International Committee of the Red Cross

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 in international and non-international armed conflict. It also undertakes to prevent suffering by proactively strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863 on the principles of Henry Dunant and the averting of the Geneva Convention, the ICRC has also originated the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and plays a significant role in providing aid to landmine victims.

The ICRC’s main role in relation to the war wounded is not to treat them, for this responsibility is the governments involved in the conflict and hence the armed forces. The task of the ICRC is first and foremost to ensure that all involved are familiar with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and apply them, meaning they also provide care for civilian victims as well as their own and afford medical establishments and personnel the protection to which all are entitled.

Nevertheless, local medical services are often completely overwhelmed by civilian situations and the ICRC is then compelled to step in to help the war wounded. When supplying hospitals with medical equipment and medicines is not possible, the ICRC must set up its own surgical facilities to offer the wounded the care that the authorities cannot provide.

Some countries simply lack the surgical infrastructure necessary to care for the wounded; in others, access to existing hospitals is denied to certain victims for political reasons, or is simply not available because of geographical factors and inadequate means of transportation. The ICRC first attempts to solve such problems by either providing medicines, dressing materials and surgical equipment to local structures or by negotiating with the authorities to obtain access to surgical care for all the wounded, in accordance with the principles of the Geneva Conventions. When these measures are insufficient, the ICRC helps to set up first-aid posts and transportation facilities where possible, send surgical teams to work within existing structures, or open new ICRC-administered facilities for surgical care and rehabilitation. Special consideration is given to establishing safe blood transfusion services and prosthetic workshops for the manufacture of artificial limbs, which are both in high demand for landmine victims.

In the last 15 years, the ICRC has organized over a dozen of its own surgical units in conflict zones. Most of them have had to treat large numbers of landmine victims, attesting to the fact that the use of this low technology weapon is becoming more widespread, especially in internal conflicts.

Current Activities

In June 1999 the ICRC launched an appeal for 105 million Swiss francs (U.S. $69 million) to fund its activities for mine victims over the next five years. The financial appeal covers all the ICRC’s activities relating to mine victims.

Goals:

• To promote universal adherence to and full implementation of the Ottawa Treaty and amended Protocol II to the 1980 U.N. Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

• To reduce the risk of mine-related incidents through mine awareness programs currently being conducted by the ICRC in six countries.

• To provide mine victims with treatment and physical rehabilitation in 23 Limb-fitting centers that the ICRC is running in 11 countries, and to continue its support for similar centers run by ministries of health.
Landmine Survivors Network

Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) works to help mine victims and their families recover through an integrated program of peer counseling, sports, and social and economic re-integration into their communities. In countries in the developing world where landmines are prevalent, survivors lose more than a leg or arm: they often lose their place as a valued and respected member of their society. LSN works with survivors and their families to support their efforts to retrace their place and become productive members of their communities. For example, landmine survivors play a crucial role in landmine education, particularly for children within communities at risk.

Since its inception, LSN has been building a worldwide network to link landmine survivors with the resources available to help them. LSN is developing the first comprehensive database designed to track the rehabilitation needs of mine victims and the organizations that can channel urgently needed assistance to the impoverished survivors who need it most.

Today, the network is concentrating its efforts on the mine-polluted countries where most survivors live, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia and Mozambique. In each country, we are working to bring medical supplies, education and employment opportunities to thousands of survivors. LSN is on the steering committee of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), a coalition of more than 1,000 humanitarian, religious and development groups, that was a co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Jerry White

Jerry White, co-founder and director of LSN, stepped on a mine in Israel in 1984 while hiking with friends. He has 10 years experience tracking the spread of weapons of mass destruction. A graduate of Brown University, White worked at the Brookings Institution prior to becoming assistant director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control in Washington, D.C. He has testified before Congress and published numerous articles in the New York Times.


White's injury in a mine field in Israel belies the arguments of those who believe the mine problem can be solved by better signs and fences. White spent five months in a hospital in Tel Aviv, where he underwent five operations and learned to walk with a prosthesis. "I was only four years old when Syrian soldiers, retreating during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, laid Soviet-supplied mines in the Golan Heights. The soldiers double hoped the mines would min or kill Israeli troops. Instead, my mine waited silently in the ground for nearly 17 years unt il it exploded under my foot and blew off my right leg.

"I was 20 years old. I had taken time from my university studies in the United States to explore the Middle East. I wasn't a soldier and I didn't have a backpack and an Arabic and Hebrew dictionary. Two friends and I had decided to explore northern Israel on a hiking trip. We were looking for a place to camp and had no idea that we had entered a mine field. There was no fence and no sign to keep us out. The next morning, on a beautiful spring day, I stepped on a mine. I can still remember the deafening blast that blew off both my legs and 75 percent of my body. Only when my friends rolled me over did they see the extent of my wounds. The explosion had ripped off my right foot, shredded my skin and my left leg. I didn't feel any pain until I was carried up out of my calf. We screamed for help but it seemed that no one but God could hear. Either I would bleed to death, or my friends would have to carry me out of the mine field. Luckily we made it out without further loss.

"All the talk about fencing and marking mine fields is a distortion from the real challenges to stop the proliferation of land mines. I was injured in a country that takes pride in how well it has fenced and marked its mine fields. But even in a small, security-conscious state like Israel, fences break down, signs fade, fall, or are stolen and mines shift with changes in weather and soil erosion."

Ken Rutherford

Ken Rutherford, co-founder of LSN, holds masters' degrees in international affairs and economics administration and has extensive international experience, including work as a U.S. Peace Corps trainer in Mauritania, and for the U.N. High Commission for refugees in Senegal. Rutherford was a training officer in Somalia for the International Rescue Committee when he was injured by a landmine in December 1993. Rutherford underwent 11 operations including the amputation of both his legs below the knee. Since his accident, he has traveled worldwide to speak out in favor of a ban and to raise awareness of the mass suffering caused by these weapons. Rutherford currently holds a teaching fellowship at Georgetown University, where he is pursuing doctoral studies in government.

"In December 1993, I was working as a training officer for the International Rescue Committee in Somalia, where my job was to help Somalis apply for loans so they could rebuild their country. My project was funded by USAID. On December 16, I was inspecting a program site near the border with Ethiopia, my car hit a landmine. I suddenly became something rare for an American: a landmine victim. It was to change my life forever.

"After the explosion, I first remember seeing a fuel leak on the floor of my car. I remember thinking: 'Is it mine?' It was. It was my right foot, I remember that I kept trying to put it back on, but it kept falling off. Then I looked at my left foot. The top part was ripped off and I could see bones going to my toes, one of which was missing. I dragged myself out of the car and called for help on my radio. It seemed like a lifetime before help arrived. While I was waiting, I prayed to God. I was also spitting up blood, so I thought that I might have intestinal injuries that could be fatal. I asked

God that if I lived, I would like to marry Kim, my fiancé of two months, and raise a family. In the evacuation plane from Somalia to Nairobi, a Belgian doctor an d an American nurse gave me blood from their bodies to mine.

"I am here today because of the resources I had at my disposal. I had a radio to call for help and airplanes to evacuate me. Most landmine victims are not so lucky. The United Nations estimates that the average lifetime care of a landmine victim costs from $5,000 to $7,000. My medical costs have already exceeded a quarter of a million dollars."

The statistics are staggering. Roughly every 20 minutes someone is killed or maimed by a landmine. That amounts to over 26,000 men, women and children each year injured through no fault of their own. The number of victims has been portrayed in terms of shocking ratios: one in every 230 Cambodians is a landmine victim and one in every 2,000 Angolans. In Angola, for example, 90 percent of the population is considered to be at risk of mine-related death or injury by providing people in mine-affected areas with information on the precautions to be taken until the mines can be cleared.

More than 80 percent of the funds will be allocated to ICRC programs which provide surgical care, medical assistance and physical rehabilitation for mine victims within the context of the organization's overall assistance to the war wounded. The ICRC is about to open three new limb-fitting centers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. It also provides direct medical assistance to health facilities and appropriate training for nurses, doctors and surgeons treating mine victims.

In cooperation with a number of National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, the ICRC is currently running mine awareness programs in 13 countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Iraq, Kenya, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan and Uganda. Twenty-four ICRC programs in 12 other countries have now been handed over to local or international NGO control, though many continue to receive financial and technical support from the ICRC. In a number of countries, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, supported by their International Federations, care for mine-injured people through health, rehabilitation and social welfare programs.

In addition to these activities, the ICRC and national societies are conducting mine awareness programs in several countries in order to reduce the number of landmine incidents in mine-affected areas.

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Landmine Survivors Network

LSN Achievements

- Recognition by the Norwegian Nobel Committee of LSN as a recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.
- High-profile tour of Bosnia in August by White, Rutherford and Diana, Princess of Wales, attracting global attention to the landmine issue just prior to the September...