

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

ICRC'S SOLEMN APPEAL TO ALL PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

On 13 August, the International Committee of the Red Cross appealed to the belligerents — Serbs, Croats and Muslims alike — urgently calling on them to respect international humanitarian law. The text of the appeal is given below.

“Following the visits its delegates have conducted during the last few days to places of detention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is evident to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that innocent civilians are being arrested and subjected to inhumane treatment. Moreover, the detention of such persons is part of a policy of forced population transfers carried out on a massive scale and marked by the systematic use of brutality. Among the long list of methods used are harassment, murder, confiscation of property, deportation and the taking of hostages — which reduces individuals to the level of bargaining counters — all in violation of international humanitarian law.

With regard to living conditions in these places of detention, it is imperative that urgent measures be taken to guarantee the physical and moral integrity of the detainees in accordance with the provisions of the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions, which must be observed in their entirety.

ICRC delegates have had only limited access to the republic's various regions and, despite repeated approaches made in this respect, they have still not received comprehensive lists of places of detention controlled by the various parties to the conflict or been notified of persons captured, and are thus unable to bring help to all the victims. The ICRC has had access to only a very limited number of prisoners of war, while the places of detention are crowded with innocent and terrified civilians.

The ICRC wishes to draw attention once again to the fact that the parties to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina bear full responsibility for all acts committed by their respective combatants.

After several weeks of intense activity in the field and in places of detention in an attempt to protect and come to the aid of the victims of this conflict, the ICRC notes that the parties to the conflict are not complying with

the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, despite their commitment in this respect.

In these circumstances, and especially in view of the pressing need to clarify the situation in all places of detention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ICRC hereby solemnly appeals to all parties concerned to:

- (a) put into effect their commitment to comply with international humanitarian law, in particular the *Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions*;
- (b) instruct all combatants in the field to respect captured persons, civilians, medical establishments, private and public places, and the Red Cross emblem;
- (c) refrain from carrying out forced transfers and taking other illegal measures against the civilian population;
- (d) take immediate steps to improve living conditions in all places of detention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in accordance with the recommendations made in respect of places already visited by the ICRC;
- (e) notify the ICRC immediately of all places of detention in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and supply accurate lists of all persons held in such places;
- (f) take the action necessary to ensure that ICRC delegates can work effectively and rapidly in adequate conditions of security.

The ICRC earnestly hopes that implementation of the above measures by all parties to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina will at last enable it to bring protection and assistance to all victims of the conflict, in line with its humanitarian mandate. The entire community of States party to the Geneva Conventions bears a collective responsibility in this regard, having undertaken not only to respect but also to ensure respect for those Conventions in all circumstances".
