



**THE FUNDAMENTAL  
PRINCIPLES OF THE  
RED CROSS**

COMMENTARY  
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## **Proclamation of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross**

The XXth International Conference of the Red Cross proclaims the following fundamental principles on which Red Cross action is based:

### **HUMANITY**

The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours – in its international and national capacity – to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

### **IMPARTIALITY**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

### **NEUTRALITY**

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

### **INDEPENDENCE**

The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles.

### **VOLUNTARY SERVICE**

The Red Cross is a voluntary relief organization not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

### **UNITY**

There can be only one Red Cross Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

### **UNIVERSALITY**

The Red Cross is a world-wide institution in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other.

## INTRODUCTION

*To think without acting leads to nothing, but to act without thinking leads to disaster.*  
-Japanese proverb.

### **A reminder**

The Twentieth International Red Cross Conference, meeting in Vienna in 1965, proclaimed the “fundamental principles upon which Red Cross action is based”. Since that time, at every Conference, the representatives of the Red Cross world rise to their feet to hear the solemn reading of those principles.

The principles, however, have not yet been the subject of any commentary. The fact is that the book *Les principes de la Croix-Rouge*, the source of the Vienna text, antedated the official version which, while being close to the model, was not identical with it. The book referred to was indeed a complete work, of a somewhat scientific character, and not a terse commentary designed to serve the general public.

A desire has therefore been expressed particularly in relation to the study on the Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross, for a simple and modern commentary which would make these principles understandable to everyone, and especially to the young people, who represent the future. For these reasons, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the Swiss Red Cross have asked the Henry Dunant Institute to prepare such a commentary. This book is intended to meet that request. For obvious reasons, it contains elements from *Red Cross Principles*, in abbreviated form, supplemented by more recent material.

The author of the Final Report on the Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross raised questions as to precisely what constituted Red Cross principles, commenting that there was some confusion concerning them. In reality, there is no possible doubt, at least with regard to the fundamental principles, for these are set forth in the Proclamation of 1965, whose fundamental character is obvious. The Red Cross world was determined at that time to provide itself with a true charter, as the fruit of a century of experience and the lasting basis for its future activity.

There is also another text on the principles of the Red Cross, adopted by the Board of Governors of the League at Oxford in 1956 and approved by the Eighteenth International Red Cross Conference in 1952. However, the joint commission responsible for drafting the fundamental principles, which subsequently became the Proclamation of 1965, took the Oxford text into consideration and took from it material of a general character.

The Oxford text, a verbose and loosely drafted document produced at the end of the Second World War, consists for the most part of organic or institutional principles and of simple rules for action – which continue to be valid within these limits but which have no place in a proclamation. The same is true for various precepts set forth in resolutions by the International Red Cross Conferences.

It will certainly be useful in due course to bring together all those organic principles, now so dispersed, into a single declaration to which the International Conference could give its approval.

Furthermore, we must avoid confusion of the principles of the Red Cross with the principles of international humanitarian law, mainly embodied in the Geneva Conventions for the protection of the victims of war. The former serve at all times to inspire the action of the Red Cross as a private institution, whereas the latter, which have an official character, regulate in wartime the conduct of States vis-à-vis their enemies.

There is nevertheless a link between these two fields, for humanitarian law had its origin in the ideal of the Red Cross, which continues to stimulate its development. Thus there are certain principles, such as those of humanity and of non-discrimination, which in a sense are common to both.

In addition, when they accord their protection to the National Societies of the Red Cross, the Conventions refer on occasion to activities which are in conformity with the principles laid down by the International Red Cross Conferences. These principles are indeed none other than those embodied in the Vienna Proclamation.

The present work will therefore be concerned with providing a commentary on that Proclamation. In presenting the Proclamation to the International Red Cross Conference in 1965, its authors by no means believed that they had achieved perfection at the first attempt. The fact is that the text suffers from some defects and omissions which will become apparent in the light of the critical examination to which we shall subject it in this study. This should help us sketch the outlines of a future revision when the time comes, for nothing in this world is unchangeable. These imperfections do not, however, have such importance or urgency as to require an early revision. As it stands today, the Proclamation provides the Red Cross, now and for a long time to come, with a firm and healthy doctrinal foundation.

### **A universal doctrine**

The work of the Red Cross is born of a high ideal, from which it continually draws fresh life, but as it primarily consists of practical actions, frequently improvised, there is a serious risk that in the haste of charitable action and in spite of the purity of one's intentions, one may deviate from the guiding principles, and unity of thought may be lacking.

There is also the fact that the Red Cross takes root in all parts of the world, differing greatly one from another. The National Societies are extremely varied, and each has its own distinctive character. Some are strong while others are still weak: they may have many members or only a few: some have had long experience while others have just come into existence. They do not all have identical activities and some do not have clearly defined programmes.

The doctrine of the Red Cross therefore – along with, but more important than, the Statutes of the International Red Cross – is the real link between these Societies, the cement which holds the stones together to make of them a solid and well built edifice. It is this doctrine which creates the unity and the universality of the structure, which, indeed, makes the Red Cross a reality. Without principles, the Red Cross would simply not exist.

It is therefore indispensable for it to have a sound and precise doctrine. Strange as it may seem, however, it was only after the upheavals of the First World War that the International Committee of the Red Cross, the founding body of the movement and designated as the guardian of its principles, felt the need to formulate this doctrine. In earlier days, tradition had more force than the written law. Certain ideas of a moral order which it was not permitted to discuss or necessary to explain imposed themselves upon human conscience. Thus it was that the Red Cross, in all its many aspects, forged its tenets in the hard school of life.

Even as late as in 1921 the first reference to a codified doctrine was unobtrusive. This concerned what we now refer to as the summary of fundamental principles, as they appear in the Statutes of the International Red Cross. They had been enumerated by the ICRC as follows, impartiality, action independent of any racial, political, religious or economic considerations, the universality of the Red Cross and the equality of the National Red Cross Societies. This text still lacked the most important principle of all, the principle of humanity. Since then a great servant of the Red Cross, Max Huber, President of the ICRC, determined to provide the institution with a doctrine. He did so, with an incomparable nobility of vision and sureness of judgement. The various elements however were dispersed among his writings, having been worked out for the most part to meet the exigencies of the Second World War.

The first systematic presentation of the principles of the Red Cross, as we have noted, dates from 1955 and served as the basis for the official Proclamation which today has the force of law.

The doctrine of the Red Cross is permanent. It is the expression of long-term wisdom, indifferent to the ebb and flow of popular opinions and ideologies of the moment. It outlived those who created it and this lasting character is perhaps a sign of its superiority over everything that happens here on earth.

In order to play the decisive role required of it, this doctrine must be universal. For people of all races, cultures and opinions to be able to accept it, it must be expressed in words which are understood by everyone.

The Red Cross has proclaimed its unity and its universality. These ideas must be based upon something to which they are similar and to which they can be compared. While people differ, human nature everywhere is the same – and there is nothing more widespread than human suffering, to which all men are equally vulnerable and sensitive.

However, even though we recognize today the unity of human feelings, we no longer believe that there is only one valid civilization, worthy of the name. On the contrary, we now acknowledge the pluralism of cultures and the need to become acquainted with them and study them deeply. In doing so we realize that humanitarian principles belong to all peoples and take root under all favourable conditions. When we bring together and compare different moral systems and dispose of the non-essentials, that is to say their special peculiarities, we find in the crucible a pure metal, the universal heritage of mankind.

As we proceed with this study we can see that there is no unmitigable collision between the “different worlds” which we have placed in contrast. All doctrines can lead to the great law of the Red Cross, but each one by its own pathway, in accordance with the convictions and characters of the various peoples. The Red Cross serves to unite, and not to divide. It is thus

for the Red Cross to proclaim norms which have universal validity, because they are fully in accord with human nature.

### **Definition and classification**

Before beginning to study the principles of the Red Cross, one must first investigate what a principle is. This is a concept which is not easy to define, but about which everyone nevertheless has relatively clear feelings. In philosophical terms, a principle is an abstraction of a moral nature, derived from the ideal tendencies of society, which imposes itself upon human conscience and becomes an absolute imperative, above and beyond discussion. In terms of what we are now concerned with, we shall say that a principle is simply a rule, based upon judgement and experience, which is adopted by a community to guide its conduct.

To achieve their purpose, these principles must be presented clearly, so that they are understood by everyone. In this respect the Proclamation is quite restrained and even lapidary. This does not mean that it does not need a commentary. The more general and condensed a text is, the richer it is in its potentialities and the more open to possibilities for exploration. To deal with cases not specifically provided for, it is necessary to extrapolate, that is, to project the lines beyond the original sketch. I shall try to give this commentary the clarity and simplicity of its model.

The principles of the Red Cross do not all have the same importance. They have a hierarchical order, indicated at the outset by the sequence in which they are presented in the Proclamation. They also have an internal logic, so that each one to a degree flows from another. I shall therefore try to place them in appropriate categories. Any classification has a somewhat arbitrary character however and the pattern outlined below will necessarily be theoretical in some aspects and, in practical life, we shall find that some of the categories overlap.

We shall remain faithful to the terminology of the Proclamation by characterizing as fundamental principles the seven propositions adopted in 1965. Some of these, however, actually include two or three concepts, bringing to about fifteen the real number of principles. We shall not be dealing here with the simple rules of action which are applied in practice and contribute to the efficiency of the organization, such rules as are to be found, for example, in what we referred to above as the Oxford text.

Among the fundamental principles we find first of all the substantive principles . These stand above all contingencies and particular cases; they inspire the organization and determine its acts. They belong to the domain of objectives and not to that of ways and means. Among these, the first one, humanity, has a special place because it is the expression of the profound motivation of the Red Cross, from which all the other principles are derived. Accordingly, we speak of this as the essential principle .

The other substantive principles are non-discrimination and proportionality (merged in the proclamation under the heading “Impartiality”). The first of these is closely linked to the principle of humanity; the second results from the concepts of humanity and non-discrimination.

Next in order are the derived principles of neutrality and independence, which make it possible to put the essential principle into action and enable us, without deforming them, to translate the substantive principles into factual reality. They also assure the Red Cross of the

confidence of all parties, which is indispensable to the discharge of its mission. Here, we are within the domain of means and not of ends. Neutrality and independence are related directly to non-discrimination,

The third category, finally, is that of organic principles which have an institutional character. Included among these are unselfishness and voluntary action (combined in the Proclamation under " Voluntary service"), unity and universality. These are standards for application, relating to the structure and operation of the institution, coming into play primarily in connection with specific tasks. They are less far-reaching than the previous principles. It should be noted however that the principle of universality has a mixed character, relating both to an ideal and to practicality, derived in part from the precepts of humanity and of non-discrimination. With regard to unselfishness and voluntary action, we find that these are closely related to the principle of humanity. Lastly, unity is linked to non-discrimination.

### **Translating principles into action**

The doctrine of the Red Cross, as we have said, is universal. Its application should also be universal. If it were to be scrupulously observed everywhere, all Red Cross activity, inspired by it, would proceed along parallel lines in the different countries, which is especially necessary in the event of conflicts.

The doctrine constitutes a coherent system, an indivisible whole, whose different parts are as solid as the stones in a building. It is impossible, therefore, depending upon latitude or longitude, to accept certain elements while rejecting others.

The reading of the Proclamation sometimes gives rise to the following question: is there any one Red Cross Society which puts this admirable doctrine into effect, at all times and in its totality? It is not easy to answer this question. We have to recognize, at least, that a substantial number of Societies fall far short of complying with all the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, either in letter or in spirit. It suffices to mention as stumbling blocks only such points as non-discrimination in relief and in organic structure, autonomy vis-à-vis the public authorities, political and religious neutrality and the extension of activity to the whole territory of countries.

A second question then arises, one which is no less serious: Is it not hypocritical to proclaim a Charter described as sacrosanct and at the same time to tolerate its transgression? The truth is that nothing in life is absolute. The doctrine of the Red Cross, formulated at a particular moment in history, applies to a living world in never-ending movement, to a society composed of men who have not attained perfection. Sometimes it represents an ideal model to which we may aspire, rather than an unbending and rigorous law.

In legal terms, it is true indeed that the ICRC, in serious cases, could withdraw international recognition from a National Society which displayed conduct in flagrant contradiction of the "conditions of recognition", one of which, specifically, is to "honour the fundamental principles of the Red Cross". If the ICRC did not have this right, the whole procedure for admission to the International Red Cross would be nothing but a farce, for it would be sufficient for a Society to comply for only one day, the day of its recognition! The International Red Cross Conference has recently confirmed this power. We may note that the ICRC has never yet had to take such an extreme measure. In any event, so long as the spirit of the Red Cross survives, that spirit which makes of the movement a living and coherent reality,

sanctions will be superfluous; should such a spirit cease to exist, it is a safe bet that sanctions would be powerless to enforce compliance.

Thus, while the ICRC vigilantly oversees the maintenance of the principles of the Red Cross – which is one of its cardinal objectives – we may be sure that inspired by the adage: *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*, it will be careful to avoid dogmatism. In publishing, before the Second World War, the conditions for recognition of new Red Cross Societies which it had itself formulated, the ICRC added to them the comment, *bearing in mind in particular the complexity of the international juridical status of various State groupings, the ICRC is obliged to interpret these principles with a certain degree of flexibility, taking into account the particular circumstances in each individual case*. Such a reservation is a wise one and is valid as well for the principles of the Red Cross.

The National Societies are the auxiliaries of the public authorities, whose full support they need and with whom they must have relations of full confidence. These Societies cannot exist as foreign bodies within their nations, as Max Huber once remarked. We may therefore assume as a general rule that whenever a Society remains for a long period in contradiction with one of the principles it is due to ineluctable exigencies imposed upon it by the law or by the power of the State.

On the other hand, what we do expect of the Society is that it will remain vigilant and on every occasion will seek to obtain a better understanding of the profound significance of the Red Cross; that it will do all within its power to return to a normal situation as quickly as possible.

The important thing is to remain dedicated, come what may, to the ideal and spirit of the Red Cross. In this domain, we may very well display our intransigence. This ideal and this spirit have been expressed in the substantive principles which, as we have seen, rank higher than the others. These the Red Cross cannot surrender at any cost. It will remain faithful to them or it will not survive.

### **Some additional observations**

We observe today a weakening throughout the world of the spirit of service. The Red Cross also suffers from this general tendency. It is therefore confronted by the need to restore and strengthen this spirit among its members.

In a rapidly changing society, too many people seem to be losing sight of the underlying realities which must guide the institution. Donald Tansley found in the Red Cross a great deal of confusion as to its fundamental role and the absence of a sense of common purpose. He saw the cause for this in the extremely diversified development of its activities in the course of its first century, a tendency which is certainly on the increase today.

There was no such problem in the early days of the Red Cross, when it was concerned only with the military wounded and sick. Today however, apart from their traditional tasks, certain National Societies exercise such varied activities as the fight against pollution, mountain rescue services, eradication of illiteracy, birth control, etc. In this connection, Tansley does not only warn against the handicaps of ignorance, but against nothing less than the danger of disintegration. I hope the present work will remedy this to some extent and contribute to better understanding of an overriding ideal.

As the world confronts new needs, it is natural to attempt to meet them. Not all suffering however can be alleviated by the Red Cross. The institution does not have a comprehensive programme, complete and fully defined. To draft such a programme would be a difficult task, demanding a great deal of time and care.

The Red Cross does of course have a certain image of what the world could be, a world with respect for life, individual liberty, universal happiness, rejection of violence and hatred, tolerance and non-discrimination. It could be asserted therefore that its philosophy is optimistic, since it does not despair of the individual and demonstrates by its actions its faith in existence. After all, if man no longer finds it possible to love his fellow beings, he is lost .

This does not mean that the Red Cross adheres to any particular ideology. It is not part of its role to approve any one system and condemn the others. It takes the world as it is, with its lights and shadows, strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, passions and fictions.

What it seeks and proposes, in the field of assistance, are practical solutions of human proportions.

Thus, as Max Huber recalled, the Red Cross was not based upon an abstract idea but was created on a battlefield, amidst the distress which was an immediate and present fact, by men and women who set to work. It is because of that that it lives and will go on living.

The morality of the Red Cross is therefore valid to the extent that it expresses itself in concrete realities. As Bergson said – and this applies especially to the Red Cross – We must always act as men of thought and think as men of action.

## I. HUMANITY

*The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours - in its international and national capacity - to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.*

### Preamble

The Proclamation begins with a brief reference which obviously does not constitute part of the principle of humanity itself. It is a kind of historic preamble, recalling that the Red Cross was born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield .

Doubtless, this phrase has no logical place in a declaration which should be devoted only to fundamental principles. It has the merit of serving as a reminder however to those – and they are numerous – who have a tendency nowadays to forget that the Red Cross was born of the sufferings of war. At the time of its creation and for the first years of its existence, the Red Cross had as its only mission the assisting of wounded soldiers and preparing itself to do so.

However, in order to measure up to their task in the event of conflict, the National Societies very soon realized the need to work in peacetime. First of all, they had to train personnel and prepare necessary material, in other words be ready for instantaneous mobilization. This personnel, on the other hand, could not be allowed to remain idle between conflicts and become demoralized by uselessly awaiting action. One could not train a huge phalanx and hold it in readiness for a very uncertain eventuality, especially when there were so many wounds to heal throughout the world.

The Societies therefore began to care for sick civilians, to run hospitals and nurseries, set up schools for nurses, to work for improved hygiene and to intervene in the event of natural disasters. Finally, they included the entire population in their sphere of activity, and this peacetime work became an end in itself. This tendency was accelerated after the First World War, at a time when it was felt that the spectre of war had been banished forever, and gave rise to the League of Red Cross Societies. The Red Cross movement would certainly never have achieved its universal extension and worldwide popularity if it had remained within its original bounds.

In the early days of the Red Cross, assistance to the war wounded mainly took the form of close co-operation with the military medical services, of which the National Societies were the natural auxiliaries. In a number of countries however it worked the other way and the foundation of the National Society stimulated major reforms in the military medical services. Today, in the most prosperous countries, the military services have assumed such proportions and attained such a high level of efficiency that they hardly have any more need for assistance from National Societies. We should not draw hasty conclusions from this, however, for this is not at all the case in a majority of countries and if, unhappily, a great battle should take place in a developing continent, there is every reason to believe that it would be a new Solferino.

Nowadays, in terms of volume, peacetime work constitutes the greater part of the day to day tasks of the National Societies. The historic reference which stands first in the Proclamation is a very opportune reminder however that the war activities for which the Red Cross was created conserves its precedence in the scale of values. This is not only true for the ICRC, which is the preeminent neutral agent in wartime. It is equally true for the whole movement. Other benevolent institutions may care for sick civilians, cripples and orphans, whereas for the Red Cross, war is the decisive test. It is in wartime, when everything seems lost, when man has chosen the path of suffering and annihilation, that the Red Cross stands as the defender of the supreme interests of humanity.

The preamble also provides a reminder of the necessity, recognized from the very beginning, of providing assistance “without discrimination”. This concept, which we shall discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, deserves to have a prominent place, for it is inseparable from the Red Cross and from the very principle of humanity itself. If, in a spirit of equity, the Red Cross extends its action to everyone, it will, in a spirit of humanity, exclude no one, even those one might be tempted to hate. Thus, as was written long ago by the Chinese philosopher Meh-ti, Only a love which makes no distinction will save the world. Any philanthropy which based its action upon the merits of the people it helped would be doomed in advance, starting from a false premise and ending in failure.

### **Terminology**

Confusion sometimes arises between the words human and humanitarian, humanism and humanitarianism, abstract expressions which all derive from the same origin – the word man.

Human , in its original sense, refers to all that concerns man. However, in the sense which is now of interest to us, the word human is used to describe a man who is good to his fellow beings. We shall come back to this point.

Humanity is therefore the sentiment or attitude of someone who shows himself to be human. Following Littré’s dictionary, we would define humanity as a sentiment of active goodwill towards mankind. The word humanity in this sense is so perfectly suited to the Red Cross that it was chosen to designate its essential principle. At the same time, the word also serves to specify human nature and even the human species as a whole. In addition, it is rather more a feeling than a principle, so that perfect logic would suggest a preference for the word humanitarianism. These are minor drawbacks however and we should maintain the word humanity, for it is simple, direct and closer to man.

Humanitarian characterizes any action beneficent to man. Humanism is a philosophical doctrine whose ultimate object is the human being. This concept is a broader one than humanitarianism, with which we are mainly concerned.

Humanitarianism is a doctrine which aims at the happiness of the human species, or, if one prefers, it is the attitude of humanity towards mankind, on a basis of universality.

Modern humanitarianism is an advanced and rational form of charity and justice. It is not only directed to fighting against the suffering of a given moment and of helping particular individuals, for it also has more positive aims, designed to attain the greatest possible measure of happiness for the greatest number of people. In addition, humanitarianism does not only act to cure but also to prevent suffering, to fight against evils, even over a long term of time. The Red Cross is a living example of this approach.

Closely associated with humanity is charity. Charity is an effort demanded of us, either inwardly or from the outside, which becomes a second nature, to relieve and put an end to the sufferings of others. Here again there is a risk of confusion of terms, for the word has also come to refer simply to the giving of alms. Charity is above all an expression of Christian morality and is synonymous with love for one's neighbour. Since there is generally only one word for "love" in modern languages, there has sometimes been a confusion between love in the sense of desire and love in the sense of devotion. It is naturally in the latter sense that we use it here, for we are speaking of altruistic and disinterested love, which can be required of us, which calls for a certain degree of self-control, a love which is extended even to our enemies.

Pity is one of the driving forces of charity. It is a spontaneous movement, an instantaneous affective reaction to the suffering of others. Littré defines pity as "that sentiment aroused at the sight of suffering that prompts one to relieve it". It is also called compassion, that stirring of the soul which makes one responsive to the distress of others, according to Larousse. Pity is like a forerunner of charity.

### **Commentary**

In the doctrine of the Red Cross, the principle of humanity, from which all the other principles flow, obviously has to stand in first place. As the basis of the institution, it provides at the same time its ideal, its motivation and its objective. It is indeed the prime mover for the whole movement, the spark which ignites the powder, the line of force for all its action. If the Red Cross were to have only one principle, it would be this one.

Such a text also enables the institution to define its tasks, to outline the field for its intervention and mark its limits, which is a major necessity. Although it is the purpose of the Red Cross to make the world a better place, it can do so only in certain respects. It cannot undertake every activity regarded as benevolent but must concentrate on specific responsibilities. Only in so doing will it guard itself from a dangerous dispersal of effort.

The principle of humanity was formulated for the first time in 1955, as follows, The Red Cross fights against suffering and death. It demands that man shall be treated humanely under all circumstances.

In the Proclamation, this principle includes three elements, very closely related to one another, apart from the reference to peace, a programme element which we shall deal with separately, as follows:

#### **(a) To prevent and alleviate suffering**

For the purpose of this commentary, we shall reverse the order of the terms in the declaration since, in its history, the Red Cross has been concerned first of all with relieving human suffering, before giving thought to preventing it. Furthermore, its restorative action, which consists in relieving distress, has continued to constitute by far the greater part of its endeavours.

Everyone knows suffering, that ancient and intimate enemy of man; from his birth it follows him like a shadow and one shudders to think of the indescribable accumulation of pain which

has weighed down the human race since the beginning of the world. The most odious form of suffering is that which man inflicts deliberately. As Montaigne said, I bitterly hate cruelty as the worst of all vices .

By suffering, we refer not only to all pain, but also to every injury, even though it is not felt. We must make an exception however for cases in which the suffering may be due to therapeutic necessity, for it is then admissible to cause pain to avoid a greater pain. We are therefore mainly concerned with unnecessary suffering.

In the past, there was a tendency to accept misery – especially that of other people – with resignation. There was an acceptance of the excessively facile explanation of inevitable destiny. Nowadays, it is true, the total sum of suffering which afflicts the world has certainly not diminished and in some regions it is on the increase. The sense of human solidarity has developed however and people are more aware of the duty of combating distress wherever it manifests itself, and no matter how disproportionate to it are the means available.

Under this heading, the principle of humanity sets for the Red Cross its task in time of war – its primary and essential function – and also its work in time of peace. It governs its work of material, medical and social assistance, both in national and international terms. It does not aim only at relieving physical pain, but also the moral suffering which the Red Cross attempts to alleviate, for example when it relieves a family of uncertainty and anguish as to the fate of a loved one. The principle is valid furthermore no matter what the cause of the suffering may be – whether it is due for example to a catastrophe resulting from natural causes, shortages of life's necessities or to human negligence or malignity.

The Proclamation correctly emphasizes that the restorative action of the Red Cross must be accompanied by preventive action. The best means of fighting against suffering, after all, is to prevent it from arising, to seek out and eliminate its causes, to nip the evil in the bud. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the common expression has it.

In the field of health, prophylaxis, vaccinations, hygiene, early detection of diseases, teaching, etc. are increasingly extensive activities among the National Societies.

In the field of administration, prevention takes the form of advance preparation, for the Red Cross must be ready at any time to face the tasks it may encounter. This necessity was apparent from the very beginning of the Red Cross and it was a mark of the genius of Henry Dunant that he understood that in order to be effective relief for the victims of war had to be prepared incessantly in times of peace. This takes the form of training personnel, preparing material, perfecting methods and conducting scientific research. It is therefore one of the conditions for recognition of new Red Cross Societies that they become prepared in time of peace for wartime activities .

In the legal field, prevention calls for the work of developing international humanitarian law. As we know, the ICRC has been concerned since the beginning with promoting and perfecting the rules protecting the victims of conflicts and it was the architect of the Geneva Conventions. Lastly, it is prevention which determines the role of the Red Cross in favour of peace. There are those who are not satisfied to see it confine itself to attenuating the effects of war, but insist that it attack the evil of war at its root and participate directly in the fight against this scourge.

**(b) To protect life and health**

It has often been said in the past that the Red Cross fights against suffering, but up to now little has been said about its fight against death. This, nevertheless, is just as important an aspect as the former; it is a supreme objective of the Red Cross to save lives. It achieves this both by its action of assistance and its action of protection. But, since death is finally inescapable, it can clearly act only to delay its coming.

Statistics inform us that the average length of human life in western Europe was 20 years under the Romans, 40 years in 1800 and around 70 years today. In the Crimean war in the last century, 60% of the wounded died, whereas 100 years later, in the Korean war, the figure for the American forces was down to 2%. In addition, during the military campaigns in the second half of the 19th century, deaths due to disease among the troops were triple or even quintuple the number of losses caused by arms. All this has radically changed, thanks to antiseptic measures and the great advance of medical science. The action of the Red Cross has also been a substantial factor.

Some philosophers maintain that the moral value of an act of charity depends upon the nobility of purpose of the one who performs it. Possibly so, but for the Red Cross what counts is that it be effective, that it be beneficial to those who suffer. As stated in the Koran, The perfect man is the one most useful to others . It does not matter a great deal, after all, in what spirit the act is performed. It is certainly true that donors sometimes have ulterior motives of self-interest, vanity or political propaganda – but it already counts for a great deal that people have been relieved, who otherwise would have received no help.

But the way in which that help is given is of great importance. When nursing a patient or giving help, one must show some humanity, that is to say, in this instance, tact, imagination and intelligence. What is charity which shows no sense of decency towards the unfortunate person and which, before comforting him, begins by crushing his self-respect? wrote Marivaux. It is true that an act of kindness clumsily bestowed may humiliate the person receiving it and even be taken as an insult. Therefore, the person who is giving or helping must not make his pity felt, but must show a cheerful face to the world. Why? Because happiness is contagious and it does good. It is as simple as that. To give happiness is also charity; sometimes even very great charity. Besides it is not difficult to smile. It is enough to reflect that one is bringing a little happiness to a frequently unhappy world.

Only in the past few years has there been a recognition of the need to “humanize” hospitals. It is no longer enough to make sure that the care is good; the time in hospital must be made as agreeable as possible for the patient and the utmost respect must be accorded to his customs and to his freedom, that most precious possession. Hospitals have made great technical advances, but even today, too often, sicknesses are being treated instead of individuals, who are regarded simply as “numbers”, and there is a neglect of the human relations between those giving and receiving the treatment. This of course is just one consequence of the degeneration of social relations which we observe everywhere, on the highways, in stores, buses and trains – resulting from the erosion of family patterns.

It is in the hospitals, however, and in asylums and old people’s homes where, feeling themselves to be in a state of inferiority and dependence and all the more vulnerable and sensitive, people suffer most from an absence of human sympathy and warmth. Research has demonstrated that patients show better and quicker recovery in a sympathetic and gay

atmosphere. There is no merit to be found in grey walls, sour faces and tasteless food. Then, let us have pretty pictures on the walls and smiles on our faces! The giving of joy is also charity, and perhaps the greatest charity sometimes.

The National Societies, in their training of nurses and social workers, can play a splendid role in this respect.

### **(c) To assure respect for the individual**

Francis Bacon once wrote that a man who does not treat his neighbour humanely is not truly human. The ideal of the Red Cross is much greater than its own action. It does not therefore limit itself to assistance and protection, but demands that everyone must respect the human person, his life, liberty and happiness – in other words, everything that constitutes his existence. This must naturally correspond to the requirements of public order and, in wartime, of military necessity.

This is a duty imposed upon the whole Red Cross movement at all times. In practice, it is manifested primarily by the interventions of the ICRC with the responsible authorities on behalf of victims of armed conflicts and disorders, the wounded and sick, shipwrecked persons, prisoners of war and civilians. These ICRC interventions, backed up by visits to places of detention, tend to bring about a strict and faithful application of humanitarian law, which has found its most complete and up to date expression in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols of 1977. These basic documents, serving as a barrier against the arbitrary exercise of power, are inseparable from the Red Cross, in their source as in their living reality.

All the provisions of humanitarian law constitute no more than the affirmation, constantly renewed, that the victims of conflicts are first of all men and that nothing, not even war, can deprive them of the minimum things required by respect for the human person. This law demands that everyone shall be treated as a human being and not as an object, as an end in himself and not as a mere means to an end.

The Geneva Conventions can be summed up in a single principle: persons who have been put out of action or who do not take a direct part in hostilities shall be respected, protected and humanely treated. These ideas are closely akin, but are not synonymous. Together, they constitute a coherent whole.

To respect is primarily an attitude of abstaining, meaning: do not harm, do not threaten, spare the lives, integrity and the means of existence of others, have regard for their individual personality and dignity.

To protect is a more positive attitude. It is a question of preserving others from evils, dangers or suffering to which they may be exposed, to take their defence and give them aid and support.

As regards humane treatment, it would be useless and hazardous to enumerate all it constitutes, since it varies according to circumstances. To determine it is a question of common sense and good faith. At least, we can say that humane treatment is a minimum to be reserved for the individual to enable him to lead an acceptable existence in as normal a manner as possible.

We shall give a real example of this action of the ICRC. Amid the hot sands of the desert, in a country where a civil war was raging and in which neither the Red Cross nor the Geneva Conventions had previously penetrated, ICRC delegates obtained an agreement from the two conflicting parties that they would abandon their ancestral practice of executing defeated enemies. Soon afterwards, a local chief suddenly came face to face with an adversary. In the single combat which followed, both were wounded, but the chief, less seriously injured, was able to bandage his wound. Then he turned to the man who, just a moment earlier, had tried to kill him, and treated his wound as well. He then took his captive to his own home. Here, his whole family, all the other warriors and all of his friends were against him and demanded that he kill the enemy. His own mother told him, If you are a real man, prove it . This chief held his ground however, and after his wound was healed took the prisoner to military headquarters. This combatant, and hundreds like him, were saved in this manner.

### **The Red Cross and peace**

The Red Cross promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples , in the words of the Proclamation. This phrase, introduced at a meeting of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross at Prague in 1961, was not a part of the original draft, because its authors considered that it was a programme question.

In their opinion, it was not for the declaration of fundamental principles to enumerate the tasks of the Red Cross but only to specify the imperatives which inspired them. Thus, in their view, action for peace flowed quite naturally from the principle of humanity with its command to prevent human suffering . It will be well to bear this point in mind if the Proclamation should ever come to be revised.

The foregoing comment does not in any way tend to minimize the importance of the question which it is customary to raise at meetings of the institution under the heading “The Red Cross and Peace”. It cannot be stated too many times that this does not entail a study, in all its amplitude and complexity, of the whole programme for maintaining peace in the world and for the peaceful settlement of conflicts, but only the modest influence which the Red Cross can bring to bear in this connection.

The founders of the Red Cross. Henry Dunant in particular, considered at the very beginning that the ultimate objective of the work they set in motion and the Convention they inspired was none other than that of universal peace. They understood the fact that the Red Cross, by pressing its ideal to its logical outcome, would be working for its own abolition, that a day would come when, men having finally accepted and put into effect its message of humanity by laying down and destroying their arms and thus making a future war impossible, the Red Cross would no longer have any reason for being. This is the meaning of the motto, *Per humanitatem ad pacem* which stands before the Constitution of the League of Red Cross Societies, along with the traditional slogan, *Inter arma caritas*.

The fact that since that time the Geneva Conventions came to cover other categories of victims and that the Red Cross enlarged its field of action to cover virtually all forms of human suffering has changed nothing – except of course that no one thinks any longer about the disappearance of the Red Cross once war has been abolished; people think rather of the complete conversion of its energies to charitable peacetime work.

In 1921, after the First World War, the ICRC and the young League of Red Cross Societies jointly launched “an appeal in favour of a spirit of peace”. It was only in 1930, however, that the subject was first discussed and exhaustively examined by the International Red Cross Conference which then passed a resolution of the greatest importance, since it established guidelines which remain valid today. The resolution said, in part:

“The Conference... considering that an essential condition of this activity is a scrupulous observance of the principle of racial, religious and political neutrality, a principle which enables the Red Cross to recruit its helpers among all races, creeds and parties, without excluding any, considering that the National Societies, in this manner, develop and organize within their territories, on a neutral basis, the efforts of charitable persons with a view to strengthening the efficacy of their work, considering that the National Societies – extending over all countries and collaborating, through their international organization, towards the realization of a common aim under a distinctive sign consecrated by a universal treaty – represent a moral force in international affairs and an element of mutual aid and reconciliation between peoples, expresses its conviction that the Red Cross, by its efforts to establish these points of contact will bring the support of its moral force and prestige to the world movement towards comprehension and conciliation, the essential guarantees for the maintenance of peace, and will thus work efficaciously against war as the sole means of preventing that suffering the mitigation of which originally formed the primary object of its activity”.

Since the adoption of that resolution, Red Cross gatherings have passed many others on the same subject. In these long texts, we find an abundance of repetition and “literature” but not so much in the way of constructive proposals. Two resolutions nevertheless deserve our attention; both relate to direct action by the Red Cross in favour of peace. The first of these emerged from the Congress which marked the Centenary of the Red Cross. It approved the role played by the ICRC in the “Cuba affair” at the request of the United Nations and concluded in general terms that, it is desirable that the Committee respond to the call made upon it simultaneously by States in conflict to act as intermediary or assist in the proper discharge of the obligations they have undertaken, thus contributing to the maintenance of peace .

The second resolution we should like to mention was passed by the International Red Cross Conference in 1969. This resolution “recommends that in cases of armed conflicts or of situations which are a threat to peace the ICRC shall, if necessary, ask the representatives of the National Societies of the countries concerned to meet together or separately with the ICRC to study the resolution of humanitarian problems involved and in agreement with the Governments concerned to examine what contribution the Red Cross could make to preventing the outbreak of the conflict or achieving a cease-fire or cessation of hostilities”.

Twenty years later, we should note that no case has arisen analogous to the Cuba crisis and that the contingencies provided for in the 1969 resolution are exceptional and inevitably call for an extremely delicate approach. It is not impossible however that certain discussions under the auspices of the Red Cross between countries seriously at odds with one another relieve tension and thus reduce the danger of conflict.

In 1967 and 1969, the ICRC brought together two round table conferences on this subject and the Yugoslav Red Cross convoked a World Red Cross Conference on Peace at Belgrade in 1975, choosing for the agenda a number of items which had been discussed at these meetings. This gathering drew up a detailed programme of action of which the Council of Delegates took note in 1977.

The first part of that programme is devoted to the indirect activities of the Red Cross in favour of peace. It takes note of the fact that the work of protection and assistance being carried out every day by the Red Cross, wherever man suffers from the acts of his fellow beings, contributes to peace. This part contains nothing new.

The second part deals with direct action: to contribute, in co-operation with the United Nations, to the elimination of threats to peace, preventing the outbreak of hostilities and helping to bring them to an end and even, as some National Societies wished, to denounce aggression. This extension of the mandate of the Red Cross did not receive the approval of all the participants, some of whom considered that in taking this path the institution would be departing from its proper role and venturing into the political field. The 1977 Council of Delegates recognized that it was essential for their comments to be attached to the programme and taken into account in its interpretation. The Council furthermore specified that the application of the Belgrade document would have to take place " with full respect for the fundamental principles of the Red Cross". This indeed is the key to the problem. We shall never go astray when we refer, as a criterion, to this primordial charter. In doing so, the various organisms of the Red Cross can see, as each case arises, what they can undertake, pursuant to the programme, without violating the doctrine of the movement.

From knowing war at close hand, the Red Cross understands better than anyone that war is inhuman, that it is just as contrary to charity as it is to justice, in that it does not necessarily lead to the victory of the righteous. There are few causes that are closer to its heart than the cause of peace.

The Red Cross cannot for all that depart from its principles, and in particular the principle of neutrality, which fixes the limits for its interventions in this field. The essential mission of the Red Cross remains that of protecting human beings in the event of conflict and of relieving their suffering. For the Red Cross, there is no just war and no unjust war – there are only victims in need of help. It cannot carry out its task except by virtue of its apolitical character, which it must safeguard above all else. At the same time, it is through the faithful execution of its traditional mandate that it gains the moral force and credibility without which its appeals in favour of peace would have no weight.

In the field of prevention of war, as in every other field, the Red Cross must refrain from taking sides between countries. This reserve with regard to controversies alien to it is profoundly wise and must be maintained. Indeed, even though peace is dear to all peoples, they are seldom agreed on the way to bring peace into being or to maintain it – even on the character peace should have. To take a position on any of the questions presented by the manner of organizing the world, whether we like it or not, means that one is putting oneself on the level of politics. To seek to exert a direct effect in this sphere nearly always implies a descent into the arena of nations and parties. To exert its influence in this way, for example, it would be necessary for the Red Cross to take a position on such matters as military budgets, the manufacture and sale of arms, and, in general, that it would either support or attack numerous political actions. By involving itself in this way in impassioned struggles for which it is not equipped or prepared, it would find itself on an icy slope upon which it could find no footing, leading it to rapid destruction.

On the other hand, other institutions which have been created to defend peace and bring about a better organization of the world do not have the same limitations and can act more freely. It

is apparent, in the crusade against war, that everyone should fight with the means at his disposal, in terms of his own essential nature and inescapable destiny. The means available to the Red Cross to eliminate war are limited. They may even seem to be ridiculous, when we can see all around us the great powers making enormous deliveries of arms to their allies of the moment, and in so doing driving them inevitably into new conflicts.

But, in the general framework of this effort for peace, the Red Cross nonetheless constitutes an important moral element. It is the symbol of peace, present in the midst of combat. Every one of its acts thus becomes a pacifying gesture. To act as intermediary between enemies, to promote humanitarian law, means the creation of a climate of appeasement and reconciliation. By asserting solidarity among men in the face of suffering and by providing assistance, the Red Cross tends to level the inequalities among them and attenuate their frustrations and resentments. It contributes to bringing together individuals and perhaps eventually whole peoples. It is just this which the Proclamation demands of the Red Cross. It is also the mandate confirmed by the Twenty-third International Conference in 1977 in its resolution on the mission of the Red Cross, which stated, that "the Red Cross, in respecting its principles and in developing its manifold activities, should play an essential part in disseminating to the population, and especially to youth, the spirit of mutual understanding and friendship among all peoples, and thus promoting lasting peace'.

### **Philosophical considerations**

The wellspring of the principle of humanity is in the essence of social morality which can be summed up in a single sentence, Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them . This fundamental precept can be found, in almost identical form, in all the great religions, Brahminism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism. It is also the golden rule of the positivists, who do not commit themselves to any religion but only to the data of experience, in the name of reason alone. It is indeed not at all necessary to resort to affective or transcendental concepts to recognize the advantage for men to work together to improve their lot.

The idea of mutual assistance originates first of all in the very instinct for preservation. It contributes to the survival of the species; it offers more in the way of rewards than it does of burdens. Through objective consideration of the evidence, basing ourselves on the consent of the majority, we also arrive at the concept of solidarity as an ideal for the organization of the community. The maxim, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, another version of the "golden rule" cited above, therefore represents a universal truth, for it is in full conformity with human nature and the needs of society.

In other words, humanity impels each of us to act for the well-being of our fellow men. What is "well-being"? It is the whole pattern of action which, at a given time, seems to be useful, just and reasonable. The inclination to do good is what we call goodness.

Goodness is a complex motive, in which we can recognize a number of related virtues or sentiments, such as benevolence, generosity, devotion, pity, toleration. To be good is also to be sensitive, charitable, helpful and useful.

If we wish to sum up all of this and express it in practical terms, using other language, we may say that a good man, moved by good intentions, is touched by the suffering of others and tries to relieve it; with respect and affection for his fellow being, he protects and assists him,

and devotes himself to him. With a tranquil mind, he endures evil; he does not yield to hatred against another, but joyfully forgives him.

Modern humanitarianism is born of this social morality and attempts to organize relations between individuals on the basis of a compromise between their interests, recognizing that charity and justice constitute a far from negligible element in their true interest. Humanitarianism works toward the establishment of a social order which should be as advantageous as possible for the largest possible number of people. It takes man both as its objective and as its means, without deifying man.

Humanitarianism is not a religion in opposition to other religions, a moral philosophy opposed to other moral philosophies. It does however coincide with the precepts of many religions and moral codes. It is one of the rare meeting places where people of all beliefs can come together and grasp one another's hands, without betraying what is most intimate and sacred to each of them.

How does humanitarianism differ from charity, which, as we have seen, is one of its major sources of inspiration? Charity is primarily the mainspring of immediate action by an individual in the presence of a stricken victim. Humanitarianism extends its merciful action to the whole of humanity. It is in permanent revolt against misery and rejects fatalism. It brings together people of good will and creates the necessary institutions. Humanitarianism takes thought and requires a degree of rational discipline.

Does humanitarianism find its inspiration in justice or in charity? Justice, generally speaking, consists in rendering to each person his due. It has different aspects which must not be confused with one another.

First of all there is legal justice, which accords to each person what is rightfully his. This is the kind of justice sanctioned by law and administered by the courts. But, in moral terms, there is also an ideal justice, known also as equity.

If we consider legal justice, we see at once that it differs profoundly from charity. It has been symbolized as a blindfolded woman holding scales. This symbol might also, of course, serve to represent charity, in one sense. Like justice, charity knows man only as a human being, and does not need to know his name. Like justice, charity holds the scales even between men. Like justice, charity gives for a valid reason. The analogy stops here however, for while justice rewards each person according to his rights, charity gives to each according to his suffering. To judge means to separate the good from the bad, the just from the unjust; to measure the degrees of individual responsibility. Charity on the other hand has nothing whatever to do with this kind of justice. It refuses to weigh the merits or faults of this or that individual. It goes much farther. Going beyond and above the opposition between good and evil, it attains, in full serenity, the level of wisdom. Then it becomes the very image of mercy, of goodness without limit, as exemplified by the expression of Lao Tse, With a good man, I am good; with an evil man, I am also good.

But, as we said, justice has many levels. From its origins in primitive vengeance, it has passed through different stages of law and of civilization, of time and place, to reach a point far beyond simple legal justice and attain a very high level. On this level, it takes on the qualities of understanding and forbearance; it is not so much concerned with reckoning the responsibility of men, their virtues and faults, but tends rather to become equalitarian and in so doing to offer everyone the same chance to seek a place in the sun. It is more interested in

providing people with what they need than it is with punishing them. It is no longer merely a matter of applying the established standards of distribution, but indeed of correcting the inequalities of fate. Such a conception is an ideal, and it is commonly not understood; most of the time it cannot be put into practice by society, which must maintain a degree of social order. At this higher level, one might say that justice joins hands with charity, and in so doing finds its own ultimate fulfilment. Thus we can see that charity and justice, far from standing in opposition to one another, finally come together and support one another, at a higher level. The Red Cross appeals to justice in its highest form, when charity takes precedence over the laws of men.

To conclude, the Red Cross movement gathers under its flag all those who wish to serve, even though the deeper reasons for their commitment may differ greatly. As Max Huber wrote, The most varied points of view in philosophy, religion and human experience enable man to understand the idea of the Red Cross, the moral principle it embodies and the action it demands.

## II. IMPARTIALITY

*It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.*

Under this heading, the Proclamation brings together three closely allied but distinct ideas. It would have been preferable to make of them three separate principles. We shall examine them one by one.

### 1. Non-Discrimination

#### Commentary

The fundamental idea of non-discrimination among men is expressed in the first sentence of the Proclamation. It had been expressed as follows in 1955: The Red Cross is ready to come to the help of each individual, equally and without any form of discrimination.

At the outset, we shall relate an actual event. At the end of the Second World War, a column of soldiers reconquering their own country came to a small town. The commander of the unit approached the woman in charge of the hospital and told her that he had a number of wounded men to leave at the hospital. She told him that the hospital was already full of enemy wounded. "Put them out then and make room for our own men," the officer said. "Over my dead body" she replied, and he realized that she really meant it as she stood barring the doorway. For a moment, the officer was nonplussed, and then he realized the truth – that enemies who had been wounded were no longer enemies – and ordered his unit to move on.

This is the principle of non-discrimination, illustrated in this instance in a simple manner with respect to nationality. We shall revert to this example later on.

To define non-discrimination, we shall first have to say what discrimination is. The relatively new and usually pejorative use of the term refers to a distinction or segregation which one makes to the detriment of certain other persons, for the sole reason that they belong to some specific category.

Non-discrimination among men is the greatest of Red Cross principles, after that of humanity, to which it is in any event related. The principle of humanity has its starting point in human suffering. It is this suffering which inspires the charitable action and determines the form it takes. The solicitude of the Red Cross cannot submit to limitations; it extends to all beings whom we recognize as our fellow-men because of the common nature we share with them. In its relations with those in need of assistance, whoever they may be, the Red Cross will show an equal readiness to be of service.

At the very beginning, after the battle of Solferino. Henry Dunant made this appeal with its ultimate connotation: care for the enemy wounded as friends. From its inception, the Red Cross has insisted upon this imperative element of humanity. If it were to be false to this ideal, it would disappear.

From 1864 onwards, non-discrimination found expression in the Geneva Conventions and, later on, in legislation on human rights. It is also a principle of long standing in the field of medical morality and ethics. We shall nevertheless seek it in vain in the Hippocratic oath, as proclaimed by that great physician of antiquity. Hippocrates himself, in fact, refused to go and care for the Persians when they were stricken by a plague, “because they are our enemies,” as he put it. Non-discrimination now stands in a prominent place in the “Geneva Oath” and the Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association, adopted in our own century.

This is an aspect of great progress made in modern thought. Today, as Louis Pasteur wrote, We do not ask a suffering man what country he comes from or what his religion is, but say simply that he is in pain, that he is one of our own and that we will give him relief.

After the sorrowful experiences of the Second World War, it was considered necessary to condemn specifically all the other forms of arbitrary discrimination along with that of nationality. Accordingly, the Proclamation forbids discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. One might also have forbidden distinctions based on any other similar criteria as was done in the Geneva Conventions, since it is obvious that the enumeration given above is not limitative but refers only to the most flagrant examples.

In what fields is the Red Cross called upon to fight against discrimination? In all the fields of concern to it and first of all so far as its material action is concerned, in the giving of care and distribution of relief. Then – and this is above all the mission of the ICRC – when it demands that authorities accord the same humane treatment to all victims. Lastly – and we refer here to the National Societies, as will be discussed further with regard to the principle of unity – membership must be available to everyone who wishes to become a member. In this latter case, we are referring to an organic principle and are no longer in the domain of objectives, but in that of means.

We have said that this requirement is absolute. However, in exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to make a choice; for instance, when a doctor or nurse, for want of medicines in sufficient quantities, is only in a position to cure a certain number of patients in his care. This is frequently a tragedy for the Red Cross, comparable to that of a raft which will sink if any more castaways cling to it. Can one, in all conscience, use an oar and rap the knuckles of human beings, children perhaps, whose misfortune it is to have not arrived first? I know of several cases where doctors have only treated the sick, wounded or starving who still had a chance of survival, leaving those for whom there was no longer any hope to die. All this represents a matter of conscience, as it is called, because the decision must be left to the individual responsible, who will reach it after deep reflection and carefully weighing the pros and cons.

In such extreme cases as those mentioned above, the doctor or Red Cross worker must make choices on the basis of the social and human attitudes prevailing in the community to which he belongs. He may, for example, give priority to those who have family responsibilities rather than to those who do not; to the young instead of to the old; to women instead of men. It may also be left to chance. If he allows himself to be guided by personal reasons, so long as they are exempt from self-interest, who has the right to reproach him? Who, after all, can claim to hold the scales of perfect justice?

## Philosophical considerations

Those who want to go more deeply into this question will have to ask themselves why and how it ever came about, in this world of ours, that recognition should have been given to this principle of non-discrimination, or, if you prefer, to the principle of equality of rights among men.

All things which are equal in some of their aspects are at the same time unequal in other aspects, even if this is for no other reason than that they are in different places. What is true for objects is true as well for men: they are both equal and unequal, depending upon what aspect we are considering. In the field of rights, one looks at man in terms of equality; in the field of need and assistance, in terms of inequality. When discrimination occurs, it is invariably due to reasons unrelated to the specific case before us, and because we do not see, in this particular case, anything but the elements which display inequality between men, in a field where it is equality which should prevail.

Under the present heading, we shall examine the problem of equality. If we have been brought to the point of recognizing the equality of rights among men, this is primarily for reasons of practicality. We certainly know very well that in this world men are not equal. Some are tall, others short; some are intelligent, and others less so – and we could find an abundance of other examples. It is obvious indeed that men differ in their physical, intellectual and moral qualities.

By applying equality of treatment to them, we would be following a mathematical rule, but not a rule of equity and even less one of humanity. Equality in treatment would be right only if it involved identical people, under exactly comparable circumstances, something that never happens.

The ideal thing would be to give to each individual not the same thing but that which is appropriate to him personally because of his nature and particular situation. Such a manner of distribution is not impossible when we are concerned with a small number of persons, but it is not practical in terms of the whole community. For one thing, the individual cases, which are inevitably complex, are then so numerous that we would soon be totally lost. In addition, we would be committing ourselves to subjective evaluation, with all its great risks of partiality and error. When the state concerns itself with establishing the abstract rights of its citizens, differentiation among them in this respect is simply impossible.

This is why society has taken as a fundamental postulate the equality of rights between men. In the final analysis, this idea is the most convenient one for regulating relations between individuals. It does not seriously harm anyone and although it does not attain the highest level of justice, it does nevertheless provide a certain degree of justice. It is certainly not without value because, as one thinker has expressed it, This has made it possible for the world of masters and the world of servants to come together and constitute a single and undivided humanity.

## 2. Proportionality

### Commentary

The principle of proportionality, which we might also speak of as the principle of equity, is expressed in the second sentence, under this heading in the Proclamation: It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress .

This phrasing is not perfect. It would have been clearer if it read, It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals in proportion to the degree of their suffering and to give priority according to the degree of urgency . This principle was formulated in a more technical and precise manner in 1955: The help available shall be apportioned according to the relative importance of individual needs and in their order of urgency.

This idea also found its place in the Geneva Conventions. The 1949 version forbids any “adverse” distinction. Thus, women are to be treated with the particular respect due to them. In like manner, it is normal to give special attention to children and old people. It is also understood that better conditions with regard to quarters or to clothing should be provided for captives accustomed to a tropical climate.

Along with quantitative inequality in treatment, the Conventions also provide for inequality in terms of time. We find, for example, that only urgent medical reasons will authorize priority in the order of treatment to be administered . Accordingly, when medical personnel have to deal with a massive influx of wounded, they will begin by treating those for whom a delay would be fatal, or at least injurious, dealing afterwards with those whose condition does not require immediate intervention. In the same way, Red Cross representatives responsible for distribution of food or medicine will meet the most urgent needs first.

At this point, let us revert to the anecdote referred to earlier under “non-discrimination”, in which the nurse refused to accept her wounded countrymen because her hospital was filled with enemy wounded. The condition of all the men in the hospital was no doubt serious because, otherwise, a more flexible solution could have been found, giving priority to the most seriously wounded of both sides – those for whom immediate hospitalization or a surgical operation was necessary – and sending those with slight wounds of both nationalities, and who could be transported without risk, to the next town.

The principles of humanity and non-discrimination call for giving complete and immediate relief to all men. In real life, unfortunately, resources are generally insufficient to relieve all suffering at once. Accordingly, there must be some standard to apply in distribution. There is such a standard: for equal suffering, equal assistance; for unequal suffering, assistance in proportion to the extent of suffering, taking into account the urgency of the various cases. For the Red Cross, there are proper and even obligatory distinctions that may be made – specifically, those which are based upon degrees of need.

Proportionality is one of the essential principles of Red Cross action, even though it took a long time to arrive at it. One of the leaders of a National Society had however already understood the point when he wrote, in 1946, “There is only one rule for the Red Cross: the greatest help to the greatest need”.

It would be unjust to offer the same assistance to those with differing degrees of need. This after all is just common sense. Let us take a simple example. After a picnic, you have two pieces of bread left. You meet two travellers, one of whom has just eaten and is not hungry, while the other has had nothing to eat all day long. What do you do – give one piece of bread to each of them? Of course not, you obviously give both pieces of bread to the one whose stomach is empty, to the one who is suffering.

### **Red Cross practice**

The principle of proportionality, though it would seem self-evident, is nevertheless difficult to apply fully in real life, where it encounters numerous obstacles.

Let us take some real examples from the Red Cross world. During the Second World War, the ICRC transported and distributed in prisoner-of-war camps of certain countries vast quantities of relief packages it received from the countries of origin of the prisoners. It accepted this task since it was a good thing for at least part of the victims to receive assistance. There were also however many prisoners who received nothing at all, because their countries were powerless to act. The ICRC then tried to arrange for some of the packages addressed to the more fortunate prisoners to be delivered to those in greatest need. The donors sometimes agreed to this, but doing so was nevertheless exceptional and affected only a small proportion of the total shipments.

We should also note that the National Red Cross Societies, during the same conflict, sent packages almost exclusively to their own countrymen detained by the enemy. They seldom thought of providing relief to prisoners of enemy nationality interned on their own territory, even though this would have been easier to do in material terms. It would indeed have conformed very well with the spirit of the Red Cross to have given help to captives of enemy nationality.

The National Societies know very well how difficult it is to collect money for the benefit of victims outside their own frontiers. They commonly encounter the objection, “Take care of our own people first, and the foreigners later,” for this form of national egoism is very widespread. Furthermore, when the National Society is able to purchase relief commodities, they are told they must favour local merchants, on the argument that money coming from the country should be spent in the country even if the products cost twice as much as they would elsewhere.

Another problem results from the fact that when neutrals help the people of a country at war they want to do so on the basis of this or that feeling of personal affinity, whether of a sentimental or practical nature. So it is that people of a given profession are ready to help others of the same profession; young people to help other young people; a political party those who sympathize with it; the followers of a religion, people of the same faith. This is only human. As in the case of assistance within a family, each one takes care of those who depend upon him, or those for whom he feels responsibilities, leaving it to others to act in the same way with regard to other groups.

In like manner, help is given more readily and more generously to inhabitants of nearby regions if, for example, they are victims of a disaster. This results from the fact that man is naturally inclined to be moved only by the kind of suffering he can see and touch, for this is what arouses his pity and his sense of solidarity. Without the magnifying glass of imagination,

charity tends to be short-sighted. This is like a law in physics: aid given by the public is in inverse proportion to the square of the distance. Consequently, in a poor continent, there are only the poor to help those who are still more poor; in a rich region, there are only the rich to help those who are less rich.

As an example let us consider the magnificent display of solidarity which followed the catastrophe in Frejus, a little town in the south of France virtually destroyed by the collapse of a dam. The sum received was enormous, some millions of francs, for the two or three thousand victims for whom new homes were built. Very good, but at the same time an ICRC delegate returned from the Far East with a report on the misery suffered by hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. An appeal was launched on their behalf at the same time as the appeal for the Frejus victims – but only a ridiculously small amount was collected.

Even if everyone were to concern himself with helping his neighbour, there are unhappily people who have no true neighbours, people with whom no one is concerned. That is one of the things the Red Cross exists for! It acts to restore the balance, seeking donations for those who otherwise receive nothing. It is the Red Cross which says to those in misery: we love you because no one loves you, we love you because there are those who hate you.

It is therefore important for the public to give its confidence to the Red Cross and support it regularly, without specifying a particular allocation of its donations, allowing it to make distributions based upon needs alone, which it is in a position to know and compare. Unfortunately, however, the public gives only “when the iron is hot” and it is impelled to act by the power of its emotion.

We must therefore provide more and better information, as indicated in the very early days of the Red Cross by Madame de Gasparin, a great humanitarian figure, who wrote: In the past, news moved at a very deliberate rate; what happened at the other end of the world reached us only a year later. If blood had been spilled, the earth had long since absorbed it; if tears had been shed, the sun had had time to dry them. Pain which did not cry out within earshot left our hearts unmoved. Gustave Moynier, one of the founders of the Red Cross, had this to say, In our time, we find out every day what is happening everywhere in the world... time no longer intervenes to dull our impression... The description, provided by the daily newspapers... in a sense places before the very eyes of the reader the men dying on the battlefields, and he can hear with his own ears, along with cheering over a victory, the groans of the poor mutilated victims in the ambulances.

These striking comments are even more true today, a century later, when the world has “shrunk” so much through the rapidity of transport, telecommunications and information by radio and television. The result is that our “neighbours” may now be “far away”; multitudes of people, suffering, everywhere in the world.

We have to regard this as a great improvement for the distressed, first of all because it means that we shall all know more quickly and better about the suffering of people – and secondly because help can reach them more quickly. Above all, it means that the more fortunate people, those who are well off and have full stomachs, can no longer avoid knowing about those in distress – for these will haunt them and bring such shame upon them that it will be unendurable, to such a point that they will finally have to open their wallets in order to be able to sleep in peace.

Better information is also attended by a certain degree of danger however, the danger of saturating the public's mind and dulling its sensitivity – in a sense “vaccinating” it against appeals to its generosity.

Other circumstances may lead to establish some nuances in the principle of proportionality. Let us take an example from everyday life. Let us suppose you come out of your apartment and find two beggars outside the door. If you are in a hurry, you give each of them the same amount. But, if you have time to stop and look at the two men you can see that one of them is old, and you decide that he should have more. But, even though the other one is young, he has only one arm. Isn't he more deserving of your pity? If you have more time, time enough to listen to them, you discover that the older man is a refugee, that he is all alone in the world – but that the younger one has children to care for. We could multiply to infinity the number of reasons for favouring one or the other. To give equally to each of them is a good deed, though falling short of a more attentive, more appropriate assistance. Making distinctions in relieving suffering is a hard thing to do, calling for a great deal of effort, time and, let us say it, a great deal of love.

While an individual making an effort to be fair will enter into the details of individual cases – so long as there are not too many of them – it is impossible for an institution to do this in rendering collective assistance, especially when it is an international operation, for it simply does not have the time nor the personnel that would be needed to do so.

If we have only a single dose of serum for two sick people, we do not divide it between them, for neither would be cured. However painful, we would have to make a choice, to give to one or the other. In the same way, speaking more generally, it is not always either possible or desirable to divide relief supplies endlessly. To be effective, relief must often be given completely, and over a period of time. It is better then to carry out a charitable action fully, for a limited group of people, than to spread limited resources over a great number of places, none of which will receive enough.

Here we touch upon a truth referred to in the introduction, the fact that the principles have a theoretical character. In practice, we cannot always take them literally. But, although their value may be relative, it is nevertheless very great, for it shows the ideal that we must continue to approach.

### **Philosophical considerations**

Under the previous heading, we raised the philosophical problem of equality and inequality among men by discussing their equality. We shall now take up the other aspect, that of inequality.

Ever since the end of the 18th century, it has been recognized that the wealth of the world should not serve to benefit only a handful of privileged people. It came to be recognized as well that suffering, poverty, disease and ignorance need not be the inevitable lot of the great mass of individuals. This gave rise to the demand for everyone to have a share in the common heritage, a place in the sun, his share of happiness.

It was also understood that an effort to create complete equality among men would be nonsensical, in view of the multitude of differences between them; that it would be absurd to think that everyone could have everything and live in an earthly paradise. The quest was

therefore undertaken for a reasonable compromise, one which would offer everyone a minimum of benefits, to the extent that what each one demanded for himself he would be prepared to recognize as the right of others. It is in these terms that we refer to equality of treatment or the vital minimum of human requirements.

Yet men have fundamentally different needs, either because of their own individual natures or because the events of their lives have broken up the equality among them. Equity will tend to restore the balance. To bring men back to the level of equality means to attend with the utmost efficacy and at the outset to the needs of those who are most deprived, that is, to allocate assistance in proportion to the distress. Thus, we can only remedy an inequality in the situation by means of an inequality in the providing of benefits.

Let us take an example completely outside the Red Cross world, that of public taxation. There was a time when only the poor paid taxes. This crying injustice was indeed a major source of the revolutionary movements at the end of the 18th century. Does equity require then that everyone should pay the same amount in taxes? Certainly not, for there has been universal acceptance of the principle of proportionality. Thus, everyone pays taxes in proportion to what he earns and to what he owns. Going even beyond this, a system of progression is now applied, whereby the rich contribute more than a proportional share to the revenue of the State, on the ground that the more a person's resources exceed the vital minimum, the more surplus he has and the more heavily he can be taxed. In this instance we have taken into account a just reason based on economic considerations.

The principle of non-discrimination previously discussed cannot be considered in an absolute sense, for corrective factors must be applied to it. There are distinctions which it is legitimate and even necessary to make. In the field which now concerns us, these distinctions are founded upon varying degrees of suffering, on needs and natural weaknesses – and on these alone. Accordingly, distinctions will be made in favour of some individuals in order to prevent or overcome inequalities resulting from these factors. This is why the Red Cross, not contenting itself with being equalitarian, works actively towards equalization.

### **3. Impartiality**

#### **Commentary**

While it was not particularly appropriate to have classified the principles of non-discrimination and of proportionality under the same heading, it was incorrect to have given this heading the designation of Impartiality, for this is a personal quality of an individual called upon to make a judgment or choice, or for “the man from the Red Cross” to distribute relief or give care. Impartiality, correctly construed, manifests itself in applying established rules, recognized as valid, without taking sides, either for reasons of interest or sympathy. For the Red Cross, these rules are, specifically, the three principles we have already considered – humanity, non-discrimination and proportionality – constituting the substantive principles.

With impartiality, we enter into another series of three principles, in which we shall also find neutrality and independence, which we have designated as derivative principles, whose purpose is to assure the Red Cross of the confidence of all parties, which is indispensable to it. Here we are no longer in the field of objectives but rather in that of *was* and *means*.

The Proclamation repeated the error which the Red Cross had made even in its early days of confusing impartiality with non-discrimination among men. In doing so, it took for the principle itself the manner of applying it. Non-discrimination is the outcome of the idea of equality among men, which in turn results from philosophical considerations on the nature of the human species. It is concerned with the very object of the action, men who are suffering. Impartiality, in contrast, is a quality required of the agents whose responsibility it is to act for the benefit of those who are suffering. If they do not observe this impartiality, they violate the trust accorded to them.

One might also say that the principle of non-discrimination discounts the objective distinctions between individuals. The principle of impartiality sets aside the subjective distinctions. To provide examples: if a charitable organization withholds its assistance from a specific category of individuals (let us say for reasons of race for instance), it is violating the principle of non-discrimination. On the other hand, if one of its representatives discriminates in favour of one of his friends against other persons, or discriminates against someone whom he dislikes, he is violating the principle of impartiality.

It is indeed a certainty that once the principle of non-discrimination has been postulated and accepted, the principle of impartiality, in itself, no longer has the same importance. This does not imply however that we should renounce giving specific expression to it, for partiality is not above-board, but underhand. Impartiality does in fact correspond to the very ideal of the Red Cross, which bars it from excluding anyone from its humanitarian concern.

The authors of the Proclamation did not preserve the idea of impartiality as a principle in its own right, or at least they considered that it was already provided for. In 1955, it had read as follows, The Red Cross will act without favour or prejudice towards or against anyone. One might say, perhaps with greater exactitude, “Agents of the Red Cross will act...”.

In defining impartiality, it is essential to revert to the word “partial” from which it originates. Partial means taking sides for or against something on the basis either of prejudice or of personal preference. We encounter both of these elements in the contrary word “impartial”, but the negation applies only to the motivation. Thus we cannot say someone who does not act is impartial – for this would be confusing impartiality with neutrality – but we can say that he is impartial who, in taking action, does so without prejudice.

Impartiality presupposes that a man called upon to take action has sufficient freedom. This freedom has a double nature, on the one hand it is freedom vis-à-vis himself and on the other, freedom vis-à-vis the outside world. In the latter sense, freedom refers to independence, which we shall discuss in another chapter. Interior freedom is perhaps even more difficult to achieve than freedom from external influences, since passion, psychic complexes and preconceived ideas influence human behaviour and, what is especially serious, do so mostly when we are unaware of the fact. Emphasizing the difficulty of impartiality, Goethe wrote in his Aphorisms, I can promise to be sincere, but not to be impartial .

Impartiality requires a precise, complete and objective examination of the problems facing us and an exact assessment of the values entailed. It calls for a sustained effort to “depersonalize” the charitable action – and will sometimes be the fruit of victory in a hard-fought struggle within oneself.

The risk of partiality is present above all in cases of civil war, internal disorders or political tensions. In such conflicts, one knows one's adversaries only too well and one has personal reasons for detesting them. This is so true that as late as 1912 an International Red Cross Conference refused to discuss the problem of assistance to the victims of civil wars, after one of the delegates had remarked that "The Red Cross can certainly have no duties to perform with respect to insurgents, who cannot be regarded as anything but criminals". Since then, fortunately, the International Red Cross Conferences have arrived at a healthier and wiser conception of the institution's principles.

Within the borders of its country, a National Red Cross Society gives its assistance to all who suffer. Guilty persons themselves are not excluded from this assistance if they have need of it, a fact which has sometimes not been well understood. The Red Cross does not however interfere in any way with the administration of justice; its action does not run counter to the essential right of a state to suppress violations of its laws. What the Red Cross does demand is that each person shall be humanely treated; if the individual is guilty, he will be sentenced by the courts, but he must have the benefit of decent treatment and receive the care required to maintain his health.

To conclude this section, we shall relate one of a thousand possible real-life anecdotes which dramatically illustrates that the Red Cross ideal, even in the most complex and contradictory situations, can prevail against all odds. In a country ravaged by civil war, the chief prosecutor had arrested one of the leaders of the revolution. In reprisal, the revolutionary movement set a price on the head of the chief prosecutor. The Red Cross Society in this country received an appeal for help – to go and pick up a seriously wounded person in the fighting zone. The Society did not hesitate, but immediately despatched an ambulance to the spot and saved the life of the wounded man. Who was the wounded man? He was the son of the revolutionary leader who had been arrested. Who was driving the ambulance? It was the wife of the chief prosecutor, who had ordered the arrest of the young man's father. *Omnia vincit amor.*

### III. NEUTRALITY

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

#### General Observations

The 1955 text read, The Red Cross must observe strict neutrality in the military, political, denominational and philosophical spheres.

No idea in the Red Cross world has created more confusion than neutrality, for the word has a range of different meanings. Before analyzing these meanings, some general considerations should be noted.

The word “neutral” comes from the Latin “neuter” meaning neither one of two things. In this sense it is essentially a negative idea; one is neutral who does not take sides in a conflict.

Neutrality does not in itself have any ethical value and can thus be assessed only in relation to particular circumstances. It takes on a moral aspect, and can even achieve nobility when it arises from the kind of firm determination which makes it possible for an institution to put its fundamental principles into effect and carry out its mission faithfully – which is precisely the case with the Red Cross.

On the general level, the idea of neutrality presupposes two elements: an attitude of abstention and the existence of persons or groups who oppose one another. Although neutrality defines the attitude of the Red Cross towards belligerents and ideologies, it never determines its behaviour towards the human beings who suffer because, in the first place, the wounded do not fight one another. And, above all, the essential characteristic of the Red Cross is to act and not to remain passive.

Neutrality and impartiality have often been confused with one another because both imply the existence of groups or theories in opposition and because both call for a certain degree of reserve. The two ideas are nevertheless very different, for the neutral man refuses to make a judgment whereas the one who is impartial judges a situation in accordance with pre-established rules.

Neutrality demands real self-control; it is indeed a form of discipline we impose upon ourselves, a brake applied to the impulsive urges of our feelings. A man who follows this arduous path will discover that it is rare in a controversy to find that one party is completely right and the other completely wrong. He will sense the futility of the reasons commonly invoked to launch one nation into war against another. In this respect, it is reasonable to say that neutrality constitutes a first step towards peace.

While neutrality, like impartiality, is often misunderstood and rejected, this happens because there are so many who want to be both judge and party, without recourse to any universally valid criterion. Each side believes, rather naively, that his cause is the only just one; that refusal to join it is an offence against truth and justice.

## Commentary

### (a) Confidence

The text of this principle in the Proclamation begins with the words, "In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all" . These words do not constitute a part of the principle, but merely explain the reason for it.

The same words are valid as well for impartiality in its true sense, of which we have spoken, and for independence, of which we shall speak. We are confronted here by three principles which we have referred to as derivative in that they relate not to objectives but to means. They contribute to the application of the three substantive principles, the mainsprings of action, and assure the proper functioning of the institution. Confidence is vital to the Red Cross; without confidence it would no longer be entrusted with work of public utility and it would receive no more donations. If a National Society or its agents were to engage in ideological disputes, how can we imagine that it could maintain its credibility among the parties on the other side, and in case of a crisis – here we are thinking mainly of internal conflicts – how can we imagine that it would be allowed to carry out its work in the two rival camps?

Despite the foregoing remarks, these words have been subject to criticism on the ground that they are too weak and give only one of the reasons which justify neutrality. It will no doubt be desirable, in the event of a revision, to be more explicit. One might say, for example, *in order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all and to maintain its unity...*

### (b) Military neutrality

The principle goes on to state that the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities . This refers to neutrality in the military domain, and this is indeed the initial understanding of neutrality.

The affirmation is an obvious one, but it is nonetheless essential. Some people have found it too laconic, even curt. It is true enough that the expression should apply to all forms of conflict and not only to military operations in the narrow sense. Furthermore, it should cover not only conflicts between nations but also civil wars and internal disorders. It might accordingly be better to say, *the Red Cross may not take sides in armed conflicts of any kind.*

We do not need to discuss here the neutrality of States, that is, the position adopted vis-à-vis countries at war by another country, described as neutral, which takes no part at all in the conflict. We are discussing instead what is meant by the neutrality which the Red Cross must observe in times of conflict.

Under the Geneva Conventions, persons caring for the wounded and sick, who may belong either to the military medical services or to the National Red Cross Society, are protected even on the battlefield. Such personnel must be respected; so must hospitals and ambulances. They may not be attacked. It is natural as a counterpart to this neutrality that such personnel must abstain from any interference, direct or indirect, in war operations. Regarded by the enemy as neutral, in the interest of the victims, these persons are required to conduct themselves as such, unswervingly. Being placed above the conflict, they must not commit acts which the Conventions refer to as harmful to the enemy , that is to say, acts which by favouring or interfering with the hostilities are injurious to the adverse party. One example,

among the most serious, would be tolerating a military observation post on the roof of a hospital.

In major armed conflicts, members of the medical personnel in enemy-occupied territory have sometimes engaged in “resistance” and in so doing have committed or encouraged acts of espionage or sabotage. They were assuredly acting on the basis of the highest and most honorable motives of patriotism. They were nevertheless violating the laws of the Red Cross and in doing so running the risk of sanctions which might harm many innocent persons. If, in the general interest of everyone, we wish to have Red Cross institutions continue their work in occupied territories, their agents must, through irreproachable conduct, continue to maintain the full confidence of the authorities. One cannot, at the same time, serve the Red Cross and fight. One must choose.

Military neutrality also applies to all spheres of Red Cross action in time of war. For example, a National Society should refuse to take part in the collection of money for national defence.

Reciprocally, in terms of both the letter and spirit of the Geneva Conventions, the authorities must not place any obstacle in the way of Red Cross relief activities, for humanitarian assistance must never be regarded as interference in the conflict, or in other words as a violation of neutrality.

### **(c) Ideological neutrality**

The Proclamation goes on to specify that the Red Cross may not engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. This is the second sense of neutrality. The term is used to characterize the reserve which the whole Red Cross must maintain with regard to any doctrine except its own, the distance it maintains between itself and controversies which are foreign to it and which would compromise its universal character. The Red Cross responds to the needs of all men and acts in accordance with principles accepted throughout the world. In doing so, perhaps without even knowing it, it places itself in the vanguard of civilization. The neutrality of the Red Cross is a sign of its serenity, of fidelity to its ideal. Any ideology to which the Red Cross might attach itself could only serve to diminish its freedom of action and reduce its objectivity.

This kind of neutrality is not the same as military neutrality, though it is coming more and more to resemble it in our age of “cold wars”. If, as was once said, war is politics carried on by other means, we could reverse the terms in our time and say that politics is war carried on by other means.

Neutrality manifests itself above all in relation to politics, national and international, and Red Cross institutions must beware of politics as they would of poison, for it threatens their very lives. Politization undoubtedly constitutes the greatest danger now confronting the Red Cross.

The Eighteenth International Red Cross Conference in 1952, taking note in a Resolution that questions of a political nature had been put before it, expresses its determination not to allow such issues to undermine the work of the Red Cross at any time and declares its unabated faith in the Red Cross as a movement concerned solely with humanitarian activities which help to promote mutual understanding and goodwill among nations whatever their political differences.

Such an attitude is now however being challenged in some quarters. Certain schools of thought maintain that everything, in the existence of a nation or even of an individual, is subordinate to political or ideological requirements. The demand is made that everyone "commit himself" and anyone refusing to do so is accused of cowardice. The Red Cross is not exempt from this pressure, and more and more demands are made upon it to enter the sphere of politics.

It must resist this trend with every ounce of energy. Once it entered this field in which powerful forces are running wild, the Red Cross would be creating dissension within its own ranks; it would be divided against itself and head towards inevitable disaster. It would also be abandoning its own essential and unique character, which distinguishes it from all other national and international organizations and enables it to accomplish what no other institution or person can achieve. The Red Cross must make it clear to those concerned that it constitutes an exception, at a time when, throughout the world, things are becoming more and more politicized.

We are not suggesting by this that politics in itself is evil. It has its value, to the extent that it contributes to the establishment of an order which will be beneficial to the largest number of people, by placing power in the hands of justice, and to the extent that it maintains at least a minimum degree of objectivity. The carrying out of such plans however is difficult, and goes beyond the means available to the Red Cross. The world of politics is characterized by struggles which reach the pitch of savagery; it is not only rival interests which are in conflict, but even sincere advocates of social progress, of this, that or the other party.

The Red Cross cannot compromise itself in this wild turmoil. It has therefore confined itself to fields of action in which there are no such disputes, or at least should not be, and aims at carrying out tasks which rally virtually unanimous support. If anyone presents the Red Cross with the well known and destructive dilemma embodied in the phrase, "whoever is not with me is against me", may it always reply, "I am with all those who suffer, and that is sufficient".

Reserve does not in any sense imply disdain or hostility however. It is clear indeed that the Red Cross Society in a country under an authoritarian regime cannot serve as a centre for opposition to the regime or to any party or faith. It can thus display an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards temporal or spiritual authorities, maintain good relations with them and co-operate with them in humanitarian activities, since the National Societies are called upon to serve as auxiliaries to governmental institutions.

All that can be asked of the Societies is that they do not militate for projects or ideas which do not have an essential connection with the Red Cross mission; that they do not adhere to a political party, even the governmental party. In the same way, Red Cross leaders, as far as possible, should refrain from performing any prominent public function and from being politically identified. Only in this way will the National Societies be able to maintain the confidence of every part of the population and not only act impartially but be recognized as doing so, no matter what happens, especially in the event of civil war or domestic disturbances. By conducting themselves in this manner, it is to be hoped, they will win the right to give assistance to all who are in need of it, including the people viewed with disfavour by the ruling class and therefore in danger of receiving nothing.

The National Red Cross Societies should be more open to contacts with their opposite numbers abroad, known by the delightful and appropriate name, "sister Societies". At

international Red Cross gatherings, delegates fraternize with one another and friendships are established, but these are something like holiday friendships. What is left of them after everyone goes home? It is enough for a crisis to arise, or even a difference of opinion between two countries, for these precious ties of friendship to vanish with the wind, a sad occurrence we have seen more than once. The National Societies however constitute an ideal intermediary for helping, outside the field of diplomacy, to resolve the acute humanitarian problems which are especially likely to arise at the time of an impending conflict, a fact recognized by the Twenty-first International Red Cross Conference, which urged such contacts between Societies in its Resolution XXI. A further question arises. How can the Red Cross play a role in the development of a spirit of peace if its national branches do not maintain among themselves relations of peace, mutual confidence and friendship? They must make a beginning by reaching out to one another across the boundaries which divide nations and coalitions of nations – otherwise all work in this field will be in vain.

The Proclamation goes on to speak of religious neutrality. This requirement has been a dominant one in the institution since its birth and has never since been disputed. At the very beginning, though the founders of the Red Cross were themselves motivated by the spirit of Christianity, they were determined to establish a purely laical organization. One cannot indeed conceive how it could be otherwise, since it was intended that the institution should by its very nature be universal. Likewise, the emblem of the red cross on a white background has no religious significance. This was proclaimed by the conferences which created this emblem in deliberately chosen terms, so that it would forever be universal and neutral, an emblem for peoples of all nations and of all beliefs.

It is self-evident that the ICRC must also observe, and with particular strictness, complete ideological neutrality. The ICRC nevertheless is unceasingly confronted by political events. Indeed, like a swimmer, it is in politics up to its neck. Also like the swimmer, who advances in the water but who drowns if he swallows it, the ICRC must reckon with politics without becoming a part of it.

Having arrived at this point in our analysis, we can see that in two of the meanings given to neutrality – military neutrality and ideological neutrality – and in these alone, the principle of neutrality as set forth in the Proclamation has a universal character and is valid for the Red Cross as a whole.

### **Other aspects of neutrality**

Neutrality however does have further connotations for the Red Cross, into which we do not have to enter in detail here, since these concern particular cases not mentioned in the Proclamation and mainly refer to the Red Cross body which is the very embodiment of neutrality, the ICRC. It is thanks to the fact that its members and principal staff members belong to a country whose neutrality is permanent and traditional that the ICRC, in times of war and turmoil, has a solid base for its mission as an intermediary. This neutrality, reinforced by ideological neutrality, offers belligerents an added guarantee of its independence.

Neutrality also is the attitude observed by the ICRC in its relations with governmental entities, treating them on the basis of equality, not expressing itself on their legitimacy, not considering whether they are recognized, not judging their politics. If it acts in this way, it does so not in order to waste its energies in idle diplomatic procedures but so as to gain access to victims in need of help, and these victims are in the power of the States. It is therefore

necessary to obtain the required authorization from States and to maintain the relations of confidence essential for continuing co-operation.

This is also the reason why, as a general rule, the ICRC abstains from making public pronouncements about specific acts committed in violation of law and humanity and attributed to belligerents. It is obvious that insofar as it set itself up as a judge, the ICRC would be abandoning the neutrality it has voluntarily assumed.

Furthermore, in the quest for a result which would most of the time be illusory, demonstrations of this sort would compromise the charitable activity which the ICRC is in a position to carry out. One cannot be at one and the same time the champion of justice and of charity. One must choose, and the ICRC has long since chosen to be a defender of charity.

## IV. INDEPENDENCE

*The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles.*

The statement in the Proclamation comprises three elements: the general principle of independence, the auxiliary quality of the Red Cross, and its autonomy in relation to public authorities. We shall deal successively with each of these three elements.

### 1. The General Principles of Independence

The Red Cross is independent, the Proclamation states, in simple and lapidary terms. The statement of the conditions for recognition of new National Societies (Point 10) refers to political, religious and economic independence.

The reasons for Red Cross independence are so obvious that there is no need to discuss them at great length. Under the penalty of being something else than what it is, the Red Cross must be sovereign in its decisions, acts and words: it must be free to show the way towards humanity and justice. It is not admissible for any power whatsoever to make it deviate from the line established for it by its ideals.

This independence is also the guarantee of the neutrality of the Red Cross. It enables every Society to work in a community of spirit with its sister Societies. It is also essential, as we have seen, for the Red Cross to inspire the confidence of all parties. It must be able to bring together all people of good will and not exclude any particular groups. Independence therefore, though a derivative principle, is essential for Red Cross action.

The ICRC and the League have clearly asserted their independence in their statutes. Some people have wondered whether there is a sound basis for this in the case of the League. In view of its multinational composition. In so doing they display a confusion which should be dissipated. When we refer to an association of any kind, we cannot speak of its independence in relation to its own members, due to the very fact that it emanates from them. In this respect, the ICRC does not differ from the League. Furthermore, an association only depends upon its members to the extent that they participate in its direction and management, within the framework of their statutory power. Apart from that, the fact that a National Society delegates one of its members as a representative at the General Assembly of the League or even its Executive Council does not give it the power to exercise a direct and preponderant power over the federation. Therefore, when we refer to the independence of an association we are thinking of its independence with regard to outside forces, in particular governments and intergovernmental organizations.

It is naturally in connection with politics, both national and international, that this independence must be asserted. We have noted that neutrality requires that the Red Cross institutions refrain from any involvement in internal or external politics. Reciprocally, to preserve their independence, it is vital for them to exclude firmly any intrusion of politics into their own sphere of action.

The Red Cross must also resist any pressure of a social or economic character. It cannot let any class, pressure group or even public opinion turn it away from the path defined for it by its objectives. Likewise, it cannot tolerate any interference resulting from financial pressure, nor any divergence from its course that might be pressed upon it, even indirectly, by the giving or withholding of money. The fact that the work of the Red Cross depends mainly upon donations renders this condition difficult, but no compromise can be permitted.

If the Red Cross is lacking in material power, it is from this very weakness that it derives its true strength. States may rest assured that in a world dominated by self-interest there is at least one institution which escapes from that prevailing rule; that where opportunism and compromise are predominant, the Red Cross acts without any ulterior motive and provides no opportunities for intrigue; that in a world marked by hatred, the Red Cross is concerned only with human brotherhood.

Finally, and for the same reasons, the Red Cross cannot associate with any other institution which does not have absolute respect for its moral and material independence, for any deviation from this course would have fatal consequences. If the Red Cross co-operates with other humanitarian organizations, it is only on the condition that these institutions, in the common work, fully respect Red Cross principles.

## **2. Auxiliary Status**

Even though the auxiliary status of Red Cross Societies is mentioned in the Proclamation only in an incidental manner, noting that the Societies are auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, and under a heading which does not use the word “auxiliary”, this auxiliary status nevertheless constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross. Because of it, the Red Cross is at one and the same time a private institution and a public service organization. The very nature of the work of the National Red Cross Societies implies co-operation with the authorities, a link with the State. Furthermore, as the Proclamation emphasizes, these Societies are subject to the law of the land; it could not be otherwise.

Under modern conceptions of social order, the general task of providing assistance to underprivileged individuals falls mainly upon the States, as the only entities having the necessary authority and sufficient resources to cope with undertakings of this magnitude.

The Red Cross cannot take the place of the State; it can only make a contribution in proportion to its resources. This contribution is mainly in the domain of private charity and of individual initiative. It is in this way that it makes itself useful, and indeed indispensable. Even if the public authorities have powerful means at their disposal, they are not always in a position to assist all of those in need, especially if the latter belong to an opposition party or to an insurrectionary group, nor can they bring about the personal and human relationship between those who help and those who are helped, which is so enriching to all concerned. Furthermore, even the best equipped official agencies may be overwhelmed by exceptional events. Along with action by the State, there is therefore a need for spontaneous and disinterested action, in particular that of the Red Cross. For the Red Cross, this auxiliary status is an important but derivative principle, for this idea does not flow from the ideal objective of the Red Cross but is rather a practical consequence of the conditions under which the Red Cross works.

The National Societies are auxiliaries first of all of military medical services. In the beginning, they were created only for this purpose. Even though this is no longer their only task, nor even as a rule the major one, it still has great significance.

To become a member of the International Red Cross, a Society must first have been recognized by the government of its country as an auxiliary of the military medical services. It is also because of this role as an auxiliary that the Red Cross Societies acquire a status under the provisions of humanitarian law, benefiting from the protection of the Geneva Conventions and gaining the right to display the emblem of the red cross. It is specified that the personnel of the Red Cross Societies are assimilated to the military medical personnel if they exercise the same functions and if they are subject to military laws.

This part of its mission is not the only one however, particularly when a Red Cross Society has transferred a substantial part of its energies to peacetime activities. Nowadays, in practical terms, as noted by the Tansley Report, the degree of co-operation with the State ranges from complete isolation to symbiosis, at least for certain services. The National Societies have undertaken to operate civilian hospitals, schools for nurses, day nurseries, blood transfusion centres, etc. They have devoted themselves to a variety of social services, to the development of public health, rescue services for the victims of disaster; they train specialized personnel in these fields and set up institutions to care for invalids, see to the interests of detainees, orphans and in general of groups whose conditions are especially difficult or dangerous, such as seamen or miners. They are also concerned with health education, accident prevention and the prevention of drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse. In some countries they even take the place of virtually non-existent official public health services.

The Tansley Report pointed out that the National Societies excel particularly in the emergency phase of assistance, in which they have done much pioneer work and gained irreplaceable experience. They appear to be more at ease under such conditions than in long-term projects. In the field of public health, the Red Cross contribution is sometimes marginal, for the needs are enormous and the Societies work for the most part as specific needs arise and on a charitable basis, as we shall see later. If their actions are to have greater impact, they must be integrated to a greater extent into co-ordinated planning.

In all of these tasks, the Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities, whether they have received a specific mandate or even a monopoly from the State or, acting in a private capacity, relieve public agencies of duties the latter would otherwise have to assume.

As we see then, in carrying out their major functions, the Red Cross Societies give their humanitarian support to official bodies, in general having larger resources than the Societies, working toward comparable ends in a given sector.

Its auxiliary function is one of the special characteristics of the Red Cross which distinguish it from other charitable institutions. As Mr. Tansley noted, it gives the National Societies a privileged status of which they are not always aware and of which they do not take full advantage. It is true of course that some of these Societies fear encroachment upon their independence and neutrality. On their side, governments may sometimes find it advantageous to “go through” their National Red Cross Societies to carry out relief activities, especially in foreign countries. In such cases, their gesture will not appear to be political and the costs will be lower, because of the presence of an existing infrastructure.

### 3. Independence from public authorities

We have seen on the one hand that the Red Cross must be independent and on the other hand that it is an auxiliary to the public authorities. Gustave Moynier, as early as August 1864, drew attention to the difficulty of reconciling two things which seem to be mutually exclusive, to enjoy the freedom of action of a private charity and to submit to the requirements of military discipline.

However, while the contrast between its private character and its link with the State is one of the particular characteristics of the Red Cross, this presents no insoluble problem. One cannot even speak of a contradiction between the two. What we can say is that proper functioning and satisfactory development of the institution depend upon a proper balance between these aspects. In this as in many other things, it is all a matter of proportion. In practical terms, the Tansley Report stressed that there is plenty of room for harmonious co-operation, particularly if we bear in mind that there are fields of activity, such as the teaching of the principles of public health, in which independence and neutrality do not have the same significance as they do in other fields.

The independence of Red Cross Societies in their relations with public authorities must be adequate. When can we say that this is the case, and how can we decide what degree of autonomy they must have? The Proclamation provides the answer and a perfectly satisfactory solution: when a Society has the autonomy it needs to enable it to act in accordance with the Principles of the Red Cross. If this condition is realized, the Society will be free in its decisions and remain true to itself. It will make sure that the voice of humanity is heard; it will act unselfishly and impartially; it will be open to all and in the service of all. It will be truly a constituent of the International Red Cross and be guided by universal standards.

The autonomy of the Red Cross will assure it of the confidence of the public, among those whom it assists and among those upon whom it depends, which is a vital factor in the event of revolution or civil war. The very fact that the government is the voice of a majority and is inevitably subject to the influence of parties and factions implies that it must sometimes be partisan in its acts. A political body may be in a poor position to act unreservedly on behalf of the whole nation. The Red Cross however must reach out its hand to all human beings who suffer, even if the State does not care about them or excludes them from the national community. It is not permissible for the National Red Cross to be swept away by any change of the regime, at the very time when it is most needed. As an exceptional element of unity amidst discord, it must be able to serve as intermediary between brothers at war with one another.

In our time, when we see governments nearly everywhere extending their grip on society, we are forced to recognize that it will become more and more difficult for Red Cross Societies to maintain their autonomy. They must defend it however, with unceasing vigilance. If they were to become mere tools of officialdom, only in the service of government policy, why should they have a distinct identity?

Let us consider just what influence public authorities do have over the Red Cross, for this is a problem of present-day urgency. We may note first of all that the governments which recognize the Red Cross Societies and their representatives within their own countries participate on a basis of equality with the delegates of the same Societies at the International Red Cross Conferences, a fact which constitutes one of the most interesting aspects of our

institution. We should also note that governments have not made abusive use of their voting power. Next, as we have seen, personnel of the National Societies gives assistance to the military medical services, and to a degree is integrated into them, thus being subject to military laws and regulations.

National Societies also carry out other public service functions. For this reason, States grant them subsidies and other benefits, such as tax, customs and postage exemptions, exclusive rights, etc. The auxiliary relation calls for and gives legitimacy to close relations with public services, which is generally very beneficial for the work undertaken. But, since it is rare to receive a favour without having to pay for it, and nothing is given for nothing, the more generous the authorities are, the more inclined they are to insist on some right to oversee the operations. This may be carried out in various ways. In the simplest form, it consists only of a periodic inspection.

The State often exercises a more direct influence however. In many countries, the law requires that the statutes of the National Society must be subject to the approval of the government. The government may then reserve certain posts of leadership in the Society for its own nominees, and in some cases the head of State chooses the President of the Society. It is more common for the public authorities to intervene in the make-up of the governing bodies, especially the Central Committee, or to have representatives of ministries sit on such bodies *ex officio*. There are some countries in which the State reserves a majority of the places on such bodies for itself, which must be regarded as abnormal. In most cases however, the solution is a reasonable one which the ICRC and the League consider acceptable, with the government having something less than half of the votes.

The statutes do not however reflect the whole reality. It may be, in a Society in which the government names a number of members of the Central Committee, that these members are then free to act as they see fit. The opposite situation may also occur, in which a Society whose statutes show no apparent State interference may nevertheless be exposed to indirect pressures which, in fact, make it subject to State authority.

In any case, the best assurance of autonomy for the Society is in the democratic structure of its organization and freedom in recruiting. We should bear in mind that such a democratic structure is required by the International Red Cross.

It is especially important that effective expression be given to the predominant wishes of its members; that the general assembly should possess certain powers, including in particular that of electing the executive committee or at least the majority of its members. The personalities of the leaders also play a major role; if they are people of authority and independence, they will be able to create a certain impression upon the public authorities and make them understand the basic requirements of the institution.

Finally, when a government asks the National Society of its country to carry out for it a public service activity and the Society agrees to do so, it becomes an auxiliary of the government, but does not for that reason cease to be itself – an independent body with its own status, obeying its own principles and displaying an emblem which symbolizes the entire institution and its ideals.

This means that in carrying out its governmental mandate, the Society will continue to work in accordance with the principles of the Red Cross, as embodied in particular in the Proclamation.

Since social welfare work in our time is constantly expanding, imposing increasingly heavy responsibilities upon the State, it is understandable that the latter should tend to assume a more direct and more authoritative relation with its agents. This is manifested by more precise and detailed legislation, by more highly developed planning and by more exacting control procedures. Such increasing interference may create certain problems and may even involve conflicts with the National Society. It is important that the responsible public authorities, in the directives they lay down, take into account the special status of the National Red Cross and leave it a certain degree of freedom in carrying out its mandate.

For its part, the National Society, before accepting a specific task, will be well advised to examine carefully the conditions under which it will work, in order to make sure that it will be able to accept the assignment without compromising the application of these principles. Every time, for example, that the social welfare work in question is too intimately involved with politics, it will be advisable for the Society to stay clear of it.

## V. VOLUNTARY SERVICE

*The Red Cross is a voluntary relief organization not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.*

### Terminology

The English title “Voluntary service”, which heads this chapter of the Proclamation and of this Commentary, is better than the French title “Caractère bénévole” (“Benevolent character”) which was adopted. In modern French language, the term “bénévoles” refers to persons who work without being paid, who donate their services.

The word “volontaire”, like the English “volunteer”, refers to someone who works of his own free will, without external compulsion – and not necessarily one who is not paid. In an army, volunteers are those who have willingly entered military service, as contrasted with those conscripted by law, or who offer, without compulsion, to take part in an especially dangerous or difficult mission.

In the Red Cross world, the concept of voluntary service implies that one serves not because of any constraint but because of a freely accepted commitment. Nevertheless, and this is comparable to military service, volunteering may take the form of a commitment which carries with it obligations from which the volunteer cannot free himself once he has signed up; he is no longer free to reject or change the conditions as he likes – that is to say, he is obliged to keep his word.

Thus the concept of voluntary service is a broader one than “caractère bénévole”. Some National Societies however describe as “volunteers” the many people who, in peacetime, give their services without pay. In such cases, “voluntary” and “benevolent” come to mean much the same thing.

We shall deal successively with voluntarism, charity, selflessness and the spirit of service.

### 1. Voluntary Service

Under this heading, we enter the field of organic principles, that is, the standards which govern the form and operation of the institution.

The Red Cross is an institution providing voluntary assistance. At its very inception, it was created on the basis of voluntarism. Henry Dunant at Solferino, confronted by the enormous number of wounded left untreated because of the shortage of doctors, tried to find help from residents and tourists in nearby Castiglione. He succeeded, and it was the women of the region, caring for the victims of both camps, who uttered the words, *Tutti fratelli* ! (All of them are brothers). Dunant spread this cry throughout the world, and it was and will be repeated by all peoples, disregarding frontiers and rising above hatreds.

Nearly a century later, when the atom bomb burst over Hiroshima, wiping out most of the city’s doctors and nurses, the blast was followed almost immediately by the arrival of several hundred girls, from 14 to 16 years of age – volunteer workers of the Japanese Red Cross.

They were the ones to begin to cope with the consequences of one of the greatest disasters in history.

From the beginning of the Red Cross, the work was seen as a contribution by private charity to relieve the evils which beset mankind, with warfare heading the list. The founders counted on disinterested assistance, spontaneous co-operation. The project did not seem possible except through the gathering of many people of good will. Henry Dunant himself remarked in his book, *A Memory of Solferino*, in 1862, *For work of this kind, paid help is not what is wanted.*

The outstanding thing that distinguishes the mercenary from the Red Cross worker is that the former works only for what he can get out of it, while the latter looks first at what needs to be done. This fact in itself should gain for nursing personnel the esteem and respect they deserve. They have a right to it because they do not work only to earn a living, but have mainly dedicated themselves to an altruistic calling which may entail certain sacrifices. We are forced to recognize however that in certain countries people still refuse to accord this legitimate consideration to members of the nursing profession, treating them instead as subordinates, as domestic servants. The nursing profession is nevertheless one of the noblest, and the esteem it deserves should be universally accorded it.

The voluntary character of the Red Cross is directly related to the principle of humanity, being in effect a means for putting that principle into effect. For the Red Cross to be able to carry out its work, it has to inspire a feeling of dedication and appeal to the best in people: its ranks must be filled with men and women with a highly developed spirit of service. Charity and self-denial are inseparable.

It is its spirit of individual and spontaneous assistance to which the Red Cross owes its character as a private institution which is at the same time capable of supplementing the efforts of the public authorities. States, characterized by Nietzsche as “cold monsters”, however well organized they may be, cannot deal with all misfortunes. Only beings of flesh and blood possess sensitivity and human warmth. It is true enough that agents of the State, responsible for social welfare activities, may be humane individuals and often are, but they are bound by laws, regulations, instructions and bureaucratic routine. They act for reasons of professional obligation, whereas a volunteer is impelled by his desire to help and by his feelings of sympathy. The Red Cross thus provides the leavening of individual charity and serves as a rallying point for the generous impulses of private persons who, it is to be hoped, will come forward, and can act with the wholeheartedness and tact which may be needed in delicate cases.

With regard to its internal organization, the Red Cross is threatened by two opposite hazards, and forever stands between them: bureaucratism and amateurism. It must protect itself from both.

Let us take bureaucratism first. The tendency towards over-organization nowadays threatens nearly all institutions. One must make sure that activism and perfectionism are not allowed to drown out the true message. Paradoxically, it is a good thing that the Red Cross does not have too much in the way of material resources, otherwise it would be in danger of losing its soul. It is not by the size of its buildings nor the number of its vehicles that the Red Cross will be judged, but by the fervour of its ideals. In the Red Cross, a certain degree of improvisation,

related to the events which call for its intervention, is always indicated.

If it should ever lose its direct contact with humanity and suffering, if it should ever forget its voluntary character, the institution would be like a cut Bower and, deprived of its sap, would soon wither and die. The machinery set up in a bureaucratic spirit, however well oiled, would become an end in itself, it would be running on no load, or it could be envisaged as a giant without eyes. Let us instead consider the legend of the giant Antaeus, who gained renewed strength every time he was thrown to the ground, that is, every time he returned to his mother, the earth itself. Let us hope that our institutions will always, in like manner, grow stronger in returning to the source from which they sprang.

The other danger facing us is that of amateurism, a disease afflicting many voluntary organizations. In their report, Donald Tansley and Pierre Dorolle considered in parallel the two major orientations which are present in the fields of assistance and health, seeing in the conflict between them a fundamental problem. A majority of National Societies still follow the traditional and historic conception of “charity”, that is to say, individual relief, given sporadically and on a small scale. Without criticizing the action itself, but the way in which it is carried out, the authors emphasized that the *old clothes* approach of the *Red Cross of the good old days* perpetuated the *dark side of charity*, marked by the dependence of the receiver, who must again and again appeal to the generosity of the donor, and again and again express his gratitude.

In contrast to this pattern, other Societies have adopted a policy of larger scale assistance, more systematically administered, tending toward the improvement of health and social security, incorporated into a general plan. In this way, many more people are reached and there is greater respect for the individual, for the assistance appears to him as something to which he is entitled, as a right.

It does not seem to us that the two approaches must necessarily exclude one another. Is it not possible for them to coexist and supplement one another to suit local needs and conditions? Individual action is essential when a disaster has destroyed the infrastructure. Furthermore, it stimulates an outpouring of spontaneous service and discloses the infinite treasures of good will. It is vital for the Red Cross to conserve this creative spirit of initiative, in the face of rigid and invasive professionalism.

Amateurism produces other ills however. Using the voluntary character of philanthropic work as a pretext, there is too often a tolerance for indiscipline and for poorly defined responsibilities; for a confusion between the conception and the execution of a task. The result of this is a lack of authority and a very damaging dispersion of responsibilities.

Furthermore, certain persons, who are convinced that their unpaid work should assure them of eternal gratitude, think that they can act as they please; they do only the work which pleases them, standing apart from the administrative structure and building little empires for themselves in their chosen field of activity. In substance, they disorganize the whole structure and create confusion. It is perfectly understandable that one Society, in wartime, “paid” a small coin every month to all of its voluntary workers, so that they would conform to the same discipline as everyone else.

Fortunately, there are also real volunteers, whose dedication is attended by modesty. They work as hard as anyone else, are willing to work under the authority of younger people and

never remind others of their volunteer status. In other words, they disseminate the true spirit of the Red Cross.

## 2. Unpaid Service

In undertaking its tasks, the Red Cross must be able to count on voluntary donations, not only in money but in work as well. It must therefore appeal for the assistance of unpaid workers.

There are two ways to give: one can give material things or money, and one can also give one's time. This is no longer a matter of class distinctions; those who have little in the way of possessions have just as much right to give as those who have a great deal, and are often more generous.

The advantages of charity for the Red Cross are obvious. Apart from the economy it makes possible, it serves to strengthen the independence and reputation of the institution. More than that, the Red Cross finds in the charitable spirit of its members that enthusiasm which conforms perfectly to its ideals and sets an example for others.

Also, as we shall see, any service constitutes part of an exchange, through the new relationship it creates. The giver also receives. His work takes him away from his solitude, or from his depressing surroundings, takes him out of himself, relieves him of the boredom of idleness and sometimes offers him a new reason for living. In organizing charitable work, the Red Cross thus has a double objective in view.

There are nevertheless real drawbacks to charitable work in a long-term undertaking or work requiring specialized skills. The remarks made by two of the founders of the Red Cross in 1867 are still relevant and deserve to be repeated:

***The giving of one's services has something appealing about it, but those who act in this way are not necessarily those upon whom we can most rely. The generous and heartfelt impulse which makes them come forward is in danger of cooling off when it comes into contact with reality and these people are likely to grow weary sooner than expected... With the system of free work, not only do the Committees have no authority over their agents but, in addition, feel indebted to them and are often embarrassed in knowing how to deal with them; they owe too much to them and are in a poor position to refuse any favours they may ask. Volunteer workers sometimes cost more than the others. The only systematic exception we would make to the application of this principle concerns the members of the Committees themselves. They are so interested in the success of the work and bear so much direct responsibility that there is no reason to fear any slackening in their zeal... They should not be paid, but this should not deter the Committees from paying the expenses entailed in their work!***

Since most people cannot work for nothing and since the Red Cross needs professional and specialized workers, sometimes with very high qualifications, part of the personnel, generally speaking, has to consist of paid employees [5]. As we noted earlier, the work may preserve its voluntary character even though it is paid for. Work does not lose its dignity because it also assures the livelihood of those who do it. The status of people working for the institution is not determined by whether or not they receive salaries. There is therefore no such thing as a superior or an inferior category. The important thing is that the work carried out for the Red

Cross shall be voluntary. Whether it is paid for or not is a secondary consideration.

The conception of voluntary service in the Red Cross was born with the movement itself, more than a century ago. The voluntary first-aid workers then constituted the basis of the new institution. At that time only wartime work was involved and the structure of the Red Cross Societies was modelled on that of the armies. The "bare-handed cohorts" of first-aid workers thus submitted themselves to the risks of combat and the discomforts of military life. The word "volunteer" in those days had its fullest meaning.

In our time, the problem is a different one, because the National Societies have a wide range of peacetime activities. Many of these Societies have the benefit of a large number of volunteer workers – for the most part well-to-do women – who give a few hours of their time every week to social welfare work, helping elderly people, visiting hospital patients, caring for children, reading to the blind, etc. There are also a great many first-aiders who have received special training and are prepared to lend a hand in case of accident or illness. These include a large number of factory workers. Others make their automobiles available for the transport of handicapped persons. Then there are the people who give their blood, collect money – and a great many others. Voluntary work does not belong only to the past. It is showing new vigour and popularity every day.

These auxiliaries receive no pay. Sometimes however the time they devote to assistance is subtracted from their regular working hours, or they may be offered a meal, reimbursement of travel costs, etc., none of which alters their status as volunteers. Sometimes they may wear a special emblem.

This brings us back to the problem of terminology. In some countries, people who come in to do occasional work are described as "volunteers". There is no question however of using this term for paid officials and permanent staff members. These are comparable to government workers or to employees in private enterprises, who also choose their occupations freely.

To conclude our comments on this point: customs, social structures and economic conditions vary so greatly from one country to another that there can be no uniform solution to the problem. It is therefore up to every Society to make its own rules. It seems to us that it would be appropriate however to limit the term "volunteers" or "voluntary workers" to persons who offer their services free or for a low sum, either on a permanent or temporary basis. They would have the right to wear the insignia of the Society or a special badge. We would emphasize again that it is not enough to be generous and devoted and have a kind heart to be a useful volunteer worker. For many tasks it is also essential to be adequately trained. This may require some effort, which the true volunteer must accept.

What is most important however is that those who serve the Red Cross, whether they are paid or not, should create a living and fraternal working community, *all of whose members are aware of reaching out together toward a higher common purpose in which each one, while maintaining his own individuality freely serves the common cause and, regardless of the hierarchical order necessary for any organization, looks upon those under his orders as colleagues*. Under such conditions there is born that team spirit which makes it possible to work shoulder to shoulder, with joy and mutual enthusiasm.

### 3. Selflessness

Related to the principle of humanity, of which, on the level of organic principles, it is, in a manner of speaking, the counterpart, selflessness has great significance for the Red Cross. The author has previously called this the “*golden rule*” of the Red Cross and in 1955, in *Red Cross Principles*, formulated it as follows, *The Red Cross does not reap any advantage from its activities; it is only concerned with the humanitarian interest of the persons who require help*. The Red Cross stands firmly by this single word “selflessness”, a word with a host of potentialities.

In speaking of the selflessness of the Red Cross, we mean that it has no interests of its own, or at least that its interests coincide with those of the persons it protects or assists. Any assistance to the Red Cross serves the victims who need its help, and vice versa.

Whenever a Red Cross body is called upon to act or make a decision, it must first of all ask itself what the interests of the victims are, and if the action will serve those interests. This “golden rule” – in which gold counts for nothing – will always enable the Red Cross to solve most of the problems it encounters, with no danger of going wrong. In moments of difficulty, it will point the way more surely than the needle of a compass.

It will not always be easy however to ascertain the real interests of those in need. To do this requires, in each case, a careful weighing of all the factors involved. What must be attained is the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number. In actual practice however, it is ordinarily the most immediate interests of the victims which must be decisive. It is above all else the lives and health of human beings – the supreme possessions of man – which are involved, and these are increasingly endangered with the passing of time. One cannot take risks when these vital interests are at stake. Knowing that delay may be fatal, the Red Cross will never sacrifice one life today in the uncertain hope of saving more lives later.

The duty of a charitable undertaking is to devote itself wholly to the welfare of human beings; such an ideal does not allow for debate leading inevitably to compromise. The Red Cross is a purely charitable institution. It has only one object, to relieve human suffering. All other activities are subordinate to this single purpose.

The Red Cross has no material motive. It is not impelled by any desire for gain but only by love for human beings. In a sense it serves only as trustee for the gifts it receives, for these are intended finally to relieve people who suffer. In a world where it seems that everything is for sale, it is remarkable to have one organization working, regularly and permanently, without the compelling incentive of commercial profit.

The Red Cross has not made the providing of free service one of its fundamental principles. However, for the simple reason of its selflessness and the absolute non-discrimination which it observes, its solicitude is extended to all who are in need of it. To make assistance depend upon a financial contribution would mean refusing it to those who are unable to pay. In order to reach everyone, the services of the Red Cross are therefore free in principle. This does not mean that the organization must systematically renounce accepting payment, for example if it undertakes to perform a public service function which is customarily paid for, or accepting and even soliciting contributions from recipients of its services who are well off, for the benefit of the less fortunate. It is quite in accord with the spirit of the Red Cross that those

who have pay for those who have not. Such considerations however must never prevent anyone from receiving the care he needs.

#### 4. The Spirit of Service

The spirit of service is indissolubly associated with the Red Cross and is the source of its vital energy. It has not however been established as one of the fundamental principles, since it is not so much a characteristic of the institution as of the persons who serve the institution.

We cannot however pass over in silence an element without which the Red Cross simply would not exist. One could refer to this concept in the Proclamation by a phrase inserted at the beginning of the principle we are now considering: "*expression of the spirit of service...*".

At this point we shall refer to what has been said by some of the thinkers and servants of the Red Cross. *After the verb "to love", the most beautiful one in the world is "to help"*, wrote Bertha von Suttner, the great pacifist and source of inspiration for Henry Dunant. Of course any organization must aim at efficacy. But, for the Red Cross worker, there must be something more, the *spiritual dimension* referred to by Bergson.

*To serve is to sacrifice a part of oneself, a part of what one owns, for the benefit of another* said Jean-G. Lossier. In his view, it is always necessary to begin by knowing oneself, finding oneself, as the only way of knowing and finding others. It is certainly true that the greater our interior richness, the more fruitful will be our work. *If there is no light within us, how shall we find the path in the darkness?*

We have to know why we serve. The Red Cross calls for dedication. If its workers are not inspired by an inner fire, if they do not know why they have chosen to serve the Red Cross, it would be better if they went into business instead – and all the more so if what they want is wealth and fame.

*To serve the Red Cross is in some respects like taking religious vows*. This bears repeating, at a time when too many people, under the pretext of serving the Red Cross, mainly intend to use it to serve their own interests. Yet, they may ask, as did Sophocles, *who does not befriend himself by doing good?* One who is truly moved by the spirit of service will be happy in making others happy. He should not expect gratitude, for he will generally be disappointed. Yet again, as Lossier said, *There are unforeseeable rewards for acts of love*. And, as he pointed out, service enables one to liberate and express oneself; it is a form of communication, of exchange. Everyone needs to participate in something which transcends him, and gives to him something of its grandeur.

The relationship between those who give and those who receive has gone through great changes in our time. The gift, as a token of superiority or pride for the giver, of inferiority or humiliation for the receiver, is an outdated idea. Today, we understand more easily that the benefactor and the beneficiary stand on the same level when they reach out their hands to one another. In this field, we have much to learn from the Third World where the sense of natural solidarity exists in its pure state. In these countries, misfortune, poverty and suffering do not abase man.

We can thus arrive at the recognition that the duty to help and the right to receive come together as aspects of pure human solidarity. We must go still further, and speak as well of the

right to give. This right belongs to all of us and to each of us. To give relief must no longer be regarded as belonging only to a privileged class.

The true Red Cross worker will efface himself as he confronts the work to be done, and his deeds will often be hidden, for he will learn that to climb up on the pedestal of useless recognition means to lower himself on the scale of real values. The glory of the Red Cross consists above all of unknown acts of heroism.

We can see at the same time that the Red Cross mission is becoming more and more difficult and for those working “in the field” more and more dangerous. In a world of increasing fanaticism, service to the Red Cross may be at the risk of one’s life.

In the words of an oath sworn by the members of a National Society, *To belong to the Red Cross is to devote one’s life to the service of humanity, to regard all men as one’s brothers; to feel their sufferings as one’s own and seek to relieve them; to respect human life and be prepared to risk one’s own to save that of others; to condemn violence and seek universal Peace... .*

Let us conclude this section with a quotation from a speech by Max Huber: *If I were to look for a comparison to portray the work of the Red Cross from the viewpoint of the International Committee, I would think first of those magnificent cathedrals of the Middle Ages, which were also built in the form of a cross. Nearly all the architects and artists who conceived, built and adorned these masterpieces, among the greatest of all time, remained gloriously unknown. These masters and their workers, sculptors and masons, generation after generation, constituted working teams which were capable of producing these perfect works of beauty and solidity because each one in his place, leaders and labourers alike, was inspired by the lofty purpose of their common efforts. So it was that every part of the structure bore the imprint of the same spirit; that a sculptor working on a part of the cornice, invisible to all eyes except those of the birds in the sky, devoted as much of his heart and skill to his work as the one who decorated the main portal. If these cathedrals were a source of legitimate pride to the cities which raised them; if the architects and workers were fully conscious of the sacred use to which the structures were dedicated, the cathedral bore for them in itself its reason for being what it was, in its serene and majestic beauty, like a hymn of praise rising to heaven.*

## VI. UNITY

*There can be only one Red Cross Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.*

Under the heading “unity”, the Proclamation brought together three concepts: unity, properly speaking, or uniqueness: there can be only one National Red Cross Society in any one country; multitudinism: it must be open to everyone; and generality in its action: it must extend throughout the entire territory.

### 1. Unity

The unique character of a National Society is also found among the Conditions for the Recognition of New Societies (paragraph 2), which require unity of leadership: the Society shall be directed by a central body which shall alone be competent to represent it in its dealings with other members of the International Red Cross.

For practical reasons, which are nonetheless imperative, the Red Cross Society must be the only one of its kind in the territory of each nation, for this is essential to the efficacy of its work. We can well imagine the confusion which would prevail in a country if several associations, all proclaiming the same principles, were to advertise that they were carrying out the same tasks independently!

Unity of leadership is essential for much the same reasons. If it is necessary for the Red Cross Society to be the only one of its kind, it is also necessary that it take its orders from only one central committee, just as an army can only obey one general staff. It is essential to concentrate its energies and resources in the same hands, for the sake of harmonious co-ordination. This requirement also applies at every level of the hierarchical structure.

In federated countries, we find a clear tendency toward decentralization, with local sections often having quite extensive powers and more or less autonomy.

In certain countries, the Red Cross Society is joined to other charitable institutions through affiliation and grants them the right to use the emblem, while preserving their particular characteristics. While we may well be gratified at seeing the Red Cross become a rallying point for people and institutions of good will, such a procedure has its hazards. A Society would accordingly be well advised to define quite precisely its relations with affiliated organizations, so that the authority of its central committee will remain intact and that respect for the principles of the Red Cross will always be ensured.

A National Red Cross Society is therefore its own master in its own domain. This is true to such an extent that International Red Cross Conferences have ruled that a National Society cannot establish a section in, or send a mission to a foreign country without the permission of the Red Cross Society in that country.

### 2. Multitudinism

The Proclamation specified that each National Society must be open to all, that is, as stated more precisely in the Conditions for recognition, it shall not withhold membership from any

of its nationals, whoever they may be, on grounds of race, sex, class, religion or political opinions. Concerning this enumeration, we refer to what we said above on the subject on non-discrimination for we are concerned here with non-discrimination in the recruiting of members. Whereas in the case of non-discrimination with regard to the persons being assisted we were in the domain of substantive principles, we are dealing now with organic principles. One can see at a glance the profound difference between the levels of these two kinds of principle in the hierarchy of values, a difference of nature and not only one of degree. While it is important for Red Cross membership to be open to everyone, the essential thing is that it must give its services without distinction to everyone in need. In the latter case, we are in the field of ends and not in that of means.

The principle of multitudinism does not mean that a Red Cross Society must accept all the citizens of its country without exception. On the contrary, it has the indisputable right to exclude individuals on grounds of their moral character, and also on grounds of ability. Positions which carry responsibilities or call for specialized knowledge, medical for example, cannot be given to incompetents. The right to eliminate undesirables is obviously less important when it is simply a matter of membership, at least in those Societies in which membership requires nothing more than the paying of dues.

What the principle does mean is that membership must not be refused for discriminatory reasons, reasons based on considerations alien to the institution, to the efficiency of its work or its reputation.

Multitudinism, by making it possible for all social, political and religious elements to be represented, prevents sectarianism and a spirit of partisanship. It provides a guarantee of confidence in the Society, both inside and outside the country and is the best antidote against favouritism.

To succeed, the Red Cross must be a popular organization. It is important for it to have a wide base and to win the mass of people to its cause, for in union there is strength. Its leaders must come from every quarter of the compass.

The foregoing considerations are especially important in countries having a large indigenous population living alongside a more developed population of immigrants. It is indispensable for the natives to be progressively associated with the work of the Red Cross and accede to positions of leadership. In this way, the Red Cross will be able to reach into the most remote corners of the country and bring a broader understanding of its ideals. It is also necessary for these people to be capable of carrying on the work that has begun, after they have gained their independence and have only themselves to rely upon. Recent experiences, gained in the course of “decolonization”, should be instructive to us in this connection.

The Tansley Report considers that the Red Cross does not take community needs sufficiently into account, especially in rural areas. In most countries, the volunteers come from the cities and encounter the traditional mistrust of countrymen for city people. It is for this reason that Dr. Pierre Dorolle expressed his hope to see the coming into being of a “barefoot Red Cross”, composed of people from the villages, which would assure its penetration everywhere.

### 3. Generality of Action

The language in the Conditions for Recognition is more precise, stating in paragraph 7 that the Society shall extend its activities to the entire country and its dependencies .

Since there can be only one Red Cross Society in a country, it follows logically that this Society must embrace within its sphere of activities the whole territory of the country, for there would otherwise be gaps in its humanitarian work. The Tansley Report has pointed out however that this condition is very far from being universally achieved.

The universality of which we have already spoken, transferred from the international to the national domain, takes the form of generality of action. This is a geographically limited universalism, a universalism proportioned to each National Society but identical in essence to that which inspires the worldwide institution.

This universalism requires the National Society to assume all the activities belonging to its traditional domain which are not already being carried out by other institutions. In this way, the combination of these rules permits the Red Cross to be present everywhere and to seek to ensure that no suffering shall be without remedy within the jurisdiction of the Society.

To cover the whole national community, the system of territorial decentralization is the most widespread and is doubtless the best. Local sections are set up in all provincial centres and in all major towns. Smaller units in secondary localities, urban neighbourhoods or even apartment blocks may be set up if necessary as adjuncts to these sections. By this means, step by step, the Red Cross can “infiltrate” the population, enabling it to reach all sections of the population, among whom it can carry out its mission and enjoy the co-operation it needs.

## VII. UNIVERSALITY

*The Red Cross is a worldwide institution in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other.*

This heading also has three parts: universality in the strictest sense – a mixed principle comprising both substantive and organic aspects – the equality of National Societies and the solidarity among them, the latter two belonging to the organic domain.

### 1. Universality

The Red Cross has a universal vocation. This signifies that it must extend to all men, in all countries, in the terms used in 1955. The first part of this idea – “to all men” – has an essential significance for the Red Cross, whose ideal requires it to open its arms to all who ask its assistance. The principles of humanity and non-discrimination imply the principle of universality, as their natural and necessary consequence. One of the characteristics which gives the Red Cross its unique quality and perhaps its virtue is the fact that it has put into effect, in its own domain, that universality so often dreamed of and so seldom realized.

The second part – “in all countries” – is a consequence of the first: in order to reach all men the charitable action must be carried out everywhere on the surface of the earth. The Red Cross must be able to traverse and explore every part of the great vale of suffering, where all men are brothers.

To achieve universality, the Red Cross had a choice between two roads, that of federalism or that of unity. Standing as an obstacle to unity is the variegated nature of the world, with its multiple facets. The work is therefore shaped along the lines of the widely differing nationalities, crystallized by such elements as sovereignty, culture, political regimes and the characteristics of peoples. On the national basis, the Red Cross proceeded step by step to develop its structures. From the beginning, the National Societies have been created as independent and self-governing institutions. The authority of the international Red Cross bodies has been mainly of a moral character. This reciprocal independence is also a powerful and unique characteristic of the movement.

The National Red Cross Societies, as such, are not governed by the principle of universality. No one expects them to disperse their resources throughout the entire world. Their mission is above all a national one, it is the international bodies of the Red Cross which practice universality and place no geographical limits to their action.

As noted by Donald Tansley, the extremely flexible structure of the Red Cross is remarkably well suited to its universal calling. It is the only institution of its type, combining an action of protection and one of assistance, and, depending on circumstances, disclosing one or another of its three countenances: ICRC, League or National Society.

Has the Red Cross attained true universality? The fact is that there are now National Societies in all the countries in the world, with very rare exceptions of a temporary nature. When a new country accedes to independence, a new Society is created, sooner or later. Does this mean that the Red Cross has come anywhere near to dealing with all the suffering which it has set out to relieve? We cannot claim that it has. The results achieved by the Red Cross in only a

little more than a century are already considerable, but the road ahead of us is a long one, with many new tasks to accomplish. The territory already covered must be cultivated in greater depth. The vital thing is that the Red Cross must strive unceasingly and with all its energy to achieve true universality. In doing this, the principle will take on its full meaning, that of universalism.

There are certain people, even within the Red Cross, who have expressed doubt as to the real value of universality, which they regard as a facade, and prefer what they speak of as “purity”, by which they mean rigid adherence to the letter of the law of the Red Cross. We have previously referred to this problem.

We shall limit ourselves at this point to a single wish: that all concerned should be wary of breaching or violating, by any hasty and unconsidered gesture, a universality which was so long in the winning. Even if it is not always as authentic as we would wish, it nevertheless represents for the Red Cross a precious heritage from which the institution has derived a good deal of its power of achievement.

It is naturally necessary to examine each case on its merits and weigh the pros and cons. In this matter as in others, the golden rule – the interests of the persons needing assistance – will show us the way. We are sure however that we shall usually find that it is better for an imperfect Red Cross Society to exist in a country than to have no Red Cross there at all. Perfection exists only in the phraseology of the Pharisees.

## **2. The Equality of National Societies**

Red Cross Societies, as we have seen, vary considerably in importance from one country to another. Nevertheless, from the beginning, all Societies have been established on the basis of equality. As a result, equality of rights in international terms has made up for factual inequality.

In 1921, the ICRC adopted a “summary” of fundamental principles in which it included “the equality of National Societies”. It should be recalled that at that time the League had recently been established on a different basis: the federation was at that time open only to the Societies in countries which had been allies on the winning side in the First World War, and, following the pattern of the League of Nations, the five principal victorious powers played a preponderant role in it. To many people, this notion appeared partisan and incompatible with the spirit of the institution. Shortly afterwards, in any event, it was discarded.

Opening its doors to all Red Cross Societies on an equal basis, the League cleared the way for that universal solidarity which gives it the strength it has today. The principle of the equality of Red Cross Societies emerged stronger than ever from this venture.

Parity of rights is the rule which best fits an institution which does not have the same motivations as those of States and which is entirely devoted to the welfare of the human being. Without it, there would be the danger of introducing elements of a political character into the Red Cross, which would soon make of it an arena for power struggles.

The equality of Societies can be compared to the great principle of the equality of men in the face of suffering, the basis of Red Cross law. The Red Cross is essentially individualistic. In addition, the equality of National Societies is the consequence of their desire for

independence. How could one consider a Society to be fully independent if, in international terms, it were dominated by other Societies? The equality of the Societies is also in conformity with the principle of the equality of States, which has now won worldwide recognition.

### 3. Solidarity

The National Societies are completely independent and have equal rights. Nevertheless, while remaining masters of their destinies and conserving their freedom of action, they have created mutual ties among themselves and have recognized that they have duties in helping each other.

Recognizing that it is better to co-operate than to isolate themselves, the Societies cultivate solidarity. Each one works, to a varying degree, for the welfare of all. This is what distinguishes humanitarian work from individual charity. The latter is free from any idea of reciprocity: a free gesture is made and no return is expected. This is the essence of its nobility, but is also a source of weakness. The Red Cross has grown up in an organized world, a world endowed with memory.

The concept of solidarity has been firmly established since the beginning of the Red Cross. In the Conditions for Recognition of New Societies as they exist today, it is set forth in the statement that the Society shall share in the fellowship which unites its members – the National Societies and the international bodies – and keep in close touch with them. In addition, the International Red Cross Conferences have passed numerous resolutions on the subject of solidarity. It was clearly the birth of the League of Red Cross Societies, however, which provided the decisive impulse and made this principle a reality. It is thanks to the League that this mutual co-operation has attained the splendid development of today.

As we have seen, the National Societies primarily give their help to people in their own countries; their specific task is carried out within national boundaries and they are not expected to exhaust their resources by attempting to deal with all suffering throughout the world. But when a nation is stricken by a natural or social disaster whose proportions surpass its national capacities, its Society appeals, through the League, to other Red Cross Societies which, on a voluntary basis, bring assistance to it in the form of personnel or material aid. Even though it may cover only a small part of the needs, this assistance is none the less precious. When an armed conflict is involved and a neutral intermediary is needed, it is the ICRC which is competent. There has recently been a tendency for Red Cross Societies in the same region to conclude mutual assistance agreements.

In this way, the National Societies exercise an international action over and above their own specific task. As a rule, the international effort is quite small as compared to the domestic activities, but the Societies of some countries have shown such great generosity that the two spheres of action tend to become equalized.

Charitable solidarity is not only precious in material terms. By the selflessness it displays, it also has symbolic value. When a Red Cross Society devotes itself to the welfare of its countrymen, it is faithfully carrying out its task, but it is not doing anything exceptional and is not acting in a manner essentially different from that of other philanthropic institutions. On the other hand, when it spreads its benefits beyond its own frontiers and in so doing acts beyond any national interest, it then truly represents what is meant by the “Red Cross”.

The National Red Cross organizations refer to one another as “sister Societies”, and this means more than the mere words would indicate. Solidarity in the face of suffering, which makes of the Red Cross a “body”, indeed a “family”, is closely related to the original gesture – that simple gesture performed by Henry Dunant as day fell after a great battle, a gesture which did something to change the face of the world.

Such mutual assistance, a branch of activity which is so much in keeping with the spirit of Red Cross work, is now in a phase of full and active development and appears to have a productive future ahead of it. We may well hope that the National Societies will find in this activity an occasion to strengthen even more the bonds between them and to give even more power to that fraternal solidarity which is one of their most glorious accomplishments.