

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

APPEAL

on the occasion of the entry into force of the 1977 additional Protocols

GENEVA, 24 November 1978

*To Governments of States Parties to
the 1949 Geneva Conventions*

On 7 December 1978 the two Protocols—one for the protection of victims of international armed conflicts and one for the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts—additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 will come into force.

These two Protocols were hammered out by the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law applicable in Armed Conflicts convened in Geneva by the Swiss Government, the depositary of the Geneva Conventions. On 10 June 1977 the plenipotentiaries of more than 100 States and of several liberation movements signed the “Final Act” of the Conference, after four annual sessions which had been preceded by several years of preparatory work. Since June 1977, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the architect of the preparatory work, has been gratified to

see that the representatives of 46 States signed the Protocols themselves at a ceremony which took place in Berne on 12 December 1977. The Protocol will remain open for further signatures until 10 December 1978. Countries which have not signed the Protocols by that date may nevertheless accede to them.

Pursuant to Articles 95 of Protocol I and 23 of Protocol II, these documents become effective six months after deposit of two instruments of ratification or accession. For each State subsequently acceding to them, the Protocols come into force six months after deposit of the relevant instrument.

The Government of Ghana, on 28 February 1978, and the Government of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, on 7 June 1978, having deposited their letters of ratification and accession with the Swiss Federal Council, the two Protocols will come into force on 7 December this year. Thereupon, they shall be part and parcel of positive law and take their place in world history.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has every reason to congratulate itself for this achievement, coming after the long effort which it has sustained since its foundation, with the constant support of the Swiss Confederation, with the aim of ensuring that human beings are better protected in time of armed conflict until peace based on justice reigns on earth. It was from such efforts that the various versions of the Geneva Conventions emerged in 1864, 1906, 1929 and 1949, to provide an invaluable safeguard for so many human beings. The 1949 Conventions, with some 450 articles, are now supplemented by almost 150 provisions—nearly all adopted by consensus, we would stress—of the Protocols. Together they contain some 600 articles.

While no enterprise of this nature may achieve perfection, it is agreed that the 1977 Protocols are a considerable progress in conferring the force of law on the principles contained in humanitarian law recognised by all peoples. They are a timely restatement of the respect due to an enemy who has been disarmed and to persons taking no part in hostilities. They also provide the Red Cross with stronger grounds on which to base its so necessary action. It may be held that the significance of the provisions in which the work from 1974 to 1977 culminated is comparable to that of the recasting of the Conventions themselves in 1949.

As we approach the end of the year in which was celebrated with zeal throughout the world the 150th anniversary of the birth of Henry

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Dunant, the prime mover in the founding of the Red Cross and promoter of the Geneva Conventions, the International Committee appeals to the governments of States parties to those Conventions to ratify as soon as possible the two 1977 Protocols or to accede thereto and thereby include the names of their countries on the humanitarian roll of honour. The International Committee, for its part, is prepared to help as much as it is considered useful in promoting the accession procedure.

By becoming parties to the Protocols, by ratification or accession, governments will demonstrate the importance which they attach to the better observance throughout the world of the fundamental rules of Geneva and will at the same time manifest their determination to ensure that they are implemented. Thereby, they will respond to the desire of the peoples to see the universal acceptance of guarantees which are essential for mankind.

A copy of this appeal is being sent to the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies of the countries concerned.
