

After the events of 11 September 2001 the ICRC has made the following statements :

A time for humanity to prevail

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States which negated the most basic principles of humanity, people all around the world share a sense of uncertainty, a feeling that what is most precious to us all – life and dignity – is under threat. Thousands of Afghan men, women and children have once again abandoned their homes over the past few days in an elusive search for safety, and in dozens of countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and Europe, the number of people for whom armed violence is an inescapable reality runs into the hundreds of thousands.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) strives to protect and assist all people affected by armed conflict wherever they are, without any distinction based on religion, race or nationality. It does this whatever the reasons for armed violence, its only criteria being humanitarian: what people need to preserve life and a measure of dignity.

To remain at the victims' side is the aim of the ICRC and its partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Working out of more than two hundred offices worldwide, the ICRC steadfastly pursues this goal. Despite the temporary withdrawal of the organization's expatriate staff from Afghanistan, one thousand local Afghan employees and their colleagues from the Afghan Red Crescent Society are continuing to carry out humanitarian work in the country, particularly in the medical field.

The purpose and the essence of international humanitarian law is to minimize the effects of war on people not taking part in the hostilities, and to protect their lives and physical integrity. Those engaged in armed hostilities must maintain a firm stance against acts that indiscriminately inflict physical and mental suffering. These fundamental principles are the common heritage of all nations and all civilizations.

Humanity is the founding principle of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. At a time when the fabric of human society risks being torn asunder by outrageous acts of violence, the ICRC and the

entire Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement stand ready to do their utmost to ensure that humanity prevails.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Communication to the press 01/33

21 september 2001

Afghanistan: ICRC calls on all parties to conflict to respect international humanitarian law

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as promoter and guardian of international humanitarian law, is increasingly concerned about the impact in humanitarian terms of the war in Afghanistan. It reminds all the parties involved — the Taliban, the Northern Alliance, and the US-led coalition — of their obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

Among the essential principles of international humanitarian law is the requirement that persons not taking part in hostilities must be treated with humanity in all circumstances: they must be spared the effects of the violence, they may not be forcibly displaced and their property must be respected. Threats to their lives, their physical integrity and their dignity are prohibited. Attacks directed at civilians are prohibited, as are indiscriminate attacks. In the course of military operations, all parties are obliged to take every feasible precaution to avoid civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure.

The warring parties have the duty to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population in the territory under their control are met as far as possible and to allow the passage of essential relief supplies intended for civilians. They must authorize and facilitate impartial humanitarian relief operations and ensure the safety of medical and humanitarian personnel. They must see to it that the sick and the wounded have access to adequate medical care. The red cross and red crescent emblems must be respected by all parties.

All those who are detained must be spared and protected against abuse, whatever the circumstances and regardless of their affiliation. Combatants captured by enemy forces in the international armed conflict between the