

# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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

GENEVA, February 5, 1963.

*440th Circular*

*To the Central Committees of National Red Cross  
(Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies.*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

On February 17, 1963, the International Committee of the Red Cross will have had a hundred years of existence.

On February 9, 1863, the Public Welfare Society of Geneva met at the instigation of its President, Gustave Moynier, to study the proposals which Henry Dunant had formulated at the end of his book "A Memory of Solferino": first of all to create already in peace-time aid societies which in time of war would assist the army medical service; then to conclude an international Convention which would serve as a basis for their action. The Public Welfare Society then appointed from amongst its members a Committee of five, in order to prepare a memorandum on the subject which would be presented to a forthcoming relief congress.

This Committee, which consisted of General Guillaume-Henri Dufour, Gustave Moynier, Dr Louis Appia and Dr. Théodore Maunoir, and Henry Dunant himself, met in Geneva on February 17,

1863. From this first meeting, which courageously went far beyond the mission which had been assigned to it, it declared itself constituted as a "Permanent International Committee" and decided that this Committee "will continue to exist . . . after the mandate which had been given it by the Public Welfare Society of Geneva has been terminated".

We know how this Committee led to the meeting of delegates of various countries which, in October 1863, formed the basis of the Red Cross throughout the world and in the following year resulted in the conclusion of the First Geneva Convention for the protection of war wounded and establishing the intervention of voluntary nurses on the field of battle.

This Committee of Five, founder of the universal work of the Red Cross, was none other than the International Committee of the Red Cross, which took this name several years later. Since that time it has not ceased from recruiting members amongst Swiss nationals according to the principle of co-optation.

One would certainly not have imagined, in 1863, how wide would be the mission of this International Committee, whose action as neutral agent and intermediary in case of war, civil war and internal disturbances is today solidly based on international law and recognized by the community of nations. For a hundred years States have considered that its existence is necessary and have asked it to carry out functions which they expect from no-one else.

But tasks which remain to be accomplished are at present much larger than they were a century ago, since war and contempt for the individual have not ceased to increase during that period. The Red Cross is a work which is perpetually developing. Having to think unceasingly of new solutions to new problems, it must look forward with confidence into the future with the firm resolve to do better and to achieve more.

The International Committee will be marking its Centenary with a very simple ceremony which will take place on February 18, 1963. Since National Societies will be sending their delegates this summer to Geneva to take part in the Centenary Congress of the Red Cross and in the inaugural ceremony of the whole institution, the International Committee does not propose that they should be

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represented at the ceremony of February 18, which will therefore be of an intimate character. It goes without saying, however, that delegates of Societies who may find themselves in Geneva on that day, will be cordially invited to attend.

During the course of a hundred years of activity, the International Committee of the Red Cross has contracted an immense debt of gratitude towards the National Societies which have so often been of such a valuable support to it. On the occasion of its Centenary it has decided to award them with its silver-gilt medal as a slight token of its gratitude. This medal symbolizes the very origin of the whole of the Red Cross movement, depicting a voluntary male nurse bending over a wounded man during the campaign of 1859.

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS

**Léopold BOISSIER**  
*President*