

GUIDELINES FOR THE '90s

1. Definition

Dissemination is the spreading of knowledge of international humanitarian law (IHL) and of the Fundamental Principles and ideals of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement so that they may be understood, accepted and respected; it is also intended to facilitate humanitarian work.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 Through a knowledge of and respect for IHL, *to limit the suffering* caused by armed conflicts and by situations of disturbances and tension.
- 2.2 To ensure that humanitarian activities are carried out in *safe conditions* and in particular that Red Cross/Red Crescent staff are respected so that effective assistance can be provided to the victims.
- 2.3 To strengthen *the Movement's identity and image*, to enhance its unity through promoting knowledge and understanding of its principles, history, structures and activities.
- 2.4 To help propagate a *spirit of peace*.

3. Recommendations

WHAT?

- 3.1 The *subject matter* for dissemination comprises two main topics:
 - (a) IHL, in particular the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and their two 1977 Additional Protocols;
 - (b) The Fundamental Principles, the Movement's ideals, its activities and its historical background.

- In certain cases, it may be useful to link the dissemination of IHL with that of other branches of law, such as human rights or refugee law.
- The choice of dissemination material and the degree of detail appropriate depend on the objective, the audience and the social and cultural context:
 - IHL — or the law of armed conflicts or the law of war — is in general the primary topic for dissemination among the military, in government circles and in universities;
 - dissemination programmes for National Societies and young people should focus on the Fundamental Principles and the RC ideals and on the general principles of IHL;
 - since the role of journalists is to inform, they are especially interested in humanitarian work and in facts concerning ongoing operations and the application of IHL.
- In countries which are not yet bound by certain IHL treaties, in particular the 1977 Additional Protocols, one of the primary objectives of dissemination must be to persuade the States concerned to ratify or accede to those treaties.
- Comments and examples relevant to each specific culture or society should be added for the sake of effectiveness, with due regard for the universal nature of IHL and the Fundamental Principles.

BY WHOM?

- 3.2 By virtue of IHL and the Statutes of the Movement, *dissemination* is primarily the responsibility of:
- The military and civilian *authorities*, whose task is to implement IHL treaties;
 - All the *National Societies*, which must provide training for their own members and encourage, assist and, when necessary, stand in for the State authorities;
 - The *ICRC*, whose mandate includes upholding the Fundamental Principles and promoting and developing IHL, and which has the primary responsibility for dissemination at the international level;
 - The *Federation*, which assists the ICRC in promoting and developing IHL and cooperates with it in disseminating both this body of law and the Fundamental Principles amongst the National Societies.

Over and above those special responsibilities, all persons and organizations concerned have a moral — and in some cases a legal — responsibility to promote the essentials of IHL according to their means, circumstances and mandates.

FOR WHOM?

3.3 In 1986, eight main *target groups* were identified, namely:

- *The armed forces*
- *National Societies*
- *Government circles*
- *Universities*
- *Schools*
- *Medical circles*
- *The mass media*
- *The general public.*

This list is still valid, but it is necessary to narrow it down to the groups that the Movement should preferably focus on over the next few years, namely:

- The *armed forces* and other *authorities* responsible for applying IHL;
 - National Society leaders, staff and *volunteers*;
 - *Young people* and *teachers*.
- The attention to be devoted to other target groups must be determined at the national and local levels according to short- and long-term humanitarian requirements and resources that are already available or can be mobilized.
 - The *media* will always constitute a priority in terms of the Movement's public relations activities, considering their impact on the public at large and their role in enhancing the image of the Movement and its components.
 - Target groups that are not listed above but may become a priority depending on the circumstances are, for example, governmental and non-governmental organizations and certain categories of victims.
 - Training National Society staff and volunteers requires considerable and persistent effort if National Societies are to remain or become effective participants in the Movement's overall dissemination programme and

useful partners of the ICRC or the Federation, possibly even of government authorities, in seeing it through.

- In many countries National Society dissemination projects must focus primarily on young people and teachers.

HOW?

- 3.4 The golden rule is to use the means of communication and teaching methods and aids best suited to a particular cultural environment and level of knowledge and the resources available.
- Each National Society, on its own or in cooperation with the authorities concerned, should first of all assess the needs and resources required and then draw up a plan of action which should be dynamic but remain realistic.
 - Dissemination as an end in itself is not productive. It must be related to and/or reflect other community-oriented activities carried out by the National Societies.
 - The objective of setting up or strengthening dissemination activities or units within each National Society must be maintained.
 - The complementarity of dissemination, information and public relations objectives and activities must be taken into account and strengthened.
 - Since resources are always limited, emphasis should be placed on training other disseminators and instructors.
 - Voluntary support and cooperation should be sought from experts such as lawyers, officers, teachers and public relations specialists.
 - With help from the Federation, the ICRC must continue to produce and supply material and devise methods that can be used in most countries.
 - Priority should be given to the most suitable methods and means of developing local initiatives and projects.
 - Financial, technical or educational considerations are undoubtedly major aspects of dissemination work, but sensitivity, imagination, creativity and dedication are by far its most important components.