

Éditorial

The armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and their ramifications for the fight against international terrorism in many countries have highlighted new challenges and risks for the conduct of humanitarian operations in situations of armed conflict and internal violence. In this edition of the Review several authors reflect on some of the fundamental challenges that directly affect the humanitarian organizations and shape their operational strategies and priorities.

Jean-Luc Blondel looks at *globalization and its impact on humanitarian action. Globalization and in particular its economic aspects may help to cause conflicts or to prolong them. International terrorism and the reactions it has triggered are also viewed in the context of globalization. Nor does humanitarian action escape being affected in many ways by this phenomenon. Pierre Krähenbühl considers the interrelation between local risks and global threats from an operational ICRC viewpoint. It no longer seems sufficient for a given delegation in the field to assess its security environment on the basis of local indicators only. Country delegations therefore need to include the evaluation of global threats in their security analysis. This complicates evaluation of the mainstays of security, such as acceptability. It also calls into question some of the ICRC's operational principles, such as neutrality and impartiality, in a world where strong ideologies are again coming to the fore and clashes between them seem to be increasing.*

Ruth Abril Stoffels sets forth the current challenges and trends in humanitarian law in a particular field of activity, namely that of humanitarian assistance. In her article she analyses the nature and limits of the right to humanitarian assistance during national and international armed conflict. She also explains how only aid that meets the criteria of humanity, impartiality and neutrality is protected by international law. However, the current difficulty lies not only in defining these criteria, but in meeting them. Against this background, moral dilemmas cannot be avoided.

Beat Schweizer shows that the original "deal" between humanitarianism and States was that humanitarian workers were accepted on the battlefield as long as they were not thought to interfere with the warfare. In this way scope was created for independent humanitarian action. Since the end of the Cold War, this "humanitarian space" has steadily been losing its independence. Humanitarian organizations are currently struggling with the ethical and political implications of these developments.

The article by Raj Rana discusses the risks that arise when the distinction between military and humanitarian action becomes blurred in times of conflict. Armed forces have considerably expanded their civil-military capacity and see it as a vital and integral part of their duties, whether they are deployed for combat, for peace support operations or as part of the post-conflict reconstruction efforts of civilian government agencies, multinational military missions, humanitarian organizations and others. The mixing of military, political and humanitarian roles may undermine the security of humanitarian personnel and the essential perception of their neutrality and independence.

ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger lastly reflects on "Speaking out or remaining silent in humanitarian work". His article is a response to the recent questioning, following the Abu Ghraib scandal, of the ICRC's working procedure, such as holding confidential bilateral

talks with the party responsible in a world where the power of public communication is stronger than ever, but where such communication is also a selective and global means of propaganda. This procedure is defensible only if the ICRC itself is convinced that it is making every possible approach and taking all possible steps, in terms of quality, quantity, level and time, in a coherent and predictable manner.

The present edition of the Review also contains several notes, documents and reports related to the issue of humanitarian action. It includes in particular a comprehensive report on a conference recently held in Geneva by the "Luxembourg Group" on humanitarian assistance in armed conflict, the (commented) Resolution on humanitarian assistance adopted in 2003 by the Institute of International Law, as well as the ICRC's Assistance policy. The aim of this ICRC policy paper – a reference framework and a practical, action-oriented tool – is to ensure a professional, coherent, integrated approach that meets the essential needs of individuals and communities affected by armed conflict and other violent situations.