

## **HISTORY OF RED CROSS**

### **Henri Dunant, founder of Red Cross**

Jean Henri Dunant was born in Geneva on 8 May 1828. His character and education impelled him to help the distressed and the unfortunate and to be concerned about social work. In 1853, he was appointed as an accountant to a subsidiary company in Algeria, which entailed a certain amount of travelling.

On 24 June 1859, Dunant arrived at Solferino where he witnessed one of the fiercest battles of the nineteenth century. The Battle of Solferino lasted for more than 15 hours and more than 40,000 were wounded. Dunant was filled with horror and pity as he viewed the appalling spectacle of human suffering. With the help of the villagers at Castiglione, he worked tirelessly, without sleep for three days, giving comfort and what medical care he could to the injured men.

Back at Geneva, Dunant was haunted by visions of the terrible battle and he devoted all his strength to ensure that the terrible sufferings he had witnessed never occurred again. In 1862, Dunant wrote and published a book entitled "A Memory of Solferino", which he put forward his ideas to foster the creation in every country of a society for the relief of the military wounded and capable of helping the army medical services to carry out their tasks.

### **Birth of Red Cross**

Gustave Moynier, a prominent lawyer in Geneva and president of the city's Society of Public Welfare, showed immediate interest in Dunant's ideas. Moynier lost no time in setting up the Permanent International Committee of the Relief of the Wounded, which was later known as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Delegates from sixteen countries met at Geneva from 26 to 29 October 1863 and agreed to approve the resolutions of the Geneva Committee. It was decided that the States foster the creation in their own territories of inter-related private societies to complement the work of military medical services. Relief workers and their medical equipment were to be protected by a distinctive emblem, a red cross on a white background.

In August 1864, the Swiss government convened at Geneva, a Diplomatic Conference bringing together representatives from twelve States. The First Geneva Convention was signed on 22 August 1864 by the representatives, with others soon to follow. Until then war and law were considered irreconcilable, but the First Geneva Convention showed that law could operate even in wartime to impose certain humanitarian rules.

### **Development of the Red Cross**

The founders of the Red Cross set themselves the task of fostering the creation of National Societies. By 1874, twenty-two national societies in European countries and soon the Red Cross movement spread to other continents.

In 1876, when Turkey was at war with Russia, they informed the Swiss Government that it was adopting for its ambulances the emblem of the Red Crescent instead of the Red Cross. The Red Crescent emblem was then used by most of the Islamic countries.

During the wars and internal disturbances, which broke out between 1864 and 1914, the Red Cross and Red Crescent were on the scene wherever men were suffering. Above all, it was during the First World War that the Red Cross was called upon to operate on a scale never before paralleled. All Red Cross Societies of the belligerent countries organised hospitals and ambulances.

The activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross also expanded greatly, particularly following the creation at Geneva of the Central Tracing Agency. The Agency received from the fighting force lists of the wounded and of the prisoners they had taken, and passed on the information to their Governments. Later prisoners were given the right to correspond with their families and the Agency was given the responsibility of receiving, checking and forwarding the enormous flow of mail.

Delegates of the International Committee visited the prisoners-of-war and, in their confidential reports, called for improvements in conditions for captives.

Mr Henry Pomeroy Davison, President of the War Committee of the American Red Cross, suggested that the Red Cross Societies of the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan should devote their resources to action in the public health field and to the organisation of relief in case of natural disaster. The League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was started in 1919 with its headquarters in Geneva, in coordinating role and work of National Societies at international level.

The Red Cross new orientation towards humanitarian work in peacetime did not affect the continuing work of the International Committee of the Red Cross. It indicated that the First World War had demonstrated the urgent need to protect many parties, including the civilians. In the years that followed, the successive signings of the Geneva Conventions served these protections.

During the Second World War, the International Committee intervened to improve the treatment of victims, avoid reprisals and ensure that camps were established in safe and healthy places.

### **The four conventions and additional protocols**

After the war, the Red Cross resumed the task of preparing for a Convention on the protection of civilians in times of war. A diplomatic Conference was convened in Geneva in April 1949 and on 22 August 1949, it adopted the four Geneva Conventions on the protection of victims of armed conflicts.

Post-war events developed apace, however, and both the experience of the first conflicts to take place after 1945 and the development of nuclear weapons led the International Committee of Red Cross to make new proposals for the protection of civilians.

Since 1945, there has been much reflection and discussion within the Red Cross about its fundamental objectives. The seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross were unanimously adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Vienna, in October 1965.

In 1968, after consultations with the United Nations, the International Committee of Red Cross organised meetings of governmental legal advisors who prepared the way for a Diplomatic Conference. The two protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions were adopted in 10 June 1977.

### **Post-war period to the present day**

The period since 1945 has seen a tremendous increase in Red Cross relief activities for the victims of natural disasters, for which the League is responsible at the international level.

In countries subject to disasters, National Societies have been seeking to develop, in agreement with their governments, their capacity to intervene in relief operations and to prepare themselves for the task of receiving and distributing relief from abroad when an international appeal is launched.

The League, which has engaged in large-scale relief work in the past, is now concentrating on coordinating relief and action between donor and recipient National Societies and between the Red Cross and the United Nations.

The activities of National Societies have since changed to reflect the requirements, to move from curative to preventive medicine and to concentrate on broader problems of public health and hygiene. The blood transfusion programme was developed and Red Cross has played an effective part in persuading people to give blood.

At the same time, the Red Cross, in almost every part of the world, is doing an active role in nursing and social welfare. National Societies have shown an increasing interest in the recruitment of young people and various programmes in schools are developed, which include first aid, evacuation, fire-fighting, nursing, social welfare services, etc...

## RED CROSS EMBLEM

The adoption of a distinctive emblem for the people and establishment placed under this special protection was an important part of this international agreement. In honour of Switzerland, a red cross on a white background obtained by reversing the colours of the Swiss flag. The **Red Cross** emblem (5 red squares on a white background) was adopted in 1863.

However, the red cross raised a problem in some countries, for although the red cross is not a religious symbol and never figured as such among the Christian countries which adopted it proved unacceptable to Turkey, the first non-Christian country to establish a relief society. In 1876, Turkey dissolved its 'Aid Society to the Wounded' formed eight years before, and re-established it with the name and emblem of the red crescent. The **Red Crescent** on a white background was mostly used as an emblem by Islamic countries.

These two distinctive emblems are equally recognised and protected since the diplomatic Conference of 1929. Their purpose is to ensure the protection of the war-wounded and of all the persons caring for them. Any abuse of these emblems endangers the entire system and constitutes a grave breach of international law.

In 1922, the Persian (Iran) – Muslims of a different rite from the Turks, took the emblem of the **Red Lion and Sun**. This emblem was later revoked in 1980 and the red crescent emblem was used in place of the Red Lion and Sun.

## GENEVA CONVENTIONS

The four Geneva Conventions contain more than 400 articles governing the conduct of nations involved in armed conflicts. The conventions have been adopted – or ratified- by 186 nations, more than 100 countries have signed one or both of the protocols. No other international treaties have been so widely accepted.

Nations that ratify the conventions and protocols promise to abide by them. Each country is responsible for violations committed by its military officers and other individuals. Violators of the conventions and protocols may be subject to international sanctions, or punishments, such as the withdrawal of trade and loans.

**The First Geneva Convention** was signed in 1864 to save the wounded soldiers on battlefields. It provides for the protection, care, medical treatment and exchange of family news of the persons concerned, and the return of medical and religious personnel. Parties of the conflict are obliged to search for the dead and to give information about them to the Red Cross. The Convention forbids attacks on wounded soldiers. Similarly, those who surrender cannot be attacked. The sick and wounded should be kept in a hospital zone safe from attacks. The Convention also prohibits all attacks on medical personnel, hospitals and staff personnel in the hospital.

**The Second Geneva Convention** was signed in 1906 to extend the principles of the First Convention to the victims of naval warfare including shipwrecked men. It was only natural that the protection that has been afforded ambulances and hospitals should be extended to lifeboats, hospital ships and their personnel. Under this Convention, hospital ships, medical aircraft used exclusively for the evacuation or rescue of the sick and wounded are treated as medical establishments on the land, and protected in the same way. Similar privileges were also extended to the means of transport used by the Red Cross for these operations.

**The Third Geneva Convention** was signed in 1929 to protect the welfare of prisoners-of-war and it contains elaborate and detailed rules for their treatment. Under this Convention, the detaining power has the obligation to arrange for their free maintenance, accommodation, food and clothing as well as medical care. The prisoners have the right to send and receive family messages and to speak in private with ICRC delegates who visit them in their camps. Prisoners are protected at all times against violence, intimidation, insults and public curiosity. Women must be treated with dignity due to their sex.

**The Fourth Geneva Convention** was signed in 1949 contains rules to ensure the safety of civilians to an occupied territory and those who happen to be in the enemy country during the war. Under this Convention, there should be safety zones for wounded and sick civilians, old people, expectant mother and mothers of little babies. Special care should be taken of orphans and children separated from their parents. The occupying powers must ensure adequate supply of food and other essential things, which should be imported, if necessary. No hostages should be taken from among civilians. Looting and acts of violence are strictly forbidden. Senseless destruction of private property is not allowed. Representatives of National Red Cross Societies, delegates of Protecting Powers and of the ICRC shall be allowed to give relief to the civilians.

## **THE ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS**

On 8 June 1977, representatives of some 100 States met in Geneva to sign the Final Act of the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law. Two additional protocols were drawn up to improve protection of civilians against the dangers of indiscriminate warfare of the effects of total war.

**Protocol I** concerns international armed conflicts. It prohibits random attacks against civilians and the things which civilians need to survive such as crops and livestock. It prohibits massive air bombardments. The parties involved in the conflict must provide medical aid and food to civilians, otherwise to permit relief supplies by the ICRC.

**Protocol II** concerns internal conflict or civil war in which the government of a country finds itself at grips with rebel forces. It covers the protection of rebel forces and the like. It provides a body of rules aimed at safeguarding certain basic values such as respect for the physical and moral integrity of the individual and the decent treatment for persons deprived of their freedom.