

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This work reviews the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in northern Nigeria, a region plagued with insurgencies, armed conflicts, and other forms of internal disturbances. The ICRC has the key role of protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and violence and providing them with assistance. The organisation also works to promote and ensure the faithful application of international humanitarian law, as well as serve as a neutral intermediary between parties to armed conflicts. Beyond these general functions of the ICRC, there are specific activities the organisation carries out in northern Nigeria. The study used a doctrinal method of research to examine these activities, employing textbooks, internet materials, periodicals, journals, and articles. The findings of the study show that the ICRC has played an extensive role in ameliorating the impacts of internal strife and armed conflicts on affected people in northern Nigeria. It further highlights the challenges faced by the ICRC in carrying out these activities and the institution's way of overcoming them.

Keywords: Armed Conflict, ICRC, Internally Displaced Persons

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1. Introduction

For decades, insecurity, banditry, kidnappings, and bombings have plagued Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation.¹ Numerous social armed conflicts, including the Boko Haram insurgency, militancy in the Niger Delta, and pastoral conflicts, affect the nation as a result of intersecting religious, ethnic, and regional divisions.² Particularly in Northern Nigeria, unemployment, illiteracy, child marriage, maternal mortality, and terrorism have become endemic.³

The occurrence of these humanitarian crises has presented immense difficulties to the region of North-eastern Nigeria, which encompasses six states, namely Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba.⁴ The ongoing armed conflict in this particular region of Nigeria has resulted in a significant loss of lives and property, with a reported death

¹ JA Tyndall and others, 'The Relationship Between Armed Conflict and Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition Status and Services in North-eastern Nigeria: A Mixed-Methods Case Study' (2020) 14 *Conflict and health* 1

² Gillian Dunn, 'The Impact of The Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria on Childhood Wasting: A Double-Difference Study' (2018) 12(1) *Conflict and health* 1

³ James Vernini, 'The War for Nigeria' (National Geographic, November 2013) <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/northern-nigeria>> accessed 7 October 2023

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'North-East Nigeria: Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states Humanitarian Dashboard' (Relief Web, 30 May 2023) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/north-east-nigeria-borno-adamawa-and-yobe-states-humanitarian-dashboard-january-march-2023>> accessed 7 October 2023

toll exceeding 37,500.⁵ Additionally, the conflict has caused a substantial displacement of people within the country, with over 2.4 million individuals classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁶ Furthermore, the dire consequences of the conflict have left over 7 million individuals in a state of vulnerability, necessitating humanitarian aid to address their pressing needs, particularly in terms of physical security and access to food.⁷

According to Raji, the displacement of individuals in the area can be attributed to a combination of factors, namely the Boko Haram insurgency, natural disasters accounting for 0.99% of cases, and 13.33% of internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁸ The current crisis has garnered the attention of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), an institution of the largest international humanitarian network.⁹ The ICRC is dedicated to mitigating human suffering, protecting life and health, and upholding human dignity, especially during armed conflicts and other emergency situations.¹⁰ In pursuit of this mission, the ICRC has been actively engaged in providing emergency assistance and

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ S Raji and others, 'North-eastern Nigeria: Assessing the Response Capacity of National Emergency Management Agency to the Plights of Internally Displaced Persons' (2021) 7(6) *Heliyon* e07274 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07274>> accessed 7 October 2023

⁹ ICRC, 'Who We Are' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are>> accessed 7 October 2023

¹⁰ *Ibid*

support to individuals affected by armed conflict and instances of violence in northern Nigeria.¹¹

The ICRC frequently collaborates with the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) to deliver emergency assistance to individuals who have been injured or displaced and recover their livelihoods.¹² These organisations engage with pertinent stakeholders in order to safeguard and support populations affected by crises.¹³ Through the implementation of various agricultural support programmes, many people have improved their family food production.¹⁴ The organisation has also facilitated improved accessibility to clean drinking water, healthcare services encompassing surgical procedures, essential household commodities aimed at enhancing living conditions, and services enabling individuals to trace the location or fate of their beloved acquaintances.¹⁵

¹¹ ICRC, 'Nigeria' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/africa/nigeria>> accessed 7 October 2023

¹² ICRC, 'Nigeria: Highlights of Our Work in 2021' (ICRC, 22 February 2022) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-highlights-our-work-2021>> accessed 9 October 2023

¹³ ICRC, 'In Nigeria, over 50,000 households receive agricultural support' (ICRC, 25 August 2021) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-over-50000-households-receive-agricultural-support>> accessed 9 October 2023

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ ICRC, 'Facts & Figures - January - June 2022' (Relief Web, 19 Aug 2022) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/icrc-nigeria-facts-figures-january-june-2022>> accessed 9 October 2023

The significance of the ICRC in improving the conditions of individuals affected by armed conflict and internal disturbances in Northern Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This paper thus examines the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the ICRC in the northern region of Nigeria.

2. The State of Humanitarian Crisis in Northern Nigeria

The humanitarian crisis in Northern Nigeria is characterised by bombing, kidnapping, and the loss of lives and property. This crisis is fueled by poor governance and religious extremism.¹⁶ Boko Haram is at the forefront of this crisis, as the group has caused the most casualties and damage to property in Northern Nigeria.¹⁷ While the insurrection launched by Boko Haram is generally concentrated in the northeast, particularly in Borno State, it was feared that militants from the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) and the Jama'tuwal-Jihad (JAS) could take over many areas in Niger State.¹⁸ Such is the seriousness of the insurgency in the northern part of the country.

Multiple militias and vigilante organisations are fighting Boko Haram and ISWAP in Nigeria's North East.¹⁹ The

¹⁶ EE Dim, 'An Integrated Theoretical Approach to The Persistence of Boko Haram Violent Extremism in Nigeria' (2017) 12(2) *Journal of Peace Building & Development* 36

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ ICRC (n 12)

¹⁹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'Militias (and Militancy) in Nigeria's North-East Not Going Away' (United Nations University, 2020) <<https://i.unu.edu/>

Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is the largest umbrella group, claiming 31,000 members.²⁰ Other groups include *kesh-kesh* groups of the nomadic Arab Shewu communities, hunters' associations, and the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN).²¹

Despite the fact that the militias lack legal standing and guaranteed financial and other resources, the Nigerian military continues to rely on them for information gathering, defensive operations, territorial holding, and even offensive actions.²² State-level government personnel make extensive use of them, from assisting in the resettlement of internally displaced people (IDPs) to engaging in counter-narcotics operations.²³ For many small communities, militias serve as the primary agents for police, security, and a variety of governance tasks such as conflict resolution and judicial

media/cpr.unu.edu/post/3895/HybridConflictNigeriaWeb.pdf> accessed 9 October 2023

²⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'As Conflict Intensifies in Nigeria's North East, So Too Does a Reliance on Troubled Militias' (Brookings, 21 April 2020) <<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/as-conflict-intensifies-in-nigerias-north-east-so-too-does-a-reliance-on-troubled-militias/>> accessed 9 October 2023

²¹ Ibid

²² BO Ajah, CE Dinne, and KK Sabiru, 'Terrorism in Contemporary Nigerian Society: Conquest of Boko Haram, Myth or Reality' (2020) 15(2) International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences 312

²³ Ibid

proceedings.²⁴ Local communities may perceive militias as being closer to them than the official police or military.²⁵

Militias and vigilante organisations, on the other hand, pose serious dangers to the Nigerian government and local communities.²⁶ They are a source of insecurity since they face no accountability for their conduct and can commit significant human rights violations and predations with impunity.²⁷ They dispute local government officials' and traditional leaders' authority, taking a broad range of governing powers.²⁸ Militias, like the Nigerian military, have been firmly embedded in the North East's conflict economy, engaging in different sorts of criminality while ostensibly acting as local police forces.²⁹ As a result, some have become reliant on Nigeria's insecurity for their own existence, benefiting from the conflict while having little incentive to seek peace.³⁰

Aside from these militias, herders such as the well-known 'Fulani herders' exacerbate the bloodshed in Northern

²⁴ Felbab-Brown (n 20)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Felbab-Brown (n 19)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ International Crisis Group, 'Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem' (International Crisis Group, 18 May 2020) <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>> accessed 9 October 2023

³⁰ Raji (n 8)

Nigeria.³¹ These bandits operate in Nigeria's ungoverned jungles, stealing cattle, kidnapping for ransom, and pillaging villages. Since 2021, these groups have killed over 3,000 civilians, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data.³²

These organisations also engage in abductions and forced disappearances. These are strategies adopted in order to instill fear in the hearts of members of the community and ultimately control them. Most notably, militants have committed several mass kidnappings of schoolchildren.³³ For example, in February 2021, about 300 female students were abducted from a school in Zamfara State, and in July of the same year, over 100 students were kidnapped in Kaduna State.³⁴ This kidnapping or abduction of schoolgirls has led to schools being shut down. It has also made formal education in affected areas almost non-existent.

³¹ Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo, 'Enclaves of Banditry: Ungoverned Forest Spaces and Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria' (2020) 64 *African Studies Review* 1

³² Fulani Militias in Nigeria: Declining Violence Not a Sign of Lasting Peace' (ACLED, 5 October 2018) <<https://acleddata.com/2018/10/05/fulani-militias-in-nigeria-declining-violence-not-a-sign-of-lasting-peace/>> accessed 9 October 2023

³³ CE Peter and SD Osaat, 'Kidnapping in Nigeria: A Social Threat to Educational Institutions, Human Existence and Unity' (2021) 4 *British Journal of Education, Learning and Development Psychology* 46

³⁴ Aljazeera, 'Gunmen kidnap over 300 girls in Nigeria school raid: Police' (Aljazeera, 26 February 2021) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/26/nigerian-school-students-abducted-in-second-kidnapping-in-a-week>> accessed 9 October 2023

The immense destruction and loss inflicted by these militias, Boko Haram, and other armed groups has placed pressure on the government to restore infrastructure and seek foreign aid, while individual households struggle to rebuild communities.³⁵ This crisis in Northern Nigeria has destabilised the economy, health system, and infrastructure, among other things, and people have been displaced. As also mentioned earlier in this section, this humanitarian crisis has affected the educational infrastructure in the Northern part of the country. This is an ongoing challenge which is of great concern.

3. Overview of the Humanitarian Functions of the International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded in 1863. It operates globally, assisting victims of armed conflict and promoting laws that safeguard war victims.³⁶ The Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, the ICRC's Statutes, those of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent guide the organisation's activity.³⁷ The ICRC is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and employs more than 21,000 individuals in over 100 countries.³⁸

³⁵ Raji (n 8)

³⁶ ICRC, 'History' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/history>> accessed 23 October 2023

³⁷ ICRC (n 9)

³⁸ Ibid

The majority of the ICRC's funding comes from voluntary contributions from governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.³⁹ The mission of the organisation is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and violence and to provide them with assistance; to promote and work for the faithful application of international humanitarian law; and to serve as a neutral mediator between parties to armed conflicts.⁴⁰ From this mandate emanate the ICRC's humanitarian functions, which include:

(i) ICRC's and The Protection Approach

This entails ICRC's Protection of the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The ICRC works to protect the lives, security, dignity, physical and mental health of victims of armed conflict and other violent situations by ensuring that authorities and other players do what they are obligated to do and respect people's rights.⁴¹ According to the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereinafter referred to as the 'Statute of the Movement'), the ICRC has the role of ensuring the protection of and

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ ICRC, 'The ICRC's Mandate and Missions' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/mandate-and-mission>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁴¹ J Kellenberger, 'Strengthening legal protection for victims of armed conflicts: the ICRC study on the current state of international humanitarian law' (2010) 92(879) *International Review of the Red Cross* 799

assistance to military and civilian victims of armed conflicts or internal strife and their direct results.⁴²

International humanitarian law and other bodies of law such as international human rights law, which is aimed at protecting people in distress, can also be upheld with this approach.⁴³ Instead of only dealing with the after-effects of violations, the ICRC also ‘addresses the causes or circumstances of violations, addressing those responsible and those who can influence them’.⁴⁴

(ii) ICRC and the Assistance Approach

The objective of the ICRC for assisting victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence is to preserve life or restore the dignity of individuals or communities harmed by armed conflict or other violent situations.⁴⁵ The assistance activities of the ICRC principally address the consequences of violations of international humanitarian law and other relevant bodies of law.⁴⁶ They may also address the causes and circumstances of these infractions

⁴² Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 1995, article 5(d)

⁴³ Hans-Peter Gasser, ‘International Humanitarian Law and the Protection of War Victims’ (ICRC, 30 November 1998) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/57jm93.htm>> accessed 19 September 2023

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ ICRC, ‘ICRC assistance policy’ (2004) ICRC, No. 855, 677

⁴⁶ Ibid

by minimising risk exposure.⁴⁷ As determined by the social and cultural environment, assistance addresses the unmet basic requirements of individuals and/or communities.⁴⁸ The responses primarily address health, water, sanitation, shelter, and economic security by providing goods and services, bolstering existing facilities and services, and encouraging authorities and others to undertake their responsibilities.⁴⁹

(iii) **ICRC and the Cooperation Approach**

The ICRC is also involved in the direction and coordination of the Movement's international relief efforts in armed conflict and other situations of violence. The objective of cooperation is to strengthen the operational capacities of national societies, particularly in countries affected by or vulnerable to armed conflict or other violent situations.⁵⁰ A further objective is to increase the ICRC's capacity to interact and collaborate with national societies.⁵¹ The cooperation strategy seeks to maximise the humanitarian work of Movement components by maximising the use of complementary mandates and

⁴⁷ Yves Sando, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross as Guardian of International Humanitarian Law' (31 December 1998) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/about-the-icrc-311298.htm>> accessed 19 September 2023

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Forsythe, (n 21)

⁵⁰ ICRC, 'Policy on ICRC cooperation with National Societies' (2003) No. 851, 663

⁵¹ Ibid

competencies in operational matters such as protection, assistance, and prevention.⁵² This role of the ICRC also entails drafting and implementing the policies of the movement that are enacted during its statutory meetings, as well as bolstering the capabilities of national societies in order to assist them in adhering to the fundamental principles at all times.⁵³

(iv) ICRC and the Prevention Approach

The ICRC endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting, reinforcing and developing international humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. It plays this preventive role by fostering a culture that respects the lives and dignity of those who may be adversely affected by armed conflict and other violent situations, which aids in the organisation's work.⁵⁴ This approach seeks to prevent suffering by influencing those who have direct or indirect influence over the destinies of individuals affected by these situations.⁵⁵ Specifically, the prevention approach entails communicating, developing, clarifying, and advocating the implementation of international

⁵² Marko Kocic, 'Cooperation with the National Societies' (ICRC, 29 October 2010) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/what-we-do/cooperating-national-societies/overview-cooperation-national-societies.htm>> accessed 19 September 2023

⁵³ Durand, (n 18)

⁵⁴ ICRC, 'Prevention' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/campaign/discover-icrc/7-prevention.html>> accessed 19 September 2023

⁵⁵ V Bernard, 'Time to take prevention seriously' (2014) 96(895-896) *International Review of the Red Cross* 689

humanitarian law and other applicable bodies of law, as well as promoting acceptance of the ICRC's work.⁵⁶

4. Humanitarian Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Northern Nigeria

The International Committee of the Red Cross provides assistance to individuals impacted by armed conflict and acts of violence in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the North-East region and a growing presence in the North-West.⁵⁷ The ICRC first established a permanent presence in Lagos in 1988 and relocated to Abuja in 2003.⁵⁸ The organization presently operates in the north-east, the Middle Belt and Niger Delta States, with more than 100 employees working in their offices in Abuja, Damaturu, Gombe, Jos, Maiduguri, Mubi, Kano, Port Harcourt and Yola.⁵⁹

The ICRC actively advocates for the enforcement of international humanitarian law and other regulations that safeguard individuals amidst instances of armed conflict.⁶⁰ Additionally, the organisation provides assistance and backing to the emergency-response initiatives undertaken by the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS).⁶¹ The ICRC carries

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ ICRC (n 11)

⁵⁸ I Emmanuel, 'Insurgency and humanitarian crises in Northern Nigeria: The case of Boko Haram' (2015) 9(7) *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 284

⁵⁹ ICRC (n 11)

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

out its activities in Northern Nigeria by active cooperation with the NRCS, and maintaining constant dialogue with local authorities and security forces about the principles of IHL through its staff members.⁶² The activities of the ICRC in northern Nigeria are as follows:

a) Provision of Food and Other Basic Amenities

The ICRC, in cooperation with the NRCS, assists in the distribution of food to the civilian population that has been affected by armed conflict and internal strife in Northern Nigeria. For refugees and people displaced by Boko Haram, lack of food is usually their main concern.⁶³ The ICRC thus cooperates with the NRCS to distribute food aid to civilians who are victims of the Boko Haram insurgency.⁶⁴ The ICRC and NRCS typically observe the situation in the conflict area before launching their emergency assistance.⁶⁵ In 2022, 219,912 people in Northern Nigeria were given standard food rations by the ICRC. Over the years, around 100 internally displaced persons in northeast Nigeria have received food and

⁶² ICRC, 'The ICRC in Nigeria' (ICRC, 3 October 2013) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/where-we-work/africa/nigeria/overview-nigeria.htm>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁶³ Jelena Pejic, 'The right to food in situations of armed conflict: The legal framework' (2001) 83(844) IRRIC 1097

⁶⁴ ICRC (n 12)

⁶⁵ Ibid

essential household items from the ICRC.⁶⁶ Also, the ICRC provided food rations to 57,000 people in 2023.⁶⁷

b) Treatment of Malnutrition in Children

The situation of violence in the North, which has lasted for decades, has negatively impacted the overall health situation in the region, particularly those of children.⁶⁸ Many mothers are unable to provide their children with the necessary nutrients for growth because of their own ill health or a lack of funds and food items. Hence, to aid in treating malnutrition in children, the ICRC supports the development of stabilization centres that can treat multiple malnutrition cases in children under the age of five at a time.⁶⁹ Between January and December of 2022, 8,522 Children under five years old with severe acute malnutrition in Northern Nigeria (Adamawa, Yobe and Borno States) received nutrition treatment from the ICRC.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Vanguard, 'High food prices trigger malnutrition level in North East' 1 November, 2023. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/11/high-food-prices-trigger-malnutrition-level-in-north-east-icrc/> (last accessed 2nd May, 2024)

⁶⁸ G Dunn, 'The impact of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria on childhood wasting: a double-difference study' (2018) 12 *Confl Health* 6

⁶⁹ ICRC, (n 12)

⁷⁰ Ibid

c) Access to Clean Water, Sanitation and Shelter

Water is indispensable to the survival of anybody and of course the civilian population at large.⁷¹ Damaging water resources or infrastructure has devastating impact on the civilian population both during and after armed conflicts. The armed conflict situation going on in the northern region of Nigeria has resulted in the destruction of many structural amenities.⁷² To ameliorate this issue, the ICRC helps provide access to clean water and sanitation for people affected by the conflict in Northern Nigeria.⁷³ According to the ICRC, over 530,000 affected people in North-eastern Nigeria have benefited from improved access to potable water. The ICRC has also provided permanent and temporary shelters for displaced and rescued persons in Borno, Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Cross River, Plateau, and Yobe States.⁷⁴ The ICRC further provides sanitation materials to displaced persons and refugees to use in taking care of their hygiene and provides shelters.⁷⁵

⁷¹ ICRC, 'Objects Indispensable to the Survival of the Civilian Population' <https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/objects-indispensable-survival-civilian-population> accessed 23 October 2023

⁷² ICRC, 'Nigeria: Responding to the needs of people affected by armed conflict in 2017' (ICRC, 5 May 2017) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-responding-needs-people-affected-armed-conflict-2017>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁷³ ICRC (n 11)

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

d) Provision of Assistance for the Internally Displaced and Refugees

According to the May 2023 situational report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Nigeria is a sanctuary for 93,130 refugees and asylum seekers, 6,842 of whom reside in urban regions such as Lagos, Ijebu, Abuja, Kano, and other States.⁷⁶ As for the internally displaced, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) stated that as of the end of 2023, Nigeria was home to 3.3 million IDPs.⁷⁷ Overlapping drivers and triggers, including recurring floods and protracted violence such as the Boko Haram insurgency, Herder-farmers conflicts, banditry are some of the main reasons for internal displacement in Nigeria.⁷⁸ These issues have also caused some Nigerians to flee abroad as refugees. Faced with the increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) created by the conflict with Boko Haram, the Nigerian government has been taking measures to ensure satisfactory conditions for IDPs.⁷⁹ This is made possible with the cooperation of

⁷⁶ UNHCR, 'Situation in Nigeria' <<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁷⁷ IDMC, 'Global Report on Internal Displacement' (IDMC, 2023) <https://api.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC-GRID-2024-Global-Report-on-Internal-Displacement.pdf> accessed 23 May 2024

⁷⁸ ICRC (n 12)

⁷⁹ Adeola Aderomola, *Internally Displaced Persons and the Law in Nigeria* (Taylor & Francis 2022)

ICRC, Nigerian Red Cross Society, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and other agencies.⁸⁰

e) Restoring Family Links

Families are often separated during conflict in the course of their flight from attacks. Families in the north are often caught up in this menace. Others have had relatives kidnapped or detained without knowledge of their whereabouts.⁸¹ The ICRC collaborates with the Nigeria Red Cross and other Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the region to trace missing persons by displaying photographs, announcing names, and venturing door-to-door in camps and communities.⁸² The ICRC has

⁸⁰ ICRC, 'Nigeria Assistance to IDPs' <<http://ihl-in-action.icrc.org/case-study/nigeria-assistance-idps>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁸¹ SA Adesote and IA Adegboyega, 'Boko Haram Insurgency, Refugee crises, and Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria, 2009-2017: A Preliminary Assessment of Governments' Response' (2021) 2(3) *African Journal of Terrorism & Insurgency Research (AJotIR)* 1. For Instance, 280 children were recently abducted from a school in the town of Kuriga, Kaduna State. The British Broadcasting Corporation reported that families faced immense fear and uncertainty as they grappled with the safety and well-being of their kidnapped relatives. Nigeria's kidnap crisis: Inside story of a ransom negotiator - BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68612958> accessed 21 May, 2024

⁸² Njadvara Musa, 'Red Cross moves to reunite 3,000 missing persons in N'East' *The Guardian* (Maiduguri, 1 June 2023) <<https://guardian.ng/news/red-cross-moves-to-reunite-3000-missing-persons-in-neast/>> accessed 23 October 2023

reunited hundreds of children in northeast Nigeria with their family members.⁸³

f) Provision of Health Care

For people fleeing violence and movement, they experience various kinds of health challenges and problems.⁸⁴ Women who are pregnant are forced to only have the opportunity to give birth in a place that is not conducive, namely the conflict area.⁸⁵ Sometimes they even have to leave their newborn baby to save themselves. Doctors and surgeons also have to deal with unusual health problems, for example injury from a bomb explosion.⁸⁶ The organization has several healthcare

⁸³ Just last year, Bashir, a child who had been missing for over a decade due to the long-running armed conflict in northeast Nigeria, was reunited with his family by joint efforts of ICRC and NRCS. In 2012, Bashir sought shelter in neighboring Cameroon after an attack on the town of Banki, where he had been staying with an uncle for religious schooling. His uncle tragically died in the attack. After years of uncertainty, the ICRC and Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) volunteers traced Bashir's family. In just under five months, they established a connection, and plans were made for Bashir to journey from Bama to reunite with his family in Maiduguri, Borno State. The emotional reunion took place in February 2023, bringing immense joy to Bashir's parents. Nigeria: Reuniting a family after more than a decade of separation. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-reuniting-family-after-more-decade-separation> Accessed 22 May, 2024

⁸⁴ L Daynes 'The Health Impacts of The Refugee Crisis: A Medical Charity Perspective' (2016) 16(5) Clin Med (London) 437

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ ICRC, 'War Surgery' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc-002-0973.pdf>> accessed 23 October 2023

centers across the Northern region of Nigeria, which perform various health care services for victims of armed conflict and internal disturbances.⁸⁷ For example, the ICRC supports five government primary health centers in Borno state, covering a catchment area of over half a million people. These centers provide essential medical services, including consultations, diagnosis, and treatment.⁸⁸

g) Agricultural Assistance

While the ICRC continues to provide emergency assistance, including food and household items, to support those affected by the violence, the organisation also provides agricultural support in places where people have access to land for farming to help restore livelihoods.⁸⁹ Across Nigeria, including northern states affected by the ongoing armed conflict situation, the ICRC has distributed agricultural support such as seeds to cultivate and cash grants to purchase tools to over 100,000 households.⁹⁰ These include vulnerable residents, displaced people, returnees, and refugees.⁹¹ Apart from the distribution of seeds to plant, the ICRC has supplied cash to cover other agricultural inputs as well as food rations to these

⁸⁷ ICRC (n 11)

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ ICRC, 'Nigeria: Displaced People Supported to Farm Again' (ICRC, 18 February 2022) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-displaced-people-supported-farm-again>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁹⁰ ICRC (n 13)

⁹¹ Ibid

households so their food needs are met during the planting season.⁹²

h) Encouraging Humane Treatment of Detainees

In the event of armed conflict and other situations of violence, detainees are acutely vulnerable to forced disappearance, extrajudicial killing, torture, ill treatment, inhumane material conditions of detention, and a lack of access to food, health care, and other basic services.⁹³ The ICRC aims to secure humane treatment for all detainees, regardless of the reasons for their arrest and detention.⁹⁴ The ICRC visit detainees in northern Nigeria during armed conflicts and other situations of violence because, in these troubled times, the divisions and resentment that drive conflict often carry over to places of detention, and deficiencies in prison, life may be exacerbated.⁹⁵ Hence, the organisation aims to ensure that the treatment detainees receive is in line with internationally recognised laws and standards and the principles of humanity.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Alain Aeschlimann, 'Protection of Detainees: ICRC Action Behind Bars' (2005) 87 *International Review of the Red Cross* Volume 83

⁹⁴ ICRC, 'Helping Detainees' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/visiting-detainees#:~:text=The%20ICRC%20aims%20to%20secure,between%20detainees%20and%20their%20relatives>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁹⁵ ICRC, 'What We Do for Detainees' (ICRC, 18 July 2023) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/what-we-do-detainees>> accessed 23 October 2023

⁹⁶ Ibid

Every year, the ICRC distributes regular sanitation items to more than 10,000 detainees.⁹⁷ Infection Prevention Measures are consistently implemented for the good of all.⁹⁸ In addition, several detention facilities receive essential medicines for the treatment of sick detainees as Food and Non-Food items.⁹⁹

i) Creating Awareness and Building Capacities towards the Management of the Dead

The ICRC has created and donated to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control tens of thousands of posters in English, Hausa, and Kanuri regarding Islamic burial rites for infectious disease victims.¹⁰⁰ For emergency preparedness, the NRCS headquarters occasionally receives donations of body bags and other forensic-related materials and guidelines.¹⁰¹ Further, the ICRC has collaborated with Federal authorities and other stakeholders on the drafting of a revised coroner's law for the Federal Capital Territory and the formulation of a national policy on the management of the deceased in emergency situations.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ ICRC, 'Operational Facts and Figures' <https://www.icrc.org/en/download/file/180802/jan-june_2021.pdf> accessed 23 October 2023

⁹⁸ ICRC (95)

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ ICRC (n 11)

¹⁰¹ O Finegan and others, 'International Committee of The Red Cross (ICRC): General Guidance for The Management of The Dead Related to COVID-19' (2020) 2 *Forensic Sci Int Synerg*. 129

¹⁰² ICRC (n 11)

j) Provision of Communication Outlets

The ICRC provides affected individuals with cell phones so they can make calls from their communities regarding health, water and sanitation, family separation, and shelter requirements. In 2021, the ICRC established a mechanism for receiving feedback and improving its core services.¹⁰³ Approximately 300 recipients of temporary shelters and surgical patients who were discharged from the Maiduguri State Specialist Hospital took part in satisfaction surveys. The collected data was utilized to further the organization's endeavors in supporting those affected by conflicts in northern Nigeria.¹⁰⁴

k) Promotion of Knowledge and Respect of International humanitarian law

The ICRC has worked with the Nigerian armed forces, over one hundred academics, and thousands of students from Nigerian universities to improve the country's understanding of IHL.¹⁰⁵ Thematically, these workshops for teachers and students are conducted annually in Abuja, Nigeria.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the ICRC routinely brief soldiers leaving for Peacekeeping missions to limit the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰³ ICRC (n 12)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ ICRC (n 15)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ ICRC, 'ICRC and Peacekeeping Missions' (ICRC, 29 October 2018) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/china-xiangshan-forum-icrc-and-peacekeeping-operations>> accessed 24 October 2023

ICRC's relationship with the Economic Community of West African States continues to grow.¹⁰⁸ This includes assisting the ECOWAS Standby Force with the incorporation of IHL into operational documents.¹⁰⁹

1) Support for the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS)

The ICRC assists the NRCS in its emergency response activities by enhancing its competence through the training and equipping of volunteers to offer first aid during emergencies and manage bodies.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the ICRC, in collaboration with the NRCS, offers first-aid training to individuals living in Nigeria's violence-prone north and Niger Delta States.¹¹¹

5. Challenges Faced by the ICRC in Northern Nigeria

In carrying out its humanitarian duties in the northern region of Nigeria, the ICRC faces formidable obstacles posed by Nigeria's social and cultural complexity, extensive territory,

¹⁰⁸ E Ferris and S Chareen, 'Internal displacement in West Africa: A snapshot' (2012) 18(5) Washinton, DC: The Brookings Institute. Disponible à l'adresse 5

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ ICRC, 'Nigeria: Training First Aid Teams to Strengthen Disaster Response and Management' (ICRC, 30 September 2021) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nigeria-training-first-aid-teams-strengthen-disaster-response-and-management>> accessed 23 October 2023

¹¹¹ Ibid

large population, and insecurity.¹¹² Even though the ICRC is a well-established organisation and has access to a wide range of resources to carry out its missions, it still faces difficulties, such as the need to protect its staff's safety and the challenge of interacting with those who are victims of violent situations.¹¹³ As can be inferred from the conflict situation in Northern Nigeria, the ICRC face numerous challenges. These challenges range from language and cultural barriers in communication to the possibility of attack from armed groups; coordination with other humanitarian entities; large population and magnitude of humanitarian needs; poor infrastructure; minimal access to people; misconceptions of humanitarian motives etc.¹¹⁴

6. The ICRC's Approach to Tackling Challenges in Northern Nigeria

In addressing these challenges surrounding their activities in Northern Nigeria, the ICRC considers the unique nature of humanitarian requirements in urban and rural areas.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹² ICRC, 'Nigeria: ICRC Expands Presence in Niger Delta and In North' (ICRC, 15 December 2010) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/interview/2010/nigeria-interview-2010-12-15.htm>> accessed 24 October 2023

¹¹³ Jakob Kellenberger, 'Challenges Faced by ICRC And International Humanitarian Law (IHL)' (ICRC, 19 October 2006) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/statement/kellenberger-statement-191006.htm>> accessed 24 October 2023

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ TOAA People, 'Urban Services During Protracted Armed Conflict A Call For A Better Approach To Assisting Affected People' (ICRC, 2015) <https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/topic/file_plus_list/4249_urban_s

organisation also ensures that they mobilise and empower other local actors to maximise the impact of short- and long-term strategies.¹¹⁶ Likewise, it strives to train its personnel and incorporate trained professionals into its humanitarian services.¹¹⁷ Most significantly, the ICRC utilises the movement's symbols.¹¹⁸ In this instance, the ICRC employs the Red Cross in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols of 1977, and the national law of the concerned state.¹¹⁹ Typically, the emblem is employed as a protective measure to safeguard the medical services of the armed forces and during conflict, civilian hospitals.¹²⁰

The emblem may also serve as a symbol.¹²¹ In this context, it is referred to as a logo, whose purpose is to ensure instant recognition and identification of the specific organisation, its identity, and its activities.¹²² The 1991 Emblem Regulations state that an emblem must be accompanied by the name or

ervices_during_protracted_armed_conflict.pdf> accessed 24 October 2023

¹¹⁶ ICRC, Professional Standards for Protection Work' <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0999.pdf> accessed 24 October 2023

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ ICRC, 'The Emblems' (ICRC, 28 December 2015) <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/emblems>> accessed 24 October 2023

¹¹⁹ ICRC (n 9)

¹²⁰ ICRC, 'The Protection of the Red Cross / Red Crescent Emblems' <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/protection_emblems.pdf> accessed 25 October 2023

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid

initials of a National Society when used indicatively.¹²³ As a member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC uses the emblem to safeguard its facilities during internal armed conflicts and disturbances, such as the one in northeast Nigeria. The organisation also uses its logo to ensure that its personnel and facilities are distinguishable, allowing those in need of the ICRC's assistance and protection to locate them.¹²⁴

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The provision of humanitarian services by the International Committee of the Red Cross renders the organisation indispensable for ensuring the well-being and survival of northern Nigerians, with a particular focus on the northeastern states. While the organisation has encountered an array of obstacles in carrying out its activities in northern Nigeria, the ICRC is aware that the affected population in these regions bears the burden of suffering from armed conflict and other forms of violence.

In the Northeast, individuals who have been forced to leave their homes due to violence have sought refuge in temporary camps. These displaced people often experience the unfortunate consequence of being separated from their families and losing contact with their loved ones.

¹²³ ICRC, 'Study on the Use of the Emblems' <<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/publications/icrc-001-4057.pdf>> accessed 25 October 2023

¹²⁴ Ibid

Additionally, they face the loss of their livelihoods, which further disrupts their lives. The organization, acknowledged as the custodian of global humanitarian law, persists in aiding them to fulfill their fundamental needs, including healthcare, housing, water, sanitation, and reconnecting them with their lost relatives.

To ensure more effectiveness and success in ICRC's efforts in Northern Nigeria, one of the first challenges that must be tackled is that of adequate security for humanitarian workers and volunteers. The safety of ICRC staff and volunteers is at risk due to the volatile security situation. Hence, the government through her law enforcement agencies must continue to ensure adequate security for ICRC workers and volunteers in the region and all over the country.

Also, more budgetary allocation should be earmarked to affected communities in the North for the sole purpose of providing basic infrastructure that mitigates dignity of humans. These infrastructures as identified in this paper include water, power, schools, hospitals, and so on. More counseling homes and rehabilitation centers should be provided in order to help victims of humanitarian crisis recover from trauma. Efforts to reunite families of displaced persons should be encouraged and further intensified. This can only be achieved when there is cooperation between major stakeholders such as the ICRC, NRCS, the government (particularly government of affected states) and local communities in the North.

It is further recommended that trust must be built between humanitarian workers and people in the Northern region due to the cultural and social divide. Building trust and acceptance within communities is crucial for effective humanitarian action. Understanding local customs and traditions is essential.