

# INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## Death of Professor Eric Martin

The news of Professor Eric Martin's sudden death on 6 January, in his eightieth year, was keenly felt by the International Committee and by all who knew him.

Professor Martin, a former President of the ICRC, had a distinguished career. Born in 1900 in Geneva, he studied medicine in that town and then in Paris, Strasbourg and Vienna, and opened his practice in Geneva in 1929. He was in charge of the University medical clinic from 1936 to 1970, was twice Dean of the Faculty of Medicine (1956-58 and 1965-66) and Rector of Geneva University from 1960 to 1962. He was a member of many Swiss and foreign medical associations and academies, doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Aix-Marseille, and member correspondent of the Paris Academy of Medicine.

He was the author of some three hundred publications on diabetes, rheumatism and geriatrics, in which subjects he specialized, and on the social aspects of modern medicine. In the last few years he had been contributing to a Geneva newspaper a weekly medical article which his intelligence and human feelings made a message of encouragement and hope.

Formerly President of the Geneva Section of the Swiss Red Cross, and a member of the Central Committee of that National Society for which he was a delegate to the International Red Cross Conference in Stockholm in 1948, Professor Martin was invited in 1973 to assume the presidency of the International Committee. During his four-year term of office he gave himself entirely and unsparingly to that difficult and

absorbing task with a breadth of vision, open-mindedness, unaffectedness, good will and kindness which won him the respect and loyalty of all. He was a man of radiating personality and stimulating drive which inspired others to surpass themselves, to strive always to do better.

He was greatly interested in the activities of the National Red Cross Societies, many of which he visited, conferring with them on the problems they had to face and establishing confidence and close and lasting friendship with their leaders. During his term as President of the ICRC he applied himself particularly to two problems of our times of concern to the Red Cross, the efforts to eliminate torture and to promote peace. He gave support and all his energy to the quest for solutions.

In recent years Professor Martin was still very active. He took part in the meetings of the ICRC Assembly; he conducted seminars for the Red Cross and studies into social medicine; only a month before his death he presented to the Henry Dunant Institute a report on the humanization of medicine and hospitals which was a model of accuracy and foresight. This was a subject he held dear all his life, which he developed in his courses to students, and which he taught by example: the doctor should aim not only to apply his skill to the treatment of his patients but should, as should all men to one another, show goodness, understanding and human sympathy.

Six months before his death, in one of his articles, Professor Martin wrote the following lines which can hardly leave us unmoved:

“ Something new was being brought home to the old doctor: his health was going to be a subject for concern and never again would he feel himself in fine fettle as he had only six months earlier. He was not indifferent to the realization; it made him think. It is perhaps not entirely useless for a doctor to know what it is to have a chronic ailment, to be in pain every day, to feel tired, with no resistance, to have lost the spirit of enterprise and the will to take action. . . . He must overcome his ailment the better to bear it; he must occupy his mind and organize his life to suit the strength remaining to him. Of course this presents him with a choice, but he must live life to the full, not in vain fuss and frenzy, but to achieve what is true satisfaction. The worst thing is to await, anxious and inactive, for the disaster, yielding to the pretext that the effort is too much, that he has not got the strength. He must make the best of every day as if life was still to go on for a long time. To have always enjoyed the benefits of good health is a privilege which brings with it the duty of repaying some of the friendship and affection of those who gave you so much. True, it is never pleasant to learn that one is seriously

ill, but the old doctor is grateful for having been confronted with responsibilities: he will try to face up to them to endow some meaning to this last lap of life."

This calm lucidity, this penetrating intelligence, and this altruism revealed in this passage epitomize Professor Martin who leaves a bright, moving and grateful memory with all who were in contact with him.

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### **ICRC delegate killed in accident in Uganda**

The International Committee of the Red Cross was grieved to learn of the sudden death in a car accident on 17 January 1980 of Miss Christine Rieben, a delegate in Uganda.

Miss Rieben, single, 30 years of age, joined the staff of the ICRC in July 1978. After training with the Central Tracing Agency she went out to N'Djamena for the Agency in March 1979. After a six-month mission in Chad and a short time at ICRC headquarters, she was posted to Kampala on 18 December last.

Her loss is deeply felt by all the ICRC which extends to her family and friends its profound sympathy.

Two other ICRC delegates in the car were injured: Mr. Pierre Pont, in charge of the ICRC delegation in Kampala, and Miss Catherine Vontobel, secretary. An employee of the Ugandan Red Cross, Mr. Jimmy Lumu, was slightly injured.

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