

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR IN TAORMINA (SICILY)

Protection of human life and civil defence

A seminar on the theme "Protection of human life and civil defence", organized by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo and the Italian Red Cross, was held in Taormina (Sicily) from 4 to 8 April 1990, bringing together for the first time representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and civil defence services. There were about 60 participants from 18 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the League Secretariat, the ICRC and national civil defence organizations from seven countries, as well as members of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law and representatives of the central committee and the provincial and local committees of the Italian Red Cross.

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of H.E. Mr. Vito Lattanzio, Italian Minister of Civil Defence, Mr. Mohamed Essaafi, Under Secretary-General and Disaster Relief Co-ordinator of the United Nations, Mr. Sadok Znaidi, Secretary-General of the International Civil Defence Organization (ICDO), Mr. Remo Paolini, *Vice Commissario Straordinario* of the Italian Red Cross, Mr. Jovica Patrnogić, President of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, and representatives of the provincial and local authorities.

The seminar was chaired jointly by Mr. Paolini and Mr. Patrnogić. There were three topics on the agenda:

- Assistance activities of civil defence services in peacetime and in armed conflicts.
- The role of volunteers in the performance of civil defence tasks.
- International status of civil defence services.

1. Civil defence and assistance in peacetime and in armed conflicts

The subjects were introduced by Dr. Ugo Genesio, Secretary-General of the International Institute of International Law. The first

speaker, Mrs. Yolande Camporini, Technical Adviser for Statutory Matters and Dissemination at the League Secretariat, presented a report on assistance provided by the Movement's components in peacetime. After outlining the various stages of such assistance (disaster preparedness, emergency relief, medium- and long-term reconstruction plans), she described the ways in which the Movement (and the League in particular) gives assistance in the event of a natural disaster and the relations between the Movement and other relief organizations.

In the second introductory report, Mr. Antoine Bouvier, member of the ICRC Legal Division, presented the provisions of Protocol I relative to civil defence. He first described the process which led to the adoption of the rules in question, then examined their field of application and main characteristics.

The two introductory reports gave rise to a very interesting discussion during which representatives of several National Societies spoke about their institutions' work in assisting the victims of conflict or natural disaster and their activities in the field of prevention. They also mentioned the role of National Societies in civil defence and the links between the Red Cross or Red Crescent and civil defence services.

The account given by Mr. Hildebert Heinzman, Assistant Director of the Swiss Federal Office of Civil Defence, of the aims and activities of civil defence and its possibilities and limitations from the standpoint of international humanitarian law, was highly appreciated.

2. Civil defence and voluntary service

The second theme was introduced by Mr. Jacques Meurant, in his capacity as member of the Council of the San Remo Institute. He addressed the subject of civil defence and voluntary service in general before going on to examine, with the help of practical examples, the tasks facing volunteers in civil defence organizations and the specific role of volunteers in National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In the course of the ensuing debate, different volunteer groups from the Italian Red Cross spoke about their own activities.

3. International status of civil defence

The third topic was introduced by Mr. Sadok Znaidi, ICDO Secretary-General, whose presentation was entitled "International status of civil defence and international co-operation".

The question of international co-operation in the field of civil defence gave rise to a lively debate. In fact, as can be seen from the high number of contributions which were added to the main reports, all the proceedings were held in a constructive atmosphere.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

At the end of the seminar the participants adopted a summary of the proceedings with a number of conclusions and recommendations, some of which are reprinted below:

- ***Protection and assistance***

“While existing activities at national and international level, carried out by states and numerous other organizations, represent a very valuable contribution to the protection of victims of all disasters, including armed conflicts, these activities could be intensified and improved in the spirit of humanitarian solidarity, in order to satisfy more completely the needs of victims for protection and assistance. These improvements are desirable in all aspects of such activities, including planning, organization, harmonization, required resources and national and international co-operation.

Studies should be undertaken to develop adequate international legal rules, and these should be based on widespread practice and on existing law related to disaster relief.

For efficient development of assistance activities in disasters, of key importance is the preparation of the disaster relief plan for the national territory, whose elaboration should be promoted in all countries.

Considering that civil defence organizations, existing in many countries, are an important factor in protecting victims and property, it is highly desirable to establish such organizations in all countries of the world, in particular in developing countries, and to increase the international co-operation of these organizations.”

- ***Civil defence and humanitarian law***

“It needs to be recognized that the special protection of civil defence under the provisions of international humanitarian law comes within the context of the general protection of the civilian population and the limitations on the means and methods of warfare. This special protection should be applied, and countries should adapt their organizations to the

standards prescribed in international humanitarian law. The dissemination of knowledge of these rules on civil defence is an important way to promote their application. The role of ICDO in this sphere was particularly stressed and should be continued.”

The participants agreed to emphasize the following points:

- “The problems of enhancing and rendering more effective the harmonization of activities of many participants in international relief actions deserves to be studied further, bearing in mind the specific role of UNDRO in natural disasters;
- all the activities in the field of disaster relief are to be considered as a contribution to the protection of certain basic human rights. In this respect the question of the right to humanitarian assistance and corresponding obligations of states and organizations should be studied further.”

● *Volunteers and civil defence*

“The inclusion of volunteers and their increased role in non-governmental organizations, in carrying out civil defence tasks should be encouraged, and questions relating to their motivation, recruitment, training and deployment should be examined further.

As regards the participation of Red Cross/Red Crescent volunteers in civil defence activities, National Societies should specify, in agreement with the competent authorities, the forms of their contribution to these activities, while respecting the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

The study of various types of activities and problems encountered in carrying out disaster relief actions should be pursued, in particular in the light of the deliberations of the seminar. The IIHL is encouraged to continue its work in this important international humanitarian field, and to co-operate with all those organizations which are ready to support such work.”

The participants also thanked the Italian national and regional authorities and the Italian Red Cross, in particular the Committee of Messina, for their hospitality and the steadfast commitment of their volunteers.