

Implementation and development of humanitarian law

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On the various subjects discussed, the Conference adopted forty resolutions ; these have been published in booklet form by the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies. One in particular of these resolutions is of special importance ; it is one which henceforth is known as the “ Vienna Declaration ”.

Indeed, the Conference, concerned at the great danger threatening humanity due to the development of weapons and methods of warfare and considering “ indiscriminate warfare a threat to the future of civilization ”, set forth in its XXVIIIth Resolution the following principles which it urged all governments and authorities involved in conflicts to respect :

- The right of the parties to a conflict to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited ;
- it is forbidden to launch attacks against the civilian population as such ;
- distinction must be made at all times between persons taking part in the hostilities and members of the civilian population to the effect that the latter be spared as much as possible ;
- the general principles of the law of war apply to nuclear and similar weapons.

The text of this resolution, which the Conference wished to keep general in scope, is today the only example of a body of principles proclaimed by an assembly attended by government delegates and relating to the protection of populations against hostilities. The “ Vienna Declaration ” ought therefore to remind everybody that only the observance of the principles it postulates can, in extreme circumstances, safeguard at least the very minimum of humanity and civilization, and thereby contribute to the return of peace.

IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITARIAN LAW

As the preceding pages have shown, the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross was of particular importance for the ICRC and its activities in the field of humanitarian law. However, apart from this Conference, the ICRC's Legal Department has

pursued its work of study and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and of the humanitarian precepts advocated by the Red Cross movement.

The Geneva Conventions

Ratifications and Accessions.—In 1965, the following States became parties to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions : Republic of Gabon (February 26, declaration of continuity), Canada (May 14, ratification), Republic of Mali (February 24, accession), Sierra Leone (June 10, declaration of continuity), Iceland (August 10, accession).

By December 31, 1965, therefore, these humanitarian treaties were explicitly binding on 108 States. Notwithstanding, the ICRC considers that even without a declaration of continuity, newly independent States are implicitly bound by the participation of the States to which they succeed, unless they explicitly repudiate these Conventions. There are ten States in this situation (Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Malta, Zambia). The total number of States bound by the Geneva Conventions may therefore be considered to be 118.

Dissemination of the Conventions.—The ICRC has continued its efforts to make the Geneva Conventions known as widely as possible among armed forces and the general public. In this field it assists States which, by signing the Conventions, undertook to ensure, and are therefore responsible for, their dissemination on their respective territories. To that effect the ICRC has put into circulation in many countries copies of the Conventions as well as summaries and commentaries. It has also published a four language abstract of the essential provisions of these treaties.

In addition, the ICRC has produced a new series of colour slides, with appropriate commentaries, illustrating the main provisions of the Geneva Conventions. These slides were taken from pictures by a well known painter, Mr. Ed. Elzingre, and aroused immediate interest.

The ICRC also contributed to the organization of an introductory course on the Geneva Conventions for Swiss army officers. Some fifty officers taking part in the course attended lectures by members

of the ICRC staff and they acquired an insight into the institution's activities in time of war.

The cause of the Geneva Conventions also found support in the nursing world. The XIIIth Quadriennial Congress of the International Council of Nurses in Frankfurt-on-Main last June unanimously passed the following statement for inclusion in the "International Code of Nursing Ethics": "It is important that all nurses be aware of the principles of the Red Cross and their rights and obligations under the Geneva Conventions of 1949". On that occasion, the ICRC, the guardian of the Red Cross principles and promoter of the Geneva Conventions, received, through its representative at the Congress, expressions of goodwill from the participants.

We would also mention that, in April, Mr. Jean Pictet, ICRC Director for General Affairs, gave his inaugural lecture at the University of Geneva, which had just created the first chair of international humanitarian law. This welcome innovation gave Mr. Pictet, who has served the institution since 1937, and who is known for a number of publications relating to Red Cross doctrine and the Geneva Conventions, a further opportunity to expound to a select audience on these humanitarian treaties.

In June a paper by Mr. Pictet, entitled "Les Conventions de Genève, Charte de la médecine aux armées" was presented by Mr. R.-J. Wilhelm, Adviser, Legal Department, to the IIIrd International Advanced Course for Junior Military Surgeons which took place in Madrid (May 31 - June 10) under the chairmanship of Brigade-Colonel H. Meuli, member of the ICRC. One of the aims of this course was to instil into the minds of these young doctors from 26 countries the principles of the humanitarian conventions and of the neutrality of medicine in time of armed conflict.

INTER-RED CROSS RELATIONS

Apart from the opportunity presented by the XXth International Conference for reinforcing ties with all the institutions of the Red Cross, the ICRC has maintained close connections with National Societies and their federation, the League. It continued to have