

# The ICRC and the Future:

*Five major challenges of the year 2000 for an organization  
in its second century*<sup>1</sup>

by Jacques Moreillon

**1) On some simple truths by way of introduction to arouse the interest  
of the reader**

— The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as an organization, has no rights of its own; the only ones it exercises are those of the silent victims in whose name it speaks.

— Were it not the defender of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, of which it is the guardian, the ICRC would be just one more voluntary agency, with a small budget.

— International humanitarian law protects only those victims whom governments allow to be protected, but its principles can and must be invoked, even when this law cannot be applied.

— The ICRC's main assets are the men and women working for it; preserving and managing this capital is one of its most important and difficult tasks.

— The hardening of political, economic and ideological antagonisms will be one of the characteristics of the years to come and one of the main obstacles which the ICRC will have to face.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the outcome of discussions with various members and collaborators of the ICRC, combined with personal reflection. It is not binding in any way for the ICRC. It was first published in the *Annals* of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 1982.

— In order to really help those whom it is commissioned to protect and assist, the ICRC is condemned to remain mononational; from which follows an even greater obligation to find an opening onto the world and, more difficult still, win acceptance by it.

**2) A reminder of some facts and laws for setting the scene—the initiated can jump to paragraph 3**

— The ICRC is the founding organ of the Red Cross movement (1863). It is a private, independent, neutral, impartial, Swiss organization, whose object is to protect and assist the civilian and military victims of armed conflicts, international or otherwise, and of internal disorders or tension.

— The ICRC was at the origin of modern international humanitarian law (1864). The main purpose of this law is to guarantee respect for the human person in armed conflict. It is made up of the “law of Geneva” for the protection of soldiers *hors de combat* and of all persons not taking part in the hostilities—and the “law of The Hague”, which sets forth the rights and duties of belligerents in conducting military operations and limits the choice of means of doing harm.

— The 1949 Geneva Conventions oblige the States parties to them (154, as at 30 June 1983) to allow the ICRC to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees and talk to them without witnesses, in the event of international conflicts. They authorize it to offer its services during civil wars, but do not oblige the parties to such conflicts to accept this offer.

— The Statutes of the International Red Cross (the first version was adopted in 1928) authorize the ICRC to offer its services on behalf of the victims of internal disorders and other situations requiring the humanitarian intervention of a neutral intermediary. Since 1919, but mainly since 1945, the ICRC has visited over 300,000 “political detainees” in some 80 countries.

— There were, as of 30 June 1983, 130 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the world, duly recognized by the ICRC. Since 1919, they belong to a federation, the League of Red Cross Societies, a plurinational organization responsible mainly for the development of its present and future member societies and for coordinating relief operations in the event of natural disasters.

— The National Societies, the League and the ICRC together form the International Red Cross. They meet every two years in the Council of

Delegates. Add to them the States Parties to the Geneva Conventions and you have the International Red Cross Conference, the highest deliberative authority of the movement, which meets every four years and whose mission is to ensure the unity of action of its members. The Statutes of the International Red Cross have been adopted by the International Conference.

### **3) Where we reach the heart of the matter: some thoughts on the ICRC's mononationality**

From the foundation of the ICRC by five Geneva citizens in 1863, all Committee members have been Swiss, a factual situation which was given legal sanction by the International Red Cross Statutes adopted in 1928. Under Swiss law, Articles 60 and following of the Swiss Civil Code, the ICRC is an association just like any bowling or yodelling club. And it is to this club, whose members are recruited by co-option and can all be qualified as direct "descendants" of the five founders, that the community of States has entrusted the guardianship of the Geneva Conventions.

It must be agreed that in a "representative" world, extolling the equality and sovereignty of States, this is an unusual situation! How then do we explain that these same States agree to it and that none of them proposes to internationalize the ICRC?

To reply to this question, we must imagine what would happen if the ICRC were in fact multinational. How would it make up a delegation to visit the "Fedayins" in Israeli prisons? Would it be the same delegation as the one going to see the Israeli pilots held by the Syrians? Which nationalities would have been equally acceptable to the government of Lagos and the secessionists in the Nigerian civil war? Would South Africa, Argentina or Poland in a state of martial law accept delegates from such an organization?

How would this organization make decisions? With what majority? By what criteria would it decide to offer its services? Confronted by the humanitarian emergency of a conflict suddenly breaking out, as in Cyprus in 1974 or, more recently, between Iraq and Iran, how long would it need to take the necessary decisions?

Finally, how could such an organization really guarantee the confidentiality required of its office? Admitted into camps and prisons, where its delegates interview captives without witnesses, how could it prove that their reports would not be "leaked" to the secret services of their respective governments or "friendly" nations?

“Why not take other neutrals?” some will perhaps say, “and mix Austrians and Swedes with these Swiss.”

“Agreed! But, then, why not some Yugoslavs? They are just as “neutral” among the Socialist countries as Switzerland in the capitalist world”.

“All right, bring in Yugoslavia. But why confine it to Europe? Burundi is a small country not threatening anyone, and the same with Burma. As for Ecuador and Peru, the fact that they belong to the Andean Pact does not make them any less neutral.”

It is obvious that there is no middle course between uninationality and universality. Yet what States require first and foremost of the ICRC is independence, i.e. the ability to make decisions as a completely neutral entity (neutral = *ne utrum* = neither the one, nor the other), to act without discrimination, by bringing relief to victims according to their needs and not their allegiance—decisions which must be taken and acted upon quickly, discreetly and efficiently.

And this independence is guaranteed by a triple device:

- mononationality,
- co-option,
- the Swiss character.

And this is the *first challenge* set by the future for the ICRC; forced to remain Swiss, it must make a correspondingly greater effort to understand, and be accepted by all that is not Swiss. If we take an extreme view of this requirement, it amounts to a veritable “internationalization of the spirit”. Of course, this does not mean abandoning Swiss virtues nor repudiating the values of the civilization in which the Red Cross was born, but rather, through deepening our knowledge and making a systematic effort at empathy, we should really come to know how to put ourselves in the place of others and understand the human and political motives of their actions, the roots of their reflexes and the special quality of their sensitivity. Acceptance by others is won through their understanding. How, otherwise, can you make others forget your colour or your passport when either the one or the other, or even both, embarrass them *a priori*? A member of the ICRC must, therefore, just like a delegate, rise above his original mental structures whenever necessary, in order to strive for true humanitarian universality, which is that of identifying with the human suffering to which he must bring relief.

#### 4) On the exaggerated hardening of ideologies and its (in)humanitarian consequences

At the inaugural session of the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference, in Manila, in November 1981, Mr. Alexandre Hay, President of the ICRC, stated:

*“At a time when the means for fighting an enemy, an ideology, a belief, have been frighteningly developed, terrorism, the taking of hostages and torture are destructive mechanisms from which more and more victims have to be saved.*

*“I would be falling short of my duty if I did not take advantage of this occasion to tell you about the concern of the ICRC in the face of these developments. The increase of violence perpetrated indiscriminately, the constant violation of basic humanitarian principles, are assuming agonizing proportions, especially in conflicts involving ideologies or race prejudice—whether restricted to one country or international—where the struggle has all the horror of total war. Just as the attempt was made, in the past, to annihilate human beings because they belonged to a certain race or a certain people, so today, a man who thinks differently seems to lose his status as a member of the human family. He becomes an “outsider”, and the principle, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”, no longer applies to him or to his next of kin, because ideological blindness keeps us from being able to recognize human character in him. This is the source of all terrorism: State terrorism which leads to attacking civilian populations, to the secret “elimination” of opponents, to their summary execution or their torture in prisons; group or even individual terrorism which strikes out blindly at anything within reach, women and children, natives and foreigners alike, who may have any connection, no matter how tenuous, with the enemy.*

*“In both cases, any pretext is put forward to justify these unjustifiable actions: military imperatives, State security, and the last means resorted to by oppressed peoples. In all such cases the ICRC is aware of one element: contempt for the human race and violation of the fundamental rule of humanitarian law, that is respect for the non-combatant. What shreds of humanity can be left if our ideologies keep us from seeing the human being in our defenceless enemy, and even deform our vision so that we see an enemy in the innocent?*

*“We are making an appeal to governments and to individuals, to those who hold power and to those who are fighting to gain this same power: while waiting for the real peace that we all hope for, we ask them that, in their conflicts, they spare the little enclaves of humanity before they*

*are crushed in the machinery of violence that knows no limits. That is the message of Henry Dunant, and that is also expressed in the many humanitarian traditions of the various civilizations of our globe—those of the past, like those of the present, in the South as in the North, in the East as in the West.”*

This hardening of political, economic and dogmatic antagonisms, these ideological deviations or caricatures, this fanatical politization is, in our opinion, the *second great challenge* the ICRC will have to meet in the years to come. How do we talk to those who are deafened by their own shouting, who reject all dialogue, who refuse the universality of man? What language do we use to make the voice of the victim heard when that voice represents absolute evil to the torturer, who thus justifies his act? Are there no limits to empathy? Are there not times when condemnation should be pronounced, even if the cost could be the cessation of immediate protection of the victims?

Recent experiences have shown the ICRC that a combination of firmness as regards principles and a dogged persistence at dialogue gives reason for hope: its delegates have gained access to prisoners in circumstances where objectively they should have been declared *personae non gratae*. There is no “miracle solution”, but a firm, calm, open, discreet and patient approach which, if it is used by men of quality, supported by an organization on which they can rely, has led and should lead to an at least partial answer to ideological fanaticism and sectarianism, an answer consisting of a well-understood and therefore acceptable humanitarian action. We would like to believe that this will continue to be possible.

**5) On the quality of the personnel and its importance for those who are neither rich nor powerful**

We could parody, “How many divisions are there in the ICRC’s army?”

What arguments does an ICRC delegate use with a Minister of the Interior to whom he has asked for access to political detainees? And, if he obtains it, how will he convince the director of a prison, thirty years his senior and on the job for twenty-five years, that improvements should be made in the detention conditions of his “clients”?

The qualities demanded of an ICRC delegate are so numerous that we cannot expect anyone to have them all:

— In the field of knowledge, apart from a sound basic education, the delegate must be thoroughly acquainted with humanitarian law and the

doctrine of the ICRC (as regards the latter, in such varied spheres as the taking of hostages, political detention, capital punishment, the emblems of the movement, the Red Cross and peace, etc.), not to mention the criteria concerning the distribution of relief, the techniques of visiting prisons, how to fill in prisoners' cards, the art of writing up pertinent notes and, naturally, a good knowledge of languages.

— As regards personality, he must, as we have seen, possess exceptional empathy, firmness, patience, perseverance, self-control, open-mindedness, intellectual curiosity, detachment, objectivity, impartiality, discernment, a sense of observation, etc., not forgetting a sense of humour... and, of course, modesty!

— Concerning availability, he must be ready to leave within twenty-four hours, be willing not to count his time and be mentally free to devote himself entirely to his mission.

The *third great challenge* of the future for the ICRC is, therefore, to know how to attract such people, train and keep them, and perhaps eventually, help them transfer to a more harmonious personal future, where family commitments or the wear and tear of field work make a change of life necessary. This implies searching "all over the place" (as quality emerges from quantity), systematic and correct individual assessments, severe and continuous selection. It implies also adequate material compensation, since although a man may well live by ideals these will pay neither the butcher nor the dry-cleaner and if one wants top quality personnel one has to pay.

The whole of the ICRC, its administration, law, principles, the Committee itself, are of no use if the people representing them in the field are not up to the situation. Just as an arrow is only meaningful when it hits its target, thereby giving meaning to the bow and the archer, so the ICRC is only fully alive through its humanitarian work, at that special moment when a doctor is treating a victim or when a delegate is opening the door of a cell and shuts himself in alone with a detainee. For this kind of mission, one cannot use any kind of man to attain the end.

**6) On the disadvantages of being poor when there is no one else to do the job**

The ICRC's regular budget now comes to about 50 million Swiss francs per year, with 20 million provided by the Swiss Government

and the rest by some of the other States signatories of the Geneva Conventions, the National Societies and private donations.

When the author was a regional delegate in South America, in the 1970s, he was supposed to “cover” this half-continent, from Venezuela to Chile, on his own. A coup d’état occurred in one of the countries of “his” zone; it was possible to gain easy access to perhaps 500 political detainees, who could be visited regularly. With two delegates, we could cope with the situation. Another coup d’état occurred elsewhere in the zone; like firemen leaving a small fire for a larger one, we had to run to the second place. Three months later we returned to the first country... and found that torture had meanwhile been introduced there, not yet systematically, but very frequently.

Now, in order to work effectively, with necessary assistance in the field and in Geneva, including all the expenses of the mission and its personnel, a regional delegate costs the ICRC about 200,000 Swiss francs per year.

At this rate, can you tell us the “price” of torture?

In 1981, our successor in the same job had to leave his post in South America to head the ICRC delegation in Iran. Six months later the South American post is still vacant, for lack of suitable candidates.

In 1981, the ICRC was unable to reopen its regional delegations in Lome and New Delhi, which it had closed for financial reasons five years earlier. The ICRC would now be authorized to visit political detainees in at least a dozen countries, but cannot do so, for lack of men and resources. What makes this situation so dramatic is that no one else can help those whom the ICRC has had to abandon. Of course, Amnesty International helps... but from the outside. No other organization systematically visits detainees in their place of detention.

Mention must also be made of the enormous dissemination campaign that should be carried out to prepare the ground throughout the world, so that the ICRC’s humanitarian work be favourably received... if the time comes. To this we should add the cost of persuading States to really fulfil their obligation—to which they have pledged themselves—to teach the law of war to their armed forces.

And this is the *fourth great challenge* of the future for the ICRC: to find the means for a humanitarian policy equal to actual needs and to its tasks, in conformity with its Statutes and the Geneva Conventions:

- to protect and assist the victims of armed conflicts and political detainees,
- to disseminate the knowledge of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross,



— to contribute to the development of National Societies in the specific fields of the ICRC.

Such are the basic functions of the ICRC, but in order to carry them out efficiently, and even then not in an ideal manner, we should need almost twice the means, in men and money, that we have now.

We believe that the ICRC must find these means within the next twelve years or so if it wants to carry out successfully what it alone can do, no more, no less.

But this growth must be planned and directed wisely, for delegates cannot be trained hastily and care must be taken not to lose the spirit of the organization by forcing the growth. Furthermore: if, during the process, it should be felt that the spirit was becoming lost, the expansion should be halted, so as not to let any more of the previous substance escape, as nothing would be worse than a large ICRC, full of . . . emptiness.

**7) On the necessity to contribute to peace—and on the difficulty of doing so without entering the political arena**

The ICRC, by virtue of its tradition and the Statutes of the International Red Cross, is the guardian of the principles of the Red Cross.

Whoever has lived through an International Conference (taking part in which, it may be recalled, are governments parties to the Geneva Conventions, recognized National Societies, their federation, the League of Red Cross Societies and the ICRC), will easily understand the importance of this meeting and the need for it. For those who have not had this experience, it will be sufficient if they read attentively the first four fundamental principles of the Red Cross to be able to imagine how difficult the task is:

*HUMANITY: The Red Cross, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours—in its international and national capacity—to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.*

*IMPARTIALITY: It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours only to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.*

**NEUTRALITY:** *In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.*

**INDEPENDENCE:** *The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles.*

We may add to this reminder article 2, paragraph 5, of the Statutes of the International Red Cross, which states that the International Conference “may not deal with political matters nor serve as a forum for political debate”, and the extent of the problem will be understood.

And yet, in spite of East-West tensions, in spite of North-South controversies, in spite of the declarations of certain governments or National Societies, the broad outline of these principles has been respected. And if this has been so, it is not only because the ICRC has devoted itself to this with unflagging single-mindedness, but also because it has been helped by the great majority in the Red Cross movement and by many governments. Had it failed, that would have been the end of the Red Cross, for if political gangrene attacked this body, still basically healthy, it would drain it of its substance or oblige it to accept amputation, i.e. to put an end to its universality—its basic strength.

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In defending the fundamental principles, there is a domain in which the ICRC's task is as difficult as it is essential, and that is the contribution of the Red Cross movement to the promotion of peace in the world. And this is the *fifth great challenge* of the future for the ICRC.

There are basically two trends of thought within the movement on this matter.

One of these believes that for the Red Cross to be up to date it must take an active interest in all the major problems of our time and try to contribute to their solution. The other fears that if the Red Cross follows this line of action, it will become enmeshed in political tangles and its humanitarian work will be paralyzed.

In our opinion, between these two schools of thought lie many non-issues, frequent misunderstandings and accusations of malicious intent. All these arise perhaps from problems of terminology; we have indeed seen that the mere use of the word “peace” occasions the same reaction

of distrust among some interlocutors as the use of "human rights" among others. . . usually not the same interlocutors !

Furthermore, people—depending on personal or national circumstances—have each their priority concerns: one thinks he has good cause to fear his country may be attacked by another, a second is afraid more particularly of an imbalance of nuclear and traditional forces, a third is deeply seared in his soul by the torture to which his comrades have been subjected, and a fourth considers racial discrimination as an affront to his personal dignity.

"And that's how", some people will tell us, "the Red Cross is led down step by step to take a political stand and its action is bogged down." "But," others will retort, "how do you expect the Red Cross to be credible—and thus effective—if, in this day and age, it takes no account of these basic problems?"

To clarify these conceptual differences we must revert to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross. We have seen that the principle of neutrality states that: "In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature."

This does not mean, however, that the Red Cross is unconcerned by problems of excessive armament, torture, aggression or racial discrimination but rather emphasizes that it must show an interest without siding with one government or another so as to "continue to enjoy the confidence of all".

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It should be mentioned that these basic concepts were fully appreciated in the Programme of Action for Peace, since it is emphasized therein that no condemnations pronounced by the Red Cross or its members may refer to a specific situation. On the other hand it was agreed that the Red Cross might make a general condemnation of certain evils. Nevertheless, condemnation must clearly be used wisely and cautiously, even if it only refers to general evils.

Indeed, the principal aim of the Red Cross is to give aid and not to blame. Is the task of maintaining peace throughout the world not that of the United Nations? Is it by condemnation that the Red Cross will make its most useful contribution to peace or is it in dealing with conflict victims, natural disasters or under-development? Above all, could it do both for long? If it were to become involved in activities

outside its particular field of work, would it not run the risk of gradually losing its effectiveness and possibilities of action in areas where it is the only operative body?

Having said this, it cannot be denied that the Red Cross, by its very existence, its universality, its open-minded attitude to all trends, the limits it has set itself, the international fraternity and solidarity it embodies, the alleviation of suffering it brings about in the very heart of warfare and the lessening of tension which is a consequence of its humanitarian work, contributes to the spirit of peace in the world. And we must not just simply be aware of it, but aim at this target consciously and systematically.

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The problem of the "Red Cross and Peace" includes a particularly difficult specific question, the attitude of the Red Cross to excessive world armament; if the Red Cross' field of possible action as regards peace is limited, it is even more so as regards disarmament.

In his inaugural address to the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference, in Manila, in 1981 (published in the January-February 1982 issue of the *International Review of the Red Cross*), the ICRC President summarized this problem as follows:

*"Since the beginning of its history, the ICRC has believed that Red Cross work for the victims of conflicts goes further than the immediate aim of alleviating suffering: it is also to make a contribution towards peace. The first step toward lasting peace is disarmament, and the ICRC considers that the Red Cross movement cannot hold itself aloof from the humanitarian problems raised by the armaments race."*

The ICRC President acknowledged that it is not enough to state one's deep distress in the face of such a predicament, but that if the ICRC and the Red Cross have not been able to do more, it is because two major obstacles block the way. Firstly, he noted that the Red Cross does not have the highly qualified technical experts whose opinions would enable it to intervene validly in the debates on disarmament. Secondly, to be effective, Red Cross intervention would have to go beyond the stage of general exhortations and propose practical procedures able to bring about disarmament. In doing this, however, it would enter the political field and would thus deviate from its fundamental principles and, even more serious, it would run the risk of shattering its unity, the

backbone of its strength. "How could the Red Cross pay such a price, and then, perhaps, get nothing for it?" the President asked.

This being considered, we can but simply refuse to be the passive witnesses of the monstrous armament race in the world, he said. Every avenue should be explored to find a way for the Red Cross movement to take a more active part in the cause of disarmament while still remaining true to its principles, and it would be unpardonable if it were to fail solely because of lack of will and imagination. Even if we were forced to conclude that the Red Cross must be limited to exhorting the States to put an end to their mad armament race, the movement must continue to do at least this.

*"The ICRC is ready and is open", the President concluded, "to any request that the Powers might make, if they can agree together that we could contribute, no matter how modestly, to genuine progress in disarmament."*

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We might add to this that the Red Cross movement is aware that the general problem of disarmament includes the more specific problem of weapons of mass destruction, be they chemical, bacteriological or atomic. In fact, humanitarian law, whose very nature and history are intimately linked with those of the Red Cross, is based on the distinction between combatants and non-combatants; yet, the characteristic of any weapon of mass destruction is that it is incapable of making this distinction. As early as 1918, the ICRC had raised its voice against the use of poisonous gas, which could not be directed against a specific target and whose effects were indiscriminate. In the same spirit, it supported the efforts which brought about the adoption of the 1925 Protocol on gases. On 5 September 1945, less than a month after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it publically voiced its alarm and, in 1948, it induced the Seventeenth International Red Cross Conference to entreat States to ban "non-directed weapons which cannot be aimed with precision or which devastate large areas indiscriminately" and "the use, for the purposes of war, of atomic energy or any other similar force".

The evolution of matters since 1948 has certainly not relieved the anxiety of the ICRC in any way but, more than ever, it must make sure that its interventions are likely to contribute effectively to peace and will not be used for political ends.

This challenge, therefore, is extremely difficult: on the one hand, we must always bear in mind that the fundamental nature of the Red Cross

is, above all, to alleviate the sufferings caused by conflicts and, on the other, we must not forget that there exists a dynamics of peace to which the Red Cross can and must contribute decisively and actively.

**8) A non-exhaustive inventory of some of the remaining problems to be solved**

The problems which the future holds for the ICRC are still, of course, numerous and it is obviously arbitrary to restrict them to five "challenges". Some of these problems may perhaps never arise (at least let us hope so), yet it would be better to have studied them thoroughly lest they take us unawares. We are thinking in particular of the ICRC's role in a possible world conflict, a nuclear conflagration or "merely" an isolated act of nuclear terrorism. Other questions, which have not been mentioned, make up the daily routine of the ICRC, such as the crumbling of power or anarchy experienced by some of its interlocutors, or the new forms taken by the world's refugee problem.

The ICRC must also continue to reflect on the international humanitarian law of the future, which should not become like certain generals . . . always one war behind. We must think today of the law which will protect the victims of tomorrow, but remember that, in this matter, the ICRC proposes . . . and the States dispose.

Finally, in thinking of the future of the ICRC, there is another question we should ask ourselves, that of its field of action. Until now, the ICRC has drawn its strength, not only from the victims in whose name it speaks and from the principles which underpin its work, but also from the limits which it has set to its range of activities and preoccupations.

Until now, for example, it is *because* it has not requested the release of political detainees that it has been able to improve their conditions of detention; it is *because* it has refused to condemn the aggressor that it has been able to visit prisoners of war; it is *because* it has abstained from taking sides in political controversies that it has been able to extol a spirit of peace credibly; it is *because* it has waited until all parties requested it to intervene that it has sometimes been able to be of service in the taking of hostages; it is *because* it has not given its opinion on the political status of opposing forces that it has been accepted by "rebels" and likewise the "legal" power; it is *because* it has not published its reports of visits to prisons that it has been able to continue making these visits.

Must we conclude that it is because it will know how to limit its choice of those it assists and protects that it will be able to continue doing

so validly? Or rather should it envisage abandoning its specific role of neutral and independent intermediary, and even act in situations other than conflicts; which first gave it its reason for being: international conflicts, civil wars, internal disorders and tensions?

At present, even in these situations, it only endeavours to protect victims when no other organization can do so better; if others can act more effectively, it withdraws, unless its presence is necessary to carry out some other action which it alone could accomplish. Should it revise this policy?

As we have said, even within these limits, the ICRC does not have the means to undertake all the tasks which it alone can do. We therefore believe that, at this stage, it should first try and acquire the means to accomplish more fully the tasks which are universally recognized as its special function before contemplating new activities which might be challenged.

We do not wish to close the door on a different future and should the international community request the ICRC to extend its work further, or even should its own conscience require this, it might have to reconsider its role; but today, as far as the eye can see, we believe that it should not depart from the role assigned to it by history and law.

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