

# Dissemination of the humanitarian rules and cooperation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the purpose of prevention

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## INTRODUCTION

When it was founded, the ICRC, recognizing the unpredictable and inescapable nature of war, hoped that it would be able to alleviate the most harmful effects of war by providing protection and assistance and raising awareness<sup>1</sup> of international humanitarian law and the need to respect it. Thus all the activities undertaken by the institution are rooted in the reality of war — the degree of medical assistance and relief, for example, depends on the number of victims, while protection for prisoners is specifically given to “persons detained because of the situation”. Similarly, the ICRC’s Central Tracing Agency forwards family messages when normal communication channels are severed, traces people who have gone missing because of the conflict, and reunites family members separated by the events. The only ICRC activities that are not exclusively a response to needs resulting from war are the dissemination of knowledge of humanitarian law and principles, and cooperation with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1869, the final resolution of the 2nd International Conference of the Red Cross stipulated that “Knowledge of the Articles of the Geneva Convention must be disseminated as widely as possible, particularly among soldiers”.

## The preventive nature of dissemination and cooperation

Like the ICRC's other activities, the dissemination of humanitarian law was codified in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, however, the preventive nature of dissemination has come to the fore. Whereas operational activities are only now tending to extend beyond the limits of the conflict, thus to begin in the phase before the actual outbreak of conflict and to continue in its aftermath,<sup>3</sup> dissemination has always essentially concentrated on those same phases. It was not until 1978, when three ICRC delegates were killed in a serious security incident in Rhodesia, that new operational objectives, namely to ensure the safety of personnel, to promote understanding for and hence acceptance of the ICRC and its work, and to facilitate access to victims, were adopted with a view to preventing violations of humanitarian law by spreading knowledge and awareness of it.

The preventive nature of cooperation in the development of National Societies is less evident. Originally, their role was to prepare themselves in time of peace to act as medical auxiliaries to the armed forces in time of conflict. Thus, as National Society volunteers were to be placed on the same footing as the armed forces' medical services in time of war, their task in time of peace was to prepare for emergency action. However, the epidemics which swept across Europe between the two World Wars and, more particularly, the desire for lasting peace after World War II radically changed the National Societies' original rationale for existence. With the support of the League of Red Cross Societies (now the Federation), they rapidly switched to providing medical and social assistance in peacetime. The ICRC, however, continued to cooperate with the National Societies in preparing for possible emergency situations. These two support systems have enabled the National Societies to gear their activities to the needs dictated by a given situation. For example, the Red Cross or Red Crescent Society of a country at war may intervene to meet the needs that arise,

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<sup>2</sup> Under the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols, the dissemination of humanitarian law is primarily the responsibility of the States, which, by becoming party to these instruments, undertake to spread knowledge of the law and to respect it. At the same time it is up to the ICRC to support these efforts, in accordance with the particular responsibility assigned to it by the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Art. 5, paras a) and g)).

<sup>3</sup> See article by F. Grünwald in this issue of the *Review*, pp. 263-281.

thereby complementing or supplementing the activities undertaken by the ICRC in its own domain, whilst if the country is at peace, the National Society gives priority to victims of natural disasters or serious socio-economic problems.

To sum up, apart from activities that are solely the responsibility of the ICRC, the scope of activities undertaken by the National Societies is determined by each Society's ability to respond to the most urgent humanitarian needs, regardless of whether they occur in a conflict situation or in time of peace. **Obviously, cooperation creates enormous possibilities for the implementation of preventive measures in time of peace.**

## **The ICRC and the prevention of war**

From the very beginning the ICRC has taken a realistic, practical approach and has concentrated on remedial activities. In his inaugural speech at the Geneva Conference of 1863, General Dufour stressed that the institution would strive to "render the consequences (of war) less terrible, rather than pursuing the illusion of eliminating war". Nonetheless, in addition to its wartime activities, the ICRC has also given much thought to ways of preventing war.

The prevention of war was first addressed by the Movement just after World War I, as evidenced by its appeal to the peoples of the world to combat the spirit of war. The appeal was made by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League, and was adopted by the 10th International Conference of the Red Cross in 1921. The ICRC exercised extreme caution in dealing with the issue, its reticence being justified by two major concerns. Firstly, the conflicts of that time were primarily motivated by economic and political ambitions, and it is hard to conceive of the ICRC championing measures for the prevention of conflicts in a Europe dominated by the territorial conquests and re-conquests of the late nineteenth century. Such an aspiration would have been considered equally absurd during the Cold War conflicts, where supranational strategic interests and national ideological ambitions prevailed. Secondly, the very structure of war lent itself to effective action by the ICRC. The combatants were educated in the art of warfare and operated within a strict hierarchical system, whilst the ICRC was in contact with the highest echelons of command. It was thus able to put over its humanitarian message and ensure that its humanitarian work would be understood at every level. Battlefields were clearly identified, the distinction between

civilian objects and military objectives was respected, and the scope of intervention by the ICRC clearly delineated. Within this context, the ICRC focused most of its efforts on remedial action, taken during the actual conflict to alleviate the consequences of violence and limit the suffering caused. *Since the end of the Cold War, however, observers have repeatedly pointed out that the world is changing, and that this process is causing new types of conflicts to emerge.* If this is the case, the ICRC might have even less reason than it did in the past to distance itself from preventive measures, including measures for the prevention of conflicts.

## Changes in the humanitarian field

Changes in the humanitarian field may be summarized as follows:

1. Most of today's conflicts are not motivated by national or supranational interests but are the product of internal tensions, more often involving issues of identity than politics or ideology. People in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Chechnya, for example, are fighting to defend or ensure the survival of their clan or community.
2. These "identity" conflicts have no territorial boundaries. The war is fought anywhere and everywhere, and affects civilians in particular. Urban violence is becoming the order of the day as confrontations occur with growing frequency in the villages and towns, especially poverty-stricken, densely populated districts.<sup>4</sup>
3. The combatants no longer make any distinction between themselves and civilians — a situation which leaves the ICRC somewhat at a loss. Whereas in the past the ICRC would traditionally negotiate with those in power and could rely on the authority of its high-level contacts to promote respect for humanitarian law at the lower levels of the hierarchy, today's conflicts present a very different picture. The worst violations of humanitarian law and principles are no longer committed by military personnel but by undisciplined irregulars and by civilians. Any civilian may be pressed into service by lawless bands of militia

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the ICRC finds it difficult to work in densely populated, poverty-stricken areas such as shanty towns. In Peru, for example, the delegation was forced to abandon its aid to victims of the violence that flared in the slums of Lima, since to assist such a small percentage of the population while two million other people all around were living below the poverty line would have been unthinkable. Yet identity conflicts and civil wars typically thrive in such surroundings.

or armed groups who, respecting neither God nor man, claim to be defending the integrity of the clan, ethnic community, or religious faith. It should be stressed that the religious factor, always acute in an identity crisis, can render the ICRC even more powerless to act, for religious fanaticism places a coherent and sacrosanct value system in direct opposition to humanitarian law, which is perceived as profane and — what is worse — neutral. And once the good and the bad (or Good and Evil) have been designated by God, what room is left for neutrality or impartiality? Crises with religious implications are further complicated by the notion of martyrdom — a very sensitive issue for an organization such as the ICRC to address since, in the eyes of fanatics, the ICRC is included in the rejection of anything Western.

4. Lastly, wars are no longer fought for the purpose of guaranteeing State or domestic security. In a situation where the most basic resources are in short supply, the goal is to destroy the other side in order to ensure one's own survival.<sup>5</sup> In some ways, today's conflicts resemble those of the Middle Ages, when capture often spelled death, when women and children were treated as the spoils of war, and when it was the practice of belligerents to destroy the enemy without further ado. The armed forces and senior government officials, formerly the ICRC's best contacts, can no longer be relied on alone to promote the letter or the spirit of international humanitarian law.

## **Prevention rather than cure**

Faced with anarchic violence, the ICRC and other humanitarian agencies do not know where to turn: they no longer have contacts in a position to pass their message from the upper ranks of the hierarchy down to its lowest levels; combatants are no longer clearly identified; the rules are no longer applied because the belligerents never learned them; and violence knows no limits, because governmental authority has given way to the arbitrary sway of the militias or terrorism. Within this context, the international community is making even greater efforts than the humanitarian organizations to find new means of crisis management. For example, in his *Agenda for Peace* the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali calls for a whole range of preventive measures to meet the

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<sup>5</sup> See Robert Kaplan's analysis of new types of conflicts, "The coming anarchy" in *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, pp. 44-76.

challenge of post-Cold War conflicts. At the regional level, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, previously the CSCE) has taken a number of steps to create international mechanisms to help prevent conflicts; such mechanisms are justified by the OSCE Secretary General in these terms: “Uncontrolled inter-ethnic conflicts were an almost unknown phenomenon in the period of East-West confrontation. With their abrupt re-emergence, the international institutions were caught completely unprepared, without experience and basically without instruments, to deal with this challenge — thus new approaches have had to be developed”.<sup>6</sup>

## **THE ROLE PLAYED BY COOPERATION AND DISSEMINATION IN CONFLICT PREVENTION**

The ICRC has developed a large number of dissemination and cooperation activities for the purpose of preventing conflicts. Some of these activities are described below.

### **Preventive action**

The ICRC defines its role in the prevention of conflicts by setting objectives and determines the extent of its involvement by allocating resources. The objectives set and the means deployed depend on the respective situation.

#### **a) The objectives of preventive action**

The objectives of preventive action are determined by the type of situation in which the ICRC intervenes. A general distinction is made between three types of situation, according to three phases: towards conflict — during conflict — towards peace. The objective of preventing violations of international humanitarian law and limiting suffering is constant and unchanging, retaining its validity whatever the situation. In all three situations it is a continuum. Dissemination, on the other hand,

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<sup>6</sup> Dr Wilhelm Höyneck, Secretary General of the CSCE, “CSCE works to develop its conflict prevention potential”, *NATO Review*, April 1994, pp. 16-22.

places varying emphasis on its respective objectives at each phase of the conflict. In a pre-conflict situation, for example, cooperation and dissemination activities are both intended to **prevent the outbreak of violence**; during the conflict, the preventive<sup>7</sup> objectives are primarily to **limit the extent of the violence**; and once the conflict is over, activities are mainly designed to **prevent a breakdown in the peace process**. Therefore, it is important to identify the type of situation in which the ICRC is called upon to intervene so that its preventive role can be determined on this basis and on the basis of the resources available for fulfilling this role.

## b) The methods used

As a general rule, the term “prevention” is taken to imply negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. But political instruments for the peaceful settlement of conflicts are rarely employed by the ICRC,<sup>8</sup> since negotiating to resolve a conflict involves military, political and economic interests which it does not address. International and regional organizations like the UN and the OSCE, on the other hand, have bodies and procedures to deal with such issues.<sup>9</sup>

However, there are other categories of preventive action in which the ICRC can intervene. Through dissemination, it helps to prevent conflicts by promoting values such as tolerance and impartiality which are conducive to the establishment of a spirit of peace. Similarly, through cooperation with the National Societies, ICRC action can have an impact on certain causes of conflict.

Thus, the ICRC’s preventive role varies, depending on the various stages in the development of conflict, which includes not only open war but also the phases leading up to and following the hostilities. Different terms are used to refer to these stages. The UN, for example, speaks of *peace-keeping*, *peace-making* and *peace-building*. The OSCE, on the other hand, refers to its activities in the pre-conflict phase as *early warning*, *early action* and *conflict prevention*. To designate the conflict phase, it uses the term *crisis management* and does not refer to preventive

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<sup>7</sup> Emphasis should be placed on the word *preventive* since, in time of conflict, dissemination also has operational objectives such as guaranteeing the safety of humanitarian activities and personnel, and facilitating access to victims.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, we might recall the role of the ICRC during the Cuba crisis (1962), in Santo Domingo (1965), and in El Salvador (1989).

<sup>9</sup> See the *Handbook for the peaceful settlement of differences between States*, United Nations, New York, 1992.

activities in the subsequent phase. For its part, the ICRC, underscoring its wish to contribute to prevention above all in situations closely associated with armed conflict, has chosen to refer to these situations as *towards conflict*, *during conflict* and *towards peace*. In these contexts, the ICRC engages in preventive activities through some forty specialist delegates in the field and through twenty or so regional delegations.

## **Dissemination and cooperation in the “towards conflict” phase**

This phase is a very dynamic one. Various degrees of tension may be observed, culminating in the state of emergency or so-called “open” conflict. In his address to the seminar on minorities and the prevention of conflicts, held at the Henry Dunant Institute in 1993, Professor Kux described four phases in the development of violence,<sup>10</sup> each of them recognizable by specific signs. Though the inventory of these signals is by no means exhaustive, observation of them helps in adopting advance measures to check any escalation.

During the initial phase, the first signs of impending conflict can be seen in the discrimination suffered by individuals because they belong to some specific group. They can take the form of public statements or street demonstrations. In the second phase, the expression of grievances leads to a mobilization of support for the cultural, social or ethnic characteristics of the group concerned. The speed of recourse to political and economic means to defend real or perceived rights depends on the speed with which the situation deteriorates (political instability, economic decline, border changes, massive migrations, the collapse of a dominant ideology, biased media campaigns, and so on). Then come the first violent demonstrations and the situation becomes polarized. Moderate leaders are replaced by more radical ones. Communication between groups diminishes, soon to be broken off entirely. The third phase is thus reached. The subjects of discord become highly emotive; political discourse is loaded with references to group identity; the emphasis is on differences rather than similarities. Groups threaten each other with the use of violence and then carry out their threats. One side organizes an armed group; the other reinforces

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<sup>10</sup> See the document *Minorities and prevention of conflicts: role of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1993, pp. 34-38.

its repressive measures. In the final phase, open conflict flares and a state of emergency is declared. Negotiations are deadlocked and demarcations of identity become battle lines.

The impact of preventive measures is inversely proportional to the rise in violence. At best, the greatest effort must be made during the first two phases, before violent demonstrations start to occur and above all before the parties feel threatened and replace moderate leaders by extremists.

To sum up, preventive measures by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can be taken at the point where the manifold causes of conflict converge. It is in such situations of political upheaval and shattered national solidarity, when political regulation is lacking and when social iniquity, ethnic exclusion and discrimination reign, that the ICRC and the National Societies can take action to prevent the situation from deteriorating into armed conflict.

#### **a) Contribution of National Societies**

The National Societies,<sup>11</sup> supported by the Federation, are particularly well placed to respond to the first and second phases in the development of conflicts. Experience shows, however, that despite the great efforts which the Federation makes to support its members, the support is not enough and, more especially, the results obtained fall short of the challenges emerging in new types of conflicts. More than ever, there is a need to address humanitarian questions before conflict breaks out by calling on the indispensable help of local authorities or institutions. International organizations do not have the cultural affinities needed for a deeper understanding of the context (which would permit timely preventive action) nor immediate access to information on sources of local tension. It is up to local authorities or institutions to take the initiative before tensions degenerate into civil war or some other form of large-scale conflict. International organizations can step in only in individual cases as they do not have the means to take preventive action wherever necessary. On the other hand, because they are well aware of the limited effectiveness of humanitarian action in response to the anarchic savagery of recent conflicts, they can do more to help competent local bodies to sustain their preventive efforts. And also because there is every likelihood of identity conflicts multiplying throughout the world.

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<sup>11</sup> See Articles 3 and 6 of the Statutes of the Movement.

The National Societies and their members are the competent local organizations of the Movement. The introversion of cultures, the recourse to identity-centred ideology and the violent forms in which this is manifested are often explained as a reaction to isolation or to the exclusion of a community from political and economic life because of its ethnic or cultural characteristics. National Societies have the means to address this particular cause of violent upheaval by simple respect for the principles of the Movement and by bearing the need for operational efficiency in mind. Let us recall the situation of the South African Red Cross during the apartheid era, when it wished to go to the townships to give help to those injured in the riots, although its members, employees and volunteers were exclusively of the white race. To reproduce within its own structures the deliberate or unintentional discrimination of the State against a community is not only contrary to the principle of impartiality, but also helps to exacerbate the feelings of exclusion and isolation which are certainly the main reasons for promoting a heightened sense of group identity and its violent manifestations. Some National Societies have modified their recruitment procedures and their structures in order to maintain a balanced representation of the communities. In South Africa, all vacant posts are now widely advertised in all regions of the country. The selection of candidates is no longer decided according to ethnic criteria or qualifications already obtained but on the basis of their training potential. Finally, once recruited, employees are helped through continuous training. The Northern Ireland branch of the British Red Cross also advertises vacant posts widely without mentioning whether the region or district concerned is Catholic or Protestant. Candidates submit their applications and indicate their religion in a sealed envelope, which is opened only after the selection process is complete. The Malaysian Red Crescent Society has also had long experience of multiracial representation since the violent ethnic clashes of 1969.<sup>12</sup>

Tolerance and participation — the real antidotes to group identity conflicts — can also be promoted by other means. In 1989 UNICEF, in cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross Society, organized a holiday camp in Lebanon for the young people of all the country's various communities. For a week, the children lived and played together, talked and shared experiences. The video which UNICEF made on this occasion is a poignant testimony to their discovery and growing understanding of

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<sup>12</sup> For further details of these various experiences, see *Minorities and prevention of conflicts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-29.

each other, beyond prejudices and stereotypes. The Spanish Red Cross has also made efforts to promote tolerance and the acceptance of others among young people. It has conducted a campaign including leaflets, posters, and a TV advertisement. At the same time, it has approached schools with an educational role-playing series relating to understanding and communication between groups, communities, or peoples.

### **b) Contribution of the ICRC**

The ICRC's contribution to conflict prevention primarily takes the form of promoting knowledge and the implementation of international humanitarian law as being conducive to mutual understanding, tolerance, cooperation, and a durable peace between peoples. This principle has frequently been recalled by the ICRC during consideration within the Movement of its role in favour of peace.<sup>13</sup> In making known the humanitarian rules, the ICRC focuses on ethical and cultural values (myth, poetry, symbolism), and on politics and law. These various elements all have a bearing on prevention: ethics, law, and politics help to tame violence, just as serious economic and social instability (massive migrations, economic crises, etc.) serve to exacerbate it. Popular ethical codes and symbolism may include a moral culture of violence, reinforced by deeply entrenched reference values such as ethnicity or nationalism. This propensity to violence can be countered by the values of peace, humanism, or humanitarianism and tolerance. Political power, depending on historical interests or the constraints imposed upon it, may establish a hierarchy of such values, create legal norms, and adopt enabling measures. However, before beginning the political and legal revival of humanitarian values, it is necessary to demonstrate that they form part of the cultural heritage of the society concerned.

### **c) Intercultural approach**

The ICRC delegation in Cairo has pursued this approach in an exemplary manner. In particular, it has published calendars which retrace humanitarian thought in pre-Islamic and Islamic history. Thus, the first "cultural" calendar in 1993 drew its references from the historical chronicles of the Arab-Muslim world. The texts, set alongside the cor-

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<sup>13</sup> See in particular: *To Promote Peace — Resolutions on peace adopted by the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent since 1921* and the reports of the World Red Cross Conferences on Peace (Belgrade, 11-13 June 1975, and Aaland/Stockholm, 2-7 September 1984).

responding provisions of international humanitarian law, largely consisted of injunctions by the Caliphs and the orders of army commanders setting out to war at the time of the Crusades. The 1994 calendar contained humanitarian quotations from Arabic literature and poetry. This year's calendar recalls agreements concluded between civilizations, some of the texts antedating Christianity and Islam. The intercultural approach thus consists in seeking in local symbolism the sometimes forgotten traces of humanitarian traditions and juxtaposing this heritage with humanitarian law so as to show the universality of these values.

The intercultural approach also finds expression through other channels of communication. The Cairo delegation has already produced two radio serials of thirty episodes which are broadcast in the countries of the Middle East, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan. The first series, based on the "Thousand and One Nights", is entitled "The Thousand and One Days". As in the original, the heroine has to save her life by telling a story every night to the king who is holding her captive. During the day, however, she escapes from the castle and sees the distress and violence in the world around her. When she returns to the king, she tells tales which reflect the injustices she has seen and shows how they can be remedied by acts of charity and inter-community solidarity. The second series, on the other hand, is based on real life incidents; it tells the stories of people who have received humanitarian aid or of those who are involved in it (volunteers from National Societies, ICRC delegates and local employees). The episodes have been produced, directed and recorded together with Egyptian professionals and actors.

The intercultural approach, the cornerstone of preventive efforts, is by no means the exclusive preserve of the Cairo delegation, though that was where the first systematic steps were taken. Now, more and more delegations — like the ones in Burundi and the Caucasus — are following suit. Other preventive approaches are also being taken in these projects: one is a completely new initiative designed to rally public opinion in support of respect for a minimum of humanitarian principles; the other seeks to encourage systematic instruction in the values underlying humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of the Movement as part of the primary and secondary school curriculum.

Concerned about the scale of the human tragedy affecting parts of Burundi since October 1993, the ICRC set up a series of meetings with leading civilians on the subject of "Burundi's humanitarian traditions: change and the possibilities for restoring their influence in the Burundi of today". The discussions resulted in the adoption of a "Declaration for the promotion of humanitarian conduct: appeal for a minimum of humanity

in situations of internal violence". The Declaration, which draws on international humanitarian law provisions, was formulated by the Burundians on the basis of traditional local proverbs in the African Great Lakes region. A national campaign was launched to publicize the Declaration, using a variety of teaching methods such as illustrated brochures, a play and a radio adaptation of it, and a video showing the text of the Declaration against a background of pictures filmed after the tragic events of October 1993. Other programmes are being carried out in the country's schools.

The Caucasus project is narrower in scope, for it is destined more specifically for schools and ministries of education. The ICRC contacted those ministries in certain countries of the former USSR and offered to prepare an instruction manual similar to the one drawn up by the Dissemination/Youth department of the Geneva section of the Swiss Red Cross, but adapted to the countries' particular traditions and culture. The manual is included in the teaching of the national language and the basic texts, presented in a form accessible to children, encourage tolerance, solidarity and the acceptance of others. It also contains interactive exercises relating to the pupils' immediate environment so that humanitarian values can be inculcated through experience and participation.

#### **d) Politics and law**

No description of the ICRC's work in the field of prevention would be complete without reference to politics and law. Political power, within its own limits, can adopt measures to protect and implement humanitarian law by giving political support for them and drawing up legal rules. The ICRC also intervenes at this level, particularly with the help of its regional delegations and by making proposals for systematic instruction in the humanitarian rules to be provided in academic circles in peacetime.

One of the first priorities of regional delegations is to encourage the authorities to adopt measures to implement international humanitarian law. These delegations can sometimes serve as an early warning system, thus enabling the ICRC to prepare for a possible emergency and to intervene very rapidly when necessary.

#### **e) Towards more systematic dissemination and the search for local disseminators**

Such is the scale and gravity of the task of ensuring respect for humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement that, in today's world, our approach must be to encourage local people to endorse humanitarian values and to undertake to propagate them. At its meeting on

20 October 1994, the ICRC's Executive Board approved a plan of action intended to reinforce a systematic approach to certain target groups. The document setting out the course of action ("To assist States to assume their treaty obligation to disseminate...") reaffirms the terms of the Final Declaration adopted by the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims (Geneva, 30 August-1 September 1993). The said obligation calls for an effort of systematic dissemination at national level, particularly to the armed forces, educational establishments, public administrations, and the population in general. The ICRC has also set itself the task of helping National Societies to systematize dissemination to all their staff and members, including volunteers. When addressing an external target group, these Societies will enjoy all the more credibility if their message is associated with some specific activity undertaken on that group's behalf.

The ICRC is gradually applying this systematic approach to dissemination in the field. Its staff for the "Eastern Europe and Central Asia" operational zone have already acquired considerable experience in this regard. Thus, apart from the programmes already launched in the schools of the Caucasus, a similar approach is currently being taken with regard to the National Societies, armed forces, and universities of that region.

All the experiences referred to here — and the list is far from exhaustive — illustrate just how far the ICRC is involved in preventing the emergence of violence through dissemination activities in the phase preceding conflict. Several of these activities, such as the national dissemination campaign in Burundi, have been developed in the light of recent events. However, the essence of these projects lies, on the one hand, in the rejection of a fatalistic view of inter-community violence and, on the other, in the conviction that such tensions can be resolved by means other than armed confrontation. The initiatives taken by the National Societies and the ICRC thus go beyond the latter's priority aim, which was to prepare for emergency situations, but also (the one is not possible without the other) make a real contribution to the prevention of conflicts.

### **Dissemination during conflict<sup>14</sup>**

During a conflict, the preventive aim of dissemination changes. It is no longer a question of preventing the *emergence* of violence but of

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<sup>14</sup> In the following lines, the question of cooperation has been deliberately left to one side. In a situation of armed violence, cooperation with the National Societies focuses on

preventing its *extension* and limiting the number of victims. The aim of preventing the emergence of violence can no longer be maintained since the parties have already effectively taken up arms and there are victims. In these situations, dissemination also includes operational aims.

Until 1978, when a serious security incident in Rhodesia cost the lives of three delegates, dissemination was concerned primarily with the prevention of violations of humanitarian law, in accordance with the recommendation of the 4th International Conference of the Red Cross in 1887 designed to "spread knowledge" (of humanitarian law). The 1978 tragedy sparked off a debate on the operational utility of dissemination to promote acceptance of the ICRC, guarantee the security of its personnel and facilitate access to victims. This period of reflection led to the ICRC Executive Board's adoption in 1990 of a dissemination policy with the specific aim of "helping to enhance the security and effectiveness of humanitarian action". Given the conditions on the ground in a situation of conflict, this immediate objective of security tends to predominate. Moreover, it must be stressed that most of the delegates specializing in dissemination are sent to areas of conflict.

In the heat of war, feelings run high among the combatants, their leaders, and the population as a whole. Dissemination then comes up against problems largely inherent in such an inflamed situation. War generates crime. With the disappearance of authority and the likelihood of punishment, the borders between legality and illegality become blurred. "Violence breeds violence and horror engenders horror".<sup>15</sup> Chaos reigns supreme when the very horror of an act offers the only chance of survival, as seems to have been the case in Rwanda. In the dynamics of conflict, where destruction of the adversary is often the primary objective, dissemination is diametrically opposed to that objective. The idea of educating regular or militia forces in time of war seems more unrealistic than the intention in time of peace "to train men to become men and to remain men even when they are combatants",<sup>16</sup> even if the act of dissemination has to be repeated. In a situation of conflict, delegates engaged in dis-

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their emergency preparedness by developing their capacity for remedial action (first aid, evacuation of the injured, etc.), rather than for the preventive action which is the subject of the present article. However, it remains important to find a means of ensuring that remedial action in emergency situations is also of long-term benefit in reinforcing the respective Red Cross or Red Crescent Society.

<sup>15</sup> Eric David, *Principes de droit des conflits armés*, Bruylant, Brussels, 1994, p. 533.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

semination can at best turn to their own heavy weapons. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, every conceivable item in the dissemination arsenal has been deployed to encourage at least a minimum of humane conduct: the creation of a network of delegates and local staff specializing in dissemination, TV advertisements, radio broadcasts, brochures, appeals in newspapers, educational sessions with the armed forces and other people bearing arms... And all for a result which, though difficult to evaluate, must be modest, given the extent of violations of the most fundamental humanitarian principles. There is a similar or even worse sense of impotence in Rwanda, where the ICRC's communication efforts have enabled it to remain "tolerated in the midst of the intolerable". Yet it has at least been able to bring help to a number of victims, though admittedly small.

However, this comment as to the very restricted impact of preventive dissemination during conflict must be placed in context. The situations referred to above are extreme cases. It can and does vary considerably on the ground, in the thirty or so theatres of operations in which the ICRC is present. In fact, the more violent and anarchic the situation, the truer the argument often put forward by the ICRC's operations staff, namely that operational activities are the best form of dissemination. Indeed, in the worst of circumstances, faced with fanaticism and a disorganized power structure that is no longer respected, where communication is no longer possible and authority has disappeared, the best way of propagating a spirit of mercy and respect for human dignity unquestionably lies in the example of impartial assistance. But the ICRC's inability to convince fanaticized minds does reflect a failure of dissemination work in the pre-conflict phase, for the humanitarian message must be conveyed before a war if there is to be any chance of getting through to the combatants' humanitarian conscience once hostilities have broken out. That is the challenge which must be taken up in times of peace and relative peace. To that end, with the indispensable aid of the States, dissemination resorts to an intercultural approach, creating a sense of responsibility in the local media and systematically raising the awareness of young people, academic circles, National Societies, and the armed forces.

## **Dissemination and cooperation in the post-conflict phase**

In the post-conflict phase, dissemination and cooperation revert to their pre-conflict aim of preventing the emergence of violence. A number of dissemination activities, moreover, can equally well be carried out

before or after a war. For example, a radio play recorded in Somalia during a phase of abating hostilities praises the values of tolerance and the promotion of a spirit of peace inspired by traditional Somalian values akin to those of humanitarian law. It would have been just as possible to broadcast a message of tolerance before the war and to promote reconciliation after the hostilities. Nevertheless, different shades of meaning do exist and it is preferable to speak of dissemination activities intended *to prevent the breakdown of the peace process*. In other words, dissemination and cooperation after the conflict must be linked to efforts to stabilize the country.

It is true that the main threats to national stability - such as the border disputes, fragile economy and precarious political situation which are all too often the lot of countries emerging from war - do not fall within the competence of the Movement. Other domains, however, particularly the social, psycho-social, and ethno-cultural, are factors which affect the return towards peace and which call for assistance from both the ICRC, the Federation, and the National Societies, whether through cooperation in development or through dissemination.

In Yemen, for example, live munitions still lie in wait around the towns which were besieged during the conflict. They represent a threat to the civil population and especially to children, who do not recognize the danger and run the risk of being maimed for life. As a partial response to this problem (the explosives are still where they were), the ICRC delegation, together with the Yemen Red Crescent Society, has organized a campaign to warn the population against the hazards and to tell children what they should do. The campaign proved to be a great success because it addressed a genuine social concern. At the same time, it was an opportunity to promote knowledge of humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

In order to maximize the preventive effect, the dissemination and cooperation options may have to be adapted to meet the more prominent social problems. In this context, the initiative taken by the Australian Red Cross, which has conducted a programme in the West Bank for the reintegration of former detainees, is particularly apposite. According to the conclusions of a recent report published after a study conducted in seven countries emerging from civil war, peace, demobilization, and reintegration are highly interdependent processes.<sup>17</sup> The reintegration of

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<sup>17</sup> Report of the World Bank Seminar, *Demobilization and Reintegration Programs for Military Personnel*, Paris, 28 October 1994.

persons removed “from civilian life” by hostilities, such as soldiers, militiamen, and detainees, is a far from negligible contribution to the restoration of peace.

In this context, we must recall the fate of the children of the *intifada*. While their situation is not as extreme as that of child-soldiers, they have grown up amidst violence and prejudice. They deserve the help of a body which could, for example, organize campaigns on the subject of tolerance and acceptance of others, or arrange inter-community camps like those run in Lebanon in 1989 by UNICEF in cooperation with the National Society. Similarly, the Spanish Red Cross has devised role-playing games to promote tolerance and acceptance of others among young people.

Finally, in preparation for a return to peace and the gradual withdrawal of the ICRC, dissemination work must be reorganized to resume a systematic approach to the priority target groups. If the ICRC withdraws from an operation without having made the authorities aware of the obligations to promote humanitarian law that adherence to the Conventions entails, or without leaving behind local dissemination structures and personnel, it must consider that it has to some extent failed in its task.

## CONCLUSION

The new types of conflict now emerging have completely changed the sphere of humanitarian action: there are no contacts capable of passing messages down through the chain of command; combatants can no longer be clearly identified; parties cannot be reminded of the rules because they have never learnt them; there are no limits to be respected because the authority of the State has given way to the arbitrary rule of militia forces or terrorism.

To ensure respect for international humanitarian law, the ICRC must now more than ever diversify its previous hierarchical and reactive approach. Due account must be taken of the fact that since the advent of irregular armed bands, recruited in haste from the most disadvantaged sections of the population, violations of humanitarian law are no longer the monopoly of the regular armed forces. Moreover, to give the message a greater impact, respect for the rules of law must be “negotiated” before armed violence breaks out. For reasons inherent in the logic of war, the impact of dissemination is inversely proportional to the rise in violence.

This means that the crucial time to ensure a minimum of humane conduct is before the outbreak of hostilities, and that the capacity to

convey the humanitarian message to those who may take up arms in a conflict, i.e. the population in general and young people in particular, is absolutely essential. The means adopted to this end include the systematic dissemination of the humanitarian message to certain target groups; reference to humanitarian values deeply rooted in the local culture so as to adapt dissemination to the local context; and, finally, efforts to develop a stronger sense of responsibility in the media and to involve National Societies to a greater extent in the task of dissemination in peacetime.

Dissemination and cooperation activities undertaken before a conflict inevitably have a preventive effect by helping to avert the outbreak of conflict. Such activities after the end of hostilities likewise help to prevent any breakdown in the peace process. Some of the most recent and remarkable new ventures have been described in this article. It is encouraging to see how they have developed and spread. Their further development and widespread implementation will require the support of the States and the active participation of the Movement's components, and are indispensable if we are to meet the challenge now presented by new types of conflict. However, besides this necessity to strive even harder before and after conflicts to prevent violations of humanitarian law, given the anarchic violence and fanaticism of conflicts of group identity, it may also be advisable to make the prevention of conflicts an explicit objective of dissemination and cooperation activities in times of relative peace.

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