

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

Taliban and the US-led coalition must be treated in accordance with the Third Geneva Convention. Civilians detained by a party of which they are not nationals must be treated in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention. The ICRC must therefore be allowed to visit them.

The ICRC is pursuing its work to assist the civilian population and war-wounded in Afghanistan through its own local staff and in cooperation with the Afghan Red Crescent Society. Hospitals and clinics supported by the ICRC continue functioning, as do the organization's limb-fitting centres. Over the past two weeks, ICRC medical convoys have reached Kabul from Peshawar and have replenished stocks in the ICRC-supported hospitals there. In Kandahar, Kabul and Herat, the Afghan Red Crescent ambulance service, which is supported by the ICRC, has been taking the injured to hospital. Meanwhile, the organization's staff are pre-positioning relief supplies in Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan.

The ICRC is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities in close cooperation with its partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Communication to the press 01/47

24 october 2001