

Jacques Freymond

**Former member of the International Committee of the
Red Cross**

**Former Vice-President
1911 — 1998**

Apart from being a great historian, a strong personality and a brilliant teacher, Jacques Freymond was an open-minded and visionary man of ideas, an achiever who got things done. Often ahead of his time, he established a new approach at the *Institut Universitaire de hautes études internationales* (Graduate Institute of International Studies) in Geneva — which he directed with charisma and authority — towards the communist countries, the third world, multilateral diplomacy, economic upheaval and legal developments. This turned the Institute into one of the top academic establishments for international law, history and economics.

Professor Freymond was co-founder, with Denis de Rougemont, of the *Institut d'études européennes* (Institute of European Studies) and — with the Cooperation Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs — of *Swisscontact au service du tiers-monde*. He was also instrumental in setting up the *Institut africain* (the future Institute of Development Studies) and the *Centre de recherche sur l'Asie moderne*. His universal outlook enabled him to serve the world with the best of his Swiss qualities — conscientiousness, creativity and broad-mindedness.

In the International Committee of the Red Cross, Jacques Freymond played an important role as a member of the Committee from 1959 to 1972, particularly as Vice-President from 1965 to 1971. His influence was crucial during the short period (February to June 1969) for which he was Acting President of the Committee, at the height of the crisis in Biafra (Nigeria).

Just as *Zukunftsmusik* was, according to Richard Wagner, “the music of today which will be understood tomorrow”, so were many of Jacques Freymond’s ideas about the ICRC.

- In October 1967, he submitted to the Committee a set of proposals for internal organization, some of which — such as the establishment of an advisory group of non-Swiss experts — were put into effect after he had left the ICRC, over a decade later. Others, such as the amalgamation of the Executive Board and the Directorate, were not implemented until the early 1990s.
- During the same period, in April 1967, he proposed that greater importance should be attached to international organizations, whether governmental or not, and to informal diplomacy; to the dissemination of knowledge of the ICRC’s fundamental principles and of humanitarian law; to a broad interpretation of this law (particularly of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions, relating to non-international armed conflicts); and to ICRC action on behalf of political detainees. All these ideas appeared revolutionary at the time but are now part of the ICRC’s day-to-day activity.
- The strict selection and rigorous training of professional delegates in order to ensure an extensive and credible ICRC presence in the field was one of Jacques Freymond’s leitmotifs, but the idea had still not become a reality by the end of the 1960s.
- Finally, his requirements regarding the selection of and input from his fellow members of the Committee, like those relating to the delegates, were stringent ... but not always popular!

Jacques Freymond carried out many missions for the ICRC — in the United States (where he was well known and greatly respected), in Viet Nam (where his experience as colonel, historian and diplomat was vitally important) and in the Middle East (particularly in Israel, where he resolved some difficult situations). But it was from ICRC headquarters especially, where he served as Acting President in 1969, that he exerted a decisive influence on the future of the institution. A decisive influence ... but one that took a long time to bear fruit, and patience was not one of Professor Freymond’s outstanding qualities. Tired of proposing reforms which were slow to be implemented,¹ he resigned from the ICRC in December 1972.

¹ See in particular “The ICRC within the international system”, *IRRC*, No. 134, May 1972, pp. 245-266.

But Jacques Freymond never abandoned his commitment to the institution, his passionate support of its mission and his respect for the men and women who served it in the field. His work *Guerres, révolutions, Croix-Rouge — Réflexions sur le rôle du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge*, published in 1976, was effectively his “bequest” to the ICRC, rapidly becoming a guide for all those who, while remaining within the institution, wanted it to adopt the reforms he had proposed.² It is to the credit of both the ICRC and Jacques Freymond that practically all his proposals of that time have become a reality today: the institution has thus been able to show that being right too soon did not mean that the great man was actually wrong.

Jacques Moreillon
Member of the ICRC
Former Director General

² Jacques Freymond, *Guerres, révolutions, Croix-Rouge — Réflexions sur le rôle du CICR*, Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales, 1976, Geneva.