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EDITORIAL

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DIVISION:

Delegates in the forefront of multilateral diplomacy

New challenges

Since the end of the Cold War, the extreme violence unleashed in numerous conflicts has testified to complete disregard for the most elementary principles of international humanitarian law.

The increasing use of aid to pursue political objectives is undermining the neutrality of humanitarian work.

The multiplicity of players now present on the operational scene is giving rise to new needs in terms of coordination.

Multilateral mobilization

In order to halt the erosion of human values, a conscious commitment of States to that effect is urgently required. "To respect and ensure respect" is a fundamental obligation of States, which furthermore have undertaken to act in cooperation with the UN when serious violations occur. A constant reminder must be given of that obligation, particularly at international conferences.

Representing the ICRC in the great fora of multilateral diplomacy – the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), Ministerial Conferences and Summits of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Conferences of Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and of the League of Arab States (LAS), Ministerial Conferences and Summits of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the IPU Inter-Parliamentary Conference – delegates of the International Organizations Division (IOD) are working to heighten that indispensable humanitarian awareness in circles of political responsibility.

That work may take various forms: first will come bilateral discussions, then the

distribution of documents and, whenever feasible and appropriate, the issuing of statements.

As part of this general mobilization, the IOD is closely involved in the preparations for the Conference for the Protection of War Victims, which the Swiss Government is convening in Geneva at the end of August.

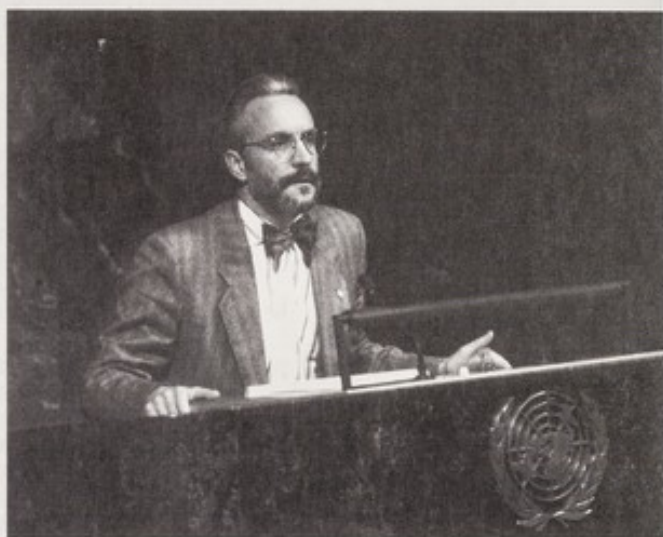
Operational coordination

With more and more people and organizations becoming involved in humanitarian work, coordination systems have had to be set up within the United Nations. IOD delegates, frequently assisted by colleagues with specialized knowledge of the various geographical regions, regularly take part in meetings of the Interagency Standing Committee and its numerous working groups; the ICRC has observer status at meetings of the Committee.

In this multidisciplinary context, the institution's representatives try to meet such challenges as reconciling the ICRC's indispensable independence with the need for consultations, the neutrality of humanitarian work with the political support that work requires, and the individual nature and purpose of each organization with a mutual adherence to a certain number of fundamental principles.

Setting the course for action

The "humanitarian environment" is developing so rapidly that continual adjustments have to be made. Yet the numerous appeals for aid force the ICRC to act at once, leaving too little time to stand back and consider.



After leading the New York delegation for five years, Jean-Paul Fallet became head of the International Organizations Division in August 1992.

Since the IOD frequently attends various fora where mainstream ideas are discussed and takes part in numerous symposia, seminars and round tables, another of its tasks is to help with this essential process of anticipatory thought and analysis within the ICRC.

Structural flexibility

As a unit of the Department of Operations the IOD, which also takes part in senior management meetings of the Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, deals with certain spheres of activity, notably human rights, in Geneva itself (see Dominique Borel's article). Fortunately the Division, with its highly mobile delegates, can count on reliable support in the field: firstly, the important delegation in New York (see the article by its head, Peter Küng), then delegates in Addis Ababa, Cairo and Riyadh, all three of whom liaise with the regional organizations (see Zidane Meriboute's article) and, finally, the regional delegations whose services are a vital link in mobilizing support for the ICRC's work.

Jean-Paul Fallet

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE ICRC AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Besides cooperating with the worldwide, specialized organizations (UN, WHO, ILO, etc.), the ICRC has built up good working relations with the regional organizations (OAU, OIC, LAS, Council of Europe). Thus constructive regular contact has been established with organizations which apparently operate on the basis of so-called "closed" statutes, i.e. exclusively intended for the members of the regions which they cover, and deal respectively with "Pan-African", "Pan-Islamic" or "European" matters.

Despite their apparent reserve, the ICRC has gradually managed to gain their confidence and be admitted as a matter of course into these organizations. This confidence derives from the fact that the ICRC protects and assists victims in the field. So it is not by chance that the ICRC has been received favourably and even warmly welcomed within these regional fora. This reminds me of a comment made to me at the OAU Summit of Heads of State in Abuja (Nigeria), where a senior diplomat intervened just when I was going up to his Minister to ask for an appointment for the leader of our delegation to see him: "I must admit", he remarked with a smile, "that initially I didn't understand why your delegation, with its rather western look, was here; but as soon as I realized it was the ICRC, I said bravo! Your place is amongst us because, after all, yours is one of the few organizations which works effectively and impartially on behalf of the Afro-Arab world...". Needless to say, this eminent diplomat did not fail to arrange a meeting with his Minister in the minutes that followed.

Organization of African Unity (OAU) – Addis Ababa

The OAU undoubtedly plays a major role in defending the interests of the "Afro-Arab world". It was founded in 1963 on a continent in the throes of decolonization, beset by wars and mass migrations. Its headquarters is in Addis Ababa; with 52 members it represents one third of the international community.

The ICRC has steadily increased its cooperation with the OAU's three main bodies: (1) the Assembly of Heads of State and Government; (2) the Council of Ministers; and (3) the General Secretariat headed by Dr. Salim A. Salim (Tanzania). In 1986 the OAU adopted a resolution in support of the ICRC's humanitarian work. Since then, cooperation has been intensified even further and has culminated in the ICRC being granted observer status at the OAU. This status was

ratified by the conclusion of a cooperation agreement signed by Dr. Salim A. Salim and President Sommaruga in Geneva in May 1992. The relations between the ICRC and the OAU are important because they enable our institution to be present to greater effect within bodies which determine the course of social and humanitarian programmes in Africa; the OAU is furthermore becoming more and more actively engaged in the prevention and peaceful settlement of inter-African conflicts.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights – Banjul, Gambia

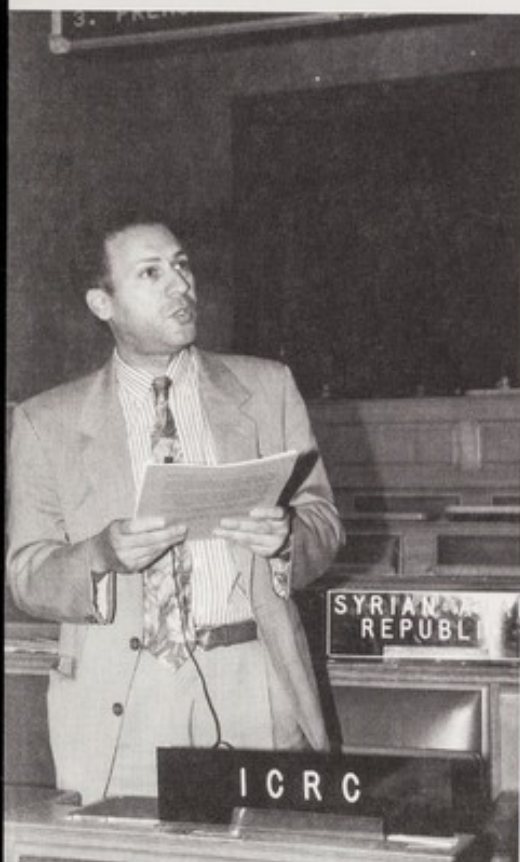
In March 1992, the ICRC was unanimously granted observer status within this Commission, the statutes of which were painstakingly and scrupulously drawn up by African intellectuals and diplomats.

The Commission, composed of eleven distinguished Africans directly elected by the heads of state, plays a decisive role in promoting human rights. In addition, it is responsible for examining periodical human rights reports by African governments and for investigating individual complaints; this is a major step forward in upholding the dignity of African citizens.

The ICRC has established very friendly relations with the African Commission and keeps it informed of developments with regard to respect for and the implementation of international humanitarian law, as well as providing up-to-date information about its activities in Africa.

Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) – Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

The OIC is composed of 51 States in Asia, Africa and the Arab world. It has three main bodies: the Conference of Islamic Kings and Heads of State and Government (Islamic Summit Conference); the Conference of Islamic Foreign Ministers; and the General Secretariat headed by Dr. Hamid Alghabid (Niger). The General Secretariat serves as a liaison between the member States and facilitates consultations and exchanges between those States and organizations interested in the Muslim world. One of the aims of the OIC is to defend the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian interests of Muslim countries. It has gained enormous respect among intellectuals and diplomats in the Third World for its pragmatic approach and active role in the peaceful settlement of disputes (Afghanistan, Somalia).



At the ICRC, Zidane Meriboute advises on the Arab/African regional organizations.

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DIVISION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The ICRC is regularly invited to take part in the meetings of Islamic Kings and Heads of State and of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and is likewise in steady contact with the General Secretariat in Jeddah and the Permanent Delegation of the OIC to the international organizations in Geneva. It should be noted that in recent years the OIC has adopted several resolutions supporting the ICRC's humanitarian work.

League of Arab States (LAS) – Cairo

The ICRC also cooperates with the League of Arab States. Set up in 1945 at the suggestion of Egypt, its purpose is to try to restore and consolidate unity within the Arab world and promote cooperation in economic and financial matters, communications, and cultural, social and humanitarian affairs.

Its main bodies are: (1) the Arab League Council; (2) the Arab Specialized Organizations; (3) the Specialized Ministerial Councils; and (4) the Secretariat General, headed by Dr. Esmat Abdel Magid (Egypt).

The ICRC maintains contact with the League of Arab States, especially with its Secretary-General, to exchange views and organize seminars on international humanitarian law.

For the ICRC delegate to specialized regional organizations everything is a matter of preparation, then steering and lastly following up each mission. Like a musician tackling a new score, he first of all needs stamina (although the conferences are very short, a lot of midnight oil has to be burnt to produce the resolutions on time), then he has to absorb the atmosphere peculiar to each conference; he must therefore have a feel for the problems under discussion and win the participants' trust by speaking frankly, while clearly emphasizing the ICRC's humanitarian, impartial and neutral message. At times this message is put across in rather more muted tones to ensure that our partners in discussion understand that the ICRC delegate's attendance and the numerous contacts he makes with diplomats and political decision-makers have only one aim, namely to alleviate the suffering of the victims of the conflicts within the area covered by the respective regional organizations.

Zidane Meriboute

An important task of the IOD is to keep track of human rights developments in various international fora.

Although human rights as such are not the direct responsibility of the ICRC, respect for them during armed conflict and its aftermath does come within the ambit of international humanitarian law, of which the ICRC is the guardian.

In fact, there are numerous situations where human rights and international humanitarian law overlap and must both be taken into account. To ensure that international humanitarian law is implemented in the field, one of the ICRC's roles is to stress its applicability in conflict situations of that kind, especially when the very conflicts themselves prevent mechanisms for the protection of human rights from operating.

Many situations examined by the United Nations from the human rights point of view are thus also of concern to the ICRC. Moreover the ICRC is operationally active in many areas which are subject to United Nations scrutiny, and in particular to that of the Commission on Human Rights at the United Nations Office in Geneva, which conducts an annual review between February and March of all human rights issues throughout the world. Some of the subjects discussed by this Commission are later taken up by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in New York. The IOD must be present in these various fora not only to keep world problems under close observation but also to monitor references to ICRC activities, either in official United Nations reports or in resolutions passed there. The IOD delegates must ensure that any such reference to the ICRC is correct, perhaps suggesting a more appropriate version which would better serve the interests of the victims or if necessary having the mention deleted. In order to do so, the delegates must keep in contact with diplomats and members of NGOs as well as with representatives of regional organizations, which frequently have their own human rights commissions (Europe, Africa, Latin America).

However 1993 has been a very special year for human rights, as the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna in June. The IOD actively helped to prepare for the Conference; it took part in four preparatory committees attended by almost all States and numerous NGOs. Major controversial issues were tackled, for instance:

Should priority be given to the right to development or to human rights? Some countries felt that without a minimum of development, human rights could not be addressed. Others conversely felt that development was not possible without respect for human rights.

Another major issue: *selectivity as regards human rights*. Why, some people say, should rich countries claim the right to criticize poor countries? They ought to put their own house in order! Why are certain Security Council resolutions mandatory for some countries and not for others? Another source of debate was the assertion: *Human rights derive from a western way of thinking; they ought to be reconsidered to take specific cultural conditions into account*.

A delegation headed alternately by the ICRC President and by the Director of the Department of Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement (including several people from the various units within the institution) went to Vienna. Its objectives were:

- to represent the ICRC at this world event, the last of which took place in Tehran in 1968;
- to put across the message that the most serious excesses occur during armed conflicts, hence the importance of knowing and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law;
- to distribute widely a document of some thirty pages giving a detailed explanation of international humanitarian law in relation to human rights and practical examples of its implementation;
- to mount a promotional stand which some 5,000 participants could consult if they so wished;
- to show films, with commentaries, about the activities of the ICRC;
- and, of course, to have the benefit of numerous contacts at all levels.

At the time of writing, the results of the Vienna Conference are not yet known, but clearly the IOD looks forward with great interest to the outcome of this event. Will it reflect the world's indecisiveness or will consensus at least be reached on what it has been agreed to call the "hard core" of human rights – rights which cannot be waived under any circumstances?

Dominique Borel

At the ICRC, Dominique Borel is the delegate to the international organizations.



THE ICRC DELEGATION IN NEW YORK

problems we are also seeking to resolve. In the last ten months, the ICRC addressed the United Nations eight times, including twice in the plenary session. These statements covered items such as humanitarian coordination, militarization of humanitarian aid, environment and armed conflicts, the problem of mines, a specific conflict situation (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and various aspects of the promotion of and respect for international humanitarian law.

Contacts with the Security Council have become an almost daily (and sometimes nightly) routine, as both institutions are dealing with the same situations of armed conflict worldwide, although from different standpoints.

Frequent contacts also take place with representatives of UN Member States. Often these countries are either parties to armed conflicts in places where the ICRC is working or they are otherwise concerned by or interested in ICRC operations and related matters.

As for the UN Secretariat, we keep in touch with most offices and occasionally the 38th floor, the working home of the Secretary-General. Emphasis is placed on contacts with the Departments of Political Affairs, Peace-Keeping Operations and Public Information and the Office of Legal Affairs, but above all with the newly created Department for Humanitarian Affairs.

Good relations also exist with the UN specialized agencies and some NGOs, although most of our contacts with them take place in the field or in Geneva.

At a time when the number and intensity of armed conflicts are on the rise, our institution has neither the exclusive mandate nor the necessary resources to deal with all of the world's humanitarian needs, which are greater and more urgent than ever before. Today, the ICRC is more convinced than ever that

thanks to its experience, know-how and independence it can be a most valuable partner to the United Nations.

Guest in North America

It goes without saying that the ICRC presence in North America also facilitates frequent contact with the National Societies concerned, as well as with governments, in order to prepare special missions from and to the ICRC's Geneva headquarters. Frequent lectures and speeches at selected seminars, conferences and round tables on subjects of direct concern to the ICRC are also part of our job. Last but not least, the New York delegation not only maintains close relations with the UN but also accredits press correspondents and, in close cooperation with the National Red Cross Society, other American media representatives interested in ICRC activities and operations worldwide.

Peter Küng

Peter Küng is head of the ICRC's delegation in New York.

It might be wondered why the ICRC has set up quarters in New York, the home of Broadway and the Metropolitan Opera House. The answer is obvious as soon as you remember that this city is not only a unique microcosm of our planet, but has also been host to the United Nations since 1946. Although it is thousands of miles away from the victims of armed conflicts whom we seek to assist and protect, New York gives us immediate, unparalleled access to over 180 governments in a single day.

Observer at the United Nations

In its post-Cold War strategy for peace the world body has considerably increased its interest in humanitarian activities, often closely linking them to considerations of a more political nature. Key principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, such as humanity, neutrality and impartiality, have practically been co-opted by some UN departments and agencies concerned. In October 1990, the ICRC was granted observer status, facilitating contacts and cooperation with various UN bodies.

The General Assembly and most of its main committees are constantly dealing with

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The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

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