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INTERNATIONAL  
**REVIEW**  
OF THE RED CROSS



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International Committee of the Red Cross  
for the International Red Cross  
and Red Crescent Movement



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The *ICRC*, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

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## Editorial

*Bringing food to the hungry: what could be a simpler and more natural thing to do? As for problems — if any should arise — what could they possibly be but logistical problems of transport, distribution and supervision? In his article “Food aid: For or against?” ICRC agronomist François Grunewald shows that in reality the problems faced are vastly more complex. He provides some interesting answers to four basic questions: “Why?”, “When?”, “How” and “How can we do without it?”*

*Gilbert Holleufer reflects on a problem posed by our media-dominated society: the invasion of our everyday lives by pictures and images of all kinds. What implications does this trend have for humanitarian action and the philosophy it is based on? Should every horror in the world be filmed, and should viewers have no choice about the images they are fed? In “Images of humanitarian crises: Ethical implications”, Holleufer writes: “It is high time to revive the noble tradition of photo journalism as it was practised in the past.”*

*Throughout the long history of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement its components have sometimes publicly championed a humanitarian cause, whether by alerting the community of States or appealing to world opinion. This is particularly true for the ICRC, which is mandated to take action in situations of armed conflict. By adopting a public stance on specific issues, the institution seeks to persuade governments to modify their behaviour or make a particular decision for humanitarian reasons. The campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines is a recent example. Are such initiatives, in view of their political connotation, consistent with the Movement’s fundamental principle of neutrality, on the one hand, and with the ICRC’s practice of confidentiality on the other? These are the crucial questions raised by British Red Cross legal expert Michael A. Meyer. In seeking to answer them, he pays particular attention to relations in this respect between the Movement’s components, each of which must be able to identify itself with any action taken by the others.*

*Should you, our readers, wish to respond to Michael A. Meyer's article, your opinions are welcome and we shall devote space to them in the Review. The pages which the late Hans Haug, a prominent member of the Red Cross, wrote on the fundamental principle of neutrality in his book *Humanity for all* can serve as a starting point for what promises to be a useful and extremely interesting debate.*

## **The Review**

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### **17 December 1996: six ICRC delegates assassinated in Chechnya**

*Six delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross were shot dead in cold blood by unidentified gunmen at their quarters at the hospital in Novye Atagi, near Grozny.*

*Fernanda Calado, an ICRC nurse of Spanish nationality  
Hans Elkerbout, construction technician, Netherlands Red Cross  
Ingeborg Foss, nurse, Norwegian Red Cross  
Nancy Malloy, medical administrator, Canadian Red Cross  
Gunnhild Myklebust, nurse, Norwegian Red Cross  
Sheryl Thayer, nurse, New Zealand Red Cross*

*Their mission was to assist victims of the conflict in Chechnya.*

*Another delegate, Christophe Hensch, a Swiss national in charge of the ICRC's Novye Atagi office, has gunshot wounds.*

*The ICRC expresses its deepest sympathy to the families of the deceased, who gave their lives to help the victims of the Chechen conflict, and to the Netherlands, Norwegian, Canadian and New Zealand Red Cross Societies. The ICRC is profoundly shocked and grieved by this tragedy and vigorously condemns this attack and the violation of the Red Cross emblem.*

# Food aid: For or against?

by François Grunewald

## Introduction

**For or against food aid?** When looking at the pictures of famine and malnutrition that abound on the small screen, this question may seem at best incongruous and at worst inadmissible. And yet it should be taken at its face value — provocative and stimulating, intended not to discourage but rather to sharpen our minds, for behind this simplistic question lie some real political stakes, some genuine issues of humanitarian ethics and some fascinating methodological problems. Our task here should perhaps be to single out the “operational” angles and then to reply to the questions “**When**”, “**Why**” and “**How**” food aid should be provided, and finally to the question “**How can we do without it?**”. As the global balance between supply (food resources) and demand (the needs) breaks down, access to these resources becomes more and more difficult for an increasingly large sector of the population, while at the same time the enormous stocks of the 1980s have melted away. Food aid has therefore become a rare commodity, to be used judiciously and in the most appropriate manner.

This study consists of four parts. The first, “historical”, part will provide some keys to understanding current trends in food aid. The second, more “methodological”, part will describe some of the advances made in the use of food aid in crisis situations, with particular reference to the action taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The third part will be devoted to several questions concerning food aid in “development” situations, and, in conclusion, some recommendations of principle concerning the role and place of various purveyors of aid are offered, together with some ethical considerations.

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Original: French.

We must begin by defining what we are talking about. In emergency situations, the first objective is to save lives. Food aid covers a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from the distribution of large quantities of various commodities, to feeding programmes conducted under medical supervision, to various systems of community kitchens. From Somalia to Angola, from Sierra Leone to Cambodia, the ICRC and many other organizations have developed emergency food aid programmes through which hundreds of thousands of tonnes of food have been channelled to millions of beneficiaries over recent decades (WFP, 1995).<sup>1</sup> It will be seen below that for the ICRC at any rate this food aid in crisis periods also serves other ends: protecting what remains of societies to enable them to establish their own survival strategies, limiting or arresting the processes of destitution of families and decapitalization of agricultural production and so forth. In “development” contexts, efforts are made to use food aid as a lever for development, as a catalyst for creative dynamism and sometimes as a tool for preventing impending food crises (Longhurst, 1992). There is much talk of “Food for Work”, such as the projects for strengthening anti-flood dykes in Bangladesh or building roads in Nepal. There are a number of other concepts, such as the efforts to stabilize prices by means of food aid which proliferated in the Sahel in the 1980s, or the systems for monetizing aid through programmes involving counterpart funds, tried out by the European Union in Angola and by CARE in Somalia. Questions about the merits of various programmes (Fryer, 1981), analysis of “areas of validity” and the cost of certain types of action, reflections on methods of need assessment and impact evaluation and economic studies on the secondary effects of aid have already been the subject of many publications, the conclusions of which vary greatly according to the viewpoint selected and the aspect of food aid taken into account.

### **In search of a historical perspective**

Since the end of the Cold War, the main concern has no longer been to support one side or the other, but on the contrary to compel certain parties involved in conflict to make peace. The aim is thus to solve, or sometimes simply to contain, the crises which for one reason or another threaten the political and economic stability of certain regions. In these situations, new strategies have emerged for the use of humanitarian assistance, and in particular food aid — not to call it the food weapon (Bessis, 1985). This is only the latest episode in a long story which we must now unfold.

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<sup>1</sup>See Bibliography, p. 606.

*Rice, peanuts, junk food and slaves, or the ruin of rural economies*

During the colonial era, the introduction of triangular trade between France, Indochina and the African colonies considerably affected local agricultural systems. By disposing of traditional food products through low-price sales of Cochin-Chinese rice and establishing a coercive fiscal policy (colonial taxes on salt or based on the number of people in a family, compulsory provision of services), the colonial power was able to develop cash crops, particularly in Africa (Rau, 1991). The farmers of the Senegalese peanut belt are all too well aware of the consequences of this development: ruined ecosystems, impoverished soil, increased vulnerability of peasant economies trying to compete on the international agricultural market (Dumont, 1962 and 1975). In addition, the local trade in cereals was greatly hampered and destructured by new consumption habits, with such imported items as rice and bread assuming an increasingly important place on the housewife's shopping list, especially in urban areas. There is a long list of countries where trade and food-aid programmes have profoundly disrupted traditional consumption patterns: spaghetti in Somalia, bread in Viet Nam and Cambodia, rice in Senegal and Mali and so forth (George, 1977).

*Grain as a weapon in Cold War geopolitics*

Strategies for the political use of food aid emerged side by side with this commercial approach, one of the first well-documented examples being that of the assistance given by the West to the Soviet Union during the great famine of 1921: in their attempt to convince Soviet power of the generosity of the West and the superiority of the capitalist system, the sponsors of this food-aid programme in fact facilitated the systematic bleeding of the agricultural sector and the crushing of the peasantry (Ruffin, 1985). Emergency food aid, ostentatiously offered or refused, often conceals ulterior motives, as may be seen from many examples during the Cold War. Thus, although the aid arriving at Cambodian refugee camps on the Khmer-Thai border certainly saved many lives, it also helped to forge the unnatural alliance that led to the resurgence of the Khmer Rouge (Shawcross, 1984). Conversely, the politically motivated refusals by the international community in 1983 and 1984 to respond to the appeals launched by FAO and WFP for aid to Ethiopia, then suffering the effects of more than a year of catastrophic drought, led not only to a major disaster in humanitarian terms but also to the acceleration of forced population displacement programmes conducted under inhumane conditions. It took those BBC documentaries shown in November 1984 and again on Christmas Eve to make world public opinion aware

of the ongoing tragedy and at long last to elicit some reaction. But by then it was too late for a great many Ethiopians.

Food aid also came to be used as a structural tool of development policy. For political reasons, steps had to be taken to prevent the process of economic collapse in certain countries from culminating in "food riots", that last stage of geopolitical upheaval. The stability of "friendly" countries had to be secured, and the only real explanation for the thousands of tonnes of food aid poured into Somalia in the 1980s, despite the well-known scale of misappropriation by the administration (Samatar, 1991), was the need to ensure that the situation in Somalia, a neighbour of Mengistu's Ethiopia, did not deteriorate.

#### *Food aid as a lever in negotiations*

With the end of the Cold War and the resulting upheavals worldwide, strategies for the utilization of food aid have also changed. Food embargoes and refusals to finance nutrition programmes are increasingly used to put pressure on a party to a conflict, irrespective of the impact on the civilian population. When one realizes that the decision-makers are not the people who are going to suffer from the shortages thus created, one can well imagine that those decision-makers will allow the areas under their control to become the scene of infinite suffering before, for fear of an uprising, they yield to pressure. But at what human cost? Economic embargoes in the broad sense certainly form part of the arsenal of diplomatic pressure available to the United Nations Security Council and can also be used unilaterally by certain countries. Great care should be taken, however, not to go too far and above all to avoid subjecting vulnerable groups in the targeted countries to severe privation as the result of these political measures. In such situations, humanitarian agencies must retain every latitude to take independent and impartial action and to prevent a disaster. Current debates about Iraq, Serbia and Burundi demonstrate the complexity of these questions.

#### *Starvation used as a weapon of war: A practice that is still all too frequent*

It happens all too often that a state of famine is maintained, if not artificially created, by certain parties to a conflict. This generally has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the object is to weaken the civilian population and the enemy's troops by hunger: from the siege of Troy in ancient Greece and those of Montségur and the Cathar castles in the Middle Ages to the sieges of Sarajevo and Kabul in 1994 and 1995, this

inhuman practice has continued to be an option in the military arsenal. On the other hand, the belligerents want to ensure that food-aid programmes will be set up in order to provide supplies for their own troops. The old Cambodian proverb “you make rice with water and make war with rice” is often still pertinent, even though the practice is formally prohibited by international humanitarian law.<sup>2</sup> But humanitarian law can only have an impact if the protagonists know, accept and respect it,<sup>3</sup> and part of the strategy of combating starvation in wartime must therefore be to educate politicians, train the armed forces and inform the general public about the principles of international humanitarian law and of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. After all, these principles are the last bastion of those who are left without any say in conflict situations.

### **Food aid in crisis situations: Some comments on method**

#### *An abundance of operational angles*

In emergency situations, food aid begins by saving lives. Then it assumes a preventive role, that of attenuating the economic repercussions of the crisis and reducing the risk of phenomena which are sometimes difficult to reverse (Mourey, 1989): mass population displacements, sale of livestock or means of production, consumption of seed, etc. For these reasons, food aid is indispensable. General (untargeted) distributions may take different forms, one of the most usual being the provision of **dry rations**, bulk supplies of maize, beans and oil distributed in different ways. Many of these programmes are large-scale operations requiring impressive logistic means. Although they long served as an outlet for the surpluses of certain rich countries (this is no longer the case in view of the low level of stocks worldwide), such programmes are costly because of the extensive logistics involved — airlifts, ships, all-terrain trucks, storage depots, etc. (WFP, 1995).

The **community kitchens** widely used in such contexts as Sarajevo and Abkhazia are designed to help people who cannot prepare their own

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<sup>2</sup> Article 14 of Protocol II of 1977 states: “Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited. It is therefore prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless, for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works”.

<sup>3</sup> See Article 1 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

meals (the elderly and those without access to cooking fuel), and may also be set up in situations where keeping food in homes might physically endanger the beneficiaries. This concern to protect civilians was at the basis of the kitchen programme set up by the ICRC and the National Red Crescent Society in Somalia.

There are also some more specifically targeted forms of food-aid distribution, such as **supplementary feeding systems** (additional to general distribution) for groups with special nutritional needs, such as pregnant women, growing children and convalescents. This kind of programme is widely used in camps where refugees or displaced people have settled for long periods. Since the basic rations often barely suffice to cover daily energy requirements (the WFP and UNHCR maintenance ration is 1,900 Kcal/day) in calcium, iron, vitamins and trace elements, deficiencies can appear in the medium and long term. On the basis of its experience, the ICRC prefers the option of increasing everybody's ration to a higher energy level (2,400 Kcal) to that of supplementary feeding, which entails individual targeting that can be dangerous and can have a limited impact because of redistribution of the supplementary ration within the family unit (Curdy, 1994). For it is still the family unit that remains at the centre of food security! (Mourey, 1995).

In the most serious cases of malnutrition (kwashiorkor, acute marasmus, etc.), **therapeutic feeding systems** have to be used. In these cases, the body begins to feed on its own living resources and to "cannibalize" itself, while trying to reduce energy consumption by slowing down its metabolism. Food intake and the return to normal must take place under medical supervision, particularly since the clinical effects of malnutrition are often complicated by infectious disease. Strategies for identifying needs, means of responding to those needs, the methods used in the field and the anthropometric criteria regarded as relevant vary greatly from one aid agency to another (MSF, 1995; WHO, 1983; UNICEF, 1992), and in these areas, as in so many others, there is no lack of controversy among the experts.

A rather special means of supplying food aid is used in certain European contexts; this involves the distribution of family or individual parcels containing a variety of foods — rice and oil, but also tinned cheese or meat. This form of aid, modelled directly on the relief sent to prisoners during the Second World War and the years of reconstruction (1945-1950), has demonstrated its merits as well as its limitations in crisis situations (particularly population movements) and in more chronic emergencies, especially those related to the breakdown of social systems

(pensions, aid for the elderly) which have accompanied the conflicts and political changes in Eastern Europe (the Balkans) and the countries of the former Soviet Union (ET Consultants, 1995).

*Sacks of rice on the TV screen... but what is the effect on small farmers?*

Over the past thirty years, emergency programmes have proliferated and food aid has become a regular feature of the media landscape. Some adverse effects of this kind of aid have also emerged, such as competition with local production which hampers agricultural rehabilitation, creation of dependence on free food, and so forth. "Against the grain", the title of a well-known OXFAM publication (Jackson, 1982), and "L'arme alimentaire" ("The food weapon", Bessis, 1985) can in no way be dismissed as fanciful views. Peasant farming has been destabilized in the long term by such programmes (Jackson). Food aid often arrives late, sometimes a whole agricultural season late, when the situation has improved and this type of assistance is no longer so badly needed. It nevertheless arrives in massive quantities and at low prices on the local markets, filling up warehouses and leaving local farmers with their produce on their hands. The countries of the Sahel were all too familiar with this situation during the great drought of 1974. Owing to a similar time-lag thousands of tonnes of food aid were poured into Somalia from the second quarter of 1993 to the end of 1994, when the real emergency phase was well and truly over and the farmers of the Juba and Shabelle basins were vainly trying to sell their produce. The most successful operations are all marked by the same sequence of events: an early and convincing alarm is sounded; food stocks already exist and no political obstacles are set up, either by the donors or by the country affected by the crisis; and, finally, the food-aid agency concerned manages either to withdraw soon enough to prevent these programmes from hampering the resumption of agriculture or to assume the role of a rehabilitation agency. Only rarely are all these conditions fulfilled.

*Supervision and monitoring are vital*

It is essential that food aid be perceived as purely humanitarian. The passage of convoys must be negotiated, and not imposed by force or blackmail — whence the importance of being accepted and recognized as a neutral intermediary, impartial and independent but also impervious to the influence of the warring parties. Only under these conditions is there any chance that the food will reach all the victims. Supervision of the aid

at the different stages of its delivery and distribution, to prevent its being used for unavowed purposes, is of primary importance. In one incident, no sooner had a food-aid agency's aircraft taken off from a remote little settlement in the heart of Africa, leaving sacks piled up at the edge of the airstrip without any supervision whatsoever, than some young soldiers slipped out of the surrounding bush, shouldered the sacks and set off back to the front lines! In cases where the supervision requirements stipulated in Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are clearly not observed by humanitarian agencies, it is alas not surprising that aid is so often held up. Lastly, we should return to the concept of humanitarian agencies' responsibility first and foremost to the victims, but also to citizens all over the world who finance these programmes through their taxes and their donations.

*The proverb of the fish and the net*

Emergency food-aid programmes must give way as soon as possible to measures for rehabilitating local agricultural and economic activities and, if necessary, for providing them with support (instead of setting out to corner the local markets). The transition from the dynamics of emergency food aid to longer-term action is difficult. The necessary know-how, the type of dialogue conducted with the local population and the realities of the power games seem to be quite different — but are they really as different as all that? Faced with these problems and complexities, pure and simple withdrawal is the option often chosen by many so-called emergency humanitarian aid organizations. It is generally easier to leave than to change, and, moreover, the media attention focused on disasters and humanitarian action is such that organizations often follow the cameras, and hence the opportunities for obtaining funds. For some agencies, the need to be present in the field in order to maintain their own structures compels them to follow the fashion. They leave as quickly as they came, in the wake of the journalists, thus lengthening the list of forgotten conflicts, of corners of the earth where people slaughter each other and starve to death far away from the cameras...and from the humanitarian organizations.

And yet the phasing out of food-aid programmes should necessarily lead to their replacement by action to support agricultural production and to stimulate the economy. Such cases are still few and far between, although for over a decade emergency rehabilitation has constituted an integral part of the operational strategy at the ICRC in food crisis situations. Food aid too is a part of this strategy.

Emergency rehabilitation covers two specific areas. First of all, there is **support for local survival strategies** (Grunewald, 1993). The local population does not remain passive in an emergency, but develops mechanisms for survival and crisis management. The aim should therefore be to stimulate these mechanisms, and for this purpose a whole system of expertise has been established and a whole set of procedures devised and put into practice. The approaches of agronomists and nutritionists, combined with those of veterinarians, fishery experts and sanitary engineers, have served as a basis for integrated programmes to help the population regain a measure of self-sufficiency in food, despite the cannon's roar. Then there is the need to **smooth the passage from the emergency phase to that of post-conflict development**. This may, for example, entail providing help for the first groups of farmers who return to areas abandoned during the conflict. It also involves curtailing as far as possible the periods during which food aid is required, in order to avoid dependence, limit the extent to which aid becomes part of local survival strategies, and keep changes in nutritional practices to a minimum.

During the past four years, large-scale agricultural programmes in Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan and Liberia, and veterinary and fishery operations in Somalia and the Sudan have led to the development of such activities in most of the major African ecosystems. At present, every single ICRC assessment team leaving for an area of Africa in serious food crisis comprises an agronomist. Since 1993, this policy has been extended to Europe, from the former Yugoslavia to the remnants of the former Soviet Union (Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, Nagorny Karabakh, Tajikistan), and into Asia with Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. The activities undertaken now take in the informal urban sector, particularly local crafts, and problems of urban and periurban agriculture: Kabul, Mogadishu, Sarajevo and the like have become pilot areas for encouraging urban survival strategies.

Environmental issues must also be taken into account. On the one hand, there are those related to the availability of firewood for cooking and the impact on ecosystems, especially forests, of the thousands of meals prepared daily in reception centres for displaced people. On the other hand, mechanisms are now being developed for preserving biodiversity in the midst of conflicts, through protection and utilization of local genetic resources, taking advantage of indigenous know-how for the propagation of traditional seeds, tubers and so forth. As mentioned above, food aid is often the "fuel" for these agricultural rehabilitation programmes, as it not only slows down the process of deterioration of the food production system but also enables it to recover. Coupled with an

input of agricultural supplies (seed, tools, tubers, etc.), food distributions carried out before the planting season, or in the form of "seed protection rations" (SPR: rations issued together with seed, to prevent the seed from being eaten in times of serious food shortages), or to tide the population over until the next harvest, are often indispensable. In the area around Baidoa, the epicentre of the famine in Somalia, this strategy turned the Bay and the Bakol green again in one rainy season.

### **Food aid and developmental contexts: What is the right approach?**

Until the late 1980s, over 80% of food-aid resources were allocated to development activities. Although this percentage has declined sharply as a result of large-scale humanitarian emergencies, it still remains considerable, representing hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cereals, legumes and oleaginous produce every year. In development contexts, the principle is simple: food aid, as a partial substitute for money, is regarded as a means of investment in the collective productive capacity and social infrastructure. There are four main types of activity in this area: Food for Work; the establishment for regulatory purposes of reserves which are run down or reconstituted to support producers' prices; "monetization", or sale of food aid at more or less subsidized rates; and support for social programmes.

#### *Myths and realities of Food for Work*

The term "Food for Work" (FFW) is generally used when food aid, instead of being distributed free of charge, is used as payment for work designed to stimulate the construction or maintenance of collective infrastructure (irrigation networks, road repairs, etc.), or as part of a natural disaster prevention policy (anti-erosion barriers, terracing, reforestation, etc.).

Experience has shown that the conditions for the success or failure of such programmes are quite easy to identify, by means of a simple economic calculation based on the opportunities open to the available manpower. If food is scarce and therefore expensive, and if job opportunities are few and poorly paid, FFW becomes attractive. This is borne out by WFP's experience in certain countries suffering severe food shortages and that of the ICRC in stimulating local manufacture of agricultural tools in Afghanistan. As soon as the number of options increases or the daily wage rate in other sectors rises above that paid by the FFW project

(urban messengers paid in cash as against rural labourers paid in flour), interest in FFW wanes perceptibly. This perfectly logical law has been clearly demonstrated in certain OXFAM irrigation programmes in Cambodia and in many other FFW projects. In the course of the ICRC's agricultural tool manufacturing programme, the smiths first requested payment in food, then asked for cash payment, and then showed a renewed interest in flour, according to variations in cereal prices and in the regularity of supplies. Moreover, local workers sometimes have to choose between agricultural activities (tilling the soil, sowing, tending and harvesting crops) or non-agricultural work (house repairs, woodcutting, crafts, etc.) on the family farm on the one hand, and the possibility of FFW on the other. This makes the planning of certain FFW programmes simply impossible. Ultimately, when the wage differential between salaried jobs and FFW reaches a certain point, the launching of a FFW programme, however well justified, becomes completely unworkable. Here again, the list of failures is long: many are those who, having omitted to make the basic economic calculation, have come a cropper over splendid FFW programmes in which no one ever came to work. Remuneration in FFW projects must therefore be assessed with due regard for local wage levels and job opportunities.

An area in which FFW nevertheless remains important is that of the maintenance of traditional collective structures in systems where the wealth, particularly in the form of cereal stocks, accumulated by certain strata of society is partly redistributed in the course of such collective work. One example is the maintenance of the "karezes" or underground irrigation systems of Afghanistan. The water emirs in charge of the irrigation networks regularly redistributed to poor farmers part of the taxes and dues they collected in exchange for this maintenance work, during which the labourers were fed. When for various reasons, especially because of the war, society as a whole was drawn into a process of decapitalization, this system of collective work for the public good could no longer continue, as everyone was struggling for his own survival. This is clearly a case for FFW.

Then there are cases in which FFW is used as a subsidy for States or institutions which cannot pay their officials or employees. Such practices may perhaps be justified in certain conflict or immediate post-conflict situations where the economy is in virtually total collapse: no money, no food to be found in the markets, salaries far too low in relation to the cost of basic foodstuffs and so forth. Great care should nevertheless be taken not to perpetuate this kind of programme as an easy solution, for there are already some indications of the disastrous side-effects that might result.

*Food aid and commodity price regulation*

Programmes for price stabilization by means of food aid operate according to a fairly simple system: food is bought up in periods of surplus in order to avoid the collapse of prices for the producer, and stocks are released in times of scarcity to avoid a sharp rise in basic food prices and to limit the risk of social unrest — food riots — that often accompany such increases, particularly in urban environments. Although these programmes are satisfactory in theory, they nevertheless come up against a number of problems. They require scrupulous honesty on the part of the price-regulating body. The institutions responsible for such programmes — often the national cereals offices of the countries concerned — can be subjected to various pressures and their senior officials to a great deal of temptation. The cost of storage (buildings to be rented or properly maintained, stock-taking, regular fumigation where necessary, etc.), of releasing stocks and of replenishing reserves are by no means negligible. Nor are the technical aspects simple, involving as they do conservation of stocks in environments where insects, fungi and rodents are “aggressive”, the fixing and application of expiry dates, stock rotation mechanisms and so on. Europe gained wide experience of these problems with its surpluses of cereals and dairy products in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, these programmes are often hard hit by the economy measures suggested by the IMF and the World Bank (UNICEF, 1987): being based on the principle of State intervention on the market in order to regulate prices for both producers and consumers, the programmes run counter to the laws of the market economy and free competition and are therefore favourite targets of the Bretton Woods institutions.

The real problems in this sector often arise from the fact that stocks are built up using not local produce but cereals imported from the North. Although the second part of the equation (keeping prices down in times of food scarcity) can indeed be applied by means of these imports, the first part (providing support for rural economies) certainly cannot; and without much incentive to produce a surplus, farmers fall back on subsistence agriculture and no longer produce surpluses for trade. All the urban workers who could make a living by processing this local produce (Muchnik, 1981; Altersial, 1981) are also deprived of their livelihood, and the vicious circle of disruption of food security systems in towns is set in motion, while farmers are left with their unsold stocks on their hands. One of the best solutions involves a triangular programme within a given region. Food is purchased in areas or nearby countries with surpluses and is eventually used in areas with deficits. This represents a mixture of the two processes described above.

*Monetization and creation of resources for development*

The principle of monetization of aid is clear: the expectance of receiving free aid and the dependency syndrome must be prevented. This can be done through such pre-existing commercial systems as State outlets, national cereal offices, cooperatives, large-scale cereal traders, farmers' unions and so forth. This monetization is usually effected through the establishment of counterpart funds, as follows: instead of being distributed free of charge, the food aid is sold, and the proceeds are used to set up a fund for investment in social or productive projects. The fund may be managed jointly by the food-aid donor and an institution of the country where the operation takes place. Projects of this kind have been in existence for some time, but not long enough for there to be a proper global evaluation of their potential and their prospects. The difficulties involved in their implementation, however, are beginning to make themselves felt (Solagral, 1995).

*Support for social programmes*

Social programmes essentially target population groups which because of poverty and national underdevelopment may be denied access to sufficient food rations in both qualitative and quantitative terms: children in kindergartens and schools, pregnant women and nursing mothers, hospital patients, destitute elderly people without pensions or any other means of support (WFP, 1995). It may be observed that the need for these programmes, which often have a considerable impact on the individuals and families concerned, increases as countries follow the recommendations of the IMF and the World Bank. To reduce national deficits, it is easier to make cuts in "social" budgets (UNICEF, 1987) than in defence budgets (Petris, 1993). Vulnerable groups thus lose their only remaining "safety net". This analysis is at last beginning to gain recognition, as may be seen from recent discussions among the seven most highly industrialized countries (G7).

*Some individual experiments: Collective granaries and seed banks*

In many contexts, the traditional practices of keeping collective granaries and community seed stocks have disappeared, and yet these disaster-prevention mechanisms were vitally important and constituted one of the social bases of food security. This is an as yet unexplored sector for the investment of food aid. In the Sahel, under the regional auspices of the Sahel Club and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, and particularly through the efforts of such

non-governmental organizations as the Rural Development Research Group and the Green Africa consortium, "village granaries" and cereal banks have been set up. More recently, under the ICRC agricultural programme in Angola, experiments have been carried out using food aid to reconstitute seed stocks in the form of community seed banks (ICRC, 1995). Although these experiments seem to be generally successful, it is still too early to draw a final conclusion and to define the relevant procedures and strategies.

### **Conclusions: A wide variety of challenges**

**The aim must be to return to our humanitarian roots, and in particular to respect for international humanitarian law.** For the ICRC, the only imaginable and ultimately effective form of humanitarian aid is that which envisages mankind in all its dignity and universality, a concept which applies equally to food aid when it is necessary. This calls for an ethical, professional and pragmatic approach to the primary objective of protecting and assisting the victims (ICRC, 1993). The task is by no means simple, although the considerable experience acquired has led to a significant improvement in the quality of services rendered to those who, one fine morning, suddenly lose everything, or who are obliged to flee their homes or to scrape a living amid war-scarred ruins. The fact still remains, however, that prevention is better than cure, and in many cases prevention is linked to respect for humanitarian law.

**Programme quality must remain an ethical requirement.** Food programmes must be based on a specific analysis of the victims' needs, taking possible medium-term repercussions into account, and not on a geopolitical appraisal of situations. It is also essential to go back to Hippocrates' initial aphorism: "First of all, avoid doing harm". When prompted by a generous impulse, we must avoid doing more harm than good by taking ill-considered action. Cost/effectiveness requirements must also be given due consideration, for the best programme is naturally the one which has the greatest impact at the least cost. Food aid must be brought out of its isolation and integrated in a broader concept of food security (Solagral, 1995). An approach which includes food aid in the process of recapitalization of family economies and support for agricultural production seems to be one of the most effective combinations for preventing potential nutritional disasters. Such multisectoral action makes it possible to take account of both the diversity of the victims' needs and the common characteristics of people everywhere. If the weather is cold, food aid will have little effect unless it is accompanied by distributions

of blankets! And if sanitary conditions are deplorable, the benefits of food aid will be greatly reduced by diarrhoea (Perrin, 1995). The need to protect the civilian population must also be borne in mind, both in analysing the situation and in seeking solutions. What should be done if famine results from the mining of agricultural land or from the looting of fields and granaries by soldiers? Should a food distribution operation be mounted if it will place the beneficiaries at greater risk? It must also be remembered that there is no such thing as an average victim or a standard situation. It is therefore essential to adapt to this heterogeneity and to devise working methods and ways of analysing all the ramifications involved, from the beginning of the emergency to the return to conditions propitious for development. A multidisciplinary procedure, combining the expertise of agronomists, nutritionists, sanitary engineers, doctors and nurses, has become indispensable. The complexity of current situations has led to increasingly complicated programmes, which in turn require strategies for follow-up and evaluation. We have to be able not only to shift the focus of ongoing programmes, but also to learn from them. This constant effort to improve is dictated by ethical considerations.

**It has become essential to separate humanitarian action from media-oriented and political/military considerations.** Humanitarian assistance in general and food aid in particular now forms part of the diplomatic arsenal of States, and is also fully integrated in their strategy of communication with public opinion in their own countries. Fund-raising efforts often lead the agencies concerned to seek the greatest possible media attention, but they must take great care not to be seduced by the siren song of easy financing (Broche, 1994; Emmanuelli, 1991). This trend already leaves too many victims in obscure corners of the planet where people are dying of hunger without anyone paying any attention, while elsewhere the humanitarian agencies are vying with one another for a share in a programme.

Food-aid convoys escorted by armoured vehicles have unfortunately become an all too common sight. Humanitarian aid delivered under the auspices of the military is liable to be associated with automatic rifles, and sooner or later these weapons may have to be fired. That will be the end of the neutrality and impartiality of aid and hence the end of access to the victims. It is therefore vitally important for military action and humanitarian aid to be placed under separate flags. Even though coordination between the various protagonists is necessary (ICRC, 1993), the humanitarian domain must nevertheless remain intact, free from all trace of army boots and tank tracks.

**As a preventive measure and especially in areas at risk (for ecological, social or other reasons), food security must be strengthened at the family level and emergency stocks must be built up.** Local, regional and world food stocks and their respective availability constitute one of the two major pillars of world food security, the other being the soundness and dynamism of the multitude of functioning food-growing systems and their capacity to produce surpluses. The collapse of the agricultural economies of the Eastern European countries, the fallow-land policy of the European Union, the combination of adverse weather conditions and agricultural policies in North America, the long-running crises in certain parts of Africa, the recent inclusion of China in the list of countries with structural deficiencies, and a series of disastrous typhoons and floods elsewhere in Asia (Thailand, Philippines, Viet Nam, Laos, etc.) had reduced world food stocks to a critical level by the end of 1995. The international community must react without delay by instituting a series of measures aimed at the reconstitution of these stocks, particularly through purchases from the countries of the South themselves. More important still, genuine policies of support for food-growing and food-security systems must be redeveloped, in particular through support for agronomic research directed towards the needs of peasant agriculture and its food-producing sectors (CNRS, 1986). Efforts to limit post-harvest losses at the peasant farm level should also be actively supported.

New working methods must be devised to allow the population to participate more closely in the assistance process. **There must be more “partners” and fewer “beneficiaries”.** At the other end of the chain, there are the victims who watch their human dignity melting away under the sun or freezing up in the cold as they stand in line for food distributions, and peasant farmers who see the storage depots overflowing with imported produce while they cannot sell their own crops. Although greater participation by the local population is an objective that has long been sought by development agencies, it has only recently been taken into account by those concerned with emergency aid (Anderson, 1989). The ICRC has gradually tried to adapt its working methods, particularly by promoting the assignment of responsibility to the population and its most respected leaders, which could greatly facilitate its action. Moreover, working in a transparent manner through traditional structures might enhance both the equity of distributions and the security of operations. Thus, whether in Somalia, Mozambique, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia or the former Soviet Union, new mechanisms for the distribution of emergency aid have been introduced and are being developed and streamlined. Similarly, the increasing importance assumed by programmes pro-

viding support for survival and agricultural rehabilitation strategies (often including a food-aid component) shows that efforts are being made to enable the victims to regain their capacity for action and reaction, instead of reducing them to the status of passive recipients of aid. A civilian population which bears the full brunt of a conflict or natural disaster or which is potentially at risk must play a greater part than ever before in maintaining its own food security within the strategies of external purveyors of aid (ICRC, 1994).

**In conclusion**, it may be noted that the news is not all bad. There are fortunately many emergency food-aid programmes which are well run, completed in time and followed by action designed to strengthen food security systems. And yet, although these programmes have saved millions of lives and the collapse of agrarian economies has been checked to some extent, it is, alas, impossible to claim that such success stories are in the majority.

The growing importance that is being attached to the concept of food security is significant. This issue, which goes far beyond mere food aid, is at last beginning to be taken into account with increasing frequency (Curtis, 1988; Chonchol, 1987). The choices made — imported or local cereals, food aid or assistance to agriculture — will shape the future (Sautier, 1989), but food aid may encounter considerable difficulties because of the global deficit situation that is developing. The step is short from “technical” to “media-political” targeting. But if they are allowed to become at best operations mounted for the media and at worst political fig leaves, these programmes could easily drift out of the humanitarian sphere. It is high time for them to return. What is at stake is the dignity of human beings, both of those who give and of those who, in sometimes humiliating circumstances, receive.

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# Images of humanitarian crises: Ethical implications

by Gilbert Holleufer

With the long-heralded advent of the information age, the upheaval caused by the proliferation of visual technologies in a society dominated by the media is forcing the entire spectrum of what used to be called “the press” to redefine itself, to reassess its professional code of ethics and to devise new working methods. Only by examining the role played by images in the global flow of information — especially their relationship to the written word — can we fully grasp what is at stake. Our world view is increasingly shaped by the images, televised or in print, to which the public is constantly exposed. Indeed, so great is their power that one can say, along with many analysts, that they are beginning to replace reality: only what has been authenticated, certified and validated by being photographed or filmed and shown on television really exists. As these images bombard us from all sides, everything that has not been seen captured on film is reduced to oblivion. What makes the power of images so irresistible?

*Images impart values.* They attract or repel. They appeal to our imagination, play on our feelings and rouse us from our complacency: in other words, images *stir our conscience* because they purport to show us, in the raw, the unadorned, indisputable reality of things as they are. That is television’s great ambition, that is its purpose; and that is what prompted Régis Debray to say that “television is fond of humanitarian stories since they are both human interest stories and moral tales”. Over the years, images of humanitarian action have invaded the media and fired people’s imagination. They are standard fare on TV news programmes and have

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Original: French.

pride of place in newspapers and magazines. Humanitarian work is probably the field most rife with the contrasts that make for powerful images: stark reality and the moral cause to which it gives rise; tragedy and the charitable response to it; evil and the good deeds accomplished to combat it.

The presentation of facts and the moral response to them are now so closely interrelated that all those who provide images of humanitarian action — whether media professionals or humanitarian organizations themselves — share a heavy burden of responsibility. For what moral justification can be found for broadcasting, night after night, all too summary newsflashes showing throngs of starving people, piles of corpses and seemingly endless scenes of horror? And what justification can be found for showing certain scenes rather than others? Finally, is any serious attempt made to explain what is shown? It would seem that the legitimate moral questions which pictures of human tragedy raise for television viewers or readers too often receive unsatisfactory answers. The media increasingly confine themselves to covering — the word, with its sense of covering up, is appropriate — humanitarian crises and situations of armed conflict in all too superficial a way: by concentrating on visual shock effects, they only scratch the surface of the problems raised. As for humanitarian organizations, the competition which they face on the “humanitarian market” encourages a deplorable tendency to appeal to people’s emotions and to publicize and promote their own activities. Visual portrayals of victims and acts of atrocity are thus seen as a means of boosting the image of humanitarian organizations. Eventually, distracted by the goals they pursue, the purveyors of such images forget that they depict real human beings and that respect must be shown for the dignity of the “subject” which is offered up for public scrutiny.

Three disturbing tendencies, ranging from the general to the specific, reflect the ethical challenge posed by the media’s exploitation of images showing human suffering:

- *The selectiveness of news coverage.* What gives the media the right to focus attention on one situation rather than on another? Why is the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina constantly in the limelight, and not the conflicts which are ravaging Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia? Why did the news agencies, which complain that their budgets do not allow them to cover the whole world, devote huge sums, and in some cases their entire resources, to reporting on the Gulf War? This is where the harmful effects of competition between news agencies can be felt; where the choices made by the most powerful can be seen to determine the direction taken by all the others.

- *Ever-faster reporting.* The tyranny of real time and the technical feats of live broadcasting have an accelerating effect that leads to an “information overload”: so many live images flood the television screens that our minds are saturated by them and we end up by not caring. Real time reporting has a perverse effect, too, in that it precludes any in-depth interpretation: events are shown either too soon or too late, but in any case there is no room for analysis, no time to gain perspective. How, then, can things be rationally understood? How can politicians make decisions when everything happening everywhere is constantly — and instantly — before their eyes? Under this avalanche of live images, there is no time for analysing events, or for the type of investigative journalism for which the Watergate reporters became famous. What benefit did CNN’s millions of viewers derive from the live ruminations of Peter Arnett as he filmed and commented on what he saw from the window of his hotel in Baghdad during the Gulf War? We are inundated with live images! But what information do they convey? Is it really all too complicated for the general public, as is sometimes claimed? The most important thing, it seems, is to offer people images to help them visualize rather than understand. The means have become the end. Such a failure to provide any form of interpretation or insight will end up by making an appalling stereotype seem natural, that of humanity divided into two groups treated unequally by fate: on the one hand all those who are suffering, and are inevitably victimized by “savages”, and on the other hand all those who are not. The more fortunate among us derive a sense of security from being shown an evil that only affects others, and to which humanitarian assistance, which soothes our conscience, is the providential solution. Such a fatalistic world view, combined with such a stereotypical conception of humanitarian action, leads to a general abdication of responsibility: how many times have we heard people say, speaking of Somalia or the former Yugoslavia, that those who live there “have constantly been fighting among themselves and always will”?
- *News voyeurism.* Should every image be shown — and can everything be visually conveyed? The use of shocking images has long been criticized, and the unease about showing them has grown as never before since 1985, when, as everyone recalls, the slow death of Omayra Sanchez, a little girl trapped in the mud, was broadcast minute by agonizing minute on television. Reporters and photographers, spurred on by the logic of real time and the pursuit of sensational stories, too easily give in to the temptation to outdo one another in portraying scenes of horror. What respect is shown for human dignity

when suffering is depicted without its cause being explained? Or when people who are valiantly struggling for survival in the midst of complex crises are presented as dazed shadows of themselves, condemned to live in filth, irretrievably lost and entirely dependent on humanitarian aid? In portraying these people's suffering, photographers use all their skills of composition to enhance it, to make it more "artistic". Recently, a New York publisher expressed admiration for a photographer whose pictures, taken in Rwanda, achieved their aesthetic effect by suggesting a relationship between death, suffering and filth. Underpinning these clichés, this cult of visibility in and for itself, is an *obscenity* that tramples on human dignity.

The huge challenge posed by these three very questionable tendencies calls for a concerted, ethical response:

News selectiveness must be countered with *a moral code of visual portrayal*, in other words an attitude which, based on a global analysis of humanitarian needs in the world, would make it possible to establish priorities according to other criteria than audience ratings and traditional political and other vested interests; an attitude which, in this age of global communications, would prompt the media to redefine their task and to report on events in all parts of the world (in Bosnia-Herzegovina, of course, but also in Kurdistan, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Angola), thereby maintaining an overall balance instead of simply showing disconnected fragments of reality.

The tyranny of real time must be countered with *a moral code of slower-paced reporting* that is conducive to reflection. Instead of dispatching images as fast as possible, time must be taken to explain, to give a balanced picture by showing different points of view, so that images are no longer used to cut costs but once again serve their ultimate purpose of providing information.

Finally, the alarming drift towards obscenity in depicting the victims of humanitarian crises must be countered with *a moral code to uphold human dignity*. Trapped as they are in complex and cruel situations, these people nevertheless remain human beings: their suffering must certainly be shown, but with decency, and with respect for their privacy. These men and women are not mute symbols of suffering: they are thinking, sentient individuals who have their own lives, their own hopes, and are often the first and foremost partners of humanitarian agencies. They must be allowed to speak up; the often formidable efforts which they have made to help themselves must be shown, along with the joy they take in life whenever they manage to find a moment's respite; so must the courage

and dignity with which they accept their suffering and face the dangers that threaten them.

This is a tall order, and one that calls for intense dialogue between media professionals and humanitarian organizations. More and more often it is these organizations, whose experience is essential for meeting the ethical challenge just described, that draw up guidelines stating how images should be used and information conveyed.

When wanton acts of violence are committed, nothing is worse than the failure to investigate and report on what has happened and to obtain images that can be used to alert public opinion. Even so, it is questionable whether any image is better than no image at all. It is high time to revive the noble tradition of photo journalism as it was practised in the past — a tradition in which the use of images is well-nigh inseparable from the art of commentary, analysis and narrative discourse. Images, used alone, blindfold our intelligence; and when we attempt to dissociate images and speech, imagination and reasoning, we are playing the sorcerer's apprentice: in order to *act*, man has always needed both.

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# Public Advocacy

## Why the Red Cross and Red Crescent should look before it leaps

by **Michael A. Meyer**

### **Introduction**

The role of public advocate on humanitarian issues appears to be a growing one for components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Before the specific matter of public advocacy can be addressed, however, it is important first to consider — or even, perhaps, reconsider — the statutory or constitutional position of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has three components: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); the recognized National Red Cross and National Red Crescent Societies (numbering 170 as at November 1996), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation). Each component is a separate entity, generally performing different tasks, under distinct parameters. Although united by a common humanitarian mission and specified Fundamental Principles, and with duties to cooperate with and support each other, the ICRC, the National Societies and the Federation are independent from each other.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for most purposes, the Interna-

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<sup>1</sup> Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (1986), Preamble and Article 1. *Handbook of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, ICRC and Federation, Geneva, 1994, p. 417.

tional Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is an ideal, rather than an operational entity.

However, this formal statutory position is not commonly understood, and it may even be changing. Recent resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and of the Council of Delegates, make specific references to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in such a way that it could be seen as an operational entity.<sup>2</sup> Such references could, of course, simply be interpreted as reflecting poor drafting. It is submitted, however, that such wording may reflect a common perception — and possibly a growing feeling among some — that the Red Cross and Red Crescent does have, or should have, a cohesion which makes it more than a loose association of bodies with a common history, objects and values; that the Movement may, in certain circumstances, take action, or be perceived as doing so, and be greater than the sum of its parts.

On a more mundane level, certainly the public at large, and many in the media, make no distinction between the components of the Movement: to them, for example, Red Cross or Red Crescent workers at the scene of natural disasters, working in refugee camps or visiting detainees are all one.

It is not the purpose of this article to consider the evolving or constitutional roles of the Movement and its components. This is a philosophical and legal issue over which people of goodwill, committed to the Red Cross and Red Crescent ideal, have, or will have, strong and diametrically opposed views, or even inconsistent ones. Regardless of whether the “strict constructionist” or the “evolutionist” approach correctly defines the present positions, two facts are clear: the actions of one component may have an effect on others, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent is generally perceived as an entity, even if there are separate components.

The components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, individually and collectively, to varying degrees and at different levels, may have some limited experience as public advocates. Indeed, it could be said that it was the public advocacy of one individual, Henry Dunant, which led to the establishment of the Movement and the original 1864 Geneva Convention

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<sup>2</sup> For examples, see Resolutions 2 and 4 of the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva, 1995, in *IRRC*, No. 310, January-February 1996, pp. 60 and 69, and Resolutions 1, 2, 3 and 6 of the 1995 Council of Delegates, *ibid.*, pp. 139, 140, 142 and 147.

for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded in war. However, Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations do not have a campaigning tradition, which is an increasingly professionalized activity. Moreover, public advocacy is an activity which has significant implications for the other roles of the ICRC, National Societies and the Federation — some of which are more well-established, and unique. For such reasons, the role of public advocate by Red Cross and Red Crescent bodies seems to require greater consideration and consultation than has perhaps been given to date.

These comments, and those which follow, are personal, and are offered to stimulate debate within the Movement, including within my own National Society.

### **The issue**

The purpose of this article is *not* to single out any one component of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, but rather, as already indicated, to encourage discussion and greater thought on the extent of the advocacy role for each component of the Movement, and for the Red Cross and Red Crescent acting collectively, bearing in mind that the actions of each component may be attributed to, or have an impact on, others. Different aspects of this issue are illustrated below.

All National Societies members of the Federation, and the Federation Secretariat, are pledged to carry out the Federation's Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties.<sup>3</sup> Task 3 of this Strategic Work Plan, as one of the means to achieve the first goal of "Enhanced respect for human dignity and humanitarian values", stipulates: "Increase advocacy on humanitarian issues." The ways listed to achieve this increased advocacy include, on the one hand, "mak[ing] better use of [the Federation's/National Societies'] experience of working with the most vulnerable to carry out public advocacy on their behalf", and "strengthen[ing] [the Federation's/National Societies'] relations with governments (. . .) in order to enhance [their] advocacy". On a close reading, these actions are not entirely clear or uncontroversial. The terms "advocacy" and "public advocacy" are not defined,<sup>4</sup> and if public

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<sup>3</sup> See the relevant decisions of the Federation's General Assembly since 1989. For a general overview of the most recent decision on the subject, that of the 10th Session of the General Assembly held in 1995, see *IRRC*, No 311, March-April 1996, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Such terms, and related ones, can be understood and used in different ways, sometimes interchangeably. The Red Cross and Red Crescent needs to consider its own definitions. To help initiate further thought, and for the purpose of this article, the following definitions are suggested: (1) "advocacy": making known to others one's support for a

advocacy goes beyond accepted activities (such as dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law) to traditional methods of campaigning (such as lobbying of legislators, petitions and demonstrations), it could actually work against the admonition to strengthen relations with governments. Further, such public advocacy may not always be consistent with the Fundamental Principle of Neutrality.

The ICRC has been promoting and conducting a growing number of campaigns, such as those on anti-personnel mines and blinding laser weapons, as well as seeking to raise public awareness of other issues, such as water and war. Few in the Movement doubt the importance of each of these issues. However, the objective of each campaign or “consciousness-raising” exercise has not always been entirely clear.

For example, the slogan for the anti-personnel mines campaign, and a number of statements and press releases, refer to landmines generally, without distinction. One can understand that from a publicity viewpoint, it is simpler to refer to “landmines” rather than “anti-personnel landmines”. However, such distinctions are important, and overly generalized wording can lead to misunderstandings. Use of the red cross or red crescent emblem as part of such a campaign logo, although perhaps able to be justified under the 1991 Emblem Regulations,<sup>5</sup> may also cause misunderstanding about the emblems’s significance, special status and neutrality.

In drawing attention to the water and war issue, it was not always clear whether the object was simply to raise public awareness of a very significant but little noticed problem during armed conflicts, or to seek to develop new international humanitarian law, or both.

From a purely practical view, one wonders whether it is possible to pursue successfully several campaigns or similar activities at the same time and maintain the same moral authority or influence. The term “campaign” may also be too general or inexact, and even detrimental, without

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particular issue; (2) “public advocacy”: advocacy to the general public; (3) “private advocacy”: advocacy to a confined audience, maybe on a confidential basis; (4) “campaign”: a planned and organized series of actions designed to achieve a specific result, using all available means and normally undertaken in public. All of these activities seek to influence, that is, to affect the views or behaviour of others. Non-confrontational methods have traditionally been successful in enabling components of the Movement to gain access to decision-makers.

<sup>5</sup> “Regulations on the use of the emblem of the red cross or the red crescent by the National Societies” (1991), in *IRRC*, No. 289, July-August 1992, pp. 339 ff.

at least some qualifying adjective(s), e.g. “public awareness”. These actions may be further complicated by the ICRC’s strong desire to maintain its independent decision-taking capacity whilst, at the same time, seeking to persuade the rest of the Movement to support its campaigns. One also has to ask whether campaigning, which is and can be carried out by many other organizations, will start to interfere with the ability of the ICRC to continue to perform its traditional role as a neutral intermediary, and its special functions under international humanitarian law. As noted below, a similar concern applies to National Societies.

### **Aspects of the Red Cross and Red Crescent’s traditional advocacy role**

Advocacy generally means to take someone’s part, or to argue on behalf of a cause. It may be undertaken privately or publicly; cautiously or vigorously. The Movement has long been an advocate on behalf of the victims, perhaps especially those of armed conflict, but also on behalf of related humanitarian causes, such as the successive Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols,<sup>6</sup> and primary health care.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the components of the Movement have operated within certain parameters which do not constrain the freedom of action of other advocacy groups. These include the Fundamental Principles of Neutrality, Impartiality and Unity; the global scope of the Movement and the need to consider differing viewpoints and traditions; and the recognized roles of the components of the Movement under international humanitarian law, which give the ICRC and National Societies, in particular, a privileged role and responsibility in relation to victims of armed conflicts.<sup>8</sup> This special status under international humanitarian

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<sup>6</sup> This activity was, in effect, endorsed by the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: Resolution 1, para. 4, *IRRC*, No. 310, January-February 1996, p. 58; Meeting of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts for the Protection of War Victims, Recommendation VIII (c), *ibid.*, p. 87. Also see Hans-Peter Gasser, “Universal acceptance of international humanitarian law: promotional activities of the ICRC”, *IRRC*, No. 302, September-October 1994, pp. 450-463.

<sup>7</sup> The Federation and its member Societies are supporting the goal of “Health for all by the year 2000”, set by the World Health Organization (WHO). This goal was also endorsed by the 24th International Conference of the Red Cross, Manila, 1981, Resolution XXII, *IRRC*, No. 225, November-December 1981, p. 340.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the ICRC and the Federation — the latter in its capacity as representative of its member National Societies at the international level — were granted observer status at the United Nations General Assembly largely because of these specially recognized roles.

law,<sup>9</sup> and the wider role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their respective countries in the humanitarian field,<sup>10</sup> has necessarily required the maintenance of a relationship of trust with governments.

This relationship of trust does not mean that National Societies must agree with every aspect of government policy. Indeed, it is essential for National Societies, where necessary, to remind their respective governments of the humanitarian consequences of their actions, and always to maintain their own independence from the State. Trusted relations with public authorities are also affected by the competence and reliability of the National Society, and its essential integrity.

From this has evolved the traditional discreet diplomacy which has served the Red Cross and Red Crescent well, especially, perhaps, the ICRC,<sup>11</sup> over nearly 135 years. The private advocacy of the Movement, including that by National Societies, has often achieved remarkable humanitarian successes precisely because of the confidence felt by public authorities in the Red Cross and Red Crescent, based on long experience, and the fact that such representations were private, thus avoiding public embarrassment or controversy.

A significant aspect of such advocacy has been the Movement's reputation for what may be termed realistic idealism, for achieving practical results for the benefit of people in need. Henry Dunant, in *A Memory of Solferino*, advocated a practical, realistic prescription to help the wounded and sick on the battlefield. Dunant detested war as much as anyone else but he recognized that, since war exists, one must do what one can at a practical level to attenuate its horrors.

Whereas the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has undertaken both public and private advocacy in the course of its history, it would seem

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<sup>9</sup> The respective tasks of the ICRC and the National Societies under humanitarian law are explained in: Hans Haug, *Humanity for all: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, Henry Dunant Institute/Paul Haupt Publishers, Berne/Stuttgart/Vienna, 1993, pp. 76-81 and 174-179 respectively. It should be noted that in a number of humanitarian law treaty provisions, the ICRC and National Societies are given an exclusive right or duty. This is another reason why the concept of a Movement is important, that is, to try to ensure that components act in a complementary way, rather than as competitors, and do not waste resources by duplicating operations.

<sup>10</sup> This auxiliary role is, in fact, a condition for recognition as a National Society. Statutes (above, note 1), Article 4, para. 3; see also Article 3, paras. 1 and 2.

<sup>11</sup> See "Action of the ICRC in the event of breaches of international humanitarian law", *IRRC*, No. 221, March-April 1981, pp. 76-83.

that the public advocacy role has been carried out with circumspection, usually on matters directly relevant to the Movement's concerns and on which it has expertise, and in ways which did not have adverse effects on Red Cross and Red Crescent actions in other areas.<sup>12</sup>

### **Pressures for change**

In recent decades, an increasing number of special-interest groups have been established with the sole purpose of publicizing a particular problem or cause, with a view to rousing public opinion for or against certain policies or actions. Amnesty International and Greenpeace are well-known examples in the fields of human rights and of the environment, respectively.

A growing number of aid and development agencies, including United Nations agencies, have also publicly taken up issues, often seeking a change in government policy. In many countries with a legal system based on common law, traditionally organizations with charitable status have been unable to become involved in politics. Although such restrictions have started to become more flexible in the United Kingdom, in a few instances campaigns by such organizations have been deemed to fall outside their charitable remit and led to public censure.

Campaigning activity also seems to be an accepted mode of political expression in many countries with a democratic tradition, and National Societies in some of these countries have found it difficult to compete for public support against other voluntary or relief organizations by adhering to the Movement's established mores of discreet diplomacy and of maintaining an independent identity. In a few such countries, with a mainly homogeneous population, campaigning may not affect the ability of the Red Cross to continue to enjoy the confidence of all and indeed, conceivably, lack of such activity might reflect negatively on the National Society.

An apparent growing disrespect for international humanitarian law, and perhaps memories of the ICRC's silence in the face of the Holocaust, may have led to increasing public condemnations by the ICRC of violations of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>12</sup> As an illustration, the 1990/91 World Campaign for the Protection of War Victims was based on Resolution VIII, para. 3, of the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross, Geneva, 1986, *IRRC*, No. 255, November-December 1986, p. 352. Subsequent decisions on implementation were made by the Movement's Council of Delegates.

<sup>13</sup> See the ICRC's established policy in such matters, referred to in note 11.

increasing vocalization as the conscience of the international community may well be laudable. However, the practical value of such condemnations in recent conflicts, when they have often gone unheeded, may be worth consideration, and an article on its own.

In the light of increasing humanitarian problems worldwide, there has been a feeling that components of the Movement should use their reputation, individually and collectively, built up over almost 135 years, to address these issues publicly, using the growing power of the media.

And in view of the growing number of aid agencies and of competition for decreasing financial resources, the ICRC and the Federation seem to have felt a need to raise their respective profiles as a way to reaffirm, and perhaps enlarge, their respective shares of public attention and support.

It may also be argued by some that the components of the Movement must move away from their traditional roles or practices to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world, where the support of public opinion may have more of an effect on authorities' behaviour than the adoption of new humanitarian law.

Such pressures appear to have contributed to demands for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to assume a public advocacy role.

### **Potential difficulties**

The Red Cross and Red Crescent does have a special standing among other humanitarian organizations for a variety of reasons, but most of these stem from the recognition given to its components under international humanitarian law and the Statutes of the Movement. As already noted, this special position requires the maintenance of a relationship of trust with States, and the Fundamental Principles have evolved, in part, to serve as guidance for components in the conduct of their relations with governments.

As previously indicated, National Societies, because of their role as neutral auxiliaries to their governments in the humanitarian field, have often been able to promote humanitarian standards and activity through quiet diplomacy, working behind the scenes, and this is likely to have been even more true for the ICRC. There are many other organizations whose acknowledged role is to speak out in public, frequently seeking to arouse and mould public opinion, with a view to changing government policy. Such groups — Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch — serve an admirable purpose. But they do not normally perform the practical humanitarian services undertaken by the Red Cross and Red Crescent,

particularly in armed conflicts and other emergencies when the security of the State, and of its most vulnerable groups, may be most threatened. Can components of the Movement become known public advocacy groups and, at the same time, retain the confidence of governments? Has not the accepted quiet approach of the Red Cross and Red Crescent generally served the victims well over the years, enabling components to achieve tangible humanitarian benefits that would not have resulted from the pressure of public advocacy? Is it not because the Red Cross and Red Crescent has been sparing in its public statements, and has a reputation for strict neutrality, that when it does speak out, its pronouncements are given respect? If components have taken a public stand on an issue, is their expert advice then seen as less than objective?

There is also the difficulty concerning the type of issue chosen for the Movement's advocacy role. Its components work with the most vulnerable in many different ways. Which issue should be chosen as the focus of public advocacy; who chooses, and how is this done? One specific example: the ICRC in particular is becoming increasingly proactive on arms control issues, albeit with some encouragement from States.<sup>14</sup> The ICRC was active in helping to achieve a ban on chemical weapons after the First World War, and its more recent actions on weapons issues may be said to fall within its accepted remit for the law of The Hague, under international humanitarian law. However, it may also be argued that the ICRC does not have the capacity to address these issues comprehensively, without drawing upon external assistance.

Moreover, these are issues which present a direct challenge to State security considerations, thus leading almost inevitably to friction with governments, which, in this field, have greater experience and expertise. On the other hand, international humanitarian law is intended to be a realistic balance between security and humanitarian considerations, and it may be said to be the role of the ICRC, if not of all the components of the Movement, to seek to ensure that due account is taken of individual human beings in such calculations. Clearly, this is a very sensitive area, where the possibility for public advocacy by individual components of the Movement may differ significantly, and may well have an impact on

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<sup>14</sup> 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva, 1995, Resolution 1, para. 4, *IRRC*, No. 310, January-February 1996, p. 58; Meeting of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts for the Protection of War Victims, Recommendation VIII (c), *ibid.*, p. 87; 26th International Conference, Resolution 2, chapter H, para. (j), *ibid.*, p. 60.

other components, especially if the ICRC seeks support for its endeavours.<sup>15</sup>

The reasonableness of the position adopted by the Movement is also important. Do we follow our previous tradition of realistic idealism, of pursuing what is realistically attainable in the circumstances, even if our long-term goal is greater? Or do we adopt the moralist, "all-or-nothing" approach favoured by so many other public advocacy organizations? It might help the Movement's image among some groups, and its own self-perception, to adopt a high-minded position, but if the Movement's *raison d'être* is to help the victims and the most vulnerable, might not they be helped more through a pragmatic approach, with short-term benefits, which still leaves open the potential for further advancement?

The tactics used are also of significance, in both the long and the short term. Following the ICRC's public support for a total ban on anti-personnel mines, the report it later commissioned on the military utility of such weapons<sup>16</sup> was automatically viewed with initial scepticism in some quarters, regardless of its merit, since it confirmed the institution's pre-existing policy. The fact that National Societies were asked to seek the support of *-serving* members of the armed forces, as well as retired ones, for the results of the report, when these findings might have been contrary to their country's policy and the official views of their armed forces, is also open to question, and for at least some Societies put at risk the necessary relationship of trust with the public authorities, so central to the special role of a National Society.

The preceding analysis does not claim to provide an exhaustive examination of the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in public advocacy. Rather, its purpose is to identify some of the areas of potential difficulty.

### **Planning for advocacy: possible points for consideration**

For the reasons given above, public advocacy is not an easy or automatic role for components of the Movement. A distinction can also be

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<sup>15</sup> The stance adopted by the ICRC with regard to anti-personnel mines resulted in one National Society being refused as a co-sponsor for a seminar on the subject, to be attended by academics, government and military lawyers. This was the first time that such a refusal had ever occurred, the problem being that, as a result of the ICRC's position, the Red Cross and Red Crescent was perceived as not being neutral on this issue.

<sup>16</sup> *Anti-personnel landmines: Friend or foe?* ICRC, Geneva, 1996.

made between different types of public advocacy: a public information programme which seeks to raise public awareness of the humanitarian aspects of an issue is different in nature and in conduct from a campaign which actively seeks to change government policy. In addition, campaigns usually create enemies, or at least controversy, which makes them difficult to reconcile with the Movement's principles and established roles. To seek to resolve this conflict, components of the Movement, individually and acting collectively in the Council of Delegates,<sup>17</sup> might consider that as a general principle it should engage in public advocacy in favour of people, not policies. For example, the Movement can speak out on behalf of suffering victims in a conflict and the duty of governments to respond. However, it would be difficult for the Red Cross and Red Crescent to advocate a specific policy to meet the victims' needs since such a policy is likely to help one group, but hurt another.

Before further campaigns are launched, it is suggested that points such as those which follow be considered.

- (i) Is the subject matter central to Red Cross and Red Crescent concerns? Is there an existing Movement policy and if so, and if it is desired to change it, how can this be done with the greatest possible consultation?
- (ii) What are the implications of a campaign on other activities and objectives, and on the Red Cross and Red Crescent's overall reputation, both in the short and the long term? Is the proposed campaign a priority task? Does the component, individually or collectively with others within the Movement, have the necessary resources to carry out a successful campaign?
- (iii) What campaign activities are envisaged, and are these compatible with the Fundamental Principles and other statutory texts, as well as with the Movement's/component's integrity? Can other methods of advocacy be used to try to achieve the same result?
- (iv) Will the Red Cross and Red Crescent be able to maintain its distinctive identity during such a campaign separate from other organizations which may be supporting the same cause?

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<sup>17</sup> The Council of Delegates is a statutory body of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, consisting of representatives of its components, which meets to discuss matters which concern the Movement as a whole. Statutes (above, note 1), Article 12.

- (v) Will the campaign seek to influence thinking by using the experience of Red Cross and Red Crescent field work or other recognized expertise?
- (vi) Participation by components must be voluntary: the campaign must not be forced on National Societies which are unable to participate or which feel that it would be counter-productive to campaign in their current national circumstances.

Some readers will no doubt consider this approach too restrictive. The essential point is that components of the Movement need to develop a common understanding of public advocacy which is well-defined.

Today, the ICRC and other components of the Movement are invited by authorities to undertake specially recognized roles, in the field and at government meetings, to which other humanitarian organizations are not invited and can only aspire.<sup>18</sup> Representatives of States still meet with representatives of components of the Movement at International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent because of the special relationship which exists between governments and the Movement, and the historic role of components of the Movement in the implementation and development of humanitarian law. It is submitted that rather than engaging, like many other organizations, in the usual methods of campaigning, the Movement should concentrate on its services for the most vulnerable (which may include a certain type of advocacy), and on promoting more effectively its unique status and function.

The special role of National Societies and other components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in relation to international humanitarian law matters was reaffirmed by the 26th International Conference, through its endorsement of the Recommendations drawn up by the Intergovernmental Group of Experts for the Protection of War Victims.<sup>19</sup> These recommendations offer Societies a unique opportunity to expand their role as a partner with their governments in the dissemination and implementation of international humanitarian law. This naturally requires a relationship of mutual trust, and it is difficult to see how public campaigning against

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<sup>18</sup> The ICRC's important roles under Article IX of the Dayton Agreement, on the exchange of prisoners of war (for the text see *IRRC*, No. 311, March-April 1996, p. 243), and as Special Rapporteur at the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims and subsequent expert meetings (*IRRC*, No. 296, September-October 1993, pp. 359 ff.), are only two recent examples.

<sup>19</sup> Resolution 1, para. 4, see above, note 6.

government policy is conducive to this necessary confidence. It would seem important for components of the Movement to make concerted efforts to enable more National Societies to take on their special role in the humanitarian law field.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has a reputation for neutral and impartial humanitarianism, earned through its long record of distinguished service and strict adherence to its principles. Regardless of the formal legal position, components of the Movement are often only able to act because of the confidence they inspire. Public advocacy, unless carefully considered and executed, will put this in jeopardy and ultimately will lead to the Red Cross and Red Crescent, including the ICRC, being treated as just another non-governmental organization.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent has rallied in recent years against the politicization of humanitarian action. Components of the Movement must be careful not to exacerbate this unwelcome trend through their own behaviour.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Resolution 4, chapter G, paras. 1 and 2 (a), *IRRC*, No. 310, January-February 1996, p. 69.

*Michael Meyer's article entitled "Public Advocacy" places the question of neutrality at the heart of the debate. Neutrality is one of the Fundamental Red Cross and Red Crescent Principles and is defined as follows:*

**Neutrality:** In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

*To give further food for thought on the issue of whether the components of the Movement should become involved in defending or promoting a cause, the Review is reproducing a few pages which Hans Haug, in his book **Humanity for All**, devoted to neutrality as a Fundamental Principle.*

## **Neutrality as a Fundamental Principle of the Red Cross**

**by Hans Haug<sup>1</sup>**

The word "neutral" comes from the Latin *ne-uter* and means: neither one thing nor the other. An institution or a movement is neutral when it *refrains from* participating in a conflict or altercation and *abstains*

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Haug, *Humanity for All: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, Henry Dunant Institute/Paul Haupt Publishers, Berne/Stuttgart/Vienna, 1993, pp. 461-464. Footnotes omitted.

from any interference. Refraining from participation and abstaining from interference can be for various reasons: it may be a question of self-preservation and self-assertion, of the judgement that good and bad, true and false are to be found on both sides, of holding back in the interests of a higher purpose or a special task. Neutrality may however have its origin in indifference, fear and cowardice. Neutrality in itself is therefore not a virtue.

The *motivation* of the principle of Neutrality is the Movement abstaining from any participation in hostilities and at all times in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature in order to continue to enjoy the *confidence of all*. This motivation is clearly well founded: those who take sides or interfere may estrange or deceive one side or the other, push them away and lose their confidence. States or economic powers may stand losses of confidence but for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which lacks the resource of power, retaining the confidence of all is essential for the fulfilment of its humanitarian mission. Only where there is general confidence, confidence of the authorities and the population, can the institutions of the Movement have unimpeded access to conflict and disaster victims and obtain the necessary support for their protection and assistance activities. In respect of the ICRC the confidence of the governments of States bound by the Geneva Conventions is probably the most important requirement for its work in the event of armed conflict, disorders and situations of tension. However, confidence is also needed by the Federation for its international disaster relief actions and its development aid to National Societies. And the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can only constructively operate with the authorities of their countries and be active in the whole territory for all inhabitants, if they enjoy the confidence of many people in all sections of the community. Confidence is the spiritual power through which the Movement lives, grows and works.

Adherence to neutrality is meant to create and maintain confidence. It is however also a means of ensuring the *unity* and *universality of the Movement*. Every disregard of neutrality, every taking of sides in hostilities or participation in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature, leads to tension, contradictions, fissures and divisions within National Societies and within the whole Movement. Like general confidence, the unity and universality of the Movement are also the basic condition for world-wide impartial and efficient humanitarian activities. If the Movement is to be a *world community*, which comes to the assistance of suffering people everywhere and at all times and

which — as is mentioned in the principle of Humanity — “promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples”, it must strictly follow the precept of neutrality in the event of armed conflict and observe it loyally also in the case of controversies in peacetime.

(. . .)

The second major aspect of neutrality is the rule to abstain at all times from participation in *controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature*. These four concepts cover spheres which in principle lie outside the mission of the Movement. Above all the Movement has an apolitical character — it has not been created and is not called upon to have an influence on the establishment of the system of law and society and to participate in the struggle for power within States and in the world of States. The Movement is not tied to religions or churches, although its idea of humanity is also rooted in religious doctrines. The emblems of the red cross and red crescent are not religious symbols. By no means does the Movement have a racial orientation. It keeps away from racial hatred or racialism as its thinking and action are centered on respect for the human being and assistance to those who suffer, without any discrimination. Finally the Movement does not subscribe to any ideology, that means to say that it is not tied to any philosophical or ideological system but to its own ideal of efficient and selfless humanitarian commitment.

In an individual case it is not always easy to define where abstention is called for and where participation is permitted and perhaps even a duty. The difficulty stems from the fact that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is based on the idea of humanity and has a humanitarian mission to fulfil. Adherence to the idea of humanity and the constructive fulfilment of the humanitarian mission may call for taking a stand on *humanitarian questions*, even though these are controversial and also have political or ideological aspects. Through their neutrality the components of the Movement are *not neutralized* in respect of *humanitarian* issues. They are not condemned to just “sitting still”. Taking a stand is legitimate if it is effected on questions linked to the Movement’s sphere of action and responsibility, such as the application and implementation of international humanitarian law, the ratification of the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions, asylum and refugee policy or respect for fundamental human rights, involving for instance the prohibition of torture and inhumane treatment of persons deprived of their freedom.

Whether the components of the Movement, by taking a stand on controversial humanitarian questions, run the risk of losing general confidence and internal unity depends to a considerable extent on the *form of action* selected. A direct and for the most part discreet approach to the authorities responsible is most likely to be in line with the special position of the ICRC and also that of National Societies. The public taking of a stand or an appeal to the population only comes into consideration when direct intervention has failed. Participation in demonstrations — which are arranged by other organizations or groups, above all those with political or ideological goals — is to be excluded. The components of the Movement must remain independent and make their own voice heard.

There is a relationship between the principle of Neutrality and other principles of the Movement, namely — as already indicated — the principles of Unity and Universality and above all the principles of *Independence and Impartiality*. The independence or autonomy of Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations vis-à-vis States, international organizations, political parties, churches and economic powers is a basic condition of neutrality. The more independence is definite and strong, the greater are the possibilities and guarantees for a neutral approach. The relationship between neutrality and impartiality is evident. A neutral movement, which refrains from participating in conflicts and controversies, is ready and in a position to give its whole attention to suffering individuals and help them in proportion to their suffering, without a secondary purpose and without discrimination. Active, all round and impartial readiness to help, taking true needs into account, stems from renunciation and abstention.

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## ***International Committee of the Red Cross***

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### **The weapons issue: Statement of the ICRC at the United Nations General Assembly, 51st session, 1996**

**Statement of 18 October 1996 before the First Committee**

A great deal has occurred this year in relation to the regulation of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Actually, there is no such dual categorization of arms in international humanitarian law, which regulates all weapons in accordance with certain generally applicable rules in order to prevent excessive suffering and destruction. All of the work and comments of the International Committee of the Red Cross with regard to weapons, whatever their nature from a strategic standpoint, are aimed at assuring the faithful and impartial application of these rules of international humanitarian law.

#### **Landmines**

On 3 May of this year, the Review Conference of the 1980 UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) amended Protocol II, which regulates the use of landmines. The ICRC has had the privilege, in keeping with its statutory mandate, to participate actively in this process.

The ICRC warmly welcomes a number of improvements in the landmines Protocol, in particular its extension to apply in both international and non-international armed conflicts, clear assignment of responsibility for mine clearance, requirements that the location of all mines be recorded, new protection for ICRC and other humanitarian workers, annual meetings of States Parties and a requirement that States punish serious violations of its provisions.

Unfortunately, the new limitations on the *use* of anti-personnel mines are both weak and complex, and there is hence a danger that these provisions will not be implemented in the types of conflict in which most recent use has occurred. In particular, poorly trained or equipped forces

may be unwilling or unable to abide by a complex set of rules or pay an increased price for self-destructing mines. Further, the implementation of new provisions on detectability and self-destruction can be delayed for up to nine years after entry into force of the revised Protocol, which means around 2007. By that time we expect that mines will have claimed well over 200,000 new victims — unless States do far more than is required by the Protocol.

The ICRC will promote adherence to the amended Protocol II of the CCW. This Protocol is intended to restrict the use of mines, but it is not meant to encourage States to use mines or to invest in new types of mines. We urge States to go far beyond the provisions of the Protocol and to renounce the production, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines.

In March of this year, the ICRC published a study commissioned by it on the use and effectiveness of anti-personnel landmines in past conflicts.<sup>1</sup> This study was undertaken by high-level military officers and its conclusions are now endorsed by 52 senior commanders from 19 countries. The study found that the use of anti-personnel mines in accordance with law and doctrine is difficult, if not impossible, even for modern professional armies. This shows that the indiscriminate effects of landmines cannot be contained in most cases. Further it was found that the military utility of such mines is most often negligible or even counter-productive for the layer. The study therefore concludes that the limited military value of anti-personnel mines is far outweighed by their human, economic and social costs.

Many States have already demonstrated that the end of the landmines crisis need not await a globally negotiated consensus. The “Agenda for Action” prepared by the Ottawa Conference in early October 1996 demonstrates how much can be done towards ending the landmines crisis through moral and political leadership.<sup>2</sup> We welcome the establishment of the “Ottawa Group”, made up of some 50 States which committed themselves, in their final declaration, to promoting, and implementing initially on the national and regional levels, the global prohibition and elimination of anti-personnel mines. In this spirit, 25 States have already renounced or suspended the use of these weapons by their own armed

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: *Anti-personnel landmines — friend or foe? A study of the military use and effectiveness of anti-personnel landmines*, ICRC, Geneva, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: *Towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines*, Declaration of the International Strategy Conference, Ottawa, 3-5 October 1996, see below, p. 647.

forces and 11 are destroying their stockpiles. The Ottawa Group's dynamic agenda for the coming year stresses the urgency of both regional and global efforts, while highlighting the need to combine moves to achieve a ban with increased assistance for mine clearance and the care and rehabilitation of victims.

The ICRC strongly supports Canada's initiative in inviting Foreign Ministers to Ottawa in December 1997 to sign a new treaty totally prohibiting anti-personnel mines. We consider this step to be a major breakthrough and encourage States to respond favourably to the Canadian invitation. This initiative properly places the Ottawa Agenda for Action and other international initiatives in the context of urgent efforts to achieve a treaty banning these pernicious weapons. Even if such a treaty does not at first attract universal adherence, as has been the case with most new instruments, it will help create an important new norm.

Recent regional initiatives reflect the growing momentum towards a ban. A resolution of the *Organization of American States*, adopted last June, calls for the establishment of an "Anti-personnel Mine Free Zone" in the Americas. States of Central America, implementing an initiative by the *Central American Parliament*, have gone even further in pledging to prohibit the production, use and transfer of these arms. If such efforts are combined with generous assistance from the international community, Central America could become the first mine-infested region to free itself from this scourge. In February 1996 the *Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity* called on sub-regional organizations on the continent to move to prohibit anti-personnel mines, in keeping with the OAU's previous commitment to a total ban. In December 1995, Ministers of the *Organization of the Islamic Conference* also called for the "complete elimination" of this weapon.

In the context of this General Assembly the ICRC would advocate the adoption of the strongest possible resolutions, which:

1. unequivocally support a global ban on, and the elimination of, anti-personnel mines;
2. call on States to end the production, use and transfer of such arms by a certain date in the very near future;
3. encourage the establishment of regional zones free of these weapons, pending the adoption of a global ban; and
4. call for a significant increase in assistance for mine clearance and the care and rehabilitation of victims.

## **Arms transfers**

The ICRC would again like to express its concern about the virtually unrestrained transfer of weapons and, in particular, small arms. Our experience in conflicts around the world is that enormous quantities of light weapons are available to virtually any individual or group which seeks them and that they are all too often used in flagrant violation of the norms of humanitarian law. Implementation of this law is made more difficult by the day as deadly weapons fall into more and more hands. In the coming year the ICRC will undertake a study, requested by the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, on the relationship between arms availability and humanitarian law violations. We will also be increasingly involved in dialogue on this issue within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

## **Blinding laser weapons**

The ICRC considers the adoption of Protocol IV prohibiting the use of blinding laser weapons to be a landmark achievement of the recent review process of the CCW.<sup>3</sup> Not only does this prohibit an abhorrent new means of warfare, but it also means that, for only the second time in history, the international community has been able to proscribe an inhumane weapon before having to witness its effects on the battlefield.

The ICRC encourages States to adhere to this new Protocol at the earliest opportunity and, when they do so, to make a formal declaration of their "understanding that the provisions of Protocol IV shall apply in all circumstances". Such a declaration would reflect the understanding reached when the Protocol was adopted at the first session of the CCW Review Conference in Vienna, and reaffirmed by 135 States at the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, that the Protocol "should apply not only to international armed conflicts". The Review Conference agreed, in its final declaration, on the need for achieving the "total prohibition of blinding laser weapons, the use and transfer of which are prohibited in Protocol IV". To this end we urge States, pending entry into force of the Protocol, to carefully monitor the relevant technologies and to ensure that such weapons are neither produced nor transferred.

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<sup>3</sup>Editor's note: Louise Doswald-Beck, "New Protocol on blinding laser weapons", *IRRC*, No. 312, May-June 1996, pp. 272-299.

## **Future weapons**

The rapid advances in the technology required to produce portable blinding laser weapons highlight the need for States to meticulously review the development of new weapons, in keeping with their obligation to determine whether their employment would be prohibited by the rules of international humanitarian law. The ICRC, as the guardian of this body of law, will continue to follow such developments. The coming decades will undoubtedly see the emergence of new capabilities for the deployment of arms the nature of which would undermine this law and whose use humanity would come to regret. Protocol IV demonstrates that the international community *can* act to prevent such developments.

## **Chemical and biological weapons**

The ICRC welcomes the imminent entry into force of the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention and urges all States which have not yet done so to become parties to it. This Convention, by prohibiting the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons, is an important reinforcement of the proscription of the *use* of poison, which has roots in very long-standing customary law and has been codified in several treaties.

Likewise, we encourage States to adhere to the Biological Weapons Convention, which, like the Chemical Weapons Convention, strengthens the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which banned the use of chemical and biological weapons. We urge States Parties to equip the Biological Weapons Convention, at the upcoming Review Conference, with the most effective possible mechanisms for transparency, monitoring and verification.

## **Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons**

Finally, the ICRC would like to comment briefly on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons.<sup>4</sup>

This was the first time that the International Court of Justice analysed at some length international humanitarian law governing the use of

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<sup>4</sup>Editor's note: International Court of Justice, *Legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons*, Advisory opinion of 8 July 1996.

weapons. We were pleased to see the reaffirmation of certain rules which the Court defined as “intransgressible”, in particular the absolute prohibition of the use of weapons that are by their nature indiscriminate as well as the prohibition of the use of weapons that cause unnecessary suffering. We also welcome the Court’s emphasis that humanitarian law applies to all weapons without exception, including new ones. In this context we would like to underline that there is **no exception** to the application of these rules, whatever the circumstances. International humanitarian law *is itself* the last barrier against the kind of barbarity and horror that can all too easily occur in wartime, and it applies equally and at all times to all parties to a conflict.

Turning now to the nature of nuclear weapons, we note that, on the basis of the scientific evidence submitted, the Court found that “...The destructive power of nuclear weapons cannot be contained in either space or time ... the radiation released by a nuclear explosion would affect health, agriculture, natural resources and demography over a very wide area. Further, the use of nuclear weapons would be a serious danger to future generations...” In the light of this the ICRC finds it difficult to envisage how a use of nuclear weapons could be compatible with the rules of international humanitarian law.

The ICRC is convinced that because of their devastating effects no one ever wants to see these weapons used. It is our earnest hope that the opinion of the Court will give fresh impetus to the international community’s efforts to rid humanity of this terrible threat.

*International Committee of the Red Cross*

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## World Food Summit

*The World Food Summit, organized by the FAO and attended by some 150 governments, was held in Rome in November 1996. The ICRC took part in the proceedings as an observer and its Vice-President addressed the conference. A paper outlining the ICRC's approach and experience regarding the issue of food security in armed conflicts was distributed to the participants. The text of that document is reproduced below.*

### Food security in armed conflicts The ICRC's approach and experience

#### 1. The ICRC's mandate, role and operations in armed conflict situations

##### 1.1 The ICRC's mandate and role

The community of States has entrusted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with a twofold mandate: **to provide protection and assistance for the victims of armed conflict and internal disturbances, and to promote and ensure respect for international humanitarian law.** By virtue of that mandate, the ICRC acts as the guardian of humanitarian law. Its work is based on the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, and on the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

##### 1.2 ICRC operations in armed conflict situations

ICRC operations include advocacy at all levels of respect for humanitarian law, visits to detainees, health and medical assistance (including the supply of water), food aid, the provision of shelter and clothing, and

the restoration of family ties (including tracing missing persons and arranging for family reunification).

The purpose of ICRC relief activities is to meet the essential requirements of populations affected by conflict. To cover **priority needs** the ICRC has developed a **comprehensive approach**, rather than focusing its assistance on specific sectors. This strategy can be described as a “pyramid”, nutrition and environmental health being the baseline of relief operations. Then come public health programmes. Curative care tops the pyramid and thus completes the assistance strategy.

Nutrition assistance includes basic food aid and nutritional rehabilitation programmes. These are conducted simultaneously with other relief activities, such as agricultural and veterinary programmes, which are aimed at restoring the greatest possible degree of self-sufficiency among the people whom the ICRC seeks to help. Environmental health encompasses water supply, waste disposal, housing, fuel, and hygiene. Activities in the field of public health are based on community participation; they include immunization and oral rehydration programmes and in some contexts also the fostering of traditional medicine. Curative care comprises medical treatment as a whole.

While food security mainly has to do with the two baseline components of the ICRC’s assistance strategy, namely food and nutrition in its broad sense (including programmes aimed at restoring access to food) and environmental health, public health and curative care are essential activities which will ensure that food security actually translates into “nutrition security”, i.e., physiological well-being.

## **2. The ICRC’s food security concept in armed conflict situations**

### **2.1 Corollaries of the food security concept**

The usual definition of “food security”, namely “permanent access for all to food nutritionally adapted in quantity and quality, and culturally acceptable, for a healthy and active life”,<sup>1</sup> also applies in conflict situations. It has four immediate corollaries:

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<sup>1</sup> *Poverty and hunger: Issues and options for food security in developing countries*, World Bank, Washington, 1986.

*Elements to be included in a draft Declaration and Plan of Action on World Food Security*, Report to the Committee on World Food Security, FAO, CFS: 95/4, Rome, 1995.

1. *The availability of food is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to prevent hunger and guarantee access to food. Means of access can be income, employment, or the ability to obtain food through production, exchange or social support programmes*
2. *Food security at the national or regional level does not necessarily mean food security at the local or individual level.*
3. *“Permanent access to food” requires peace and stability. International or internal conflicts and natural disasters may severely disrupt food production, commercialization and stock management.*
4. *Adequate food in both quantity and quality is not enough to ensure a healthy and active life. Access to basic services such as health care or water supply are also of crucial importance.*

Access to food is the cornerstone of food security. It must be recognized as a fundamental right, not only in peacetime but also in situations of conflict. International humanitarian law specifically prohibits the use of starvation as a weapon and contains provisions regarding the right of civilians to receive essential relief supplies in time of war.

## 2.2 The food security concept in armed conflict situations

Many conflicts are very closely linked with food insecurity. For the ICRC, food security has to be considered primarily at the individual and household levels, since **conflicts affect individuals and households** before adversely impacting the whole country.

In conflict situations, food insecurity is often due not so much to an exhaustion of resources as to the sudden loss of means of production, employment and salaries, and to the destruction of trade networks. On the African continent and in parts of Asia in particular, food insecurity may, however, predate the onset of conflict, because of poor access to means of production, low income, high demographic pressure on limited natural resources, poor health, low nutritional status and educational level, etc. Inadequate access to food is thus either precipitated or aggravated by conflict.

## 3. Food security and ICRC humanitarian assistance

### 3.1 The ICRC’s policy in relation to food security

With regard to food security, the ICRC believes that the aims of humanitarian operations should be as follows, depending on the stage at which action is taken and the gravity of the emergency due to the conflict:

- *to prevent overt food insecurity (ideally);*
- *to restore at least minimum food security (usually);*
- *to minimize the risk of food insecurity in the future (as soon as possible).*

It should be emphasized that any assistance aimed at restoring or strengthening food security at individual and household levels in a conflict situation is bound to meet with only temporary success as long as peace is not restored, for the following reasons:

- *people are unable to maintain their self-sufficiency in terms of food because human and financial resources are being diverted away from agricultural production;*
- *harvests are destroyed and fields cannot be cultivated owing to landmines;*
- *food is diverted for consumption by military personnel.*

**The prevention of conflicts, respect for international humanitarian law during actual conflicts, and the termination of hostilities are thus key factors for sustained food security.**

In conflict situations, the ICRC's comprehensive response to needs is based on a threefold strategy:

1. *to prevent destitution (by first identifying any changes in normal access to food, e.g., modification of food consumption, consumption of seed, selling of assets and of means of production);*
2. *to support the restoration of normal access to food, especially by providing the necessary means of production;*
3. *to restore at least a minimum level of access to basic health services, water and environmental health facilities (so that food security actually translates into "nutrition security" and physiological well-being).*

### 3.2 The ICRC's operational approach and experience

#### 3.2.1 *Promoting respect for international humanitarian law*

Although in many cases food insecurity is already a problem before the outbreak of conflict, failure to respect international humanitarian law generally precipitates and exacerbates the food crisis. In every conflict situation, the ICRC urges all parties at all levels to ensure respect for humanitarian law; this is done by:

- spreading knowledge of the humanitarian rules among the armed forces and the civil authorities;
- making direct representations to the authorities to ensure respect for the civilian population (e.g., in situations where access to farming land is denied or when soldiers regularly loot granaries and farmers' food stocks);
- raising awareness of humanitarian law among the civilian population itself (bottom-up dissemination).

### *3.2.2 Preventing destitution*

When there is a potential or actual food shortage or people cannot afford to buy food, individuals and households start to modify their lifestyle, channelling their limited resources into obtaining food and other essential items (medicines, clothes and shelter). By providing support for these coping mechanisms, the ICRC seeks to alleviate human suffering and prevent a drastic fall in the general standard of living. This approach is based on the active participation of the population in defining what type of relief operation is needed. However, during prolonged periods of acute food insecurity, people may be forced to adopt strategies that will threaten their livelihoods in the long term. Assistance programmes therefore focus on coping mechanisms that are not detrimental to future food security and on preventing processes that may lead to destitution.

Although the basic patterns of coping behaviour may be similar in different contexts (lower food consumption, modification of eating patterns, modification of cropping patterns, selling of livestock, modification of expense patterns, migration of family members, selling and leasing of assets, indebtedness, etc.), the precise way in which coping mechanisms are implemented and their interaction vary depending on the context and the conflict.

In accordance with its relief policy, the ICRC takes into account the multiple and interrelated facets of these coping mechanisms. The most important parameters in this respect are agriculture, economic conditions, nutrition in its broad sense (i.e., including food acquisition and consumption patterns, and the assessment of nutritional status) and health, including water supply and environmental health. Focusing on agricultural production, or on food intake, or on nutritional status (e.g., the prevalence of under-nutrition) alone will give only a partial view of the food security problem and thus make it very hard to decide on the type of assistance best suited to the situation.

The ICRC's assessment methods may be subject to constraints of time and physical safety, but the organization always endeavours to maintain its comprehensive approach. Once the ICRC has identified the specific coping mechanisms and their limits (adverse effects on future food security), it decides on the humanitarian action to be taken. Each context is different, but among the range of ICRC activities designed to help maintain or restore food security are the following:<sup>2</sup>

- **Distribution of food and non-food relief**, to cover identified needs, to improve the biological utilization of food (e.g., by distributing blankets in cold climates), and to provide items for barter so that people will not be forced to sell vital means of survival and production — *Rwanda (1995): food distributions for 360,000 people per month (displaced persons and residents of areas where large numbers of returnees had arrived), and non-food distributions for residents whose assets had been looted.*

- **Public kitchens**, to provide daily meals for people in urban areas who are unable to obtain and prepare proper meals for themselves — *Abkhazia: a kitchens programme has been running since 1994, owing to the protracted crisis there. In 1996, about 20 such kitchens were supplying meals covering all daily food energy requirements to some 7,000 elderly and other needy individuals selected by the community. Fresh food is supplied to canteens by local producers (kolkhozes and sovkhazes) whose activities are supported by the ICRC.*

- **Setting up of emergency water and environmental health facilities**, to provide an immediate supply of water and latrines for displaced persons in order to help safeguard their health — *Burundi (1995): mobile treatment units were brought in to provide drinking water for displaced persons in a temporary camp.*

### 3.2.3 *Restoring access to food, basic health services, water and environmental health facilities*

Simultaneously with efforts aimed at the prevention of destitution and the provision of support for non-deleterious coping mechanisms, the ICRC conducts, where and whenever possible, activities designed to pave the way towards rehabilitation in the post-conflict phase. Such activities are implemented with a view to helping people regain sustainable

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<sup>2</sup> Only a selection of recent ICRC assistance programmes are mentioned (in italics).

self-sufficiency in producing and acquiring food, and thus ensure its optimal biological utilization.

Examples of these activities are:

- **Agricultural, veterinary and fishery programmes:** seed and tool distributions, livestock vaccinations — *Somalia (1991-1996), Sudan (1993-1996): distribution of seed and fishing tackle, veterinary activities* — *Afghanistan (1995-1996): irrigation and fruit tree care* — *Sri Lanka (1996): distribution of 170 MT of rice and other crop seed, 4,300 hoes and 2,000 sets of fishing tackle to 13,720 families living in regions affected by the fighting as well as by drought* — *Angola (1996): seed multiplication project set up on the Planalto.*

- **General food distributions as a back-up until the next harvest:** this is done until there is sufficient agricultural return for farmers to keep the seed for the planting season — *Rwanda (1995): food aid (along with seed and tool distributions) for some 70,000 resident and returnee families to facilitate the resumption of agricultural production.*

- **Small-scale credit programmes:** to promote the recapitalization of farming systems — *Azerbaijan (1996): small-scale credit project to enable farmers to buy agricultural supplies (mainly spare parts for agricultural machines and fertilizers). To be reimbursed using part of the next harvest.*

- **Food- and cash-for-work programmes:** to increase people's purchasing power, while rehabilitating vital structures (sanitation facilities, roads, irrigation facilities, etc.) — *Rwanda (1995): food and cash for work to rehabilitate sanitation systems (about 100 workers per project)* — *Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia: rehabilitation of irrigation systems, programmes for the manufacturing of farming tools and fishing nets. In Afghanistan, the community had to rehabilitate one third of its irrigation canals using its own labour and cash resources before the ICRC provided support, so as to ensure community participation and commitment.*

- **Programmes aimed at revitalizing the local economy:** through an ad hoc supply of food to local markets at a time of speculative hoarding, through contracts to buy food and other items on local/regional markets from local producers, through the supply of raw materials to handicraft makers and local factories, through subsidies, and so forth — *Central Bosnia (1995): provision of essential materials for local factories (glue for a shoe factory, sugar for a jam factory, vaccines and veterinary medicines for dairy farms supplying a milk factory).*

● **Rehabilitation of health structures:** reconstruction, provision of drugs — *Burundi (1995): distribution of medical supplies to 95 health centres and 17 hospitals.*

● **Rehabilitation of water and environmental health facilities:** reconstruction of latrines and rehabilitation of wells — *Chechnya (1995): provision of safe drinking water by setting up a distribution network, and repairs to the local water distribution system for some 300,000 inhabitants of Grozny.*

● **Reconstruction of destroyed houses** — *Nagorny-Karabakh (1996): supply of construction materials for rebuilding houses for 3,000 returnee families.*

#### **4. Food security in armed conflict situations and the response of the international community**

In view of the aims of humanitarian assistance and the scope of operations designed to help restore or maintain food security for individuals and households affected by armed conflict, as described above and as implemented by the ICRC and other humanitarian agencies, a number of requirements need to be fulfilled, each of which calls for support on the part of the international and donor communities:

- ***Achieving food security in conflict situations requires a comprehensive response. Operations cannot be limited to emergency food aid. A wide array of activities are involved, ranging from emergency health care and sanitation to economic and social support. In addition to providing food aid for basic survival, the aim is to restore self-sufficiency and to reduce future vulnerability to disaster.***
- ***Optimal responses must take account of the medium and long term, meaning that from the very outset budgets and programmes must be planned with a view to the phase beyond the immediate emergency.***
- ***Prevention of food insecurity resulting from conflict is paramount. It is obviously less costly in financial terms — let alone in human terms — than attempting to restore food security once people have become destitute.***

From a practical standpoint, fulfilling those requirements would involve effecting the following major changes:

1. *The international community and the media should lay greater emphasis on the prevention of conflicts. Prevention is not newsworthy, whereas overt human tragedy always makes the headlines. Because*

*the media increasingly serve as a trigger for action by the international community, they should cover the threat of a crisis as well as turning the spotlight on the crisis once it has broken out.*

2. *“Emergency responses” (whether the crisis is linked to conflict or to any other disaster) cannot be equated with “short-term operations”. Budgeting, staffing and programming must be planned from the outset for at least the medium term, and must provide for different activities in support of coping strategies.*
3. *Ensuring adequate food security at the household level should become the top priority of authorities and policy-makers. One basic supporting argument is the recognition that inadequate access to food (especially access to land for food production) is more often than not a triggering factor in the onset of conflict.*

## **5. Conclusion**

Ensuring access to food and food security is a fundamental right and a priority in any emergency situation. While the long-term eradication of food insecurity depends on political resolve, the short-term alleviation of suffering caused by food shortages requires a comprehensive approach aimed at strengthening the strategies adopted by the victims themselves to optimize their access to food and minimize the impact of the problem on their future livelihoods. Since most conflicts are either protracted or recurrent, long-term activities are also needed to restore, as far as possible, access to basic services (health, water and environmental health), and the productive capacity of the populations concerned.

These actions vary in scope and duration but all of them require a change in the traditional vision of humanitarian assistance in emergency and crisis situations. Prevention of deterioration should be the key issue. Once “curative” action becomes necessary, a prospective approach is needed to pave the way towards the restoration of self-sufficiency.

## ***In the Red Cross and Red Crescent World***

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### **Recognition of the Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society (Persatuan Bulan Sabit Merah Negara Brunei Darussalam)**

The International Committee of the Red Cross has officially recognized the Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society. This recognition, which took effect on 6 November 1996, brings to **170** the number of National Societies that are members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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### **Towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines**

#### **Declaration of the International Strategy Conference, Ottawa, 3-5 October 1996**

Following consultations with relevant international agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, the States represented at the Ottawa Conference, the 'Ottawa Group', have agreed to enhance cooperation and coordination of efforts on the basis of the following concerns and goals with respect to anti-personnel mines:

1. a recognition that the extreme humanitarian and socio-economic costs associated with the use of anti-personnel mines requires urgent action on the part of the international community to ban and eliminate this type of weapon;

2. a conviction that until such a ban is achieved, States must work to encourage universal adherence to the prohibitions or restrictions on anti-personnel mines as contained in the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons;

3. an affirmation of the need to convince mine-affected States to halt all new deployments of anti-personnel mines to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of mine-clearance operations;

4. a recognition that the international community must provide significantly greater resources to mine-awareness programs, mine-clearance operations and victim assistance;

5. a commitment to work together to ensure;

- the earliest possible conclusion of a legally-binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel mines;
- progressive reductions in new deployments of anti-personnel mines with the urgent objective of halting all new deployments of anti-personnel mines;

- support for a resolution of the 51st session of the United Nations General Assembly calling upon member States, *inter alia*, to implement national moratoria, bans or other restrictions, particularly on the operational use and transfer of anti-personnel mines, at the earliest possible date;
- regional and sub-regional activities in support of a global ban on anti-personnel mines, and
- a follow-on conference hosted by Belgium in 1997 to review the progress of the international community in achieving a global ban on anti-personnel mines.

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### **Declaration by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

On 18 October 1996 the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia deposited an instrument with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in which the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared that his country would maintain the reservations and declarations made by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia regarding the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

## **Books and Reviews**

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**John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of charity: War and the rise of the Red Cross*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1996, 448 pp.**

John F. Hutchinson, professor of history at Simon Fraser University (Canada), tells the story of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement from its origins to the 1920s. The very critical look he takes at the Movement leads him to conclude that the ICRC and the National Societies fell, as it were, into a trap: in striving to ease the suffering of wounded and sick soldiers, they were gradually swept up in the nationalistic and militaristic currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In support of his view, Hutchinson quotes abundantly from the deliberations of the diplomatic conferences and International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and from the works of Gustave Moynier. Numerous photographs also serve to illustrate his point. The book concludes by relating the circumstances in which the League of Red Cross Societies (today the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) was founded — an event which the author claims weakened the Movement as a whole.

At the time when Hutchinson researched his book, permission to consult the ICRC's archives was granted subject to very restrictive conditions, in particular the obligation for authors who were given access to specific documents to submit their manuscripts to the ICRC before publication. Hutchinson found this unacceptable and decided not to consult the archives. It should be pointed out that in early 1996 the ICRC made all documents over 50 years old available to researchers.<sup>1</sup>

Written by an author whose status is unusual in that he apparently has no connection with the Red Cross, *Champions of charity* reaches

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<sup>1</sup> The new *Rules governing access to the archives of the ICRC* were published in *IRRC*, No. 314, September-October 1996, pp. 554.

conclusions that may shock the Movement's members and sympathizers; nevertheless, they are supported by an abundance of documentary evidence which the author has examined with great care. Hutchinson deserves credit for opening a debate in which other historians may wish to take part.

*Françoise Perret*  
ICRC Research Officer

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In this important book, John F. Hutchinson, professor of history at Simon Fraser University, takes a critical look at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement from about 1860 until just after World War I. To do so, Hutchinson had to overcome the "courteous stonewalling" (p. 3) of the ICRC, as well as a tendency on the part of many to treat Red Cross personnel and agencies with near religious devotion.<sup>2</sup>

From the very first chapter Hutchinson offers his readers a persuasive revisionist interpretation of Red Cross developments. Henry Dunant, who vigorously pushed the idea of voluntary medical aid societies that would work to help the war wounded, is shown to be an evangelical Christian with a messianic complex, who at times could spout "pseudoreligious nonsense" (p. 14). He pursued various schemes of dubious nature and was plagued by financial scandal. The Geneva Committee of Five that took up Dunant's ideas and became over time the respected ICRC manifested typical Swiss middle-class attitudes toward the lower classes and especially lower-class women (as compared to higher-class ladies). In these social attitudes, early ICRC members were of course no different from most of the European middle-class males of their time, notably the French. The particular theme of gender, and others as well, is supported not only by documentary evidence but also by the many illustrations that grace the manuscript.

Among other points, Hutchinson shows that the basic ideas written into the first Geneva Convention (1864), authorizing neutral medical personnel to attend to sick and wounded combatants, were circulating widely in Europe; that Dunant and his Swiss colleagues had no monopoly on these ideas; that the German practice of voluntary medical assistance

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<sup>2</sup>Book review reprinted with the permission of the *The International History Review*.

in war was quite advanced for its time; and that these ideas and practices were accepted by States largely out of concern to make war more efficient and acceptable, rather than because of the triumph of morality over *raison d'État*. With the creation of larger, draft armies and the more rapid spread of news, military establishments needed to do more to care for the wounded. Or, as the author writes, "Realpolitik was every bit as important as humanitarianism..." (p. 29).

It is true, as Hutchinson notes, and as a recent study by an ICRC official also shows,<sup>3</sup> that the ICRC first saw itself not as the lead operational Red Cross agency but as an organization that would support the national aid societies. However, Hutchinson makes clear that early on, and thereafter, the Swiss founding fathers of the movement manoeuvred to protect their position as the guardian of Red Cross developments. Rather than being high-minded, self-effacing, and above the fray, the Swiss in Geneva were part of the fray, beating back an early French bid for Red Cross leadership, then later an American one. From one point of view this ICRC primacy, or at least independence, turned out to be a good thing, for the modern ICRC has proved its humanitarian worth in numerous armed conflicts and complex emergencies — especially in contemporary international relations. From another viewpoint, however, Hutchinson's history shows that the all-Swiss ICRC could be just as nationalistic, self-serving, and petty as any other component of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The author also shows that the original symbol of the Movement, a red cross on a white background, probably had nothing to do with reversing the Swiss flag. He says there is no evidence for this interpretation in the 1860s. Rather, the bogus interpretation of the symbol's evolution was allowed to develop later, as part of a wise effort to downplay the role of Christianity in the origins of a movement that had become more global and multi-cultural, especially after Turkish involvement in the 1870s.

No doubt the central point to this study is that nation-states, principally their militaries, appropriated National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for their national purposes, and the ICRC was powerless to prevent them — although the Geneva group did not always oppose the nationalists. This trend was evident by 1870 but was clarified beyond doubt by World War I. There would not be, during wartime, neutral and interna-

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<sup>3</sup> François Bugnion, *Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, ICRC, Geneva, 1994, 1438 pp.

tional protection and assistance controlled from Geneva, but rather each National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society would service primarily its own nationals. From time to time the Russians or another group would propose a more centralized arrangement, but such plans always collapsed on the rocky shores of militarized nationalism. At times the ICRC joined the nationalist coalition to protect its position. Just as universal Marxism yielded to nationalism, so did Dunant's universal humanitarianism. In the United States during World War I an American was convicted of treason for refusing to support the American Red Cross — supposedly a private or at least quasi-private humanitarian society. The Japanese Red Cross Society of the time had no trouble combining militarism, sexism, aggression and expansionism, and was perhaps not so different from many other national units of this “humanitarian” movement.

Hutchinson concludes this publication, part of a multi-volume research agenda, with an engrossing effort by the American Henry Davison to reorient and restructure the Red Cross Movement after World War I by creating the League, now International Federation, of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. His original plan would have subordinated the ICRC to League (and American) leadership. The League was created through questionable procedures and was formally recognized in 1928, but in much weakened form, in part because of shrewd manoeuvres on the part of the ICRC, which was experienced in diplomacy. But this episode left the Movement even more fractured than before, now with two headquarters in Geneva and a certain rivalry between them on many occasions since the 1920s.

Overall, Hutchinson has done prodigious and careful research with a much needed critical eye. If the ICRC will be unhappy with this work, so will be many French, Americans, Japanese, and others. In so far as this non-historian reviewer can tell, errors are few and inconsequential. Most Red Cross publications are bland and self-congratulatory. Few are the independent authors who have striven for objective understanding of this much revered Movement and who have braved the difficulties of circumventing the obstacles in gaining access to the mostly closed archives of the ICRC. This is an important book for readers interested in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international relations, public health, and military establishments.

*David P. Forsythe*  
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**Jean-François Berger, *The humanitarian diplomacy of the ICRC and the conflict in Croatia (1991-1992)*, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, 1995, 70 pages**

There are some works which are noteworthy just as much for the questions they leave unanswered as for what they actually say about the events they set out to describe. Jean-François Berger's *The humanitarian diplomacy of the ICRC and the conflict in Croatia (1991-1992)* is one such book. In only 70 pages the author could do no more than paint a general picture of these two years of humanitarian diplomacy, and readers hoping to find more details will certainly have to seek them elsewhere. But Jean-François Berger, who was the head of the ICRC's Yugoslavia Task Force in 1991 and 1992 and was thus himself a player in the events he relates, obviously did not intend to write a definitive and comprehensive work on this chapter of modern history. He no doubt considered it useful, however, to give a first overview of these few months that were pivotal for the ICRC's work in this context. And indeed the book offers us some valuable insights.

History is made up of a succession of superimposed layers. The person who has to do the initial spadework has a thankless job. Too close to the events in question, with access to only some of the sources, he or she has the difficult task of outlining major developments, identifying the main problems and producing a sketch whose details will be filled in by the historians of the future. Those historians will owe a debt of gratitude to Jean-François Berger for clearing the ground.

This particular historical work, written so soon after the events, also serves an immediate purpose; it provides food for thought on the nature of humanitarian action in the last years of the twentieth century, on the role of the ICRC and in particular on humanitarian diplomacy, which is one of its instruments.

In recent years, and especially since 1989, humanitarian action has been entering a new era. It has moved into the forefront of international attention, one reason being that with the end of the Cold War certain

conflicts that had long been stifled have flared up into infernos. Another reason is that humanitarian action has become a complex and nebulous field, where governments using such action as a pretext rub shoulders with organizations of all kinds, whose standards of professionalism vary widely, and whose independence and impartiality are not above suspicion. What is more, all these players are operating in a context where sensational treatment of human tragedy and of appalling events has become part of the arsenal in the competition among the mass media.

It is in this setting that the ICRC has to conduct its ever-expanding activities, with due regard for its principles of action and its original and primary objective: to protect the victims. This is a difficult task, as in the context in which the ICRC operates there is always a risk of politicization and blunders, there is a constant temptation to distinguish between "good" and "bad" victims, and there is often a danger that humanitarian work will be manipulated for other purposes.

What Jean-François Berger demonstrates is that in this new and complicated environment it pays to adopt a professional, responsible and scrupulous approach. In describing the ICRC's diplomacy and the mediation efforts it made, the author merely confirms what we already know about mediation: its success depends on the atmosphere, the mediator's spirit of tolerance and ethical approach, the choice of venue and, of course, the importance of impartiality in choosing the right person for the mediator's job. Those are but a few of the factors which the parties themselves mentioned as being behind the success of the ICRC's efforts. Those same parties, asked to give their impressions of the ICRC's role, both questioned the neutrality of the organization, which they perceived either as partial or as excessively neutral. This in itself shows how difficult it is to maintain neutrality in practice, and how vital it is to do so.

Jean-François Berger concludes his work by drawing some lessons and expressing some wishes. He would like humanitarian agencies to present a united front and to rely on existing rules of humanitarian law. Are these wishes likely to be fulfilled? Many observers have their doubts when they consider the free-for-all that humanitarian endeavour has become; but that in no way detracts from their being worthy objectives, and the ones we have to pursue.

*Jean F. Freymond*

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**Dominique-D. Junod, *The imperiled Red Cross and the Palestine-Eretz-Yisrael conflict 1945-1952: The influence of institutional concerns on a humanitarian operation*, Kegan Paul International, London and New York, 1996, xvi and 344 pages.**

Dominique-D. Junod's book on the ICRC's humanitarian activities in the Middle East after the Second World War fills a gap, for the years that witnessed the birth of Israel against the backdrop of the Holocaust in Europe and the expulsion of tens of thousands of Palestinians from their homes certainly merit special attention. Herself an historian, the author gives a vivid description of the events that shook the Middle East between 1945 and 1952. Hence the book's interest for today's reader. For one thing, it recounts the historical facts, the repercussions of which are still being felt to this very day. For another, her critical analysis of a largely unknown chapter of humanitarian endeavour is a major contribution to spreading knowledge of the ICRC and its work.

Mrs Junod worked at the ICRC as an historical researcher. For the purposes of her book she had access to the archives of the International Committee and could make full use of them. The study was first written in French and approved as a doctoral thesis at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva. She has since left the ICRC and now lives in Israel.

Nevertheless, the author did not limit herself to the documents of the ICRC archives. She also obtained firsthand accounts from ICRC delegates and other people who had had personal experience of the period concerned or had been actively involved in the ICRC's work, and drew on other archives, in particular those of Britain and the State of Israel. It is surprising, however, that the author did not consider it useful to round out her view of the facts by also examining the archives of the Arab States concerned. Her explanation — practical difficulties of access to those archives — will not convince anyone who hopes to be assured of an impartial approach, even in a committed historical work. An omission of this kind is especially serious when it comes to research on a conflict

situation, in which it is more crucial than ever to take the position of each of the parties into account.

After a brief introduction of the ICRC, its operating principles and the serious problems in store for it following the Second World War, Mrs Junod describes the start of the ICRC's intervention during the unrest that shook Mandatory Palestine, then a territory under British administration. It was in February 1945 that a Zionist organization first approached the ICRC, requesting it to visit Palestinian Jews deported by the British authorities to Eritrea. At the time, however, the ICRC's energies were still fully tied up in its endeavours to help victims of the Second World War, and the reaction from Geneva shows that the ICRC was not immediately able to meet the challenges from the Middle East. It was only in the autumn of the same year that the ICRC decided to step in — to the displeasure of the London government — on behalf of a certain category of Jews deported from Palestine. And it was not until early 1948 that ICRC delegates set up their headquarters in Jerusalem, following the United Nations vote on the partition of Palestine and a few months before the withdrawal of British forces, a departure that left free rein to hostilities between Arabs and Jews for control of the territory. Mrs Junod recounts the ICRC's activities to assist civilians on both sides, during the war and also after the armistice agreements. It is nonetheless striking that the author shows such small interest in the fate of the Palestinian refugees. Yet the Palestinian civilian population, expelled from their villages and towns and subsequently "parked" in refugee camps that exist to this very day, were beyond doubt the primary victims of the hostilities, which were marked by the intense desire of each side to exclude the other. It should be recalled in this connection that ICRC delegates are still working in the Middle East on the territory that was Mandatory Palestine. The situation has changed, but the humanitarian problems remain basically the same.

The review of Mrs Junod's book could stop there, with a favourable assessment of an interesting book produced at great pains and dealing with a significant chapter in the annals of humanitarian endeavour and of the post-war ICRC — a story that is yet to be written. However, the author decided to take her investigation even further, as indicated by the book's subtitle: *The influence of institutional concerns on a humanitarian operation*. The book's title itself, *The imperiled Red Cross*, recalls the fact that the ICRC's very existence was in the balance at the time. The author attempts to show that a humanitarian initiative, or even a project, may be motivated by considerations totally divorced from the (humanitarian) problems that need to be solved on the ground — in other words, that an organization such as the ICRC was not acting simply out of a desire

to protect and assist persons in distress because of the fighting, but also had other reasons for doing so. She reaches the following conclusion: “*My research in fact demonstrates that it was political interests more than humanitarian convictions that motivated the ICRC’s great projects in the Palestine conflict, whether or not they had the result of improving the lot of the victims of that conflict (...)*”; the ICRC had, she felt, taken this action *inter alia* to demonstrate its usefulness, its (moral) right to survive, following its failures during the Second World War and in particular its inability to assist Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.

This approach led the author to examine and present the other major projects pursued by the ICRC alongside its operation in Palestine. There were many of them, the most important of which undoubtedly included the new codification of international humanitarian law that culminated in the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions in 1949. There was also the arduous quest for a new balance within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Legal scholars will observe with satisfaction the links between action in the field and the codification of a new law (for example, with regard to the discussion on safety zones).

What should we make of the hypothesis constantly repeated by the author in the book? Was the ICRC really acting chiefly to make up for the mistakes committed during the Second World War? Was it trying to “clear” its name and prove its worth despite past failures? There is no need to review here the history of the ICRC’s action — or inaction — to help civilian victims of Nazi persecution, Jews in particular.<sup>1</sup> The ICRC unquestionably did all it could after the war to prove that it was able to rise to the challenges facing it, that it could successfully accomplish its tasks in Palestine. It is also true that the ICRC was in peril in the immediate post-war years. It came under attack both from within the Movement and at the political level, especially from the USSR and Yugoslavia, which quite simply wanted the elimination of this private, neutral and independent body. Let us not forget that during the period that witnessed civil strife in Palestine and the creation of the State of Israel, the world experienced the extraordinary transition from the Allied victory in 1945 to the Cold War with nuclear warheads on permanent alert. At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> See Jean-Claude Favez, *Une mission impossible? Le CICR, les déportations et les camps de concentration nazis*, Payot, Lausanne, 1988, and Francois Bugnion, *Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, ICRC, Geneva, 1994, in particular, p. 224 ff.

the colonies' incipient struggle for independent statehood was heralding far-reaching geopolitical changes. What was more natural than for the ICRC to try to find its bearings? And even if it did attempt to vindicate itself in Palestine, why not? This attitude must be considered in parallel with the fact (mentioned in passing by the author) that the ICRC was at the time also engaged in operations as complex as those to alleviate suffering during the civil war in Greece, the conflict in Indochina, the strife on the Indian subcontinent, or the mass displacements in Central Europe resulting directly from the war. Its constant funding problems must also be taken into account.

The ICRC therefore had every reason to do its utmost to succeed in its activities in Palestine. The Geneva-based institution had to confirm its credibility and at the same time re-establish and reinforce its position internationally, especially in the new post-war environment and the Cold War. The author's contention that purely political considerations or concern for its own survival did more to determine the ICRC's actions than humanitarian motives nonetheless remains unconvincing and ultimately highly unlikely. Mrs Junod's book does not, at any rate, furnish proof of this.

*Hans-Peter Gasser*  
International Review of the Red Cross

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