

# The 125th Anniversary of the *International Review of the Red Cross*

## A FAITHFUL RECORD

### III. THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT: SOLIDARITY AND UNITY

by **Jacques Meurant**

The spirit of solidarity in suffering is one of the foundations of the Red Cross.

Jean-Georges Lossier\*

Help for all means a universal Red Cross.  
A universal Red Cross means a united Red Cross.

Walter Bargatzky\*\*

Activities to protect and assist the victims of armed conflict and the development and implementation of international humanitarian law have been important topics for the *Review* since it first appeared.<sup>1</sup> This is only

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\* Jean-Georges Lossier, *Solidarité — Signification morale de la Croix-Rouge*, A la Baconnière, Neuchâtel, 1948, p. 83.

\*\* "Red Cross unity in the world", *International Review of the Red Cross (IRRC)*, No. 163, October 1974, p. 526.

<sup>1</sup> The first two parts of this article, "I: Protection and assistance" and "II: Victories of the law" were published in the *IRRC*, No. 303, November-December 1994, pp. 532-541, and No. 306, May-June 1995, pp. 302-306, respectively.

natural, bearing in mind the mandate of the ICRC, of which the *Review* is the official publication.

The *Review* has provided a record of the mission and the national and international activities of the Movement's various components, which have developed in highly diverse areas over the past 125 years in both war and peace, and thus traces the evolution of what is often referred to as "Red Cross solidarity".

The *Review* also reflects the different stages in the history of the institutions which make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; it presents a broad variety of observations, opinions and information on their mandates, and on the structure and principles that have gradually forged the Movement's inner unity.

It is interesting to examine how the Movement has worked to create unity through solidarity. The content of the *Review* over the past 25 years will help us do this by providing examples from the recent and the not-so-recent past.

## **Solidarity**

### **1. The origins of solidarity**

The relief societies set up from 1863 were motivated essentially by a spirit of charity that prompted their activities to assist wounded and sick soldiers on the battlefield; but perhaps at that point they were not aware of being bound by a pact, or of sharing mutual responsibilities.

Indeed, one might wonder how these few fledgling relief societies could have undertaken joint action or pledged mutual assistance when the prevalent trends of the times, political and economic nationalism in particular, tended to confine them within the national territory of countries that were poised to tear each other apart.

Although the concept of international solidarity was not among the European States' concerns in the 1860s, it was present in the counterforces that developed in the latter half of the century — pacifist associations, philanthropic movements and church organizations — all of which formed powerful lobbies that pressed their governments to place the national interest second to the notion of a higher interest, that of humanity as a whole.

Heirs of the Geneva tradition of philanthropy, Henry Dunant and his fellow-founders of the Red Cross shared these ideas. Dunant thought that,

beyond their wartime mission, the relief societies could render valuable services in the event of epidemics, floods, fire disasters, and so on.

Like Dunant, Gustave Moynier had a vision of what the Red Cross could be, and what it could offer to the world. It was clear to him that the Red Cross could become a universal movement, because he was confident that it would continue to expand geographically and develop quite naturally along with the social progress from which it emanated. But, in his view, this development would have to be a gradual process demanding a great deal of patience, for the underlying structure of the Red Cross was still fragile.

The first step, in accordance with the recommendations of the 1863 Conference, was to promote contacts among the Central Committees, so that they could exchange experiences and agree on measures to be taken in the interest of their cause. With this in mind, the Second International Conference of the Red Cross, held in Berlin in April 1869, felt it essential to set up a journal to "put the Central Committees of different countries in touch with each other and bring to their attention the facts, both official and otherwise, that they need to know".<sup>2</sup>

The founding of the *Bulletin international des Sociétés de secours* was a key event, because it created a permanent link among the relief societies and between those societies and the Committee in Geneva. Moynier, who was the *Bulletin's* first editor, used it freely to express his views. In the foreword to the first issue, which was published in 1869, the Committee set out to justify the creation and the mandate of the relief societies, "whose network extends to Asia and America".<sup>3</sup> It highlighted the fact that the Societies were permanent structures, even in peacetime, and pointed out that new developments since 1864 had given them an international mission and a "declared intention to provide mutual assistance and to help all individuals in distress who are within their reach, with no distinction between friend and foe".<sup>4</sup>

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 doubtless offers the first example of "Red Cross solidarity" because of the involvement of a number of societies from third-party countries. In spite of the prejudice and rancour shown by the parties to the conflict, the Committee observed

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<sup>2</sup> "Publication d'un Bulletin international", *Bulletin international des Sociétés de secours* (hereinafter referred to as "the *Bulletin*"), No. 1, October 1869, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "Avant propos", p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

that "the relief societies have rendered immense service in the midst of great calamity (...) No other war in Europe has ever offered the spectacle of such a deployment of charitable activities. In the war of 1866, this movement barely crossed the borders of the belligerent States, whereas this year it seems as if the entire world was moved to cooperate in tending to the wounded. Solidarity among peoples, although belied by a struggle between two races bent on mutual destruction, was also gloriously affirmed by the neutral countries' sensitivity to the cries of the wounded and the dying".<sup>5</sup>

Gustave Moynier took pride in the trust which the Red Cross Societies had earned during this war, for it guaranteed its independence; but he was nevertheless aware of shortcomings. For example, he believed that despite the autonomy which each Central Committee enjoyed, they still had to establish themselves "in harmony with the spirit, the needs and the customs of the country which [they represent]".<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the relief societies had demonstrated uneven levels of development and were in danger of collapsing unless they constantly sought to improve their services. He wondered how to incite a healthy rivalry among them and to urge them to progress and "overcome the resistance that apathy or lack of planning has, in many places, set in the path of Red Cross expansion".<sup>7</sup>

Moynier thought that solidarity was the spur that would encourage the societies to help each other and to develop: "if the societies all made an express pledge of mutual assistance, each one would be stimulated by a sense of responsibility (...) They would strive to do better, and the commitments they made would give them an irresistible impetus, without in any way jeopardizing their autonomy".<sup>8</sup>

More than a spur, solidarity stands alongside centralization, planning and mutual assistance as one of the rules of conduct which the societies undertook to observe.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Les Sociétés de secours pendant la guerre de 1870", *Bulletin*, No. 5, October 1870, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Les dix premières années de la Croix-Rouge", *Bulletin*, No. 16, July 1873, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup> Gustave Moynier, *La Croix-Rouge, son passé et son avenir*, Sandoz et Thuillier, Paris, 1882, pp. 239-240. In 1896, he wrote further that: "The purpose of proclaiming solidarity is not so that those who invoke it can use it to cushion their laziness, but on the contrary so that it will act on them as an energetic stimulant", *Notions essentielles sur la Croix-Rouge*, Georg, Geneva, 1896, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Gustave Moynier, *La Croix-Rouge, son passé et son avenir*, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>9</sup> Gustave Moynier, "Ce que c'est que la Croix-Rouge", *Bulletin*, No. 21, January 1875, pp. 1-8, at pp. 4, 5.

Until the time of his death, Moynier was the advocate of Red Cross solidarity and used the *Bulletin*, which was the “official general monitor” of the Red Cross,<sup>10</sup> as a vehicle for his ideas: “By publishing the *Bulletin*, we are permanently consolidating moral unity among all the Central Committees by writing about their common interests, and we are encouraging their progress through emulation, by initiating them in their work”.<sup>11</sup>

The emulation he spoke of occurred when it came to preparing the relief societies for action in wartime, and particularly to improving health services, medical equipment and staff training. The Third International Conference of the Red Cross (Geneva, 1884), examining the lessons to be learned from the experience of the Balkans conflict and the Russo-Turkish war, laid the groundwork for cooperation among relief societies in peacetime for the organization of transport convoys for the wounded, the recruitment and training of auxiliary medical staff, and the storage of relief supplies. The *Review* published many examples of the relief societies’ achievements in these respects, illustrating them with photographs, maps and drawings.

Hence, the 1870 war and subsequent conflicts at the turn of the century demonstrated the need for an understanding between the relief societies; this was a prelude to the growing awareness on the part of the Red Cross of its responsibilities on the international scene. Yet the Red Cross was still not recognized worldwide, and it had yet to acquire a sense of its responsibilities in peacetime as well as in war. It would take a World War with millions of casualties for the concept of solidarity to take hold in public opinion and for all peoples to consider the struggle against all forms of suffering as their concern. Only then would Red Cross solidarity truly become an international moral value.

## 2. Solidarity in action

The creation of the League of Red Cross Societies was a milestone, for it came in response to a desire to encourage and develop solidarity among the National Societies in time of peace so that they could harmonize their efforts to alleviate human suffering. The founding Societies, which had witnessed the terrible consequences of the First World War

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<sup>10</sup> Gustave Moynier, “Les dix premières années de la Croix-Rouge”, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> “Les journaux de l’œuvre”, *Bulletin*, No. 2, January 1870, p. 60.

and were aware of the National Societies' potential as a humanitarian force, were determined that they should work in peacetime within a federation representing both their ideals and their activities.

The first gestures of international solidarity came in the area of disaster relief, particularly in the efforts to combat the famine and epidemics that were ravaging Eastern Europe.

In the 1920s, the *Bulletin*, which was renamed the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge* in 1919, recorded the international activities carried out by the National Societies and the League, with cooperation from the ICRC. These activities included the 1919 typhus control campaign, the fight against famine in Russia from 1920 to 1924, and the relief operations for victims of earthquakes in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan and Persia.

From this time on, the coordination and development of disaster relief became one of the fundamental missions of the League, which was renamed the International Federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 1991. This was the spearhead of the activities conducted by the League, which had a longstanding reputation as being the organization most rapidly on the spot and with the highest performance in the field. From 1919 to 1967, the League responded to more than three hundred appeals for emergency relief around the world. This figure is an eloquent reminder of how the sense of solidarity is constantly sustained by misfortune.

The *Review* has reported on large-scale operations, such as those conducted in 1956 and 1957 for Hungarian refugees in Austria and Yugoslavia; between 1959 and 1962 for Algerian refugees in Tunisia and Morocco; and in 1962 when those refugees had to be repatriated to newly independent Algeria.

Red Cross solidarity also flourished between the two World Wars in the field of health, which had become an international as well as a national problem. The major objectives of the League and the National Societies were to control disease and improve the well-being of the population. This was the golden age of curative medicine, symbolized by the nurses whose praises were sung during the Great War.

The *Review* published many studies based on experience which sought to improve medical treatment or means of transport for the sick, and reported on proceedings of the International Commission set up to standardize medical equipment. It published highly technical articles on advances in medical treatment and supplies, ranging from a contribution

to research on an ideal antiseptic for impregnating military dressings<sup>12</sup> and a report on the standardization of stretcher straps.<sup>13</sup>

Without abandoning the curative aspect of their medical and social activities, the National Societies gradually shifted the emphasis to preventive measures, with first-aid programmes, mother and child care, home care and health education, and the more recent introduction of primary health care, all of which have provided a wealth of material for the *Review*.

### 3. Solidarity and development

Between 1948 and 1967, the National Societies grew in number from 65 to 106. The Movement enjoyed a spectacular expansion, owing mainly to the newly-won independence of many African, Asian and Caribbean countries. This created new responsibilities, for a new Society cannot simply be set up; it must still develop into a functional organization. In 1961, the League's Red Cross Development Programme was introduced for the purpose of organizing the National Societies as a force to provide relief and assistance to the population; a force that drew its strength from the participation of individuals whose activities were geared to the specific needs of each country.

As Henrik Beer, a former League Secretary General, wrote: "This new dynamic Red Cross must be carried forward on the impetus of new principles. It resolutely turns its back on paternalism, which has been superseded by fellowship and full team spirit. It is this which is the originality of the League's mission. At the same time, under the drive and impetus of a spirit of understanding and harmony, it has undertaken the challenging task of weaving a vast network of technical co-operation in the most widely varying fields".<sup>14</sup>

The *Review* provides readers with an overview of how the concept of development evolved within the Movement and of the successive strategies that were set up by its statutory bodies. National Society leaders, experts and practitioners have contributed articles expressing their views on the principles and methods of assistance which the richer National Societies adopt for the benefit of their less well-endowed sister Societies.

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<sup>12</sup> Professor L. Demolis and Dr Chausse, *Bulletin*, No. 311, July 1928, pp. 690-764.

<sup>13</sup> Colonel Chelwinski, M.D., *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, No. 117, September 1928, pp. 789-816.

<sup>14</sup> Henrik Beer, "The League of Red Cross Societies in the modern world", *IRRC*, No. 73, April 1967, p. 176.

The one-way flow of charity which characterized the period between the two World Wars gave way in the 1960s to the notion of multilateral assistance between “donor” (now called “participating”) National Societies and “beneficiary” (now called “operating”) National Societies. It was not until the 1980s that the Movement adopted the more healthy notion of true partnership and active participation of underprivileged communities in their own development, with internal support from volunteers among the local community and appropriate external support from sister Societies.

In recent years, the *Review* has featured special reports on development and cooperation; these show that it is a characteristic of solidarity to evolve under the pressure of events, whether new forms of violence or serious social problems.

In 1988, development was essentially a political concept: the National Societies, their federation and the ICRC had their own opinions on the matter, which could be interpreted in a number of ways depending on whether it was seen as the development of National Society structures and programmes or whether National Society activities were regarded as an integral part of social and economic development in their own countries. The debate on development also revealed differences between proponents of multilateralism and proponents of bilateralism.

What emerged from all this was an affirmation of the specific role played by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in the area of development, and of the need for the Movement to be able to rely on strong, independent National Societies capable of fulfilling their duties as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the event of conflict or natural disaster, and of promoting services for particularly vulnerable communities.<sup>15</sup>

In an extremely unstable international context marked by a dramatic disparity between needs and resources on the one hand, and by increasingly pronounced social divisions on the other, the concepts of development that were current in the 1970s and 1980s were called into question and strategies had to be adapted in order to give priority to the most vulnerable communities and to women, children, refugees, displaced persons and those living on the fringes of society, who bear the brunt of political, economic and social upheaval.

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<sup>15</sup> See the special feature entitled “Development and co-operation within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”, *IRRC*, No. 264, May-June 1988, pp. 203-287.



To mark the 75th anniversary of the Federation, the *Review* examined this problem in a special issue devoted to the role of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent in helping vulnerable communities. Specialists, theorists, practitioners and researchers from within the Movement and from the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and research institutes demonstrated by means of practical case studies that the condition of vulnerable groups can be improved only with the involvement of members of those groups. The latter must rediscover and tap their own problem-solving capacities; the humanitarian agencies are there only to help them play an active part in their development.

In its medical assistance programmes for conflict victims, the ICRC for its part has adopted an approach which gives prominence to the role that local institutions and communities can play in coping with the situation. It steps in to support their efforts but never seeks to act as a substitute for them.

Generally, in cases involving children in distress, victims of drug abuse and the “poorest among the poor”, the families — especially mothers — relatives, peers and neighbourhood associations can take effective measures to encourage the spirit of solidarity among these particularly vulnerable groups and help them improve their plight.

As the President of the ICRC has observed, “the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is well placed to act as a catalyst and coordinator. Its many volunteers are particularly qualified to reach out to vulnerable groups, to involve them in assessing needs and priorities and to devise and carry out plans of action. Moreover, by developing a greater sense of responsibility among others, the message of solidarity which they convey at all levels is in itself an affirmation of human dignity”.<sup>16</sup>

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Thus solidarity in all its different forms has taken root within the Movement both as an ideal and as an obligation. Going one step further, some may even feel, like Jean-Georges Lossier, that the Movement has made of solidarity a virtue which lends the Red Cross its moral significance.

Without any doubt, solidarity is the key to the Movement's unity.

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<sup>16</sup> Cornelio Sommaruga, “Greater solidarity for a more humane approach to development”, *IRRC*, No. 301, July-August 1994, p. 314.

## Unity

The concept of the Movement's unity is a complex one: it cannot be merged with the principles of solidarity and universality which underpin it, for it comprises structural, organizational and relational factors in addition to its moral element.

Mr Walter Bargatzky, then President of the German Red Cross in the Federal Republic of Germany, stated in an article that appeared in the *Review* in 1974 that solidarity, of which the components of the Movement had given so many examples since the Red Cross was founded, had helped to forge what he referred to as the international unity of the Red Cross. In his view, the fact that the National Societies have the same rights and a duty of mutual assistance implies that they must, "for the specific purpose of mutual aid, also maintain an inner solidarity, a community of ideas and organization which is virtually equivalent to unity of thought and action".<sup>17</sup>

More than one hundred years earlier, Gustave Moynier had realized that there was a bond of unity among the relief societies operating under the Red Cross banner. This bond was "their driving spirit, this spirit of charity that spurs them to provide aid wherever blood flows on the battlefield".<sup>18</sup> In his authoritative study on the Red Cross Principles, Jean Pictet remarked: "Being unable to achieve unity in the material sphere, the Red Cross has created it in regard to its ideal".<sup>19</sup>

The Movement's moral unity, which draws upon the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent by which its components are bound, emerged only gradually. It has often been challenged and arouses scepticism since it is not the emanation of an organic unit per se, but rather, as Jean Pictet wrote, an "organized group of bodies with its own Statutes", that is, the International Red Cross created in 1928. "This ingenious edifice, which was improved still further in 1952, only established flexible and fairly loose ties between its members, leaving each the largest possible measure of autonomy. The unity achieved remains purely symbolic."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Bargatzky, *op. cit.*, p. 516. See above\*\*, p. 447.

<sup>18</sup> "Du double caractère, national et international, des Sociétés de secours", *Bulletin*, No. 4, July 1870, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Pictet, *Red Cross Principles*, ICRC, Geneva, 1956, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The Movement's unity is nevertheless a reality, yet even today it continues to exercise the minds of the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions.

### **1. Moral unity — the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent**

Without stating or defining any principles as such, the founders of the Red Cross, and Gustave Moynier in particular, strove from the beginning to discern the main features of their humanitarian ideal.

The driving force behind their ideas was Christian charity, which is often mentioned in the Committee's circulars and the early issues of the *Bulletin*. Yet it is the essential principles on which their efforts were based — humanity, neutrality and unity — that can be perceived in the resolutions of the October 1863 Conference and in Article 6 of the Geneva Convention of 1864.

Gustave Moynier sometimes decreed rules of conduct, sometimes principles. In 1875, he stated that the relief societies were "bound together by their more or less formal commitment to conduct themselves according to certain identical rules. There are four such rules or principles: centralization, foresight, mutuality and solidarity".<sup>21</sup>

In later writings, he mentioned the principles of universality, charity, fraternity, equality and non-discrimination. In his pamphlet entitled *Notions essentielles sur la Croix-Rouge*, published in 1896, he proposed a set of principles for action, the main purpose of which was to highlight the specific nature of the relief societies, and which the societies had to undertake to respect if they wished to be recognized.<sup>22</sup> One of these principles was to "adhere to the principle of moral solidarity which unites all the National Societies".<sup>23</sup>

The fact is that in the late nineteenth century the International Committee and the relief societies were aware of the existence of common principles but did not feel the need to create a body of principles or a specific Red Cross ideology, for one simple reason: countries which shared a common heritage and religion naturally shared similar values and there was no need to recall them or put them down in writing.

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<sup>21</sup> Gustave Moynier, "Ce que c'est que la Croix-Rouge", *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Gustave Moynier, *Notions essentielles sur la Croix-Rouge*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

But when the Movement began to expand, embracing new National Societies that represented other civilizations, beliefs and cultures, it became necessary to refer to a set of values which all could accept and which would be the connective tissue binding the ICRC and the National Societies together.

The emergence of these principles as reflected in the *Bulletin* and, from 1919, in the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge* leaves an impression of laborious effort, trial and error.

In 1921, the ICRC introduced into its Statutes the four "fundamental and uniform principles that lie at the base of the institution of the Red Cross, i.e. impartiality, political, religious and economic independence, universality of the Red Cross and equality of its members".<sup>24</sup> Curiously enough, the principle of humanity was not mentioned.

The process was further complicated by the creation in 1919 of the League of Red Cross Societies. The statutory bodies of the League and the ICRC tried to outdo each other in casting confusion on the nature and number of the principles. They locked horns in semantic disputes which arose at the 1948 and 1952 sessions of the League's Board of Governors. The League added thirteen more principles to the ICRC's four. "Feast after famine", exclaimed the Chairman of the Standing Commission, Ambassador André-François Poncet.<sup>25</sup>

As Richard Perruchoud points out, however, this list was a "hotch-potch of principles mixed together with statutory directives and simple examples of cases in which the fundamental principles applied".<sup>26</sup>

It was a long road from these uncertain initiatives to the proclamation of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna in 1965. In between there were many joint studies in committee, but above all the power of conviction and inspiration of the seminal works by Max Huber and Jean Pictet which gave shape to a set of principles that were acceptable to all.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Statuts du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, RICR*, No. 28, April 1921, pp. 379-380.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Richard Perruchoud, *Les résolutions des Conférences internationales de la Croix-Rouge*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1979, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Jean Pictet, *Red Cross Principles*, *op. cit.*; Max Huber, *La pensée et l'action de la Croix-Rouge*, ICRC, Geneva, 1954.

The Fundamental Principles, which are now part of the Movement's official doctrine and were included in its Statutes in 1986, are inalienable. Yet they have to be explained if they are to be understood and publicized. This the *Review* set out to do over the past 25 years, by publishing explanatory studies, among which Jean Pictet's *Commentaries on the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* take pride of place.<sup>28</sup> As it had done in the sphere of dissemination of humanitarian law, the *Review* offered studies that sought to show the similarities and points of convergence between these principles and the precepts of the various civilizations and religions.

Such efforts to clarify and disseminate became increasingly necessary as the international turmoil of the 1970s and the resulting questioning of values prompted the Movement to defend the specific nature of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross.

Although the basis and enduring character of these principles have never been challenged, some wonder if they are always appropriate: is the principle of humanity too all-embracing for the Red Cross, beset as it is on all sides by humanitarian needs? Is it possible or reasonable to expect the Red Cross to embark on highly technical activities which its volunteers are not qualified to carry out? Is there not a danger that volunteers and the National Societies which they serve may lose their independence if, by acting as the agents of government authorities, they identify too closely with them? How can universality be reconciled with the great variety of philosophical and religious tendencies? And how can young people be convinced of the value of the principle of neutrality?<sup>29</sup>

During this same period, drawing upon past experience and extensive consultations, Donald D. Tansley pointed out in his reappraisal of the role of the Red Cross that the wording of the principles was not easy to understand or communicate, and suggested that they be rewritten "in a language and a form which can be easily understood".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See *IRRC*, No. 210, May-June 1979, pp. 130-149; No. 211, July-August 1979, pp. 184-197; No. 212, September-October 1979, pp. 255-258; No. 213, November-December 1979, pp. 301-312; No. 214, January-February 1980, pp. 29-34; No. 215, March-April 1980, pp. 70-78; No. 216, May-June 1980, pp. 129-141; No. 217, July-August 1980, pp. 193-197; No. 218, September-October 1980, pp. 250-255.

<sup>29</sup> See Anton Schlögel, "Possibilities and limits of the Red Cross", *IRRC*, No. 155, February 1974, pp. 63-70.

<sup>30</sup> Donald D. Tansley, *Final Report: An agenda for Red Cross — Re-appraisal of the role of the Red Cross*, Geneva, 1975, p. 35, quoted in *IRRC*, No. 273, November-December 1989, "Applying the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: A subject for continued thought", pp. 501-506, at p. 501.

The question was of course pertinent but, in the opinion of the League and the ICRC, it was not crucial, and at the Twenty-third International Conference of the Red Cross held in Bucharest in 1977 they stated: "Its fundamental principles are the most valuable asset of the Red Cross, they constitute a binding force, a set of guidelines, a programme of action, the source and expression of an ideal, and a guarantee of universality. There is no need to re-formulate them; the main thing is to live up to them, and make them known and respected".<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, a great deal of thought was necessary to try to give each principle a significance that guaranteed and reinforced the cohesion of the Movement, for "the Movement's unity, its credibility and efficiency" were at stake.<sup>32</sup> In 1989, as a contribution to a study ordered by the 1986 session of the Council of Delegates, the *Review* began to publish a series of articles on the Fundamental Principles so as to provide a basis for theoretical and case studies on how they should be implemented. The studies reaffirmed the specific Red Cross and Red Crescent approach to humanitarian issues of the times: "It focuses on the human being; the protection of his life, health and dignity is its ultimate goal".<sup>33</sup> The Movement's principles — the principle of humanity which strengthens the bonds among individuals and hence among peoples, the principle of universality which implies solidarity among the National Societies, and the principle of neutrality which consists in remaining receptive to others and ready to act whatever the circumstances — reject violence and defeatism and encourage dialogue and cooperation.

Modern humanitarianism, however, requires not only that suffering be alleviated but also that the causes of suffering be examined and if possible eradicated. The Movement took the attitude that it should work within set limits which it could not overstep without endangering its fundamental purpose; its first priority was the victims, and its preventive action took place in its own specific fields of activity: health care, social welfare, environmental protection, education for peace and promotion of a culture of solidarity.

The essential task in fact is to spread knowledge of the Fundamental Principles. Today, as in the past, "they make for cohesion and unity in

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<sup>31</sup> "Applying the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: a subject for continued thought", *IRRC*, No. 273, November-December 1989, p. 501.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 504.

the Movement, and give its actions a predictability that should inspire international confidence. They exist to advance the lofty ideal of relieving human suffering, and respecting them requires a high degree of moral responsibility from all who serve under the red cross or red crescent emblem".<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Contributions to peace

Through its principle of humanity, the Red Cross favours mutual understanding, cooperation and lasting peace among the peoples of the world.

When he wrote in 1869 that the National Societies had the "conviction that they were useful auxiliaries of peaceable propaganda and that they made a real, *albeit indirect*, contribution to arousing an aversion to war", Gustave Moynier foreshadowed a decades-long debate within the Movement on the nature and validity of the Red Cross contribution to peace, and on its limits.<sup>35</sup>

After the First World War, the Red Cross contribution to peace drew greater attention. Characteristically, a joint appeal from the ICRC and the League to the Tenth International Conference of the Red Cross held in Geneva in 1921 exhorted "all peoples to combat the spirit of war that is still rife throughout the world (...) The Red Cross is not content to work in peacetime; it also wishes to work for peace".<sup>36</sup> Almost all subsequent International Conferences have expanded upon this declaration, and many prominent figures in the Movement have written in the *Review* on the theme of the Red Cross contribution to peace.

This was the case in the 1930s, for example, when a number of studies published in the *Review* raised the question of the responsibility of the Red Cross with regard to peace, highlighting the peaceable and pacifying value of its work to remedy human suffering. The Red Cross contribution to peace thus appeared to be the result of its humanitarian activities in time of war and in peacetime, a consequence of the principle of humanity.

Gradually, the Movement enlarged the scope of its concerns. In the 1950s it began to examine the topics of atomic weapons, disarmament and the peaceful settlement of conflicts. These themes were an encouragement

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<sup>34</sup> Marion Harroff-Tavel, "Neutrality and impartiality", *IRRC*, No. 273, November-December 1989, pp. 536-552, at p. 552.

<sup>35</sup> "Avant Propos", *Bulletin*, No. 1, October 1869, p. 3 (our italics).

<sup>36</sup> Tenth International Conference of the Red Cross, Geneva, 30 March - 7 April 1921, Report, Resolution V.

to members of the Movement who favoured more precise statements and more direct action for peace, including a contribution to the effort to combat the causes of war.

There was heated debate within the Movement, revealing differences over the very concept of peace and the nature of the contribution the Red Cross could make. Some saw this as indirect, that is, consisting of traditional protection and assistance activities, and others saw it as direct, implying the denunciation of aggression and injustice. This dissension was a threat to the Movement's cohesion.

Not until the First World Red Cross Conference on Peace (Belgrade, June 1975) did the Movement adopt by consensus its "Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a Factor of Peace", and in particular its own definition of peace.<sup>37</sup> As Jacques Moreillon wrote: "With this consensus, the Red Cross made peace over the matter of peace — a considerable event in itself. It was a sort of pact, and, as such, both a result and a beginning".<sup>38</sup> This was to strengthen the Movement's unity. The Second World Conference on Peace held in Aaland, Finland, and Stockholm, Sweden, in 1984 was to corroborate these results; it combined the definition of peace with a set of guidelines that, according to Conference Chairman Harald Huber, "express the Movement's consensus on all aspects of its contribution to peace. Wherever its members come from and whatever their own ideas, they are all bound by the same Red Cross concept of peace and of the means our Movement can, or cannot, use to contribute to peace".<sup>39</sup>

In 1994, the Movement continued to uphold the commitments that it had made at the two Conferences on peace in 1899 and 1907. As Jacques Moreillon observed: "Our contribution to peace must remain indirect to be effective, but must be based on an overall awareness of what constitutes peace".<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "By peace, the Red Cross does not mean the simple absence of war but a dynamic process of collaboration among States and peoples, which is founded on freedom, independence, national sovereignty, equality, respect for human rights and a fair and equitable distribution of resources with a view to satisfying the needs of the people", *Report of the League of Red Cross Societies on the World Red Cross Conference on Peace (Belgrade, 11-13 June 1975)* and *Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a Factor of Peace*, LRCS, 1978, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Moreillon, "The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, peace and human rights", *IRRC*, No. 217, July-August 1980, pp. 171-183, at p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> "The Second World Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on Peace", Closing Ceremony, *IRRC*, No. 243, November-December 1984, p. 316.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Moreillon, "The promotion of peace and humanity in the twenty-first century — What role for the Red Cross and the Red Crescent?", *IRRC*, No. 303, November-December 1994, p. 608.



### 3. Unity through complementarity

As mentioned earlier, the moral unity that derives from the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, its solidarity and its contribution to peace does not reflect an organic unity within the Movement. History has decided otherwise: the Movement has not grown into a compact whole or a sort of monolith; rather, over time it has developed into a group of unique institutions formed at different periods but sharing the common objective of alleviating suffering and defending human dignity.

From the beginning there was a danger that moral unity within the Red Cross would break down and that its principal components would become dispersed if they lacked the support of a unified structure to direct its institutions' humanitarian work.

There have been many attempts at unification, starting with a suggestion put forward by the International Committee in 1867 to set up a "Superior Council" composed of members who would be elected by the Central Committees in the various countries, the Committee in Geneva acting as its Bureau. A proposal by the St Petersburg Central Committee followed in 1884, advocating an International Committee of the Red Cross whose members would be appointed by the leadership of the National Red Cross Societies, forming a central institution that would be formally recognized by the States signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1864.

Neither of these proposals were adopted. The Franco-Prussian war had shown that, as auxiliaries to army medical services, the National Societies were obliged to appeal just as much to patriotism as to humanitarian feelings to muster the resources they needed to carry out their work. As François Bugnion concluded: "An International Committee composed of representatives of the various nations' Central Committees would certainly be paralysed just when it was most sorely needed".<sup>41</sup>

This implicit acknowledgement of the independence of the National Societies and hence of the Committee was corroborated by Gustave Ador, who felt that "the noble humanitarian purpose of the Red Cross would be better served and pursued by a meeting of individual minds than by regulations".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> François Bugnion, *Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et la protection des victimes de la guerre*, ICRC, Geneva, 1994, p. 1141. See herein, pp. 427-446, a chapter from the book, entitled "La composition du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge". On the origins of the International Committee of the Red Cross, see also André Durand, *The history of the International Committee of the Red Cross: from Sarajevo to Hiroshima*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1984, pp. 174-194.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Paul des Gouttes, *Gustave Ador, président du CICR*, Georg et Cie, ICRC, Geneva, 1928, p. 13.

Gustave Moynier expanded on this idea in 1896: the National Societies must maintain their independence, for “local habits and customs are apt to foster the spirit of charity within a population”. At the risk of contradicting himself, he added: “It would have been utopian to try to subject peoples of all races, living at every latitude, to a uniform administrative system and a single, albeit mitigated, authority (...) Never, in high places, was the incongruous notion entertained for an instant, neither at the outset nor at any later stage, of an international Red Cross, and it is quite inappropriate to describe the existing Red Cross as such”.<sup>43</sup>

The ICRC has always remained true to its policy of defending the independence of the National Societies and promoting solidarity in time of war.

But the National Societies’ independence does not mean that they are isolated from each other, for they were designed to cooperate. In an 1870 issue of the *Bulletin*, Moynier made the prophetic observation that the National Societies “form a vast federation whose members have pledged mutual assistance”.<sup>44</sup>

This idea made headway and in 1919 culminated in the creation of the League of Red Cross Societies. The *Review* reflected the flutter of ideas that emerged at the end of the First World War (expected to be the last) and the founding of the League of Nations. In 1913, there had already been talk of an “International Union of the Red Cross”;<sup>45</sup> and in 1919 there were dreams that a “Humanitarian League of Nations” could exist alongside the political League of Nations.<sup>46</sup> Even the ICRC glimpsed prospects of a broader mandate for the Red Cross and coordination of its activities within a “World Union of Red Cross Organizations”.<sup>47</sup>

*In fact, the founding of the League created more problems than it resolved, particularly for the ICRC. The stakes were high, since the areas*

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<sup>43</sup> Gustave Moynier, *Notions essentielles sur la Croix-Rouge*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> “Du double caractère, national et international, des Sociétés de secours”, *op. cit.* note 18, p. 160. See also “Ce que c’est que la Croix-Rouge”, *Bulletin*, No. 21, January 1875, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Professor Bogagewski, “La Croix-Rouge dans le développement du droit international”, quoted by Paul des Gouttes in “De la Fédération des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge”, *RICR*, No. 8, August 1919, p. 927.

<sup>46</sup> Dr. A. Ninagawa, “Le rôle futur de la Croix-Rouge et le Pacte de la Paix”, *RICR*, No. 183, March 1919, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup> Renée-Marguerite Cramer, “La tâche de la prochaine Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge”, *RICR*, No. 4, April 1919, p. 414.

of competence of the ICRC and those of the new League had to be defined while preserving the achievements already made: the National Societies' independence had to be maintained and Red Cross unity preserved.

The reports on and resolutions of the International Conferences that appeared in the *Review* give only a sketchy picture of the constant flurry of meetings, commissions and heated negotiations that took place between 1919 and 1928 around the concepts of merger, unification, duality, unity and coordination. Finally it became clear that the only way to preserve Red Cross unity was to officially recognize the complementarity of the ICRC and the League. The 13th International Conference of the Red Cross settled the matter in 1928 when it adopted the Statutes of the International Red Cross. As the text's main authors, Colonel Draudt, Vice-President of the League, and Professor Max Huber, member of the ICRC, wrote: "It was not a matter of setting up a new organization from scratch, but of maintaining intact and strengthening existing elements which had already demonstrated their worth through the services they had provided. It was more a matter of harmonizing the role and functioning of those different elements in the best interests of the Red Cross and to ensure their coordination and unity by placing them in the framework of the International Conference as the supreme deliberative authority of the Red Cross".<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. Towards unassailable unity

Although its status defies legal logic, the International Red Cross has the great merit of presenting to the international community an image of unity which it must continuously improve and uphold. Readers of the *Review* are struck by the determination of the Movement's members to keep in step with the times and to periodically re-examine the Movement's mandate and internal structures, with the preservation of its unity as their main concern.

The changes that occurred internationally in the late 1960s inevitably had repercussions on the Red Cross mission, the activities of the Movement, and even on the place of the Red Cross on the world scene. The difficulties encountered by the ICRC in various internal conflicts of the 1960s, the emergence of numerous non-governmental humanitarian organizations, and the political manoeuvring that infiltrated the Movement's

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<sup>48</sup> Colonel Draudt and Max Huber, "Rapport à la XIII<sup>e</sup> Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge sur les Statuts de la Croix-Rouge internationale", *RICR*, No. 119, November 1928, p. 994.

meetings created a sense of unease within the International Red Cross. "Does the world still need us?" asked one National Society President.<sup>49</sup> Others were worried by the depth of the differences of opinion within the Movement; these had reached the point at which the only solution was to conduct a comprehensive reassessment of the historic mission of the Red Cross and its ethical basis, including an examination of "the unwritten principle of unity of ideal, since it is nothing less than the continuance of this unity which is at stake", in the words of Walter Bargatzky.<sup>50</sup> His main concern was that Red Cross cohesion and unity should be maintained internationally, for, he remarked, "because of its unity and its universality it has found a way into all political spheres, to all military fronts. So I believe that the only clear and irrevocable criterion for the future of the Red Cross must be: Help for all means a universal Red Cross. A universal Red Cross means a united Red Cross".<sup>51</sup>

The study reappraising the role of the Red Cross, called the "Tansley Report" after its author, was very timely indeed. Ordered by the Standing Commission, its purpose was to rethink and redefine the role and structures of the Red Cross in modern society so as to determine how in a world of rapid and constant change the Red Cross could adapt to assert itself and ensure its future service to humankind. The study was also intended to "chart a course for the various bodies of the Red Cross, enabling them to direct their efforts and enterprises in the right direction (...) Red Cross unity, universality and capacity to adapt itself to changing conditions depend, as in any organization, on the correlated action of its various interdependent organs. Special attention will therefore be given to the inter-relationship of the various international and national bodies of the Red Cross".<sup>52</sup>

The Tansley Report, which was published in the *Review* along with reactions from the International Red Cross institutions, had the merit of shedding light on a previously rather obscure matter: the objectives of the Movement as a whole.<sup>53</sup> Without calling into question the structure of the

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<sup>49</sup> General Torstein Dale, President of the Norwegian Red Cross, in *IRRC*, No. 140, November 1972, pp. 635-636.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Bargatzky, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>52</sup> Standing Commission of the International Red Cross, "Programme for a re-appraisal of the role of the Red Cross", *IRRC*, No. 115, November 1970, p. 592.

<sup>53</sup> See Claude Pilloud, "Reflections on general Red Cross objectives", *IRRC*, No. 187, October 1976, pp. 506-511.

International Red Cross, Tansley proposed that the Movement's fundamental objective should be "the provision of emergency help, on an unconditional and impartial basis, whenever and wherever human needs for protection and assistance exist because of a natural disaster or conflict".<sup>54</sup> This definition did not completely satisfy the National Societies or their federation, which found it too restrictive. It was not until 1977 that the Twenty-third International Conference of the Red Cross meeting in Bucharest reaffirmed the Movement's mission, included the National Societies' medical and social activities to prevent disease, promote health and foster among their members a sense of social responsibility and voluntary service, and encompassed dissemination activities.<sup>55</sup>

The adoption in October 1986 of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was the major event of the past 25 years. For the first time in the legislative history of the Movement, the Statutes set out its purpose, its goals and what it was that motivated and inspired its action: its basic mission, its Fundamental Principles, its mottoes and its contribution to peace. Moreover, its new name — International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement — underscored its dynamic character as an institution that since its creation had lived for and by universal humanitarian action.

Eight years after the Statutes were adopted, the Movement once again had to undergo a period of reassessment prompted by problems relating to the application of humanitarian law, the proliferation of humanitarian aid agencies and the difficulty of coordinating relief operations. An Advisory Commission was created in 1993 by the Council of Delegates to "study policy matters of common interest to all components of the Movement and possible courses of action and to advise the Council of Delegates on the Movement's priorities and policies". The ultimate goal was to allow the Movement to fulfil its humanitarian mandate with the greatest possible efficiency and cohesion.<sup>56</sup>

This was the imperative that President Sommaruga referred to recently when he declared to the Movement: "It is tragically pointless to be united and universal if the Movement fails to be effective. But it cannot be

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<sup>54</sup> Donald D. Tansley, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>55</sup> 23rd International Conference of the Red Cross, Bucharest 1977, Resolution I: "Mission of the Red Cross", *IRRC*, No. 201, December 1977, pp. 507-508.

<sup>56</sup> Council of Delegates, October 1993 session, Birmingham, Resolution I, *IRRC*, No. 97, November-December 1993, p. 489.

effective unless we know what is expected of us, what specific task is assigned to each one of us. We must know the clear division of labour between the various partners involved in humanitarian endeavour. To be sure, the Movement must grow more united and universal day by day, but it must also become more effective! The world needs us and it must be able to count on a Movement capable of meeting the great humanitarian challenges while respecting the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent".<sup>57</sup>

The Council of Delegates, which will address the question of the Movement's future at its December 1995 session, will have these words to reflect on. They echo the feelings that the members of the Standing Commission, the members of the ICRC and the President and Vice-Presidents of the League already expressed in 1972 during an informal meeting in Montreux, Switzerland, organized by the ICRC to examine questions of mutual interest: "The Red Cross, therefore, is a complex body formed of various components but moved by principles that make for cohesion yet distinguish it from other welfare movements. What is important is to devise methods of organization that will enable each constituent part to shoulder its specific responsibilities in co-operation with the rest, and thus maintain diversity within unity".<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "75th anniversary of the foundation of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies — Address by the President of the ICRC, Mr Cornelio Sommaruga", *IRRC*, No. 300, May-June 1994, p. 282.

<sup>58</sup> J.-L. Le Fort, "Meeting of Red Cross leaders", *IRRC*, No. 135, June 1972, p. 346.