UNIT 16  HOW DOES THE ICRC OPERATE?

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16.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in the ICRC’s mission statement, the organisation combines four approaches in its overall strategy after analysing a situation in order to, directly or indirectly, in the short, medium or long term, ensure respect for the lives, dignity, and physical and mental well-being of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence.¹

16.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

• explain how the ICRC operates;
• discuss the role of the ICRC in protecting civil and detainees during war; and
• describe the preventive action of the ICRC.

¹ The ICRC Its Mission And Its Work, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, Switzerland.
16.3 ACTIVITIES OF THE ICRC

The ICRC's work developed along two lines. The first of these is operational, i.e. helping victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The second involves developing and promoting international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. These two lines are inextricably linked because the first operates within the framework provided by the second, and the second draws on the experience of the first and facilitates the ICRC's response to the needs identified. This dual nature thus reinforces the very identity of the ICRC and distinguishes it from other international humanitarian organisations, private or intergovernmental, which generally concentrate on just one of these two priorities.

On the basis of the above mentioned facts the activities of ICRC can be divided on three heads.

1) Protection in war
2) Assistance of conflict victims
3) Preventive Action

Whereas the first two falls under the operational lines and the latter one falls under the second, the second involves developing and promoting international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.

Self Assessment Question

1) Discuss the various activities of ICRC.

2) What are the main objectives of ICRC in war situations?

16.4 PROTECTION IN WAR

In its activities to protect people in situations of armed conflict or violence, the ICRC's mission is to obtain full respect for the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law. It seeks to:

- minimize the dangers to which these people are exposed;
- prevent and put a stop to the abuses to which they are subjected;
- draw attention to their rights and make their voices heard;
- bring them assistance.

The ICRC does this by remaining close to the victims of conflict and violence and by maintaining a confidential dialogue with both State and non-State actors.

Assisting victims of anti-personnel mines is a good example. While treating them, the ICRC receives information that helps it map out the incidents, target representations to the groups responsible, set up awareness-raising programmes to prevent accidents among the local population, adapting the message to the commonest kinds of victims (children, women and shepherds), provide in certain circumstances mine-clearance organisations with information, organise rehabilitation for people with artificial limbs, and perhaps provide them with professional training and loans to start a business. Knowledge and experience of this kind also proved to be useful in the process leading to the adoption of a new treaty prohibiting the use of anti-personnel mines.
The first formal step taken by the ICRC when a conflict breaks out is to remind the authorities of their responsibilities and obligations towards the civilian population, prisoners, and wounded and sick combatants, giving priority to respect for their physical integrity and dignity. After carrying out independent surveys, the ICRC puts forward recommendations to the authorities for tangible measures – preventive and corrective – to improve the situation of the affected population.

At the same time, the ICRC takes action of its own accord to respond to the most urgent needs, notably by:

- providing food and other basic necessities;
- evacuating and/or transferring people at risk;
- restoring and preserving contact between dispersed family members and tracing missing persons.

Where places of detention are concerned, the ICRC also undertakes programmes with a longer-term, structural perspective, providing technical and material assistance to the detaining authorities.

Protection in war can be further divided into three they are:

1) Protection of Civilians
2) Protection of detainees
3) Restoring family links

**16.4.1 Protection of Civilians**

Civilians often endure horrific ordeals in today's conflicts, sometimes as direct targets. Massacres, hostage-taking, sexual violence, harassment, expulsion, forced transfer and looting, and the deliberate denial of access to water, food and health care, are some of the practices which spread terror and suffering among civilians. Humanitarian law is founded on the principle of the immunity of the civilian population. People who are not, or no longer, taking part in the hostilities may under no circumstances be attacked: they must be spared and protected. In international armed conflicts, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and Additional Protocol I of 1977 contain specific provisions that protect civilians and civilian property.

In non-international armed conflicts, the civilian population has the right to protection by virtue of Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions. Protection is the mainstay of ICRC activities, at the heart of its mandate and of international humanitarian law. The ICRC maintains a constant presence in areas where civilians are particularly at risk. Its delegates keep up a regular dialogue with all weapon bearers, whether they are members of the armed forces, rebel groups, police forces, paramilitary forces or other groups taking part in the fighting.

**Displaced by conflict**

Armed conflict often results in large-scale displacements of civilians, both across international borders and within the frontiers of affected countries. In most cases, these people have had to leave behind all but a few of their worldly possessions. They are obliged to travel long distances, often on foot, to seek safe refuge away from the fighting. Families are dispersed, children lose contact with their parents, and elderly relatives too weak to undertake such an arduous journey are left behind to fend for themselves. Refugees and internally displaced people lose their
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means of generating their own income. They are therefore dependent, at least in the first instance, on the goodwill of their hosts and on humanitarian agencies for their survival.

When people are displaced within their country’s borders as a result of an armed conflict, they form part of the affected civilian population. As such, they are protected by humanitarian law and benefit from ICRC protection and assistance programmes.

Indeed, given the extremely precarious situation in which many internally displaced people find themselves, they form a large percentage of the beneficiaries of ICRC activities. Where the national authorities are unable to do so, the ICRC steps in to provide for the most urgent needs of displaced people. In doing so, however, it keeps in mind that the resources of host communities may have been stretched to the limit to accommodate the new arrivals, thereby rendering them vulnerable too, and that those who are left behind may also face extreme hardship and danger. It is with reference to this, the bigger picture, that the ICRC determines the beneficiaries of its assistance programmes. Vulnerability, rather than belonging to a particular category, is the deciding factor.

People who have fled across international borders are considered refugees and benefit from protection and assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In such cases, the ICRC acts only at a subsidiary level, particularly where refugees are protected by humanitarian law or when its presence is required as a specifically neutral and independent intermediary (during attacks on refugee camps, for example). It also provides Red Cross message services to enable refugees to re-establish contact with family members from whom they have become separated as a result of an armed conflict.

The ICRC believes that it is often violations of humanitarian law that cause displacement in the first place. In addition to its operational work on behalf of refugees and displaced people, therefore, the ICRC strives to disseminate and to promote respect for humanitarian law so as to prevent displacements.

Women and war

The ICRC assists women victims of conflict as part of its broader mandate to protect and assist all victims of conflict. However, since women do have specific protection, health and assistance needs, the ICRC focuses attention on ensuring that these needs are adequately and appropriately addressed in all its activities. In particular, it puts emphasis on the protection which must be accorded to women and girls, and to spread awareness among weapon bearers that sexual violence in all its forms is prohibited by humanitarian law and should be vigorously prevented. Women and girls predominantly experience armed conflict as civilians and as such are often exposed to acts of violence, including:

- death and injury from indiscriminate military attacks and the prevalence of mines;
- lack of the basic means of survival and health care;
- limitations on their means to support themselves and their families.

Disappearances, hostage-taking, torture, imprisonment, forced recruitment into the armed forces, displacement – these all happen to women and girls, as well as men and boys.
More specific – but not exclusive – to women and girls is the crime of sexual violence. Since wars began, rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as a means of warfare, to humiliate and subjugate the enemy. Violations such as rape, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery and enforced impregnation or enforced termination of pregnancy are heinous attacks against the life and the physical and psychological integrity of the person, and are recognised as such under humanitarian law.

Although women are frequently portrayed solely as victims, this does not reflect reality. Women throughout the world are showing not only that they can be extremely resilient, but also that they can put their ingenuity and coping skills to full use in their daily roles as heads of household, breadwinners and care providers within their families and communities. Such capacities are helping to sustain and rebuild communities torn apart by conflict.

Women also take an active part in war, in direct combat as part of a military force, and may support their menfolk who are fighting. As combatants captured by the enemy, women are afforded protection equal to that of men under humanitarian law. The law recognises women’s need for special protection according to their specific needs. Women fighters, like their male counterparts, must also be instructed in the law of war, so that they can act in accordance with the rules.

Children and war

Although the ICRC acts impartially to assist all the victims of war and internal violence according to their needs, it cannot be denied that the needs of children are radically different from those of women, men and the elderly. All too often children are helpless, first-hand witnesses of atrocities committed against their parents or other family members. They are killed, mutilated, recruited to fight, imprisoned or otherwise separated from their families. Cut off from the environment familiar to them, even those who manage to escape lack any certainty as to their future and that of their loved ones. They are often forced to flee, abandoned to their own devices and rejected without an identity.

The ICRC registers children who have been separated from their parents as a result of armed conflict and searches for their next-of-kin in order to restore contact; the children are reunited with their families wherever possible. If the children are too young or traumatised to give details about their identity, the ICRC takes a photograph, which is then circulated widely or displayed in public in the hope that their relatives will recognise them.

The ICRC gives children, along with other civilians, food aid and other material assistance, both in emergencies and over the long term. It also improves their access to safe water and medical care.

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols give prominence to the protection of children, both by means of provisions protecting the civilian population as a whole and provisions that focus specifically on children. The ICRC has been involved in the negotiation of other treaties that provide similar protection, especially the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and its 2000 Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8 of which considers it a war crime to recruit children under the age of 15 years or to use them to participate actively in hostilities.
16.4.2 Protection of Detainees

In international armed conflicts, the Geneva Conventions recognise the right of ICRC delegates to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees. Preventing them from carrying out their mission would amount to a violation of humanitarian law.

In non-international armed conflicts and situations of internal violence, Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and the Statutes of the Movement authorize the ICRC to offer its services to visit detainees, and many governments accept its proposal to do so.

Deprived of freedom: severe vulnerability

Being deprived of their freedom puts people in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the detaining authority and within the prison environment. This vulnerability is particularly acute in times of armed conflict and internal violence, when the excessive and illegal use of force is commonplace and structural deficiencies are exacerbated.

The ICRC works to:

- prevent or put an end to disappearances and summary executions, torture and ill-treatment;
- restore contact between detainees and their families;
- improve conditions of detention when necessary and in accordance with the applicable law.

It does so by carrying out visits to places of detention. On the basis of its findings, it makes confidential approaches to the authorities and, if necessary, provides material or medical assistance to the detainees. During visits, ICRC delegates conduct private interviews with each detainee. They note down the detainees’ details, so that their cases can be followed right up to the time of their release; the detainees describe any problems of a humanitarian nature they may face. While refraining from taking a position as to the reasons for their arrest or capture, the ICRC tries to ensure that detainees benefit from the judicial guarantees to which they are entitled under humanitarian law.

Conditions for ICRC visits

Before beginning visits to places of detention, the ICRC first submits to the authorities a set of standard conditions.

Delegates must be allowed to:

- see all detainees falling within the ICRC’s mandate and have access to all places where they are held;
- interview detainees of their choice without witnesses;
- draw up, during the visits, lists of detainees within the ICRC’s mandate or receive from the authorities such lists which the delegates may verify and, if necessary, complete;
- repeat visits to detainees of their choice as frequently as they may feel necessary;
- restore contact between detainees and family members;
- provide urgent material and medical assistance as required.
16.4.3 Restoring Family Links

The ICRC’s Central Tracing Agency works to restore contact between dispersed family members in all situations of armed conflict or internal violence. Each year, hundreds of thousands of new cases of people being sought by their relatives are opened, whether they concern displaced people, refugees, detainees or missing persons. Those who are located are given the opportunity to send and receive Red Cross messages and/or are put in contact with their families thanks to the worldwide network supported by the ICRC and comprising 186 National Societies.

Link to the outside

In international armed conflicts, the ICRC’s Central Tracing Agency fulfils the task assigned to it under humanitarian law of gathering, processing and passing on information on protected persons, notably prisoners of war and civilian internees.

For detainees and their families, receiving news of their loved ones is always of huge importance. In a wide range of contexts, the ICRC has given prisoners of war, civilian internees, security detainees and sometimes even ordinary detainees the opportunity to communicate with their relatives.

Dispersed families

Preservation of the family unit is a universal right guaranteed by law. The ICRC does everything possible to reunite people separated by conflict, by establishing their whereabouts and putting them back in touch with their families. Special attention is given to particularly vulnerable groups, such as children separated from their parents or elderly people.

Sometimes, a travel document provided by the ICRC is the only means for a destitute person without identity papers to join his or her family settled in a third country or to return to his or her country of origin. The growing number of refugees and asylum seekers has meant that the ICRC is called upon more and more often to issue travel documents for people who have received authorization to settle in a host country.
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**Missing persons: the right to know**

Even after the guns have fallen silent, the families of missing persons continue to be haunted by the unknown fate of their loved ones. Are they still alive? Are they injured or imprisoned? Humanitarian law obliges all parties to a conflict to provide answers to these questions and recognises the right of the families to know what happened. The ICRC assists in this process by collecting information on missing persons or by putting mechanisms in place together with the authorities with the aim of clarifying the fate or whereabouts of persons unaccounted for and informing their families.

At the end of 2001, the ICRC launched a project on “The Missing” which aimed to heighten awareness – among governments, the military and international and national organisations – of the tragedy of people unaccounted for as a result of armed conflict or internal violence, and of the anguish suffered by their families. A process of consultation, drawing on the knowledge of experts from all corners of the globe, culminated in an international conference on missing persons and their families, convened by the ICRC in Geneva, Switzerland, in February 2003. The conference brought together 350 participants from 86 countries, and its recommendations form a strong basis for future work. The ultimate goals are to ensure that the authorities and leaders responsible for solving the problem of missing persons are held accountable, to enhance assistance to families and to prevent further disappearances.

The ICRC is strongly committed to its project on “The Missing”. Operational guidelines are currently being implemented on the ground by all the ICRC delegations concerned.

**Self Assessment Question**

4) How does ICRC restore family links?

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**16.5 ASSISTANCE OF CONFLICT VICTIMS**

Modern-day humanitarian emergencies are characterised by outbreaks of extreme violence frequently directed against civilians. These often coincide with or are the indirect cause of other crises such as famines, epidemics and economic upheaval. The combined effects may put the civilian population in extreme peril, their coping mechanisms stretched to the limit, and in dire need of assistance.

The primary aim of ICRC assistance is, therefore, to protect conflict victims’ lives and health, to ease their plight and to ensure that the consequences of conflict – disease, injury, hunger or exposure to the elements – do not jeopardize their future. While emergency assistance saves lives and mitigates the worst effects of conflict, the ICRC tries always to keep sight of then ultimate aim of restoring people’s ability to provide for themselves.
Assistance may take a variety of forms, depending on the region and the nature of the crisis. It may include the provision of food and/or medicine, but usually builds on the capacity to deliver essential services, such as the construction or repair of water-supply systems or medical facilities and the training of primary-health-care staff, surgeons and prosthetic/orthotic technicians.

In certain conflicts, unlawful tactics may be used by either side, such as blockades on food and other essential goods, obstruction of water supplies, and deliberate destruction of crops and infrastructure. In such cases, before providing assistance, the ICRC attempts to prevent or bring an end to violations by drawing the parties’ attention to their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

Before beginning any assistance programme, the ICRC makes a careful assessment of what each group needs in the context of its own environment, so that the aid is appropriate. In addition, the ICRC makes sure that supplies are distributed in compliance with the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality.

In its constant quest to improve the quality of its action, the ICRC monitors each programme throughout, adapts it as the situation evolves and, when it is over, evaluates the lessons learned and ways to do better next time. The ICRC’s evaluation policy applies to every sphere of its activity, not just relief operations, so that it can provide the best response possible to the multifaceted needs of conflict victims.

### 16.5.1 Economic Security

Economic security means that a household is self-sufficient and can meet its own basic economic needs. In a conflict or crisis, in which displacement, theft, looting and the destruction of property and infrastructure are commonplace, households may no longer be able to provide for themselves, thereby becoming dependent on outside aid.

In its approach to assistance in the context of an armed conflict, the ICRC focuses on the dynamics of household economics and is concerned with both the means of production to cover all the basic economic needs of a household and the provision of resources to meet those needs. Although some needs are more important than others – food and water, for instance, are vital – there is too often a tendency to forget, in crisis situations, that human beings need more than just food to live on. The ICRC therefore takes into account all of a household’s basic economic needs, such as housing, clothing, cooking utensils and fuel.

Depending on the degree of loss of economic security, the ICRC provides one of three types of assistance:

**Economic support:** to protect victims’ vital means of production, so that they can maintain their productive capacity and economic self-sufficiency at the household level as far as possible;

**Survival relief:** to protect the lives of conflict victims by providing them with the economic goods essential to their survival when they can no longer obtain these by their own means;

**Economic rehabilitation:** to support conflict victims in restoring their means of production and, where possible, regaining their self-sufficiency.
16.5.2 Water and Habitat

The ICRC’s water and habitat programmes aim to:

− ensure that victims of armed conflict have water for drinking and domestic use;
− to protect the population from environmental hazards caused by the collapse of water and habitat systems.

Even in peacetime, millions of people throughout the world have difficulty gaining access to clean drinking water, proper housing and decent sanitation. The problem is further compounded in wartime, when destruction of infrastructure and mass displacement can expose millions more to death and disease. In the heat of battle, water sources may be deliberately targeted; people may have to leave their homes and seek water in hostile environments; or the infrastructure that provided water may be damaged by the fighting.

A dramatic increase in waterborne and water-related diseases, such as diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid and cholera, are the immediate signs of the breakdown of these life-sustaining systems. Further down the road, water shortages reduce food production, aggravate poverty and disease, spur large migrations and undermine a State’s moral authority. As water and shelter are so essential to survival, ensuring access to them is a priority for humanitarian organisations.

In order to provide access to water, improve hygiene levels and protect the environment, the ICRC carries out a range of activities:

− rehabilitation of water-treatment plants, distribution networks or gravity water systems linked to pumping stations;
− construction of wells, harnessing and protection of water sources and drainage systems, construction of waterstorage containers;
− purification and distribution of drinking water;
− construction and rehabilitation of latrines and sewage-treatment systems: collection and treatment of waste, including hospital waste;
− renovation and reconstruction of health facilities and schools;
− work on infrastructure in places of detention to provide inmates with at least the minimum water requirements and ensure decent sanitation and living conditions;
− setting up and organisation of camps for displaced people;
− introduction of vector-control programmes, protection of foodstuffs, decontamination of living spaces, reduction of energy consumption, use of alternative energy.

16.5.3 Health Services

The aim of ICRC health programmes is to ensure that the victims of conflict have access to essential preventive and curative health care of a universally accepted standard.
As a direct effect of conflict, people can be killed, injured or displaced, medical structures destroyed and supply lines disrupted. At the height of a conflict, the number of people who are wounded, fall prey to infectious disease or are affected by malnutrition can reach epidemic proportions and quickly outstrip the capacities of existing local health services. Meanwhile, as an indirect consequence of conflict, the destruction of health facilities, shortages of qualified staff and lack of medical supplies can mean that the more common health problems go unattended and basic health services such as antenatal care, vaccination programmes and elective surgery fall by the wayside. Therefore, while rapid assistance is needed to attend to the most urgent needs, support for the existing health system is essential to ensure that normal health services are restored or maintained.

The Full Spectrum of Health Care

ICRC health-related activities range from reconstruction or rehabilitation of buildings to management support, training of medical staff, epidemiological surveillance, revitalisation of immunisation services, supply of essential medicines and medical equipment, and the loan of expatriate surgical/medical teams. To counter the disruption of primary-health-care services caused by conflict, the ICRC provides direct assistance to existing health centres and district hospitals, as far as possible with the active participation of the communities concerned. In cases in which hunger or even famine have taken root, intensive feeding centres supervised by medical staff are set up for children suffering from malnutrition. Undernourished children, besides facing death from starvation, are extremely vulnerable to disease and infection.

War Surgery

The ICRC’s long experience in treating war casualties has given it considerable expertise in this field. ICRC surgeons train expatriate medical staff who have volunteered to work for the organisation and are new to the specific skills and techniques required in the field. They also teach local doctors these skills to enable them to take over and continue to treat the wounded once the ICRC teams have left. At international level, courses and workshops are organised each year, such as the H.E.L.P. courses (Health Emergencies in Large Populations), which enable the ICRC to share its knowledge and experience. ICRC doctors publish manuals on war surgery and contribute to professional periodicals.

In an unsafe environment, gaining access to the wounded and transporting them to hospital can present considerable difficulties. The ICRC, in partnership with the local National Society, develops programmes for pre-hospital first aid and the evacuation and transportation of injured patients.

The ICRC also builds National Societies’ capacities to respond to emergency situations by, for instance, running first-aid courses for volunteers, which cover organisation as well as life-saving techniques. The ICRC may provide National Societies with communications equipment and ambulances to assist them in preparing for emergencies.

Health in Prisons

ICRC medical staff accompany delegates on their visits to places of detention in order to assess the inmates’ health and detect any consequences of ill-treatment, whether physical or psychological. The doctors and nurses who conduct these visits are well versed in the specific problems of prison health, such as hygiene,
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epidemiology, nutritional needs and vitamin deficiencies. They identify priority public health problems in prisons that need to be controlled. When the risk of a health problem in prison is so great that the response capacity of the penitentiary health service is overwhelmed, the ICRC implements vector-control programmes to address such problems as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and vitamin deficiencies.

Addressing the health problems of prison inmates also requires the training and knowledge necessary to make proper medical assessments as to whether detainees have been the victims of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

To Walk and Work Again

During armed conflict, many people become disabled either from direct causes such as anti-personnel mines or ERW or from indirect causes linked to the collapse of health systems. Injuries inflicted by anti-personnel mines or ERW can lead to amputation, severe disability and psychological trauma. Such war casualties require specialist surgery and post-operative care in the first instance and rehabilitation and psychological support in the longer term. In many cases, the authorities do not have the means to provide such care.

In 1979, the ICRC established a service for the physical rehabilitation of war victims. Since then, it has implemented and/or assisted more than 85 projects in 36 countries. Hundreds of thousands of people have received prostheses, orthoses, crutches or wheelchairs, accompanied by physiotherapy, helping them to regain some measure of mobility and, in many cases, economic independence. By providing financial, educational and technical assistance, the ICRC aims to improve the accessibility of rehabilitation services, to enhance the quality of such services and to ensure their long-term functioning, since people with conflict-related disabilities will need to have their appliances replaced and repaired for the rest of their lives.

Not all governments have the means to sustain these services, as rehabilitation is still not considered a priority. The lack of guaranteed long-term support by local organisations has led to the creation of the ICRC Special Fund for the Disabled. It ensures the continuity of programmes after the ICRC’s withdrawal from a country and supports physical rehabilitation centres in developing countries.

Self Assessment Questions

5) How does the ICRC assist conflict victims?

6) How is economic security extended to the conflict victims?
16.6 PREVENTIVE ACTION

Making the rules known

The ICRC’s preventive work is designed to contain the harmful effects of conflict and keep them to a minimum. The very spirit of international humanitarian law is to use force with restraint and in proportion to the objectives. The ICRC therefore seeks to promote the whole range of humanitarian principles so as to prevent – or at the very least to limit – the worst excesses of war.

Prevention through communication

In its prevention programmes, the ICRC targets in particular those people and groups who determine the fate of victims of armed conflict or who can obstruct or facilitate ICRC action. These groups include armed forces, police, security forces and other weapon bearers, decision-makers and opinion-leaders at local and international levels and, with an eye to the future, teenagers, students and their teachers.

The strategy behind these activities comprises three levels:

- awareness-building;
- promotion of humanitarian law through teaching and training;
- integration of humanitarian law into official legal, educational and operational curricula.

The ultimate aim is to influence people’s attitudes and behaviour so as to improve the protection of civilians and other victims in times of armed conflict, facilitate access to the victims and improve security for humanitarian action.

Respect and ensure respect

States have a legal obligation to ensure that their armed forces are fully versed in the law of armed conflict and universal humanitarian principles at all levels in the chain of command and that they apply them in all situations. The ICRC promotes the systematic integration of humanitarian law and principles into military doctrine, education and training and assists States in this process.
Since the forces of law and order are often called upon to intervene in situations of internal disturbances and violence, the ICRC works to ensure that police and security forces receive systematic training in human rights and universal humanitarian principles.

In many of today’s armed conflicts – which are mostly non-international – weapon bearers who may have little or no training are directly involved in the fighting. Recent examples around the world have shown how the proliferation of armed groups has led to appalling abuses of the civilian population and jeopardized the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The ICRC endeavours to establish relations and build contacts with all the protagonists in a conflict. In this way, it can make the activities and working methods of the ICRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent better known and thus make it easier to reach the victims and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers.

Making a difference

Humanitarian action has become the domain of many organisations, groups and individuals. As more entities respond to ever-pressing needs for humanitarian assistance around the world, dialogue is necessary to prevent duplication and complication of efforts on the ground.

The ICRC therefore strives to make decision-makers and opinion-leaders, such as parliamentarians, members of NGOs and specialised agencies, aware of its activities in order to gain their support in ensuring the implementation of international humanitarian law. To this end, it engages in humanitarian diplomacy, which includes creating and maintaining a network of contacts with a variety of humanitarian actors and coordinating activities with other actors in the field.

Securing the future

To reach tomorrow’s decision-makers and opinion-leaders, the ICRC targets leading universities to encourage the inclusion of humanitarian law in courses offered in particular by the faculties of law, political science and journalism. As with the military, the ICRC’s approach is to work with the authorities concerned, train trainers, produce resource materials and maintain a network of contacts within the academic world.

In an attempt to reach all segments of society and to include humanitarian law as part of basic education, the ICRC helps ministries of education, National Societies and other educational bodies to introduce humanitarian law and related topics into secondary-school programmes. The ICRC has developed an education programme for young people aged between 13 and 18 years to help them embrace humanitarian principles in their daily lives and to apply the principles when assessing events at home and abroad. The programme, entitled “Exploring Humanitarian Law”, consists of a resource pack, with 30 hours of learning activities, translated into 25 languages. Since its launch in 2001, the programme has been adopted or is being considered for adoption in secondary-school curricula by the authorities of about 90 countries.

Safer steps

The lethal pollution from mines and ERW is a legacy of conflict that continues to kill and maim civilians, block access to basic necessities and hinder reconciliation, often for decades after the last shot has been fired.
In affected countries, the ICRC’s preventive mine-action programmes seek to reduce the suffering of people living in mine/ERW-contaminated areas. Its programmes are flexible and designed to meet the requirements of each situation. They may include providing safe access to water and firewood or to safe play areas for children. It is also important to raise awareness of the problem in order to prevent accidents. This may involve giving information about contaminated local areas or alerting people at risk to the danger of mines and ERW and promoting safe behaviour.

Social research on war

To develop new prevention strategies, in 1999 the ICRC launched a programme of research in collaboration with academic institutions. The aim of the programme was to gauge the views of civilians and combatants on the many facets of war and build greater respect for the rules that regulate war. By promoting the results of this research – see “Roots of behaviour in war” on the ICRC website – the ICRC seeks to build local and international momentum and expertise regarding preventive strategies, and strengthen research into international humanitarian law by major research and academic establishments, international and non-governmental organisations and prevention specialists.

Self Assessment Question

9) How does the ICRC aim to prevent/limit the excesses of war?

16.7 COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

Why cooperation?

The purpose of ICRC cooperation activities is to enhance the capacity of National Societies to fulfil their own responsibilities as Red Cross or Red Crescent institutions in providing humanitarian services in their own countries. In particular, the ICRC assists and supports National Societies in their activities to:

- provide assistance to victims of armed conflict and internal strife (preparedness and response);
- promote international humanitarian law and spread knowledge of the Fundamental Principles, ideals and activities of the Movement;
- restore contact between dispersed family members as part of the worldwide Red Cross and Red Crescent tracing network.

Mutual support

In countries affected by conflict, the National Societies and the ICRC work together to mitigate human suffering by mounting joint assistance operations for
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By providing technical expertise and material and financial assistance to National Societies to help them develop their skills, structures and working relationships so that they may carry out their tasks and responsibilities effectively and efficiently;

- advising and supporting National Societies on compliance with the conditions for recognition as a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, on the adoption and revision of their statutes and on other legal matters, especially for the implementation or compliance with humanitarian law;

- promoting the exchange of operational information and coordination of activities among the Movement’s components so as to make the best use of available resources and contribute to mutually supportive action for the victims of armed conflicts and internal strife, and the beneficiaries of assistance, in accordance with the Seville Agreement Cooperation activities are carried out in close consultation and coordination with the International Federation, which has the lead role in assisting National Societies in their overall development endeavours.

**Self Assessment Question**

10) Discuss the activities of the ICRC in cooperation with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
16.8 SUMMARY

- In this Unit, we discussed the various roles played by the ICRC in reducing the excesses of war and in protecting the conflict victims.

16.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1) The ICRC plays a pivotal role in protecting detainees and restoring family links-discuss.

2) What are the various facets of the assistance and preventive action taken by the ICRC to protect the conflict victims?

16.10 ANSWERS AND HINTS

Self Assessment Questions

1) Refer to Section 16.3
2) Refer to Sub-section 16.4.2
3) Refer to Sub-section 16.4.2
4) Refer to Section 16.4.3
5) Refer to Section 16.5
6) Refer to Sub-section 16.5.1
7) Refer to Sub-section 16.5.2
8) Refer to Section 16.5.3
9) Refer to Sub-section 16.6
10) Refer to Section 16.7

Terminal Questions

1) The ICRC plays a very important role in protecting the detainees and reducing the excesses of war by putting an end to disappearances, restoring contact between detainees, improving conditions of detainees and carrying out visits to places of detention under certain conditions.

It also aims to restore family links by tracing missing ones and re-uniting them with their families.

2) The ICRC extend its assistance to the victims in the following ways:

a) By providing economic security,
b) By endorsing water and habitat programmes,
c) By extending health services.

The ICRC furthers its prevention programme through communication which is directed towards:

a) Awareness building,
b) Promotion of humanitarian law,
c) Integration of humanitarian law into educational and operational curricula.
16.11 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


6) Leslie C. Green, “The Contemporary Law of Armed Conflict.”