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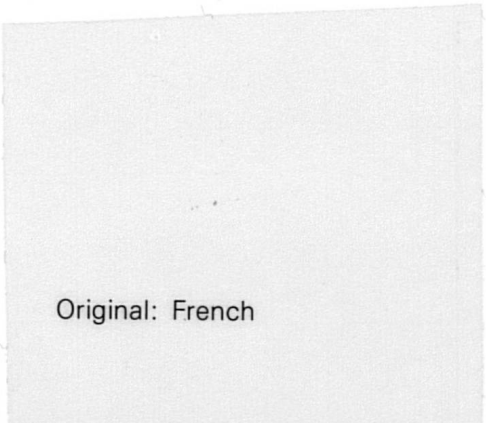
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NOTE

This report is primarily an account of the ICRC's work in the field and its activities to promote international humanitarian law. Mention is made of some of the negotiations entered into with a view to bringing protection and assistance to the victims of international and civil wars and internal disturbances and tensions. Other negotiations are not mentioned, since the ICRC feels that any publicity would not be in the interest of the victims. Thus, this report cannot be regarded as covering all the institution's efforts worldwide to come to the aid of the victims of conflict.

Moreover, the length of the text devoted to a given country or situation is not necessarily proportional to the magnitude of the problems observed and tackled by the institution. Indeed, there are cases which are a source of grave humanitarian concern but on which the ICRC is not in a position to report because it has been denied permission to take action. By the same token, the description of operations in which the ICRC has great freedom of action takes up considerable space, regardless of the scale of the problems involved.



Original: French

In law, the work of the ICRC is based upon the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the resolutions adopted by International Conferences of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

Since it was founded, the ICRC has set itself the task of improving, in law and in fact, the situation of war victims.

It was at its prompting that the first Geneva Convention was adopted in 1864. In the years since, the ICRC, with the support of the entire Movement, has made constant efforts to have governments adapt the Conventions to changing circumstances, especially the escalation in means and techniques of warfare, in order to provide more effective protection and assistance for the victims of armed conflict.

Today, almost all States are bound by the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, which, in times of conflict, protect wounded and sick members of the armed forces on land and at sea, prisoners of war and civilians.

Two Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions were adopted on 8 June 1977, mainly to reaffirm and develop humanitarian rules governing the conduct of hostilities (Protocol I) and improve the body of humanitarian law applicable in non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II). Almost half the world's States are now bound by the Protocols.

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

- In the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, the international community gave the ICRC a mandate to act in the event of international armed conflict. In particular, the ICRC has the right to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees. The Conventions also confer on the ICRC a broad right of initiative.**
- In situations of armed conflict which is not international in character, the ICRC also has a right of initiative recognized by States and enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions.**
- In the event of internal disturbances and tension, and in any other situation which warrants humanitarian action, the ICRC has a right of humanitarian initiative which is recognized in the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and allows it to offer its services to States without that offer constituting interference in States' internal affairs.**