

side experts, of various nationalities, who have agreed to take part in the institution's deliberations in a personal capacity and who meet twice a year in Geneva in a working group. In 1990, they met on 14, 15 and 16 May, and on 26, 27 and 28 November.

## Development of international humanitarian law

In its Resolution III, the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross asked the ICRC to continue its work to improve identification of medical transports and to keep it informed of developments.

In accordance with this request, and pursuant to Article 98 of Additional Protocol I, the ICRC continued to work on revision of the Protocol's Annex I (Regulations Concerning Identification) and convened a meeting of technical experts in Geneva on 20-24 August 1990, attended by over 110 experts and government observers representing 60 States party to Protocol I or only to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, as well as observers from specialized international organizations (in particular ICAO, IMO and ITU).<sup>4</sup> The meeting of experts made it possible to study in detail the present provisions of Annex I and to prepare the necessary amendments incorporating the technical rules adopted since 1977 by the specialized international organizations. It was likewise an opportunity to clarify and update some of the existing provisions.

As stipulated in Article 98(2) of Protocol I, any amendments must be ratified by a diplomatic conference that Switzerland, as depositary State for the 1949 Conven-

tions and their Additional Protocols, said it was prepared to convene.

The ICRC also continued discussions with the aforesaid specialized organizations on problems relating to the marking and identification of medical transports in armed conflicts. These organizations have always been most helpful and cooperative. IMO, for example, has granted the ICRC observer status.

### New weapons

In accordance with Resolution VII (B) of the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross, the ICRC continued to follow weapons development, in particular that of small-calibre bullets, and new weapons technology.

ICRC lawyers and the institution's technical adviser attended meetings, both in Switzerland and abroad, on small-calibre bullets and new infantry weapons under development. They reminded the participants of the relevant rules of international humanitarian law and stressed the need to standardize tests in order to identify, before they go into production, bullets that fragment too easily.

Further to recommendations made by the round table on battleground laser weapons, held by the ICRC in June 1989, the institution convened two specialized working groups that met from 31 May to 1 June and from 5 to 7 November 1990 respectively. The first meeting dealt with technical and medical aspects of the use of such weapons. The second studied the inevitable psychological and social problems that would be caused by laser weapons whose principal effect would be the permanent blinding of soldiers. A study was made comparing those effects with other wounds and disabilities caused by war. The results of these meetings will enable a larger conference in 1991 to con-

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<sup>4</sup> International Civil Aviation Organization, International Maritime Organization, International Telecommunication Union.

sider the advisability of some kind of regulation to prohibit or limit weapons whose principal effect is to irreversibly blind combatants.

### The law of war at sea

The ICRC took an active part in the round table of experts on international humanitarian law applicable to armed conflict at sea. The meeting was held in Toulon, France, and was organized by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in conjunction with the Mediterranean Institute of Strategic Studies and the French Red Cross. It was the second of a series of meetings under the plan of action adopted in Madrid in 1988, which provides for the drafting of a document indicating the present state of treaty and customary law and, where appropriate, some proposals for its amendment and development. The Toulon meeting discussed methods and means of combat in naval warfare. This included both general principles and specific rules relating to the use of sea mines and long-distance weapons, precautions that must be taken in the event of attack, the use of blockades and the establishment of special zones.

The ICRC also took part in a symposium on the law of naval warfare which was held by the Naval War College in Newport, USA, from 1 to 3 February 1990. The meeting, which discussed the targeting of merchant shipping, had 62 participants, half of whom were US Navy officers. The other participants were academics or military personnel from the USA and a few other States.

### Humanitarian assistance

The development of international law in the area of assistance to the victims of natural and technological disasters continued to be of keen interest to the ICRC.

The institution, whose mandate primarily concerns armed conflict, made a point of stressing that humanitarian assistance in such situations is governed by detailed provisions of international humanitarian law. By laying down the relevant procedures, those provisions establish the principle that civilians who lack the basic necessities for their survival must be enabled to receive impartial humanitarian assistance.

### Relations with other institutions in the realm of international humanitarian law

The ICRC kept in close touch with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy, and, as in previous years, helped in the preparation and running of several courses and seminars organized by the Institute. Thus, it was closely involved in the *15th Round Table on current problems of international humanitarian law* (4-8 September 1990) which brought together over 150 people representing governments, the academic world, international organizations and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The meeting examined specific means of improving respect for international humanitarian law and discussed topics such as:

- the contents and scope of the obligation to ensure respect for the law (Article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocol I of 1977);
- the role of the future International Fact-Finding Commission (Article 90 of Protocol I);
- the usefulness of a system of periodic reports on the application of international humanitarian law;
- the role of the United Nations in implementing that body of law.