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In law, ICRC action is founded upon the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Statutes of the International Red Cross, and the Resolutions adopted by International Red Cross Conferences.

Since it was founded, the ICRC had set itself the task of improving, in law and in fact, the condition of the victims of war. It was under its impulse that the *Geneva Conventions* were adopted; their latest revision goes back to 1949, and they have been ratified by practically all the States throughout the world (see table on pp. 95-98). There are four Geneva Conventions:

- *First Convention*: for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field
- *Second Convention*: for the amelioration of the condition of wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea
- *Third Convention*: relative to the treatment of prisoners of war
- *Fourth Convention*: relative to the treatment of civilian persons in time of war.

On account of the development of the various forms and techniques of war, the ICRC, with the support of the Red Cross movement as a whole, made constant efforts to adapt the Conventions to changing circumstances, to obtain a better application of the law in force and to ensure thereby a wider range of protection for the victims of international and internal armed conflicts. To that end it drafted two *Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions*, the first relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, and the second relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts. The Protocols were signed on 8 June 1977, after examination by the States at a diplomatic conference, which had been convened by the Swiss Government, and which held four sessions between 1974 and 1977.

The legal basis of any action undertaken by the ICRC may therefore be summarized as follows:

- in the case of an *international armed conflict*, the ICRC may intervene by virtue of the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, in particular, under art. 126 of the Third Convention and art. 143 of the Fourth Convention; in addition, its right of initiative is recognized in art. 9 of the First, Second and Third Conventions, and in art. 10 of the Fourth Convention;
- in situations of *armed conflict not of an international character*, the ICRC has the right of initiative under art. 3 common to the Four Geneva Conventions;
- in all other situations, including *situations of internal disturbances and tensions*, the ICRC may offer its services in accordance with its traditional right of humanitarian initiative, confirmed in art. VI of the Statutes of the International Red Cross.