

as rescuers have prompted many improvements in specific medical transport techniques.

As Dr. Bernard Kouchner states in the preface: "...we wonder at the imagination shown by man in bringing help to his fellow-men...".

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THE MANAGEMENT OF MASS BURN CASUALTIES AND FIRE DISASTERS

The Mediterranean Burns Club is a professional organization which is very active in the areas of burn therapy and fire safety. The United Nations has cited it as a leading scientific body in its field in connection with the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Together with the Plastic Surgery Department and Burn Centre at Palermo City Hospital, the Club held the first International Conference on Burns and Fire Disasters in Palermo from 25 to 28 September 1990. A number of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, specialized associations and several Italian government ministries were also involved in organizing the event.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together practitioners and theorists in order to pool and compare the results of their research and their experience in coping with disasters, particularly the medical, paramedical, logistic and administrative aspects of burn treatment and fire-disaster management. The participants also discussed preventive and safety measures, training for the personnel needed to deal with such situations and information and communication problems encountered in this type of disaster.¹

Dr. S. William A. Gunn, President of the Mediterranean Burns Club, and Professor Michele Masellis, the Club's Secretary-General and head of the Plastic Surgery Department at the Palermo City Hospital, were the driving force behind the Conference. Their idea was to bring together burn-therapy specialists and experts in disaster management — quite a rare occurrence — so that they could discuss the problems they had in common on both the theoretical and the practical levels, and seek better ways of treating burns and preventing the fire disasters that cause them.

¹ See the account of the Conference's proceedings in *IRRC*, No. 280, January-February 1991, pp. 69-71.

The proceedings of the Conference have just been published.² The book contains the complete text of the papers presented by about a hundred experts from around the world.

Experience with forest fires, ship-board fires, hospital fires, liquid-gas explosions and other major blazes in Ireland, Japan and Italy, for example, shows that there is a need for the public authorities in every country to adopt a multidisciplinary approach in planning rescue operations and to coordinate the work of the security services, civil defence units, fire-fighters, Red Cross and Red Crescent teams and voluntary agencies involved.

The participants also stressed the necessity for action to be taken at the national and local levels, and indeed within individual families, to ensure adequate preparation for the eventuality of burn injuries. It is vitally important to make individuals, families and communities self-sufficient in coping with the emergency phase of a disaster, and hence to provide instruction in first aid and to set up teams of trained volunteers.

Burn-therapy procedures have become highly sophisticated and papers on the subject submitted by several surgeons attending the Conference will be of great interest to specialists. Generally speaking, however, the participants underlined the need to improve the arrangements made for emergency treatment of burn victims and for their speedy transfer to hospital, and to increase the technical and psychological preparedness of rescue teams and other professional and volunteer staff involved in rescue operations. Nor was the need to provide psychological assistance to the victims themselves overlooked.

Emphasis was also laid on the importance of training doctors to deal with the aftermath of disasters (simulation exercises, constant updating of technical knowledge, courses, etc.) and extending first-aid and health-education courses to certain sectors of the population, particularly schoolchildren.

The ICRC was invited to the Conference and presented a paper on the role of the national and international Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations in preventing natural and man-made disasters. Particular attention was given to the ICRC's mandate and the specific nature of its relief activities and its medical work in connection with armed conflict. The proceedings of the Conference also include a contribution by the Italian Red Cross on its role in large-scale emergencies.

Finally, the Conference made clear that the task of dealing with major disasters is not only a matter for specialists; it also requires deployment of the resources normally used by government, public works, agriculture, and national health-care and social welfare systems. This will make assistance to victims all the more effective as the different services involved become aware of their interdependence and take steps to coordinate their activities.

² M. Masellis and S.W.A. Gunn (eds.), *The Management of Mass Burn Casualties and Fire Disasters*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1992, 340 pp.

The experiences, lessons and proposals contained in this book are recommended reading for doctors, civil defence workers, firemen, all those engaged in the medical, paramedical, security, logistic and training aspects of disaster relief, and of course the professionals and volunteers of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which play an increasingly vital role in assisting the victims of disasters of all sorts.

Jacques Meurant

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL MECHANISMS GOVERNING THE USE OF FORCE: AMBIGUITIES AND LIMITATIONS¹

This study by Romualdo Bermejo García, Professor of Public International Law at the University of Navarra, examines the age-old and yet topical issue of the use of force in international relations.

As Professor Bermejo rightly points out, analysing international provisions governing the use of force is a major challenge, not only because of the complexity of the subject and the controversy that surrounds it but also because of its broad scope of application, since the topic is as fundamental as the existence of States and their independence.

Professor Bermejo's work is unquestionably a comprehensive, well-documented and detailed study of the use of force and self-defence both prior to and since the establishment of the collective security system provided for in the United Nations Charter. The author holds a pessimistic view of the workings of the system and examines new proposals which, in his opinion, should be introduced in view of the current state of international relations. He thus advocates the principle of preventive self-defence, provided that it remains commensurate with those of proportionality and necessity. This is, however, a widely debated concept on which no consensus has been reached by jurists.

Professor Bermejo's work provides an interesting historical and legal analysis of intervention on humanitarian grounds, which he examines as one of the courses of action that might possibly justify the use of force. The author's position, on

¹Romualdo Bermejo García, *El marco jurídico internacional en materia de uso de la fuerza: ambigüedades y límites*. Faculty of Law, University of Navarra, Civitas, Madrid, 1993, 422 pp.