

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

MANUAL ON THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL IN ARMED CONFLICTS¹

This manual is intended for military and civilian medical personnel whose services may be required in the event of armed conflict. Its purpose is to inform them about the provisions contained in international humanitarian law (the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols) which should be familiar to all medical personnel and are designed to help them accomplish their humanitarian mission on behalf of victims of armed conflicts.

The author, Mrs. Alma Baccino-Astrada, doctor of Law and Social Sciences, member of the Youth bureau at the League of Red Cross Societies, compiled a practical handbook, written as simply as possible, to group together the essential provisions of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols relevant to the subject.

The opening chapter gives a brief introductory review of the main stages in the development of ideas, against the background of historical events. This will give medical personnel a better understanding of how the Red Cross and international humanitarian law came into being. This first chapter tries also to define medical personnel and the part they are expected to play in situations of armed conflict, the significance of the rights and duties incumbent upon them and granted to them by the provisions of international humanitarian law. Emphasis is placed, too, upon the distinctive emblem (the red cross and the red crescent) and its value.

With regard to the main part of this handbook, it was felt useful to distinguish between the duties incumbent on medical personnel by international humanitarian law (Chapter 2) and the rights conceded

¹ *Manual on the Rights and Duties of Medical Personnel in Armed Conflicts*, by Dr. Alma Baccino-Astrada. Published by the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva 1982. 78 pages. Published in French, English, Spanish, Arabic editions. Price: 4 Swiss Francs.

to them (Chapter 3). It is not always very easy to make this distinction as certain rights entail certain duties and vice versa.

It is obvious that medical personnel, when required to serve in a conflict, in their capacity as the agents of a State bound by the Geneva Conventions and possibly by the Additional Protocols, must obey the provisions laid down by these texts: any violation of these provisions would constitute a breach of national or international law, for which they would be held responsible, and would possibly lead to various sanctions. It is equally important, however, for medical personnel to be aware of their rights and not allow themselves to be unduly intimidated. Since they may find themselves required at any moment to perform their duties or assert their rights in the most unexpected way, it is essential for medical personnel to know what their rights and duties are.

It is also the duty of the public authorities to inform their citizens about the provisions of international humanitarian law, for in ratifying or acceding to the Conventions and Protocols the States assumed the obligation to disseminate knowledge of these same Conventions and Protocols in their respective countries "as widely as possible in time of peace and in time of armed conflict".

In view of the nature of the services provided by medical personnel, of their responsibilities and the conditions in which their duties are performed, and considering the number and complexity of the relevant provisions, it would be impossible to give medical personnel any adequate preparation for these aspects of their mission at the very last moment, when conflict breaks out. It is consequently imperative to start preparing them for their work in peacetime and it is hoped that this manual will be of some assistance.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF CIVIL DEFENSE ¹

The new regulations of international law concerning the status of civil defence are an innovation: they create a completely new legal status, established in the general interest by the Diplomatic Conference

¹ *New International Status of Civil Defence*, by Dr. Boško Jakovljević. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague—Boston—London, and Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1983. 142 pages. In English. 32.50 dollars.