

Secretary-General to pay special attention, in his work on "the respect of human rights in time of armed conflict", to the protection of women and children and to take appropriate measures to make known their plight in armed conflicts and the international regulations which exist for their protection.

THE ICRC AND SWISS NEUTRALITY

Mr. Max Petitpierre, a member of the ICRC and a former president of the Swiss Confederation, recently delivered a lecture on the foreign policy of Switzerland. The extract which we give below will certainly be of interest to our readers, as it refers to the ICRC and to the neutrality of the country where it has its headquarters.

... Finally, there exists a field where Switzerland has special responsibilities towards international society, that of humanitarian law. Switzerland, thanks to Henry Dunant, introduced to the world the concept of the Red Cross and, at the same time, the first principles of humanitarian law that were applied in cases of armed conflicts. This law has developed substantially so as to include gradually all war victims as well as victims of civil wars and even of internal political struggles. While, at first, it had been conceived with the object of protecting combatants, today it seeks to protect civilians. Switzerland has here a specific task to carry out. It was this country which had convened, and had presided, a world-wide diplomatic conference at Geneva in 1949, at which the four Geneva Conventions now in force were hammered out. Further conferences are planned in order to complete and improve what is already in existence. The ICRC has been entrusted with their preparation.

Swiss neutrality is the fundamental condition on which rests the activity of that unique institution, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which, through its field of action extending throughout the whole world, is international, and which is Swiss by its composition, since Swiss citizens alone may become members.

Through the ICRC and its delegates, Swiss presence and activity are felt today on five continents, practically in every area where armed conflicts break out.

No doubt, humanitarian law does not lend itself to spectacular achievements. Its effects are felt only by those peoples or individuals who have become victims and who endure the sufferings caused by war and hatred. Its political utility is therefore limited. But it enables untold sufferings to be alleviated and brings relief to a multitude of persons and families.

The ICRC is not a political authority. It draws its might from moral strength, which it personifies. In certain desperate situations, it is asked to step in even where the Geneva Conventions do not apply. Thus, some years ago, at the time of the Cuba crisis, the United Nations Secretary-General, with the agreement of the Soviet Union and the United Nations, requested the ICRC to carry out a mission which was outside its traditional activities, since it consisted in checking ships heading for Cuba, which was then under blockade. This request, incidentally, did not have any sequel.

When we make an appraisal of our foreign policy, we must reserve to humanitarian law, whose safe-keeping and development have been entrusted to us by the 125 States that have signed the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the place which it deserves to occupy. This is a specific task which is tied to the strict application by Switzerland of its neutrality...
