

## **Protection of Victims of War**

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### **WORLD CAMPAIGN FOR THE PROTECTION OF VICTIMS OF WAR**

The World Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War reached its peak on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, 8 May 1991. This was the day when members of the Movement were invited to form a "chain of light" around the world as a reminder that the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is to "light the darkness" for all victims of war.

Readers will recollect that the Campaign, launched officially on 28 January 1991, has three main objectives:

- To draw attention to the plight of thousands of war victims;
- To promote knowledge of and respect for international humanitarian law;
- To spur governments and the general public to ensure that all victims of war receive the protection and assistance to which they are entitled.<sup>1</sup>

The main events which have marked the Campaign since the beginning of January 1991 are reviewed below.

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*"Nine out of ten victims of war today are civilians.*

*Millions of them face death, injury, imprisonment, mutilation, separation from their families and forced exile.*

*Their suffering is an insult to humanity".*

With these words, former ICRC President Alexandre Hay launched the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's World Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War in Geneva on 28 January 1991.

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection, see "World Campaign for the Protection of War Victims", *IRRC*, No. 275, March-April 1990, pp. 138-143.

Mr. Hay, who is the Campaign Chairman, said its purpose was to bring the victims the *“protection and assistance to which they are entitled under international humanitarian law.”*

He went on to give facts and figures on *“man’s inhumanity to man”* during the so-called *“post-war”* period since the end of World War II in 1945.

*“Today civilians are increasingly caught in the crossfire”*, Mr. Hay declared. *“In the First World War they accounted for 15% of war victims. In the Second World War, they were 65%. Today, they are 90%. In such a situation, we cannot remain silent.*

*War is an obsolete means of settling disputes. But as long as it persists, its victims must receive the protection and assistance to which they are entitled under international humanitarian law”*.

The launching of the Campaign was marked by press conferences and special events organized in some 60 towns and cities around the world. At a press conference held in Geneva, H.R.H. Princess Christina of Sweden, Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the ICRC, and Mr. Mario Villarroel Lander, President of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, stressed the need to promote respect for the victims of armed conflicts.

Heads of State and government and other leading figures took part in the launching of the Campaign. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, said in a message of support: *“Today’s Solferinos occur mainly within the borders of a country, where brother fights brother and the innocent victims are women, children and old people. The initiative to launch this Campaign brings honour to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”*.

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Many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were keen to play an active part in the last six months of the Campaign. Indeed, never before had all the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement participated on such a scale in a single project. In addition to the international events described below, the National Societies organized promotional campaigns, seminars, symposia and lectures on the protection of victims of war, exhibitions of posters, photographs and children’s drawings, the issue of postage stamps, the striking of medals, etc. They were also enthusiastic in

collecting signatures, particularly from government circles within their own countries, in support of the February 1990 Appeal calling for respect for “the fundamental human rights of individuals at all times and in all circumstances”.<sup>2</sup>

The World Campaign also enjoyed the support of a number of *international and national “ambassadors”*.

Chosen for their reputation and influence in the world of the arts, culture and science, their role was to promote the Campaign in the media and thereby ensure that its message reached as large an audience as possible. Among others, the actress Nastassja Kinski and the actor and author, Sir Peter Ustinov, took an active part in the Campaign as international ambassadors.

In addition, National Societies were invited to nominate their own “national ambassadors” from among prominent countrymen whose integrity, independence and interest in the humanitarian cause were indisputable.

On several occasions these ambassadors went on field visits to areas affected by conflict. They were accompanied by journalists and gave several press conferences.

At both international and national levels, the Campaign was supported by large multinational companies and organizations such as the World Veterans Association.

To assist National Societies in promoting the World Campaign in general and World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day in particular, the International Promotion Bureau (IPB), set up jointly by the ICRC and the League and headed by Maurice Graber and George Reid, prepared *audiovisual and written material*. This included articles, eye-witness accounts, information sheets on conflicts, humanitarian law and the Principles of the Movement, suggestions for humanitarian projects, sets of posters, photographs, badges, etc. A video film was made illustrating the reality of war, with John Lennon’s song “Imagine” providing the background music.

Several kits were sent to the National Societies, together with copies of the IPB’s newsletter, “Humanity”.

In addition, a report intended for the general public and entitled “*Victims of conflicts*” was prepared by the Peace and Conflict Research Department of the University of Uppsala (Sweden). This independent publication scrutinizes modern armed conflicts and the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

plight of their victims from the general viewpoint of international humanitarian law. It is reviewed below (see pp. 342-344).

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The *International Drawing Competition* for children under fifteen was a great success. Its theme was protecting women, children and the elderly.

*“By reaching out to young people and children in schools and asking them to understand and to show the necessity for the protection of victims of war through their paintings, we are continuing to spread the vital message of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”*, said Nastassja Kinski, Ambassador for the World Campaign.

Over 600 paintings were received in Geneva from 58 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and it was estimated that the total number of entries worldwide were in the tens of thousands. A number of National Societies also organized drawing contests within their own countries.

The jury, presided over by Nastassja Kinski, met on 20 March 1991 at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva to select the ten winning entries. The prize-winners will be invited to Geneva in August; together they will visit the ICRC and the League, the city itself and the surrounding countryside. Each entrant selected for the international competition will receive a Certificate of Merit.

An exhibition of 105 paintings, including at least one from every National Society that entered the competition, was on display in the foyer of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva up to 14 May 1991; the exhibition will also be mounted at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Budapest in November 1991.

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The culminating point of the World Campaign was 8 May 1991, *World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day*. Its slogan, “Light the Darkness”, was taken from Albert Schweitzer who likened the International

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to a light in the darkness for all those living under the shadow of violence, death and exile.<sup>3</sup>

In some 130 countries, the occasion was marked at nightfall by the lighting of lamps, torches and candles to express solidarity with the victims of war and a universal desire to ensure respect for humanitarian law.

In Geneva, on the Avenue de la Paix (Avenue of Peace), between the United Nations and the ICRC, thousands of people attended a concert given by the *London Chamber Orchestra* and accompanied by a spectacular display of special lighting effects. The ceremony concluded with the song "When will there be peace?", by Nick Bicât, sung by children in several languages while thousands of candles were lit to form a chain of light in support of the victims of war.

Other ceremonies of a similar nature were held on the Great Wall of China, in Hiroshima, New York, Beirut, Cairo and Moscow, in Norway and Fiji, in refugee camps in Asia and guerrilla camps in Latin America, at ICRC delegations, and by National Societies, etc.

BBC television (BBC 1), in conjunction with television networks in other countries, produced an international programme on this chain of light around the world. Presented by Sir Peter Ustinov and with the ceremony in Geneva as its theme, the programme is made up of sequences showing various aspects of war, extracts from the Geneva Conventions being read by famous actors and scenes of events to mark 8 May which were filmed in the four corners of the world.

The programme was broadcast by BBC 1 on 10 May and at a later date by television stations in many countries.

The IPB advised National Societies to take full advantage of the possibilities offered by this programme. For instance, they could suggest that television stations in their own countries broadcast chat shows and discussions explaining the role and activities of the National Society, organize meetings on the National Society's work between representatives of government ministries, the press and television, and local and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental; or televise publicity material to raise funds, recruit new members, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> See also below, p. 312, the joint message from the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In Switzerland, several events with a humanitarian theme have taken place over the past six months, most of them in connection with the celebration of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation. The *Review* will be covering some of these in its July-August 1991 issue.