

Message from the President

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

For the International Committee of the Red Cross, 1992 had already been fraught with concern about the scale of suffering caused by conflicts and the grave and repeated violations of international humanitarian law. The year 1993 was little better, as violence and inequities continued in many parts of the world. On the other hand, the past year also brought awareness of the urgent need to respect and ensure respect for humanitarian rules. The International Conference for the Protection of War Victims enabled the ICRC to resume multilateral dialogue with the States, which should yield results at the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 1995.

In 1993, the ICRC intervened in numerous conflicts in an effort to curb the inhumane and cruel practices that are all too common today. Delegates were deployed in an increasing range of operations to provide protection and assistance and often had to work in critical conditions. Moreover, the complexity of current situations and the dynamics of modern conflicts compelled the ICRC to adopt a new approach. All too frequently, however, its mandate and the purpose of its mission were called in question by failure to respect the protective emblem of the red cross. Once again, the institution mourned the loss of several of its staff.

Concurrently, the ICRC consolidated its network of regional delegations, whose work of fostering contacts, promoting cooperation and spreading knowledge of international humanitarian law is focused on prevention. If a conflict breaks out, these field posts can rapidly be turned into operational delegations.

Learning from the lessons of 1992, the ICRC wanted to join together with the international community in mutual discussion designed to enhance respect for international humanitarian law. Switzerland, as the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions, thus convened the International Conference for the Protection of War Victims, which was held in Geneva from 30 August to 1 September 1993. The 165 Governments represented at the meeting adopted a solemn declaration confirming the responsibility of States in respecting and ensuring respect for the basic humanitarian

rules and principles. The commitments made by the international community call for action to prevent violations and react against them. Belligerents - irrespective of their degree of power and influence, their legal status or legitimacy - are all duty bound to observe these basic principles of humanity in times of international and non-international conflict.

The United Nations, for its part, significantly stepped up its capacity for action in areas such as preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping and peace-making operations. There are, moreover, growing needs to be covered and numerous humanitarian activities requiring proper coordination. An in-depth dialogue was therefore maintained by the ICRC both with the various States and with the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which is in charge of coordinating the work of the various humanitarian agencies. The debate on links between peace-keeping operations and independent, impartial humanitarian action remains of paramount importance. In this context, the ICRC continues to uphold the fundamental Red Cross and Red Crescent principles which guide its action and which even today are the key to gaining access to the victims. The principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality remain indispensable to the success of humanitarian action.

In the name of all the victims it was able to protect and assist in 1993, the ICRC expresses its gratitude to all the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their Federation for the support it received from them, and to the Governments that gave it the means to operate with complete independence.



Cornelio Sommaruga
President of the ICRC