

## Tribute to the Memory of Eglantyne Jebb

*On 29 September 1976, during a ceremony held at the headquarters of ICRC, a commemorative tablet was unveiled in honour of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of a truly noble person, Eglantyne Jebb. A number of speeches were made during the ceremony, which was attended by officials and staff members of the International Union for Child Welfare and the ICRC, by representatives of the Swiss authorities, the city of Geneva and various international organizations. Several members of the family of Eglantyne Jebb were also present.*

Mr. V. Winspeare Guicciardi, Director-General of the European Office of the United Nations, read a message from Mr. K. Waldheim, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in which he observed that the life and work of Eglantyne Jebb proved that idealism and love of mankind could be blended successfully with practical action and efficient organization. He felt that those who were now following Eglantyne Jebb in the never-ending struggle for the rights and well-being of all children could draw valuable guidance from her life.

The next speaker was Lord Gore-Booth, chairman of the Save the Children Fund. He began by reading a message in which the Archbishop of Canterbury drew attention to the invaluable work of the Save the Children Fund and the International Union for Child Welfare. The cruelty inflicted on children was the result of man's inhumanity to man; help should be given to children all over the world, particularly in the developing countries.

Lord Gore-Booth went on to evoke the memory of two outstanding Englishwomen who had done so much to alleviate human suffering: Florence Nightingale and Eglantyne Jebb.

From early childhood Eglantyne Jebb was gifted with exceptional qualities of energy and foresight. Her family was reasonably well-to-do,

and, like Florence Nightingale, she could easily have chosen a comfortable country life. But she did not; instead, she chose to teach in a small country school where the children were taught only up to the age of eight. She became intensely aware of this injustice.

In 1913 she went to Bulgaria. The Second Balkan War had broken out and she saw what happened to children when their country was torn and their families scattered by war in the land. She returned home determined that something had to be done. During the First World War she strongly opposed the continuation of the Allied blockade after the cessation of hostilities.

In 1919 the Save the Children Fund was founded, and through Eglantyne's prodigious energy and vision it began a long struggle in Europe against chaos and starvation. For example, 12 million meals were served to children in Eastern and Central Europe who were victims of hunger and sickness.

All of us involved in this kind of work were, added Lord Gore-Booth, the heirs of Eglantyne Jebb and the trustees of the dedication she put into her work, and we take great satisfaction that it is being continued. She was known to have repeatedly used a particular phrase: "We must get something done". This was the right spirit in which to work. He told the participants of a motto he had once seen in an article about a certain youth project, and which nicely expressed the mood in which one should work; it was: "I can, I will."

Eglantyne Jebb was always very grateful for the help and encouragement which she received from the ICRC. The link which had been forged between the two institutions more than half a century previously was now stronger than ever before.

In his address, the chairman of the IUCW, Mr. Auguste Lindt, said how greatly he had been struck by the extraordinary personality of Eglantyne Jebb as it appeared in her writings, and by the creative imagination which she constantly showed.

She had a prophetic sense and a broad vision of a new world to come, in which she saw men drawing ever closer together. She expressed this in a penetrating phrase: "The world is only a village"; in this sense she was to be considered as one of the best advocates of the idea of solidarity.

As a teacher in a primary school in her country she was shocked by the immense social differences which existed at that time, and which she later saw in numerous European countries. She decided she would fight to put an end to the sufferings of children; in so doing, she showed an amazing persuasive power and a truly modern grasp of promotional

techniques which she felt were indispensable in order to mobilize the masses throughout the world, for the task of child welfare. She was the first to call for help for the children of Africa; indeed, her idea for an international conference on African children materialized less than three years after her death, which occurred on 17 December 1928.

During the First World War she clearly saw the need for aid to the developing countries. Mr. Lindt read a sentence from the writings of Eglantyne Jebb which was particularly striking as it was written at a time when only European civilization and technology were thought to be of any value:

“We must help raise the children of the indigenous tribes so that they will later on be able to build a civilization in keeping with tradition, their needs and their potential, so that they will be able to choose and adopt what is good from other peoples, and reject what is bad.”

Eglantyne Jebb anticipated the need for a new international organization for the protection of children; this organization, which was set up in 1920 under the patronage of the ICRC, eventually became the IUWC. Mr. Lindt extended a special welcome to Mrs. Gordon M. Morier, who had been a personal friend of its founder and was at present its Honorary President, and laid stress on the fact that the life and work of Eglantyne Jebb were in themselves a lesson in mutual understanding and an appeal for international co-operation.

*The next speaker was Mr. Alexandre Hay, President of the ICRC.*

With the unveiling on this spot of a memorial to Eglantyne Jebb, we commemorate both the hundredth anniversary of her birth, and the close co-operation which has united the Save the Children International Union, ever since its foundation, with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At the time when the International Union was founded, just after the end of the First World War, Europe had not yet recovered from the aftermath of the conflict: its population was decimated by epidemics; many of its peoples were divided among themselves by local struggles; food, medicines, clothing, all were lacking; and it was especially the children who had to bear the brunt of these privations. As the barriers along the borders gradually lifted, widespread relief enterprises were undertaken. National Red Cross Societies, the Hoover Administration, religious institutions, public and private bodies, the League—which had just then been founded—all brought emergency relief supplies to the most distressed areas. The ICRC, which had established all over Europe a network of permanent delegations and had built up stocks, was busy

repatriating prisoners, helping refugees, distributing food and fighting against epidemics.

The founder of the Save the Children Fund, Eglantyne Jebb, devoted herself, as soon as peace was restored, to bring aid to children. She soon realized that, in view of the extent of the needs and the deteriorating food situation, it had become essential to set up a permanent body that would specialize in the protection of children, claim support from the international community, and proclaim a set of principles of universal appeal. But time was running short. The lives of several million children, at the approach of the winter of 1919, were threatened by disease and starvation. She understood that to get immediate results, at a time when the prejudices born of the war had not yet been eliminated, when supply-lines to the former central European imperial powers were still blocked by war-time restrictions, she should call upon the aid of an organization whose relief parcels crossed political frontiers and whose principles of impartiality coincided wholly with those very ideals which she herself wished to apply.

Eglantyne Jebb therefore decided to meet Dr. Frédéric Ferrière, a member of the ICRC. She knew that he had been in the forefront of the movement for the protection of civilians and had created the civilians section in the Central Prisoners of War Agency, and she had read his reports on the terrible situation of the civilian population in Central and Eastern Europe. She came to Geneva in September 1919 to expound her plan to him. Both he and Marguerite Cramer, who was also present at the meeting, were immediately convinced, and brought round the other members of the ICRC to their views. On 24 September, the International Committee decided to lend its patronage to the new body and, after having listened to what she had to say at one of its sessions, communicated to her their decision on 10 November. The *Comité suisse de Secours aux Enfants*, the Swiss counterpart of the Save the Children Fund, took part in the discussions which resulted in the creation, towards the end of the year, of the Save the Children Fund.

In this way the new institution, while retaining complete autonomy, was closely linked to the Red Cross movement. Its founders confirmed the spiritual ties which joined them to the Geneva institution of the ICRC, when they chose to meet, for the adoption of their statutes, in that same room of the Athénée where the sessions of the International Conference of 1863 had been held. At the early meetings of the International Union, one may note, amongst those who worked together with its founders, the names of many members and officials of the ICRC, such as Horace Micheli (who took the chair at the founders' meeting at the

Athénée), Georges Werner (the first Chairman of the Executive Board), Suzanne Ferrière (an Executive Board member who played a considerable part in its development), Etienne Clouzot (secretary-general), Charles de Watteville and Valdemar Wehrin (the International Union's emissary to Moscow in 1920). Several National Red Cross Societies decided to affiliate with the Save the Children International Union, while others associated in its work. ICRC delegates in the field often distributed the relief articles collected by the International Union.

It was likewise in full communion of thought with the ideals of the ICRC that Eglantyne Jebb put into effect a project which was very close to her heart: the drafting of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the Declaration of Geneva, which by its affirmation of the right of children to enjoy protection and respect without distinction of race, nationality or belief, extended to all children the ideals which had inspired the Red Cross—and it was Gustave Ador, the President of the ICRC, who had the privilege of broadcasting the Declaration of Geneva from the Eiffel Tower transmitter on 21 November 1923.

Thus, the history of the Save the Children International Union has been closely linked with that of the ICRC, even though they were entirely independent of each other in structure and policy. What united them most firmly was their solidarity in their work, founded on an identity of views with regard to the principles of impartiality and universality in the field of assistance and on relations of personal friendship and mutual confidence.

Eglantyne Jebb's shining personality was such that she had the gift of winning immediately over to her side those who spoke with her. Someone once wrote of her that she was both "idealist and realist", and those were indeed, in addition to a will of steel, the most striking traits of her character. With her rather slight frame, clothed in a brown gown almost of monastic cut, wearing a plain silver cross for all adornment, her appearance was indeed that of an apostle preaching to people to follow her faith. "She made you feel", those who knew her used to say, "that you had not accomplished anything at all in your life so far, that your shortcomings were many; then she called upon you to rise above yourself by revealing to you qualities which you would never have thought you had possessed." Mrs. Gordon M. Morier, who was one of the first to work with Eglantyne Jebb, will surely forgive me if I tell how, the very first time she met her in 1921, she was carried away. On her way to Etienne Clouzot, who had invited both ladies to see him, she happened to be with Eglantyne Jebb in the same tram, and, having recognized her, she struck up a conversation. At the first tram stop

Eglantyne Jebb began to speak of her work, the development she thought it would take, the help she would be needing. Only three steps further on, she had definitively won over to her cause the future president of the International Union for Child Welfare !

The institution created by Eglantyne Jebb very quickly became known all over the world, just as she had intended. Its merger with the International Association for the Promotion of Child Welfare has made it today one of the outstanding among all the international charitable organizations, and its activities extend not only to physical and moral assistance, but to all matters relating to information, research and legislation, in connection with the rights of the child. It is a privilege for the ICRC to have been associated with this admirable institution in the very first days of its life, and it appreciates very much the honour of participating in the commemoration of the centenary of its founder's birth. We are most grateful to the Executive Board of the International Union for Child Welfare, and our thanks also go to you, Mr. Ambassador, and to the Chairman of the Save the Children Fund, for having decided to raise this tribute to her memory on this particular spot.

May this stone be the lasting sign of fruitful collaboration and may it testify to the vitality of the work begun by Eglantyne Jebb and continued so openheartedly today by the International Union for Child Welfare.

*After this commemorative meeting, which was held in the main hall of the ICRC, all present went into the garden, where the stone has been unveiled, thus bringing to a close this ceremony, which, like the woman whose memory was being honoured, was dignified and simple. The inscription, in English and French, reads as follows :*

**Eglantyne Jebb (25.8.1876 - 17.12.1928)  
Founder in 1920, with the patronage of the ICRC, of the  
International Union for Child Welfare,  
initiator of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.**

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*In order to illustrate more fully the personality of Eglantyne Jebb and to enable our readers to place themselves within the context of a period richly marked by generous efforts made in the international field, we give below some extracts from an article by J. M. Small which appeared in 1950 in the Revue internationale de l'enfant. The author describes the first thirty*

*years of the International Union for Child Welfare, which was founded in 1920, and gives an account of the origins of the entire international movement, kindled in great part by a report drawn up by that untiring champion of civilians, Dr. Frédéric Ferrière, then Vice-President of the ICRC.*

“In November 1918 Dr. Ferrière went to Vienna on behalf of the ICRC, returning with a well-documented report on the situation of children and how their general state of health had been affected by the blockade and the difficult economic situation in the preceding few months. His report was accompanied by numerous photographs of scrawny, shrivelled children, with emaciated faces and protruding bones, their sunken eyes looking fearfully and reproachfully from out of their sockets. Dr. Ferrière’s appeal was heeded; gradually, government help for Austria was organized, while in Switzerland, Sweden, Great Britain and the United States, private action by many people was set on foot on behalf of children.

Austria, however, was not the only place from which these increasingly heartrending pleas could be heard. The ICRC delegates organizing the repatriation of prisoners of war in Central and Eastern Europe were everywhere witnesses to the destitution and starvation facing the local population, and to the spread of epidemics and tuberculosis. At the same time they found acute shortages of foodstuffs, fuel, linen, pharmaceutical products and dressings, soap and disinfectants. Dr. Ferrière’s first report seemed to be only a preface to this chronicle of human suffering.

The governmental aid which a number of neutral countries, Austria’s immediate neighbours and the Inter-Allied Commission had decided to make available was slow in getting off the ground. Moreover, it was the subject of public and parliamentary debate, and this at a time when human beings were continuing to despair and die. It was essential that private aid, being faster, should be stepped up.

One day late in the summer of 1919—Mrs. Frick-Cramer relates—Dr. Ferrière invited me to have tea at his house and meet an English-woman who was anxious to help children. I can still remember the quiet little garden in Florissant that warm afternoon. We were introduced to the woman whose name you must have already guessed: Eglantyne Jebb. Those who met her did not easily forget her rather striking looks, a middle-aged woman, her fair hair turning grey, wearing a hat trimmed with blue gauze, between that of a member of the Salvation Army and a slightly unobtrusive Gainsborough portrait. She spoke with a calm, gentle voice, her words inspired by the imagination of the heart and by deep feelings, but held in check by lucid powers of reasoning.

She was a visionary and a realist at the same time. During the conversation she said that, on reading Dr. Ferrière's report on Vienna, she had made up her mind once and for all. Men could slaughter each other, but the children had to be saved, because they were innocent of the crimes and hatreds of their elders and unaware of the divisions between nations and parties and, moreover, because they were the hope of mankind. If the children of the world were not protected both physically and morally, then the world itself would be heading towards self-destruction. She firmly believed that children should be cared for and protected, without distinction as to race, nation or religion. International aid for children was to everyone's advantage, but it was also a way of helping the divided nations to resume activities in common and it provided an opportunity for renewed collaboration in a sphere which all could find acceptable.

Miss Jebb then sketched out a plan of action. In such an undertaking she felt that the nations would have to unite; it would therefore be necessary to create a neutral international centre. Union of the classes would be necessary; an appeal would have to be made to all categories of people, workers, farmers, intellectuals. The Churches also should unite. "I shall go and see the leaders of the Protestant Churches; I already have the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury. I shall appeal to the Archbishop of Uppsala. I shall invite the Orthodox Church and the Patriarch of Jerusalem to work with us. I shall go and see the Holy Father in Rome to obtain his help, and also to persuade him to accept Geneva as the centre of our work." Her bright eyes radiated confidence. In a simple down-to-earth manner, she described in her clear voice the programme she had in mind. Being totally committed to her work, this frail woman knew no doubts. She certainly did not seem shy, but, at the same time, gave no sign of personal pride; of somewhat modest and unassuming appearance, she was essentially a voice, calling out to the world. When she spoke, her words were plain and straight to the point, and she struck a chord in our hearts as we listened to her in the garden that day in Geneva. It was the same when she addressed an initially cool audience at the Albert Hall, and again when she was received in solemn audience at the Vatican and appealed in her quiet tones to the Pope."

*Eglantyne Jebb felt that immediate relief was more urgent than making plans for the future. She believed, in fact, that children's rights should be recognized at once, at the same time as action was being undertaken on their behalf. This idea was embodied in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, of which she was the initiator, and which was promulgated in 1923 as the charter of the Save the Children International Union. In her article in International Review (May 1963) on the Declaration of the*

*Rights of the Child, Mrs. Morier wrote: "Eglantyne Jebb liked to go and meditate on the Salève, a mountain near Geneva. It was there that she worked out the Declaration, but it was Georges Werner and Etienne Clouzot who helped her to put it in its final form." This text, known as the Declaration of Geneva, is reproduced below:*

### DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

By the present Declaration of the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the "Declaration of Geneva", men and women of all nations, recognising that mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality or creed:

- I. — THE CHILD must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually.
- II. — THE CHILD that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured.
- III. — THE CHILD must be the first to receive relief in times of distress.
- IV. — THE CHILD must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation.
- V. — THE CHILD must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of its fellow-men.

*In an expanded and amended form, this text was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1959. However, the fact that this Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which has a preamble and ten principles, was given much wider dissemination under United Nations auspices should not make us lose sight of the original Declaration of Geneva, in which, in a brief preamble and five equally brief articles, Eglantyne Jebb expressed in admirably succinct form the aspirations of an entire generation which had been torn by wars, revolutions and famine. We can therefore do no better, to conclude this tribute to her memory, than to recall its significance.*

J.-G.-L.