

People on War

A worldwide consultation on the rules of war

In a worldwide consultation, civilians and combatants alike were asked how they viewed their experience of war, what basic rules they thought should be applied in war, why these rules break down and what their expectations for the future were.

This consultation was organized by the ICRC to mark the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the protection of war victims. Under the guidance of an opinion research firm – Greenberg Research, Inc. – ICRC staff and Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers carried out this research in 12 countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia/Abkhazia, Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, Lebanon, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia and South Africa), conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews, group discussions and national public opinion surveys. Between October 1998 and September 1999 they spoke to more than 20,000 people: ordinary people who had lost their homes, soldiers, doctors and prisoners of war, those who had loved ones missing, guerillas and members of paramilitary groups, NGOs and international peace-keepers. Some 20,000 questionnaires were collected and processed, and over 250 individual and 100 focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed, yielding one of the biggest and most innovative bodies of social research on war ever carried out.

Surveys on the basis of a questionnaire only were conducted in a further five countries (France, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) in order to reflect these people's perceptions of war.

By making the outcome of this consultation public, the ICRC hopes to initiate a local and international debate on humanitarian issues raised by warfare — a debate in which the major political players, international and non-governmental organizations and aid specialists should participate.

The People on War Report (Final Report), the Report on the Parallel Research Programme, and the various Country Reports are

available on the People on War website www.onwar.org. They may also be ordered from the

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THE REVIEW