

COLLOQUIUM ON THE PROTECTION OF WAR VICTIMS

(Geneva, 23-24 February 1990)

The first public event of the World Campaign for the Protection of War Victims took place in Geneva on 23 and 24 February 1990, in the form of a Colloquium attended by some thirty personalities of international repute—politicians, academics and members of humanitarian institutions, artistic circles and the media.

The list of participants was as follows: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who at present heads the United Nations operation in Afghanistan; Mr. Maurice Aubert, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; HRH Princess Christina of Sweden, Vice-Chairman of the Swedish Red Cross and Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Campaign; Mrs. Malak El Chichini-Popovic, an Egyptian expert in political science and economy, working for the University of São Paulo's Institute for Research on Violence; Mr. Jonathan Fenby, a British journalist and Deputy Editor in Chief of "The Guardian"; Mrs. Gisèle Halimi, a Paris lawyer and Chairman of the Association "Choisir"; Mr. Alexandre Hay, former President of the ICRC, Chairman of the Commission on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Peace; Mr. Jean-Pierre Hocké, former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Mrs. Michiko Inukai, a Japanese writer and journalist, Chairman of the Foundation for Child Refugees in Japan; Mr. Abbas Kelidar, Adviser to HRH Hassan Ibn Talal, Crown Prince of Jordan; Mr. Dragoljub Najman, a writer and former Assistant Director General of UNESCO; General Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria; Mr. Roland Paringaux, journalist, "Le Monde"; Mr. Misael Pastrana-Borrero, former President of Colombia; Mr. Dith Pran, photographer, "The New York Times"; Mr. Yves Sandoz, Director at the ICRC (in charge of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement); Mr. Amadou Seidou, former Ambassador of the Niger to France; Mr. Pierre de Senarclens, Professor of International Relations, University of Lausanne, and President of the World Organization against Torture ("SOS Torture"); Mr. Pär Stenbäck, Secretary General of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; Mrs. Han Suyin, a writer of Chinese origin and expert on Chinese affairs; Mr. Serge Telle, Technical Adviser on International Affairs,

Office of the Secretary of State for Humanitarian Policy attached to the French Prime Minister; Mr. Peter Townsend, a Royal Air Force hero of the Second World War, who is the author of several books on the plight of Third World children; Mr. Peter Ustinov, actor and dramatist, Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF, UNESCO and the UNHCR, the first Goodwill Ambassador appointed for the World Campaign; and Mr. Karel Vasak, a former Director at UNESCO, who is an expert in international law.

The following representatives of the ICRC, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the National Societies were also present at the Colloquium as experts: Mrs. Jacqueline Avril, physician and ICRC delegate; Mr. Jean-François Berger, ICRC delegate; Mr. Peter Oryema, Secretary General, Uganda Red Cross Society; Mr. André Pasquier, Special Adviser to the Director General of the ICRC, and Dr. Kingsley Seevaratnam, Adviser to the Secretary General of the League on International Affairs.

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The Colloquium was opened by the Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Campaign, Princess Christina of Sweden. In her address, the most important passages of which are quoted below, she spoke of the international community's debt to Henry Dunant and pointed out that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, founded by him, had gone on to become a world-wide movement that for more than 125 years had helped to save people from death, humiliation and oblivion.

Deplorably, however, every day events run counter to humanitarian principles:

"How many men, women and children throughout the world are still waiting for the protection and assistance to which they are entitled?"

How many of them have sent cries of distress from the depths of their solitude and anguish, from their jail cells and camps for prisoners and refugees?"

How many are suffering from irremediable wounds, from the loss of a father or mother, of a husband or wife, of a child, or have seen in the ruins of their homes the loss of everything most dear to them?"

This has been the fate of tens and even hundreds of thousands of people, most of them civilians."

Great and efficient though the efforts of committed persons and humanitarian institutions are at the present time, humanitarian action remains insufficient. More than ever, "respect for humanitarian law is our struggle".

"Is it idealistic to call on humanity to refuse the fatality of war?"

Is it idealistic to claim primacy for a law which is the birthright of all

civilizations and which, if not respected, precludes respect for all of humanity?

Is it idealistic to want to make the cries of these millions of forgotten victims heard, and to respond by giving them the protection and assistance they need?

Is it idealistic to call on all governments to ratify and apply fully the existing conventions on international humanitarian law and human rights?

Yes, it is, just as idealistic as it was over 125 years ago to launch the revolutionary idea of the Red Cross and the initial Geneva Convention. But this is idealism in the service of a profoundly realistic cause.

I am convinced that respect for life and human dignity is today the only realistic policy."

Princess Christina concluded by saying:

"As the 20th century draws to an end, the solution to the major problems of our time cannot be dissociated from respect for the universal values on which humanitarian endeavour is based. Whether protecting human life or alleviating suffering, fighting hunger and disease, promoting understanding and co-operation, no lasting progress can be made unless measures are taken to safeguard the life and dignity of every human being.

Only by making this awareness truly universal can we hope to renew the humanitarian spirit and instill greater morality into politics.

This Colloquium, which marks the launching of the World Campaign for the Protection of Victims of War, provides us with an exceptional opportunity for contact and dialogue that can help to bring that life-giving spark of humanity, hope and peace to all victims of war."

At the opening ceremony, a message from Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, Secretary General of the United Nations, was also read out:

"Today's Solferinos occur mainly within the borders of a country, where brother fights against brother and the innocent victims are women, children and old people. It is therefore the plight of civilian victims of armed conflict that has now become one of the major worries of humanity... I want you to know that we in the United Nations shall follow your discussions with the closest attention and that you can count on the total support of the international community."

In a message to the Colloquium Mr. Willy Brandt, former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, said:

"While Europe is mourning the victims of the bloodshed in a country like Romania, thousands of women, children and old people around the world have to endure hardship as the civilian victims of ongoing armed conflicts.

Since these people living in misery need our solidarity and assistance on all continents, I fully support your initiative to launch the World Campaign for the protection of civilian victims of all kinds of wars”.

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The World Campaign for the Protection of War Victims seeks to mobilize public opinion in support of two simple ideas:

- Everything possible must be done to bring present armed conflicts to an end. It is the duty of governments to find some means of proscribing forever this outdated way of settling disputes.
- So long as there are armed conflicts their victims *must* be given the protection and assistance that is their right.

Taking these two ideas as a starting point, the Colloquium discussed the three following themes:

1. Working for peace

The world has become a “global village”. It is threatened by present-day conflicts. Increasingly sophisticated weapons have made war ever more cruel, indiscriminate in its effects and unforeseeable.

What conditions, methods and means would bring an end to war? How must we interpret current events in view of the imperative need for peace?

The Colloquium recognized that war is not inevitable and that more effort should be devoted to preventing it by removing its root causes. These are closely connected with present-day problems such as underdevelopment, famine, overpopulation and pollution.

At present there seems to be a *détente* in international relations. Advantage should be taken of it to try to reach a peaceful settlement of regional and local conflicts, all of which are obstacles to true peace. But as the meeting stressed, there can be no lasting progress towards world peace unless states restrict their export and import of arms, and especially unless expenditure on armaments is transferred to development work.

The experts also pointed out that wider participation in public life through the extension of democracy lessens the dangers of armed conflict.

Whilst acknowledging the value of the work done by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to alleviate suffering caused by war, the experts said it should make more use of its greatest assets—its Principles, credibility and experience—to prevent armed conflicts.

2. The forgotten victims

In the world of today protection for, and assistance to, victims of armed conflicts largely depend on how much notice people take of those conflicts.

Unfortunately, United Nations successes in settling some conflicts and détente between the superpowers and the Eastern and Western blocs tend to divert attention from the cruel realities of the conflicts still going on.

The World Campaign for the Protection of War Victims is thus all the more necessary to prevent the victims of these conflicts being forgotten.

How can the world be made aware of the suffering of the “forgotten victims”? How can the media be persuaded to meet their responsibilities in this respect? How can governments be made to shoulder their responsibilities and stand by the victims? Who should denounce abuses and how? Where does one draw the line between political and humanitarian issues?

Recognizing that the nature of conflict has changed, that more and more it sets brother to fight brother, and that nine out of ten casualties are civilians, the experts were of the opinion that governments should do more to honour their commitment towards international humanitarian law and have especially a duty not just to respect Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and personnel but also to ensure that they are respected.

The Colloquium stressed that civilian populations should never be used as bargaining counters and called on governments to give war victims all necessary humanitarian assistance and recognize their right to seek and receive it.

The Colloquium declared that the Campaign for the Protection of War Victims needed the support and active participation of the media and governments to make the general public aware of the sufferings and rights of war victims. The media should be able to send information from the war zones for this purpose and the opposing Parties should not forbid the media to enter those areas.

3. Respect for life and human dignity in the heat of battle

On the principle that defending the application of humanitarian rules in conflicts does not mean justifying conflicts or making it easier to wage war, and that international humanitarian law can help check the escalation of violence, what is the best way to spread knowledge and ensure application of rules that are usually mentioned only when they have been violated?

The Colloquium recognized that in vast areas of the world many war victims and combatants were not aware of their rights and duties under international humanitarian law. The Colloquium was of the opinion that the Campaign gave an admirable opportunity of making these rights and duties known at all levels.

Following its discussions the Colloquium adopted the attached appeal. Several hundreds of leading personalities from all over the world, and the Chairmen or Presidents of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies will be invited to sign this appeal during 1990 and to circulate it as widely as possible in 1991.

COLLOQUIUM FOR THE PROTECTION OF WAR VICTIMS

APPEAL

"The world has never been closer to peace. But war has never been more destructive.

Ninety per cent of its victims are civilians. The suffering of these innocent people is an intolerable insult to humanity. It is in the power of mankind and is part of the duty of the international community of nations to put an end to the spiral of violence and the suffering it brings.

We appeal to governments, to governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as to the leaders of combatants on all sides, and to the people of the world:

- to respect the fundamental human rights of individuals at all times and in all circumstances*
- to live up to their international undertakings and responsibilities, to enable all necessary humanitarian aid to be made available to victims of violence and to ensure that they can seek and receive such aid*
- to recognize that the life of each human being is the concern of all.*

Armed conflict is an obsolete and absurd means of settling disputes. However, so long as it persists, the plight of its victims is of universal concern.

- We must not remain silent.*
- As human beings we must reach out to succour every suffering man, women and child.*
- We must urge governments to make available the funds needed to protect, help and nurture these victims of man's violence to man, and to enable them to live normal lives.*

After centuries of conflict, let us dare to conceive of a world without enemies."