



THE ICRC IN SRI LANKA



OUR ACTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been in Sri Lanka since 1989. At the time we were responding to needs arising from the uprising of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the country's armed conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Today we are addressing the humanitarian needs that remain.

We advocate for broad measures to be taken to provide families of missing people with an answer about the fate and whereabouts of their relatives. We are also implementing a support programme around the country to help these families deal with their psychosocial, legal, administrative and economic needs.

We visit places of detention to help authorities improve detainees' treatment and living conditions, including their access to health care and their right to

due process. The remains of people who die during armed conflict, natural disasters or migration have to be managed professionally and with dignity. We support the judicial medical community to strengthen its capacity and contribute to dialogue on forensic-related policy issues.

We promote and strengthen knowledge of international humanitarian law among armed forces, national authorities, civil society and academic circles and train the police in applicable international legal standards on search, arrest and detention procedures. Together with our national partner the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, we promote universal humanitarian principles that are central to the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PEOPLE

During the past conflict we registered more than 34,000 tracing requests from families whose relative(s) had gone missing. We currently have a caseload of over 16,000 tracing requests from families of missing people island-wide, some of which date back to 1990. We are re-contacting these families to update each case.

In 2014-2015, we carried out an island-wide Family Needs Assessment with 395 families of missing people to identify their needs. We shared with the authorities detailed findings from the assessment and recommendations on how to address these needs. According to the majority of families interviewed their most pressing need is to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives followed by the need for emotional support. Families also need help to restart their livelihoods and to deal with administrative and legal difficulties. We

have started to address these needs with a support programme implemented through local organisations.

Families of missing people experience a loss known as ambiguous loss, which is defined by the state of uncertainty they live in. We conduct lectures in universities on the concept of ambiguous loss to raise awareness of it with the aim of having it added to psychology and counselling curricula. Understanding ambiguous loss is essential to provide families emotional support to cope while they wait for answers.

The ICRC worked with the authorities to introduce the Certificate of Absence as an alternative to the death certificate in Sri Lanka for missing persons whose fate is yet to be ascertained. When requested, we offer expert guidance on laws pertaining to missing people and in the scientific process of identifying human remains.



HELPING AUTHORITIES IMPROVE TREATMENT AND CONDITIONS FOR DETAINEES

In Sri Lanka, we have been visiting detainees since 1989. Visits were then carried out to detainees held in connection with the uprising of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and thereafter, the armed conflict. Today we visit all detainees in places of detention. Any findings and recommendations from the visits are shared only with detaining authorities with the aim of supporting their efforts to improve treatment of detainees, conditions of detention and respect for their judicial guarantees. We are carrying out small-scale infrastructure development inside prisons and are working with the authorities to address prison overcrowding and improve prison health-care services.

We organize local workshops and international seminars and sponsor the participation of prison authorities at these

events with the aim of building their technical capacity and facilitating the exchange of best practices. We contributed to establishing a national task force to address the legal and judicial causes of prison overcrowding. The task force, which is co-chaired by the Secretaries of the Ministry of Prison Reform and the Ministry of Justice, was recognized by the cabinet in 2016 and its mandate was expanded to tackle prison reform in addition to overcrowding.

We help detainees keep in touch with their families through the exchange of Red Cross messages and by giving families a travel allowance to visit their detained relatives. We also provide ad hoc assistance in case of emergency as well as recreational and educational items for detainees.



STRENGTHENING FORENSIC CAPACITY

Worldwide, we work to ensure that the remains of people who die during armed conflict, disasters or migration are handled with dignity and professionally managed. In Sri Lanka we train the judicial medical community on the application of forensic archaeology and anthropology in the recovery, analysis and identification of human remains. We also sponsor judicial medical officers to attend trainings abroad to enhance their knowledge.

We sponsor workshops to address challenges in the management of the dead in disasters. As part of a quality-assurance pilot project we are developing with the Institute of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, we are providing technical expertise to improve existing facilities, build capacity, and to collect, centralize and manage forensic-related data.





WORKING IN COOPERATION WITH THE SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY (SLRCS)

The ICRC works closely with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society. We provide financial, technical and material support for its work to restore contact between family members separated by the past conflict or natural disasters, the dissemination and promotion of the Fundamental Principles

and humanitarian values, and to develop its staff and volunteers' emergency response capacity and first aid skills. We also provide them training on Safer Access, which are actions and measures to ensure acceptance and security when delivering services.



L. Gillett/URIC

PROMOTING RESPECT FOR HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

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 international humanitarian law (IHL) among armed forces, national authorities, civil society and academia. We help them integrate principles of IHL into their trainings and curriculum and sponsor their members to participate in IHL seminars, workshops and conferences overseas to enhance their understanding of the subject. In view of Sri Lanka's role as a contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, we conduct briefings on IHL for members of the armed forces to be deployed on

peacekeeping missions abroad and for the navy on maritime security operations. We also provide training for the Terrorist Investigation Division, Criminal Investigation Department and the Narcotics Bureau of the Sri Lanka Police on international human rights law in the correct use of force and firearms and international standards in search, arrest and detention procedures.

We organise an annual national moot court competition for undergraduates of law to understand how to apply IHL in an international criminal court setting.

The 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 organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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