

## BOOKS AND REVIEWS

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### VOLUNTARY SERVICE BY THE RED CROSS IN PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

The activities by the Red Cross, within the National Red Cross Societies, rely to a great extent on voluntary work. One of the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross specifically states that the Red Cross "is a voluntary relief organization not prompted in any manner by desire for gain". Nevertheless the concept of voluntary service is neither universally understood nor uniformly applied.

Several successive Red Cross Conferences have placed the examination of this matter on their agendas, namely: the Third Balkans Conference in Athens in 1979 (in its September-October 1979 issue the *Review* published three papers which had been read at that meeting), the Third European Conference, in Budapest, in 1981 and the Twenty-fourth International Conference, in Manila, in November 1981. These Conferences put forward proposals or adopted resolutions asking the Henry Dunant Institute to undertake an overall study of the concept of voluntary service. The work which has just been published by the Institute, under the signature of its Director, Mr. Jacques Meurant, is the outcome of an inquiry conducted amongst a large number of National Societies.

This study endeavours to show the various types of voluntary service within the context of the activities of the Red Cross and to analyse them in the light of the experience of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the international Red Cross institutions. The book also tries to examine the role of the Red Cross voluntary service within the various kinds of societies and civilizations known to us today and see whether it is able to renew itself and adapt to changing requirements in the industrialized countries and the developing countries.

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<sup>1</sup> *Le service volontaire de la Croix-Rouge dans la société d'aujourd'hui* by Jacques Meurant. Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1984, 202 pages. In French; editions in other languages will appear shortly.

Moreover, over the last twenty years, close consideration has been given not only in the Red Cross itself but in other and widely varying circles as well, to the different ways in which the individual person and citizen takes an active part in the life of his village or city. Attention has also been given to participation by entire groups of populations in improving their living standards within a community or region. To sketch a general picture of the Red Cross volunteer workers and describe the various kinds of work they do is, after all, to examine the extent to which the Red Cross reflects and responds to this need to take part in those structures and in those programmes.

The study goes one step further: it attempts to gain a better understanding of the voluntary workers actively involved in Red Cross service and of what they are doing; it strives to identify their place within the National Societies and to examine their situation relative to the regular paid staff of the Red Cross.

Thus the book reaches concrete conclusions in that it puts forward a number of suggestions to the National Societies for dealing with special difficulties in recruiting and organizing their volunteer workers; it suggests methods as to how they should be trained and guided with a view to optimizing voluntary services. Furthermore, the National Societies are today witnessing changes in the motivations and needs of their volunteer workers and these changes inevitably give rise to the question of the kind of recompense or remuneration they receive in exchange for their commitment and services. This study of the concept of voluntary service aims to make recommendations or set out guidelines for National Societies concerning voluntary work in order to adapt the role and future action of the Red Cross to a modern world which is undergoing profound changes.

In brief, the study published by the Henry Dunant Institute should permit of a clearer definition of voluntary work carried out within the Red Cross, its evolution, its inherent value and its scope. As in the case of other private and non-governmental organizations, for the Red Cross too the principle of voluntary service is a crucial issue. The future of the Red Cross, if not indeed (as some people believe) its very survival, depends on it.

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