

# Foreword

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# FOREWORD

For the ICRC, 1985 was the year of the launching of its “programme for the future”.

From 1981 to 1983 the entire Committee and its members—directorates, management and staff—apart from customary ICRC tasks, were engaged in intensive reflection on its future. What sort of world awaited it between now and the year 2000? What were likely to be the conflicts, disturbances or tensions whose victims would need its assistance and protection? From which areas or countries would it be able to withdraw? In which regions, on the contrary, ought it to establish its presence already in anticipation of future difficulties?

In the aggregate, the Committee reached the conclusion that its activities were going to increase during the coming years, but what resources would it need to deal with such growth? In personnel, in money, in support of all kinds? On what support would it be able to rely, from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, from governments, from the media, from public opinion?

In managing these increased resources, what priorities should it establish? What rate of growth? Where should the effort be made in the first place? What was the optimal rate, neither too fast nor too slow?

And during this growth what would happen to the spirit that should always constitute the core of its strength, to the cohesion and motivation of its staff, to its sense of limitations and proportions, to the moral force of its principles? Was there not a risk, as some have said, that by growing too much it might “lose its soul”? But at the same time, could it leave unanswered the tragic appeal of so many victims, both present and future?

Were it necessary to summarize in a few words the conclusions reached, let us say that the ICRC cannot foresee any rapid and appreciable improvement in the state of the world. Its experience over recent years has shown that armed conflicts—whether national or international—are lasting longer and tending to become politically and ideologically more extreme. Military attitudes are hardening, hostilities are being waged with increasing intensity and implacability, and there is little hope of short-term solutions. In addition, there is considerable risk that the internal disturbances and tension prevailing in a number of countries may degenerate into civil wars in the near future, with the possible intervention of foreign troops.

As conflicts increase in number, intensity and duration, as attitudes harden and become more extreme, the suffering they inflict will be greater and more prolonged, and the hardest hit will be the civilian population. The ICRC’s mission as a humanitarian, neutral and independent institution will therefore be needed more than ever. The number of its interventions will increase as well, not to mention the complexity of the problems it will be called upon to face, both for the protection of people who fall into enemy hands and to provide medical and food aid for displaced populations.

Anticipating such developments and planning ahead in terms of qualified staff and financial, material and logistic resources, planning ahead, too, for the even more essential support by National Societies, governments and public opinion, henceforth rank high among the ICRC’s tasks. The Committee therefore established—first of all internally—a series

of objectives, priorities and a growth rate (declining compared with the last the years) within the framework of a five-year revolving programme. It calculated the resources required to meet the needs forecast and specified the sources from which they will be drawn.

At the same time the ICRC commissioned Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co. to carry out a management and rationalization study with a view to increasing the institution's internal and external efficiency, both now and in the future.

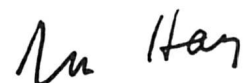
Thus 1984 saw the revolving programme put into internal operation and major rationalization measures introduced; in that same year a detailed strategy *vis-à-vis* governments, National Societies and the public was formulated and two basic documents were prepared, constituting the public component of this extensive programme, which was set in motion in 1985:

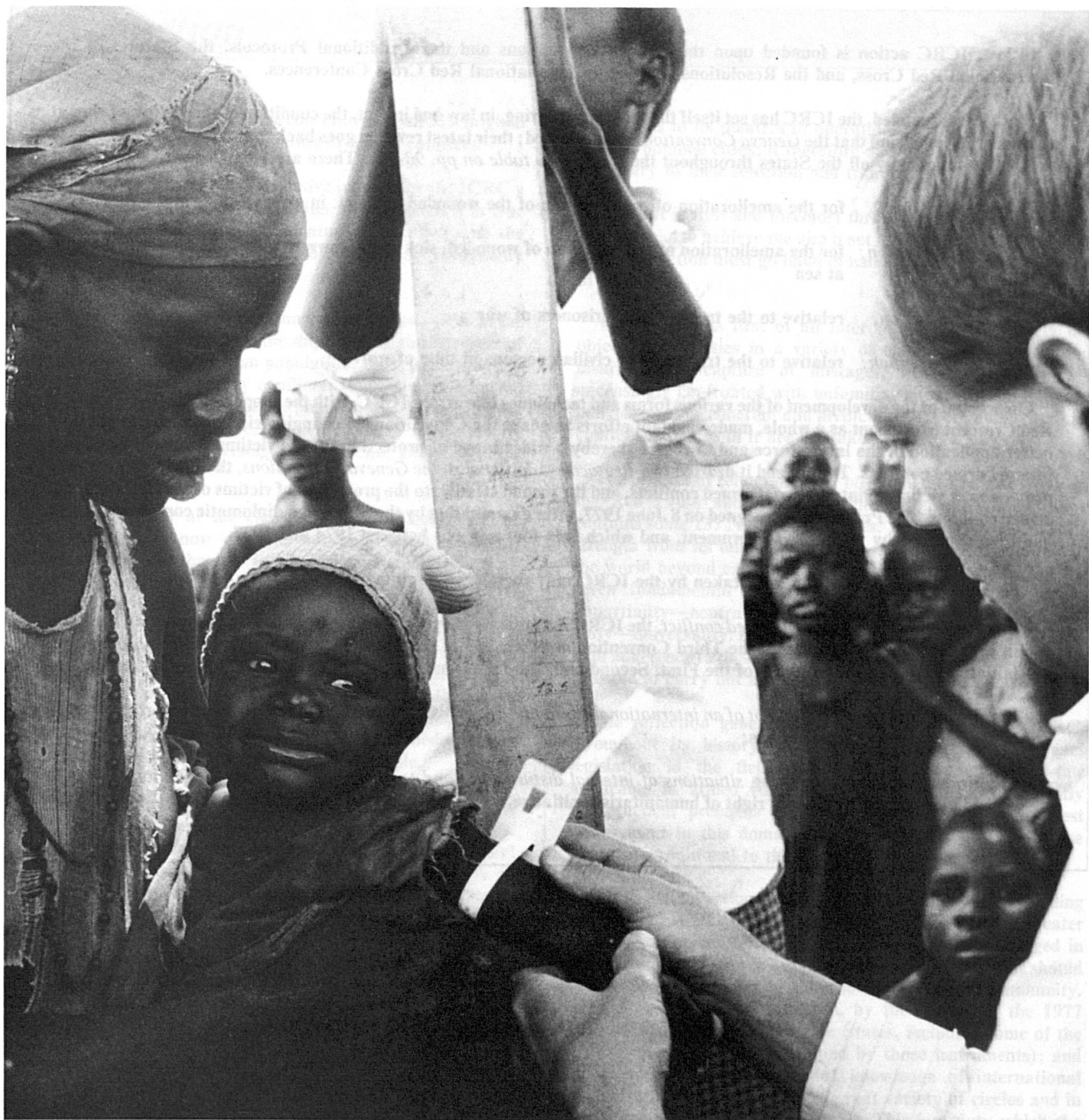
- *Appeal for a Humanitarian Mobilization*, launched by the President of the ICRC at his annual press conference in January 1985;
- *The International Committee of the Red Cross and its Future: a Five-Year Programme*, which since 1985 has also been sent to governments and National Societies when special representations are made to them.

Consequently, by virtue of these two documents and the oral and written comments which have systematically accompanied them, 1985 was and will remain the year which marked the launching of its programme for the future.

I wish to take the opportunity offered by the *Annual Report 1985* to express my thanks to the governments, the National Societies, the media and the public for the very favourable response they have shown to these approaches by the ICRC. Both materially and in terms of moral support every one of them has, without exception, shown an understanding and a sharing of our objectives which have profoundly encouraged us in our endeavours. The ICRC considers itself singularly well understood and supported. It has found that despite forecasts which, in their realism, are hardly optimistic, there is a common faith in the future of its mission and, through this, in the future of humanity. This is the message of hope for all that I would like to share with you here.

Alexandre HAY  
President of the ICRC





*Angola: Checking the nutritional status of children under six years of age. (Photo: Yannick Müller)*

In law, ICRC action is founded upon the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Statutes of the International Red Cross, and the Resolutions adopted by International Red Cross Conferences.

Since it was founded, the ICRC has set itself the task of improving, in law and in fact, the condition of the victims of war. It was under its impulsion that the *Geneva Conventions* were adopted; their latest revision goes back to 1949, and they have been ratified by practically all the States throughout the world (*see table on pp. 93-96*). There are four Geneva Conventions:

- *First Convention*: for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field
- *Second Convention*: for the amelioration of the condition of wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea
- *Third Convention*: relative to the treatment of prisoners of war
- *Fourth Convention*: relative to the treatment of civilian persons in time of war.

On account of the development of the various forms and techniques of war, the ICRC, with the support of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a whole, made constant efforts to adapt the Conventions to changing circumstances, to obtain a better application of the law in force and to ensure thereby a wider range of protection for the victims of international and internal armed conflicts. To that end it drafted two *Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions*, the first relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, and the second relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts. The Protocols were signed on 8 June 1977, after examination by the States at a diplomatic conference, which had been convened by the Swiss Government, and which held four sessions between 1974 and 1977.

The legal basis of any action undertaken by the ICRC may therefore be summarized as follows:

- in the case of an *international armed conflict*, the ICRC may intervene by virtue of the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949, in particular, under Art. 126 of the Third Convention and Art. 143 of the Fourth Convention; in addition, its right of initiative is recognized in Art. 9 of the First, Second and Third Conventions, and in Art. 10 of the Fourth Convention;
- in situations of *armed conflict not of an international character*, the ICRC has the right of initiative under Art. 3 common to the Four Geneva Conventions;
- in all other situations, including *situations of internal disturbances and tensions*, the ICRC may offer its services in accordance with its traditional right of humanitarian initiative, confirmed in Art. VI of the Statutes of the International Red Cross.