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Autor: Sommaruga, Cornelio

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In 1994, while efforts towards peace were gaining ground in several parts of the world, the International Committee of the Red Cross was facing new challenges, tragedies that mankind had believed would never be seen again. Entire civilian populations suffered privation, disease, deliberate massacres, even genocide.

The ICRC continued its work to provide protection and assistance to the victims. It sometimes acted alone, but also enlisted the cooperation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies or other humanitarian organizations, both local and international.

Looking back, two basic observations can be made:

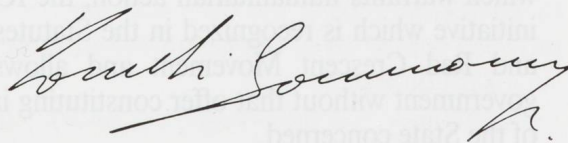
- *whatever the type of conflict — international or internal, conventional or otherwise — an independent, specifically neutral and impartial intermediary is essential for the conduct in the long term of effective humanitarian operations, which must be clearly distinguished from political and military efforts to achieve peace;*
- *no humanitarian action can release States from their responsibility to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to work for the restoration of peace and for international order and security.*

It seems to me that this dual approach offers the essential lesson to be drawn from the past year. I am thinking in particular of faithful compliance with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, whose proclamation in 1965 by the

20th International Conference meeting in Vienna is approaching its 30th anniversary, and also of the need to draw a clear distinction between humanitarian action and peace-keeping operations.

Looking ahead, the ICRC places great hopes in the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, due to be held in Geneva in December 1995, and trusts that it will give the international community the opportunity to strengthen its commitment to international humanitarian law, thus relieving the suffering of war victims.

The ICRC is aware of the challenges that the future holds, and therefore expresses its gratitude to all the governments, all the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and all other organizations concerned for their trust and support. It also thanks the parties to conflict which allowed its delegates in the field to bring into the heart of violence the first signs of tolerance, a glimmer of humanity and a hope for peace.



Cornelio Sommaruga
President of the ICRC