

Practical application and development of humanitarian law

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II. GENERAL ACTIVITIES

PRACTICAL APPLICATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITARIAN LAW

The Geneva Conventions

During 1960, the ICRC continued its efforts to obtain universal recognition of these Conventions, promoted by it, which constitute the foundations of international humanitarian law. It can be said that ratification of the Conventions (or accession to them) has now become general. All the great Powers are bound by these basic documents¹.

During the year, the ICRC published an English version of the Commentary on the Second Geneva Convention of 1949 for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea. This is the last volume of the series and with it the immense work on which the ICRC was engaged is accomplished. Each of the four Geneva Conventions has thus been examined in a thorough Commentary, both in English and French. The four books make a total of 2,438 pages in each language.

Countless copies, summaries or commentaries of the Conventions were distributed in all parts of the world. The ICRC published reprints of the illustrated booklet summarizing the main principles of the Conventions ; one of these reprints contains Lingala, one of the principal languages of the Congo, and is intended for the armed forces in that country convulsed by disturbances.

A first edition of the *Handbook*, drawn up in accordance with the proposals of the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross (New Delhi, 1957) in order to contribute towards the dissemination of the Conventions among young people, has been published in

¹ By the end of 1960, 77 States were bound by the Geneva Conventions.

French, illustrated by photographs. This trial-edition was financed by the ICRC and the League and is more particularly intended for the National Red Cross Societies. Copies have been distributed to them, as well as to a number of personalities ; in some cases, they were accompanied by a translation in English, German or Spanish. They were very favourably received and several National Societies announced their intention of ordering a substantial number of copies, so that the publication of new editions in languages other than French can be taken into consideration.

Consultations and courses on humanitarian law

While one of its delegates (Mr. R.-J. Wilhelm) was visiting Japan, the ICRC took this opportunity to organize a series of interviews and discussions, in various countries of Asia, on the Geneva Conventions and humanitarian law, in which Government representatives as well as members of National Red Cross Societies took part. These contacts not only contributed towards a better understanding of the Conventions, but also towards the preparation, already in time of peace, of the practical means of applying them.

In August, an adviser in the legal department of the ICRC (Mr. H. Coursier) was invited by the International Law Academy at The Hague to hold a course at the Palace of Peace. About four hundred students attended this course, which concerned the evolution of international humanitarian law and comprised five lectures :

1. The protection of the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field ;
2. The status of prisoners of war ;
3. The protection of civilians in time of war ;
4. The status of refugees ;
5. The abolition of slavery and the fight against the scourges of mankind.

It was completed by two seminars on humanitarian aid to political prisoners and on the question of the right of asylum.

The same adviser in the legal department of the ICRC took part in training lectures organized by various branches of the Junior

Red Cross. Thus, he was invited to Langenlois by the Austrian Red Cross in June, and in July, at the invitation of the British Red Cross, he went to Barnett Hill (Sussex) to give talks on the Geneva Conventions to instructors and teachers from various countries.

Finally, on several occasions, the ICRC received enquiries concerning the interpretation of the Geneva Conventions or certain aspects of Civil Defence in regard to International Law. As in previous years, it prepared a number of advisory opinions of a legal nature.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

The International Centre for the Co-ordination of Legal Assistance, whose headquarters is in Geneva, the ICRC being one of its founders, continues its work. It instituted a delegation in Rome, which co-operates closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Working together with AGIUS¹, this delegation co-ordinates legal assistance activities in Italy.

RED CROSS PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURE FOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

The Drawing up of Red Cross Principles

Following the publication of J. Pictet's book, "Red Cross Principles", the opinion has been voiced on several sides that an official declaration of the principles governing the institution should be drawn up in a concise and systematic manner.

In 1958, the ICRC, the Executive Committee of the League and the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross entrusted a Joint Commission of the ICRC and the League with the preliminary examination of this proposal. The Presidents of these two institutions appointed Messrs. F. Siordet and J. Pictet, for the ICRC, and Messrs. H. Dunning and W. Phillips, for the League.

¹ Abbreviation of the Italian expression: *Assistenza giuridica agli stranieri* (legal assistance for foreign nationals).

This Commission drew up a first report, which was sent to all the National Red Cross Societies, requesting their opinion on this important matter. Replies, some of them very extensive and detailed, were received from twenty-six Societies.

The Standing Commission having requested the Study Group to draw up a new version of the Principles, taking into consideration the remarks made by the National Societies, the Group submitted a second text to the Standing Commission, which adopted it, after a few amendments on October 6, 1960.

In order to ensure the universal character of this declaration of the Red Cross Principles, the text will first be submitted to the Council of Delegates to be held in Prague in October 1961. If quasi-unanimous agreement is achieved, the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross—the Conference of the Red Cross Centenary—which is to meet in Geneva in 1963, will be asked to give its general and final approval of the text.

Convening of the International Conferences of the Red Cross

The Standing Commission of the International Red Cross asked a special Commission, composed—as that which prepared the drawing up of the Red Cross Principles—to examine the methods of convening the International Conferences of the Red Cross, in order to avoid a repetition of the difficulties and incidents which arose in connection with the Conferences of Toronto and New Delhi in 1952 and 1957. After examining the question, this Working Party drew up a report together with proposals, which the Standing Commission adopted, without appreciable amendments, at its meeting of October 6, 1960.

RELATIONS WITH RED CROSS INSTITUTIONS

In 1960 as in previous years, the ICRC maintained close relations with the National Red Cross (Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) Societies, as well as with their federation, the League of Red Cross Societies. The Directorate of the ICRC and the Secretariat of the League continued to hold joint weekly meetings, alternately at