

THE HANDBOOK

The handbook is a practical tool for all individuals or groups who wish to accompany families during their search for their missing loved one. It presents various simple activities designed to address the needs of families, such as:

- supportive listening;
- providing information to the families;
- organizing support groups that enable families to exchange experiences;
- helping family members to redirect their energies (into vocational activities, for instance);
- raising public awareness of the needs of the families;
- providing referrals to existing services and/or specialists in relevant areas.

ITS STRUCTURE

The handbook is divided into five sections:

1. General information
2. Relatives of missing persons
3. Accompanying families
4. Accompanying families during the recovery and identification of human remains
5. Dealing with work-related stress

Throughout the handbook, case boxes provide illustrations in the form of stories drawn from life; example boxes use field experience to demonstrate how perceptions and actions vary with the context; information sheets either supplement the text with more details or provide summaries; and action sheets make a broad range of recommendations on such subjects as activities for support groups, raising public awareness and making referrals to specialists.



ACCOMPANYING THE FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HANDBOOK



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THE MISSING
end the silence



ICRC



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THE MISSING

The Missing include all those persons whose families are without news of them, or who have reliably been reported unaccounted for, owing to armed conflict or some other situation of violence.

The fate of the Missing is, by definition, unknown: whether they are alive or dead is unconfirmed. There are various circumstances that might lead to persons becoming unaccounted for: during a conflict, members of armed forces or armed groups may be reported missing in action, entire populations may be isolated by the fighting, and children may be separated from their families while fleeing fighting or as a result of their forced recruitment into armed forces or armed groups. There are other situations in which families may be left without information about the fate of their loved ones: when arbitrary arrests and secret detentions take place; when, because of the scale of casualties, bodies are disposed of roughly, without any form of identification; and so on.

Families whose loved ones have gone missing during armed conflict or other situations of violence, or during a time of political upheaval, have needs; and individuals and communities throughout the world are responding to them. Some of these individuals act as ‘accompaniers’: they are often ordinary people who have no specific professional expertise, but who do have an enduring commitment to helping these families. Accompaniment is challenging work and often requires action at many different levels. To assist accompaniers, the International Committee of the Red Cross has produced a handbook on the subject.

The main objective of the handbook is to bolster the work of accompaniment by providing accompaniers with:

- an overview of the specific issues concerning the families of missing persons (the Missing);
- an explanation of accompaniment, treating it as a means by which non-specialists can provide support for the families;
- practical tools and recommendations for accompaniment.

THE NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES

As they are part of a community affected by violence, the families of the Missing will have some of the same needs as everyone else in their area. However, the fact that one of their relatives is missing will often give rise to additional needs: legal, administrative, financial, psychosocial, or related to the search for their missing relative. There is another important need that the families of the Missing are likely to feel: the need for acknowledgement and formal recognition of their plight.

The handbook contains actual examples of such needs. It also contains fact sheets on grieving, on funerals and on the importance of ritual for the families of the Missing.



Kishor Kayaastha/ICRC

ACCOMPANIMENT

In this context, ‘accompaniment’ means ‘walking beside someone’ and being supportive whenever necessary. The main goal of accompaniment is to strengthen the abilities of individuals and families to deal with difficulties arising from the disappearance of their relatives and to resume a healthy social life. This can be done by making use of resources available in the community – local and national, individual and collective – and by creating a network of support.

THE ACCOMPANIER’S ROLE

Accompaniers are often teachers, religious leaders or other figures of importance within the community. No formal qualifications are required. It is far more important to be motivated and sympathetic, and willing to help the families of the Missing.

The handbook provides a detailed description of the role of the accompanier, including the qualities and experience necessary for successful accompaniment.

