

ICMP'S SYRIA/MENA PROGRAM

Since March 2011, when the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) began, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have lost their lives. It remains unclear how many people are missing and disappeared from all sides of the conflict; however, estimates are in the tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, or have joined the dangerous migration across the Mediterranean. The conflict in Syria, like conflicts in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere in the MENA region, has therefore had a major impact on neighboring countries and countries throughout the Mediterranean basin.

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ICMP's Syria/MENA Program focuses on establishing the foundations for an effective process to address the issue of the missing. The program places the rights of families of the missing at the center of the effort to account for their relatives, regardless of the circumstances of the missing person, their ethnic, or religious background, or their role in the conflict. The program is being implemented among refugees and along migratory routes. A systematic and effective missing persons program has the capacity to resolve a large number of cases, enabling families to access their rights to the truth, to justice and to reparation. This is fundamental to upholding the rule of law and will play a major role in any post-conflict settlement. As such, resolving missing persons cases contributes in a significant way to creating conditions that will make it possible for refugees to return to their homes.

OBJECTIVES OF ICMP'S SYRIA/MENA PROGRAM

❖ **Build capacity among families of the missing, and others to participate in a process of accounting for missing persons**

The Syria/MENA Program seeks to build capacity in affected communities to engage proactively in and sustain a process of accounting for the missing. Empowerment of and participation by families will be enabled through training, and by developing a knowledge base about the rights of victims and survivors.

❖ **Develop a participatory process of data collection among families of the missing**

Building on its experience in the collection of data from more than 100,000 families of the missing around the world, ICMP is launching a participatory process to collect data from families of the missing from Syria. ICMP's Online Inquiry Center (OIC) and Identification Data Management System (iDMS) are available in Arabic and other relevant languages and fully accessible to families of the missing from Syria. This makes it possible to collect, analyze, protect and share data, securely and easily. The data, on individual missing persons and, where available, the circumstances of their disappearance, can then be used to locate and identify them.

❖ **Prepare the ground for a future rule-of-law-based effort to account for missing persons and create conditions that will enable people to return to their homes**

ICMP's Syria/MENA Program seeks to enhance the capacity of families of the missing, Syrian civil society groups, and legal experts to address the issue of missing persons, and to acquire technical and legal knowledge about relevant international standards, including those on data

protection. The program will also contribute to a future strategy to account for missing persons inside Syria. In addition, it seeks to help families of missing persons create a common platform regardless of sectarian or national affiliation or the role of the missing person in the conflict. These steps will contribute to the restoration of the rule of law, the credibility of transitional justice and an increase of confidence among families of the missing, contributing to an environment in which people will be able to return to their homes.

OUTCOMES

- ❖ Families of the missing, through increased knowledge and skills, are better able to engage in the process of accounting for their missing relatives.
- ❖ Civil society groups support families of the missing and the process of accounting for missing persons through improved documentation and data collection.
- ❖ The data collection process yields statistical and qualitative information on the issue of the missing, which will be an important element in any future peace and reconciliation process.
- ❖ A database on missing persons, built with the participation of families of the missing and civil society, reduces the scope for politicization of the issue of missing persons.
- ❖ A rule-of-law-based approach, including relevant institutional and legislative needs, is introduced in post-conflict Syria to account for missing persons and secure the rights of the families.
- ❖ Improved data collection on missing persons from Syrian refugees strengthens the capacity of countries, including EU states, to account for Syrians who are missing on migratory routes to Europe.

ABOUT ICMP

ICMP is an independent, treaty-based international organization with headquarters in The Hague; it is the only international organization tasked exclusively to work on the issue of missing persons. Its mandate is to secure the cooperation of governments and others in locating missing persons from conflict, human rights abuses, disasters and other causes. The activities of the Syria/MENA Program draw on ICMP's 20 years of experience in more than 40 countries, particularly in the Western Balkans and Iraq. ICMP spearheaded an effort that made it possible to identify more than 70 percent of the 40,000 people missing as a result of the conflict in former Yugoslavia. ICMP seeks to build partnerships with families of the missing, relevant civil society organizations, governments and international organizations. It has unparalleled experience in supporting impartial capacity-building and engagement by families and civil society organizations. Data collection and data analysis through the Syria/MENA Program utilizes ICMP's existing specialized data infrastructure and its high-throughput capacities to make large-scale identifications.

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