

LAUNCHING OF THE PROGRAMME OF COMMEMORATION  
OF THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS  
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

## 125 Years at Work

*In a period of 20 months, from November 1862 to August 1864, an almost unnoticed revolution took place, the result of the feelings aroused in various European countries by the publication of a small book, entitled **A Memory of Solferino**. Its author, the young Swiss businessman Jean-Henry Dunant, used the sympathy it generated to promote the idea that wounded soldiers should, since they are no longer capable of fighting, cease to be treated as enemies. He wanted nations to organize groups of volunteers who, with the full backing of their respective governments, would stand ready and able to render assistance to wounded and sick members of armies in the field, whether friend or foe.*

*To have succeeded, in less than one year, in bringing together in Geneva the representatives of 16 interested governments and a number of philanthropic organizations to consider how this idea could be applied, was a tremendous achievement. And on 29 October 1863, the Red Cross was born.*

*The praiseworthy determination, imagination and courage of Henry Dunant and the pioneers who made up the Committee of Five—the future International Committee of the Red Cross—led to the conclusion, on 22 August 1864, of the first Geneva Convention. This modest instrument, composed of only ten articles, paved the way for the whole body of humanitarian law and constituted a milestone in the history of mankind.*

*Now, 125 years later, the Movement founded by Henry Dunant has become a major force in the world for the protection of human life. It is, however, a Movement about which most people know little, although man's inhumanity to his fellows has compelled the Movement to expand its activities to such an extent that, in most countries, the Red Cross and Red Crescent are recognized as an independent but essential part of the health and social welfare services.*

*Nevertheless, the principles which guide the Movement's every action, and are the common heritage of all of its components, are generally not well known. Many governments do not understand what the Movement can and cannot do. Others doubt its ability to remain neutral in the face of today's problems. Paradoxically, it is sometimes accused of partiality when it is actually applying the very principles of neutrality and impartiality which require it to refrain from judging events or people or from making any distinction between victims other than the urgency of their needs.*

*In countries where, thanks to the Red Cross or Red Crescent, communities have access to efficient blood transfusion or first-aid services, run on a non-profit basis and usually provided free of charge to the patients, people often do not realise that elsewhere the same Red Cross or Red Crescent reunites families separated by war, cares for prisoners of war and civilian detainees, the sick and wounded and displaced civilians driven from their homes by conflict, helps its fledgling sister Societies in their efforts to develop and to raise the health and nutritional levels of the people, brings relief to the victims of famine, and clothes, feeds and shelters the victims of major natural disasters.*

*It is therefore the aim of the ICRC and the League, on the occasion of the Movement's 125th anniversary, to make better known to people all over the world, particularly the young, the concerns, activities and projects of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in every country and sphere, in the hope of thereby generating greater public participation in the Movement's activities and broader support for its appeals.*

*At its meeting in Rio de Janeiro, the Council of Delegates adopted a two-year commemoration programme, extending from November 1987 to October 1989, described in this issue of the Review (see pp. 653-654).*

*During the next two years, the Review will report and comment as fully as possible on the programme's major events in Geneva and worldwide. The commemoration should also be viewed as an opportunity to carry out an in-depth reflexion on the Movement's various*

*accomplishments over the past 125 years and to increase our understanding of the personal contributions of the founders and precursors of the Movement, as well as our knowledge of the evolution of the humanitarian ideals underlying the adoption, in August 1864, of the first Geneva Convention.*

*Over the coming months, the Review will act as a forum for this reflexion and for all those who wish to contribute to it.*

The Review

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