

SRI LANKA

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE DISAPPEARED

SEPTEMBER 2021



On 30 August, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) remembered the thousands of people around the world who are either missing or separated from their families due to armed conflict and other violence, disasters, humanitarian emergencies and migration. Globally, more than 210,000 people are currently registered as missing by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Family Links Network, which helps to reunite families.

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. At present, we have over 15,000 pending requests, of which some date back to 1990. Behind these numbers is the suffering of the families of missing people who continue to live in the anguish and uncertainty of not knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones or what happened to them.

"We want the families of missing people to know that their loved ones are not forgotten. They are not alone and we will continue supporting states to do everything in their power to provide answers to the families, thereby upholding the families' right to know," said Robert Mardini, director-general of the ICRC.

In Sri Lanka, the ICRC implements an island-wide support programme that addresses the psychosocial, economic, legal and administrative needs of the families of missing people and advocates for a mechanism that provides answers about the whereabouts of their loved ones.

SUPPORTING COVID-19 RESPONSE IN PRISONS



The ICRC continues to support the Department of Prisons and the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka in their COVID-19 response in prisons by donating personal protective equipment (PPE) items including gloves, gowns and overalls, face shields, goggles, masks, surgical caps non-contact thermometers, cleaning and disinfection material and personal hygiene items. These will be used in the Prison Headquarters in Colombo, Galle Prison, Angu-nakolapelessa Prison, Colombo Remand Prison and Negombo Prison.

RENOVATIONS AT MAHARA PRISON



The ICRC donated construction material to renovate the hospital at Mahara Prison which was damaged during riots in November 2020. The material will be used to repair and restore three wards constructed by the ICRC in 2017. The renovation work, to be done primarily by the detainees under the supervision of the Director of Prisons, is expected to be completed by the beginning of 2022. The repairs will benefit more than 1,700 detainees.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL) AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



The ICRC, in collaboration with the Bandaranaike International Diplomatic Training Institute (BIDTI), organized a webinar “IHL and protection of the natural environment: A preventive response”. The event aimed to raise awareness of humanitarian law protecting the natural environment in light of the updated [Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict](#) published by the ICRC in 2020. Experts from legal academia and the armed forces discussed the role of national legislation, policies and military practice in forming an effective preventive response. The speakers discussed existing domestic legal response to protecting the environment during armed conflict, identifying areas for improvement while highlighting the role of the National IHL Committee in carrying out compatibility studies, coordination among related agencies and spreading awareness on the subject.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF RFL PROGRAMME



The ICRC is carrying out an island-wide [Restoring Family Links \(RFL\)](#) needs assessment together with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS). The assessment aims to enhance the capacity of the National Society to trace missing people and improve access to such services. The assessment will span over about six months and the findings will enable both organizations to better understand and help migrants, foreigners and people impacted by natural disasters.

THE CONVERGENCE OF RELIGION AND HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES: EXPANDING RESEARCH INTO CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM



Over the last few years, the ICRC has established links with Buddhist academic circles in Sri Lanka to explore the confluence of Buddhism and humanitarian law. Efforts are also being made to network with Christian and Hindu scholars for similar research and dialogue. An online briefing was conducted with Christian scholars from Theological College of Lanka and the Department of Christian Civilization at the University of Jaffna. We also met prominent Hindu scholar and preacher Kambavarithy Ilankai Jeyaraj to explore avenues for further academic research on religion and IHL.

TOGETHER WE ARE UNSTOPPABLE: CELEBRATING WORLD RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT DAY



Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers make a difference in communities across the world every day. Appreciating their determination in serving communities despite the additional challenges posed by the pandemic, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day was celebrated on 8 May under the theme “Together we are #unstoppable”.

Marking the day, ICRC president Peter Maurer said, “Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers are on the front line of every crisis, sometimes at risk to their own safety. They work relentlessly with and for communities to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the worst of situations, in armed conflict, disasters and other humanitarian crises. World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is our opportunity to pay them tribute; they are making a difference all over the world every day and ensure no one is left behind.”

This year, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners joined the Sri Lanka Red Cross to launch a scholarship programme that will benefit 50 students from low-income families selected from 25 districts. This long-term initiative will support the students with a monthly allowance until they complete their education. The scholarship was officially inaugurated at the National Society’s Colombo branch in the presence of Jagath Abeysinghe, president of the SLRCS.

The Sri Lanka Red Cross also planted around 250 trees in 25 districts under the “Restore the Lost World” programme to promote eco-friendly behaviour in school children.

A [video clip](#) honouring volunteers and highlighting the ICRC and National Society's joint response to COVID-19 in Sri Lanka was released and a radio programme was aired on Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation radio channels in Sinhala, Tamil and English, followed by a quiz.

World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day commemorates the birth anniversary of Henry Dunant, the founding father of the Movement and joint recipient of the first Nobel Peace Prize. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has around 14 million volunteers worldwide.

FACTS & FIGURES (MAY – AUGUST 2021)



ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

- **5** families met for follow up on tracing enquiries and **3** new requests registered
- **701** relatives of missing people join weekly psychosocial support sessions, **87** of them referred to required resources for assistance with economic, legal and administrative, educational and health needs
- **105** families provided cash grants to support earning a livelihood
- **22** families of missing people provided multipurpose cash grants to cover immediate needs (food and other essential expenses)
- Economic Security Multidisciplinary Monitoring Survey on the effects of COVID-19 for **300** households, including families of missing people



MONITORING THE CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

- **1** visit made to **1** place of detention
- **28** detainees visited and findings and recommendations shared confidentially with immigration authority

- **5,432** detainees in 10 places of detention provided hygiene items and personal protective equipment (PPE) items including **18,200** gloves, **2,750** gowns and overalls, **1,500** face shields, **325** goggles, **3,500** FFP2 masks, **5,500** surgical caps, **12,300** surgical masks, **20** non-contact thermometers distributed to prison health officers
 - **3** Red Cross messages (containing brief family news) given to **2** prison authorities
 - Improved video visitation rooms in Angunakolapelessa Prison for **200** detainees
 - Handed over fabric to Prison Headquarters for the production of **5,000** face masks
 - Donated construction material to renovate hospital in Mahara Prison, benefiting **1,700** detainees
 - Provided construction material to renovate a storeroom and install a gas connection in the kitchen of New Magazine prison, benefiting about **1,200** detainees
 - Covered outdoor rest area at the temporary immigration centre in Welisara, benefiting about **150** migrants
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PROMOTING HUMANITARIAN LAW

- Conducted a virtual briefing session on the ICRC's work on religion and humanitarian principles with **14** Christian scholars from Theological College of Lanka, the Department of Christian Civilization at the University of Jaffna and Catholic scholars. On 2 July, a virtual follow-up meeting was held with Theological College of Lanka
 - A legal officer attached to the Sri Lanka Army participated in the 14th Advanced IHL Seminar for Academics and Policymakers, conducted virtually by the ICRC and Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights from May to June
 - Met renowned Hindu scholar Kambavarithy Ilankai Jeyaraj on 28 July to network with Hindu circles and explore the convergence of Hinduism and humanitarian law
 - Conducted a webinar on IHL and protection of the natural environment on 31 August in collaboration with BIDTI. Speakers included representatives of academia, the Sri Lanka Army, the Attorney General's Department and the ICRC
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SUPPORTING SRI LANKA RED CROSS




- **64** volunteers trained in branch disaster response techniques
- **25** first-aid instructors attended a refresher training course delivered by Sri Lanka Red Cross
- **7** sessions organized on humanitarian principles and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Commemorated World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day with the launch of a scholarship programme, tree planting, a radio quiz and a video on the joint COVID-19 response
- Funded **1,400** towels, **1,400** bedsheets and **375** folding mattresses to be maintained as emergency stock for the monsoon
- Provided financial support to the National Society for **2,500** gloves, **3,500** face shields, **2,800** overalls and **85,000** surgical masks in response to the third wave of COVID-19
- Disinfected **488** public spaces in **6** districts (Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale and Puttalam) to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19
- Jointly launched an island-wide Restoring Family Links needs assessment via telephone, conducting **128** interviews in **10** districts (Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Hambantota, Kandy, Kilinochchi, Matara, Nuwara Eliya, Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee and Vavuniya)

International Committee of the Red Cross
29, Layards Road, Colombo 05, Sri Lanka
T + 94 (11) 250 33 46
F + 94 (11) 250 33 48
E-mail: colombo@icrc.org www.icrc.org

Vavuniya Office
70, Vairavar Kovil Road
Vairavarpuliyankulam, Vavuniya
T +94 (24) 222 28 55
F +94 (24) 222 25 37

Batticaloa Office
Manresa Road, Kothukulam, Pillayaradi
Batticaloa
T +94 (65) 222 70 70

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