

Message of the President

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Message from the President

Some years tend to be remembered more than others and 2001 is likely to be one of them. Many of the events that shaped it in political, social and economic terms were indeed momentous and will long remain subjects of public and academic debate. The humanitarian community faced important challenges and I wish to review here some of the most significant ones from the viewpoint of the ICRC.

One of the issues most in evidence was the emerging debate about the relevance of international humanitarian law (IHL). Open and critical discussion of the extent to which it is implemented is both necessary and justified. In countless situations of armed conflict around the world, men, women and children face extreme hardship and violence every day. The degree to which IHL is being respected has a direct bearing on their plight; the need to achieve greater respect for the rules and provisions it contains is therefore a major concern for the ICRC.

I attach great importance to taking a comprehensive view when assessing contemporary conflicts and their consequences. It has been said that the world will never be the same after the heinous crimes of 11 September 2001, which came as a severe shock to the conscience of mankind. The attacks that took place that day dealt a blow to the most fundamental values of human society, particularly those at the heart of IHL. One should take care, however, not to allow those events to overshadow the seriousness of many other conflicts around the world which are often forgotten or overlooked. To lose sight of them or neglect the violations that occur in them would create the risk of weakening IHL and thus reduce the ability to protect and assist populations at risk.

The applicability and adequacy of international law in general, and IHL in particular, have been questioned since 11 September in connection with the fight against terrorism. IHL is applicable insofar as the struggle against terrorism amounts to or includes armed conflict. As for its adequacy in dealing with new security threats, I am convinced that international law, if correctly applied, is one of the strongest tools that the community of nations has at its disposal to re-establish international order and stability. It is important to remember that the provisions of IHL were designed in full awareness of the need to strike a balance between State security and the preservation of human dignity. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols do not prevent justice from being done, but require due process of law when dealing with offenders. To put it very simply, there is no contradiction between full respect for existing rules of IHL and a resolute struggle against terrorism.

The ICRC has not only followed this debate closely, but has also taken part in it. Our organization has an abiding interest in making sure that the norms of humanitarian law are observed. An essential part of its mandate under IHL is to ensure that all victims of war receive assistance and protection based on the values underlying that body of law, i.e. humanity and respect for individual dignity. IHL is and must continue to be the instrument that enables the ICRC's staff in the field to obtain access to conflict victims. This remains our central concern. Operating in many of today's conflict zones is already a complex and difficult matter. There are uncertain chains of command to deal with in many armed factions. Combatants are frequently not distinguishable from civilians. The easy availability of weapons contributes to the protracted nature of many wars. The causes of many conflicts

are often overtly ethnic or religious. To operate effectively in such environments, it is essential to project a clear and well-perceived identity, especially in view of the multiplicity of humanitarian organizations on the ground, with their different rules of engagement and working principles. For the ICRC, these complex situations have confirmed the importance of maintaining and developing dialogue with all – I do mean all – parties to a conflict. The acceptance and legitimacy of the ICRC's operations depend on it.

Even so, absolute security is not achievable. The murder of six of our colleagues in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 26 April came as a terrible shock and was entirely unacceptable. The deaths of these dedicated men and women led to a suspension of operations, and to date the efforts to shed light on the circumstances and responsibilities involved have yielded no satisfactory results.

In 2001, the ICRC was present and active in 80 contexts worldwide, operating out of 200 offices with a staff of nearly 11,000 and one of the biggest budgets in its history. Let me offer a few examples of what this meant in terms of protection and assistance activities. Delegates visited over 300,000 persons held in 1,988 places of detention in 70 countries, including places like Afghanistan, Algeria, Colombia, Myanmar and Rwanda. More than 418,000 Red Cross messages were delivered, enabling many members of families separated by war and tension to be reunited or exchange news. An average of 320,000 internally displaced people and approximately 260,000 residents received food and other assistance on a monthly basis. Substantial aid was given to 134 hospitals in 22 countries and regions, in particular the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, countries in the northern and southern Caucasus, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and Somalia. These facilities treated some 280,000 patients during the year. The ICRC was also involved in 40 prosthetic/orthotic projects in 14 countries, manufactured 28,024 orthopaedic appliances, and fitted 14,140 disabled individuals – 9,779 of whom were mine victims – for the first time.

In a number of contexts, 2001 provided further confirmation that the need for humanitarian activities does not disappear with the end of armed hostilities. I feel strongly that caution should be exercised when applying general models to different situations. When it is said, for instance, that humanitarian organizations should focus exclusively on the conflict and immediate post-conflict phases, and then hand over their programmes, it should not be forgotten that in many situations there are neither the means of ensuring a smooth transition nor any organizations to which programmes can be handed over. Needs remain and people must be helped. There must of course be a clear and identifiable reason for activities to be carried out by humanitarian organizations rather than by other groups in the so-called transition period.

The importance of cooperation among humanitarian agencies continued to be emphasized in 2001, in particular within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. At the Council of Delegates in November, an overall strategy was adopted for the Movement with the goal of strengthening the capacity of National Societies. At the operational level, 45 National Societies in countries affected by armed conflict or internal strife worked with the ICRC on programmes ranging from aid distribution and medical services to tracing and preventive action. In addition, 15 National Societies from third countries were engaged in partnerships with the ICRC in 19 different contexts.

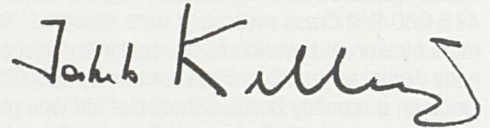
PART 1



The publication in October of the ICRC's *Women Facing War* study was a particularly rewarding moment. It marked the conclusion of several years of intense research aimed at drawing attention to the plight of women in wartime, and also to their remarkable strengths and capacities. It is my firm intention to have the study serve as a basis for targeted action on the part of the ICRC.

The highly unfavourable situation in the Middle East made it impossible to achieve a breakthrough on the issue of the emblem. A satisfactory solution to this problem remains a priority for the ICRC, which is determined to promote at every opportunity the adoption of a third protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions introducing an additional protective emblem.

The present *Annual Report* offers a comprehensive overview of issues and priorities that marked the year 2001. It illustrates the diversity of activities carried out and the creative manner in which the ICRC discharges its mandate. It also highlights the important fact that all conflicts, however global or however local, put individual lives at risk and involve people who are entitled to assistance and protection. The ICRC is more determined than ever to act on their behalf.



Jakob Kellenberger

PART 1