1. National context

The Kingdom of Thailand is located in the centre of mainland south-east Asia. Under the present constitution, Thailand is governed by a constitutional monarchy with the king as head of state, with a prime minister as head of government entrusted with executive power, a house of representatives and a senate holding the legislative power and a supreme court with the judicial power. The country, by and large, has relatively good social and economic indicators. However, there is a great disparity in income levels in all the segments of society in general and especially between Bangkok and the rural areas, resulting in large population movements within the country and across its borders. Because of this, Thailand has been facing its share of humanitarian concerns. The financial crisis in south-east Asia in 1997 resulted in a significant slowdown of economic growth followed by a problem of rising unemployment and increases in poverty and related social issues. However, the country is now recovering with an annual growth rate of about 2 per cent with forecasts of growth rates of around 4 per cent for 2003.

Capital: Bangkok
Population: 62.9 million (2001)
GNP per capita: US$ 1,948 (2001)
Life expectancy: 73.5 years (2001)
Infant mortality rate: 18 per 1,000 live births (2001)
Adult literacy rate: 95 per cent (2001)

2. Foundation

Mission
The Thai Red Cross Society (TRCS), in keeping with the spirit of the Movement’s Fundamental Principles, endeavours to alleviate human suffering, promote international humanitarian law, and provide health services to the most vulnerable among children, women and the aged. The activities of the TRCS cover four areas: medical and health-care services; disaster preparedness and response, blood-transfusion services; and the promotion of the quality of life. It strives to build a dynamic organization with the cooperation of volunteers, youth and provincial chapters to enhance its services and improve its capacity to reach vulnerable people in times of need.

The activities of the Thai Red Cross are directed towards the promotion of humanitarian values, seeking innovative and dynamic approaches to keep meeting changing needs and adjust to new situations while maintaining high standards through human resources development. Such efforts were acknowledged through the granting of the ISO 9002 to the national blood centre and Queen Savang Wadhana Memorial Hospital in Sriracha, and the hospital accreditation to King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital.

The TRCS collaborates closely with the government particularly through its hospitals and other health institutions including the blood programme, but operates as a private organization. The public image of the society is associated with its work helping people affected by natural disasters and assistance to those displaced by conflicts in neighbouring countries.

Legal base
The society was established as the Red Unalom Society by royal permission in 1893, and was later renamed the Thai Red Cross Society (TRCS). Royal decrees in 1918 and 1920 formed the legal basis for the TRCS. It was recognized by the ICRC in 1920 and became a member of the International Federation in 1921.

Constituency
The TRCS is represented in all of Thailand’s 75 provinces and 193 districts. Provincial Red Cross chapters are usually chaired by the provincial governor’s wife. In a country with one of Asia’s largest cities, the society tries to extend its services to the rural as well as urban areas. The central administrative offices and main institutions such as King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital, including the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute and the national blood centre, are located in Bangkok. At the provincial level, in addition to the Red Cross chapters, there are also 12 Red Cross health stations, Queen Savang Wadhana Memorial Hospital in Sriracha, Chon Buri province and nine regional blood-testing laboratories.

3. Capacity

Leadership
The Thai Red Cross has always been closely associated with the royal family who initiated the society based on
the Red Cross concept in 1893. The society is under the patronage of the king. The queen is the president of the society. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn serves as executive vice president. A council of 20 members and 12 representatives from the provincial Red Cross chapters are appointed by the queen to oversee the operations of the society. The council members are mostly professionals from the fields of health, law, finance, diplomacy and philanthropy. The council meets at least three times a year, presided over by the executive vice president. There is an executive committee that includes the secretary general, his assistants, the treasurer and directors of the various bureaus of the society. This committee meets twice a month.

The roles of staff members and volunteers are relatively well defined. Leadership training sessions for officers and for volunteers are conducted regularly to upgrade knowledge and develop skills thus enhancing the efficiency of the services and management of the society.

Human resources
The TRCS employs approximately 7,104 staff. The majority of these are employed at the two Red Cross hospitals in Bangkok and in Chon Buri province. Health facilities are managed independently in each institution. The provincial Red Cross chapters employ their own staff.

The TRCS has approximately 372,739 members and 68,000 volunteers. The volunteer base is predominantly female (90 per cent). Volunteers are involved mainly in relief work and social services. The Red Cross youth enlists the cooperation of young people from 7,500 schools from all over Thailand.

Financial resources
The society’s total expenditure in 2001 was CHF 47.5 million. A large part of its income comes from the interest on investments and from fund-raising events such as fairs and bazaars. Over 25 per cent of the total income originates from government funding for the society’s health institutions. Approximately 70 per cent of the total expenditure is for medical services. Provincial Red Cross chapters are largely financially self-reliant.

The fund-raising bureau, established in 1921, is responsible for finding ways to augment the society’s financial resources. An annual Red Cross fair, various charity events, sale of Red Cross mementos, government lotteries and special fund-raising drives for specific projects help satisfy increasing demands to meet rising operating costs.

Material resources
The TRCS owns hospitals, health stations and other health facilities as well as buildings where administrative offices and technical activities are located.

Organization/planning
The TRCS, in the spirit of its mission, is continuously revising programmes and activities in order to meet the new humanitarian needs in Thailand, particularly in view of the changing age and social structure of the population and especially the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It endeavours to maintain a state of readiness to meet emergencies in times of crisis and natural disasters.

The administration of the Thai Red Cross includes the administration office, the relief and community health bureau, the King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital, the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute, the Queen Savang Wadhana Memorial Hospital, the College of Nursing, the national blood centre, the central bureau, the finance bureau, the personnel bureau, the Red Cross youth bureau, the Red Cross volunteers bureau and the fund-raising bureau. In addition, there are six specialized centres: the rehabilitation centre, the AIDS research centre, the eye bank, the organ donation centre, the information technology centre, the office for property management, the first-aid and health training centre and the national stem cell registry programme.

Partnerships
The society is active in regional groupings, notably amongst the ASEAN National Societies, and is one of the leading members of the Asian Regional Task Force for AIDS (ART). On a number of occasions, the TRCS has provided logistic support for international or regional conferences and workshops such as the Fifth International Conference on Home and Community Care for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (Chiang Mai, December 2001).

A good example of collaboration and assistance from other countries and other organizations is the Netherlands/Australia/Thailand cooperative HIV-research project (HIV-NAT). This project involves the Thai Red Cross AIDS research centre, the Netherlands national AIDS therapy evaluation centre, and the Australian national centre on HIV epidemiology and clinical research. Such research also involves collaboration with various universities and government hospitals throughout Thailand.

4. Performance

Activities
Relief
Relief assistance in times of disaster is carried out by the relief and community health bureau as well as the volunteers bureau. Assistance is provided to those affected at the time of disasters and later to assist them to resume a normal life. Relief assistance is also extended to people living in remote areas and to those in disadvantaged urban areas, regardless of race, religion or belief. In times of peace, readiness is insured to cope
with emergencies, whether it be in terms of personnel, materials, transportation or communications.

**Health**
With the modern 1,400-bed King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital in Bangkok and the 500-bed Queen Savang Wadhana Memorial Hospital in Sriracha, Chon Buri province, the TRCS runs a sophisticated medical programme using up-to-date technology. The King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital is a teaching hospital. Free medical services are provided to poor patients. The society also runs 12 primary health-care stations in remote parts of the country. Other medical and health-related services include a rehabilitation centre, an eye bank, an organ donation centre as well as the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute where BCG, rabies vaccines and snake serums are produced for domestic use and export.

At the Red Cross college of nursing in Bangkok, over 100 undergraduates are admitted each year and trained in a four-year degree course. Post-graduate students attend specialized nursing courses. There is also a school for training of radiology technicians.

The first-aid and health education training centre provides first-aid training to the public. Its health-educational activities focus on four main areas: home care; mother-and-child care; care for the elderly and the chronically ill; and healthy living.

In an effort to reach rural and impoverished areas, a number of mobile medical teams have been formed. They include a medical and dental team, the Princess Sirindhorn eye surgery unit, the eye glasses for children programme, the repair of harelip deformation programme and the ear, nose and throat unit. The “Union of hearts for His Majesty the King” project, which was set up to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged children living in impoverished areas, received an award of excellence from the American Red Cross in 2001.

**Blood**
The TRCS national blood centre has been entrusted by the ministry of public health with formulating and carrying out the national blood programme. Blood is collected on a voluntary non-remunerated basis with every unit of blood tested according to set standards. Blood and blood components are supplied to hospitals in the Bangkok area and the nearby provinces. Blood supplies are converted into blood components and blood products for the treatment of certain diseases. The centre also conducts research, organizes training in the areas of haematology and transfusion medicine and helps set up regional Red Cross blood centres. In 2000, there were 146 provincial branches and eight regional laboratory processing centres countrywide. On an annual basis, in the Bangkok area alone, approximately 431,007 units of blood are collected (1,115,000 units are collected countrywide).

**HIV/AIDS**
The AIDS research centre of the TRCS has been in operation for more than ten years. It has taken a leading role in Thailand and in the region with regard to prevention, counselling, treatment and research on HIV/AIDS. As a member of ART (the regional network), the society hosted the first workshop on home care for people living with AIDS in 1997. The first anonymous clinic for HIV testing and counselling was established in 1991. On average, more than 1,000 people come to the clinic each month. The centre has also been concerned with providing support for people living with AIDS. Campaigns have been organized for donations to provide AZT treatment to HIV-positive pregnant women to decrease the rate of transmission of the HIV virus to newborn children. Moreover, as part of the campaign, the centre raises funds to provide powdered formula to newborn children. Another drive is to raise funds to purchase drugs for people living with AIDS.

**Social services**
As part of its volunteer services programme, and to meet the needs of an ageing population in a society with disintegrating extended families, the society has initiated home care and care for the elderly programmes. Another programme to meet the needs of our times is the Red Cross children’s home for abandoned children and daycare centre for children of TRCS staff. The society also runs a limited programme for street children in Bangkok, recognizing the extensive needs in this area.

**Youth**
The Red Cross youth bureau, established in 1922, engages in development programmes in schools and among young people to promote a sense of social responsibility and the practice of Red Cross principles, which will give members a sound basis to become important resources for their communities. Health education, training in first aid, and understanding of various social and environmental problems and dissemination on IHL are particularly emphasized.

**Relevance/effectiveness**
Many of the TRCS activities are part of the country’s health infrastructure. Efforts are being made to meet new humanitarian concerns in a rapidly changing society. A prominent example is the HIV/AIDS programme.

5. Further information

Web site: [http://www.redcross.or.th](http://www.redcross.or.th)