

**MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL  
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT  
TO THE THIRD SPECIAL SESSION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ON DISARMAMENT**

*The following message was addressed last June by the President of the ICRC, the President of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Chairman of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to the Third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Disarmament, which was held from 31 May to 25 June 1988. In this message, the Movement draws the international community's attention to the terrible damage caused by modern weapons, which are hideously cruel, in particular antipersonnel mines, which are often used without discrimination and which kill or maim numerous innocent victims, bullets that cause especially appalling wounds and chemical weapons.*

*The Movement requests States to respect the rules prohibiting or restricting the use of such weapons, to ensure that these rules are strictly observed and to give favourable consideration to the drafting of additional rules.*

*It reminds States that the 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions reaffirm the fundamental principles in this connection and that the 1980 Convention states the rules pertaining to the prohibition or restriction of the use of certain conventional weapons.*

*All States are invited to accede to those instruments.*

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From the outset the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has stressed that its basic *raison d'être*, which is the humanitarian activities it undertakes on behalf of the victims of armed conflicts, does not in any way imply acquiescence to the state of war. It wishes to make this clear to the Third Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament, as it has done at previous sessions. Indeed, how could any other attitude be adopted by a Movement which, for the past 125 years, has sadly been a first-hand witness to so many armed conflicts, with all the deaths, injuries, and physical and mental suffering they entail; a Movement which expends considerable energy, in almost 150 countries, in providing medical and social assistance to people in need?

Admittedly, the first and most important task of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is action in the field, caring for the wounded, visiting prisoners and giving material and moral support to the civilian population. It also draws up and promotes international humanitarian law designed to protect the victims of armed conflict.

But field activities and legal work have naturally always been accompanied by a more general reflection that has led the Movement to express—in no uncertain terms—its indignation about the terrible effects of war and to focus its attention on the contribution it can make to a more peaceful world. In 1984, it once again addressed a message in these terms to the international community at the close of a meeting attended by all the components of the Movement (the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ICRC and the League).

The obvious connection between peace and disarmament has not escaped the Movement, which did not hesitate to join in the effort to achieve general and total disarmament. However, the relationship between disarmament and State security is also undeniable; it sets the limits, in this respect, on what can be done by a Movement compelled by virtue of its principles to remain outside the political forum. It is essentially by bearing witness to the horrors of war and setting an example of humanitarian activity that the Movement brings home to Governments their responsibilities in dealing with the problem of disarmament with all the energy such a task requires.

The sinister escalation, throughout the twentieth century, of the methods of warfare deployed in armed conflicts has led to the appearance of increasingly cruel weapons and means of mass destruction, with well-known consequences for innumerable innocent victims who are either massacred or mutilated for life. The Movement is gravely concerned about such developments. Indeed, it was at the forefront of the

effort to ban chemical weapons between the two World Wars and was one of the first organizations to express consternation after nuclear weapons had been used.

Although the dreadful effects of such devices are now common knowledge, the Movement considers that its presence on today's battlefields makes it its duty to draw the attention of the international community to the terrible damage caused by modern weapons, which are hideously cruel.

We are thinking in particular of antipersonnel mines, which strike indiscriminately, maiming the victims they do not kill outright, and bullets which cause especially appalling wounds. Even in the narrow perspective of warfare, there is no need to maim soldiers who could be put out of action by some other means, and it can never be justified to massacre children.

The same goes for chemical weapons, which sadly are once again making headline news and which strike their victims indiscriminately.

The 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions reaffirm that it is prohibited to employ weapons of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering and a Convention was adopted in 1980 to prohibit or restrict the use of devices such as mines and booby-traps. States should accede to or ratify those instruments.

Large-scale studies have been undertaken and are still continuing on the effects of different types of bullets. States should spare no efforts to bring these studies to a successful conclusion and must respect their obligation to refrain from using projectiles that cause unnecessarily cruel injury.

The prohibition to resort to chemical weapons has achieved universal recognition. States must prevent this ban being put into jeopardy.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement greatly appreciates the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Organization with regard to disarmament and the holding of this Third Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament.

The specific suggestions we are making to States will provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their good will.

We earnestly beg them to seize this opportunity.

*President of the  
League of Red  
Cross and Red  
Crescent Societies*

*Chairman of the  
Standing Commission  
of the Red Cross  
and Red Crescent*

*President of the  
International  
Committee of the  
Red Cross*

**Mario Villarroel Lander**

**Ahmed Abu-Goura**

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## REFERENCES

- Message to the International Community from the Second World Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on Peace, held in Aaland and Stockholm from 2 to 7 September 1984.
  - Convention of 10 October 1980 on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects.
    - Protocol on Non-Detectable Fragments (Protocol I);
    - Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices (Protocol II);
    - Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons (Protocol III).
  - 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949; Protocol I, Article 35.
  - ICRC Appeal of 5 September 1945 to the Central Committee of the National Red Cross Societies regarding the end of hostilities and the future tasks of the Red Cross.
  - ICRC Appeal of 5 April 1950 to the High Contracting Parties signatory to the Geneva Conventions—Atomic Weapons and “Non-Directed” Weapons.
  - Geneva Protocol of 17 June 1925 for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare.
  - Appeal against the Use of Poisonous Gases addressed by the ICRC to the belligerents on 6 February 1918.
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