

## THE RED CROSS AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

*In memory of a contributor to "International Review"*

*Mr. Henri Coursier, former legal adviser to the ICRC, recently published in the Revue de Défense nationale<sup>1</sup> an article on the Red Cross which we wish to bring to the attention of our readers and of which we give an extract below. We do so today as a tribute of gratitude to the memory of a writer of whose death we have just been distressed to learn, and who was one of our most regular contributors.*

*Many articles by him on international humanitarian law, dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and ICRC action for the benefit of political detainees were published in our review. These included: "Legal Assistance to Refugees" (September 1950), "Restoring the Right of Asylum" (December 1950), "Studies on Training in Humanitarian Law" (May, July, December 1951, July 1952), "Francis Lieber and the Laws of War" (May 1953).*

*Apart from these texts which display extensive knowledge on Red Cross problems, Mr. Coursier devoted a work to the same subject entitled "The International Red Cross" and two booklets, one edited by the ICRC, "Course of Five Lessons on the Geneva Conventions", and the other by the ICRC and the League in the form of an illustrated manual "The Geneva Conventions".*

*We now give an extract<sup>2</sup> from his latest study on the Red Cross in which he analyses the organization's independence. (Ed.).*

Both in its national and international role the Red Cross is growing continuously. The Geneva Conventions refer to the International Committee of the Red Cross thirty-four times and confide to it peacetime and wartime duties in the public interest. The national legislations of many countries have appealed to the Red

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<sup>1</sup> Paris, 24th year, No 11.

<sup>2</sup> Our translation.

Cross to train nursing personnel and provide blood transfusion services; they give it a major part to play in the organization of civil defence and social services, and yet the Red Cross is still a private institution. Of all the organizations which widely cooperate in international life, the Red Cross is the only one to have remained independent from the concentration of world activities under the authority of the United Nations. Today specialised agencies such as the ILO, WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF influence considerably the working conditions, public health, culture and international assistance of nations, in place of earlier institutions, whereas the Red Cross is still responsible for its humanitarian work in accordance with its own traditions. That does not mean that it remains aloof from the United Nations; in fact the Red Cross cooperates with it, often at its request, but when doing so is entirely autonomous. The mission entrusted in 1948 to the International Committee and the League, for example, to assist the Palestine Refugees, was financed by the United Nations and was the subject of a contract according to which the two Red Cross organizations alone had discretion for the use of the funds.

This private character of an association entrusted with important public functions is justified by the fact that those functions are humanitarian and should be discharged, when necessary, outside the framework of official international relations. The United Nations, for example, could not contact *rebels* in the event of civil war. Only a *private* institution like the Red Cross could in such circumstances act as the essential neutral intermediary to relieve all suffering in both camps.

It goes without saying that large scale relief action, such as the assistance to Palestine refugees, far exceeds the financial resources of a private institution. In the circumstances, however, the Red Cross was extremely useful in supplying the needs of a million refugees for over a year until the United Nations was able to set up a special agency, UNRWA, to handle the problem . . .