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FOREWORD

In the Annual Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross, what has been done during the year can never be shown to equal what had to be done. This is due in the first place to the very nature of the conditions making the ICRC's work necessary in countries ravaged by the destruction and violence of war or crisis, when the hardship suffered by the people is at its worst. Another reason is the stimulating yet harrowing fact that humanitarian work can never be enough.

With that qualifying comment, it must be admitted that the delegates and staff of the ICRC were extremely active in 1976. In 54 countries they carried on the traditional Red Cross protection and assistance to victims of armed conflicts and internal disorders. They saw some 76,000 detainees, distributed relief supplies to a value of about 72 million Swiss francs, and handled 203,918 inquiries.

These figures may sound impressive, but in fact they give only a superficial idea of the work carried out by the ICRC in 1976. They do not indicate the difficulties, disappointments and obstacles encountered by the delegates in the discharge of their mission. Behind these figures there are thousands of special cases and personal tragedies which make us only too aware, when all is said and done, of how inadequate is the work we are able to do.

The facts of which this Report gives an account are not such as to give cause for satisfaction. They clearly show that we live in a world which becomes hardly more humane with time. The atrocities committed during the civil war in Lebanon and the increasingly widespread use of torture in various regions are two grievous examples of what goes on in the world.

However, the ICRC has no alternative but to continue unremittently its conventional mission for conflict victims. It did so last year to the extent its resources permitted in war-torn Lebanon, in the Israeli-occupied territories, in Cyprus, and in countries in South-East Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Of all the work in which it was engaged, that which it had to do in Lebanon was the most important and by far the most difficult. The work of the ICRC delegates, of the Nordic National Society doctors and nurses, and of the local Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers in Lebanon was no mere routine. More than once these men and women risked their lives to accomplish their mission, earning worldwide admiration for their courage and self-sacrifice.

Like all operations undertaken by the ICRC, the work in Lebanon would not have been possible without the material and moral support of the Red Cross world and the international community.

On behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross, therefore, I express profound gratitude to all who, in 1976, took a direct or indirect part in and gave support to our activities. Thanks to their contributions the ICRC was able to provide thousands of people with sufficient protection and assistance to survive and not lose hope.

Alexandre Hay
President of the ICRC

