

THE RED CROSS AND PEACE

The question of peace is among the most important problems which the Red Cross has to consider. In this chapter the ICRC and the League set out their own thoughts, which must be read in conjunction. With all due knowledge of and respect for the other's considerations, each Institution attempts to bring its own specific contribution to the study and advancement of that universally cherished aspiration, peace.

PART I:

Considerations of the ICRC on the Red Cross and peace

I. *Proposals in the Report on the Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross*

The Final report on the Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross (Tansley Report) outlines three forms of Red Cross contribution to peace that have been either put into effect or advocated, and in connection with each of them it puts forward the following proposals:

1. The adoption and publicizing of general resolutions, as a form of peace education.

According to the Tansley Report the resolutions on peace passed by the International Conferences of the Red Cross have generally had no specific follow-up and their effects, particularly upon governments, have been limited. *The Red Cross could well profit from a careful evaluation of the effectiveness of conference resolutions in making a contribution to peace (p. 41).*

2. The indirect contribution the Red Cross makes to peace through all of its traditional humanitarian activities.

It is not sufficient to assert that the activities of the Red Cross in protection, assistance, health and social welfare contribute undeniably to the promotion of peace by eliminating the scourges which threaten it. The assertion must be proved, by planning and evaluating those activities in terms of their effects on maintaining or restoring peace.

3. Direct action, as proposed by some Societies, consisting mainly in mobilizing public opinion against particular groups or governments whose conduct may constitute a threat to peace.

Such action as the naming of aggressors and injustices will not be viewed as non-political, impartial, neutral and humanitarian, the Tansley Report says. It can only damage and probably destroy the useful protection and assistance activity of Red Cross. . . .

The movement should therefore recognize and state that *certain forms of direct action for peace are simply incompatible with other Red Cross primary roles (p. 40).*

Summing up, and taking into account the differences of opinions existing within the movement itself on the means whereby the Red Cross can contribute to peace, and also the effect of such a contribution, regarded as slight as compared to the effectiveness of other activities, the Tansley Report states that *it seems unwise for Red Cross to consider work for peace as a separate function parallel to or of the same nature as protection or assistance, or its health and welfare activities (p. 40).*

II. *The position of the ICRC*

In a report to the World Red Cross Conference on Peace (Belgrade 1975), the ICRC defined as follows what it felt the concept of peace implied:

We should never forget that the fundamental reason for the existence of the Red Cross is to work for peace. It is also useful to recall what the Red Cross means by that glorious word: peace.

For too long, people considered peace to be only the absence of war. Nowadays, we know very well however that when the guns are finally silenced, a real state of peace does not necessarily ensue. Right before our eyes, there are so many examples of violence, arbitrary exercise of power, injustice and contempt for the most basic principles of humanity that we are compelled to recognize that the spirit of war predominates over the spirit of peace. The more or less veiled refusal to concede to large communities of people the right to their national identity, discrimination against certain minorities, obstacles to the essential freedoms of the individual—all these testify to a spirit of war. The will to destroy an adversary, whether physically or morally; the killing of innocent people; the systematic practice of torture and terror; the deliberate teaching of hatred: all are diametrically opposed to true peace—and thus to the principles of the Red Cross (p. 1).

Despite the undeniable difficulties in finding within the movement a common approach to peace, the ICRC believes that over and above differences in culture, religious beliefs and political convictions, the

members of the Red Cross are in agreement on certain essential points in this field. It is generally recognized, for example, that the Red Cross, being in the best position of all to understand the unutterable suffering produced by any war, cannot be indifferent to the aspirations of the peoples for peace and is duty-bound to contribute to peace.

Furthermore, as stated on the occasion of the World Red Cross Conference on Peace (Belgrade 1975) and at various other times, all the members of our movement concede that there can be no true peace, even in the absence of war, whenever the human person is not respected.

Finally, no one can dispute the fact that by its impartial relief activity and by the application of its fundamental principles the Red Cross makes an irreplaceable contribution to peace by strengthening the spirit of solidarity and understanding among men and among peoples.

1. *The adoption and publicizing of general resolutions*

The Red Cross must explain why its preventive action designed to limit the suffering of victims of conflicts does not in any way imply a resignation to war, for which the Red Cross has often been reproached, but testifies on the contrary to the horror it feels in the face of war. It is possible, as the Tansley Report observes, that the resolutions on peace adopted by the International Conferences of the Red Cross do not elicit from the governments responsible for organizing peace a response in proportion to the hopes they express. Their importance should not be underestimated however, for they reveal a permanent Red Cross concern; they express its constant desire to explain the long-term significance of humanitarian action and its search for all possible means to strengthen its contribution to peace. They also demonstrate its determination to make its voice heard generally on the problems of peace and disarmament.

It is nevertheless clear that such appeals and declarations will have a real impact only if they are the expressions of a unanimous will and not simply of a majority decision within the movement. It must be emphasized that the participants in International Conferences of the Red Cross, whatever their different points of view, have so far always insisted that their resolutions on the contribution of the Red Cross to peace should be unanimously adopted, being conscious of the fact that on this subject only unanimity will confer upon such resolutions the necessary authority within the movement and ensure them a hearing outside.

Finally, to hold the attention of those for whom they are intended, it is essential for these declarations to be kept in proper proportion, both in their frequency and in their language.

2. *The indirect contribution to peace*

The ICRC cannot but endorse the Tansley Report wish to see the Red Cross analyze and evaluate more systematically its role in protection, assistance, health and welfare in order to demonstrate how these activities contribute effectively to peace.

It is no doubt an exaggeration to assert that the approach to the problem thus far has been purely empirical and without consideration for effectiveness (p. 39, paragraph 7). Henry Dunant himself and later Max Huber, to mention only the most outstanding thinkers, analyzed the role of the Red Cross in relation to peace and showed how our movement's concrete humanitarian activities, in propagating the spirit of peace and understanding among men and peoples, contribute to the solution of political and social differences which divide mankind.

In its report to the Belgrade Conference, the ICRC mentioned some of the practical activities of the Red Cross which, in periods of armed conflict, may open the way to reconciliation, e.g.:

- assistance of every kind provided by National Societies to victims belonging to the adverse party (wounded, prisoners of war, civilian internees, separated families, etc.);
- interventions designed to ensure the application of international humanitarian law and respect for humanitarian principles by all parties to the conflict;
- support by the National Societies directly concerned for the initiatives of a neutral intermediary, such as the ICRC, to encourage a resumption of talks between the belligerents and to find solutions for humanitarian problems.

The foregoing measures are only examples. They are obviously not the only ones which, in time of war, have special relevance with regard to peace.

Apart from the indirect contribution to peace resulting from traditional humanitarian activities, other and more specific forms of action have been studied and put into effect, corresponding to an unceasing concern within our movement. As stated in Resolution XXV of the Fourteenth International Red Cross Conference (Brussels 1930): *... the Red Cross, by its efforts to establish these points of contact will bring the support of its moral force and prestige to the world movement towards comprehension and conciliation, the essential guarantees for the maintenance of peace, ...* Later meetings of Red Cross leaders organized by the ICRC in 1933, 1967 and 1969, and studies published on this

subject in 1951 in the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge* showed that, while not being unlimited, there were nevertheless numerous and concrete means, deserving methodical study, whereby our movement could act more specifically for peace. Among these activities, it is appropriate to mention in particular those of value in education for peace: teaching Red Cross principles and ideals to youth; the organization by the League and National Societies of international youth meetings; preparation of suitable educational material, such as the secondary-school teachers manual proposed at Belgrade by the ICRC; the Action Programme for Peace; and so forth.

The ICRC does not share the scepticism which permeates the comments of the Tansley Report on this type of activity (p. 41, paragraph 3). Convinced as it is that such exchanges and such teaching effectively propagate a spirit of peace and better understanding among peoples, the ICRC, on the contrary, advocates intensifying and extending the measures already taken in this field.

With regard to a hypothetical role which might be played by resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross as a form of education for peace (p. 41, paragraph 4), it does not appear that any such function has ever been ascribed to them within the movement.

There is certainly no doubt that the effort at planning and evaluation proposed by the Tansley Report could better orient and hence render more effective Red Cross work for peace through its traditional and specific tasks referred to above. This effort might attempt in particular to give a more systematic and more convincing presentation of these activities as indirect contributions to peace.

3. *Direct contribution*

The Tansley Report only considers as direct action for peace action that *involves criticizing specific groups as aggressive or responsible for the causes of war* (p. 38).

Let us make it clear at the outset that the tendencies which appear within the Red Cross in favour of open criticism of governments and parties described as responsible for tensions or conflicts have never been followed by the movement as a whole.

The ICRC itself believes that any direct intervention by the Red Cross in the event of a threat to peace or of an armed conflict is conceivable only in the limits of respect for our movement's principles and of its permanent concern to avoid everything which might interfere with efforts to assist the victims.

One of these principles is that of neutrality, which provides that the Red Cross shall abstain from taking sides for either of the adversaries. This prudence, with regard to controversies which are alien to it, is based upon profound wisdom and must be maintained at all costs, for the life of the Red Cross depends on it. By entering the arena of conflicting interests and opinions which divide the world and align peoples against one another, the Red Cross would be rushing headlong toward its own destruction. However slightly it might venture upon this slippery path it would not be able to stop.

We should note, furthermore, that it is only through the satisfactory discharge of its duties of protection, assistance and community service that the Red Cross has gained its moral force and prestige, without which its appeals and statements on peace would have no influence. It could not therefore work effectively for peace by taking action which would compromise its traditional activities.

The ICRC shares the Tansley Report opinion that it would be unwise for the Red Cross to denounce publicly and by name those responsible for aggression and injustice, and that any such declarations would be of worse than dubious value as contributions to peace.

Fortunately, however, there are other ways in which the Red Cross can act more directly in favour of peace. This subject must be dealt with in more general terms and be studied more thoroughly. Taking into account the development of the international community and of weapons, it is important to know to what extent and by what means the Red Cross can act, in addition to its traditional humanitarian activity, to maintain or restore peace, while remaining true to itself and its principles.

As recent experience has shown, discussions entered into, at the instigation of the ICRC, by National Societies of countries with serious differences between them have contributed, by settling certain humanitarian problems, to easing tensions which might have led to armed conflict. In other cases, such talks have led to a resumption of negotiations between belligerents.

These actions demonstrate, as confirmed by Resolution XXI of the Twenty-first International Conference of the Red Cross (Istanbul 1969), that the Red Cross, over and above its traditional humanitarian activity, should always be ready to act in the search for means to promote peace.

From this point of view, Red Cross work for peace cannot be regarded as secondary. On the contrary, its importance and significance are vital, even if we recognize that it does not actually constitute *a separate function parallel to or of the same nature as* the traditional activities of the Red Cross.

PART II:

The League of Red Cross Societies and peace

1. Historical background

The League of Red Cross Societies was born of an immense longing for peace—the longing shared by all who, horrified by the First World War, thought that a new universal order based on co-operation and concord would be set up for future generations to enjoy. Just as the League of Nations was founded to give life and substance to this longing for peace, the League of Red Cross Societies was born of the desire to harness the activity, energy and goodwill shown by National Societies during the war for effective peacetime activities, under the auspices of a federation.

In 1921, at the request of the Xth International Conference of the Red Cross, the League and the ICRC jointly made a solemn appeal to all the peoples of the world to resist the spirit of war. Since then the governing bodies of the League have year after year reminded the world of the Red Cross duty of showing itself as a spiritual and moral force dedicated to humanitarian work and helping to create a feeling of international brotherhood inspiring detestation of war and love of peace.

In this examination of the work for peace done by the Red Cross, the Tansley Report has been primarily concerned with evaluating the kinds of contribution made by the Red Cross to the cause of peace, namely adopting and disseminating resolutions, and its indirect and direct contributions to peace. It has pointed out its merits and limitations, concluding that the Red Cross should not look upon work for peace as a separate function, parallel to or identical with protection, assistance or health and welfare; but that it should confine its ambitions to improving the planning, analysing, sharing and evaluating of these activities if it aspires to doing effective work for peace.

2. Adoption and dissemination of Resolutions

Ever since the League was founded, there has not been a session of the International Conference of the Red Cross, the Board of Governors or the Executive Committee which has not shown the interest and concern of the Red Cross for world peace. The rich harvest of resolutions adopted by the statutory bodies of the International Red Cross shows the feeling shared by National Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League that the Red Cross as a whole cannot

be indifferent to the disasters threatening humanity, and their conviction that even if it cannot do anything to stop wars that have started it can at least help to maintain and develop an atmosphere that is favourable to peace.

We have to recognise that since the First World War the Red Cross attitude has steadily evolved, from a general desire to combat the spirit of war and work for peace, towards a more specific attitude directly related to the consequences of the Second World War and the new world balance of power.

The Red Cross can even be said to have done pioneer work by taking the initiative in ways considered daring at the time. Thus the danger of the use of atomic weapons leading to a world cataclysm was constantly in the minds of Red Cross governing bodies in the fifties, and was condemned by Red Cross meetings.

Now, not only does the Red Cross work for peace by means of protection, assistance and development, or calling for scrupulous observance of the Geneva Conventions; it also calls upon the Powers to come to a peaceful solution of conflicts.

The Board of Governors, the Executive Council and even the Committee of the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen have made a point of reaffirming the principles of respect of the Geneva Conventions and the defence of an ideal of peace in times of very specific events likely to endanger world peace.

At the same time the Red Cross is aware that there can be no spirit of peace when self-respect is violated and inequality, injustice and discrimination prevail; and it has consequently made appeals in which it associates itself with campaigns against prejudice, discrimination and racism and calls for development activities and education campaigns to be stepped up.

These resolutions are in many cases inspired by current events; they spring from humanitarian impulses. They show that the Red Cross is careful not to mould its expression of opinion on definitions of peace which would impose restrictions on the universality of its mission, and that it makes every effort to be directly "geared" to events when it condemns war, violence, injustice and violations of human rights.

The Red Cross makes its voice heard whenever evil is perpetrated against mankind. Its resolutions have the merit of reminding world opinion of the objectives it sets itself by its work for the preservation of peace and the protection of the peoples of the world.

National Societies have used its resolutions as the theme of their recruitment and publicity campaigns, to attract all those wishing to

spare their contemporaries the horrors of modern war. There is no doubt that the accession of new members to the humanitarian activities of the Red Cross has lent sinew to its work of reconciliation and unification in accordance with its fundamental principles and to its contribution to safeguarding and promoting peace.

3. *The contribution to peace*

The contribution to peace is what matters most, especially to the League, which owes its foundation to the hope of no more war and the intention of developing humanitarian activities unconnected with war. The League looked upon itself as an institution which existed to serve peace when its Board of Governors unanimously adopted in 1961 the motto *Per humanitatem ad pacem* which admirably supplemented and supported the first Red Cross motto *Inter arma caritas*. The Board inserted this double motto into the new League Constitution of 1976.

It may be asked whether the year 1976 will be considered, later on, as a milestone in League history. It may reasonably be looked upon as such, judging from the adoption of the new League Constitution which opens up new prospects to it. The League has adopted, and inserted in its Constitution, the fundamental principles of the Red Cross adopted in Vienna in 1965. They include humanity, which stresses Red Cross responsibility for promoting mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and a lasting peace between all peoples of the world.

Even more remarkable is the general object of the League, as defined in Article 4 of the new Constitution. It reads:

The general object of the League is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by the National Societies with a view to the prevention and alleviation of human suffering and thereby contribute to the maintenance and the promotion of peace in the world.

Article 5 of the League Constitution completes, specifies and codifies various functions which although not new were not explicitly mentioned in previous statutory texts and are contributions to the spirit of peace. They include relief to victims of disasters and armed conflicts, activities for safeguarding public health and the promotion of social welfare, the education of young people in humanitarian ideals and the development of friendly relations between young people of all countries, as well as assisting the ICRC in the promotion and development of international humanitarian law and dissemination of this law and of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross among the National Societies.

The World Red Cross Conference on Peace, organised jointly in 1975 by the Red Cross of Yugoslavia and the League, was a considerable event in Red Cross history, for it adopted a Red Cross Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of Peace defining the principles of Red Cross action to promote peace, and lays down a set of guidelines in the form of plans to guide National Societies, the League and the ICRC in their work for peace.

Following this Conference and pursuant to Resolution No. 20/1975 of the Board of Governors, a Commission on the Red Cross and Peace has been formed. It is composed of the National Societies of Australia, Canada, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Democratic Republic of Germany, Indonesia, Mauritania, Philippines, Senegal, Yugoslavia and the Republic of Zaire, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Barroso.

This Programme of Action is described and commented on in other documents submitted at the Bucharest Conference. It may surely be considered a valid and important effort to systematise and give better direction to traditional kinds of work for peace, and to improve the allocation of responsibilities among the various components of the Red Cross in the light of their respective areas of competence.

Like the Tansley Report, the Belgrade Programme of Action distinguishes activities which contribute indirectly to peace, like assistance and protection, from a direct contribution to peace. In the latter connection we are well aware that all members of the Red Cross do not see the direct contribution to peace in the same light; but this could not be otherwise in a movement characterised by such widely differing cultures, opinions and approaches.

The Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of Peace is a conclusive example of this; some of its recommendations have evoked the comment and criticism of some of the delegations present at the Belgrade Conference.

These points have been investigated by an *ad hoc* working group formed in pursuance of a resolution of the Council of Delegates, which has made every effort to arrive at a consensus on the way these plans are to be interpreted.

4. *The indirect contribution to peace*

The League's work for peace is wholly contained in its various activities applying the principle of international mutual aid and strengthening friendship and understanding between one nation and another, without which there is no true peace.

As the federation of National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies, the League puts special emphasis on the universality of the Red Cross and is also the means whereby its members give effect to their solidarity.

The often-repeated statement that the traditional activities of National Societies and of the League—protection of health and social welfare, disaster relief and the development of community services—are an indirect contribution to peace may seem trite. Many detractors do not fail to urge the smugness of such statements when the real problem is notoriously to attack the roots of the evil and the causes of tension and war.

We shall come back to this later. May we be allowed to endorse Mr. Tansley's view that in the above the Red Cross is on its surest ground, for its contribution to an atmosphere of peace spares it from occupying positions forbidden to it by its principles.

The League Development Programme for turning every National Society into a living organised force has enabled the League to set up a widespread technical co-operation network of the most varied scope, which is backed by a spirit of understanding and concord.

In the first place, exchanges between National Societies of developing and other countries make for solidarity and understanding; and secondly they are a means of developing traditional peacetime activities. The League's multilateral assistance programme recognises the right to assistance of underprivileged Societies; by so doing it helps to lessen the inequality among nations which is such a prolific cause of dispute.

The League aims at creating a collective conscience free from any clannish spirit of exclusiveness or prejudice, and from any obstacle to social progress and self-respect. It also aims at propagating a humanitarian ideal without which all achievement is incomplete. The Red Cross Development Programme makes its active contribution to the promotion of an ideal of peace primarily by means of work done in common.

The idea of international mutual aid and solidarity is particularly significant when it relates to the relief of victims of disasters, refugees and displaced persons.

Red Cross international relief operations for victims of natural disasters, conflicts or internal unrest quite clearly encourage a spirit of union and peace in the countries affected, and strengthen international understanding and solidarity.

The movement has allotted to Red Cross Youth the unique task of establishing true brotherhood between the young people of all countries.

The League arranges for young people from all countries to meet in international study centres or seminars; it promotes participation by teams of young people from certain countries in work useful to communities in other countries; it makes young people active in upholding or disseminating humanitarian ideals and principles. By so doing it encourages young people to respect and better understand each other, and does away with the only real barrier between nations, mutual ignorance and the perpetuation of past outworn hatred.

Red Cross Youth sets up friendly relations and live contacts between young people the world over, and so serves the cause of peace; for it appeals to the imagination and stimulates friendly rivalry among the young people of today, who are characteristically receptive to universal values.

Examples of activity are innumerable. Statistics are imposing and speak for themselves. But what seems even more important to us is the moral benefit—however small—of these activities. It helps to lessen tension and set up a spirit of co-operation and mutual help in which peace can flourish.

We do not think it is fanciful to say that these activities help to maintain peace. That seems to us an impartial modest judgement on an experiment that has been going on for more than half a century.

Admittedly, the Tansley Report points out that the contribution has not been sufficiently measured—but can you measure solidarity? And he suggests that the Red Cross should give careful consideration to the effect of its assistance and development programmes.

It has to be recognised that over the last few years the National Societies have called for more direct action, and more systematic programmes for peace, regretting that traditional Red Cross activities have not been considered more from the angle of their promotion of peace or better conceived as a factor of peace.

5. The direct contribution to peace

It is not for the Red Cross to make any pronouncement on the contradictions inherent in the notion of peace, or to act as if peace legitimised and consolidated hierarchies or hegemonies set up by war.

The duty of the Red Cross is to rise above quibbling and make a frank—but reasonable—approach to the problems caused by the outrage on human dignity entailed by deprivation of the means of subsistence, health and life—and of freedom and dignity.

No one can gainsay that the Red Cross must not take up a political stance; that would be against its principles. But as Mr. J. Barroso said in his message to the opening meeting of the Belgrade Conference:

in some cases it is impossible to maintain absolute neutrality, and an attitude of defence against evils should be adopted and precautionary measures taken in order that peace be respected. It is not a right, but a duty, although some people do not wish us to adopt this attitude. We must be something more than a voice sounding the alarm. We must be an instrument which prevents, even attacks the problems which could provoke armed conflicts, and act before it is too late, so as to mobilise public opinion. The logical result is that, alone, we cannot solve all the problems, and that we need the help of countries and international institutions. But, in our efforts, it is necessary to maintain our impartiality, neutrality and universal character.

In short, the question is whether to agree with the Tansley Report that work for peace must not be a separate function co-existing with the other main functions of protection and assistance. The basis is there. The general object of the League is first and foremost to alleviate suffering and thereby contribute to peace. But beyond academic schools of thought and definitions we are tempted to ask another question, which is how the Red Cross can better contribute to the maintenance and the promotion of the spirit of peace. Differences of opinion on methods of contributing to peace, or of implementing some controversial plans, must not be considered an insuperable obstacle to the work for peace of the Red Cross.

The first thing that has to be recognized is that no humanitarian action can be isolated from its political context. This means that humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross have to lay down a humanitarian policy that is valid in the *long term* and is based on a thorough analysis of current trends and the new world order. This policy entails drawing up a "humanitarian strategy". The Red Cross has its principles. Its responsibilities are clear. Its strategy is taking shape. Whether its principles and strategy are applicable, whether they get things done, remains to be seen. The challenge is a real one. But in the words of Poincaré: *Peace is a continuous creation.*