

# IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

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## DISSEMINATION OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

*There are principles, such as those of the Red Cross, which must be maintained at any price and there are humanitarian conventions which, reflecting a minimum degree of humanity, must be respected by everybody. National Societies in every country are concerned with their dissemination and we all know the importance attributed to such efforts by the ICRC, which itself sponsors and reinforces them in a variety of ways.*

*At Founex, near Geneva, an "International Study Centre for leaders of young National Societies" was organized by the League of Red Cross Societies as part of the Centenary programme. A number of lectures were presented on the activities of the Red Cross in the world today. One of the speakers dealt with the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions by the Red Cross Society in the German Federal Republic and we think it worthwhile to reproduce the text as a description of Red Cross activity in this particular field, for the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions does not imply acceptance of war; quite the contrary, it contributes to the struggle against war by defending those moral principles which inspire the Red Cross and which affirm human solidarity and peaceful aspirations.*

*The text given below is by Mr. Willy Heudtlass, Director of the Press and Radio Service of the Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany and, in so far as it concerns the Geneva Conventions, is the result of co-operation between the author and Mr. H. Hülsemann, that National Society's legal adviser.*

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Gathered here for the Centenary of the Red Cross, we can be proud that we are the representatives of a humanitarian idea and of the organization inspired by that idea which, in nearly every country of the world, has for a century been doing more for peace between the nations and for fraternity than any other private organization. With even greater pride we can, as representatives of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun, observe that in the name of this idea no man has ever killed ; on the contrary, it has brought to millions of human beings throughout the world mutual assistance in time of distress.

This meeting is attended by many nationals of States which have been founded in the course of the last few years and who only recently have been able to feel that they have practical responsibility for upholding the Red Cross idea. This is not to say that they did not previously feel any responsibility for ideas of peace and fraternity. But the recent emergence of new States has given to many the possibility of acting in their country to promote the work instituted one hundred years ago by Henry Dunant. All who are in sympathy with the movement will appreciate how important for the Red Cross and the dissemination of its ideal throughout the world is the founding of new Societies, that is to say the progressive disappearance of gaps on the map where the Red Cross banner does not fly side by side with the national flag.

In this manner, the number of men and women, and of youths too, fired with the desire to proselytize their fellow citizens to this fine ideal is growing from year to year. The experience of the last hundred years has also shown that belief in the value of a cause is but one of the conditions necessary to serve it effectually. The final aim is to ensure that both in war and peace the inspired principles of the Red Cross spirit shall prevail. For this they must be disseminated as widely as possible. We all know how great sometimes is the distance separating the declaration of principles from their implementation and Henry Dunant himself already pointed out the dangers likely to arise from this fact. In 1894, he wrote to one of his Swiss friends who was a member of the Red Cross : " Mountain warfare can become a terrible thing and if the people are not given instruction beforehand on the Convention and have not assimilated it, if they do not respect its provisions, they might well have to

pay for these shortcomings by suffering drastic reprisals inflicted by the enemy. You would do well to give the text of the Geneva Convention in your next report. The duty of the regional committees everywhere is especially to make known and widely accepted the full extent of these regulations and to make clear the duties and advantages deriving therefrom ”.

Thus, you may see that Henry Dunant considered the Geneva Conventions to be effective only in so far as its provisions were known to everybody.

The task of making the full extent of these humanitarian texts known is formally stipulated in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 as an obligation. Dissemination of the text of the Conventions must be carried out as widely as possible ; they should be a subject in programmes of military and civil instruction and the whole population should be given the opportunity to become familiar with them.

By accession in 1954 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany undertook all the obligations arising therefrom. In addition, the Red Cross too voluntarily committed itself to the dissemination of knowledge on the Conventions among the general public. In this manner, the State and the Red Cross have established two coextensive programmes of instruction. That of the State is intended first and foremost for the *armed forces*, whilst that of the Red Cross is aimed primarily at the *civilian population*.

### **Armed forces**

All members of the “ Bundeswehr ” (Federal army) undergo this course of instruction. . . . All officers follow courses given by the legal advisers of the Army Staff. The duty of instructing other ranks falls on the officers. Teaching is based not only on the text of the International Conventions applicable in the event of war, but also on text-books published by the Ministry of National Defence dealing, inter alia, with each Convention bearing on the Red Cross. There is also other teaching material referring to the Geneva Conventions, such as numerous typical cases and questions with solutions involving the application of international law in time of war, an illustrated primer and a film on the Conventions.

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Some of the questions relating to the Geneva Conventions to which the military have to reply are :

1. What International Law Conventions contain the most important provisions relative to the treatment of the wounded, the sick, the shipwrecked and prisoners of war ?
2. Who is entitled to punish members of resistance movements ?
3. Is it permissible to take reprisals against the persons or property of civilian populations ?
4. Is it permissible to inflict punishment on a community ?
5. Is it permissible to take hostages ?
6. What are the protective emblems worn by army medical personnel, or displayed by military hospitals, army medical service vehicles and material ?
7. What are the consequences of wrongful use of the protective emblem, e.g. by the installation of an artillery observation post on a hospital building ?
8. What exemption is to be granted to airborne medical forces ?
9. How are the transport facilities available to airborne medical forces defined and what conditions must be fulfilled for entitlement to their use ?
10. What objects may be taken from prisoners of war and what personal effects may they retain?

### **Civilian population**

The information disseminated by the National Red Cross Society has two objectives : first, it is intended for the members of the Society itself and secondly, its aim is to interest the civil administration (government departments), doctors, clergy, hospital staffs and all other sections of the population involved, including youth. With regard first of all to instruction of the active members of the Red Cross, this is attended to by a central school in Bonn and several schools in the provinces. Courses, conferences and seminars are organized in order to make the principles of the Geneva Conventions known to the lawyers and legal advisers of the Society.

Thus, the Red Cross strives to prepare—for readiness in the event of a war which nobody wants—a network of legal experts having special knowledge which will enable them to make clear to

any occupying forces the statutes that they must observe. And this applies also to the civil population. It is from these legal experts that teaching personnel is sought so that they may pass on their knowledge to members of local organizations. Already nearly every one of the 520 administrative districts has a legal adviser familiar with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions.

The Red Cross has drawn up texts relating to the Geneva Conventions and intended to be used for teaching. They form the basis of the courses for training Red Cross active relief workers. Four courses have been arranged: the first consists of a general introduction and an outline of the importance and effectiveness of the agreements affecting the Red Cross.

Starting with the event which was at the origin of the Red Cross, the battle of Solferino, attention is then given to the development of the outstanding ideas which led to the international conferences of 1863 and 1864 in Geneva. This is followed by an exposition of the fundamental ideas the essentials of which have remained unchanged since 1864, but of which the practical application is constantly being extended.

In the second part of the course, attention is given to the Red Cross sign as an emblem and as a protective insignia. The provisions of the Conventions concerning the use of the Red Cross sign in time of war and of peace are studied analytically. The third part deals with the principles of the Conventions relating to captivity and internment. Finally, the theme of the fourth part is the protection of the civilian population.

Particular importance attaches to this subject. It covers the rights of the population in their relations with an occupying power, the guarantees enabling the National Red Cross Societies to continue operation in occupied territory, and co-operation for the practical implementation of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention affecting the Red Cross. Other subjects include the organization of hospital zones and localities, exemption granted to civilian hospitals and their staffs, the transport of medical equipment, food and clothing for the civilian population, special protective measures for children, repatriation of families, the operation of public health services, various mutual assistance programmes, aid to wounded and sick civilians in regions where fighting takes place.

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When it is not possible to organize conferences in this course, advantage is taken of the others, for example, that covering first aid, to give lectures on the Geneva Conventions and their scope. The same procedure is adopted during other meetings attended by the Red Cross legal advisers. One of the central themes on the agenda might be one of the aspects of the Geneva Conventions, for example: "guerrilla warfare and international law", "trial of prisoners of war", "the progressive development of the Geneva Conventions and the dangers of atomic war".

In order to give instruction to the civil population, advantage is even taken of fêtes, commemorative ceremonies, etc., in order first of all to arouse public interest. If circumstances allow, courses of several days' duration are organized for civil servants, legal experts, doctors, and the clergy. This programme is completed by lectures in schools, youth centres and adult education centres.

The Legal Commission of the German Red Cross undertaking the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions, has divided the country into three regions, namely North, West and South, in order to facilitate arrangements for large meetings in the territory covered by several regional associations of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic.

The publications issued by the National Society concerning the Geneva Conventions are very varied. They extend from a primer and a summary of the Geneva Conventions to a large volume with texts and explanations; they range from essays on particular aspects and a wide selection of examples to a volume containing a summary of the conferences. A recently issued illustrated primer, to which I shall revert, is the latest vehicle of instruction. In addition, the International Committee and the League have made other means of instruction available to us.

Whenever possible we have recourse to the press, radio, television and cinema. During the events in Hungary in 1956 great interest was displayed by the German population in the German Red Cross relief train and the strict application of the Geneva Conventions of which this was a manifestation.

It would be appropriate to mention here the excellent work written by Mr. H. Coursier and published by the ICRC under the

title *A Course of Five Lessons on the Geneva Conventions*. The German National Society has recognized its usefulness and has reproduced the successive chapters in its monthly review. But before doing so, it had brought this work to the attention of the faculties of law in all German universities and also of other legal associations and certain administrative authorities. Thanks to these efforts, there are now more than one thousand new recipients of the German Red Cross monthly review.

I would like to add a word on what has been done to enable youth groups to achieve understanding of the Geneva Conventions. The Junior Red Cross seems particularly suited for this task. When the seed of the Red Cross idea is planted early, a good harvest may be expected in later years. Naturally, problems must be presented differently from the manner adopted for instruction to adults and the teaching profession plays an important rôle in this respect. Teachers engaged in work with the Junior Red Cross are able to follow courses and attend seminars either in first aid or in Red Cross principles. The international meetings of educators organized by the League, which are regularly attended by representatives from the German Junior Red Cross, are ideal opportunities for exchanges of experiences and on these occasions the Geneva Conventions are always well to the fore.

These must be interpreted realistically in order to give effective guidance through the maze of paragraphs. A recently published illustrated primer takes into account the intuitive rapidity of young people. This is a booklet which is entitled *Im Geiste von Solferino* (In the Spirit of Solferino) and its purpose is to explain the rights and duties deriving from the Geneva Conventions.

There we have a broad outline of the work of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany in connection with the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions among the civilian population. The subject is difficult, as it involves the explanation of legal problems in readily understandable forms to a wide uninitiated public. No country is immune from the danger that the rights and duties provided for by the humanitarian Conventions and which are valid for all may become stark reality. There is therefore a heavy responsibility incumbent on the National Societies of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and the Red Lion and Sun, both for

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themselves and for the inhabitants of their countries. This is why you must consider the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions in your country as an obligation requiring your utmost efforts.

Just as it is true that a knowledge of a foreign language involves study of the grammar, work within the Red Cross can only be fully effective if based on adequate knowledge of the Geneva Conventions. " Knowledge is power " is an aphorism which has always been true. The Red Cross is a moral force, and its existence and authority should be defended first and foremost with the weapons of the spirit and the mind. That is what the great French poet Victor Hugo meant when he wrote to Henry Dunant : " You are arming humanity " .

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## **Denmark**

### **The Red Cross and Refugees**

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary, published an illustrated brochure entitled *The Red Cross and Refugees*, mention of which was made in the September 1963 issue of the *International Review*. We now learn that, following on the wish formulated by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, recommending co-operation between the offices of the United Nations and the National Red Cross Societies on the local level, that is to say, in Denmark, the Information Centre for the Scandinavian countries and the Danish Red Cross, this brochure has recently been published in Danish by the Red Cross in Copenhagen, which ensures wide distribution among schools and the young. The publication represents a first tangible result of such co-operation which we have pleasure in pointing out to our readers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Røde Kors og Flygtningene, Dansk Røde Kors, Copenhagen, 1964.*