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Autor: Hay, Alexandre

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Foreword

The 1977 Annual Report gives an extensive description of the tasks performed by the ICRC in 1977 throughout the world and in Geneva. These tasks have included "conventional" activities in aid of the victims of international armed conflicts and civil wars; "non-conventional" activities in aid of "political detainees"—a task of increasing concern to the ICRC in the last few years; its work to develop and propagate knowledge of the Geneva Conventions; its relations with the Red Cross world, with governments, international organizations and the mass media; and many other spheres of activity besides.

It is very likely that readers of the Annual Report will be struck by the extent of the ICRC's achievements and by the diversity and number of its interventions compared with the relative meagreness of its resources in men and money. But let there be no mistake! The truth is that had the ICRC received from the States signatories to the Geneva Conventions, who are in fact its mandators, more substantial and more regular support, it would have been capable of discharging its tasks on a much larger scale and could have provided aid and comfort to a far greater number of victims. Only too often has the ICRC been compelled to withdraw delegates from some country or region or to close down provisionally the offices of its delegation, as was the case in West Africa, so as to concentrate the bulk of its forces and resources in a zone with more urgent claims on its efforts.

The ICRC has had to review constantly the deployment of its operational staff and to trim its sails to the relative gravity of the needs of the hour, because it did not have adequate reserves and had to make the difficult choice of dealing with matters that seemed to be most urgent. The result was that the ICRC did not find it possible to expand in regular fashion its bilateral contacts with as many countries as it would have wished, especially with those of the Third World, thereby diminishing its chances for swift and efficacious action in the event of a conflict. The esta-

blishment of settled relations with the States signatories to the Geneva Conventions and with the liberation movements is a long-term process which demands both constancy and perseverance. The ICRC cannot bring this process to a successful conclusion unless it has a sufficient number of delegates who are not only well versed in humanitarian questions but also responsive to the real conditions of life in the developing countries.

However, not all the difficulties in the path of the ICRC are of a financial nature. In several cases, it has come up against political obstacles which have slowed down or even stopped the development of its activities. It is disquieting to find that there has been a tendency for politics to become increasingly and more deeply involved in humanitarian matters, with the consequence that the fate of thousands of victims is becoming linked to considerations which are totally contrary to the Red Cross spirit.

In conclusion, it should be realized that while the Annual Report presents a relatively exhaustive account of the work accomplished during the year under review it gives only a partial impression of all the activities the ICRC would have wished to carry out and was not able to do so, either because it did not have sufficient means available or because of the increasing politization of humanitarian questions. I hope that in the years ahead the ICRC will be enabled to do more, and to work more efficiently, for the alleviation of suffering caused by violence and tyranny. But for this, it is imperative that the States signatories to the Geneva Conventions give the ICRC more substantial support than they have so far. In particular, it is essential that they should provide it with the funds it needs and put into practice, on the field of action, the lofty humanitarian principles solemnly proclaimed at conferences.

Alexandre Hay
President ICRC

