

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE ¹

After proposing several definitions of basic concepts, such as “disaster” or “humanitarian assistance”, the author quotes a number of historical precedents of organizations devoted to humanitarian assistance, i.e. the Commission for Relief in Belgium (founded in 1914), UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 1943-1948) and the International Relief Union (1927), and stresses the importance of the lessons learned from their experience for setting up disaster relief organizations, now or in the future.

In a concise second chapter he examines a particular category of interventions, namely Red Cross relief actions *in armed conflict*. The fundamental provisions of international humanitarian law are set forth, elucidating the categories of protected persons and the distinction between international and non-international armed conflicts. An evaluation is also made of the main questions currently arising in connection with international humanitarian law.

The author then goes on to review the provision of assistance to *refugees*, covering the period from 1949 to the present time, and underscores the essential role devolving on the United Nations Organization, through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, whose aims and methods are carefully described.

The fourth chapter of the book is wholly devoted to the *legal bases* for humanitarian action. In his in-depth analysis of this subject, the author successively considers the delimitation of international relief operations by the principle of State sovereignty, the relevance of human rights to relief actions, the present acceptability of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention, and geopolitical factors in relief actions. The chapter also contains a very useful recapitulation of the United Nations legal bases for humanitarian action as they are laid down in the Charter.

The following three chapters give an account of all national, international or private organizations which play a leading or auxiliary part in

¹ P. Macalister-Smith: *International Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organization*, Nijhoff, Dordrecht and Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1958, 244 pp.

organizing and implementing disaster relief operations. Summarizing the origin, aims and methods of each of these organizations, the author also evaluates the results obtained.

Among the organizations thus considered there are the components of the Red Cross (ICRC, League and National Societies), United Nations bodies (UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WHO, WFP...), intergovernmental entities such as the EEC and certain non-governmental organizations or other actors of a special nature such as the Order of Malta.

This section of the book ends by examining two questions of considerable practical importance, namely bilateral humanitarian assistance, and relief planning at the national level.

The next chapter deals with the fundamental question of relief co-ordination, and consists largely of an account of the origin, work (and difficulties!) of the principal body engaged in this activity, the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO).

Recalling the growing desire of the organizations involved for the adoption of an international instrument devoted exclusively to disaster relief (and the reticence of States as regards such an instrument...), the author concludes his analysis by examining several *ad hoc* drafts compiled by various organizations.

This review of all existing organizations, soundly documented by numerous bibliographical notes, reflects a very comprehensive knowledge of the problems encountered in relief work. Mr. Macalister-Smith's book will undoubtedly render invaluable service to the specialists for whom it is destined.

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THE APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW PARTICULARLY IN MIXED CONFLICTS ¹

Amongst the most thorny problems presently encountered in the sphere of international humanitarian law must be considered mixed or "internationalized internal" conflicts, and these are the main subject of this book. By mixed conflicts is understood internal conflicts which, after intervention by foreign troops, take on little by little the characteristics of

¹ Martin Hess: *Die Anwendbarkeit des humanitären Völkerrechts, insbesondere in gemischten Konflikten*, Schulthess Polygraphischer Verlag, Zürich, 1985, 286 pp., in German.