

ASPECTS OF DISSEMINATION

The year 1977 may be considered a turning point for the dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Principles and the ideals of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. If we briefly review events of that year, we see that from 21 to 30 March 1977 the first European Red Cross Seminar on the Dissemination of the Geneva Conventions, organized by the Polish Red Cross and the ICRC, was held in Warsaw. Representatives of European and North American National Societies and of the ICRC and the League attended the seminar which adopted the following principles:

« Although dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law is a responsibility of governments, it should be a direct concern of the Red Cross in general and particularly of each National Society in its own country.

The dissemination of the Red Cross ideals must not be limited to the Geneva Conventions but should cover Red Cross principles and be included within the broad concept of man's responsibilities to man.

Dissemination cannot be dissociated from the propagation of a spirit of peace by all members of the Red Cross family. Dissemination should never make war appear "acceptable" ».

These principles, which were ratified by the Twenty-third International Conference of the Red Cross (Bucharest, October 1977), have ever since guided the dissemination activities of all the components of the Movement.

Dissemination, which is primarily the responsibility of governments, has of course been one of the main concerns of the ICRC and many National Societies from the very beginning; but there can be no doubt that the recommendations adopted in 1977 by Red Cross Conferences, the adoption of the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions by the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law applicable in

Armed Conflicts, as well as Resolution 21 on dissemination,¹ adopted by the same conference, gave decisive impetus to the process of spreading knowledge of humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross. They enabled the Movement to define the nature of dissemination, draw guidelines for it and systematize programmes of action.

This was the starting point for the series of regional seminars organized by National Societies and the ICRC in various parts of the world and soon after followed by seminars at national level. This new awareness led to successive Red Cross programmes of action in the area of dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Principles and ideals of the Red Cross (1978-1981, 1982-1985, 1986-1990) which serve to guide the Movement as a whole.

It is not our intention here to describe the efforts and accomplishments of each of the Movement's components since 1977 in the field of dissemination. Successive reports presented to International Conferences of the Red Cross in recent years and the ICRC's journal "Dissemination" are rich sources of information. Dissemination has become a major area of activity in which co-operation between the ICRC, the League, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Henry-Dunant Institute has been constantly developing and intensifying.

Now that ten years of assiduous work have been accomplished, the Review would like to give theoreticians and practitioners, both inside and outside the Movement, the opportunity of discussing dissemination in their respective domains and sharing with us their personal

¹ The Diplomatic Conference, in Resolution 21 adopted on 7 June 1977, after inviting the signatory States "to take all appropriate measures to ensure that knowledge of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts, and of the fundamental principles on which that law is based, is effectively disseminated", particularly to the armed forces and to appropriate administrative authorities and at universities and secondary schools, urges National Red Cross, Red Crescent Societies:

- "3. To offer their services to the authorities in their own countries with a view to the effective dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law;
4. Invites the International Committee of the Red Cross to participate actively in the effort to disseminate knowledge of international humanitarian law, inter alia:
 - (a) publishing material that will assist in teaching international humanitarian law, and circulating appropriate information for the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols.
 - (b) organizing, on its own initiative or when requested by Governments or National Societies, seminars and courses on international humanitarian law, and co-operating for that purpose with States and appropriate institutions."

experiences. Dissemination of humanitarian law within the university is discussed by an eminent Belgian professor who does not forget that he is also a teacher (see pp. 155-167); the ICRC official responsible for instructing the armed forces in the law of war looks back over the development of programmes for teaching humanitarian law to military personnel, drawing conclusions from his years of experience (see pp. 168-179); the deputy head of the French armed forces medical corps shares with us his thoughts in a lecture given to a group of reserve officers (see pp. 180-191); "The prestige and the pressures of dissemination" could be the title of the article sent by a most distinguished lawyer from the British Red Cross Society, whose dissemination work he describes realistically (see pp. 192-199).

When considered in the context in which they were written, the above very authentic contributions show that dissemination has in 1987 become truly established and that its importance is growing daily, if only because of the tragic realities of modern warfare. It has gone far beyond the confines of Red Cross institutions and has reached into military, academic and medical circles and the media. It is to the credit of the authors of these articles that they do not conceal the limits and obstacles to dissemination, thus demonstrating that though the principles are universal, the programmes and methods must constantly be re-evaluated, adapted and reorganized.

There is another lesson to be drawn, and it forms the backdrop to this discussion: the basic rules of international humanitarian law must be introduced into the training of simple soldiers and officers; knowledge of humanitarian law and the Principles and ideals of the Movement must be disseminated among the staff and volunteers of the National Societies, students and journalists—those are the people it is essential to reach. It is no less important to emphasize, especially with young people, the universal moral meaning of the principles of humanitarian law beyond their application to armed conflict. Disseminating knowledge of international humanitarian law and the Principles and ideals of the Red Cross also, and perhaps above all, means helping to make the average citizen aware of the virtues of humanity, impartiality and solidarity; it means fostering within him the spirit of peace; finally, it means helping him to act as a responsible person.

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