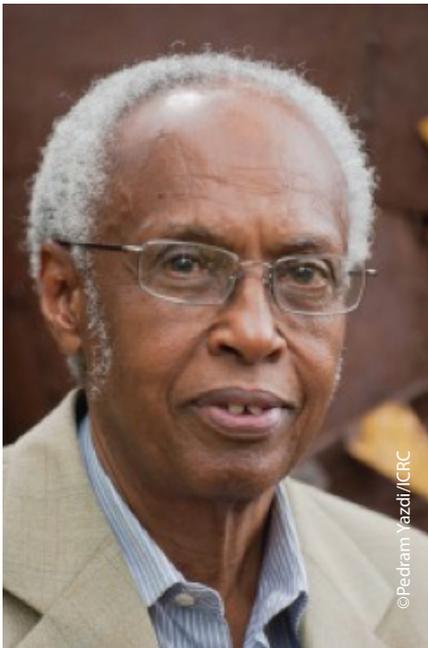


Trying to locate people and put them back into contact with their relatives is a major challenge for the ICRC, the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) and the network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and volunteers in the region and across the world.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR HUMANITY



Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, President of the Somalia Red Crescent Society (SRCS).

The ICRC has maintained its presence in Somalia since the seventies, responding to the needs of armed conflict victims. The work of the ICRC has been made possible through collaboration with the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS) whose extensive local network ensures intimate community proximity. Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, president of the SRCS since 1972, understands this relationship all too well. He spoke to Rita Nyaga on his experience working with ICRC.

Q: What is your general view of the ICRC in Somalia?

A: I first joined the Somali Red Crescent as a volunteer for some years before I was elected President of the society. At the time, I also served as the director of Medical Services Department in the Ministry of Health. During this twin assignment, I had the opportunity to observe up close, ICRC's operations in Somalia during the Ogaden war (1977 – 1978). ICRC provided humanitarian assistance to tens of thousands of victims including the displaced and prisoners of war.

The same support was given in 1991 when civil war broke out in Somalia and has been going on since.

I have gained a unique perspective on the way ICRC approaches its work in Somalia and the SRCS has continued to work with them on many different projects throughout the different phases of the conflict in the country.

Q: The SRCS receives support from many different quarters. What is special about the ICRC?

A: We believe that the ICRC is our major partner. The degree of cooperation with the ICRC spans over 30 years. We also share similar values being part of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. This shared

history is what makes the continued support from the ICRC special.

Q: Is the SRCS present in all regions of the country?

A: The SRCS has 19 branches with 150 sub branches throughout the country. For instance, in health, which is our flagship program, we have close to 90 mother and child healthcare clinics, 44 of which are located in south and central Somalia. Like other Red Cross and Red Crescent societies the world over, our main asset are the volunteers who are from the communities we are trying to assist.

Q: What challenges do you experience in situations of armed conflict and how do you cope with them?

A: The greatest challenge for us is consistency in the provision of health services to the people who need it most. We have been forced to close some of our healthcare clinics by parties in the armed conflict. They need to understand our role as a neutral and impartial humanitarian organization and we continue to remind them of this position.

Q: Being president of the SRCS for over three decades, what do you take pride in most?

A: My legacy as president of the SRCS for 40 years is keeping the Unity of the

organization throughout the different phases of the conflict in Somalia. The SRCS has endured through the dynamic nature of the environment by working with the different political leaders across the divide. This is a sensitive issue which requires us to keep adapting to the different situations in all the regions.

Q: What danger does the nature of the environment pose to the work of the SRCS?

A: Personally, I am able to travel frequently to Somalia. I have not faced any danger with regard to my life. Unfortunately, a number of SRCS volunteers have been victims of the armed conflict. Together with the ICRC, we are working on a safer access framework which aims to help increase our capacity and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts.

Q: Does the SRCS receive support from other Movement partners?

A: Yes, we receive valuable support from the International Federation of Red Cross

and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in our activities. This support combined with the help from other National Societies makes it possible to implement SRCS programs, especially in Puntland and Somaliland.

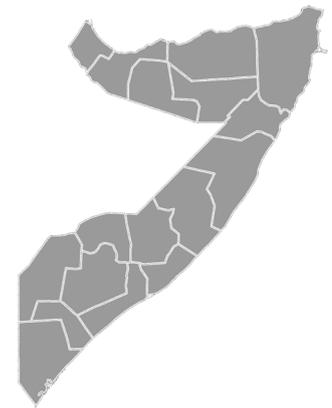
For example, the Norwegian Red Cross Society supports three physical rehabilitation centres in Mogadishu, Gaalkacyo and Hargeisa. These centres provide orthopedic healthcare.

The German Red Cross supports water and sanitation projects that help build community resilience.

Other partners include the Swedish and Finnish Red Cross who support the SRCS Mother and Child Health program in Puntland and Somaliland. The Qatar Red Crescent supports two clinics in Somaliland while the ICRC supports those in south and central Somalia.

Discussions are also ongoing with the Iranian Red Crescent, which has been helping the SRCS on an adhoc basis.

This cooperation with the Movement is crucial as it enables us to impact the community for a brighter future.



To find out more about the ICRC Somalia visit www.blogs.icrc.org/somalia

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