

# Promoting norms to limit violence in crisis situations: challenges, strategies and alliances

by **Marion Harroff-Tavel**

## **Promoting norms to limit violence: some original initiatives**

In Somalia, a group of young actors, musicians and scriptwriters are working on a play which is to be produced, filmed and distributed in the form of a video throughout the country. One scene shows a young militiaman boasting of how he has terrorized the population and the reaction of the woman he loves. She evokes the suffering caused by his conduct and refuses to marry a man who has disregarded the code of honour of his clan. This creative work contains a message for young militiamen about the effect of unbridled violence on both its victims and its perpetrators.

In India, a national research centre is running a programme to promote international humanitarian law at the universities of Delhi and Bangalore. This gives the country's future political, financial and military elite, and tomorrow's legal experts, an opportunity to discuss the rules to be observed in situations of conflict. These rules, enshrined in humanitarian law, govern both the conduct of hostilities and the proper behaviour to be adopted vis-à-vis those who are not, or no longer, taking part in the fighting.

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In Central Asia, the armed forces organize manoeuvres during which soldiers are faced with situations where international humanitarian law applies. The ICRC takes part in the practical exercises, playing its own role.

In the Russian Federation, journalism students attend a course on the media and war. Among other topics, they discuss protection for journalists and the responsibility of the media in crisis situations. Their discussions cover both legal and ethical issues.

In Guatemala, representatives of the Maya community are seeking points of convergence between the customs of the Maya and the rules of international humanitarian law. Artists, journalists, members of academic circles, government officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are all involved in this joint project, which makes it possible to tailor the means used for promoting international humanitarian law to the context.

These few examples illustrate the widely diverse nature of the groups that have to be targeted for the promotion of the humanitarian reflex: combatants, of course, but also decision-makers, those who bear political responsibility for a conflict or who may be able to influence its course, economic circles, opinion-makers (the media and intelligentsia), teachers, young people and many others. They also illustrate the variety of situations in which this task of “disseminating”<sup>1</sup> the humanitarian message is performed, whether as a preventive measure or to avoid the recurrence of acts condemned by the international community.<sup>2</sup> Finally, they demonstrate the creative spirit inherent in dissemination, both as concerns the teaching methods applied and the communication tools used.

But why must we promote international humanitarian law? What is the purpose? What is the context? What message should be put across and what strategic approach adopted? What working principles must be

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, the terms “dissemination” and “promotion of international humanitarian law” are used synonymously. The word “dissemination” appears in the Geneva Conventions; it denotes action taken to spread knowledge of the content of the humanitarian treaties. However, the term “promotion” is more appropriate to encompass the whole range of the ICRC’s activities aimed at improving understanding and acceptance of humanitarian law.

<sup>2</sup> The *International Review of the Red Cross* recently devoted the major part of an issue to the dissemination of international humanitarian law (No. 319, July-August 1997, pp. 357-454).

respected? These are some of the questions this article will address, offering some avenues for reflection.

### **The problem**

There is no need to embark on lengthy descriptions of the suffering caused by violations of humanitarian law in armed conflict, no matter who the culprits: the pictures beamed from Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan have brought us face to face with such suffering in recent years.

Nor is there any point in dwelling on the numerous attacks on humanitarian workers. For the ICRC, already traumatized by the murder of three delegates in Burundi, the assassination in Chechnya of six of its staff as they slept in the hospital where they were working, followed by the death of three others in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, created shock waves whose reverberations will be felt for a long time to come. But the ICRC is not the only institution to be targeted. Members of other organizations, including National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, have been killed, kidnapped or threatened, paying the price for their commitment to the humanitarian cause.

Apart from instances where they have actually come under attack, humanitarian agencies frequently see their activities hampered. The obstacles they encounter are often the result of the image they project: they may be perceived as purveyors of Western values, destabilizing the host society, as instruments of the foreign policy of “wealthy” States or of the economic interests of the private sector. In the eyes of some, humanitarian programmes merely salve the conscience of those who are at the root of their problems. Humanitarian agencies working for political ends — or politicians launching humanitarian operations? In short, humanitarian workers are often considered as foreigners who decamp as soon as the violence escalates; visitors who spread messages of tolerance whereas, during the course of history, they have all too frequently displayed a great deal of intolerance. There is no need to go on: rightly or wrongly, the image of humanitarian agencies can become a prism in which everyone sees reflected his or her particular vision of the world.

Whether this perception of humanitarian action is based on actual fact or whether it is engineered by the perpetrators of violence in order to stigmatize unwelcome witnesses or to discredit the international community, the basic issues remain the same. Access to the victims depends to a large extent on this image.

### ***The raison d'être***

How could the promotion of international humanitarian law and the principles of humanitarian action — in other words, dissemination — possibly rise to all the challenges outlined above?

First of all, dissemination alone does not claim to be able to reverse the logic of total war, curb the atrocities caused by spiralling hatred, or even prevent conflicts.

To question the *raison d'être* of humanitarian law because it is not observed, and hence to question the value of dissemination, as certain disillusioned observers sometimes do, is to believe that the usefulness of a rule is measured by the extent to which it is respected. That is false reasoning; it is actually the contrary which is the case. First, there are tasks, such as combating torture, which failure renders all the more urgent; secondly, behaviour and attitudes can be influenced not only at group level but also at the level of the individual. Beyond the phenomenon of collective violence there are acts of humanity which will never be acknowledged. Success in this area cannot be quantified. Finally, anyone who has ever listened to victims of conflict knows that, once an individual's basic needs in terms of food, access to medical care, safety and shelter have been satisfied, his primary concern is that the oppression to which he has been subjected might be repeated and afflict the next generation. Of course, a victim's dearest wish is that humanitarian attitudes be encouraged among his adversaries, but in time, once the conflict is over and passions have abated, thoughts on humanitarian action in time of war extend to the victim's own environment.

### **The protagonists**

The dissemination of international humanitarian law is an obligation for all States party to the Geneva Conventions, who must "include the study thereof in their programmes of military and, if possible, civil instruction, so that the principles thereof may become known to the entire population, in particular to the armed fighting forces ..."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Articles 47/48/127/144 respectively of the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949; Article 83 of Additional Protocol I and Article 19 of Additional Protocol II of 8 June 1977.

It is also a responsibility for the ICRC which, in accordance with the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, has a duty to maintain and disseminate the Movement's Fundamental Principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality) and work for the understanding and dissemination of humanitarian law. A precondition for effective protection of those who are not, or no longer, taking part in the hostilities is that the parties to the conflict must be familiar with the rules which afford such protection.

Thus the ICRC has to do everything in its power to ensure that States fulfil their obligations as concerns dissemination of the law. This involves not only offering advice or sharing expertise, but also more tangible support, for example when a State does not have the human or financial resources it needs to fulfil its obligations. The ICRC may even temporarily act as a substitute for a State if the latter is sceptical about the usefulness of disseminating humanitarian law, in the hope that it can demonstrate that it is in the authorities' interest to follow its example.

### **The objective**

The objective pursued in promoting international humanitarian law and the principles of humanitarian action is to secure respect for this body of law and to gain access to the victims which it protects. In other words, promotion of the law is one of the instruments which make it possible to influence the attitudes and behaviour of all those who are or may be in a position to ensure that, in situations of armed violence, restrictions are placed on the means of warfare used, that victims are treated humanely, and that humanitarian activities can be carried out on their behalf. The steps taken by humanitarian organizations and States to secure compliance with the law, and the pressure of public opinion orchestrated by the media, to cite just two examples, pursue the same aim.

Some people will say that trying to establish a relationship between knowledge of a rule on the one hand and respect for that rule or changes in behaviour inconsistent with it on the other is too ambitious a goal. Indeed, this is a legitimate question. In the field of dissemination among the armed forces, it is recognized that formal teaching has to be backed up by incorporation of the law in military instruction. Hence the efforts made to translate the law into directives which can then become part of military regulations. Hence also the ICRC's concern to remain in contact with the armed forces, even beyond teaching activities, so as to maintain

with their members a dialogue which will help facilitate humanitarian action. Teaching alone is not enough.

How should we view the effects of dissemination among young people? Does it have any chance of influencing their behaviour when they are faced with violence, not only here and now but above all at the time when they might be called upon to apply humanitarian law? Once again, a degree of modesty is in order. There is no automatic cause-and-effect relationship here. Proceeding from an analysis of a conflict situation and the response the law can offer for the problems to which it gives rise, the aim is to provide the adolescent with the means to reflect on the mechanisms of violence and to gain a better understanding of the forces behind it. All this is a necessary prelude to “acceptable” behaviour when violence erupts.

In short, even though the ultimate objective of dissemination is to influence attitudes and behaviour, it is important to remain aware that multiple factors converge to shape them; for example, the extent to which the basic needs of the individual are met in a context of violence, the psychological effects of the trauma experienced, fears of punishment or expectation of reward, to mention just a few. When the individual finds himself in a situation in which he is fighting for his very survival, showing respect for a rule of law or a moral imperative may well become a secondary matter.

Even if, for the reasons given above, the impact of dissemination on behaviour is difficult to assess, dissemination does have one essential merit: it places individuals squarely before their responsibilities by making them aware not only of what the international community expects of them — for some this is the least of their concerns — but also of the dividing line recognized by what we call, for want of a better expression, “the universal conscience” between what is acceptable and what is not. Like a mirror held up before us, it reflects an image of ourselves. Whether or not the individual assumes his responsibilities when called upon to do so is a choice, a reflex even, in which numerous criteria come into play. If the person concerned knows what those criteria are and has given them some thought, this is already quite an achievement. Indeed, it is the primary function of dissemination.

### **The context**

The context in which dissemination is carried out is a world which is changing at several levels. Among recent developments there are three

which have a major impact on the promotion of humanitarian law: the weakening of the State, the changing nature of conflicts, and the globalization of information, at least among the more privileged members of society.

On the global scale, the international system founded on the nation State as a sovereign power is losing ground. The nation State is being undermined by the assertion of religious, ethnic, tribal, clan and geographical identity. The State is also becoming less powerful in the face of the globalization of society, accelerated by that of the economy and by the information age. Lastly, the very foundations of the State are eroded when individuals try to assume its functions by accumulating executive, legislative and judicial powers. The weakening of the nation State, characterized by a lack of confidence on the part of the governed in those who govern them, the declining credibility of State institutions, and even the attempts of some citizens to exclude others from mainstream society may all have repercussions on international humanitarian law, a product of the nineteenth century which places obligations first and foremost on the State or the structured entity opposing it, obligations which the State is not always able to fulfil.

The nature of conflicts is also changing, as the following features of civil wars demonstrate.

- While there are still instances of conventional internal conflicts in which government armed forces are pitted against an organized opposition, there are also extreme situations in which the violence arises from relations between individuals, perhaps between neighbours. Even so, war is not a spontaneous eruption of violence sparked by a breakdown in interpersonal relations; it may be the result of months of propaganda and meticulous preparations. Once the violence of war is unleashed it is no longer possible to make a distinction between civilians and combatants.
- An increasing number of children are being enlisted into irregular armed groups.
- In some conflicts triggered by issues of identity, the argument of collective responsibility resurfaces. Refugees belonging to an ethnic group considered guilty of crimes are hunted down by people convinced that theirs is a just cause; humanitarian law — and refugee law — go by the board.
- Some conflicts become “privatized”, with oil, mining or gas companies or major landowners playing a significant role in the recruitment

of armed militia to ensure their own security or to influence the outcome of the conflict.

- The mercenary dimension of war is increasing, the importance of drug trafficking equalled only by that of the illicit arms trade. War provides fertile ground for criminal activity.

Finally, there is the revolution in communication technology. The effects of the cybernetic age and the possibilities it offers are far from being fully appreciated. Computers are a formidable tool for promoting humanitarian law, at least among the more privileged sectors of society. Every individual should be able to demand respect for this body of law, no longer leaving States alone to bear responsibility for its implementation, since they frequently prove to be incapable of meeting that obligation.

### **The message**

Although the message in situations of conflict is a universal one, focusing on the protection of those who are not, or no longer, taking part in the hostilities, the manner in which it is put over differs depending on the way in which problems are analysed, on the person for whom the message is intended, or on the time and place: the language used to address an American soldier fighting in the Gulf war cannot be the same as that used to talk to child soldiers in Liberia. The language appropriate for a teacher will not be the same as for an adolescent.

Next, the message should as far as possible be associated with a practical activity and illustrated by that activity. For example, by purifying the water in all the areas of a town, especially the neighbourhoods most severely affected, a sanitary engineer can demonstrate the principle of impartiality. All humanitarian workers, whether doctors, nurses, logistics experts or prison visitors, must receive training in communication skills and know what points to make in a given context.

In practice, the ideas conveyed are very simple. What has to be put across is not so much the whole range of provisions of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols — which are often highly detailed and complex — but essential rules which express their basic content. For the operational delegate responsible for spreading knowledge of humanitarian law in a country in conflict, the broad lines of the existing law are quite sufficient. However, a legal specialist will bear in mind that this law is also a set of rules which can be invoked in order to protect victims, and which has to be developed wherever shortcomings are identified.



Finally, it would be a mistake to believe that the message is a product delivered to its addressee in a one-way relationship. The act of communicating involves exchange, dialogue, listening, questioning, give and take, and attempts to reach mutual understanding. Even the way in which the individual who is speaking behaves is a message in itself. The mere fact of taking an interest in the culture of one's audience and being ready to talk about humanitarian issues creates a space for dialogue, an opening which can lead the way to a more structured message about the law when the time is ripe.

## Strategies

To succeed in such an ambitious undertaking, a strategy is essential. Otherwise there is a great risk of becoming bogged down in short-term initiatives with no future. This strategy hinges on three main concepts.

### *Forging links with the local culture*

Let us take an example, similar to the Maya project mentioned earlier: in Somalia, the ICRC appointed local historians to conduct a study on the sources of past conflicts, traditional ways of settling disputes, and the respect due to women, children and the elderly in Somali custom. The study gave rise to a series of radio programmes produced with the BBC on "the clan system and war", "women and war" and "war: the viewpoint of community elders". A cartoon strip intended for young militiamen was also created on the basis of this research, and plays were performed by several local theatre groups. All these productions convey a humanitarian message that is in line with contemporary humanitarian law but stems from the country's own traditions.

This is an interesting approach which is currently being taken up by the ICRC in Rwanda. The delegation's national employees have held group discussions throughout the country to seek points of convergence between international humanitarian law and local codes of conduct in conflict situations. A historian is in charge of the study.

However, such attempts to link the message of international humanitarian law with local culture are open to discussion, as the following few examples illustrate.

- Some authors cast doubt on the idea that culture is a corpus of perceptions, beliefs or symbols which dictate specific opinions, attitudes

or behaviour.<sup>4</sup> Does such a corpus, which supposedly remains stable over time, actually exist? Surely societies are permanently interacting with their environment? These same authors put us on our guard against inventing tradition as an invention of modernity, and against the risk of instilling, through constant repetition, certain values and standards of behaviour which refer explicitly to the past.

- African staff of the ICRC are asking themselves whether the new forms of conflict should lead the organization to invoke traditions which they consider to be antiquated. They point out that many African ethnic groups have a purely warrior tradition and consider killing to be proof of bravery. So why should the universal message of humanitarian law be watered down at the very moment when the globalization of information by means of the Internet gives the African elite access to that message? What is more, they say, where is the common cultural tradition to which the message of humanitarian law can be linked when 400 different ethnic groups coexist in one country?
- Other staff members, also in Africa, are enthusiastic about the idea of highlighting the humanitarian traditions which existed in their countries even before humanitarian law came into being. They see this as a means of giving young people a sense of historical continuity and of promoting recognition of Africa's cultural heritage. It is, moreover, a way of restoring to their proper status the traditional leaders whose influence was beneficial to the community, but who lost all their power when conflict caused the social fabric to disintegrate.

The approach, therefore, has to be tailored to each specific country, or even each region. Sometimes it is necessary to distinguish between substance and form, for example by using the sayings of minstrels in Mali or the stories of Kivu as a means of conveying a universal message. The golden rule is always to find out what the expectations of the target population are before formulating the message to be passed on, often by some of its own members.

Whatever the approach chosen, seeking to develop these links, which for want of a better word we describe as "cultural", is an essential strategy of dissemination, which implies working with local partners to spread knowledge of a body of law whose content has universal value.

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *L'illusion identitaire*, Editions Fayard, 1996, 306 pp.

### *Forming alliances*

Six well-known African singers accompanied the ICRC on a tour of conflict zones so that they could witness the effects of war for themselves: displaced populations, children mutilated by landmines, young widows struggling to bring up their families alone, child soldiers, and so on. The fruit of this harrowing journey was a song — “So why?” — which sounds a warning to the young people of Africa, invites them to reflect upon ethnic conflicts, the suffering of civilians, and the destruction of an entire generation, and urges them to react. The tour, which was the subject of a documentary film, also provided the material for a book, with a preface written by President Nelson Mandela.<sup>5</sup>

This is a recent example of forming alliances. In this case it is the individuals who have the greatest influence on young Africans — their idols — who do the talking. The ICRC withdraws into the wings, giving centre stage to these new ambassadors of the humanitarian cause.

Another example is a project in the Caucasus, where the ICRC is working with national educational experts under the auspices of the respective ministries of education on an educational programme for 12-year-olds, carried out by teachers in schools. Local specialists are scanning their countries’ literature for texts which will encourage these young people to think about the limits which must be placed on violence.

A final illustration comes from Ethiopia, where, with the support of the Red Cross, circus performers are conveying humanitarian messages on a wide range of subjects (AIDS prevention, hygiene, the Red Cross and Red Crescent principles, respect for the emblem, etc.).

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is in itself a unique network, and cooperation between the National Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC should be given the highest priority. The ICRC is working in this direction, involving National Society staff in its own dissemination programmes or providing support for such programmes launched by the National Societies themselves. This pooling of expertise is beneficial to all the partners.

In short, the time has come for a genuine mobilization of all concerned — States, political, academic and economic circles, the Movement, UN

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<sup>5</sup> *Woza Africa! Music goes to war*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 1997, 96 pp.

agencies and NGOs — so that international humanitarian law, which contains rights and obligations both for parties to conflict and for individuals, can regain the prestige that is its due.

At a time when some industrialized States are wondering about the relevance of emergency assistance as the sole — but essential — response to conflicts, their political and diplomatic support for such a mobilization around universal ethical principles, and not around Western values, would be more than welcome.

*Development of strategies for communicating with the new perpetrators of violence and those who have a direct or indirect influence on their behaviour*

Strategies for communicating with the new perpetrators of violence can only be devised on a local basis. Such strategies require a thorough understanding of the motivating forces behind the behaviour of those to whom the message is addressed, whether they are groups involved in organized crime, paramilitary groups connected with economic interests, children — often on drugs — or others.

Achieving this understanding takes time and the ability to listen. It could be facilitated by more systematic recourse to ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists in the country concerned. Indeed, for the message to be not only understood but also remembered and assimilated by the person receiving it, it is essential to find the linguistic, visual or symbolic vehicle which is sure to have an effect on the listener, or the argument which will appeal to his reason. This message may stray a long way from legal language, but it is very close to reality. Just as knowledge of a rule is not necessarily enough to ensure that it is respected, there are contexts in which that rule has scarcely any sense since all rules are flouted. Perhaps, in such cases, a link must be found between the message and the actual experience of the audience, and arguments devised more systematically on the basis of an understanding of the interests of those to whom the message is addressed rather than on humanitarian, legal or political considerations.

The field of social science is full of potential. Learning the lessons it can offer should be seen as a priority.

Finally, it is important to approach the political or economic decision-makers, military commanders or leaders of armed groups, and the opinion-makers who foment a conflict or influence its course. To that end, a chart showing the formal or informal power structure in a society must be drawn up so that contact can be made with those who will exert

a real influence on respect for the law, on acceptance of humanitarian activities and on the security conditions in which they are carried out.

### **Working principles**

There are three principles which should govern any dissemination activity.

#### *The identification of needs by or with the beneficiaries*

Are the ICRC's efforts to promote humanitarian law and the Fundamental Red Cross and Red Crescent Principles a response to an external demand? This is rarely so, except where the success of an initiative generates such a demand, as was the case with dissemination at universities in Colombia. Generally, the projects launched by the ICRC are spontaneous.

Dissemination should preferably meet an expectation, particularly in peacetime or in post-conflict situations. Just as representations to authorities on behalf of prisoners are based on a relationship of trust with those same authorities who have permitted the ICRC visits, a dissemination project should, if possible, be undertaken to meet specific needs or in response to requests made by political, military, academic, educational or other authorities.

Clearly, such consultation is frequently impracticable in the midst of a conflict, and in such situations it is first and foremost those guilty of violations of humanitarian law who must be reached. When a society's structure has broken down to the point where the authorities are not in a position to give their consent to a dissemination project, or they themselves are resistant to the humanitarian message, recourse to the media or networking is the only remaining option.

#### *Support for those who want to learn how to teach*

Training people to teach humanitarian law and encouraging the incorporation of this law in military instruction is the right course to follow; in other words giving support rather than standing in for others.

Without being fundamentally altered, the message can then be adapted and re-invented, not so much for the sake of authenticity, but because it will emanate from the very depths of the society concerned, and will thus be all the more meaningful for those to whom it is addressed.

### *Evaluation*

Dissemination is an enterprise which requires innovative ideas and whose corollary is the right to make mistakes, provided that they are not repeated. Hence the importance of an assessment process whereby ongoing projects can be more closely monitored and adjusted as they proceed, completed projects can offer valuable lessons, and future projects can be better planned.

Certain targeted assessments have been carried out, for example of the mine-awareness programmes in Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Evaluating the results of the teaching component of programmes (whether it is appropriate in terms of the objectives sought) and the way they are conducted (strategy and resources) makes it possible to improve their quality. As for evaluating their impact, which is certainly more difficult (how can the impact of talks about violence be evaluated in adolescents?), it remains a challenge which will require careful consideration in the future.

### **Conclusion**

Although at the global level the number of large-scale conflicts seems to have declined, crisis situations are arising with growing frequency and deadly conflicts are dragging on, for example in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Burundi, and Sudan, not to mention the tragedy that is unfolding in Algeria. The number of victims of these situations is also on the increase.

The way in which conflicts develop is still often unpredictable, whether they are of an ethnic, political or socio-economic nature. Hotbeds of tension or conflicts initially confined to relatively small geographical areas can set entire regions ablaze, as proven by the recent events in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

So what is to be done? The urgency of needs means that food and medicines have to be provided and the victims of excesses have to be protected. At the same time an attempt has to be made to analyse *as far as possible* the probable effect that this assistance will have on the evolution of the conflict and efforts to build peace<sup>6</sup> — *as far as possible*,

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<sup>6</sup> Mary B. Anderson, *Do no harm: Supporting local capacities for peace through aid*, Cambridge, Local Capacities for Peace Project, 1996, 61 pp.

since there are humanitarian emergencies in which several aims (helping a population in distress and restoring peace) cannot easily be pursued simultaneously.

All this is not enough. Hence the strong interest shown in conflict prevention by the community of States which supply and fund emergency assistance. The term “conflict prevention” is not clearly defined, but covers the measures taken when a specific situation seems likely to degenerate into violence in the foreseeable future.<sup>7</sup> One of these measures is preventive diplomacy, which aims to influence *decision-makers* who might opt for confrontation in a situation of “unstable peace”. Another is the action taken with regard to *situations* diagnosed as being pre-conflict, which implies the existence of an early warning system.<sup>8</sup> Such action can take various forms: diplomatic consultations, cultural exchanges, military, economic or social measures, education for peace, and support for local crisis-management mechanisms.

The promotion of international humanitarian law is one of the instruments of the ICRC’s preventive action.<sup>9</sup> One of its special features is that it is not restricted to situations of unstable peace or pre-conflict situations. It covers the whole spectrum of situations (peace, crisis, conflict, post-conflict) and looks to the long term. On the other hand, its content is very narrowly defined: as we have seen, it aims to influence attitudes and behaviour so as to ensure that when armed violence breaks out the principles of humanitarian law are respected. In peacetime, the promotion of international humanitarian law is an educational act, which may be described as “advance preventive action”. Once a crisis has erupted, it aims to regulate behaviour and could be called “immediate preventive action”.

Another interesting feature of the promotion of international humanitarian law is that it pursues specific objectives and is carried out according

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<sup>7</sup> In the literature available to us the concept of conflict prevention does not generally cover crisis management once violence has erupted, nor conflict management, conflict mitigation or peace-making. On the topic of conflict prevention, see *Preventing a violent conflict: A study*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stockholm, 1997, 67 pp. (in particular pp. 35 and 36).

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Bertrand, “Vers une stratégie de prévention des conflits?”, *Politique étrangère*, Spring 1997, pp. 112-123.

<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see Jean-Luc Chopard, “Dissemination of the humanitarian rules and cooperation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the purpose of prevention”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 306, May-June 1995, pp. 244-262.

to the same principles as those of technical cooperation.<sup>10</sup> It contributes in various ways to the construction of a strong civil society.

- Programmes for the dissemination of international humanitarian law in educational and academic environments contribute to the training of leaders who will analyse the political scene in the light of ethical considerations, especially in conflict situations. By leaders we mean not only individuals who exercise political responsibility at national or international level, but also members of religious communities, teachers, journalists, businessmen, members of political parties and NGO representatives.
- Dissemination work carried out with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies boosts their institutional capacity. Indeed, offering support for local NGOs which have direct knowledge of needs and possibilities is an essential component of any technical cooperation programme.
- Finally, the dissemination of international humanitarian law is a decisive factor for the reinforcement and expansion of the “rule of law”, which is indispensable for the construction of civil society not only at the national but also at the transnational or even international level.

In today's changing world, promoting rules to limit violence in crisis situations is a responsibility of the “global village” which is taking shape, comprising a network of State, economic and political entities, organizations, associations and citizens.<sup>11</sup> Awareness of this common responsibility is a decisive step towards greater respect for humanitarian law - a body of law which is all too frequently perceived as an unattainable ideal, or, when it is violated, as an inadequate set of rules,<sup>12</sup> whereas in fact countless lives are saved because one day States or individuals decided to comply with it.

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<sup>10</sup> *DAC principles for effective aid*, Development Assistance Manual, OECD, Paris, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> An independent commission comprising 28 international leaders has drawn up a report on this topic, which we recommend to the reader: *Our global neighbourhood*, Report of the Commission on Global Governance, Oxford University Press, 1995, 410 pp.

<sup>12</sup> Olivier Russbach, “Une justice internationale à la carte”, *Politique internationale*, No. 67, Spring 1995, 13 pp.