

Head of ICRC, Cairo



LORRAINE MALLINDER sprach mit dem Leiter des Internationalen Komitees des Roten Kreuzes in Kairo über seinen Arbeitsalltag.

MEDIUM AUDIO PLUS

My name is Jérôme Fontana. I'm the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Cairo, Egypt.

The ICRC focuses mainly on helping victims of armed conflict. I've been working with them for the past 23 years, living with my family in 12 different countries – in Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Africa and now in the Middle East.

I must admit, I'm not a morning person. My day starts at around 7 a.m. with breakfast and a shower. I'll have something light to eat – cereal, fruit, milk. The shower is where I get my ideas. My colleagues know that everything I tell them when I arrive at the office is based on my shower!

I leave home at around 8 a.m. I'm very fortunate to be able to walk to the office. It gives me the chance to see the people in the street, to look at the shops, markets and cafes, and to feel this special energy we have in Cairo.

cereal ['sɪəriəl]
• Getreideflocken, Müsli

morning person
• Morgenmensch

“A lot of my work involves diplomacy”



Fotos: Ahmed Abdelfattah, Matyas Rehak, Darya Kiprina, Eric Valenne geostory/Shutterstock.com; CICR



On Jérôme's to-do list: learning Arabic



El Moez Street, in the walled city of historic Cairo



Backgammon: one of the oldest games in the world, and played with passion in Egypt, it is said to take a minute to learn, and a lifetime to master

INFO TO GO

The ICRC was established in 1863 with the aim of ensuring that the victims of armed conflict receive protection and assistance.

The first thing I do is read the news. Then I prioritize my e-mails. I check my agenda for meetings and organize my day. In the morning, I might have a meeting with one of the Egyptian ministries, or with people from embassies or think tanks.

In my other postings, I used to travel to dangerous areas. But here in Cairo, a lot of my work involves diplomacy. I might be discussing violence in North Sinai, where around 50,000 to 60,000 people have fled their homes. Or I might be looking at the situation in other countries in the region, such as Yemen or neighbouring Libya.

After morning meetings, I eat lunch in the office while checking e-mails or reading. My wife always packs delicious food for me – spaghetti bolognese or rice and chicken curry.

In the afternoons, I often do research. Right now, I'm looking at how climate change is making the situation worse for vulnerable countries suffering from armed conflict. I'll discuss these issues with UN agencies that have regional headquarters in Cairo, such as the UNHCR.

At around 7 p.m., I usually get a call from my wife, reminding me it's dinner time. Otherwise, I'd just continue working – because it's never-ending. My older son is studying in the UK, but my younger son and daughter are at secondary school here.

We eat our dinner around the table, which is important for us as a family. We usually have fish or meat, with vegetables and rice or pasta. At the dinner table, it's funny to hear what a 16- or 17-year-old thinks of my day. When I ask my kids if they'd like to do my job, they say: “No way!”

There's never enough time to do everything I want to do. I wish I had more time to learn Arabic, for example. But by evening, I feel exhausted mentally. I go to bed early, usually with a book – some non-fiction or a novel by a local author. It helps me fall asleep nicely.

embassy

• Botschaft

exhausted

[ɪg'zɔːstɪd]
• erschöpft

issue

['ɪʃuː]
• hier: Thematik, Problem

No way!

ifml.
• Auf keinen Fall!, Nie im Leben!

posting

• Abordnung, Posten

prioritize

[praɪ'ɒrɪtaɪz]
• Aufgabenschwerpunkte setzen

secondary school

• weiterführende Schule (ab dem elften Lebensjahr)

think tank

• Expertenkommission

UNHCR

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

• Hohes Flüchtlingskommissariat der Vereinten Nationen

vulnerable

['vʌlnərəbəl]
• gefährdet, schutzbedürftig