

*THE ICRC, THE LEAGUE AND THE REPORT
ON THE RE-APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF THE RED CROSS (V)*

Dissemination of knowledge of international
humanitarian law and of Red Cross principles

Comments by the ICRC and the League

The Tansley Report does not devote a special heading to the problem of dissemination, its remarks on this subject being scattered in various chapters. In the interest of greater clarity, the ICRC and the League felt it would be useful to bring them together, to summarize them, so as to identify the general concepts.

The Report's comments may thus be divided into two groups.

1. General considerations

There are two important general considerations in the approach of the Report to the dissemination of knowledge of humanitarian law and of Red Cross principles: ignorance of the subject within the movement and the difficulty of disseminating it.

The Tansley Report notes that *the general public did not know very much about Red Cross* (p. 13), and that *Red Cross leaders and members know very little about what Red Cross is and does outside their own activity* (p. 49).

This is true both for the content and meaning of the principles of the movement which are *not well understood by the majority of Red Cross members* (p. 49).

According to the Report, great confusion prevails about the exact meaning of the essential functions of protection and assistance and of concepts of human values.

We share this opinion; these notions need to be clarified and explained. It has been observed in particular in the course of armed conflicts—to refer only to these—the extent to which ignorance of Red Cross principles and of the Geneva Conventions can prejudice humanitarian activities of the Red Cross and hence cause harm to the victims. The ICRC, profoundly concerned over this situation, wishes to continue and intensify its efforts at dissemination, in co-operation with the National Societies and the League, and with Governments and the mass media.

The Tansley Report furthermore recognizes that *dissemination of the Geneva Conventions is a difficult task* (p. 23).

It is difficult because it is a long-term effort which offers no hope of immediate results. We must also recognize that speaking of war, even for the purpose of attenuating its effects, is an unpopular venture. It is nevertheless essential, since it would indeed be useless to develop and codify humanitarian law if it were finally to remain unknown to those responsible for applying it.

It is against this background that the “First European Red Cross seminar on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions” (Warsaw, 1977) endorsed three basic principles, which we believe to have a very general value and deserve to be presented here as guiding rules in matters of dissemination:

1. *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.*
2. *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.*
3. *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”.*

2. Particular proposals

1. Presentation of the law in simplified form

The Tansley Report states: *A first step might be to simplify the law, in information terms...* (p. 69).

The ICRC and the League share the Report opinion on this point. Taking into account suggestions which have been made, the ICRC has

set up a working group in conjunction with the League which has attempted to summarize the fundamental principles of humanitarian law in order to facilitate its dissemination.

The group has produced a draft ¹ and we await the comments of participants in the Twenty-third International *Red Cross Conference*.

2. Information for those concerned

The Report states further: *In information terms, there is a need for something between Jean Pictet's The Principles of International Humanitarian Law and the brief Soldier's Manual published by the ICRC (p. 69).*

The range of ICRC publications is more extensive than one might suppose from the Report. For several years, the ICRC has been making a considerable effort to extend the field of its publications, with regard to subjects, translations, audio-visual presentations and the different circles addressed—such as the armed forces, schools, universities and the general public.

A total of over 20 different publications try to cover the varied and wide range of readers likely to be interested in humanitarian law or the Red Cross and its principles. For instance, the *School Manual*—and its accompanying *Teacher's Manual*—has reached over two million copies, has been translated into more than a dozen languages and introduced in some 40 countries in all continents.

In the next three years, the ICRC intends to put out the following publications:

Commentary to the Additional Protocols

This publication would be the counterpart of the *Commentary* to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Brief commentary to the Additional Protocols

This publication would be in response to the wish expressed by many National Societies for a simple teaching aid to be used in their dissemination programme.

Handbook of the Laws and Customs of War

This handbook would be primarily for the armed forces and would summarize, for every subject, the essential points of the laws and customs of war from 1907 to 1977.

¹ Published in *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 206, September-October 1978, p. 247-249.

Text book on international humanitarian law

This text book is at present being prepared in conjunction with UNESCO and the Henry Dunant Institute.

Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols

There would be a need for the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols in a single volume, in which the complementary nature of the various articles would be clearly apparent by the use of differentiated type.

Essential rules of the Geneva Conventions and of the Additional Protocols

The present booklet (*Essential Rules*) should be re-issued so as to include the essential provisions of the Additional Protocols.

Index to the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols

The present index to the Geneva Conventions should be re-edited and supplemented with references to the Additional Protocols, a task which might be entrusted to the Henry-Dunant Institute.

Book on the ICRC's principles

Collection of articles stating the ICRC's principles on about a dozen specific points.

Practical guide for National Societies in the event of conflicts

The issue of such a guide would fulfil a recommendation of the World Red Cross Conference on Peace held at Belgrade in 1975.

Booklet on identification systems

This booklet would summarize all that has been done in this field, taking into account the Additional Protocols.

A part from these definite projects, the ICRC would like, if possible, to issue two manuals giving examples of the implementation of humanitarian law: one for armed forces; the other for National Societies and the general public.

Several National Societies have produced publications in these areas, and many have also made use of ICRC publications. The ICRC and the League consider that this valuable activity by National Societies should be continued and developed.

3. Regional approach

The Tansley Report suggests that *a regional approach could take into account cultural values and practices (in the regions under study), as well*

as associating Red Cross values more directly with the values found in a particular culture (p. 69).

It was precisely in the spirit of this pertinent comment that the ICRC organized a mission for studying African traditions for similarities and differences between African humanism and the fundamental principles of humanitarian law as expressed in the Geneva Conventions.¹

In these studies, the ICRC does no more than suggest lines for Possible research, since it is up to the countries themselves to follow up the studies, through specialized institutes, universities, etc.

ICRC regional delegations play an important role in this connection, through their contacts and the knowledge they gain of principles and traditions in the places where they are working.

Encouraging the staff of National Societies to attend regional seminars is also a reflection of the ICRC's desire to take regional cultural values into consideration. To cite some examples:

- Organization of a Regional Training Institute for National Society leaders in Central Africa et Kinshasa, Zaïre (August 1973);
- Seminar on the Conventions, humanitarian law and first aid at Kampala, Uganda (February 1976);
- National seminar on Red Cross principles and international humanitarian law at Ouagadougou, Upper Volta (March 1976);
- Seminar on international humanitarian law and methods for its dissemination at the Henry Dunant Institute (October 1976);
- National seminar on the Geneva Conventions at Bogota, Colombia (November 1976);
- First European seminar on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions at Warsaw, Poland (March 1977);
- First African English-speaking seminar of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions at Mombasa, Kenya (August 1978);
- First Asian seminar of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions at Kuala Lumpur (November 1978).

Other seminars are scheduled for 1979 in Tunis, Bogota, etc.

¹ See *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 179, February 1976, p. 57-63; No. 185, August 1976, p. 387-401.—*International Review* published also articles on Polish tradition, No. 171, June 1975, p. 272-280; No. 192, March 1977, p. 128-132; on Islam, etc.

4. Officer responsible for dissemination

The Report suggests also that *at a bare minimum, every National Society should have a protection officer who would be responsible for dissemination efforts, reporting and liaison with ICRC (p. 70).*

In October 1975, in a memorandum distributed to all National Societies, the ICRC encouraged all those which had not yet done so to appoint a person responsible for dissemination.

Resolution XII on implementation and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions, adopted unanimously at the International Red Cross Conference at Teheran, asked the ICRC to support the efforts of governments and National Societies in dissemination, in particular by preparing information material suited to the spheres and areas it was proposed to reach, advising National Societies on drawing up plans of action in this field, systematically publicizing the achievements of governments and National Societies, and organizing or participating in seminars on international humanitarian law. To put this resolution into effect, the ICRC must be able to rely upon the participation of the National Societies.

The appointment of an officer by each Society should ensure the exchange of information and continued activity at the national level.

The ICRC would thus be in a position to act as co-ordinator of information on dissemination, on the basis of the particulars it receives, or should receive, from the National Societies in reply to its inquiries.

5. Co-operation between the ICRC and the League

The Tansley Report does not refer to co-operation between the ICRC and the League in this connection.

Generally speaking, the Red Cross has everything to gain from increased support by the League for the ICRC's efforts at dissemination. This co-operation will be greatly facilitated now with art. 5. 1. j. of the new League Constitution, stating that the League will *assist the ICRC in the promotion and development of international humanitarian law, and collaborate with it in the dissemination of this law and of the fundamental Principles of the Red Cross among the National Societies.*

Two other sub-paragraphs in article 5 of the League's Constitution will also necessitate a close collaboration between both institutions for their implementation:

- g) *to encourage and coordinate between National Societies the exchange of ideas for the education of children and young people in humanitarian ideals and for the development of friendly relations between young people of all countries;*

- h) *to assist National Societies to recruit members from the population as a whole and inculcate the Principles and Ideals of the Red Cross.*

For the dissemination of Red Cross Principles and humanitarian ideals, particularly among young people, co-operation between the League and the ICRC is essential. The two institutions will define the nature of this collaboration and establish guidelines for it.

3. Conclusions

To give greater effect to its work of dissemination, the ICRC believes that its policies in this field must be characterized by:

- (a) attempts to find methods and language suited to the various recipients;
- (b) priority efforts directed to the armed forces, primarily responsible for the application of humanitarian law;
- (c) development of personal contacts and establishment of dialogue;
- (d) the determination, in any complete programme for dissemination, to give a prominent place to the contribution of the Red Cross to peace and a spirit of peace.

The League considers that these policies of the ICRC should receive its full support.¹ To this end, the ICRC and the League reproduce the following concrete suggestions adopted at the "Seminar on international humanitarian Law and Methods for its Dissemination", at the Henry Dunant Institute in October 1976.²

1. *Dissemination, being the propagation of an ideal, must be done by strongly motivated individuals who believe in that ideal.*
2. *Dissemination must be adapted to the categories of people for whom it is intended (military, medical personnel, students, children, public administration, members of National Societies of the Red Cross, the general public, etc.)*

¹ In October 1978, the League and the ICRC adopted a Red Cross programme for the dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law and of Red Cross principles and ideals. Additional information on this subject will be given in a forthcoming issue of the *Review*.

² See *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 188, Nov. 1976, pp. 565-567.

3. *Methods of dissemination must be diversified according to the various parts of the world in which they are used.*
 4. *Dissemination needs money: all National Societies which can afford it should have a "dissemination programme" on their regular budget and should envisage financing a similar programme for less fortunate Societies, with ICRC technical assistance.*
 5. *Each development programme of the League should include a budget for dissemination; the programme budget should be established jointly by the participating National Society, and the ICRC, in consultation with the League Secretariat and the operating society.*
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