

A memorial service was held on 30 August in St. Peter's Cathedral in Geneva. A large congregation, including the members of the ICRC Assembly and Executive Board and many of the staff, representatives of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their federation, the League, and representatives of the Swiss federal and cantonal authorities, attended the service and heard the moving tribute paid to his predecessor by ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga. The *Review* would like to share this tribute with its readers.

*The Review*

## **Tribute to Alexandre Hay**

*Alexandre Hay bore the last few months of his illness, which he knew was extremely grave, with lucidity and fortitude. He had full confidence in his doctors but as a deeply religious man he knew that, while our duty as human beings is to strive for success in what we do, the final word lies with the Creator. He never made a show of his religious conviction, but at the hour of reckoning did not hesitate to affirm his unreserved submission to God's will.*

*Mr. Hay and his family remained confident right up to 23 August, and we all shared their confidence, hoping against hope. Alas, our hopes were in vain and we had to face grim reality. Everyone at the ICRC and all his friends in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement were deeply shocked and saddened, sharing the pain felt by his family and particularly by Mrs. Hay, who had surrounded her husband with loving care from the onset of his illness.*

*In the days that followed we slowly began to measure our loss. Alexandre Hay, with his warm and generous personality, is no longer with us. Little by little, however, grief is giving way to thoughts about the course his life had taken, about all he gave us and the Red Cross as a whole, and about all he did to alleviate the suffering of so many victims of conflict throughout the world.*

*We recall things we already knew, but which we now perceive with renewed admiration. How could this artistically gifted man move with so much ease, and without sacrificing any of his inclinations or basic convictions, from law to diplomacy, from diplomacy to finance, and*

from finance to humanitarian work, achieving the most outstanding results of his career through his dedication to the Red Cross mission?

It would be wrong to say that he had his “secret”, because although a man of considerable discretion Alexandre Hay was never secretive. He was loved and respected by all, and whatever he did was done in the firm belief that everyone around him, both within and outside the ICRC and at all levels of the hierarchy, was a fellow individual and that all staff members had a mission to fulfil and should join forces to serve others. One of his great natural gifts was his sense of service, founded on consideration for others and prompted by an acute sense of justice and a discreet but deep feeling of charity.

Mr. Hay’s awareness of his responsibilities as President was coupled with the intimate conviction that his primary duty was to serve — to serve everyone. His first concern was to listen to those around him, as if better understanding were the key to providing better service. He rarely voiced an opinion until he had heard what others had to say, and when he did so, he spoke in simple and measured terms, preferring a quiet statement of facts to flights of rhetoric. Everyone knew that his words were prompted by sound judgement and consequently they always rang true. Indeed, he had a natural authority which made him an effective and exceptional leader of men.

Alexandre Hay’s discretion, sense of service, respect for others and simple and direct language made him a perfect “Red Cross person”. His statements always included a reference to the fundamental principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality, and they became the basic tenets of his daily existence. He came to the ICRC after many years with the Swiss National Bank in Bern, and adjusted remarkably quickly to the requirements of the humanitarian mission, maintaining the independence he had so successfully achieved at the Bank. He enjoyed the art of humanitarian negotiation and knew how to capture his audience’s attention and win the confidence of his counterparts at the highest level, whether in government, international organizations or opposition groups of all sorts. *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* might have been his motto.

His thoughts, beyond any legal, diplomatic or political considerations, were always directed to the ultimate objective of the Red Cross, handed down by its founders — humanity. And if, in the heat of action, one of his colleagues appeared to forget that fundamental principle, President Hay always gently but firmly brought him back onto the right track. Although he was faced daily with poverty, despair and the cruelty of war, Alexandre Hay drew strength and serenity

from his profoundly humanistic and humanitarian beliefs and an optimism that naturally spread to all those around him.

President Hay's skill in humanitarian negotiation opened many doors to the ICRC. His primary concern was to gain access to the victims of conflict, to all those entitled to receive protection and assistance from ICRC delegates. But negotiations are also called for in financial matters. His talent as a financier and organizer and the personal relations built up over years of economic and monetary diplomacy had well prepared him for the task. His insistence on strict control over the institution's finances, his generosity of spirit and persuasiveness made him a staunch defender of the ICRC's financial interests vis-à-vis States, National Societies, governmental organizations, NGOs and private donors. Thanks to the remarkable results he achieved, ICRC activities saw a considerable expansion in a world that had an ever-growing need for a neutral humanitarian intermediary.

Development, dissemination and implementation of international humanitarian law were also among President Hay's major preoccupations. He was convinced that the ICRC's operational expansion should not take precedence over the institution's historical and moral responsibilities and treaty obligations with regard to the law. In legal as well as financial matters he maintained a policy of openness and mutual trust with the Swiss Federal Council, Parliament and Administration in Bern. I myself was working in the Swiss capital at the time and on many occasions remarked the high esteem in which he was held, in recognition of his courage in rising to the great humanitarian challenges of our time.

In his speeches and lectures he always came back to the same idea of a humanitarian mobilization based on the Red Cross principles. The spirit of Geneva pervaded the life of this true citizen of Geneva, proud to be at the head of the venerable institution to which his city had given birth.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its unity was one the great causes embraced by President Hay up to the very end of his life. He constantly sought dialogue with his colleagues at the League and in the National Societies. He was concerned about certain problems of communication, feared politicization of the Red Cross world and insisted that within the dynamics of the Movement's development the ICRC must maintain its role as a specifically neutral institution discharging its own special mandate with the support and cooperation of the National Societies. His firm stand on matters pertaining to the Movement's unity, his commitment to upholding the

*Fundamental Red Cross and Red Crescent Principles, the interest he took in the development of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, practically all of which he had visited in person, his profound belief in the principle of voluntary service and his sensitive approach to women's issues within Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations earned him the respect and admiration — and often the friendship — of those he met throughout the Movement.*

*The presence here today of so many distinguished personalities from the Red Cross world bears witness to the high regard in which President Hay was held by all. The messages of sympathy that have poured in from colleagues and friends the world over testify to the resounding success of President Hay's tireless work in behalf of the ICRC and its humanitarian goals and pay tribute to his achievements in the service of the noble objectives of peace and justice, which he pursued with such remarkable determination, wisdom and efficiency.*

*True to the motto per humanitatem ad pacem, after stepping down from the Presidency Alexandre Hay centred his efforts on the promotion of peace. When I took over from him in May 1987 and he addressed the ICRC Assembly in his capacity as Chairman of the Commission on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Peace, he stressed that he intended the Commission's work to focus on the action to be taken among young people and in the area of information so as to enhance public awareness of the Red Cross's contribution to peace. The next logical step for him was to assume the presidency of the World Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War. This was his last effective contribution to Red Cross work. Despite very poor health, he attended the concert held on 8 May in the Avenue de la Paix and was thus able to see this major undertaking through to the end.*

*Alexandre Hay was not only a man of action but also an extremely sensitive and kind-hearted person. He did not sit in judgment on others or tell anyone what to do. But what he did and what he was served as a wonderful example of courage, humanity, trust and loyalty to an ideal of human compassion. When such a charismatic figure passes away, whatever his age, it is always too soon for those who remain.*

*The grief felt by his wife and family is shared by everyone who knew Alexandre Hay and by all those who aspire to greater justice and respect for human rights. The entire Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the ICRC in particular, the institution's current and former staff members and I myself — who enjoyed his support and*

*invaluable counsel when I succeeded him as President — owe Mr. Hay an immense debt of gratitude.*

*The city of Geneva and all Switzerland, the entire international community and victims of conflict throughout the world join with us in expressing our admiration for this great servant of humanity. The memory of his extraordinary personality will live on with us always.*

**Cornelio Sommaruga**  
*President*  
*International Committee*  
*of the Red Cross*

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