

Henry Dunant Medal

The idea of having a medal bearing the name of the founder of the International Red Cross, which later became the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, was submitted to and approved in principle by the Council of Delegates, meeting on the 100th anniversary of the Red Cross in 1963. Thanks to the generosity of the Australian Red Cross, the Henry Dunant Medal was established by the International Red Cross Conference in Vienna in 1965. The first awards were made at the next Conference, held in Istanbul in 1969.

The purpose of the Medal is to acknowledge and reward outstanding service and acts of great devotion by a member of the Movement to the Red Cross and Red Crescent cause. The Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is the body that selects recipients and, as a general rule, not more than five awards are made every two years. This enhances the Medal's value and maintains its prestige as the highest honour the Movement can bestow upon one of its members.

The Standing Commission proceeds according to regulations adopted in 1965 and revised in 1981. Whether it decides to recognize a single outstanding act or dedicated service over the years, under the regulations the Standing Commission has to give special weight to the international significance of the act or service. If this dimension is lacking, the Commission would tend not to select the individual concerned, whose merits, though no doubt great, should be recognized rather by his or her National Society.

In recent years, owing to the large number of staff involved in international operations and the growing insecurity in the contexts where those operations are conducted, there has been a sharp increase in deaths and injuries among members of the Movement. Since the regulations relating to the Henry Dunant Medal specifically allow for the possibility of posthumous recognition, and in that case the number of awards is obviously not limited to five, a large proportion of the Medals awarded (or almost

all of them, as was the case during the Council of Delegates in Seville in 1997) go to individuals who have died recently.

There is a growing body of opinion, including among the members of the Standing Commission, that this tendency to use the Medal as a means of honouring the memory of deceased staff members is changing the nature of the award. The Standing Commission feels that it would be preferable to devise other ways of expressing the gratitude of the Movement's components¹ to men and women who have perished or whose health has been severely affected in the service of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The Standing Commission does not, however, support the establishment of a new medal or other type of award applicable to all members of the Movement.

The Standing Commission feels it is important — except in certain cases — that those who receive the Medal know why they have been selected. They should be looked up to as examples to be followed during their lifetime. It is thus the wish of the Standing Commission that priority be given to individuals still in active service or having recently retired, and that most of the awards should go to persons in this category. There is no intention, however, to overlook the tragedies for which the Medal has been awarded so often in the past. On the contrary, the components of the Movement (National Societies, the ICRC and the Federation) are invited to set up their own procedures, if they have not already done so, to pay tribute to their staff members who have lost their lives or have suffered bodily or psychological harm in the course of their duties. This would also make it easier to respect local custom. Depending on its situation, resources and traditions, each component of the Movement will certainly find the most appropriate solution, whether in the form of medals, certificates, commemorative plaques, publications or artistic events, gardens or other places for quiet reflection. In any case, it is important that the event receive due publicity.

In accordance with the regulations, it will still be possible to make a posthumous award of the Henry Dunant Medal. However, the components of the Movement, all of which should henceforth establish other forms of recognition in such circumstances, should submit posthumous nominations for the Henry Dunant Medal only in truly exceptional cases.

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¹National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Committee of the Red Cross.

CRITERIA FOR AWARDING THE HENRY DUNANT MEDAL

adopted by the Standing Commission at its meeting
of 20 and 21 April 1998

1. Intent of the Henry Dunant Medal and criteria for awarding it

“The Henry Dunant Medal is intended to recognize and reward outstanding services and acts of great devotion, mainly of international significance, to the cause of the Red Cross [and Red Crescent] by any of its members.” It may be awarded on the basis of “risks run and arduous conditions endangering life, health and personal freedom [or ...] for a long period of devoted service to the International Red Cross [and Red Crescent Movement]”. In addition to the above criteria, the Standing Commission announced publicly that it would not award the Medal to persons still working within the Movement.² Only a very small number of Medals are to be awarded at one time. The Medal may be awarded posthumously.³

The Standing Commission takes the view that the Henry Dunant Medal should be awarded to individuals who belong to the Movement and who have distinguished themselves either by their long and outstanding service to the ideals of the Movement, or because they acted with exceptional courage and dedication in a given situation or situations. Furthermore, the Standing Commission will evaluate candidates according to the following interpretation of the Regulations.

1.1 Member

A “member” of the Red Cross/Red Crescent may be an individual volunteering his or her time without thought of pecuniary gain, or a paid professional (delegate, staff member) earning a living from his or her work for the Movement. When putting forward or judging a candidate, the accent should be on the exceptional nature of the act rather than on the member’s status.

² See the Standing Commission’s circular letters concerning the award of the Henry Dunant Medal, addressed to National Societies on 27 November 1994 and 15 November 1996.

³ See Articles 1, 2, 5 and 6 of the Regulations.

When the Standing Commission decided that persons still active in the Movement should not receive the Medal, it was in order to judge candidates more even-handedly, to avoid using the award simply to recognize long careers, and to eliminate any actual or perceived exertion of personal influence by certain leaders. This rule is maintained, and applies to all candidates still occupying a senior position within one of the Movement's components or statutory bodies.

The Medal will not be awarded to a member of the Red Cross/Red Crescent who is also engaged in activities outside the Movement in a field that could be contrary to the Fundamental Principles of neutrality and independence.

1.2 International significance

The Regulations state that the Henry Dunant Medal should mainly recognize acts or services of "international significance". This is to distinguish the Henry Dunant Medal from other medals that individual National Societies have established or may establish to pay tribute to their members on the national level. Thus candidates should be put forward and judged in terms of their specific contribution to the international aspects of the Movement's work, be it in the field of general policy, governance or operations.

1.3 Risks run and arduous conditions endangering life, health, and personal freedom

When the Henry Dunant Medal was established, it was primarily meant to recognize acts of great courage during a field operation. Indeed, many of those who initially received the Medal distinguished themselves through their exceptional courage and devotion to the humanitarian ideal during major operations. Over time, and particularly in recent years when respect for humanitarian personnel has declined in many contexts, the Medal has been awarded to delegates or personnel who were killed or seriously wounded in the line of duty. While there is no doubt that it is important and necessary to recognize those who have given their lives or suffered serious physical or psychological harm in the course of their duties, it would be preferable that each component of the Movement establish its own award in order to preserve the unique character of the Henry Dunant Medal.

Naturally, if a member of the Red Cross/Red Crescent who has been killed or wounded in the line of duty also acted with great courage and devotion and took risks in order to help others, he or she could be awarded

the Medal. In judging a candidate, the accent must be placed on the exceptional merits of the individual rather than on the danger inherent in many operational activities.

2. Posthumous Henry Dunant Medals

A candidate for a posthumous award of the Medal should be judged according to the criteria outlined above. Posthumous Medals should not be automatically awarded to those who have died in the service of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, unless they personally distinguished themselves (see point 1.3). The Medal should be awarded to the living, rather than the dead, as it is important that the individuals receiving it know that their peers valued their contribution to the humanitarian cause and consider them as an example to others.

3. Tributes to members of the Movement killed in the line of duty

Considering the growing number of volunteers and delegates who have been seriously wounded or killed during an assignment, the Standing Commission encourages each of the Movement's components to establish its own medal or other award to pay tribute to those who have given their lives or sacrificed their health to the Red Cross/Red Crescent cause, according to the following main criteria.

3.1 Criteria to be met for honouring members of the Movement killed or injured on assignment

Many humanitarian operations take place in dangerous settings, whether conflict situations or the aftermath of a natural or technological disaster. Fortunately, many members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent who have had to work in life-threatening conditions have survived serious security incidents.

While it is difficult to establish absolute criteria for an award in the event of death or serious injury, a distinction should be nevertheless made between accidents and killings. Thus those who have died or have suffered serious bodily or psychological harm in the line of duty should receive some kind of recognition (e.g. murder or injury perpetrated by a combatant or act of banditry, hostage-taking, rape, accident during a natural or technological disaster relief operation). A death or injury that was not premeditated, but caused by a mine, a stray bullet, etc. might also be considered deserving of recognition.

3.2 Type of award

The distinction awarded to those killed or injured on assignment does not necessarily have to be in the form of a medal. Alternatively, there might be a document, such as a certificate of recognition, and a ceremony which would either be public or else publicized afterwards in the press. Indeed, the publicity given to the award is an important aspect of the recognition that the Red Cross/Red Crescent gives to its members, who often take risks for the sake of others.

4. Conclusion

The Standing Commission will award the Henry Dunant Medal to members of the Movement in accordance with the intent and criteria laid down in the Regulations, as interpreted in points 2 and 3 of the present document. In addition, it recommends that components of the Movement which have not already done so establish their own form of recognition for members who have died or suffered serious bodily or psychological harm in the course of their duties.
