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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The year 1996 has been full of suffering but also full of hope, both for action in aid of conflict victims and for international humanitarian law. There was:

- ◆ *the continuing tragedy of the hundreds of thousands of civilian victims in the Great Lakes region of Africa;*
- ◆ *the suffering caused by so many conflicts which have so far defied any peaceful solution, such as those in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka;*
- ◆ *the silent but all too real suffering of the victims of forgotten conflicts, such as the prisoners of war still held in Iran and Iraq;*
- ◆ *the suffering — irremediable as yet — of those victims who remain inaccessible despite the repeated efforts made in several internal conflicts, particularly in Tajikistan;*
- ◆ *the suffering of so many families in Bosnia, in Chechnya, in Kuwait and elsewhere, who are still without news of people near and dear to them;*
- ◆ *the growing dangers that have to be faced by staff engaged in humanitarian operations: for the ICRC, 1996 was overshadowed by the murder of several of its delegates — three in Burundi in June and six in Chechnya in December — and by abductions in Sudan and Chechnya.*

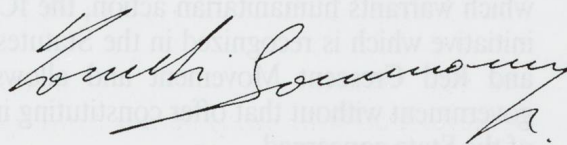
But there was also hope:

- ◆ *the hope raised by the International Strategy Conference for the elimination of anti-personnel landmines (Ottawa, 3-5 October), and by the ongoing international campaign for a total ban on such weapons;*
- ◆ *the hope that a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation will be developed with many senior military personnel, although a clear distinction between military operations and humanitarian activities must nonetheless be maintained at bilateral and regional levels and in United Nations peace-keeping operations. Military person-*

nel and humanitarian workers are together in the field; even though their tasks differ, their procedures need not necessarily be contradictory. The ICRC accordingly submitted a set of guidelines to the United Nations this year to facilitate compliance by peace-keeping forces with international humanitarian law;

- ◆ the hope that the ICRC's Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law will be steadily extended, in accordance with the resolution adopted by the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Geneva, December 1995);
- ◆ the hope that the growing synergy in the field of humanitarian endeavour will be steadily enhanced by trusting and constructive dialogue between the ICRC and the other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and with the United Nations, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, non-governmental organizations and leading opinion-makers;
- ◆ the hope that the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to be held in Geneva in 1999, will be a milestone event to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Conventions and the centenary of the First International Peace Conference in The Hague.

It is only with the help of the men and women who understand, support and share its mission that the International Committee of the Red Cross can take up the challenge of all this suffering and all these hopes. On behalf of the ICRC, I wish to thank them all most warmly.



Cornelio Sommaruga
President of the ICRC