

The meeting ended with a day of discussions, organized jointly by the Institute and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), on the subject "Refugees — a continuing challenge for humanity: for a realistic approach in asylum policy".

As usual, the round table was followed by a Red Cross and Red Crescent symposium, this time devoted to "National laws and policy as a factor in the development of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies".

The ICRC was also involved in a number of courses, conferences and seminars organized by institutions and associations concerned with international humanitarian law, such as the *American Society of International Law* (Washington, 28-31 March), the *International Institute of Human Rights* in Strasbourg, France, the *Inter-American Institute of Human Rights* in San José, Costa Rica, and the *United Nations Institute for Training and Research*, which held a series of courses in The Hague in July.

Relations with other international and regional organizations

The high point of 1990 came when the ICRC was granted observer status with the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 45/6 adopted by consensus on 16 October). Until then, the ICRC had had consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council; this did not reflect the institution's specific character nor its growing cooperation with UN bodies in New York.

The new status takes due account of the ICRC's specific nature and of the mandate conferred on it by the 1949 Geneva Conventions; it also means that the institution will henceforth have access to

all UN meetings and to the documents relative thereto.

The ICRC started making representations to bring about the change in July 1990. Delegates in New York and in Geneva called on about one hundred Permanent Missions, and the institution's field delegations contacted many governments, at the same time enhancing awareness of the ICRC, its mandate and activities and its specific role in today's world.

Observer status having been obtained, delegates from the ICRC's International Organizations Division adopted a new approach at the forty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly, making the ICRC's position better known on a number of questions, such as the new international humanitarian order, the United Nations Decade of International Law, and the United Nations Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons. The delegates emphasized the need to strengthen compliance with existing rules rather than to supplement them, reminding those concerned that the ICRC stood ready to work towards that end. They also encouraged States to ratify the Additional Protocols and stressed that the ICRC attached great importance, in peacetime as well as in war, to dissemination of knowledge of the rules of international humanitarian law.

As an observer, the ICRC was able to attend sessions of the UN Security Council, which met to discuss issues such as the situation in the Middle East. In addition, the ICRC again attended meetings organized by the UN on human rights issues, questions concerning refugees and displaced and repatriated persons, and detention matters. In the latter field, the Eighth Congress for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, organized by the UN from 27 August to

7 September in Havana, recognized that ICRC visits to places of detention contributed to the struggle against torture and disappearances and often resulted in a general improvement in detainees' material and psychological conditions of detention.

The ICRC stepped up its contacts with the UN Centre for Human Rights, in particular in the areas of training and dissemination, as had been recommended in resolutions adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly. Talks on international humanitarian law were given in seminars and workshops organized by the UN, especially in Latin America.

The ICRC also had the opportunity to exchange views on its operational activities with participants in different inter-agency meetings — both in New York and in the field — which dealt more specifically with the situation in the Horn of Africa and in southern Africa.

As in the past, the International Organizations Division participated in many international meetings (Organization of African Unity, Council of Europe, Organization of the Islamic Conference, League of Arab States, Inter-Parliamentary Union, to name but a few), each of which provided an opportunity for the ICRC to lend an attentive ear to the concerns of the international community and to express the humanitarian point of view.

Dissemination

Dissemination of international humanitarian law and the principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is always one of the ICRC's primary objectives. Through such activities the ICRC seeks to promote respect for international humanitarian law and prevent violations of it; to increase the

effectiveness and safety of humanitarian action; and to strengthen the Movement's identity and cohesion whilst making the specific role of each of its components (ICRC, League, National Societies) better known.

The ICRC's efforts in this respect are based on the particular responsibility for dissemination assigned to it by the Movement's Statutes. The ICRC is also helping, along with the League and the National Societies, to achieve the objectives of the Third Programme of Action which was launched for a four-year period by the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross in 1986.

The Programme had four objectives: to encourage States to ratify or accede to the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions; to analyse the legal and practical consequences of provisions of the Additional Protocols; to disseminate and encourage the dissemination of international humanitarian law; and to integrate the dissemination of the principles and ideals of the Movement in all its activities.

With the Third Programme of Action drawing to a close, the ICRC decided in 1990 to review its own dissemination policy in the light of its experience over the past 10 years. It was found that, of the eight target groups identified by the Movement for dissemination,⁵ the ICRC should henceforth focus to a greater extent on five of them: the armed forces, National Societies, government authorities, academic circles and the media — without, of course, neglecting the others. Experience has shown that it is always necessary to adapt dissemination methods to local cultural, political and other con-

⁵ Armed forces, National Societies, government authorities, universities, schools, medical circles, the media and the general public.