

Editorial

Bringing food to the hungry: what could be a simpler and more natural thing to do? As for problems — if any should arise — what could they possibly be but logistical problems of transport, distribution and supervision? In his article “Food aid: For or against?” ICRC agronomist François Grunewald shows that in reality the problems faced are vastly more complex. He provides some interesting answers to four basic questions: “Why?”, “When?”, “How” and “How can we do without it?”

Gilbert Holleufer reflects on a problem posed by our media-dominated society: the invasion of our everyday lives by pictures and images of all kinds. What implications does this trend have for humanitarian action and the philosophy it is based on? Should every horror in the world be filmed, and should viewers have no choice about the images they are fed? In “Images of humanitarian crises: Ethical implications”, Holleufer writes: “It is high time to revive the noble tradition of photo journalism as it was practised in the past.”

Throughout the long history of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement its components have sometimes publicly championed a humanitarian cause, whether by alerting the community of States or appealing to world opinion. This is particularly true for the ICRC, which is mandated to take action in situations of armed conflict. By adopting a public stance on specific issues, the institution seeks to persuade governments to modify their behaviour or make a particular decision for humanitarian reasons. The campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines is a recent example. Are such initiatives, in view of their political connotation, consistent with the Movement’s fundamental principle of neutrality, on the one hand, and with the ICRC’s practice of confidentiality on the other? These are the crucial questions raised by British Red Cross legal expert Michael A. Meyer. In seeking to answer them, he pays particular attention to relations in this respect between the Movement’s components, each of which must be able to identify itself with any action taken by the others.

*Should you, our readers, wish to respond to Michael A. Meyer's article, your opinions are welcome and we shall devote space to them in the Review. The pages which the late Hans Haug, a prominent member of the Red Cross, wrote on the fundamental principle of neutrality in his book *Humanity for all* can serve as a starting point for what promises to be a useful and extremely interesting debate.*

The Review

17 December 1996: six ICRC delegates assassinated in Chechnya

Six delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross were shot dead in cold blood by unidentified gunmen at their quarters at the hospital in Novye Atagi, near Grozny.

*Fernanda Calado, an ICRC nurse of Spanish nationality
Hans Elkerbout, construction technician, Netherlands Red Cross
Ingeborg Foss, nurse, Norwegian Red Cross
Nancy Malloy, medical administrator, Canadian Red Cross
Gunnhild Myklebust, nurse, Norwegian Red Cross
Sheryl Thayer, nurse, New Zealand Red Cross*

Their mission was to assist victims of the conflict in Chechnya.

Another delegate, Christophe Hensch, a Swiss national in charge of the ICRC's Novye Atagi office, has gunshot wounds.

The ICRC expresses its deepest sympathy to the families of the deceased, who gave their lives to help the victims of the Chechen conflict, and to the Netherlands, Norwegian, Canadian and New Zealand Red Cross Societies. The ICRC is profoundly shocked and grieved by this tragedy and vigorously condemns this attack and the violation of the Red Cross emblem.
