



CHILDREN IN WAR



ICRC

All the names used in the brochure have been changed to protect the identities of the children.



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CHILDREN IN WAR

Conflict increases the vulnerability of those who are already vulnerable, especially children. A child needs a family and a community that provide a nurturing and protective environment. The effects of war on the young can be devastating. In 2008, the number of children who had been forced to flee their homes, either as refugees crossing an international border or as internally displaced persons (IDPs), stood at 18 million.

Conflicts, which today are often internal in nature, spare no one. Children are imprisoned, raped, maimed for life, even killed. Armed conflict tears families apart, forcing thousands of children to fend for themselves and to care for very young siblings.

Exploitation of children, which often increases during armed conflict, takes many forms, such as forced labour or – in extreme cases – slavery. This may be the fate of children who have been recruited by armed forces or armed groups or of children in detention.

Child trafficking, for purposes such as unlawful adoption and forced labour, may also increase. Boys and girls deprived of the protection of their parents and other relatives are most at risk.

Destitution and the loss of close relatives may force young girls into early marriages or prostitution and very young children to become the heads of their families. The disruption of public services can restrict children's access to health care and education. At least half of the world's out-of-school children of primary school age live in conflict-ridden countries. In addition to their immediate suffering, children are also psychologically damaged by witnessing atrocities committed against their loved ones.

But the resilience of boys and girls must not be underestimated. Well-targeted care can help them recover, cease to be victims of war, and take possession of their lives.

"... a child means every human being below the age of eig teen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1



CIVILIANS UNDER ATTACK

Civilian objects like schools or hospitals are protected under IHL. Nonetheless, they have increasingly come under fire. Sometimes, schools are used to shelter those who have been forced to flee their homes. In the southern Philippines region of Mindanao, they shelter some of the tens of thousands of people displaced by the conflict. At Datu Gumbay Piang elementary school, Samira Endosan, a pregnant mother of seven, was brewing coffee in a classroom turned dormitory when, she recalls, “a piece of shrapnel hit me in the back.” Eight people were wounded, including three young children who were playing in front of the classroom.

When regular armed forces of a government or armed groups use parts or the whole of a school or hospital for their own purposes, not only do they deprive civilians of health and education, but they also expose them to attack by the enemy. Padre Alberto, a Catholic priest in Colombia, recounts his experience: “Last February, soldiers came and settled down inside our small boarding school. They started cooking, throwing garbage and made classrooms dirty. The children had run away and parents did not want them to come back as long as soldiers were still there. Luckily, I could contact the ICRC, who spoke to the commander immediately. Things came back to normal the very same day: soldiers cleaned up and left. The commander apologized and promised it would never happen again. The children have come back and school has restarted. The parents are very happy to know the ICRC is protecting us.”

The following chapters look at the most significant risks boys and girls face during conflict, and some of the responses to them by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), using examples from the field, primarily in situations of armed conflict. However, the ICRC’s activities in other situations of violence – inter-communal violence, for instance – are very similar.

OUR CHILDREN ARE DYING

“Our children die in infancy because no one comes to vaccinate or to treat them. We have no teacher; our children can neither read nor write. They are afraid to play in the jungle because of armed groups that roam about our villages. When they are 12, we have to hide them so the guerrillas do not recruit them as fighters and the army does not take them away as guides and informants. Our children are scared by the sound of combat and traumatized by displacement. Nonetheless, we keep having children. Children are what is left when one has lost everything else.”

A native Indian in Colombia

LIVING IN FEAR

Noam, Adi and Amir Maoz spent their childhood in a kibbutz close to the Gaza Strip, from where armed groups are firing rockets. When the siren starts, they have 15 seconds to run to the closest shelter.

“At one point we had up to eight of these alerts a day. It was hard to study normally. It’s not something you can get used to. It scares us every time. Some children in school can’t stop crying. Many have nightmares.”

“Sometimes the siren doesn’t warn us in time. Once a rocket fell just five metres from our door. There were splinters in the house. We were lucky nothing worse happened.”



Carl De Keyzer/ICRC



Jan Powell/ICRC

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

The ICRC's mission is to safeguard the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence, to come to their aid when they suffer and to prevent that suffering by promoting and strengthening universal humanitarian law and principles.

The ICRC acts impartially to assist all victims of war and internal violence, but the objects of its immediate attention, in every situation, are always those who are most vulnerable. Hence, children are among those who benefit from all ICRC field activities.

The ICRC promotes respect for IHL during its instruction and training sessions for armed forces and armed groups. It reminds parties to a conflict of their obligation to permit humanitarian access to those in need, including children, at all times. The ICRC also works to ensure that all civilians, including children, are spared; it does this through public campaigns, posters, leaflets, plays, and radio and TV broadcasts.

As this brochure will detail, the ICRC also carries out programmes targeting children in particular: for instance, it traces children and reunites them with their families, undertakes activities with the specific aim of putting an end to the involvement of children in armed conflict and, sometimes, provides specific support for detained children.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Protection for children in wartime is enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL), which is binding on both States and non-governmental armed groups. This body of law - which includes the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their two Additional Protocols of 1977 and Additional Protocol III of 2005 - provides general protection for all persons affected by armed conflicts and also contains provisions specifically related to children.

As civilians, children are protected under IHL in two different situations. First, if they fall into the hands of enemy forces they must be protected against murder and all forms of abuse: torture and other forms of ill-treatment, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, hostage-taking or forced displacement. Second, they must in no circumstances be the target of attacks, **unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities**. Instead, they must be spared and protected. Many of the rules of IHL constitute customary law and are therefore binding on parties to an armed conflict, regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant treaties.

Human rights law – like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict of 2000 – also specifically takes into account the need to protect children against the effects of armed conflict.

TORN APART

“It was the end of October, and we were at school. My mother and father were working in the fields. The armed men attacked, and everybody fled, including the teachers. I went home, and I found my younger sister, carrying the baby on her back. I did not know where our parents were. All of us six children left together on foot, towards Goma, because that is where all the other villagers were heading. We found shelter in a house under construction, and spent two weeks begging for food. We were very hungry. Finally, some women at the local market took us here to this shelter for lost children.”

Bahati, a 13-year-old boy from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is one of the countless children who become separated from their parents, or from their usual caregivers, during the panic and chaos caused by armed conflict. In the DRC, anecdotal evidence suggests that a very large percentage of families have lost one or several children in their frantic flight from threats. Parents do not know whether their children are dead or alive. Children are desperate for help. The lives of adults and of children are overshadowed by the anguish of separation.

Survival at stake

Clearly, the displacement that follows conflict – either inside the same country or across an international border – is one of the major causes of families being separated. The separations following mass displacement run into numbers that are staggering: the tens of thousands of separated Rwandan children in the 1990s, for instance, or the situation in the DRC in recent years. But family separations can also be voluntary. For example, it is not unusual for parents who have become destitute, or who feel their children are not safe, to entrust them – temporarily – to an orphanage, to relatives or to neighbours who are better off, in the belief that that would improve their chances of survival. Such temporary arrangements often last well into the long term, particularly if after the separation the child or the family has to flee owing to armed conflict. In some desperate situations, parents give away their children for adoption, in the hope that this will improve their child’s prospects.

Whatever the initial cause of separation, these children are at great risk of neglect, exploitation, abuse, recruitment by armed groups, unlawful adoption or trafficking. Girls may be particularly vulnerable, especially to sexual abuse and forcible early marriage. For babies and very young children, their very survival may be at stake. Without the care and protection that only an adult can provide, they may soon die of hunger, or of treatable illnesses like diarrhoea.

In such situations, it is not unusual for very young children – sometimes as young as eight or nine – to be propelled into adult roles. They become heads of families, taking care of and protecting younger siblings. Such households are extremely vulnerable to a number of hazards: for instance, the “breadwinner” of the family may be recruited into an armed group or forced into prostitution in order to survive. They also attest to the remarkable strength and resourcefulness that children are capable of demonstrating.

Spontaneous fostering

In a number of societies, spontaneous fostering may be an ad hoc solution during a crisis. This was the case with 51-year-old Suzanne Nyombe, one of many such foster mothers in the eastern DRC: “I was fleeing the fighting in my village with my children when I heard a baby crying on the road. I looked in the ditch and there she was, about ten months old, surrounded by dead bodies. I could not leave her there to die. So I took her and now she lives with us here, in our place of refuge. I have called her Jemima.”

THE FINEST CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It was in early 2003 that war reached Bohebly, in Côte d'Ivoire. Two-year-old Tia was with a relative, Delphine, while her mother worked in the fields. Delphine and Tia were abducted and taken to neighbouring Liberia. Then the toddler was lost and after a while Delphine made her way back to the village, alone. "Everyone thought Tia was dead," says the village chief. "How could a little girl survive all alone out in the bush?" "I knew she was still alive," replies her mother. "I used to see her in my dreams. No one believed me, but I was sure I'd find her some day." All the while, a Liberian woman had been raising Tia as her own child. As the little girl did not know her own name, tracing her was more difficult than usual. There were many cases of separation and the Red Cross staff was overwhelmed. Eventually, the tracing file opened by Tia's family in Côte d'Ivoire was matched with the one opened by her caretaker in Liberia. Tia's mother recognized the child in the photograph, despite the passing of the years. A scar on Tia's back clinched the identification. Just before Christmas 2007, Tia returned home to a jubilant welcome.

ADOPTION

Experience shows that most unaccompanied children have parents or other relatives willing and able to care for them, who can be found. Adoption should not be considered if there is reasonable hope of successful tracing and reunification. It should be considered only if it is in the child's best interests and should be carried out in keeping with applicable national, international and customary law. Also, priority is always given to adoption by relatives wherever they live. When this is not feasible, adoption within the community to which the child belongs – or at least within his or her own culture – is to be preferred.

A GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION

The plight of children affected by armed conflicts has long been a matter of grave concern for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.* By adopting a plan of action concerning children affected by armed conflict, the components of the Movement demonstrated their commitment to this issue.

The plan of action consists of two commitments:

To promote the principle of non-recruitment and non-participation in armed conflict of children under the age of 18 years, notably through the promotion of international legal standards among all armed groups (governmental and non-governmental) and by raising awareness within civil society of the need not to allow children to join armed forces or groups.

To take concrete action to protect and assist child victims of armed conflict, notably by addressing psychosocial and physical needs of children living with families as well as of unaccompanied children and by advocating in behalf of children who participated in armed conflict in order to facilitate their social reintegration.

* The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) is made up of the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies).



TOGETHER AGAIN

The family and community usually provide the most effective protection for children. The priority is therefore to reunite separated children with their families and communities of origin. To find them, the ICRC employs a process called ‘tracing.’

The organization is in a unique position in this respect since it works alongside other components of the Movement. In many conflict areas, the ICRC would not be able to reunite families without this long-standing collaboration. Worldwide, thousands of specialized staff and volunteers of National Societies are ready the day conflict breaks out. They remain when the ICRC pulls out of the country, and continue to look for missing relatives.

Looking for families

The work starts with the early identification of children who have been separated from their primary caregiver. When massive numbers are involved, priority will be given to those most at risk: very young children, the sick and the disabled, and children who are unaccompanied, without any adults to look after them. A distinction must be made between separated children – who are without their usual caregiver but are under the protection of another relative – and unaccompanied children, who are on their own or under the care of persons totally unrelated to them, often as a result of spontaneous fostering.

In the case of child-headed households, the immediate priority is to provide food, shelter, and access to education and health care. The ICRC will prioritize interim arrangements – like foster families or, in exceptional circumstances, short-term institutional care – while searching for parents. The aim is always to provide the child some form of family-based care, ideally within the community to which the child belongs.

Long-term commitment

Keeping the child within the community is especially important as the tracing process can take years. In the case of Amie Foray, it took ten years. Her grandmother recalls the day when gunfire erupted around her village in Sierra Leone: “We travelled through the forest but a second attack sent us fleeing in different directions.” The year was 1997 and Amie was four. With the passage of time, her family came to accept that she was no longer alive. In fact, she was being looked after by people who were themselves in flight, which greatly complicated the tracing process. Finally, in October 2007, the ICRC was able to bring Amie home. The entire village attended the reunion of the teenaged Amie with her mother and her grandmother.

Helping separated children is often a long-term commitment. The tracing of surviving relatives is a complex process, often made more difficult by ongoing conflict, and may involve several National Societies in various countries. One particularly efficient means of reconnecting families is the radio. It was the means through which Bahati, the 13-year old Congolese boy, and his siblings were reunited with their parents, after a five-month separation.

Follow-up

Reunification is not necessarily the end of the story. Follow-up may be needed. Such follow-up is particularly important after prolonged separation, when the child has been reunited with distant relatives, or when the family is in very difficult



circumstances. It is also necessary when children come back with small children of their own.

Should it be proven, after a reasonable lapse of time, that the child has no living relatives ready to take him or her into their care, the ICRC will, together with the authorities or in collaboration with the National Society and/or other humanitarian agencies, try to find a suitable long-term solution.

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

The ICRC has a mandate under IHL to reestablish links among separated family members, which it carries out in close partnership with the worldwide network of National Societies.

- The ICRC identifies and registers children who have become separated from their usual adult caregivers. This information is then spread through the Movement's national – and if necessary, its international – network, broadcast through local media, and disseminated in public places. Often, photos are taken and exhibited at Red Cross branch offices and in places that draw crowds of people, such as markets. The ICRC also provides families the opportunity to communicate with each other, by telephone or – often – by exchanging Red Cross messages.
- The ICRC receives many requests from parents whose children have gone missing as a result of conflict or other situations of violence, or of displacement; it starts the tracing process on receipt of such a request.
- The ICRC supports the creation of specialized tracing units within National Societies throughout the world.
- Given the number of civilians affected by conflicts, the Movement collaborates closely with other humanitarian agencies.
- The website www.FamilyLinks.icrc.org was set up to help restore contact among those separated by conflict or natural disasters. Since 2003, more than 770,000 persons have posted their names on this website.

WAVES OF HOPE

"Hello, this is Gedeon Masumbuko Birindua from Radio Bobandano. We are going to open the programme with a tracing list from the ICRC. If you have lost your child during an armed conflict, the Red Cross can help you find him. Do call the following phone number: 081 76 83 615. And now we are going to read out the list. Nema Bahati, born 1997, from Kibumba, Nema Justine, born 1993..." In the eastern DRC, since late 2008, announcers at five radio stations have been reading out, three times a day, the names of children lost in flight. Scores of them, separated during this latest conflict, have already been reunited with their families. "In a country where people keep informed through small portable radios, this is the most efficient way to reunite families torn apart," says Prosper Sebuhire (ICRC Goma).



WHAT THE LAW SAYS

IHL aims first to address the root causes of family separation. It prohibits all forms of behaviour that may threaten family unity, such as forced displacement of civilians or direct attacks on them. When families are separated as a result of conflict, IHL seeks to facilitate contacts among family members and their eventual reunion, as well as the provision of appropriate care for the children who are affected. Under certain strict conditions, children may be temporarily removed from an area of conflict for their safety, but only in the company of persons responsible for their security and well-being.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also seeks to ensure that separated or unaccompanied children receive special protection and assistance, as well as appropriate alternative care: for instance, foster placement, placement in suitable institutions, *kafala*¹ or adoption.

1. A concept of Islamic law, which may be defined as a voluntary commitment to take charge of the needs, upbringing and protection of a minor child, as a father would for his own child. However, *kafala* does not create a legal parent-child relationship.





INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Though they are usually the victims of war, sometimes children also take part in armed conflicts. There are tens of thousands of children recruited or used by armed forces and armed groups in at least 18 countries around the world. This practice has made 'child soldiers' a household term today.



Often unarmed, they are used in a large variety of roles: cooks, porters, messengers, spies, human mine detectors, sexual slaves, forced labourers, even suicide bombers. Therefore, aid organizations prefer to call them “children associated with armed forces or armed groups.” Whatever they may be called, these children risk their lives or their health. They often suffer serious injuries, disabilities, and long-lasting physical and psychological scars; and their future, once conflict is over, is uncertain.

Children join armed groups for various reasons. There is, of course, forced recruitment, or outright abduction. Jacinata Ayaa was eight when she was abducted from her village in Uganda. “They used me first as a babysitter but, when I turned 12, I had to start training as a fighter. I think I was about 13 when I got my first child. A little later, I was shot twice in the same leg. I became weak, but still I had to walk, carry the child, carry the weapon – and fight.”

But many children join voluntarily. Serious social inequalities, the social breakdown caused by war, separation from adult caregivers, lack of access to education, displacement: these are some of the reasons that may compel minors to enlist. Ideology may play a role, when a cause is fervently valued in the community, or when family members are already fighters. Children may also be tempted by the power and status that accrue to weapon bearers. Avenging the death of a relative may also be a motive. Often, these factors are linked to each other and have a cumulative force.

Akaash remembers joining an armed group in Nepal, at the age of ten: “Because they offered me money, a weapon and an opportunity to prove that I was something.” Girls are not immune to the lure Akaash describes. This is shown by the story of Furaha, who was persuaded to join an armed group in the DRC because two of her friends were already members. She was 15, and her role was to escort a commander: “Whenever the officer went to fight, the escorts were also engaged in combat. It was very hard.”

Children can be extremely valuable to armed groups. They may be more obedient and easier to manipulate than adults, and – depending on their age – less aware of the danger they are in. In certain cases, children are forced to commit atrocities against their own families or communities, to ensure their blind obedience and to cut them off from their roots. That they may become perpetrators should never obscure the fact that they are victims first of all.

Even under less extreme circumstances, their social reintegration can be difficult, because families and communities may dread the return of someone they consider to be more perpetrator than victim. The result may be stigmatization, discrimination or even outright rejection. Also, these children are often deprived of schooling, and the community may not value the skills – leadership and organizational abilities, for instance – that they have acquired during their time with armed actors.



Invisible girls

The stigma attached to girls usually runs deeper and lasts longer. In some cultures, the sexual abuse they may have suffered compromises their marriage prospects. When, like Jacinata Ayaa from Uganda, they come back as mothers, their children will be included in the community's rejection of them. Therefore, girls will often avoid registering as former fighters, thus rendering themselves invisible, both to national programmes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and to aid agencies. DDR programmes tend to overlook girls for another reason: more often than not, they have no weapons to turn in. All this means that their return to civilian life may put them at risk of marginalization, unable to receive assistance in rebuilding their lives.

Demobilization and reintegration of children is essential for the rebuilding of societies torn apart by violence. The first priority is to reunite them with their families and home communities. They must be reintroduced into the educational system and helped to find employment through vocational training or income-generating projects. This is crucial for preventing their becoming marginalized, which often leads to their being recruited again.

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

The ICRC is active in preventing the recruitment of children and carries out remedial activities on their behalf.

- The ICRC actively promotes the principle of non-recruitment and non-participation in armed conflict of persons under the age of 18 years. It reminds States and armed groups of their obligations under international law, and works to introduce those principles into domestic legal systems.
- When wounded or detained, children benefit from the ICRC's activities in behalf of combatants *hors de combat*.
- The ICRC may request armed forces or armed groups to release individual children.
- Even though the organization does not involve itself in DDR negotiations, it is willing to assist with implementation. In particular, it reunites demobilized children with their families and ensures follow-up, particularly in regions where it benefits from access that other agencies do not enjoy.
- In collaboration with National Societies and in consultation or collaboration with the International Federation, the ICRC may involve itself in efforts to meet the psychological and physical needs of boys and girls who have participated in armed conflict and to ease their reintegration. This was the case in Sierra Leone and Liberia, to cite two examples.

KILL OR BE KILLED

"It was in 2003, I was 11. We were walking on the road and met strangers with weapons. We were told not to run. My mother ran and she was shot dead right in front of me. They gave me a gun and taught me how to shoot. On the front, a bullet hit my arm. When they would capture someone from an enemy faction, they would point a gun at me and tell me to kill that person, so I did. If I didn't obey, I would be shot on the spot. I saw it happen to other kids.

During the war, my father was wounded and all of my brothers and sisters were killed. I am alone now with my father, who is very sick. After the war, I applied for the Child Advocacy and Rehabilitation (CAR) programme and was chosen. Despite all I have been through, I am optimistic about my future. I think I will be a good person. Liberia will have a good future as long as we can keep away from war. It ruins everything. My family is gone. My childhood is gone. I can't get it back."

Oliver, whose story this is, is now 17 years old. He is learning masonry at the CAR centre in Monrovia, along with 150 other children or young people who are victims of the war in Liberia. The project is run by the Liberia National Red Cross Society with support from the ICRC. Oliver is one of the most talented apprentice masons at the centre.

LAYING DOWN ARMS

Cyprien was nine when he volunteered to join an armed group in the eastern part of the DRC: "My mother was always scolding me. I was fed up." Six years later, he was brought home by the ICRC, happy but a bit worried about the future: "As fighters we can have everything we want. After all these years, I will arrive empty-handed. I have no idea what I will live on." Jean, who returned at the same time, has no such doubts: "I am very happy to be home. I was a child soldier for less than a year but I didn't like it, because I could not be with my family. I don't think I will ever go back."





Chris Hondros/Getty Images

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Protocols I and II additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 forbid the recruitment, and the participation in hostilities, of children under the age of fifteen. In international armed conflicts, when recruiting children between fifteen and eighteen years of age, States must endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest. Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which applies to both international and non-international armed conflicts, also provides similar forms of protection.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) aims at raising the age at which children may be recruited and participate in hostilities to eighteen albeit with some exceptions:

Compulsory recruitment into States' armed forces is prohibited for all those under eighteen years of age. The age of *voluntary* recruitment must be raised from fifteen. In addition, States have the obligation to take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who are not yet eighteen years of age do not take a direct part in hostilities. The Optional Protocol also provides that non-governmental armed groups "should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years." Children who have been demobilized must receive all appropriate assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration.

Recruiting children under the age of fifteen, or using them as active participants in hostilities, is also considered a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 8).

CHILDREN AND DETENTION

When children are held behind bars, their well-being and security are at risk. There are a number of reasons why children are detained during periods of conflict. In many cases, it is a direct consequence of their association with State armed forces or non-governmental groups. When there is an increase in the number of children detained, it is often directly related to their active participation in hostilities. The spread of gang violence has also led to the detention of young persons. Many children end up in prison as a consequence of the general social breakdown created by conflict.

Whatever the reasons for their detention, children are entitled to specific kinds of care and protection. Separation from their families is a privation that causes serious suffering. They may be subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Sometimes, they are used as cheap labour, made to work in the fields and to clean. They are often deprived of a proper education. All this, together with the possibility of falling under the influence of hardened criminals, jeopardizes their chances of reintegration into society.

Boys and girls must be detained separately from one another and, most importantly, from adults, except when they are being held with family members, or when it is necessary for their well-being that they stay with adults, especially women. Children should benefit from the highest possible standards of accommodation, food, drinking water and health care – like check-ups and vaccinations – and have access to recreational activities. They have the right to an education and to vocational training. It is especially unacceptable to imprison a child for years while he or she is awaiting trial; but, all too often, children are unaware of their rights and risk prolonged detention.

Children may be detained simply because their mothers or other relatives are. In the case of very young children, this might be an acceptable state of affairs, because, generally, it is in the best interests of the child to be close to his or her mother. The alternatives – for instance, life in an orphanage or no contact with the mother – may be highly undesirable.

For older children, being detained with their mothers or other relatives provides them with physical and emotional protection. This is particularly the case where no other close relative can take care of the child, or when the child is stigmatized and mistreated by the community or the extended family because of the detention of the parent. But a prison is not a place in which to grow up. Life in prison has obvious disadvantages, and solutions will vary from case to case. The best interests of the child should always dictate every decision to be made in this regard.

Sandra, a Colombian guerrilla, is one such imprisoned mother: “A friend of mine outside the jail takes care of my eight-year-old daughter. I was three months pregnant when they caught me, and my





Bikas Das/Associated Press

two-year-old son now lives with me. In the mornings, he goes to the prison's kindergarten, and in the afternoons, he plays with the other six toddlers in our courtyard. It is very complicated for my family to come and visit me here in Bogota, and we can spend on average only around five hours a month with our visiting children. Being separated from one's child is extremely hard."

It is crucial for the psychological well-being of children to have access to their parents, whether it is the child or the parent who is detained. Sometimes, it can be both. Khaled, a 13-year-old Afghan, has been detained in Iraq since he was 11. His parents are being held in a different Iraqi detention centre. Thanks to the intervention of the ICRC, the authorities are currently organizing an *intra muros* visit between him and his mother. Khaled has learnt Arabic and can now express himself perfectly in that language.

AN EDUCATION BEHIND BARS

The juvenile detention centre in Kandahar is a small house near the famous Red Mosque. At any time, the 20 young men housed there may be seen reading, doing beadwork, or playing board games. During the day, they attend classes with a teacher and a tailor who shows them how to make clothes in the local style. Only four of them are there as a result of the fighting. But the director of the detention centre, Dr Saleh Muhammad, is certain that none of them would be there were it not for the war: "Almost all these poor boys are here for petty theft. Their fathers cannot support them. What other choice do they have?" Jamil is 15 years old and was able to resume his studies at the centre: "This place is almost as good as home, except that my family is not here." It is Dr Muhammad's hope that with education and the right influence, the boys' prospects will improve.

The centre is supported by the ICRC.

MISSING PARENTS

Eight-year-old Gazala is from Bethlehem, on the West Bank, and both her parents are detained, in – different – Israeli prisons. “We live a difficult and tough life,” she says. “My grandmother, with whom I live, is trying to make up for the love of my parents. But I can’t forget their faces, I need them every minute. There is not a single day that I don’t miss them and cry because we are separated.”

An ICRC family visit programme makes it possible for Gazala and her grandparents to visit their detained relatives. To date, this programme has enabled between 12,000 and 16,000 Palestinians from the West Bank to visit their loved ones.



Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Under IHL, persons deprived of liberty must be treated humanely in all circumstances. Such acts as murder, torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, corporal punishment and mutilation, whether committed against adults or children, are prohibited. In addition, IHL provides that children deprived of liberty must be afforded special protection and treatment in keeping with their age. In particular, they must be held separately from adults, except in those cases when an entire family is detained as a unit. The pronouncement or execution of a death sentence against persons who were under 18 years of age at the time of their offence is also prohibited.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States Parties have agreed that children may be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period necessary (Article 37).

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

As part of its humanitarian mandate, the ICRC visits more than half a million detainees in more than 70 countries every year; 33,000 of these persons benefit from the ICRC’s family visits programme. In 2008, the ICRC made individual visits to 1,500 minors. The organization works to monitor and improve conditions of detention, through regular, confidential dialogue with the authorities in charge. Detained girls and boys, as well as mothers with small children, are a priority. The ICRC strives to ensure the physical and psychological security of the child, as well as his or her future, in various ways.

- The ICRC identifies and registers detained children.
- The ICRC enables detained boys and girls and the children of detainees to maintain regular contact with their families. It facilitates family visits and telephone conversations, and puts its family message services at the disposal of detainees. Remaining in touch contributes to the psychological well-being of everyone concerned and makes social rehabilitation after prison easier.
- The ICRC’s delegates monitor the material conditions of detention and ensure individual follow-up for detainees. They check whether the infrastructure is adequate, and whether detainees have enough space, light and fresh air. In this regard, infants require special attention.
- The ICRC strives to ensure that detainees are able to meet their basic needs: proper food, water, clothing, medical care (including immunization), education, access to recreational activities, and baby items.
- As part of its efforts to improve sanitary conditions for detainees, the ICRC often carries out maintenance, renovation or construction work in places of detention. The organization always takes the needs of women and children into consideration: for example, it supports construction of separate accommodations, or facilities that are adequate, for women with babies or small children.
- The ICRC assesses whether it is in the best interests of the child to be held with relatives. If not, it advocates separation from adult detainees, either in facilities specifically for children and/or adolescents or in a separate part of an institution where adults are held. It strives to persuade the authorities to provide female guards for detained girls.
- The ICRC also attempts to persuade the authorities to provide access to legal assistance and speedy judicial procedures for detained children. It works with national authorities to improve legislation concerning detained children.



Maya Alleruzzo/Associated Press

AT HIGH RISK

Manou, who was ten at the time, and his six-year-old sister, Chance, were tending to their family's fields – in the eastern DRC – when the armed men arrived. Some of them attempted to sexually assault Manou who was wearing a dress. When they realized he was a boy, they started hitting him. Meanwhile, the other men were raping Chance. When their mother found them, Chance's lower limbs were paralyzed and Manou was suffering the effects of his beating: he had been severely injured and later developed a serious infection in the abdominal region.

This grim story is not unique. The incidence of rape and of other forms of sexual violence increases dramatically during periods of conflict, and adult women are not the only victims. It is estimated that in the DRC, one victim in two is a minor. Rape can be a method of warfare, used by armed groups to torture, injure, extract information, degrade, displace, intimidate, punish or simply to destroy the fabric of the community. The mere threat of sexual violence can cause entire communities to flee their homes. Dr Tharcisse Synga in the DRC, who treats many victims of rape, has no doubt: "Sexual violence is a barometer of war. If there is more fighting, there is also more sexual violence. Ethnic groups use it against each other and children are not spared."

Displacement, destitution or separation from caregivers makes boys and girls extremely vulnerable: sexual exploitation is a major risk. At times, in order to survive children may have to resort to prostitution. The practice, followed in some societies, of giving away young or very young girls in marriage may find encouragement in the general state of destitution that follows war. All these girls risk early pregnancies, which might lead to medical complications and even death. The fate of children born of rape can also be dire: in such instances, relatives sometimes reject, even kill, the baby. Victims of sexual abuse are also exposed to the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible diseases.

Adult children

In Iraq, decades of conflict have created millions of fatherless children. The consequences for boys may be different from those for girls, but they are equally serious for both.

Amal, an Iraqi twice widowed by war, was forced to give her 11-year-old daughter in marriage to a man more than 20 years older. She was Amal's youngest daughter. "I know I have done wrong," Amal says. "But there was no solution. I had four daughters, one mentally ill. I spent nights sleeping on an empty stomach. In 2008, a man proposed to me, but he did not want to take my mentally ill daughter. Soon after, a rich man proposed to my 11-year-old, saying he was willing to house the mentally ill sister too. I agreed because it provided a solution for all of us. But after a few months of marriage, my 11-year-old daughter told me that her husband was raping her sister. Because of shame, the fear of scandal and of being thrown out onto the street by my present husband if my daughter got divorced, I asked her to shut her mouth. All I could do is to take my mentally ill daughter to a shelter. I left the other one with a rapist."

While girls might be forced into early marriages, boys become breadwinners at an age when they should be in elementary school. Ibraheem was only nine years old when he had to start trading goods on the streets of a city in southern Iraq: "In 2008, I lost my father in a fire. Since then, I have been responsible for my mother and three sisters. They do not work; they have to stay at home. In our society, men have to take care of women. So, I had to leave my school and give up my dream of becoming a doctor. Every day, I have to put food on the table. At the end of the month, there should be enough money to pay the rent. Otherwise, I will be judged by the community and I will see in my mother's eyes that I am not the man of the house."



Wojtek Lembnyk/ICRC

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

IHL provides that persons in the power of a party to an armed conflict must be treated humanely in all circumstances. More particularly, IHL protects these persons against outrages against personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, forced prostitution and any form of indecent assault.

Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, rape and other forms of sexual violence constituting a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions are war crimes when committed in international or non-international armed conflict (Article 8).

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

The ICRC has adopted a comprehensive approach that includes both preventive action and assistance for victims.

- In its IHL training programmes for armed forces and armed groups, the ICRC emphasizes the prohibition against sexual violence and advocates its inclusion in the law or in internal regulations.
- Through campaigns, plays, posters, leaflets and other awareness-raising activities, the ICRC tries to prevent sexual violence, always stressing the fact that it is a serious crime with severe repercussions for the victims. The campaigns are undertaken to create awareness of the issue, to help in the breaking down of taboos and to inform victims of the services available to them.
- Similar campaigns are carried out to remind authorities, armed actors and the general public of other issues pertaining to IHL, such as the absolute need to spare civilians in conflict. The ICRC issues constant reminders on the rights of the civilian population, children included. It provides financial and material support for victims of war in a number of ways.
- Victims of sexual violence require immediate medical attention. Treatment is provided in health facilities that receive ICRC support in various forms: drugs and medical equipment, training for medical staff, repairs, and so on.
- The ICRC provides volunteers at the community level with psychosocial training to enable them to counsel victims and to mediate between victims and their families. In the eastern DRC, for example, “listening houses” have been established for the benefit of victims of sexual violence.
- ICRC staff document alleged cases of sexual violence, report them to the authorities and urge them to take action.



Wojtek Lembnyk/ICRC

Birendra Yadav lost his parents when he was 12 years old. When his older brother was killed during the conflict, Birendra was on his own. That is why the ICRC chose the boy as one of the beneficiaries of an income-generating project that it runs jointly with the Nepal Red Cross Society. The aim of the project is to generate income by enhancing the means of production of households whose livelihoods were severely affected by the conflict. Birendra now expects to join a computer-training centre. He dreams of the day when he will open one of his own.

HEALTH

Modern warfare does not spare children: it injures, maims and kills them. It does great harm to children in many other ways as well. One of the indirect consequences of armed conflict is that essential infrastructures are not maintained and become obsolescent. Access to health services and medicines is diminished, and sometimes the entire health-care system collapses.

Jan Powell/ICRC



Needs are far greater than the resources with which to meet them. States and municipalities have much less money to spend on essential health care, such as vital immunization programmes and mother-and-baby clinics. Difficulty of access to regions gripped by violence is another reason for the collapse of vaccination campaigns. The consequences are potentially fatal: for instance, outbreaks of measles or meningitis that occur, especially – but not exclusively – in crowded conditions, in camps for refugees or for displaced persons may be deadly. In war, even the most common illness can kill.

Doctors and nurses may be among those who flee violence and chaos. Sometimes, clinics and hospitals are directly targeted by fighters. Difficulty of access to clean water is often a serious problem and a major cause of various illnesses, like diarrhoea, which may be fatal in infants and toddlers. More often than not, impoverished families cannot afford health care. Poverty breeds malnutrition, which stunts growth and depresses the immune system, leaving the child more vulnerable to illness. When five-month-old Barakissa Ouattara arrived at a local Red Cross nutritional centre in northern Côte d'Ivoire, she weighed just one kilogram.

The director of the centre remembers: “Her mother was herself very thin and could not feed her properly.” The meagre harvests no longer produced surpluses that could be sold, her work in the fields exhausted her and she had three other small children to feed: the mother was without the means to pull this last baby through.

For the past 30 years, Afghanistan has been enduring one conflict after another. At the Mirwais hospital in Kandahar, Dr Alan Karibbean, a paediatrician working for the ICRC, says, “The situation has exacerbated the severity of the children’s illnesses. By far the most important factor is the nutrition factor, which increases morbidity and mortality in children. Thus, even common illnesses are much more severe because they are malnourished.”

Newborn babies, as well as pregnant mothers, are particularly at risk when health structures are out of reach or when they are without basic materials, like cotton or a clean razor blade with which to cut the umbilical cord. Pregnancy and childbirth are major causes of death in developing countries under normal circumstances; the situation worsens dramatically during periods of conflict.

AMINA'S STORY

Amina is ten years old. She remembers a day when she was playing with friends in the small town in north-west Pakistan where she lived: "All of a sudden, the bomb came. I still do not know where it came from." Shrapnel struck her legs. At the local clinic, her wounds became infected. Her father took her to the ICRC surgical hospital for weapon-wounded in Peshawar. After two operations to remove the shrapnel, Amina is getting better, and slowly learning to walk again. When asked what she wants to do when she grows up, she grins shyly: "A school teacher." Almost half the war-wounded civilians treated by the ICRC in Peshawar are either women or children.

A DOCTOR REMEMBERS

Said Abu Hasna, a Qatari Red Crescent doctor on an ICRC mission, treated the injured at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, during the Israeli military incursion of 2009: "I had never been in a situation like this. At times, I could not hold back my tears. I particularly remember Bissan, an eight-year-old girl. She was brought to the intensive care unit. She had lost her brother and other members of her family. She had extensive injuries and her situation held little hope. It was only three days later that she recovered consciousness. When she opened her eyes, she flashed a big smile. Her courage simply blew me away."



WHAT THE LAW SAYS

When civilians are deprived of that which is essential to their survival – adequate food, water, and medical treatment – IHL provides that relief action must be undertaken. Each party to the armed conflict must allow and facilitate such operations, if they are humanitarian, impartial and conducted without any adverse distinction.

Under IHL, the wounded and the sick must be respected, protected, treated humanely, and given the necessary medical care and attention; the law also requires protection and respect for medical and humanitarian relief personnel.

Through the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States Parties have also recognized the right of those under the age of 18 to "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health." The Convention also requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to "ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care" and to combat disease and malnutrition (Article 24).

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

- Mother-and-child care is a top priority for the ICRC. Support for local health structures is directed first to improving mother-and-child services at the first level of care and to emergency surgical, gynaeco-obstetric and paediatric care. The ICRC trains local nurses, doctors and other medical staff. It can provide equipment, medical supplies and medicines.
- The ICRC organizes regular distributions of baby parcels containing hygiene and other items suitable for infant care.
- The ICRC helps to train female medical personnel, particularly in those societies where it is taboo for women and girls to be in the company of men – including medical personnel – who are not relatives. If necessary, it may pay for women and their dependents to be transported to clinics with female staff.
- As a rule, the ICRC supports the local structures of its privileged partners, the National Societies. It may also contribute to the support provided to other medical centres. In emergencies, the ICRC may itself tend to the injured or wounded (e.g. by performing operations) or provide basic health care for the population.
- The ICRC provides support for immunization programmes.
- Access to clean water and sanitation is critical for good health. ICRC engineers provide water distribution structures like water bladders, repair existing water systems and build toilets in collective centres.
- The ICRC may provide support for therapeutic feeding centres to help malnourished children; it may also provide support for the mothers of these children. Given the risks related to the use of powdered milk in aid operations, the ICRC, in line with the WHO's policy of promoting breast-feeding, has since 1984 restricted the use of powdered milk to the treatment of malnutrition

MENTAL HEALTH

Diya was three-and-a-half years old when he was kidnapped with his father in Iraq. To break the father down, the kidnappers tortured Diya; his father had to listen to his son's screams from an adjacent room. Diya still has the scars on his skull. He eats poorly, has nightmares, is hyperactive and wets his bed. He lives in constant fear of "thieves" and at night, he can fall asleep only if he is allowed to hold his father's leg.¹



Children experience or witness terrible events during conflicts: the little girl who watched her mother being raped; the children who saw their father beaten and then taken away, never to return; those who fled their homes when the bombs began to fall; the 14-year-old who had to climb over the lifeless bodies of her father and brothers to get out of the ruins of her house. They develop fears that never leave them and lose confidence in the ability of adults to protect them. Mothers from the Philippines to Lebanon tell similar stories: "When there is a thunderstorm, my children scream because they believe the bombing has started again." Zukhra was an eight-month-old baby in Chechnya when her mother, who was holding her, was killed during a shootout. Zukhra lay on the street for several hours, bullets flying around her, before someone came to her aid. She is seven years old now but is yet to say a word; clinical examinations have revealed nothing wrong with her.

Children who have been forced to commit atrocities while bearing arms are very likely to be scarred psychologically. So are ten-year-olds who are forced to become their families' breadwinners. Psychological distress expresses itself in various forms: physically (stomach pains, headaches), as behavioral difficulties (withdrawal, aggression towards people or objects), as learning disabilities, bed-wetting, difficulty in speaking, and in many other ways as well.

Childhood and adolescence are critical stages in a person's psychological development, and traumatic events during these periods can have lasting consequences. But children are remarkably resilient and recover from traumatic experiences in the most unexpected ways. "Indeed, children have natural but variable capacities to adapt to the changes in their environment. This will depend on several factors, amongst them their age, their personal aptitude, as well as the characteristics of their social and emotional environment. The resilience to an event or traumatic situation may vary from one child to another and the support should be adapted accordingly," says Laurence De Barros-Duchene, an ICRC mental health coordinator.

Trauma cases do sometimes require mental-health care, but only very seldom. In conflict-affected countries, humanitarian agencies prefer a community-based approach to one that concentrates on individuals. This consists of creating the most favourable conditions for victims to recover by themselves. Most often, it is necessary only to restore a sense of normalcy: through care and nurturing, by meeting basic needs, restoring normal routines and structures, and providing recreational activities (staging plays, role-playing exercises, games, sports, drawing, etc.). In certain societies, traditional rituals can help, particularly for reintegrating children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

1. This little Iraqi boy and his family are refugees in Lebanon; he is being treated through a UNHCR project.

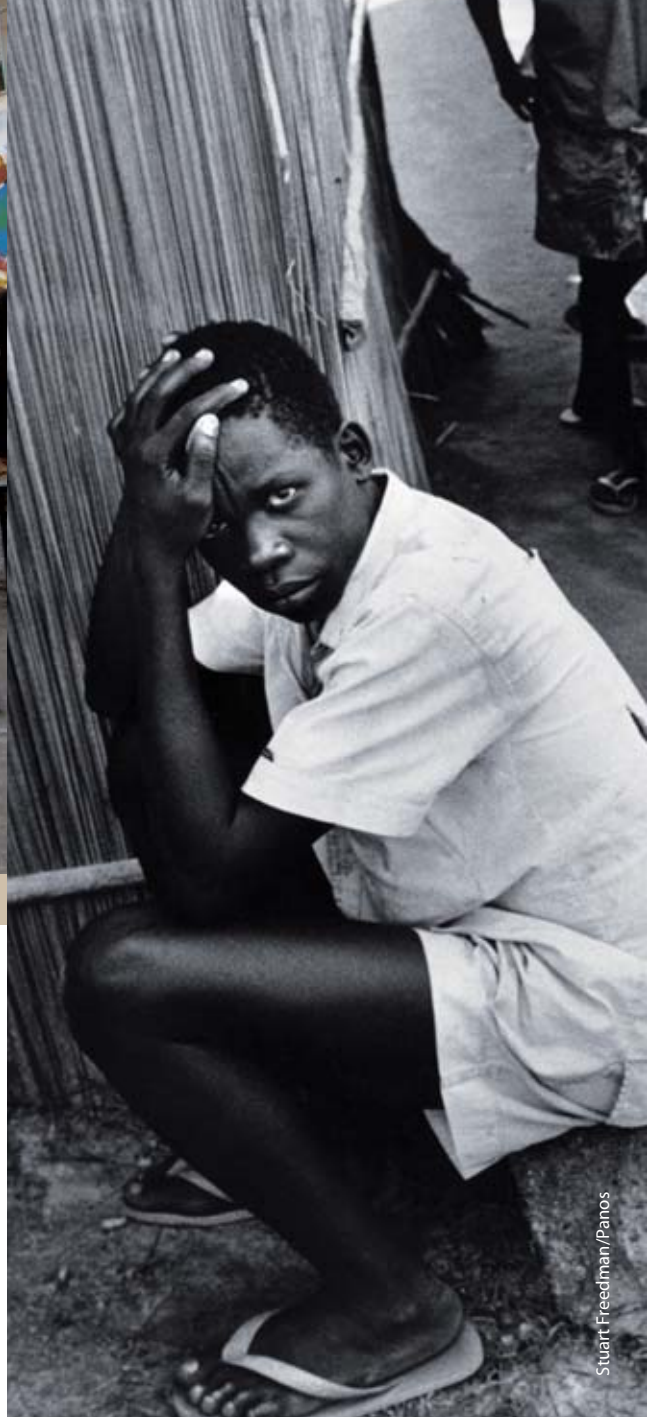


Thierry Gassmann/ICRC

In some cases, the psychological suffering may be so intense as to require more targeted attention. This may be the case with families of missing persons, who live in a state of constant uncertainty, unable to mourn for their loved ones whose fate remains unknown. Children in these situations are highly sensitive to the emotions within the family circle – even when they are misguidedly “spared” the truth – and may even develop a sense of guilt. The ICRC tends to the needs of certain families – whose members are missing – by providing psychological care, among other things.

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

- The ICRC contributes to projects run by National Societies to provide psychosocial support for children who are victims of armed conflict. For example, the ICRC cooperated with the Algerian Red Crescent when it launched a programme to provide psychological care for thousands of young victims of violence. Currently, the ICRC is providing support for the Chechen branch of the Russian Red Cross Society in a project to build playrooms for children.
- The ICRC provides support for families of missing persons in dealing with the consequences of a loved one’s disappearance. This includes, in addition to material help, psychological support and care.



Stuart Freedman/Panos

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or *armed conflicts*. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters *the health, self-respect and dignity of the child*” (emphases added). The Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict includes a similar provision for children who have been unlawfully recruited or used in hostilities.

INVISIBLE KILLERS

An unevenness in the ground, a ribbon hanging from an olive tree or lying in a paddy field: often invisible, always innocuous-seeming, landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) are killers; and the great majority of their victims are civilians.



In southern Lebanon, a few days before his twelfth birthday, Muhammad was riding pillion on his father's motorcycle when they hit something on the road: "I fell off the motorbike into a hole, and I remember something blew up." His father was only slightly injured, but the blast set Muhammad's body on fire. When he woke up in hospital, he had lost both his legs.

These weapons can kill or maim decades after the end of conflict. Bounma's father was not born when bomber planes dropped cluster bombs over Laos in the 1960s. But 40 years later, the toddler Bounma was killed instantly when a bomblet exploded in his parents' back yard. His six-year-old sister's legs were peppered with shrapnel and his oldest brother took the blast in the face.

Most of those who are killed and injured are men working in fields or engaged in other livelihood activities, simply because, in order to survive, people have to go on farming, collecting water and firewood, grazing livestock or collecting scrap metal in contaminated areas. However, children are also frequently victims of these weapons. Boys in rural communities are particularly at risk because of the tasks they are often assigned: farming and herding, for instance. In addition, children often put themselves at risk out of ignorance or curiosity or because of peer pressure.

Children make up almost a third of the casualties of mines and ERW throughout the world: the figure for Afghanistan is almost 50%. If only civilian victims are considered, children account for 46% of all the casualties in the world. ERW are a threat in more than 70 countries.

Children can also be indirect victims. The sudden loss of a father or other breadwinner, through disablement or death, can often mean the end of access to education and health services, as well as malnourishment, particularly consequential for young children.

Young survivors are often severely disabled, and this can affect their prospects permanently. In some societies, the risks for girls are destitution and the end of all hopes of marriage. This may reduce them to begging or other degrading activities such as prostitution, or make them vulnerable to ill-treatment. The consequences can be equally severe for boys, who are expected to become breadwinners and take care of their families.

However, a young victim who receives proper medical and orthopaedic care can lead a normal life with dignity and follow almost any profession. This requires financial resources, since a child will need a new set of prostheses every year, for the full period



Marko Kokic/ICRC



Sebastiao Salgado/ICRC

of his or her physical growth, and regular follow-up in an orthopaedic centre (at least twice a year). The prospects for disabled children depend also on having the same educational opportunities as their peers. Unfortunately, many of them are deprived of such opportunities, because schools are not adapted to their needs (because they are wheelchair-inaccessible, for instance) or simply because they are kept at home.

Tesfahun Hailu, a 20-year-old Ethiopian, lost his leg and part of his arm when he was 13 years old: "I was playing with a strange object I had found, trying to open it, but it exploded." The strange object was a

landmine. His mother had died when he was five, so, he says, "I was doing odd jobs like shining shoes. After the accident I wondered how I could continue to work." The ICRC Special Fund for the Disabled fitted him with an artificial leg, which enabled Tesfahun to return to school and even give his schoolmates dancing lessons. "A lot of disabled people sit at home and feel useless because society doesn't give them a chance. But if they are given a chance, they can really lead full and active lives," he says. "I want to go to university and become a doctor. In my village, there is only one doctor for 6,000 people. We need more of them."

BANNING MINES AND CLUSTER MUNITIONS

The international community has taken significant measures to ban mines and cluster munitions. The Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines (Mine Ban Convention) was adopted in 1997. By signing the Convention, States Parties committed themselves to ending the use of anti-personnel mines, assisting victims, removing the threat of mines already in the ground and reducing the interim risk to civilians through preventive actions. The Convention on Cluster Munitions was signed by 94 States in December 2008. It prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions.

RITA'S STORY

Rita Pariyaar was herding cattle near an army barracks when she touched off a mine with her right foot. The ten-year-old Nepalese remembers: “[It felt] like my foot stepped on a cauldron of hot water, and the next moment there was blood all over. It took me a while to digest the fact that I had nothing left below my ankle.” She was taken to an ICRC-supported orthopaedic centre in Pokhara, in western Nepal, where she was provided with an artificial limb and given physiotherapy. After a year of care, Rita is happy to be back in school again.

WHAT THE ICRC DOES

The ICRC's activities are both preventive and remedial:

- The ICRC assists National Societies in providing safer alternatives to livelihoods in contaminated countries. Activities to this end typically involve the establishment of safe areas, including safe playgrounds for children in mine-affected areas, the provision of new sources of water in non-contaminated areas and of alternative sources of food or fuel, and micro-credit projects.
- The ICRC carries out risk-education activities such as raising awareness in emergencies, with the intention of bringing about long-term changes in behaviour and ensuring that communities have a central role in determining clearance priorities. Informal activities, like quiz competitions and puppet theatre, may be used to educate children.
- The ICRC is actively involved in the development, promotion and implementation of norms of IHL that prevent and address the human suffering caused by mines, cluster munitions and other ERW, such as the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War.
- The ICRC takes action, in conjunction with national authorities, to reduce the effects of weapon contamination and provides support for National Societies to develop their capacities.
- The ICRC assists in the provision of emergency care for the war-wounded and aids hospitals and medical structures in many mine/ERW-affected countries.
- The ICRC operates and supports physical rehabilitation facilities for weapon victims and other physically disabled people in conflict-affected countries to help them regain mobility and economic independence. It may also help in the social reintegration of the disabled and in enabling them to play a productive role in society.



A PUPPET'S GUIDE TO SAFETY

The leading role in the ICRC's mine-awareness campaign in Chechnya is played by Cheerdig, a much-loved character in Chechen stories that have been handed down through the generations. For the last few years, the Chechen Puppet Theatre Company has been using a puppet play featuring Cheerdig to teach children about the risks posed by unexploded ordnance. The play, entitled *Danger, Mines: The New Adventures of Cheerdig*, has toured camps and collective centres for the displaced in the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia; a comic book featuring Cheerdig has also been published and is now used in schools. The ICRC has produced Cheerdig posters and a cartoon film that was broadcast by the state television company. Advice given by Cheerdig has become so popular that children now take longer but safer routes to school instead of the shortcuts of the past.



Boris Heger/ICRC

PROMOTING HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

What really happened at My Lai, a Vietnamese village, in 1968? Why is it necessary to spare civilians in times of war? Why not outlaw war altogether? Should those who violate IHL be punished? And what can a bystander do when someone else's human dignity is threatened?

These are some of the questions thousands of teenagers around the world, aged 13 to 18, have already tackled in the framework of the Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) programme. EHL grew from the recognition that armed conflict and urban violence were ubiquitous and that media coverage and entertainment products glorifying violence ensured that adolescents would not be able to ignore them and that some young people knew about war at first hand.

EHL aims at developing awareness and understanding not only of the rules to be observed during conflict, but ultimately of those necessary if people are to live together. Though it focuses on the issue of protecting life and human dignity in wartime, its lessons can be extended to every corner of our lives. The curriculum helps to prepare young people to become informed adult citizens at the local, national and global levels.

Inculcating humanitarian principles among young people is part and parcel of the long-standing ICRC tradition of helping governments to promote IHL and of the Movement's efforts throughout the world in this regard.

For more information, visit www.ehl.icrc.org

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.





Claire Kablun/ICRC



ICRC