

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

ICRC appeal

for a humanitarian mobilization

The traditional annual press conference given by the President of the ICRC took place on 10 January 1985 at the headquarters of the Committee. It provided not only an opportunity to make the usual assessment of events in the year which had just gone by but, in particular, was the moment chosen by the ICRC to launch an "Appeal for a Humanitarian Mobilization".

This appeal—the text of which is published below—was widely disseminated; it was sent to all the Permanent Missions in Geneva and New York, to all the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to the League, to the media and to bodies such as the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues. A more detailed memorandum was sometimes enclosed with the Appeal, entitled "Respect for and Development of International Humanitarian Law—Support for the Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross—From Manila (1981) to Geneva (1986)—Interim Assessment and Future Prospects". The Appeal itself is a summary of this memorandum and sets out the main points contained therein.

On 14 January the Appeal and the Memorandum were delivered and commented on by the President of the ICRC in Amman to members of the Standing Commission, an extraordinary session of which had been convened by Dr. Ahmed Abu Gura, president of the Jordan Red Crescent Society.

This ICRC Appeal for a Humanitarian Mobilization is a follow-up to Resolution VI adopted by the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference (sometimes also called the "Manila Appeal") and entitled "Respect for international humanitarian law and for humanitarian principles and support for the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross". It is a landmark in the process of alerting public opinion, the governments and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement to the vital importance of universally respecting and up-holding fundamental humanitarian rules; it was preceded by appeals concerning specific conflict situations addressed to the States party to the Conventions and by private and public meetings of

experts and will be followed by similar meetings at a regional and global level. The main aim of all these measures—designed with a mind both to the various sectors of the public for whom they are intended and to worldwide or regional problems—is to help make the next International Red Cross Conference (Geneva, 1986), organized by the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross and the Council of Delegates, a formal occasion to stress the need for action to terminate all violations of international humanitarian law and ensure that all those bound by this law respect it.

ICRC APPEAL

The ICRC, more and more concerned by the increasing violations of international humanitarian law and principles of humanity and by the obstacles put in the way of the development of its activities in some countries, endeavoured in the past and is still endeavouring now to curb this disastrous trend. In 1981, the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference in Manila adopted by consensus a resolution which echoed the Committee's concern: it noted and regretted the limits imposed upon the activities of the ICRC not only in situations covered by international humanitarian law, but also in internal disturbances and tensions. The International Conference also made "a solemn appeal for the rules of international humanitarian law and the universally recognized humanitarian principles to be safeguarded at all times and in all circumstances and for the International Committee of the Red Cross to be granted all the facilities necessary to discharge the humanitarian mandate entrusted to it by the international community."

Although this appeal was launched jointly by the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and the States signatory to the Geneva Conventions, it had virtually no result and it must be acknowledged that the problems still stand. On three occasions, in 1983 and 1984, the ICRC appealed to the community of States to take steps to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions in the armed conflict between Iran and Iraq. It made repeated approaches—some of them public—to Israel to secure its recognition of the applicability of the Fourth Convention in the occupied territories and to ensure respect for all the provisions of the Convention. In connection with the conflicts in Afghanistan, western Sahara, Kampuchea and elsewhere, it made persistent representations to the belligerents.

Confronted with the present crises, governments are tempted to think only in the short term, to reject everything that does not suit their immediate interests and to relegate humanitarian considerations to the background, giving priority to what they consider to be the imperatives of politics and security. This refusal to implement humanitarian law defies the whole international community (the States, the legal system, the organizations) and inflicts intolerable suffering on the victims of conflicts.

In 1974, the ICRC had 357 employees and delegates. At the end of 1984, this figure had risen to 890 persons, of whom 455 were permanently in the field, not counting nearly 1,000 locally recruited employees. In 1974, there were 16 delegations abroad; ten years later, there are 36 plus 16 sub-delegations. This growth reflects the greater number of conflicts, which tend to last longer and are often fiercer than those which occurred in the 1960's. In many countries, internal tensions are liable to develop into internal disturbances, which in turn may become civil wars, sometimes with international involvement. Unfortunately, there is no likelihood of peaceful settlements to the numerous armed conflicts at present taking place. The humanitarian problems linked to the occupation of territories and the holding of prisoners of war are likely to persist. Detention on political grounds and ill-treatment in connection with such detention are likely to continue and even, in many countries, to increase.

Furthermore, there are indications that other confrontations may develop between countries or ideologies. At the same time, irrespective of internal and international political conflicts, the marked growth of the population in a large part of the world is very likely to create increasing tensions, if only because of the drop in the standard of living which it causes. This tendency appears to correspond to a fairly general decline in respect for the rule of law, internally and internationally. A wider divergence has been noted between the authorities' declarations of intent and their actions, and there has been a lessening of regard for commitments simultaneous with (if not a consequence of) their increase. At the national level, the power structures become more rigid or break up in chaos: both situations lead to arbitrary action and violence against defenceless victims.

Only a general mobilization can prevent these dismal forecasts from coming true. Everyone must realize the urgent and drastic need for a great upsurge of humanity and solidarity, which has become indispensable in view of the present and potential madness

of human violence. But the ICRC does not for a moment imagine that it can win the struggle on its own: it must mobilize governments and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to join in the battle for universal respect of defenceless human beings.

The staggering humanitarian needs of the future call for commensurable efforts. States, first of all, must take advantage of every "humanitarian respite", every short period of grace, the Red Cross can give them to build up peace; at the same time, they must be absolutely unwavering in honouring their humanitarian commitments in those conflicts which they were unable or incapable of avoiding, and they must ratify the instruments of humanitarian law to which they have not yet acceded. None may remain indifferent. The 161 States party to the Geneva Conventions are under the obligation not only to respect, but also to ensure respect, for the rules of international humanitarian law. Any government which, while not itself involved in a conflict, is in a position to exert a deterrent influence on a government violating the laws of war, but refrains from doing so, shares the responsibility for the breaches. By failing to react while able to do so, it fosters the process which could lead to its becoming the victim of similar breaches and no longer an accessory by omission.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement must throw into the struggle for the respect of man's dignity all the moral strength of its principles and universality. The ICRC, too, must be mobilized for an all-out, long-term effort to disseminate knowledge of international humanitarian law, contribute to the development of National Societies and seek material and political means to conduct a humanitarian strategy in keeping with the mandate entrusted to it by States in the Geneva Conventions.

To cope with the increasing number, variety and duration of conflicts, with the inhumane treatment arising from the hardening of ideological, or even religious and racial attitudes, and with the declining respect for treaties and law in general, only a concerted action by all the forces of universal humanitarianism, a mobilization of States and peoples, might raise in any decisive manner the level of respect for humanitarian rules in conflicts—short of abolishing war altogether.

The main questions are: how are political leaders to be imbued with humanitarian values and politics leavened with the humanitarian spirit? How can it be shown that in every political situation there are humanitarian aspects which one ignores at one's peril? Ways and means must be devised to promote the acceptance and

application of humanitarian law and its principles among political leaders. To achieve this, public opinion must be aroused and enlisted. This is a difficult task for the ICRC, whose relationship with the public is inevitably ambiguous: its humanitarian action demands, in the interest of the victims, a great measure of discretion, even though the ICRC reserves the right to appeal to world conscience when its delegates establish that serious breaches of humanitarian law have repeatedly occurred, and when the representations it makes confidentially have had no effect.

Progress—if outright victory is not attained—in the struggle for the humanitarian cause requires the support of the governments and National Societies as much as that of the media and through them of public opinion.
