

E. BELLO: AFRICAN CUSTOMARY HUMANITARIAN LAW¹

Humanitarian principles are common to the human beings of all nations; they are to be found everywhere, deeply embedded in the conscience of man, once the particularities arising from culture and external circumstances have been removed. E. Bello's study is a further demonstration of the truth of this statement.

His book, which unfortunately exists only in English, is divided into three main parts. The description of armed conflicts in pre-colonial Africa, with the modes of combat, the lawful measures permitted against civilians or civil objects, and the means of putting an end to conflicts, is followed by a comparative analysis of existing norms in African customary law and those prescribed by the international conventions of humanitarian law. The last part of the work, which constitutes the conclusion to the comparative study preceding it, is dedicated to a subject which is of particular interest to the author: the establishment of an African institute of international humanitarian law, to further the dissemination of knowledge of this law in Africa by the National Societies of the Red Cross. The index and a good bibliography complete this concise and fascinating work. The reader, upon closing it, would like to read much more on the same subject and would like to find similar studies on the humanitarian principles of other cultures.

THE ICRC IN INDOCHINA, 1946-54²

Engaged in Indochina in one of the first great decolonization conflicts, the ICRC had to cope with a situation which was in many ways new to it. The Indochina war, in which an expeditionary force was pitted against guerrillas in civilian clothing, dragged on over seven years (from 1946 to 1954), until it gradually reached such a state of "decay" that it was scarcely possible to apply humanitarian law any longer.

Faced with the attitude of the French who tried to limit it to a partial rôle and the Vietnamese who refused to comply with its requests and

¹ Prof. E. Bello: *African Customary Humanitarian Law*, Oyez Publishing Limited and International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, 1980, 158 pages, 15 Swiss Francs. In English only.

² Jean-François Berger: *L'action du CICR en Indochine, 1946-1954*. Editions Corbaz, Montreux, 1982. 96 pp. 9.50 Swiss francs. In French only.

then refused to discuss with it, the ICRC was confronted in Indochina with a delicate, arduous and often thankless task. It was only at the price of unremitting tenacity that significant results were obtained.

Mr. Berger's small book is a quick but dense summary of the ICRC's operations on a terrain and at a time which were both extremely difficult, but also very exciting. The ICRC found itself at grips with obscure hostile forces whose attitude perhaps served as an example and made for unfavourable reactions in other parts of the world and at other times, even right up to the present. These perspectives add to the interest of this short study which is easy to follow thanks to a map, chronological tables and photographs.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

It gives us pleasure to report the recent publication, under the auspices of the Libyan Arab Red Crescent,¹ of a *Brief summary of international humanitarian law*, in Arabic.

It is a small sized book (approximately 14 × 19 cm), of 30 pages by Mohammed Hamed Al-Asbali. The preface is dated 1 April 1980. In these few pages the author, in a short historical chapter, provides information on the origin and nature of international humanitarian law. He then gives a quick explanation of its principles. Although extremely simplified, this work may constitute a useful introduction to a complicated subject.

It is certain that in such small space not much can be said about international humanitarian law, which, after its recent developments in 1977, consists of almost six hundred articles. We hope this *Brief summary* will induce its readers to seek more information on the subject.

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