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Inhaltsverzeichnis

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
ACTION IN THE FIELD	7
AFRICA	9
Southern Africa	10
— Angola	10
— South Africa	13
— Namibia/South West Africa	14
— Mozambique	14
— Zimbabwe	15
— Other countries	15
East Africa	16
— Ethiopia	16
— Sudan	18
— Somalia	19
— Uganda	20
— Kenya	23
— Madagascar	24
— Mauritius	24
— Tanzania	24
— Other countries	24
Central and West Africa	24
— Chad	24
— Zaire	25
— Rwanda	26
— Congo	27
— Togo	27
— Benin	27
— Burkina Faso	28
— Cape Verde	28
— Gambia	28
— Ghana	28
— Guinea	28
— Liberia	28
— Mali	29
— Niger	29
— Senegal	29
— Sierra Leone	29
LATIN AMERICA	31
Central America and the Caribbean	32
— El Salvador	32
— Nicaragua	34

— Costa Rica	36
— Cuba	37
— Grenada	37
— Guatemala	37
— Haiti	38
— Honduras	38
— Other countries	39
South America	39
— Argentina	39
— Bolivia	40
— Chile	40
— Colombia	41
— Paraguay	41
— Peru	42
— Uruguay	43
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	45
Conflict in Afghanistan	45
— Activities in Pakistan	46
India	48
Sri Lanka	48
Conflict in Kampuchea	49
— Activities in Kampuchea	50
— Activities in Thailand	50
Viet Nam	53
Refugees in South-East Asia	54
Malaysia	54
Indonesia and East Timor	55
— Indonesia	55
— East Timor	55
Philippines	56
People's Republic of China	57
Republic of Korea	57
The Democratic People's Republic of Korea	57
Other countries	57
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA	60
Conflict between Iran and Iraq	60
— Iraq	62
— Iran	63
Lebanon	63
Israel and the occupied territories	66
Syria	68
Conflict in the Western Sahara	68
— Other countries	69
EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA	72
Poland	72
Spain	73
— Other activities	73

The International Tracing Service in Arolsen	78	FINANCES	108
Contributions in kind received by the ICRC in 1984 . .	80-81	— Nature of expenditure	108
Relief supplies dispatched by the ICRC and inventoried in the field in 1984.	82	— Balance Sheet	108
ICRC telecommunication network	84	— Income and expenditure account	108
		— Specially financed operations	109
		— Financing	110
		— Audit	110
THE LAW AND JURIDICAL CONSIDERATIONS .	85	TABLES	
International humanitarian law	85	I. Comparative balance sheets as at 31 December 1984/1983	111
— Respect, application and development of inter- national humanitarian law	85	II. Summary statement of income and expenditure/ charges in 1984	112-115
— Dissemination of international humanitarian law and the principles and ideals of the Red Cross	87	III. Expenditure in 1984 according to type of ac- tivity	116-117
Co-operation with other international and non- international organizations on legal and humani- tarian issues	92	IV. Contributions from governments in 1984 . .	118-119
— Participation in international and regional meetings	92	V. Contributions from National Societies for 1984	120-121
States party to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and to the two Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977	95-98	VI. Contributions for specially financed operations in 1984	122-125
		VII. Movement of funds for specially financed oper- ations and for relief operations in 1984	126
CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT	99	SPECIAL FUNDS	
Members of the Red Cross movement	99	Foundation for the International Committee of the Red Cross	127
— National Societies	99	Augusta Fund	128
— League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies .	101	Florence Nightingale Medal Fund	129
Organs of the Red Cross Movement	102	Clare R. Benedict Fund	130
— Standing Commission	103	Maurice de Madre French Fund	131
Henry Dunant Institute	103	Omar el Muktar Fund	132
		Paul Reuter Fund	133
INFORMATION	104	Special Fund for the Disabled	134
— Information from the field	104	ATAG, Fiduciaire Générale SA	135
— Information from headquarters	104		
— Publications and film productions	105	MEMBERS OF THE ICRC AND THE DIRECTORATE	136-137
PERSONNEL	107		

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.