

Miss Weitzel was born in 1917 at Lausanne where she was educated before doing a year's course at Oxford. She then launched out into a dual career in journalism in Switzerland and abroad and in the Swiss women's military service. She was attached to that service during the Second World War and from 1953 to 1977 was head of the women's auxiliary service of the Federal Military Department in Berne, the equivalent in Switzerland of the ministry of defence. At present she is engaged in writing a study on scope for women in national defence.

CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

ICRC APPEAL

On 20 March 1979, Mr. Alexandre Hay, President of the ICRC made the following statement at a press conference in Geneva:

Unusual situations provoke unusual reactions.

As the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been involved in virtually every armed conflict in the modern history of man. It channels and distributes relief to victims on both sides of political dividing lines, visits places of detention and monitors observance of the humanitarian rules that form the "raison d'être" of the Conventions of Geneva.

In this context the ICRC holds a position that is unique: in many situations its delegates, protected by the universally recognized emblem of the Red Cross, respected for their discretion and scrupulous impartiality, have access where others are barred.

This often involves delicate political brinkmanship. Working on both sides of front lines requires absolute neutrality, or any ICRC mission would be doomed.

But neutrality does not equal indifference. And in the pursuit of its humanitarian missions, the ICRC is proud to admit it does take sides: the side of the victims, wherever and whenever it is called upon to help.

In that respect our dedication to the victims of the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe conflict is no different from previous ICRC involvements—in Africa or elsewhere.

What is different is the callous disregard on the part of all parties in that conflict for the most basic standards of human decency, the appalling lack of respect for human life, and the way in which the self-denying efforts of our field workers are taken for granted—or worse.

In this context, the slaying of 3 ICRC delegates in the eastern part of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe last summer is a sad reflection on the mentality of those who know, or should know, that we are there for the sole purpose of alleviating human suffering—nothing more and nothing less.

If international relief workers are disposed of in such a way, it is not hard to imagine what fate awaits the real or presumed enemy who falls into the hands of the opposite side.

It is this climate of wanton and persistent cruelty in the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe conflict that has prompted us to launch this unprecedented appeal.

This departure from our habitual policy of diplomatic circumspection is deliberate. If it displeases one or all of the sides involved, so be it. Our commitment is to those who suffer, not to those who cause the suffering. For too long, we have been a witness on both sides of the conflict of systematic violation of the code of human conduct. The degree of misbehaviour has risen to such levels, that the ICRC feels it can no longer remain silent.

Hence, the International Committee of the Red Cross launched on 19 March the following appeal to the authorities in Rhodesia, the leaders of the Patriotic Front, the “Front-Line States”, to the members of the U.N. Security Council, to the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and to all the 145 States parties to the Geneva Conventions, and in particular the United Kingdom.

The ICRC hopes that the global reach and top-level dissemination of this appeal will arouse the conscience of all the nations of the world about this intolerable situation prevailing in this region of Africa.

Appeal

1. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has become increasingly alarmed in recent weeks by the multiplication of acts of inhumanity committed by the parties to the conflict in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. As the fighting escalates and spreads out over the entire country and into the neighbouring countries, the warring parties adopt ever more merciless attitudes; they combat not merely to defeat, but to annihilate those who oppose them or seem likely to oppose them. Moreover, the authorities on both sides of the front often prevent the ICRC from properly carrying out its humanitarian tasks of protection and assistance to war victims—a task which is based on international humanitarian law and for which the ICRC has received a clear mandate from the international community.
2. The conflict in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe has been fought from the outset in a particularly cruel way. Fundamental humanitarian rules accepted by all nations—such as the obligation to distinguish between combatants and civilians, and to refrain from violence against the latter—have been largely ignored. In fact, those who suffer most in the conflict are the civilian populations living in the war-affected areas as well as persons displaced and families separated by the hostilities. Moreover, very little progress has been made towards providing effective protection against inhuman treatment to those who are in the hands of the adverse party: captured combatants and other persons detained as a consequence of the conflict.
3. Since the end of 1976, the ICRC has on several occasions launched formal appeals to the authorities in Salisbury and to the leaders of the nationalist movements in order that they respect and apply the basic humanitarian rules in their conduct of warfare. The Front-Line States as well as the United Kingdom have been informed of the launching of these appeals and invited to support them. In practice, these appeals have not had the desired results.
4. The rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation compels the ICRC to launch an urgent appeal to the parties concerned and to spell out concretely, publicly, and in detail what is needed to stop the proliferation of indiscriminate violence in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and to enable the Red Cross to effectively carry out its humanitarian tasks.

5. *In general*, the ICRC appeals to *all the parties* that they:

- cease all attacks against the civilian population in the war-affected areas (killings and ill-treatment, burning of villages and “protected villages”);
- spare the lives of those who surrender, and give humane treatment to all captured enemy combatants;
- respect the protective emblem of the Red Cross and thus allow those who carry it in the accomplishment of their humanitarian task to work in safety;
- allow the freedom of movement necessary to all Red Cross personnel seeking to bring relief to the civilian population in the war-affected areas;
- disseminate, or allow the ICRC to disseminate, to their armed forces the basic humanitarian rules for the conduct of warfare.

6. The ICRC *specifically* requests of the *Transitional Government in Salisbury* that it:

- formally suspend the execution of captured members of the nationalist forces and other persons sentenced to capital punishment for offences of a political character;
- allow the ICRC delegates to visit regularly, and without witness, in their places of detention (in addition to detainees under the Emergency Regulations to whom the ICRC already has access):
 - all captured members of the nationalist forces,
 - all persons sentenced to terms of imprisonment for offences of a political character,
 - all persons detained under the provisions of martial law,
 - all civilians forcibly removed from their habitations in the war-affected areas and temporarily detained in camps;
- allow the ICRC to provide medical care without discrimination to all wounded and sick war victims;
- ensure normal supply of food to the civilian populations in rural areas and stop the destruction and confiscation by its armed forces of goods (food stocks, cattle) that are essential for the survival of the civilian population in the war-affected areas;

- permit continued material and medical relief assistance, by the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations, to the civilian populations in need as a consequence of the hostilities, and allow the ICRC to resume relief distribution in those areas where they have been forbidden by the security forces;
 - abstain from attacking civilians in the course of military operations in neighbouring countries.
7. The ICRC *specifically* requests of the *Patriotic Front* that it:
- cease the killing of captured enemy combatants and civilians;
 - cease the shooting down of civilian passenger aircraft;
 - allow the ICRC to visit captured enemy combatants and civilians, regularly and without witness, wherever they are detained, and to forward family messages between them and their next of kin;
 - refrain from abducting civilians, in particular children, to neighbouring countries and allow those who are in refugee camps in Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique and elsewhere to return to their homes if they so desire;
 - allow the ICRC to register all civilians, whatever their age, in refugee camps in Botswana, Zambia and Mozambique, to forward family messages between them and their next of kin in other refugee camps and in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, to trace missing persons and to carry out repatriation of individual persons on humanitarian grounds;
 - clearly separate civilian establishments, particularly refugee camps, from military installations.
8. The ICRC points out that ultimate responsibility for respecting and applying the provisions of humanitarian law lies, not with the ICRC, but with the parties to the conflict and with all States which have ratified or adhered to the Geneva Conventions and have thereby committed themselves to respect and to *ensure respect* for these Conventions in all circumstances. It therefore also appeals to:
- all the States parties to the Geneva Conventions, and in particular the United Kingdom,
 - the Front-Line States (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia),

- the members of the United Nations Security Council,
- the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity,
- the Secretary-General of the United Nations,

to fully support its appeal to the warring parties in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in order that an end be put to all the suffering there and that all the victims of the conflict receive the humanitarian protection and assistance to which they are entitled and which they so urgently need.
