

Federal Councillor Kaspar Villiger visits ICRC

On 13 November 1989, the Head of the Federal Military Department and Mrs. Villiger visited the International Committee of the Red Cross, where they were received by President Cornelio Sommaruga. Mr. Villiger was accompanied by Majors General Peter Eichenberger, Chief Medical Officer, Carlo Vincenz, Deputy Chief of Staff Operations, and Fritz Husi, Director of the Federal Office of Adjutancy.

President Sommaruga thanked the Federal Councillor for the support traditionally afforded to the ICRC by the Swiss Confederation and went on to review ICRC activities worldwide, emphasizing those of topical interest.

After signing the Visitor's Book, Mr. Villiger expressed the Federal Council's solidarity with the ICRC in connection with the abduction of the institution's two delegates in southern Lebanon.

Mr. Villiger's visit to the ICRC ended with a tour of the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

President's mission to New York

For several days in October, the ICRC and humanitarian law had a high profile at United Nations Headquarters in New York. On 13 October, a ceremony was held there to mark the 125th anniversary of the original Geneva Convention of 1864. This was followed by the opening of an exhibition on the Geneva Conventions and the work of the ICRC.

Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, the ICRC President, took part in the two ceremonies. He had the opportunity to talk to the United Nations Secretary-General and representatives of the Security Council before, giving a press conference to the United Nations Correspondents' Association.

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The ceremony on 13 October to **commemorate the 1864 Geneva Convention** was organized by the Swiss Federal Council and the United Nations in New York. In addition to Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, UN Secretary-General, it was attended by Mr. René Felber, member of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, President Sommaruga, representatives of almost all the UN member States and a number of other guests.

Mr. Felber, who presided at the ceremony, reviewed the development of international humanitarian law from the original Convention to the 1977 Additional Protocols.

Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar spoke of the excellent co-operation established between the United Nations and the ICRC in their respective activities and of the UN's role in codifying humanitarian law.

Representatives of the UN Assembly's various regional groups (Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean) then paid tribute to the ICRC's work in conflict areas and stressed the key role played by humanitarian law in the system of international law, expressing the hope that the Additional Protocols would be ratified by all States.

After thanking the various speakers for their expressions of confidence and support, President Sommaruga spoke of the profound shock caused by the abduction in Lebanon on 6 October of two ICRC delegates and made a solemn appeal for their unconditional release. Then, recalling humanitarian law's century and a quarter of development, Mr. Sommaruga called on all governments, whether at peace or at war, to accord higher priority in their political decisions to matters of humanitarian concern, and to continue lending their support to the ICRC.

This ceremony was followed by the official opening of an **exhibition on the Geneva Conventions and the work of the ICRC** set up at United Nations Headquarters. A preview of the exhibition was held for a large number of ambassadors and representatives of the press, the UN Secretariat, the American Red Cross, the Swiss Red Cross and non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International (represented by its Secretary General). The ICRC President told them that the purpose of the exhibition was threefold—to make people see, make them understand and make them take action. He pointed out that the exhibition itself was a contribution to humanitarian mobilization.

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During his visit to New York, President Sommaruga, accompanied by Mr. Michel Veuthey, head of the ICRC's International Organizations Division, and Mr. Jean-Paul Fallet, head of the institution's New York delegation, had **talks with the United Nations Secretary-General**. Mr. Sommaruga expressed his appreciation for the high degree of co-operation between the ICRC and the United Nations on a growing number of matters of common interest and thanked Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar for UN support of ICRC activities. The ensuing discussions covered several situations of concern to the ICRC: the prisoners of war still being held in connection with the Iran/Iraq war, the conflict in Lebanon and the abduction of two ICRC delegates there, the 200 Moroccan prisoners who have still not been repatriated from the Western Sahara, the critical situation of some 300,000 civilians trapped on the border between Thailand and Cambodia and events in Namibia, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Mr. Sommaruga also pointed out that thanks in part to the UN Secretary-General's efforts to restore peace, the ICRC had been able to carry out a number of exceptionally successful humanitarian operations. But donor countries had to give more financial support to the ICRC to enable it to launch large-scale programmes.

Finally, Mr. Sommaruga mentioned the United Nations Decade of Peace and International Law, expressing the hope that international humanitarian law would figure prominently in it.

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At a luncheon with **Security Council delegates**, President Sommaruga expressed the ICRC's gratitude for their contribution to the humanitarian mobilization. He spoke of the ICRC exhibition commemorating the 1864 Geneva Convention and the peace-making initiatives of the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council which were directed at areas where the ICRC was also working. He went on to review the ICRC's activities in various parts of the world and its major causes for concern, and spoke of the ICRC's efforts to encourage disarmament, especially with regard to chemical weapons, and the preparatory work done on the 1980 UN Convention on certain conventional weapons. His speech was followed by an informal discussion.

On 13 October, Mr. Sommaruga accepted an invitation from the President of the **United Nations Correspondents' Association** to give a press conference to some 30 New York-based journalists.

During his stay, the President visited the **Greater New York Chapter of the American Red Cross.**

This three-day mission demonstrated the recognition accorded to the ICRC's activities and showed how those activities complement the United Nations' efforts to find a peaceful settlement for conflicts.
