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MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE ICRC IN 1998

In the course of 1998 the ICRC underwent a significant and far-reaching reorganization, based on the results of a two-year study on its future known as the Avenir project. The aim of the project was to strengthen the ICRC's specific identity and to improve its capacity to perform the tasks entrusted to it by the States party to the Geneva Conventions. During the nineties the major upheavals on the global political scene were accompanied by an unprecedented proliferation of new humanitarian organizations working in the field, with aims similar – but not identical – to those of the ICRC. The objectives and methods of warfare also changed; with the increasing involvement of irregular combatants humanitarian workers had to operate in ever more dangerous conditions.

These developments prompted the ICRC to reflect upon its own methods and objectives, with a view to enhancing its ability to respond to the challenges created by the new environment. "Where do we go from here?" was the key question.

The answers ranged from the ethical to the institutional and practical. The basic aim remained the same – to alleviate human suffering in times of conflict – but new means of pursuing that aim had to be devised. As a result, the entire institution was reorganized in a drive to achieve greater efficiency.¹

For instance, to increase synergy between the promotion and dissemination of international humanitarian law on the one hand and communication on the other, the previously separate divisions responsible for these activities were merged. The Relief and Health Divisions were also brought together since their aims are the same: to enable conflict victims to survive by providing them with adequate food, housing, water supplies and health care. At the same time, coordinated steps must be taken to help them maintain or regain their self-sufficiency once the emergency phase is over.

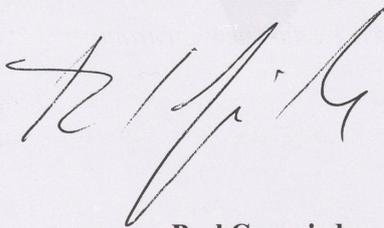
Another objective of the new structure is to devolve greater autonomy and responsibility on delegates working in the field, so as to strengthen teamwork and efficiency in ICRC delegations around the world. "Planning for results" is the name given to the new policy governing all action taken both at headquarters and in the field. Its main features are closer definition of humanitarian needs and objectives followed by strict reporting on the action taken and evaluation of the impact of such action.

¹ See pp. 409-411.

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Last but not least, the very workings of ICRC headquarters were adapted accordingly. The Assembly, made up of the members of the Committee, remains the supreme governing body for matters of broad policy. The Executive Board has been replaced by an Assembly Council comprising five members of the Assembly and the Director-General. The Directors now meet once a week under the overall guidance of the recently appointed Director-General, and deal with the direct application of objectives and strategies, while the Assembly, together with the Assembly Council, remains responsible for overseeing the ICRC's activities as a whole.

I speak for the entire institution in expressing the hope that this new approach will help us meet the increasing and ever more complex humanitarian needs all over the world.



Paul Grossrieder
Director-General

The ICRC around the world in 1998



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