

Foreword

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FOREWORD

1978 has been an outstanding year in the annals of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Never, in over a hundred years of activity, with the exception of the period of the Second World War, has the ICRC been operational at any one time on as many fronts and in as many countries.

The continent of Africa had the unenviable privilege of being the principal scene of ICRC activities, with no less than eight major armed conflicts. In a score of African countries from the Red Sea to the Atlantic coast and from the Mediterranean to the shores of the Indian Ocean, the ICRC took protection and assistance to hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, most of whom were women and children.

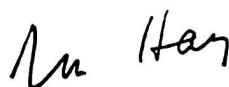
Yet the sound of arms was not confined to Africa alone; fighting took place also in the Middle East—especially Lebanon, in Indo-China and Central America, to name only the major theatres of war. Alongside its work for the benefit of victims of armed conflicts, the ICRC extended its protection and assistance to thousands of people deprived of their freedom for political reasons, and to their anguished families, who were often suffering material hardship. Despite the limited range of the ICRC's goals in its humanitarian work for political detainees, it was for many of these detainees a glimmer of hope shining through the darkness enveloping their place of confinement.

In intervening in situations where violence and passion more often than not overrode reason and respect for human life, the ICRC delegates paid a heavy toll to the ideal of the Red Cross. In 1978, four of them were killed in action: Louis Gaulis in Lebanon, and Alain Bieri, Charles Chatora and André Tièche in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe. Not only were these deaths the cause of tremendous grief among the relatives and friends of the victims, they were a savage blow to the ICRC, both in Geneva and in the field. These tragic events were a further reminder to the world, as if such a reminder were still necessary, of the risks involved in the work of the ICRC delegates, and proof of the vital need to make the meaning of the Red Cross mission and its guiding principles, especially those of neutrality and impartiality, better known and understood among political leaders, combatants and the general public. The information and dissemination work which requires the participation of the whole movement should render the observance

of the protective signs of the red cross, the red crescent and the red lion and sun in areas of armed conflict still more widespread.

ICRC involvement in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America has been considerable, in terms of both the number of conflicts and their extent, and has required extensive financial and material support from the international community and the Red Cross world. The ICRC would like to express its sincere gratitude to the governments, National Societies and public and private institutions which, by their contributions in cash and kind, allowed it to fulfil its mission of protection and assistance. A word of special appreciation goes to the people and authorities of Switzerland, who for many years and without laying down any qualifications have ensured the financing of over half of the ICRC's expenses in its ordinary account.

Alexandre Hay
President of the ICRC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Hay', written in a cursive style.