



James Nachtwey/MAGNUM

**Beyond despair.** A vicious clan war has ravaged the lives of the Somali people for the past two years. The ensuing disintegration of all forms of social order has left the entire population at the mercy of armed gangs high on drugs, while the most devastating famine to have hit the world in decades has gripped the country in a stranglehold. Even humanitarian organizations have not escaped the wrath of the belligerents: relief workers live under a constant threat of violence, some have actually lost their lives.

But the people of Somalia suffer not only in the physical sense; they have had to look on helplessly as their children died before their eyes because they could not feed them.

In response to the overwhelming needs the ICRC mounted a massive humanitarian operation together with the Somalia Red Crescent Society (SRCS), doing its best to provide as many people as possible with regular food supplies and medical care. Apart from a few small non-governmental organizations, the ICRC was practically alone in this task up to mid-1992 when the United Nations got its relief programme off the ground. In the meantime hundreds of Somalis were dying every day. ICRC doctors reckon that at least 25% of Somali children under five have perished from severe malnutrition and that in some places virtually all of them have been wiped out.

Since communications have been cut off both within the country and with the outside world, the whole of Somalia uses the ICRC's tracing service as a national and international post office. Families split up by the war can use the service to keep in touch and take comfort in the knowledge that their relatives are safe and sound.