

OPINION NOTE

A personal experience in Turkey, Iran and China: The need for the ICRC to adapt in a multipolar world

Pierre Ryter

Pierre Ryter is a former ICRC Head of Delegation who worked with the ICRC for thirty-two years, holding different positions in the Middle East, Asia and Africa as well as in Geneva.

Abstract

This Opinion Note is a reflection on the challenges faced by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in emerging countries that want to be heard in the humanitarian world without being major donors. The author underlines the importance of the feeling of humiliation that can be seen in the narratives of these countries. After listing some of the specific activities that can be developed in such contexts, he refers to the concept of strategic anchoring developed by the ICRC in order to work more effectively in a world that is becoming increasingly multipolar.

Keywords: historical narrative, humiliation, strategic anchoring, humanitarian diplomacy.



When the cold war came to an end, many in the West assumed they were the winners, the new Masters of the Universe. That's why they are now so disoriented by a world that is turning out to be very different from the one they expected. ...

All this high-minded Western universalism is well-meaning, but it is also arrogant, unrealistic, and paternalistic. It is a new form of *unrealpolitik* that is now running up against the reality of seemingly intractable divisions.

Hubert Védrine¹

Introduction

How is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – an organization founded in Europe in the nineteenth century and the promoter and guardian of universal humanitarian rules and principles – adapting to the new realities of a multipolar world in the making, as described in 2007 by former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine in his book *History Strikes Back?* To answer this question, I am going to describe the specific experiences of three emerging countries in which I have worked over the last ten years, namely Turkey (2006–09), Iran (2009–13) and China (2013–16). These are three countries that are finding their own voice on the international stage, including in the humanitarian arena.

Since the Cold War ended, the ICRC has mainly carried out its activities in countries receiving assistance (recipient countries) and has maintained structured dialogue with the countries financing this assistance (donor countries), which are for the most part Western nations. Like most of my colleagues, I cut my teeth as a delegate in operational contexts in which the authorities allow the ICRC to operate according to its established working procedures, including direct access to the beneficiaries of its protection and assistance activities. Dialogue is not always easy, but it is based on a shared understanding of the humanitarian issues of the day.

In Turkey, offers of services made by my predecessors in the late 1980s to assist people affected by the violence in the southeast of the country were rejected by the authorities. In Iran, following a strained dialogue in the 1980s on prisoners of war taken during the conflict with Iraq, the ICRC was asked to leave the country in 1992. In China, in spite of the dialogue maintained throughout the 1990s concerning access to people deprived of their liberty, the ICRC was not able to start visiting the country's prisons.

In the 2000s, the ICRC was able to start (or restart) activities in these countries. In 2003, the invasion of Iraq by a US-led coalition signalled the start of the second Gulf War.² In Turkey and Iran, temporary missions were established in Ankara and Tehran, with a view to contributing to efforts to coordinate humanitarian action in order to assist victims of this conflict.³ In China, an ICRC

1 Hubert Védrine, *History Strikes Back*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2008, pp. 1, 16.

2 “2003: Invasion of Iraq”, *BBC News*, 7 September 2011, available at: www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-14666720/2003-invasion-of-iraq (all internet references were accessed in June 2018).

3 In Iran, activities were carried out from the end of 2001 in connection with the situation in Afghanistan, marked by military intervention by the United States and its allies in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001. In Turkey, the ICRC did not succeed in prolonging its presence in Ankara beyond the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in 2011.

regional delegation for East Asia was opened in Beijing in 2005, following the signing of a headquarters agreement with the Chinese authorities.

At the start of each of my missions in these three countries, I was able to gauge just how much the national narrative influences the way in which the ICRC carries out its activities. I will begin by recounting the “never again” stories of Turkey, Iran and China, and continue with a description of ICRC activities in these contexts. I will then provide some insights into the concept of strategic anchoring developed by the ICRC to pave the way for approaches adapted to the new realities of the newly multipolar world to which Hubert Védrine refers in the opening quote.

To each his own “never again” story

Through its presence in these countries, the ICRC has developed a better understanding of the way they see themselves and the way they see the world. It is general knowledge that Turkey, Iran and China have various things in common: an imperial past, a millenary culture and a strong will to make a comeback as major players on the world stage. Anyone living in these countries will quickly realize that they also share the perception that they have been humiliated by the West, which stripped them of their status as world powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As observed by Hubert Védrine, with the Cold War at an end and a unipolar world emerging, many believed that a new world order was taking shape, one that drew its legitimacy from the United Nations Charter and the universal values it enshrines and had as its common narrative a “never again” story which had crystallized from the tragic experience of a Europe brought to its knees by two World Wars and a Holocaust in the first half of the twentieth century.

The experiences of Turkey, Iran and China, however, were completely different. The “never again” stories of these three countries had nothing to do with the World Wars of the twentieth century or the Jewish Holocaust.

Turkey’s “never again” story is the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire following its decline in the nineteenth century, finalized by the Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920, which left the emperor with nothing but a small portion of Anatolia. Atatürk’s nationalist forces rejected this agreement and launched into a war of liberation against France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Greece. This conflict ended with the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, marking the birth of modern Turkey. For the Turks, Sèvres remains a symbol of the humiliation suffered by their country, which, thanks to Atatürk, was reborn and transformed into a “homeland” for persecuted Turks all over the world. Atatürk created a nation-State based on the Western model, with the army acting as the guardian of secularism. In recent years, however, the Turkish authorities have looked to the country’s Ottoman past with a renewed sense of pride and have questioned Atatürk’s strict interpretation of secularism.

Iran's "never again" story features the 1953 coup d'état orchestrated by the CIA against Mossadegh's democratically elected government. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the shah and established the Islamic Republic of Iran, taking steps to ensure that he did not meet the same fate as Mossadegh. Towards the end of that year, students stormed the US embassy in Tehran, taking forty-three American diplomats hostage. This was a blatant flouting of international law, and the United States was humiliated. Apart from the 1953 coup, the Islamic Republic of Iran's "never again" story is largely drawn from memories of the injustices suffered by Shia Muslims through the ages. It is these memories that have led the Islamic Republic to take a stand on the world stage against the "arrogant powers", accusing them of pursuing imperialistic expansionism and having a vision that is demeaning and debasing for the peoples concerned.

China's "never again" story is the "century of humiliation", spanning the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, when its empire crumbled and the country was preyed upon first by Western colonial powers and later by Japan. A symbol in China's "never again" story is the Nanjing massacre perpetrated by Japanese occupation forces in 1937. The legitimacy of a power is premised on its ability to keep the peace and maintain national unity, and Taiwan's independence constitutes the crossing of a red line for the Chinese authorities.

Turkey, Iran and China were deeply humiliated by their relegation to the status of minor powers in the nineteenth century. Humiliation, defined by Bertrand Badie in his book *Humiliation in International Relations* as "any authoritarian assignment of a status that is inferior to the desired status, in a manner that does not conform to defined norms",⁴ leads to asymmetrical relations between powers – between great powers and weak powers, and between weak powers and weaker powers.

In an attempt to shake off this humiliation, Turkish, Iranian and Chinese leaders first embarked on a relentless quest to Westernize their societies in the first half of the twentieth century. They then made an about-turn, striving to recover their cultural heritage and assert their right to be different in a backlash against Western universalism.

In Iran, after the 1979 revolution, which ushered in a return to Islam, a renewed appreciation of the country's pre-Islamic past developed. For example, when the Cyrus Cylinder, regarded by some as the first human rights charter, was loaned to Tehran by the British Museum in 2010–11, over half a million Iranians went to see it.⁵ In China, after the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), which sought to sweep away the past, and several decades of rapid progress on the path to economic development, the authorities began to promote the "Chinese dream",

4 Bertrand Badie, *Humiliation in International Relations: A Pathology of Contemporary International Systems*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2017, p. 6.

5 British Museum, "Extension of Cyrus Cylinder Loan", 4 January 2011, available at: www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/cyrus_cylinder.aspx.

in an attempt to reconcile the nation's past and present.⁶ Turkey, for its part, sought to make its voice heard by repositioning itself as the heir of the Ottoman Empire.⁷

For the Red Cross world, these assertions of identity by Turkey, Iran and China were nothing new and were evident in the actions of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) of these countries, which were created before the First World War at a time when the Ottoman, Persian and Chinese Empires were feeling threatened. The Ottoman National Society was created in 1868, but it only became active from 1876 when it started using the red crescent, a Turkish imperial symbol. The Iranian national society (Persian at that time) adopted the red lion and sun, the Persian imperial symbol that was proposed as a protective emblem at the International Conference held in The Hague in 1907. These two imperial symbols were recognized as emblems on an equal footing with the red cross at the Diplomatic Conference held in 1929.⁸ Perfunctory attempts by the Chinese National Society, created in 1904, to adopt its own emblem came to nothing.

ICRC activities in Turkey, Iran and China

In Turkey, Iran and China, the ICRC has only rarely had access to victims other than during international armed conflicts.⁹ These emerging countries have no wish to be recipients of humanitarian assistance, nor do they want to join the club of ICRC donor countries. What kind of activities does the ICRC carry out in these contexts?

Promoting humanitarian diplomacy

The ICRC's ability to work in the most challenging international contexts has caught the interest of the authorities in Ankara, Tehran and Beijing. A look at current events reveals the desire of Turkey, Iran and China to shine on the world stage. Aside from their economic interests, their status as regional powers (or as a global power in China's case) leads them to position themselves, including in the humanitarian arena, precisely where the ICRC is most operational.

The diplomatic support of these countries has become essential in the most iconic contemporary conflicts, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Sudan and Somalia. The Chinese authorities, keen to play the role of a "responsible" power,¹⁰ have expressed their willingness to support the ICRC diplomatically on

6 See news report, photos and comments on the concept of the "Chinese dream" from *China Daily*, available at: www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/Chinese-dream.html.

7 For more information on neo-Ottomanism, see, among others, Darko Tanasković, *Neo-Ottomanism: A Doctrine and Foreign Policy Practice*, Association of Non-Governmental Organizations of Southeast Europe (CIVIS), Belgrade, 2013.

8 Iran stopped using the red lion and sun in 1980.

9 In the 1980s, the ICRC visited Iraqi prisoners of war (PoWs) in Iran and Vietnamese PoWs in China. It also took part in operations to repatriate Iranian and Iraqi PoWs via Turkey.

10 On this subject, see Hanna B. Krebs, *Responsibility, Legitimacy, Morality: Chinese Humanitarianism in Historical Perspective*, Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute, September 2014, available at: www.odi.org/publications/8661-responsibility-legitimacy-morality-chinese-humanitarianism-historical-perspective.

several occasions, and the Syrian crisis has provided an opportunity to develop and deepen dialogue with the Iranian authorities. Turkey, which hosted the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, is striving to be acknowledged as a “humanitarian power”.

Strengthening respect for international humanitarian law

Activities to promote international humanitarian law (IHL) enable the ICRC to maintain direct contact with civil and military authorities. In addition to meetings of experts who understand and promote humanitarian law, what else can be done to encourage the incorporation and implementation of international rules in the systems of countries that are in the process of reaffirming their identity?

One way to prevent these rules from being regarded as foreign to the country in question is to recall that they are anchored in its collective memory.

Turkey, as a regional power and NATO member, is keen to enhance its role as a link between the West and the Islamic world. In 2008, the Turkish Red Crescent Society invited the National Societies of the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to Istanbul to attend the celebrations organized for its 140th anniversary, presenting itself as “the mother of the Red Crescent” whose roots can be traced back to the codification of humanitarian law. This initiative is a reminder that when the Ottoman Empire adapted IHL to its needs, it opened the door to the contextualization of a body of law that is even today not widely known and not always properly understood in Turkey outside specialist circles.

With the 1979 revolution, Iran put Islam at the heart of its political system and broke its strategic links with the West. The question of compatibility between IHL and Islam was raised when the ICRC carried out activities to assist Iraqi prisoners of war (PoWs) in the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88). At the start of the conflict, the Iranian authorities decided to treat Iraqi PoWs according to the principles of Islam, which put them at odds with some of their international obligations under the Geneva Conventions. Twenty years later, when Iraq became a battlefield once again, the question was back on the front burner. It was in these circumstances that the ICRC initiated a dialogue on humanitarian matters in the holy city of Qom with experts in Islamic jurisprudence. In 2016, at a conference in Qom marking the 10th anniversary of this dialogue, the president of the ICRC commended the progress made, highlighting “the necessity to translate academic achievements of the Islam/IHL dialogue into concrete humanitarian results in conflict-affected regions”.¹¹ These efforts to promote IHL in religious circles are undertaken as a complement to the work carried out with civil and military authorities responsible for implementing and ensuring respect for IHL domestically and internationally.

Since its Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, China’s policy focus has been on peace and development. The new generations have no memory of the wars that

11 See ICRC, “International Conference on Islam and IHL – Statement by the ICRC”, 8 December 2016, available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/speech-icrc-president-international-conference-islam-and-ihl.

dominated their country's history during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. In October 2016, an exhibition designed by Geneva's Art and History Museum, the ICRC and the Caen Memorial to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the original Geneva Convention was put on display to the Chinese public in Beijing, with the inclusion – in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of China and its Foundation – of elements drawn from national experience.¹² This gave the Chinese audience an opportunity to see how the country's National Society had operated throughout the twentieth century, including in the dark days of the 1930s and 1940s, when the country was divided and occupied by foreign forces.

Developing a dialogue on protection to gain access to people deprived of their liberty

In the atmosphere of this new era of international politics where human rights and humanitarian rhetoric were fused, for many States – especially States which had no tradition of openness to put it mildly – the whole field of humanitarian action became extremely dangerous. They started to perceive it as something which was there to promote changes in their States, up to regime change. I think the worst that happened in the 1990s and 2000s was a confusion between protection of human rights and regime change.¹³

This observation by Fyodor Lukyanov fully applies to Iran and China. At the beginning of the 1990s, the authorities accepted the offer of services made by the ICRC involving visits to their prisons¹⁴ but then changed their minds as the confusion between the protection of human rights and regime change grew and it became increasingly difficult to make the authorities understand the ICRC's strictly humanitarian approach.¹⁵ The creation of a humanitarian space for dialogue (see below) provides an opportunity to address these issues in a framework that is not prone to politicization.

Creating a humanitarian space for dialogue

Human rights-related questions are at the heart of the political issues that divide the international community, as observed by Fyodor Lukyanov. In order to cultivate dialogue in sensitive contexts, the ICRC offers a depoliticized space where tricky issues can be addressed, placing them in a strictly humanitarian framework.

12 See ICRC, "China: Special Exhibition Highlights 'Humanity in War'", news release, 14 October 2016, available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/china-humanity-in-war-exhibition.

13 Fyodor Lukyanov, cited in ICRC, "Resisting the Politicization of Humanitarian Action in the Post-Cold War Era", *Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog*, 14 June 2016, available at: <http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2016/06/14/resisting-politicization-humanitarian-action-post-cold-war-era-interview-fyodor-lukyanov/>.

14 Visits started in Iran in 1992 under an agreement with the authorities, but were discontinued.

15 The situation is different in Turkey. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, a body of the Council of Europe, makes regular visits to prisons and maintains a dialogue on this subject with the authorities in Ankara. See Council of Europe, "The CPT Visits Turkey", 24 May 2017, available at: www.coe.int/fr/web/cpt/-/cpt-carries-out-periodic-visit-to-turkey.

One option for addressing some of these questions in Iran and China is the Health Emergencies in Large Populations (HELP) course,¹⁶ which brings together health professionals and aid workers and provides them with an opportunity to discuss the dilemmas facing humanitarians in an interdisciplinary framework. Another tool is Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL),¹⁷ an education programme for young people. EHL has been very well received in Turkey and Iran and is being further developed in China, where it has been incorporated into the National Society's programmes. The promotion of humanitarian values among young people is considered a priority by Chinese Education Ministry officials, and they welcome the participatory methodology used.

The messages conveyed by HELP and EHL focus on the dilemmas that humanitarians face in the performance of their work and that are engendered by conflicts of values arising in crisis situations. The participants are asked to decide what course of action should be taken based on ethics and freedom of conscience.

In China, the dialogue on health care in detention, initiated in 2007, provides ICRC doctors with an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the Chinese prison system, particularly the fight against tuberculosis, with their Chinese colleagues.

Through these different dialogues, the ICRC emphasizes that humanitarian action must be centred on people, regardless of their circumstances and, as stipulated in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, "without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria".

EHL has contributed to a better understanding and increased acceptance of the ICRC in Turkey, Iran and China, by making government officials in charge of educational programmes more aware of issues relating to neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. Similarly, by bringing professionals from diverse sectors (governmental, non-governmental, civil and military) together around the same table, HELP contributes to promoting humanitarian ethics that transcend the differences between these actors.

Developing strategic partnerships with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

As explained above, the National Societies of these countries are key partners for the ICRC. Their grounding in civil society, their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and their commitment to Red Cross and Red Crescent principles in their work means that they can facilitate the work of

16 HELP is a multidisciplinary training course on the principles and practice of humanitarian work in disasters, conflicts and other crises, with a focus on health and ethics. A brochure is available at: www.icrc.org/fr/publication/health-emergencies-large-populations-help-course.

17 Developed by the ICRC, in close association with the Educational Development Center and with the active participation of twenty sites from all parts of the world, EHL offers thirty hours of educational activities. Building on the experiences of a wide variety of countries, the programme is transnational in scope, cutting across political, social, religious and cultural contexts, and can easily be adapted to diverse educational settings. A project summary is available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/exploring-humanitarian-law.

the ICRC in accordance with their sometimes punctiliously upheld prerogatives. Strategic partnership agreements have been signed with the national societies of Iran and China to establish a cooperation framework at the national and international level.

The ICRC's concept of strategic anchoring

The above examples of activities carried out in Turkey, Iran and China, while in no way exhaustive, help us to understand the approaches that enable the ICRC to anchor itself in countries that are neither aid recipients nor donors.

Other countries of importance to the ICRC did not enter the framework for humanitarian action that took shape at the end of the Cold War. Taking note of this, in 2011 the ICRC identified a number of emerging countries in which it wanted to rally long-term support for ICRC causes beyond the operational work carried out in them. This is how the concept of strategic anchoring came about.

My experience in Turkey, Iran and China is that the concept has strengthened the legitimacy of activities that have been under way for years, such as the Islam–IHL dialogue in Iran, the health care in detention dialogue in China and the HELP course, started in the 1980s, all of which find their *raison d'être* in strategic anchoring contexts. In addition to contributing to cooperation within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the goals of gaining access to victims and donors, the concept of strategic anchoring also validates activities carried out in partnership with other national actors concerned with humanitarian issues (academia, think tanks, foundations, the media, NGOs, economic actors, professional associations, etc.).

Strategic anchoring also validates the need to listen to emerging countries in order to understand their take on humanitarian issues and develop a dialogue on subjects of common interest. In order to achieve this, the role of national ICRC personnel is strengthened at delegations carrying out strategic anchoring activities. The internationalization of ICRC expatriate staff also contributes to this effort. With a growing number of employees now recruited from outside donor countries, the ICRC is ensuring that it is equipped with the means to become better integrated into the multipolar world now taking shape, to better understand it and to be better accepted in it. All these efforts help to strengthen the humanitarian diplomacy work of the ICRC, which can no longer rely on the support of donor countries alone when it comes to operating in certain parts of the world.

Strategic anchoring is a useful concept for ICRC delegations operating in emerging countries that are keen to assert themselves in the international arena without renouncing their national identity. Some delegations operating in recipient countries fully engaged in self-assertion processes have taken on board the lessons learned from these experiences.

Conclusion

On 20 November 1985, Raisa Gorbachev and Nancy Reagan laid the first stone of Geneva's International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum. This symbolic act was part of a process that was to lead to the end of the Cold War. The Museum, conceived in this climate of optimism, opened its doors three years later on 29 October 1988. Visitors were invited to take a journey back into the history of humanitarian action, following a Time Wall displaying the main tragedies that have marked the Red Cross's work since its creation. However, what had been intended as a simple reminder of a collective memory quickly became a source of controversy. The end of the Cold War caused memories to thaw. Which memory did the Wall display?

In the 1990s, the armed conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus showed that, in Europe, collective memory was fragmented, with the endeavours of some to remember often clashing violently with the endeavours of others to forget. In this climate, Turkey officially denounced the fact that the Time Wall placed greater emphasis on tragedies occurring during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in which the victims were Christians rather than Muslims.

On 18 May 2013, the Museum reopened its doors after being closed for twenty-two months for refurbishment work carried out by three non-European architects, one from Brazil, one from Burkina Faso and one from Japan.¹⁸ The Time Wall did not survive this facelift and disappeared twenty-five years after its creation. The permanent exhibition is now simply called "The Humanitarian Adventure", an adventure that is no longer centred on the European experience of history.

Up until the start of the twenty-first century, the national narratives of different countries had not called into question the common narrative of the "never again" story resulting from Europe's tragic experience. However, with the return of major powers such as China and Russia to the international stage and the advent of many emerging nations, other narratives began to be heard beyond the borders of these countries and collective memory became plural. History is no longer a one-way street, and it is difficult to be sure who is on the right side of history and who is on the wrong side.

As Hubert Védrine wrote in the opening quote to this article, the Western nations "are now so disoriented by a world that is turning out to be very different from the one they expected". Largely financed by Western donors, the ICRC uses the Fundamental Principles as a compass to guide its work, and it is these principles that have enabled it to remain operational throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Today, countries around the world, including Western nations, are witnessing the rise of identity politics and nationalist sentiment. The examples of Turkey, Iran and China show that it is not enough to remain neutral and independent to be accepted as a humanitarian

18 See International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, "The Museum: History and Architecture", available at: www.redcrossmuseum.ch/en/the-museum/history-and-architecture/.

actor. In an increasingly globalized world, a growing number of countries want to be recognized as a different kind of nation. To be accepted, the ICRC must listen to these countries, understand them and accept their differences.

The “never again” story based on Europe’s tragic experience in the twentieth century remains an essential pillar of world order, but it is now echoed by other national “never again” stories arising from different episodes of suffering. In the Middle East, East Asia and elsewhere in the world, it is often the case that the national narrative of some contradicts the national narrative of others, and this is a real or potential source of conflict. The ICRC should not take positions on the essentially political issues that divide historians.

Jean Pictet, the ICRC’s eminent legal expert who was in charge of the preparatory work that led to the drafting of the four Geneva Conventions adopted in 1949 for the protection of war victims, wrote in 1986:

[T]oday the uniformity of human psychological make-up and the universality of standards governing the behaviours of nations are recognized, and no longer is there belief in the supremacy of any one civilization: indeed the plurality of cultures and the need to take an interest in them and study them in depth is recognized. This leads to an awareness that humanitarian principles are common to all human communities wherever they may be. When different customs, ethics and philosophies are gathered for comparison, and when they are melted down, their particularities eliminated and only what is general extracted, one is left with a pure substance which is the heritage of all mankind.¹⁹

Today, over thirty years after these words were written, this “pure substance” remains the foundation on which the ICRC bases its presence and action in a world challenged by simultaneous trends towards globalization and fragmentation. In order to be understood and accepted in a multipolar world, the ICRC must take the trouble to contextualize its action and its discourse while upholding its universally recognized humanitarian principles.

19 Jean Pictet, “Humanitarian Ideas Shared by Different Schools of Thought and Cultural Traditions”, in Henry Dunant Institute and UNESCO, *International Dimensions of Humanitarian Law*, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1988, pp. 3–4.

