

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)

Origin. Founded in Geneva in Feb. 1863. From its outset the ICRC saw that volunteers could act effectively on the battlefield, without risking rejection by officers and soldiers, only if they could be told apart from ordinary civilians by a distinctive emblem and were protected from fighting.

The 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was held in Geneva in Nov. 1999 and adopted a Plan of Action for 2000–03.

Mission Statement. The ICRC acts to help all victims of war and internal violence, attempting to ensure implementation of humanitarian rules restricting armed violence.

The ICRC's mission arises from the basic human desire, common to all civilizations, to lay down rules governing the use of force in war and to safeguard the dignity of the weak. With a mandate from the international community to help victims of war and internal violence and to promote compliance with international humanitarian law, the ICRC's activities are aimed at protecting and assisting the victims of armed conflict and internal violence so as to preserve their physical integrity and their dignity and to enable them to regain their autonomy as quickly as possible. The main treaties governing international law are the Geneva Conventions (1949) to which 188 states are signed up, and the Additional Protocols of 1977 (Protocol 1 has 156 signatories and Protocol 2 has 149 signatories).

* The ICRC is independent of all governments and international organizations. Its work is prompted by the desire to promote humane conduct and is guided by empathy for the victims. The ICRC is impartial: its only criterion for action is the victims' needs. The ICRC is neutral and remains detached from all political issues related to conflict.

* By applying these principles strictly, the ICRC is able to act as an intermediary between the parties to armed conflict and to promote dialogue in situations of internal violence, with a view to finding solutions for matters of humanitarian concern.

* Through its work, the ICRC helps to prevent the worsening of crises and even at times to resolve them.

* The ICRC systematically reminds all military and civilian authorities directly involved in armed conflict or internal violence of their obligations under international humanitarian law and the other humanitarian rules by which they are bound.

* The ICRC has the duty to remind all States of their collective obligation to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

* In all societies and cultures, the ICRC endeavours to promote international humanitarian law and the fundamental human values underlying the law.

* As the founding member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC directs and co-ordinates the international work of the Movement's components in connection with armed conflict and internal violence.

* The ICRC gives priority to co-operation with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their Federation. It acts in consultation with all other organizations involved in humanitarian work.

Finance. The ICRC relies for its financing on voluntary contributions from signatories to the Geneva Conventions, supranational organizations such as the European Union, and public and private sources. To obtain the necessary funding the ICRC launches annual appeals.

In 1999 the ICRC maintained a permanent presence in 60 countries with a total staff of around 10,000, and conducted operations in around 80 countries. It also stepped up its drive to raise awareness of the banning of landmines, lobbying at international, national and regional levels.

Headquarters: 19 avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland.

Website: <http://www.icrc.org>

President: Jakob Kellenberger (Switzerland).

Further Reading

Moorehead, Caroline, *Dumont's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross*. HarperCollins, London, 1998