



note from the Editor

*“Toute action humanitaire s’insère dans un contexte politique.”¹ These words come from Jacques Freymond’s 1976 book *Guerres, Révolutions, Croix-Rouge*. The author goes on to stress that every humanitarian organization must therefore define a long-term humanitarian policy based on an in-depth analysis of that political context, the main features of the time, the social climate, the nature of political structures, the interplay of major forces and the global political system.*

It may be useful to consider just what Freymond, a former Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, is saying in this passage – and what he is not saying. He is pointing out that humanitarian issues cannot be considered in isolation if humanitarian action is to achieve its goal. In the context that concerns us – situations of conflict – attaining that goal means working close to the victims of violence in order to improve their plight and ease their suffering. However, the “humanitarian space” so vital to humanitarian action is not only set in a political environment but also delimited by that environment. As a major international relations expert, Freymond is certainly not suggesting that humanitarian work should be subject to political considerations. Still less is he saying that humanitarian action can be a valid substitute for decisions which necessarily lie in the political domain.

Hence, if humanitarian agencies are to become more effective in fulfilling their mandate in aid of victims, they need to analyse and get to know the environment in which they are operating.

¹ “All humanitarian action has its political context.” (p. 77, ICRC translation)

This first issue of the Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge – International Review of the Red Cross in its new format is devoted to the “Humanitarian debate”. The editor deliberately opted for a broad base so as to give contributors the freedom to write on topics of their own choosing. It is probably no coincidence that most articles address some aspect of the relationship between humanitarian and political action and seek answers to the practical problems arising in this area.

It is intended that this debate on humanitarian issues will open a new chapter in the history of the Review, with a fresh set of aims and a different look. However, the Review is not abandoning the mandate given to the first Bulletin in 1869 by Gustave Moynier, then Red Cross President: “Tout en servant au perfectionnement de l’œuvre [de la Croix-Rouge], il doit être un instrument de propagande en sa faveur”.² These days, the Review no longer really serves as a communication channel within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It now seeks more than ever to provide a forum for discussion on humanitarian issues and thereby to help promote the cause of victims of war and other forms of violence. In this respect, the Review aims to be a – or rather, the – journal of international humanitarian policy, action and law. It will remain – albeit in a different form to that of 1869 – a “promotional instrument” for the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

In order to achieve this goal, and since a multidisciplinary approach is plainly appropriate, the Review intends to open its pages still further to contributions from circles that wish to take part in the humanitarian debate. The editor will nevertheless continue to give special attention to a subject which has always been one of the Review’s strong points: the study of international humanitarian law and contributing to its development. The editor wishes to consolidate the Review’s status as the specialized publication on international humanitarian law.

² “While helping to advance the work of the Red Cross, [the *Bulletin*] must also serve as a promotional instrument on its behalf.” (ICRC translation)

If the Review is to succeed, it must also become more attractive to its various target readerships, whether academic institutions, national or international political circles concerned with humanitarian questions, the Red Cross and Red Crescent world or individuals responsible for the internal and external security of their country. Readers should make up their own minds after perusing the articles in this issue and those that will follow at quarterly intervals.

To sum up, the Review hopes to create an informal forum for debate between people interested in the humanitarian cause. Readers are invited to join the ICRC and its staff in actively contributing to this debate.

To mark the centenary of the first Hague Conventions of 1899 and the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the June 1999 issue of the *Review* will examine a number of topical themes relating to contemporary international humanitarian law.

The September 1999 issue will focus chiefly on certain topics on the agenda of the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which will be held in Geneva from 31st October to 6 November 1999. All issues devoted to a particular theme will naturally also contain articles on other subjects.

THE REVIEW