

The Review does not normally report on the ICRC's operational activities in various regions of the world. Situations are constantly changing and news — including press reports — rapidly becomes outdated. Nevertheless, from time to time the Review would like to publish an ICRC press release or other text dealing with an operational matter which is of more than immediate interest or can serve as an example.

Now back in Liberia, ICRC calls for fundamental reappraisal

(22 April 1996)

Two delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) arrived in Monrovia from Freetown on Sunday 21 April aboard a helicopter loaded with emergency supplies. The main task of the two delegates, who spent the night outside the city centre, is to support volunteers from the Liberia National Red Cross Society in their work to identify the most pressing needs of the country's people.

This mission has begun eight days after the ICRC delegation's premises, in the Mamba Point neighbourhood, were looted and the delegates were consequently withdrawn. In the present situation there are no plans to base an ICRC team in Monrovia. Working with the ICRC's local Liberian employees and using those vehicles that it has proved possible to recover, the Red Cross will endeavour to take the injured to the city's hospitals and to collect the dozens of bodies that are strewn around the streets, presenting a serious health hazard.

The ICRC feels that the present needs can be met only through a large-scale operation, but that no such operation can be carried out unless steps are taken to ensure the safety both of the victims and of those coming to their aid. The humanitarian agencies' supplies, equipment and vehicles have been regularly and systematically stolen and used to increase the means at the disposal of the warring factions.

In view of the fact that the civilian population has been spared no suffering or humiliation over the past six years — and in particular since the present fighting started on 6 April — the ICRC feels that a thorough reappraisal is needed. It therefore calls on the community of States to take into account the particular nature of this type of conflict in its urgent search for ways to restore order and stability.

ICRC
Press Release No. 96/15
22 April 1996

The ICRC's Delegate General for Africa gave the Review his initial thoughts on the issue raised in the press release reproduced above.

Liberia: humanitarian logistics in question

Since 6 April 1996, there have been new and dramatic developments in the conflict in Liberia, and there are again grounds for fearing the worst with regard to the survival of the civilian population. The ICRC once more deplores and condemns the serious and systematic violations of the elementary rules of international humanitarian law and of the minimum principles of humanity that have been committed since the start of the conflict in December 1989.

For six and a half years the civilian population, the wounded, persons placed *hors de combat* and prisoners have been regularly subjected to killings, torture, mutilation, hostage-taking, forced labour, looting, destruction of property and forced displacements. Children have been enlisted to fight and even dead bodies have been desecrated. Tens of thousands of people have been killed or wounded, more than half of the country's inhabitants have been driven from their homes, traditional mechanisms of cohabitation among different groups have been swept away, moral boundaries and all reference to the principles and values that underlie and unite any human community have disappeared. The efforts made by the international community to put an end to the tragedy have not succeeded in checking this inexorable degradation.