoting the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The ICRC also works with the SLRCS to develop its capacity in emergency preparedness and response and supports its first-aid programme. The ICRC provides training to the SLRCS on Safer Access, a framework to help National Societies increase their capacities and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in varied contexts.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our delegation partnered with the SLRCS to provide emergency relief assistance to people left vulnerable due to the impact of the pandemic. We also provided technical, material and financial assistance to the SLRCS to launch awareness campaigns and to disinfect public places, thereby reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The ICRC also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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