

# IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

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## WHAT PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS?

A year ago, the *International Review* pointed out the effort being made everywhere to disseminate knowledge of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and that although these efforts may not be of so great a scale as is desirable, they do show that minds are awake to reality.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the achievements in this important field, as revealed by a study of documents recently received by the ICRC from National Societies and various interested authorities, and also some ideas and suggestions mentioned in Red Cross and Red Crescent reviews throughout the world, are worthy of interest.

National Societies are indeed the mainspring of the movement. Their more than 200 million members cover the surface of the globe. They are therefore in a position to disseminate knowledge on the Geneva Conventions through their publications, first to their members and, through them, to the population. They do so because the Geneva Conventions ask them and charge their governments to do so, and because International Conferences of the Red Cross repeatedly and consistently call for it to be done.

Action is still of course the best expression of an idea. But the written and spoken word, if less eloquent than action, have a longer range.

**Spain.** — In January, February, June, July and August of 1966, the Spanish Red Cross review published systematic and extensive articles on the International Red Cross, humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, and its limits in

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<sup>1</sup> "Progress in Dissemination of Knowledge of the Geneva Conventions", *International Review*, Feb. 1967.

warfare on land. Its October 1966 issue devoted an article to the origin and content of the First Geneva Convention of 1864. It gave the history of unceasing efforts to ensure the application of humanitarian principles in difficult circumstances.

A lecturer may paint a vivid picture of history, another might bring out the lessons to be learnt. What is essential is that it be understood that the Red Cross is not a code, but a noble inspiration and that it is the very spirit of the Conventions. The Spanish Red Cross narration of the Geneva Conventions contributes to their wider dissemination.

**Mexico.** — Spain is not the only Spanish-speaking country to take the initiative in this respect. The Mexican Red Cross review broaches the question in its September 1966 issue, recalling Las Casas who, well before the Red Cross was even thought of, tried to apply its principles to the American Indians. The name by which he is remembered “ El Conquistador Conquistado ” is itself a summary of his work. In its October 1966 issue, the same review—linking the Red Cross with art and culture—gives a concise article on the principles of international humanitarian law, written by Mr. J. Pictet, member of the ICRC and Director-General, Legal Affairs.

**Colombia.** — The National Society of Colombia has taken a worthwhile step: every Saturday, from 1 to 1.30 p.m. it broadcasts a programme devoted to the Red Cross and its activities, including the Geneva Conventions.

**German Democratic Republic.** — The review of the Red Cross in the German Democratic Republic, in two separate issues, has described the problems and tasks of a national information bureau. As such a bureau is not something which is improvised on the spur of the moment, this publication responded to one of the concerns of the authors of the Conventions, namely, preparation in time of peace for humanitarian tasks in time of war.

The same review published an article in 1966 on the principles of the Geneva Conventions. As the author stated, when the Geneva

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Conventions are not respected, the people they are designed to protect are exposed to frightful suffering. So long as there is no complete and general disarmament, so long as war and its causes have not been banished from the earth, it is our duty to form a barrier against the dangers of aggression and to contribute to the alleviation of the suffering it causes.

International humanitarian law is an essential feature of the work to be accomplished.

The National Society of this country has just published a 23-page illustrated booklet which it distributes widely to the armed forces and the population.

**Federal Republic of Germany.** — *Idee und Tat*, edited by the Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany, outlined, in 1966, a plan for the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions. A summary is given below.

It is to the members of the Red Cross that instruction should first be given, for they should know more about the Conventions than people who are not members. This is the first rule, and applies to all members, whether they be craftsmen, businessmen, doctors, nurses or whatever their calling. In addition, teaching should be by a group of well-informed jurists. Through them the cadres of the Red Cross movement will be reached first, then the future instructors qualified to spread knowledge of the Conventions to the public at large.

*Instructors.* — The best method of training instructors would probably be evening courses at the Society headquarters, given by jurists. Efforts should be made to ensure as much as possible the participation of members of the teaching profession.

Members of special services, such as Health, Social Welfare, First-Aid, should, furthermore, be given instruction adapted to their speciality, if possible illustrated copiously with examples and appropriate explanations of their practical activities, emphasizing their rights and duties under the Conventions.

*Members of the Red Cross.* — Six to eight hours training should be sufficient for Red Cross members, it being understood that,

as already mentioned, ambulance attendants, first-aiders and other members of teams engaged in field work should receive special courses on the Conventions in the course of their basic training. After the course, each participant would receive a booklet summarizing the tuition given and constituting part of his standing orders.

*Junior Red Cross.* — Here too it is the cadres who should first be trained by, or at least with the close co-operation of, jurists. Teaching material should be appropriate, adapted specially to youth.

*Doctors.* — Instruction for doctors should begin in the university, in a manner similar to forensic and social medicine. This is merely a complement to their normal training and should be easy to organize.

*Other groups.* — The instructor will endeavour to treat knowledge on the Geneva Conventions as being part of the general education. His aim is to see to it that people do not live in ignorance of the Conventions but, on the contrary, adopt a constructive attitude towards them. For this purpose, the study of the Conventions should first be included, if possible, in school curricula, for the more senior pupils.

In order to reach the public at large, local and regional committees of the National Society should set up groups responsible for disseminating knowledge on the Conventions, each group having a qualified instructor or jurist.

**Lebanon.** — Under the title “ La Croix-Rouge à l’Ecole de guerre ”, an article in the National Society’s review in 1966 recounts that a course in international humanitarian law has been given to senior army officers by leading members of the National Society.

**Pakistan.** — The review of this country’s Red Cross Society has this to say of recent events:

“ During the war one of the most important of Red Cross tasks was to see to the welfare of POW’s. Apart from the exchange of

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correspondence between prisoners of both countries and their families, an exchange of relief parcels took place at Hussainiwala, on the frontier. It was also Hussainiwala, on 2 February 1966, which was the scene of the first exchange of prisoners; there was a second exchange on 8 February. Red Cross volunteers made the necessary arrangements for the reception and lodging of the returning prisoners. Thanks to the ICRC's good offices, all enquiries into conditions for prisoners of war and the collection of information on them were carried out smoothly . . .

Similar work was undertaken for the welfare of interned civilians . . .

The Army C. in C., the Adjutant-General, the Director of Medical Services and many commanding officers have expressed their appreciation of the National Society's work, co-operation and assistance in emergency. ”

**France.** — *Vie et Bonté*, the French Red Cross review, published the following news item in 1966: “ The Upper Rhine Section of the French Red Cross and the German Red Cross of South Baden have undertaken to reach an agreement permitting them both to act on either side of the frontier in the event of disaster. The German customs and police authorities would be prepared to make appreciable concessions. The crossing of the frontier by Red Cross personnel could be allowed without their showing any identity papers. Full exemption from customs duty would be allowed to vehicles and their loads. Customs clearance of material used at the scene of disaster and therefore not repatriated, such as blood plasma, foodstuffs, etc. could be cleared through customs later.”

This type of arrangement is true to the spirit of the Geneva Conventions.

More recently, in October 1967, the same review published a number whose general theme was “ What must be known of the Geneva Conventions ”, and an off-print was made into a 16-page booklet. This gives, after the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission of Five on February 17, 1863, which was the origin of the International Standing Committee for Aid to Wounded Soldiers and of the ICRC, the texts of conferences given by the French Red

Cross Information Service in various military schools and at universities, under the heading: "What we, as soldiers, husbands and fathers, should know about the Geneva Conventions". Several chapters allude to the spirit of the Conventions and give an account of what has been achieved by them. The booklet concludes by giving the text of the code of nursing ethics adopted in 1965 by the International Congress of Nurses, and of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross adopted by the XX International Conference of the Red Cross.

**Switzerland.** — From April 25-28, 1967, the Swiss army gave a course at Geneva on the Geneva Conventions, for officers in all branches of the forces. It was the fourth of its kind, with some fifty participants, and included lectures and practical exercises on the four Geneva Conventions and the law of war in general, as well as film and slide projections. Several members of the ICRC personnel co-operated in organizing the courses. The programme was as follows:—

**First day:**

- 2-2.50 p.m. Historical background to the law of war.
- 3-3.50 p.m. The Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field (First Geneva Convention).
- 4-5.50 p.m. Discussion and exercises on First Geneva Convention.
- 6-6.50 p.m. Film: "Fidèle à l'esprit des Conventions de Genève".

**Second day:**

- 8-8.50 a.m. The Hague Convention respecting the laws and customs of war on land.
- 9-10.50 a.m. Discussion and exercises on the Hague Convention respecting the laws and customs of war on land.
- 11-11.50 a.m. Slides on the law of war in general.
- 1.30-2.20 p.m. The Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention).
- 2.30-4.20 p.m. Discussion and exercises on the Third Geneva Convention.
- 5.00-7.00 p.m. Conducted tour of ICRC.

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### Third day:

- 8.00-8.50 a.m. The Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention).
- 9.00-10.50 a.m. Discussion and exercises on the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- 11.00-11.50 a.m. Slides on Geneva Conventions.
- 1.30-2.20 p.m. The law of neutrality—Neutral States and the Geneva Conventions.
- 2.30-4.20 p.m. Discussion and exercises on the law of neutrality.
- 4.45-6.00 p.m. Practical experience.

### Fourth day:

- 8.00-8.50 a.m. The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in case of War.
- 9.00-10.50 a.m. Discussion and exercises on the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in case of War.
- 11.00-11.50 a.m. Topical problems relating to the law of war; general discussion.
- 1.15-2.15 p.m. General discussion (cont'd.).
- 2.30 p.m. Conclusion.

Switzerland having no outlet to the sea and, consequently, no navy, the programme did not include the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea (Second Geneva Convention).

In 1968, the Swiss army published and distributed to all its members a 40-page illustrated handbook. It is designed to explain clearly to every soldier the most important regulations on conduct in war.

A number of States parties to the Geneva Conventions have made similar efforts for the dissemination of knowledge on them, but the majority have taken no such action. As already mentioned, several National Red Cross Societies have published booklets, e.g. in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Austria and others.

**Netherlands.** — At the present time a second edition of a loose-leaf Red Cross manual for teachers is being prepared. The first edition was published and distributed to all schools in the Netherlands. It deals with Red Cross history and aims, the Geneva Conventions and their application, and gives practical examples and many suggestions on how to present a subject in the framework of the afternoon meetings which the Red Cross organizes in most Dutch schools.

It is planned to distribute the second edition also to teachers' training schools.

**Canada.** — We mentioned some time ago the special edition of the Canadian Red Cross review *Despatch*, in 1966, dealing with dissemination of knowledge on the Geneva Conventions in Canada. It gives a masterly summary of Red Cross history, humanitarian law, and treaty rules and principles. As we have said, the formula was adopted by the French Red Cross in *Vie et Bonté*.

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Hoping that other National Societies which publish a review will be inspired by example, we shall in a forthcoming issue reproduce some or all of the text contained in *Despatch*, that it may be a guide to Red Cross Societies wishing to resort to this effective media of disseminating knowledge on the Geneva Conventions.

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