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 armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

Risk education

During conflicts and immediately post-conflict, the ICRC provides information to the civilian population about known and suspected danger areas and how they can best keep themselves and their loved ones safe. The grassroots networks of National Societies can play a key role in raising awareness of danger areas and promoting lowers behaviour both in the short term and as long as the problem exists.

Information gathering

Information concerning the location, date and time of accidents can be crucial to help minimize the possibility of future accidents, and also helps prioritize clearance activities. The ICRC collects, collates and uses this information to make programming decisions and also shares it with other agencies such as clearance and victim-assistance organizations.

Capacity building

The ICRC also helps build national capacity to respond effectively to weapon contamination. By supporting National Societies or other national bodies, such as the government body tasked with coordinating weapon contamination activities, the ICRC can help develop and support long-term solutions to weapon contamination.

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THE PROBLEM

Contamination from unexploded and abandoned weapons continues to kill and maim people, block access to basic necessities and hinder reconciliation for years or even decades after the last shot has been fired. The exact nature of the threat posed by these weapons varies depending on the nature of the conflict and the weapons used in addition to explosive remnants of war as such as grenades, mortars, cluster munitions, bombs and missiles. The problem often encompasses unstable or insecure ammunition stockpiles and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. To reflect this reality, the term ‘weapon contamination’ is used by the ICRC as an umbrella term for all operational activities aimed at reducing the resultant impact on the civilian population.

WEAPON CONTAMINATION

WEAPON CONTAMINATION may have the immediate impact of hindering the return of civilians to their homes and the delivery of aid. In the longer term it may prevent the repair and reconstruction of infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, roads, wells, markets and agricultural land in south-east Asia, for example, the problem of weapon contamination continues to have an impact on people more than 30 years after the end of the conflict.

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IN BRIEF
The ICRC’s Response

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WEAPON CONTAMINATION UNIT

The weapon contamination unit provides the ICRC with operational expertise on landmines, explosive remnants of war, stockpiles and small arms. The unit is responsible for activities to reduce the impact of weapon contamination on people. These may include field assessments on weapon use, risk education, clearance and information gathering. The unit directly implements activities in the field, advises and provides technical support to other units within the ICRC, and plays a lead role within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

During conflicts and immediately post-conflict, the unit seeks to ensure that ICRC delegations are able to assess and respond to humanitarian needs related to weapon contamination, including potential security issues and the ICRC staff in the longer term. Before conflict, the unit supports delegations and National Societies in the development of appropriate assistance and protection activities which respond to the needs of the affected population.

Risk reduction

Access to basic necessities such as water or firewood is often hindered by the presence of unexploded ordnance or mines. The ICRC can provide technical assistance and needs assessment, and remove or destroy items in contaminated areas. ICRC teams are able to clear and make safe key buildings and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water pumping stations, to allow post-conflict rehabilitation to start and essential services to be restored. If clearance is not possible, or not an immediate priority, these teams can mark off dangerous areas and warn people not to enter them.

The ICRC can therefore also plan, or work directly with delegations. Clearance teams provide technical analysis and needs assessment, and remove or destroy items in contaminated areas. ICRC teams are able to clear and make safe key buildings and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water pumping stations, to allow post-conflict rehabilitation to start and essential services to be restored. If clearance is not possible, or not an immediate priority, these teams can mark off dangerous areas and warn people not to enter them.

The ICRC – owing to its wide acceptance in the international treaties such as the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In ongoing conflicts, the ICRC makes representations and takes action to address the consequences of weapon contamination, in an attempt to reduce the impact on the civilian population.

Protection led risk reduction interventions

Prior to, during and after a conflict, the ICRC undertakes a range of activities to prevent injuries and economic damage to affected populations. This includes advising and providing technical support to other organizations. The ICRC can therefore also advise other organizations, in order to reduce the impact of weapon contamination, on how to plan, or work directly with delegations. Clearance teams provide technical analysis and needs assessment, and remove or destroy items in contaminated areas.

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A range of possible interventions

Weapon contamination often forces civilians to place themselves at risk in order to survive. The ICRC undertakes a range of activities to reduce the risk of weapon contamination on affected populations and to ensure a rapid and effective response.

Clearance

Immediately following the end of hostilities, the ICRC is often on the ground before other organizations are able to undertaken working. In such situations, unexploded or badly stored explosive remnants of war can present a serious threat both to the local population and to ICRC teams. Depending on the context, teams can deploy as part of the ICRC’s rapid deployment plan, or work directly with delegations. Clearance teams: provide technical analysis and needs assessment, and remove or destroy items in contaminated areas. ICRC teams are able to clear and make safe key buildings and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water pumping stations, to allow post-conflict rehabilitation to start and essential services to be restored. If clearance is not possible, or not an immediate priority, these teams can mark off dangerous areas and warn people not to enter them.

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The work of the ICRC in response to weapon contamination is directly related to the organization’s mandate to protect civilians from the effects of conflict. Over the last decade the ICRC has established itself as a leading actor in this field. The organization undertakes a wide range of effective interventions, including the provision of medical treatment, physical rehabilitation and economic assistance to victims of armed conflicts and to promote international humanitarian law. The ICRC is often on the ground before other organizations are able to set up operations, for example in such situations, unexploded or badly stored explosive remnants of war can present a serious threat both to the local population and to ICRC teams as they attempt to re-build their lives, or assistance with alternative ways to obtain basic necessities such as water, fuel or food if it is too dangerous to return to their usual sources. Health care and emergency medical treatment can be provided to those injured as a result of weapon contamination. The ICRC also deploys specialist teams to clear contaminated areas, either in direct support of ICRC operations or in order to protect civilians.

**WEAPON CONTAMINATION UNIT**

The weapon contamination unit provides the ICRC with operational expertise in landmine, explosive remnants of war, stockpiles and small arms. The unit is responsible for activities to reduce the impact of weapon contamination on people. These may include field assessments on weapon use, risk education, clearance and information gathering. The unit directly implements activities in the field, advises and provides technical support to other units within the ICRC, and plays a lead role within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. During conflicts and immediately post-conflict, the unit seeks to ensure that ICRC delegations are able to assess and respond to the humanitarian impact of weapon contamination, including potential security implications for the ICRC staff. The unit supports delegations and National Societies in the development of appropriate assistance or protection activities which respond to the needs of the affected population.

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**A range of possible interventions**

**Weapon contamination** often forces civilians to place themselves at risk in order to survive. The ICRC undertakes a range of activities to reduce the impact of weapon contamination on affected populations and to ensure a rapid and effective response.

**Risk reduction**

Access to basic necessities such as water or firewood is often hindered by the presence of unexploded ordnance or mines. The ICRC can provide information on safe water points or work directly with communities. Clearance teams provide technical analysis on need assessment, and remove or destroy items in contaminated areas. ICRC teams are able to clear and make safe key buildings and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water pumping stations, to allow post-conflict rehabilitation to start and essential services to be restored. If clearance is not possible, or not an immediate priority, these teams can mark off dangerous areas and warn people not to enter them.

The ICRC – owing to its wide acceptance in the field, legitimacy and independence – can access areas that are off-limits to other organizations. The ICRC can therefore also undertake clearance activities — helping to make safe areas that other organizations cannot reach.

**Protection led risk reduction interventions**

Prior to, during and after a conflict, the ICRC renders assistance under international humanitarian law. Prior to a conflict, the ICRC can provide targeted risk reduction interventions to minimize the impact of weapon contamination. In ongoing conflicts, the ICRC makes representations and appeals to the conflict parties to cease weapon contamination in an attempt to reduce the impact on the civilian population. As a result of weapon contamination, the ICRC builds safe play areas in areas that children can have fun in a secure environment.

The ICRC provides micro-grants to reduce forced risk taking. Economic need drives people in farm areas that are suspected to be contaminated, to use unsafe or unexploited areas for crop growing. Through these grants people can undertake various income-generating activities such as animal husbandry, tailoring and baking.

**THE ICRC’S RESPONSE**

The stationery of the ICRC in response to weapon contamination is identified directly from the organization’s mandate to protect civilians from the effects of conflict. The ICRC undertakes a range of effective interventions, including the provision of medical treatment, physical rehabilitation and economic assistance to victims of armed conflicts and to promote international humanitarian law.
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**Risk reduction**

Access to basic necessities such as water or firewood is often hindered by the presence of unexploded ordnance or mines. The ICRC can provide permanent solutions that protect people and the area is determined the threat removed. The ICRC supports and infrastructure such as water points, and supports school and health centres in contaminated areas. Weapon contamination can have a serious economic, social or environmental impact, and the ICRC supports the development of alternative means of earning a living, or helps affected communities develop agricultural and forestry activities in safe areas. When children have nowhere safe to play, as a result of weapon contamination, the ICRC builds safe play areas to prevent loss of life and ensure that their children can have a fun and secure environment.

**Protection**

Prior to, during and after a conflict, the ICRC reminds authorities of their obligations under international treaties such as the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In ongoing conflicts, the ICRC makes representations to parties to the conflict concerning weapon contamination, in an attempt to reduce the impact on the civilian population.
The ICRC’s Response

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