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Impact of War on Women

El impacto de la guerra en las mujeres

L'impact de la guerre sur les femmes

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IMPACT OF WAR ON WOMEN

Le CICR est une organisation humanitaire indépendante qui se donne pour objectif de protéger et d'assister les victimes de guerres et de tensions internes. Il déploie ses activités dans quatre-vingts pays. La loi humanitaire internationale accorde des mesures de protection pour les femmes égales à celles pour les hommes. Dans certains cas, les besoins spécifiques des femmes induisent des mesures de protection particulières. Cet article présente un nombre d'actions sur le terrain visant particulièrement les besoins des femmes.

The ICRC visits prisoners of war and persons detained in relation to conflict and political violence throughout the world. More men are detained than women, but because women are a minority in detention situations, they may in fact suffer worse detention conditions than men, not as a deliberate discrimination, but simply because there are not as many prisons for women as for men. Hence women may be housed in a ward of men's prison and in quarters that do not adequately meet their needs.

War and armed conflicts affect all human beings. The seriousness and magnitude of suffering leave no room for complacency. The context in which humanitarian organizations operate needs to be regularly evaluated; it is also necessary to examine whether they adequately respond to the needs of the present victims of armed conflicts, women, men and children.

International humanitarian law has accorded women, as civilians, the same general protection as men, and recognized that they must be given a special protection in accordance with their specific needs. Yet women do still suffer from violence and are even specifically targeted in situations of armed conflict because they are women.

The ICRC is an independent humanitarian organization which endeavors to bring protection and assistance to victims of armed conflict and internal tension. The ICRC is impartial: its only criteria for action are the needs of the victims. The ICRC is neutral and remains detached from all political issues related to conflict and endeavors to promote dialogue in situations of internal violence, with a view to finding solutions for matters of humanitarian concern. The ICRC, active in 80 countries and with delegations based in 56 of these countries, carries out its mandate throughout the world through its detention and protection activities, its relief and medical assistance programs, its efforts to re-establish family links, and its dissemination activities.

Here are some examples of gender-related activities that the ICRC has led in various fields :

- In Lebanon, the ICRC gave financial assistance to families of detainees in order to facilitate family visits and also assisted the families with administrative procedures. The delegation also provided material assistance to wives of detainees.
- In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ICRC provided extensive support as an organization that listens to the families of the missing, made representations to the authorities and acted as a neutral intermediary to forward the files of persons missing to the respective authorities, liaised with "missing" commissions and international organizations (like the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) for the former Yugoslavia), and is endeavoring to support families through the various associations set up within the country (recently co-ordinated by a delegate with expertise in psy-

cho-social activities). In the year 2000, the ICRC published the first "Book of Belongings", containing photos of clothing and personal effects that were found on unidentified dead bodies. Families have recognized items belonging to over 80 missing persons so far, allowing formal identification to begin.

- In Congo-Brazzaville, the ICRC in its dissemination sessions to the armed forces, promotes awareness and implementation of the law of armed conflicts (IHL), including protective measures for women.
- In Algeria since June 1999 the ICRC has been supporting psychological rehabilitation programs for women and children who have been victims of violence (including women who have been victims of rape), which are run by the Algerian National Society in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Labour. This support is given through funding and provision of equipment and material for the programs, and through the services of a child psychiatrist who provides expertise in matters of staff training and care for the victims. The ICRC will also give a contribution to the equipment of 5 new workshops for women in zones affected by violence, for a total cost of 200,000 CHF, and will continue to provide other material support to the different workshops already set up and to the centers taking care of children.
The intended beneficiaries of this program are around 4,400 children, 600 women and 240 professionals working in the medical and paramedical sectors.
- In Peru, during the year 2000, several women who had been raped have been assisted by the ICRC, through consultation with ICRC medical doctors, and referral to a gynecologist for medical check-up and a psychologist for counseling. The ICRC paid for the medical expenses.
- In Sierra Leone, a vegetable seeds-assistance program is targeted to women's associations whose members are underprivileged

women such as widows and female heads of households. The program was designed to enhance skills, food security and income-generating opportunities for women affected by armed conflict. So far, 11'720 women have received extensive training and cash-crop seeds and tools.

- The ICRC in Afghanistan has developed some small scale agricultural programs for women in their homes, e.g. kitchen gardens, in order to provide some assistance and a potential source of income. The Kitchen Garden Program provides vegetable seeds, fertilizers and tools to families headed by widows and disabled persons in an attempt to decrease dependency on food aid, reduce living costs, create an income and strengthen coping mechanisms.
- In Sri Lanka, the Russian Federation and Rwanda, the ICRC has provided sewing machines and material to develop existing or new clothes workshops as a means of generating income for vulnerable groups, particularly targeting widows or female headed households.
- In Mexico (Chiapas) the ICRC is organizing training courses for traditional midwives in an attempt to ensure that all women, especially in indigenous communities displaced by armed conflict, receive adequate prenatal care.

Furthermore the ICRC has just completed a study initiated in order to better identify ICRC activities carried out in favor of women during armed conflict and to provide a better basis for an analysis of women's situation and of ways to improve the response to women's needs. The study focuses on :

- Identifying women's needs, including access to basic goods and services, such as food, shelter and primary health care as well as, to a certain extent, the strategic needs of women.

- Drawing up a realistic picture of ICRC's activities with regard to women, and evaluate whether these activities adequately respond to the identified needs.
- Examining of the International Humanitarian Law, in order to assess its coverage of women's needs
- The establishment of guidelines from the findings of the study in order to improve the protection of women and promote their role in society.

For up-dated information about the ICRC's activities with regard to its work and in particular about the women and war project please consult the ICRC web page: [www. icrc. org](http://www.icrc.org)