

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1988)

Vorwort: Foreword
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FOREWORD

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement exists to alleviate human suffering. It usually has to work in a context of sharp political antagonism and stubborn economic rivalry, or, worse still, bitterly hostile dogmas.

This is not a tale of woe, but the simple truth, as the International Committee of the Red Cross knows from experience. For a century and a quarter it has been doing uphill work in the world's most dangerous "hot spots"; it has witnessed the great problems of the age at close quarters.

In such circumstances, keeping level-headed is not easy. Trying as well to gain allies in its work for humanity, by calling upon governments everywhere to subscribe to its principles, shows an idealism of which the Movement is justly proud.

But when the Red Cross or Red Crescent summons the world to co-operate in its humanitarian work it may harvest grapes of wrath. Its appeals may do nothing to deter leaders concerned only to safeguard their political gains; its approaches to a government may be too timid to have any effect, or so plain-spoken as to provoke irritated rejection.

Nevertheless it has its successes. Now and again States do decide that its humanitarian demands are reasonable, and that they can trust the workers it sends out — men and women who come to relieve suffering as the Movement has done hundreds of times before, deriving the strength they need from their principles alone.

More than ever, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement — especially the ICRC — has to be on the alert lest in these disturbed times vast areas of a region or continent cast aside all respect for human dignity and commit uncontrollable atrocities in their wars.

So often, the ICRC's only ally is its moral prestige. Faced with appalling dilemmas, it constantly has to find a modus vivendi between the vital demands of its humanitarian work and the political and military priorities of warring sides. It never stops trying to narrow the gap between these two extremes, so as to keep inviolate among the disasters of war the little oasis of quiet essential to non-combatants and fighters placed hors de combat.

Fundamentally, Red Cross responsibilities are the same as ever. It is ways and means that are changing. More than ever the Movement needs the international community's support to be able to meet the soaring cost of relief for human suffering and muster the material resources this requires. Only with that support will its men and women be free to work heart and soul at their job of saving lives.

Cornelio SOMMARUGA
President of the ICRC

