ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF UTOPIA

Reflections on the Principles of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent

Introduction

The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent have remained unchanged for all these years. This permanence of the tenets, and even of the terms of their definition, is at the root of the coherence of the Movement and has contributed to the growth of a unique worldwide message.

The decisive phase of the Fundamental Principles was the progression from the 'subconscious' motivation of the organization to its written form. The Principles were not a spontaneous generation ; the philosophy and ideology of the Institution had been set down clearly in 'Un souvenir de Solferino' and in the writings of hundreds of men and women of the Red Cross bent on keeping alive the spirit of Henri Dunant.

This subconscious of the Red Cross became a hidden mechanism to rectify the errors made by the members in applying the Principles.

As a human organization, the Red Cross, like any human being, has a mind and a body, and these may work together or may function without coordination. The brain gives orders that are accepted by the extremities, or it may send impulses that do not produce the right motor response. The Principles form the basis of our thoughts and of the action they inspire; they provide the substance of our thinking and give coherence to our activity.

The following pages consider these intellectual and motor functions of the Red Cross and try to show how each of the Principles can bring order and method to the thinking as well as to the work of the Organization.

2. The intellectual functioning of the Red Cross Organization

As we saw in the Introduction, the Red Cross, like the human body, can be seen as having an intellectual function (thinking) and a motor one (action).

Taking the metaphor further, we can say that the thinking process in the "head" [1] of the Institution serves to transmit orders to the "body" : orders that ensure the proper execution of the sanitary, social, educative, protective tasks for which it is responsible.

2.1. The thinking process of the Red Cross.

A series of steps are required to ensure the necessary coherence.

This process ensures that our ideas flow like a river between its banks, so that no energy is wasted in vain attempts to side-step obstacles that would diminish coherence. The steps to which we refer may be summarized as follows:

1. An understanding of the goal of the Institution.
2. Adherence to the ideology of the Movement.
3. Ability to see where activity is required.
4. Training for the provision of response to different social needs.
5. Ability to transmit to the "body" of the organization the stimuli for suitable action in the field where this is required.

This procedure of thinking, applied to the idea of the creation of the Red Cross by Henry Dunant and developed implicitly in his 'Souvenir de Solferino' [2], has points that deserve special attention :

1. His goal was to relieve the suffering of the wounded and prisoners of war.
2. The ideology was that this aid should be provided without any type of discrimination.
3. In his 'Souvenir de Solferino', the author specifies the potential areas of activity :
   * *attention to the wounded*
   * *protection of prisoners of war.*
4. The plan for the care of the wounded and prisoners was put into effect by creating organizations for this sole purpose, guided by the essential condition that care should be given to all without distinction.
5. The capacity of these organizations was based on their existing before the need arose for immediate action. This implied training in ideology as well as in the activities so as to ensure the success of the humanitarian action.

---

[1] This mention of the "head" of the Institution has nothing to do with the directors. All members, from directors to base-line volunteers, must act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles, so all their activities must be carried out in the spirit of the Red Cross.

[2] Henry Dunant, *Un souvenir de Solferino*, pub. CICR, Geneva, 1982

‘Un souvenir de Solferino’ lays down the ideological structure of the Red Cross and the steps to be taken before the “body” of the organization goes into action. It is clear to readers that the book is based on the experience of a real situation that calls for our humanitarian action. The experience drove Henry Dunant to propose realistic measures to help war victims.

The founder of the Red Cross has often been branded as a dreamer, but there is no doubt that it was the bond he established between idea and action that determined the origin of the Institution.

We all know that the Red Cross exists because of its activity, but we must not forget that it is the way in which this is carried out that determines its personality and its status in the international community.

Hence the importance of the role of the “head” which maintains the logical sequence between our objective and our activity.

In the Red Cross, the end does not justify the means. If the means are not in accordance with our ideology, we destroy the confidence and security of those receiving our help, and also the balance that must exist between ideology and action.

2.2. The head on the shoulders.

Obviously the head has to be in proportion to the body and placed on the shoulders.

The way of thinking that is finally useful, is the one that, even though utopian, is feasible, practicable and sustainable by the organisation.

A project is taking shape in our mind. Before any decision is taken to put it into practice, the Red Cross must fulfil certain conditions if it is to be worthwhile socially.

Feasible : in the sense that it can be carried out with the means available, or with means that could reasonably be made available.

Practicable : in the sense that what we have designed in our mind can be attained with the means we have been able to allocate for its fulfilment.

Sustainable : that when the project is under way, it can prove workable and can continue without hampering other projects.

It would be foolish to boast of our ideology and our attempts to be of service if we were then incapable of coping with the social demands that spring up. Many of the failures of the Red Cross have come from an ill-judged commitment arising from the idea that our principles obliged us to undertake it. We are obliged by the Fundamental Principles in the inactivities we undertake, but obviously this does not mean the impossible task of solving all the problems of the world.

The ideology is put into practice in the work we do, but it never requires us to tackle problems for which we are not capacitated.

Never relinquishing the hope of making the world a better place, more human, the "head" of our organization cannot be a force trying to drag the "body" along, nor a weight that impedes its progress.

The personalisms and/or messianisms that appear in all human organizations and that can lead to this situation must be diluted for the sake of the Institution.

The model that conforms to the ideology of the Red Cross is one built with the contributions and the projects of all the members.

2.3. Step by step

The application of the Fundamental Principles requires a series of steps or stages that could be outlined as follows :

a) Instruction. A knowledge of the definition of the Principles
b) Education. An understanding of their utility and application.
c) Capacitation. Training for their exercise.

All too often it was thought that instruction in the Fundamental Principles was sufficient to implant coherence and a good understanding of their meaning, overlooking the fact that the Principles are a first normative element and one for reflection – the first step of a long road.
In learning to read, one starts by recognizing the vowels and consonants, but then they must be joined to form words and meaningful structures. It is rather the same with the Fundamental Principles : their definition enables us to begin to use the basic symbols of the complex philosophy of the Red Cross.

A system of learning the Principles by heart can serve as the groundwork for the course of education that will make them comprehensible, and for the suitable training in using them correctly in each of the activities.

This education is not limited to what is taught in the Red Cross school training courses but comes with the daily life of the organization. Just as a family transmits values to its children, so does the Red Cross [3] transmit its intrinsic ideals to all its members.

The problem arises when the process deteriorates and the theory expounded does not coincide with the customs observed in the Institution, so that the members must choose between the ultra-orthodox path and a liberal interpretation of the ideology. Both these extremes can lead to visionary conceptions of what the Institution should be, and to factions within the organization.

The process of education in the Principles would be meaningless if it were not applicable to daily life. The application is two-fold : theoretical on the one hand and on the other eminently practical. The theory deals with the way of acting in given situations ; practice implies that as a result of training we are able to respond in the same way to situations and cases that we have studied theoretically.

Capacitation assumes previous education and similar contexts, an assurance that the common response of the organization will be the same in similar circumstances.

2.4. Personal identification

Obviously, the Fundamental Principles regulate the life of the Institution and not the private life of its members. This is a basic condition for the fulfilment of the Principles since the personal criterion is restricted only when expressed in the name of the Institution or in the course of Red Cross activities.

Identification with an ideology has a component of the priorities of the individual, and one of them may prevail over others. Three possible attitudes to the ideology of the Institute may be suggested :

- A personal identification with the ideology of the Red Cross may prevail over all others, a situation that would be advantageous to the Organization rather than to the attitudes and decisions of an individual.
- Other interests could come before those of the Red Cross in the course of the work of a member. In material terms, as in others, this could bring positive, negative or neutral results to the work, but negative as regards the necessary application of the ideology.

[3] The term 'family' applied to the Red Cross refers to the varies entities of which it is composed : the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

- In his own mind, the person might give priority to interests other than those of the Red Cross, but his reasoning and assimilation of the Fundamental Principles would lead him to make decisions and to act along the lines of the Institution. The result would be positive for the Red Cross, so the attitude is not open to criticism. Even so, it is clear that identification with the Principles is a guarantee that they will be applied.

These three possible attitudes towards the Institution also have their variations that determine the posture of the individual members, so it is impossible to lay down rules for judging the type of connection there is between our own interests and priorities and those of the Red Cross.

One of the best ways to improve the individual orientation is still by debate and discussion of the subject in the normal running of the work and in coming to decisions.

The identification of the individual with the Fundamental Principles eliminates the tension generated by a conflict between personal interests and those of the Institution. This is why the Red Cross, without rejecting individual criteria nor fomenting any sectarian tendency, must further the identification of its members with the Fundamental Principles.

Using once again the terms of the metaphor, the ideal is that our "body" should conform to the dictums of its own "head".

2.5. The brain of the Red Cross

The "head", acting as the seat of the brain and of most of the senses and sentiments, acquires special importance when it begins or carries out its task of processing data before coming to decisions that will be put into effect by the motor part, the "body".

So the "brain" of the Red Cross is made up of various lobes, one for each of the Principles. Our "brain" must therefore act with the reasoning and the criterion imposed by each one, so that decisions are made in accordance with all of them, not with only a part. All the readings of the Fundamental Principles coincide in the judgement that they are inseparable and form a single concept.

Later we will see how each of the Principles, according to this analysis, may tilt the balance in favour of some aspect of the functioning of the "brain" and facilitate a series of actions.

3. THE MOTIVE POWER OF THE ORGANISM OF THE RED CROSS

So far we have spoken of the thought function of the "head". Its existence is justified if it is followed by an executive function, that of the motor part, the "body" of our organism.

The activity of the Red Cross, performed by the "body", makes it possible to achieve humanitarian results - the very reason for the creation of the Institution.

3.1. Coordination of thought with action

Activity alone generates addiction. Action calls for more action and yet more. The history of the Red Cross, wherever one looks, is plagued with hundreds of initiatives based on a compulsive growth of activity without a close study of the needs and of their conformity to the aims and ideology of the Red Cross.

Close coordination between thought and the action performed by our "body" is what gives coherence and meaning to the work we do.

This does not come only from a good capacity to think ; our body has to respond to the wishes of the brain, and the results are proportional to the effort we make.

In commenting on the intellectual function, we mentioned the importance of following a sequence that would bring results : instruction, education and capacitation. And these were the previous steps towards developing the willingness and the capacity to do the work.

3.2. The steps towards making the application viable

We have to add to the above sequence of steps for the intellectual function another that refers to the motive function. This also requires a guideline to maximize the results of the mental effort made by the organization.

The framework of theory constructed by thought has to be materialized into something tangible, and in the Red Cross this means a task, a service, aid. etc.

If the task is to integrate a group of refugees into our community, Obviously we must want to do it, but the wish will come to nothing if we do not take practical measures designed to

facilitate the integration (teaching the language, explaining the customs, providing access to housing, to schools for the children to jobs, etc.)

The sequence for making it possible to carry out our aims is the following :

Training.- Once the aim is known, filtered, and instrumented by our ideology, the action towards its realization must be set up.

Like any order given by our brain, this must be transmitted to our extremities, movements, and so on. The "body" of the Red Cross receives these messages regarding the actions that will serve to achieve the aims.

The next step is to make sure that our emotional, verbal, manual capacities are up to carrying out the task proposed by the brain. Permanent training is needed to develop the necessary skills, and the Red Cross prepares the organization for the work it must undertake.

Repetition.- The fact of having followed a training course for certain tasks does not mean that we are qualified to act in a given situation. Repetition is essential. In every activity of the Red Cross, repetition and widening of experience make a huge difference to the operations and to the consequences for the beneficiaries.

Repetition enables us to compare, and this is essential in evaluating our real capacity. And if the repetition is extended throughout the territory, in the most exhaustive manner possible, the coherence of the action is increased enormously.

So to sum up : if we have managed to find a good project to reduce or eliminate a situation of risk, it should be repeated as often as possible, taking advantage of the training received for its introduction.

If the Red Cross tries to offer assistance to drug-addicts, it is useless to do it with just a few or in one centre. If our undertaking is to be effective, the activity must :
be repeated so that it includes the greatest number of people, and with
common methodologies.. If similar methods are applied, comparisons can be made to ensure that the best are being applied. Only by comparison can the practices be contrasted with a view to selecting the best.

Constant improvement. - Training and repetition provide room for improving the general level of our activities.

If we always start new projects, abandoning the former ones, there is no opportunity to improve our methods nor is experience brought to the new undertaking. One of the features of the Red Cross is its permanence in a locality, and this obliges us to make a long-term study of our plans. A sphere of activity cannot be abandoned without serious consideration and it often happens that this leads to a modification rather than a stoppage of the task.
The social obligations assumed by the Red Cross in starting an activity can only be replaced by others that go further, or when the needs we were attending to are now clearly supplied by services outside our institution.

The processes of perfecting, adapting or modifying are those that are best in tune, ideologically, with the character of the Institute.

The final stage of improvement is a kind of "feedback" generated in the course of development of a project, and that may imply a re-designing of training and of repetition.

Innovation. - The ability to innovate and create is closely related to the conviction that our projects can be taken further. Innovation comes with activities that had not been tackled before, but that are seen as desirable by both the "head" and the "body".

Normally, the wish to innovate acts as an incentive and a spur to a general modernization, to push further ahead, and as a reminder that the future holds new challenges that will require new strategies.

In our case, the best innovation comes from the experience of all the steps detailed in our sequence and from a close study of previous activities. As we are not tied by routine, these can be joined in the analysis, and they bind us to a constant revision of our methods of work.

3.3. Intellectual and motive process

The following diagram summarizes the functions and procedures of the Red Cross in relation to the factors that can affect their fulfilment.

FUNCTION	PROCESS/SEQUENCE	CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS
INTELLECTUAL	1. Comprehension of the aim 2. Fidelity to ideology 3. Ability to observe/analyse human situations 4. Organization of responses 5. Transmission of stimuli for action	• Sensitizing • Information • Education • Instruction • Capacitation

	6. Re-working for revision and correction of personal orientation	• Self-criticism
MOTIVE	1. Comprehension of the stimulus 2. Comprehension and development of the activity 3. Systemizing the response to the stimulus 4. Improvement of the activity 5. Return of the stimulus to create a new one	• Training • Reasoning • Repetition • Improvement • Innovatiion

To compress a summary into a diagram has a chilling effect, but the intention is to show that both the planning and the activity of the Red Cross must follow a process that ensures the viability of the response to social problems.

We can nearly all remember from our schooldays that when we were given clay or plasticene to mould, we embarked first on an ambitious plan for a bust or a tower or something of the kind. After a few attempts we managed something like an ash-tray, more within our limits. With more training, we might now be able to produce something more complex. The search for a balance between our desires and our capabilities, together with the development of new ideas and activities, is the same in the Red Cross as in each one of us.

The humility of the Red Cross lies in knowing what it can do today ; its creativity and spirit of progress are the urge to learn today what can be done tomorrow.

All this process grows, too, with the participation of catalysts acting between the head and the body of the organization - stimuli, sentiments and shared experiences.

This theory is implicit in the Principles, which govern what we do today while giving a contour of the world we aspire to, placing our targets for the future. Some were not in agreement at the XXV International Congress which gave its approval to the Principles, but clearly it is not enough to see and read them in the form of a resolution ; they must be held against the light to see what they contain in all their depth and substance.

3.4. To sum up

As we said in the Introduction, our reference to the intellectual and motor functions of the Organization is the groundwork for an analysis of the Fundamental Principles.

The metaphor of the organism - with the thinking head and the mobile body – is intended as an illustration of the intellectual responsibility of the Red Cross, (expressed in its ideology), and the duty of activity (carried out by all the members).

Philosophy and activity are joined by a process that develops and regulates the capacity for thought and that of action.

Each one of the Fundamental Principles can provide the elements of security and of strategy that frame our credentials.

4. THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Any commentary or reflection on the Principles must start by presenting them in the official version (XXV International Conference of 1965 and the International Conference of 1966), the only version in force in the whole of the Red Cross.

- **Humanity**
  International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

- **Impartiality**
  It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

- **Neutrality**
  In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political,, racial, religious or ideological nature.

- **Independence**
  The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

- **Voluntary Service**
  It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

- **Unity**
  There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

- **Universality**

  The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide. [4]

4.1. A glance at the Principles

The Fundamental Principles can be viewed from many standpoints, and most of the studies have turned on their application to warfare. This comes, of course, from the inevitable presence of the Red Cross in every kind of war and conflict, normally with an international mandate to act in favour of the victims and to reduce the number of casualties.

As an organization, the Red Cross is proficient in situations of conflict and disaster ; action would not be possible otherwise. These situations can be very complex, and the where and how of the Red Cross activity are of great significance.

This complexity is the result of an abnormal state of affairs. The famine in Sudan was not only the effect of a long drought but was magnified and made fatal by the ten years of internal conflict that had destroyed the system of food supply. The population, isolated by the war, was left without resources, unable to provide for their basic needs.

The Principles are a guide to the position we adopt so as to go to the centre point of the problem, for the maximum benefit of the victims.

This reflection on our position – on whether we are within the conflict or outside it – could take us very far. The fact is that the Red Cross is expected to be present wherever problems arise[5]: whether to solve them or to avoid their escalation or to alleviate the sufferings. This is not completely stated in the international mandate granted by International Humanitarian Law but it is the unwritten contract established by the community as a whole and that we assume as an obligation.

---

[4] Before the approval of the present Fundamental Principles by the XXV International Conference of 1965 and their updating in that of 1986, Jean S. Pictet in his book '*The Principles of the Red Cross"* defined two groups of Principles : **The Fundamental Principles** - Humanity, Equality, Proportionality, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence and Universality, and the **Organic Principles** : Unselfishness, Gratuity, Voluntary service, Helpfulness, Autonomy, Multiplicity, Equality among the National Societies, Unity, Solidarity and Prevision.

[5] Very intelligently, Marcel Junod chose the title of his book on his experiences as a member of the ICRC as "The third combatant" - as the mission of the Red Cross in time of war. The dedication of the book contains the following reflection on this role of the Red Cross : "The adversaries are never more than two, but alongside them, and sometimes between them, there is a third combatant".

At any rate, the Fundamental Principles must have something of value since they have enabled us to work in situations of the greatest human complexity while the Red Cross has continued to grow and thrive.

4.2. Usefulness of the Principles

Each of the Fundamental Principles forms a part of the credentials of the Institution and depicts some feature of its character, without, however, effacing our peculiarities as an organization. Our activities are not directed against anyone, but this does not imply any weakness or uncertainty on the part of the Red Cross.

4.3. Another metaphor

In the first part of these reflections we used the example of a human body to symbolize the thinking and motor functions of the Institution. Now as an illustration of the significance of the Fundamental Principles we can use the image of Greek temple in which these seven Principles are the cornerstones.

The Fundamental Principles exemplify a building that has withstood the passing of the centuries, standing firm against the elements.

We can take these cornerstones of the imaginary temple to represent each of the Fundamental Principles.

After laying the foundations, we can take the example further to continue the building we use as a symbol.

4.4. Humanity : the objective

Work in favour of humanity has been stated as the central purpose of the Red Cross, so the Principle of Humanity supports this fact and determines our responsibility to alleviate human suffering.

The very text of the Principle could be the global objective of the Red Cross.

The force of this Principle lies in the fact that it makes the Red Cross responsible for the development of a humanitarian task devoid of any exclusive consideration, assigning to the International Movement the activities aimed at relieving suffering.

The humanitarian purpose of the Red Cross stems from respect for the human person, a respect which implies his protection, his care, and the furtherance of all the conditions for the positive development of his environment.

An interesting point is that the activity of the Red Cross is always directed towards the final recipient – the person, and that it is the result obtained from this individual attention that is the yardstick of our achievement. Our work would be meaningless if it did not terminate in results for individuals with names and surnames, even though they were not the direct aim of the activity. There are many interesting texts, such as *The Third Combatant* [6] by the ICRC Delegate, Marcel Junod, which show the importance of concentrating on individual care that projects to a a wider field. Help for one victim means help for his family, his friends and his environment and so on, and the collective result is important.

> **In attending to the victim of a road accident, providing the first aid that may save his life, we are not only relieving the physical suffering of the victim but also reducing or avoiding the psychological suffering of his family and friends and the problems for those around him. This is the strength and the charge of the Red Cross : to relieve suffering, starting from individual care, which will have results on a much wider scale.**

The Red Cross prefers this individual attention to problems, though situations arise in which assistance is required on a larger scale.

The desire to be the first to arrive at the scene of a catastrophe has nothing to do with capturing the limelight. Our humanitarian task, and that of coming face to face with the circumstances that produce suffering, oblige us to be the first on the scene and to accept that very often we will be the last to leave, having done everything possible to leave behind us a project for the future.

The undertaking, and the speed with which it is carried out, are logically deducible from the implication of the Institution in its Principle of Humanity.

To be prepared to attend to people in need is another of the requirement recognized by the Red Cross as one of its obligations to the community. It is not only a question of mobilizing human and material resources ; these must be capable of coping with the situation on the ground. In *A memory of Solferino,* Henry Dunant insists on the point that to be capable of offering service in time of war, groups must be prepared in time of peace as Societies of Aid - now the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

---

[6] Marcel Junod, *The Third Combatant*, ICRC Publications, Geneva, 1985.

Preparation for humanitarian work, in the broad sense adopted by the Red Cross, is a permanent challenge of both a cultural and technical character. The cultural side of the preparation presupposes an attitude of willingness on the part of the Institution and of its members **to do whatever is required**, in whatever sphere and without question. This readiness is more easily found in situations of emergency, but it is essential to extend it to the day by day functioning of the Red Cross. The daily tasks call for a continuous, unfailing response, and a very high degree of availability. The culture of the Institution must promote, among other qualities, this permanent attitude of "On your marks, get set, go!"

Preparation extends to areas that require a high standard in the work of the Institution, and to the technical capacity to carry out its daily tasks. Projects, ideas and methods must be kept up to date to meet this permanent challenge.

The Principle of Humanity also imposes a mode of conduct in the `performance of our functions. The response to problems cannot be merely mechanical ; our beneficiary must be given assistance that will solve or palliate his situation of need, and he must receive it "in Red Cross style" which is easily defined : it arises when the person receiving our care is seen not as a mere consumer of the service but as a human being in the fullest possible sense – physically, culturally, socially and so on.

This is achieved by rationalising and understanding the underlying causes of the person's need, attacking the focus of his suffering, counteracting its effect and sharing, even if only in imagination, the feelings of a human being when all his security and his life in peace have been shattered.

Quite definitely our main objective turns around Humanity, and for this reason we are subject to a doctrine that facilitates the work so that no one is excluded from the humanitarian action of the Red Cross.

With this first Principle we lay the first stone of the foundations of the Greek temple that we are using to illustrate our commentary.

4.5. Impartiality : opinion

The Red Cross has opinions about a great number of things ; it had to have them from the moment when the timeliness of its creation was being considered.

The Principle of Impartiality is the one that expresses most clearly and profusely the Red Cross vision of society, of give and take, of solidarity, etc.

The Red Cross is sometimes said to be a small society or a society within society. This view can only be held when society is considered as a certain model or a form of civilization. To maintain its ideology of work, the Red Cross bases its activity on a system governed by the fulfilment of the Principles, and by the Principle of Impartiality we establish that everyone, without any shadow of discrimination, must receive its services.

This, then, is how the Red Cross views human relationships, and this is the model of society that it advocates.

At the root of the Principle lies the fact that the Red Cross recognizes the existence of different options - ideological, religious, and so on – and does not try to overlook or ignore them. But at the same time, it insists that these differences must not give rise to violence, rejection, intolerance, and that they must not undermine humanitarian action.

Some things come before others : life, respect for human beings and for the environment, agreement over shared aims . . . the Red Cross is of this opinion and tries to convince all and sundry that its model of society is one in which solidarity comes before differences since these become purely anecdotal when the very existence of the person is threatened.

The other part of the opinion of the Red Cross as expressed in the Principle of Impartiality does not try to raise any controversy that could later impair its activity or its neutrality.

We do not try to impose our opinion, even though we try to demonstrate by our example that the avoidance of violent controversies and the generation of tolerant attitudes help to make the world a better place.

In the commentary on the Principle of Humanity we insisted on the duty of the Red Cross to tackle social needs head on. The Principle of Impartiality states that no differences can be set up in the face of such situations, and **the only dictate in our action is that this should be in proportion to the need.**

A proportional response then creates a praxis for the use of the resources of the Institution. This is another of the opinions of the Red Cross : the largest resources must be afforded where the suffering is greatest, and mechanisms of internal cooperation must be set up for the movement of these resources among the National Societies as required. This is also our opinion for a world of solidarity, **in which geographical and political frontiers would be a tool of organization but never one of separation.**

We believe that many disasters and situations of violence and of insecurity can be foreseen, so part of the resources of the Institution are directed towards developing projects that would

help to avoid these disasters. This gives communities greater competence to face whatever misfortunes may lie ahead.

From this it is clear that the Red Cross believes that communities must be able to uphold their own development with the proportionate support they may receive. A better world would be one in which :

- Race, religion, option, class, were not motives for conflict.
- Respect for other ideas would outweigh any inclination towards violence and intolerance
- Local solidarity would expand to attain worldwide solidarity.
- The neglected would find more assistance to bridge the gap that separates them from the more fortunate.
- Support were given to developing communities.

This Principle contains some of our utopias and paves the way for an understanding of much that happens around us.

Passive impartiality merely observes the world without any initiative on the part of the Red Cross, while active impartiality, always within our code of absolute respect for others, means that we must struggle to get people to respect and understand one another, avoiding violence and attitudes of intolerance.

We must show that Red Cross ideology is capable of raising the level of peaceful coexistence, not only on a worldwide scale but in the small community where tolerant and sharing attitudes and aptitudes can be generated.

Obviously the internal organization of the Red Cross must be an example of this philosophy – a prototype of the model of coexistence it advocates.

4.6. Neutrality : the position.

Any person or organization must adopt a position that makes him or it recognizable. This is the objective of the Principle of Neutrality : to be identifiable before society.

The Red Cross has taken a resolution to remain neutral, even when it forms part or takes part in events. It is sometimes said that this neutrality makes it easier to adopt a position with regard to a situation. The decision made by the Red Cross is that it will always stand outside controversies so that it may be able to take action to deal with the effects of events as they occur.

The position of neutrality is essential to our aim to be in the centre of conflicts and to avoid becoming the property of anyone.

Human beings have an inborn urge to judge, purely and simply through the filters they have acquired from their education, culture, and so on. This is why the Red Cross insists that its position is not decided by individual members of the Institution but by itself, deciding for all of us. This avoids the danger of allowing any member to express a judgement that could prove favourable or harmful to others.

To defend the unprotected, a stand must be taken on the means of changing the circumstances that make these people vulnerable. The Red Cross can adopt these positions, but within rules that ensure that the method of implementing them does not violate the Principle of Neutrality.

The Red Cross has developed sagacious methods of taking a stand without breaking the rule of the Principle of Neutrality.

Neutrality nearly always implies not having intimate friends. The prudence of not being on anyone's side maintains a certain psychological distance which is bridged only when we are valued and observed continuously.

This distance enables us to come to an agreement on a plan of action without arousing susceptibilities on the part of others involved in the decision or in conflict. We have to learn to be liked for what we do rather than for what we say. The Principle of Neutrality drives us to this, challenging us to gain adherents without our having to take sides with anyone.

This practice of neutrality does not limit our responsibilities, and to make this clear we must examine the three consequences of its application :

1. The Red Cross takes a clear stand on the situation of the most vulnerable.

Red Cross has never avoided speaking out about the situation of victims of conflict or that of the most vulnerable. In fact, it is one of our obligations to expose the situations that generate violence, poverty, discrimination . . . everything that constitutes vulnerability.

The difference lies in the fact that the Red Cross never tries to act against anyone nor in favour of anyone but simply to expose the inhumanities and the misfortunes that surround us, and to try to avoid their recurrence. The reason is very simple : as we are going to have to deal with these situations, we have to be able to work without the resentment of those who

feel offended and also without the approval of those who feel favoured by our action.

The only understanding that we really need, even if it comes much later, is that of the beneficiaries of our intervention.

Before taking any line of action we try to fulfil the following requirements :

- Ensure that our action will not harm those we have to help.
- Ensure that our service cannot be used to benefit someone at the expense of others.
- Arouse sympathy for the problem in question.
- Demonstrate that our view will allow some social improvement.
- Avoid emotional language or opportunism that might be encouraged by a situation of social alarm or even come into fashion.

In brief : we must say what has to be said without either justifying or attacking anyone, at the right moment, always for the benefit of those in most need, and avoiding emotional speech.

2. *The position of neutrality places the person who adopts it under the obligation to act as a mediator.*

It is hardly surprising that the Red Cross regards mediation as one of its main functions. We are, in fact, great mediators. The action of placing ourselves in the centre of conflicts and problems means that both the opponents are watching us to see which side we will take, and as we take neither side, this is already a start on bridging the gap between them.

Mediation extends also to our social work. We take action to awaken sympathy for the problems of the less fortunate, trying to enlist the help of the indifferent and to incite the others to rise above their situation of vulnerability.

Our position of neutrality has the virtue of mediation, and mediation is possible only if we have decided beforehand not to belong to a specific band or group.

Neutrality is very reserved and lonely, and so is mediation. The mediator is not out for victories for himself nor for others ; his aim is to find the balance and the serenity that will help others to come to decisions that will do no harm to an individual nor to a community.

3. *We will always have to take action in the face of the problems and needs that arise around us.*

There are cases in which not to take up a position absolves us from the obligation to act.
In the Red Cross, the opposite is true ; although we may not express a preference or an option, we are still obliged to intervene in situations in which our Organization has some responsibility or capacity to act. We cannot just scurry away, even though only two are at loggerheads. We must intervene immediately to prevent their harming each other, very often before the start of any negotiation.

Actions often get under way before mediation begins and they continue throughout the operation. It is the only way to demonstrate our commitment.

The Red Cross may silence its opinion about some measures taken by a government, a regional government or a town council with regard to its population, but it must help the population to remedy any hardship caused by these measures. At the same time it must look for an opening that will allow the mediation and the search for the best possible solution.

The Principle of Neutrality is upheld by three pillars :

- Position
- Mediation
- Action

4.7. Independence : strategy

Each one of the Fundamental Principles sustains the others, and this gives rise to a coherent ideology. It is clear that if the Institution did not keep its distance from power and from the powers (whether or not they are legally established), it could not possibly meet the challenge of Independence as laid down in the Fundamental Principles, nor, of course, those of Neutrality and Impartiality.

To define the Red Cross as 'an auxiliary of the authorities' can give a wrong idea of the independent nature of the Institution. How is it possible to be an auxiliary of someone or something and maintain one's independence? The word itself - auxiliary – helps to remove any doubts about the question.

In the framework of the Fundamental Principles, the Red Cross is an 'auxiliary' of the authorities only in the matter of humanitarian action, and it is this situation that enables the Institution to define the areas in which it wishes to intervene.

Looking at it from another point of view, the aid offered to a region by the Red Cross is of a strictly humanitarian nature, aimed at improving the conditions of life of the population.

Submission to the laws of these countries, however harsh they may seem to us, can never be a reason for departing from the Fundamental Principles. Red Cross must make a permanent effort to find a space in the society of each country which will enable it to be identified as what it is. The Red Cross is not the property of any government, nor is it the opponent of any government.

Independence is a strategy to be free and to be able to comply with the Fundamental Principles.

This fulfilment or compliance is, of course, hard to evaluate since it is a question of creating a spirit of independence throughout the Institution. And why a spirit? Independence in the day to day activity of an organization is very difficult to attain. There are many ways of destroying or limiting the independence of people and hence of the organizations they belong to. We are all familiar, (in our particular activity in the Red Cross), with the small or greater pressures we receive every day to bring the Institution round to support one rather than another alternative.

This is why the Red Cross has to strengthen its 'spirit of independence', that which will generate a striving for true independence, indispensable if we are to be what we are, with no names or titles other than those we have given ourselves.

The "spirit of independence", even though it may tolerate on occasions – mistakenly – the loss of formal independence, induces a trend in the Red Cross organization to seek ways and means of securing larger and larger quotas of ideological and operational autonomy.

The mentalization of this "spirit" is not limited to the higher ranks of the Institution : in common with any other Principle, that of Independence has the same importance at any level and in any activity.

Each voluntary must apply the "strategy" of independence to make sure that his voluntary service is not used to advance someone's purpose.

This promotion of the spirit of independence throughout the Institution moulds a personality respectful of the laws of the country but able to achieve sufficient autonomy to have our principles respected and fulfilled, and to allow the struggle to improve the laws, standards and situations that assail human beings.

This implies permanent reflection on the decisions we make, to know whether they are influenced by real human needs or by the pressure of collective or ideological interests. This is not as difficult as it may appear ; the origins of partisan pressure are easily recognized. One must turn a deaf ear.

Not to apply the Principle of Independence can injure the Principles of Impartiality or of Neutrality. All too often the International Committee of the Red Cross or the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent have had to withdraw temporarily, *in extremis*, a measure of aid, when their independence was threatened.

If one of the sides in a conflict imposed a distribution of aid that excluded the other side, this would go contrary first to our Principle of Independence and then to that of Impartiality (since the aid were be discriminatory) and of Neutrality (in favouring one side rather than the other)

Independence is the strategy that allows us to carry out our work respecting the totality of the Fundamental Principles.

4.8. Voluntary Service : the method.

This is the Principle with the briefest definition, but without it the Red Cross could hardly exist. In a short text we find many of the ideas that govern the Institution and that are firmly maintained :

- The non-profit-making nature of the Red Cross.
- The voluntary adherence of its members.
- That the activity of the Red Cross pursues no interest other than the betterment of the conditions of the beneficiaries.
- That the activities of the Red Cross are carried out mainly by voluntaries and always in this spirit.
- That the Red Cross be formed by and of members of the community by their incorporation into the Institution.
- That the volunteers must 'govern' the Institution.
- The Red Cross is not imaginable without its voluntary service, which embodies the fulfilment of its ideals.

Quite definitely the Principle of Voluntary Service determines the *method* of the Red Cross.

How could the members of the Red Cross be humanitarian, impartial or neutral if they received some kind of material benefit from belonging to the Institution and did not participate on their own account?

The voluntary nature of service affords complete freedom, and at the same time a firm undertaking on the part of the individual to adhere to the way of thinking of the Red Cross. The unprompted decision to take part in a voluntary service engenders a number of rights and of obligations to be observed by both the volunteer and the Institution.

The Institution is under the obligation to avoid disappointing its members, to be faithful to its precepts, and in return it can demand unpaid work in favour of the community. The volunteers have the right to carry out this unpaid labour, and the obligation to act in accordance with the criteria of the Institution, criteria which they themselves have helped to define.

Voluntary service is a simple acceptance of rights and duties on the part of both the Red Cross and the volunteer, free of any type of financial or material deal that could impair the relationship.

The commitment of the volunteers has also been a bone of contention : how far does it go? Can the Red Cross demand dedication and specialization on the part of its volunteers? They come into their own when there is a task to be done, so they are the most important means for doing it. So the volunteers agree to accept certain points as valid :

- Humanitarian work is the basic purpose of the Red Cross.
- The principal means of carrying out this task is through the voluntary workers.
- A volunteer worker adheres to the Red Cross to do the humanitarian work of the Institution.
- The task to be performed requires different grades of dedication and specialization.
- Volunteers must bear these requirements in mind when considering their wish to participate.

The commitment, as mentioned above, also implies certain rights :

- The assurance of a task to be performed.
- The availability, within the existing resources, of the right facilities for the work.
- The availability of training courses for the activity.
- Ways and means of sharing in the decision-making of the Institution.

It must be remembered that the Red Cross should be fundamentally the ensemble of the volunteers who form it. The weight of management is borne essentially by this sector, independently of the technical tasks undertaken by the salaried staff

This responsibility resting on the volunteers adds additional weight to the intention that they should assume important responsibilities which must never be left to hastily adopted decisions taken by an individual and not based on intelligent and responsible interaction.

Right from the start, the Red Cross has delegated the solution of necessities in those who were nearest, an option that is evident in the great decentralization of the activity all over the world.

This proximity of the volunteers to reality is valuable, but it has its risks,it could mean losing sight of needs outside the area of activity or knowledge of the volunteers. It should be remembered that the sheer size of the Red Cross imposes the obligation to attend to local and to global needs in the proportionate measure dictated by the Principle of Impartiality.

The structure of the Red Cross is also defined by the Principle of Voluntary Service. The purpose and value of the Institution lie in the fact that the voluntary workers are its main resource. A majority of paid workers would overturn the model, and economic factors would prevail.

Paid workers are obviously a component of Red Cross activity, collaborating in its smooth working and in attracting and consolidating voluntary action.

4.9. Unity : the coherence

The Principle of Unity, stating the existence of a single National Society that is active throughout the whole territory, provides cohesion in the development of the work of the Red Cross.

Unity, as interpreted in the definition of the Principle, introduces an immediate mechanism of solidarity within the Institution as well as in the aid proffered to those in need.

Internal solidarity comes from the need to create a territorial network at the service of the whole population as a means of creating efficient methods of organization and of action.

> **Without this Principle of Unity, the Red Cross could become, instead of an Institution, merely a franchise or a warrant for the use of its symbol. But the aim of the Red Cross is not only to provide services but to carry this out on the basis of an ideology and in a manner characteristic of its criteria of action.**

Unity implies an institutional culture typified by the need to promote a feeling of belonging to the Institution, a sentiment that creates a bond between the members and that gives them the power to respond homogeneously to similar challenges.

The Institution shows a tendency to appoint differing and even competitive personalities in the various sectors of its territory [7]. This localism must be corrected by a spirit of community that will canalize the energy of the territory through the organization.

The Principle of Unity does not stand in the way of forming and maintaining connections and good relations with local practice. On the contrary, the Red Cross must try to form part of the community in which it is acting, the only barrier being any threat to the attainment of its objectives or to the application of the Principle of Unity.

The question is much simpler than it appears. Our Institution has a very well-known name - the Red Cross – and a family name that comes from the territory in which it is working. By far the more important is the first name : the family names are circumstantial and in no way affect day-to-day activity.

This activity extends equally over national territories and international ones. The Red Cross must never take up a position on the basis of frontiers or geographical limits. This would be contrary to the Principal of Neutrality and could even involve a participation in a conflict, which would be in direct contradiction to its essential ideology. This also binds the Red Cross to accept the frontiers defined by national governments and by international organs and to adapt without delay to any geo-political changes.

Neither must the Principle of Unity be used as a political argument to give priority of a territory to the Red Cross. The philosophy of our Institution has always been one of detachment from the problems and differences created by men among themselves. To share in the elimination of these differences, it is absolutely essential not to create others.

So the Red Cross tries to be coherent in :
Creating a real culture of solidarity throughout its ranks ;
Generating a close network for the performance of its activities ;
Adapting to the geo-political realities of every moment.

[7] In an attempt to rival other localities, the people of one area often claim a set of virtues that mark them out as superior. But this creates a sense of branded ownership that stands in the way of joint action and creates competitiveness even in petty affairs. Since it forms part of its own communities, the Red Cross is sometimes drawn into this regionalism. The application of the Principles imposes corrective measures which stimulate a culture of cooperation and solidarity throughout the Organization. It would be incomprehensible that the Red Cross should be formed of different groups and members lacking the determination to collaborate in all their undertakings.

4.10. Universality : cohesion.

The Principle of Unity marks the first step towards creating the international network of the Red Cross, and no one can fail to be aware of the essentially international and internationalist character of the Institution. The vision of humanity inspired by the Principle of Universality generates a series of obligations towards all mankind and an acceptance of the fact that human problems always have a global dimension far beyond our own little universe.

The coherence of the movement acquires a meaning when a part of the objectives close to home reach out to embrace the larger tasks of the organization, and when the job to be done is seen as the part of a whole.

The power of Universality

Universality is the source of an exceptional power. Each member of the Red Cross feels identified with the work of his opposite number in another country, and the success or failure of the other is felt as his own. This force becomes consolidated and is sustained, and it is put to use by the Institution when partnership between members is raised to the exercise of Universality.

This is put into practice by trying to bring our local objectives into collaboration with the construction of a global project. There are many ways of doing this, from collaboration with other territorial sectors of the Red Cross to working as members of the whole Organization.

The purpose of this Principle is to establish the relationship of common responsibilities and mutual support in the family of Red Cross, which will enable it to face the challenges of humanitarian service.

The Principle of Universality defeats any localism or sectionalism that could deform the Principal, while propounding the non-existence of any frontiers in the ideology of the Institution.

The most recent humanitarian crises have demonstrated the absolute necessity of mutual aid among all the members of the Red Cross family [8]. The challenges to humanitarian mediation

[8] The expression 'members of the family' refers here to the three entities that make up the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and their humanitarian task :
The National Societies, responsible for Red Cross activity in their respective countries,
The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent which contributes to the development of the humanitarian activities of the National Societies, coordinates their operations in aid of the victims of natural disasters and in aid to refugees outside the war zones, and

are immense, and we know, unfortunately, that man-made humanitarian crises are not going to end in the near future.

It becomes more and more important to let it be known that when the Red Cross expresses an opinion, it does so in the name of its one hundred million members of the organization around the world. It is this unanimity underlying the Principle of Universality that may boost, in the not far distant future, the importance of the opinion and the attitude of the Red Cross (as expressed in the Principles of Impartiality and of Neutrality) towards the problems facing humankind.

Nowadays It is hard to imagine that a book of the type of *A Souvenir of Solferino* would arouse the emotions of the people and governments of the world, but the Red Cross has a little-used tool to plead for peace, and this tool is the mass of its members. The Principle of Universality could become the universal catalyst of the organisation to attain objectives no less important than those of the Geneva Convention.

The task of arousing this feeling of cohesion is not an easy one since we talk at a given moment of abstractions that are not readily grasped in the day to day life of the Institution.

One of the ways of bringing home this common universal project is through the work of international cooperation which is the Red Cross instrument for manifesting its readiness for action and its cohesion as a humanitarian organization.

The foundations of the temple

This seventh Principle of Universality completes the blocks on which the temple is built. The Institution stands on this foundation, so its solidity determines the size of what can be built later.

Part of the foundations is – as it were – below ground and not visible : the most 'intimate' component of the Red Cross. The quality that forms its real character is perceived by intuition rather than by words, and society takes it for granted. It is recognized not only from history but also from the way of life of the Institution. It is what we are interiorly, the reality that can

---

The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. As the neutral intermediary in cases of war and disturbances, the Committee tries to guarantee, on its own initiative or in the terms of the Geneva Convention, protection and aid for the victims of international and civil wars and of disturbances and internal strained relationships.
These three components of the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are governed by the Fundamental Principles and by the decisions of the International Red Cross Congress held every four years and by the Council of Delegates every two years. The International Conference is made up of members of the International Movement of the Red Cross and of members of the governments of countries that have signed the Geneva Convention.

become our specific task, the burden we can bear, and so on. In other words, it is the first step towards being credible.

The visible zone of the foundations is the part that we declare as our ideology, that shows our intentions, but it is the solidity of the base that shows what can be constructed.

5. THE AREAS OF INTERVENTION BY THE RED CROSS

We have already pointed out that the Red Cross would be meaningless if we did not provide definite aid for war victims and for the weakest, the abandoned, the forgotten, etc.

For each area of intervention there are ideological reasons that justify our action, and some aspect of the Fundamental Principles that comes more into play. And obviously, one or other of these Principles will come under scrunity on account of the difficulty involved in its application or the problems of its fulfilment.

Here we will try to examine some of the keys to understanding the applicability of the Principles in the various circumstances and contexts that the Red Cross has to face.

The Fundamental Principles, as we saw in the last section, can be seen as the base or the foundations of a Greek temple, and the rest of the building stands on these foundations.

Taking the example further we can imagine the columns as representing the different areas of intervention of the Red Cross. Obviously, our imaginary base -–the Fundamental Principles – must be able to support the hefty columns which represent the actual service we offer to the community.
These “columns” or groups of action that we can examine are as follows :

- Action in time of war.
- Action in the face of natural disasters.
- Action in aid of the most vulnerable.
- Action to protect and improve the environment.
- Action to promote fellowship and peace.

5.1. Red Cross action in time of war

The ideology of the Red Cross was drawn up with war in mind, the most extreme tragic circumstance with which man has to contend. Clearly the action of the Red Cross in such a situation must be ruled by all seven Principles, even though their application *in situ* may be hard to achieve.

This has allowed the Red Cross in general to accumulate a vast amount of experience of the efficacy and efficiency of the Fundamental Principles in the most difficult situations, when the effort to save lives is `paramount.

A member of the Red Cross finds no difficulty in understanding and accepting the global application of the Principles, apart from the feeling of impotence that comes from not being able to denounce certain situations as he would like to.

The complexity of present-day warfare is raising certain doubts about the evolution of Red Cross action. What part must be played by the National Societies, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the I.C R.C. to make them better able to prevent conflicts, and if these arise, how to go about reducing the damage they cause and then to participate in post-war reconstruction and reconciliation?

Putting prevention before aid.

The sources of conflict - hunger, the lack of any outlook for the future, a lack of education, social discrimination, poor health services, poverty, despair – are more and more endemic and extend over large areas of the world.

The task of prevention is based on action to counteract these pernicious results of deprivement and exclusion, accepting that the greatest effort in the future will have to go towards improving living conditions rather than towards mitigating conflicts when they arise.

When the Principle of Humanity speaks of human suffering, it refers to the widest range of suffering, and the prevention of greater or lesser suffering forms part of its relief. It is better to relieve small sufferings and avoid their propagation than to think that action can wait until they are grave.

It may be difficult to distinguish between degrees of suffering but it is clear that the pain of a refugee, obliged to abandon his country, his family, friends and belongings, is aggravated by the lack of attention or of resources that he must endure in the course of his integration into the new environment. The Red Cross must procure that the initial suffering of leaving his country is not intensified by a situation of extreme deprivation in which it becomes more and more difficult to attend to his human and material needs.

Internal cooperation.

Nearly all the work of prevention falls on the National Societies and by derivation on their territorial networks. They are responsible for taking Red Cross action to the situations of need.

The International Organizations of the Red Cross and Red Crescent must show the Movement the lines to be followed, complementing any shortfall on the part of the National

Societies, setting up systems of cooperation between them, and promoting the development of their structures.

The better equipped National Societies will in turn collaborate towards improving the situation of the less favoured so that they can cope with the development of their community – our small share in avoiding critical situations likely to culminate in conflict or human tragedy.

The Principles and International Humanitarian Law

International Humanitarian Law and, fundamentally, the Geneva Conventions were the texts in which the philosophy of the Fundamental Principles was most fully expressed. The application of the Convention testified to the strength of an ideology that is based on strict total respect for human beings and that obliges all men to respect the feelings of his neighbour, even though he be his enemy.

One can say that there was a pre- and a post-Convention history. There was no law before the Convention to ensure the defence of the weakest against the brute strength and attitude of conquest of the powerful or of the victor. Only after it, by persistent repetition, dissemination and demand of the rules formulated in International Humanitarian Law was it possible to put a limit to the cruelty of war, putting an end to the situation of impunity of a human being who turned his evil will against his fellows.

The existence of the Convention showed the Red Cross that its ideological adventure, begun in 1864, could be captured in a text that would express the length and breadth of the ideals of the whole Institution. The Principles were laid down in 1965, with the authority transmitted by the Geneva Convention and even more by its proven ability to defend the weak.

It is in a wartime situation that one of the leitmotifs of the Principles is seen most clearly : the violent restriction of the state of well-being and of human rights. All the efforts and work of the Red Cross in wartime are based on the return of peace, generating and creating possibilities for this return.

Once conflict has broken out, it becomes more and more difficult to ensure any observance of international humanitarian law, and this is when skill and operational capacity become decisive in determining the effectiveness of the Red Cross.

There are several approaches :

- *The task of urging governments to prohibit or restrict the use of certain types of arms.*

Since the advances of technology are made also in the field of armaments, there has to be a permanent warning signal to try to neutralize new weapons when they appear.

This demand for their neutralization or for the restriction of their use is effective when it is directed to the States that are directly responsible and when positions are taken up on an international scale for enforcement of the demand.

The attempt to block the machinery of war must extend well beyond the mediation and activity of the ICRC ; public opinion must be enrolled to give more weight to our campaign.

This must never raise doubts about the application of neutrality. Any action to promote the well-being of people, and that neither takes one side nor causes violent confrontations, is compatible with the spirit and the substance of the Principle of Neutrality.

- *To know how to be in the right place at the right moment and take the right action*
  The prevention of a conflict and the alleviation of suffering it causes can be tackled if we have managed to assess the evolution of events on the spot and have taken the right steps towards responding to the different needs.

The advantage of having national societies in practically every country as well as an international network of delegations of the IRCC means that the Red Cross is in direct contact with the hot spots all over the world. In the new environment of conflicts within the nations rather than between different states, it is essential to know the root of the problem, the cultural background and so on.

Independently of the concrete action undertaken by the ICRC, the National Societies of countries in conflict should intensify their presence in the humanitarian work required in any armed conflict, serving very often as an instrument that enables the international organisms of the Red Cross to work with better knowledge of the territory.

The national societies would again be the key to restoring peace, collaborating in the humanitarian tasks of reconstruction and striving to consolidate the peace. Humanitarian aid in the demobilisation of guerrillas or regular armies, the return of refugees, and rebuilding work now figure in the list of our services.

The National Societies of the nations enjoying peace and development must collaborate in every way possible with the Societies of warring countries, providing resources and joint projects of every kind.

However, the overall responsibility for directing Red Cross action in wartime still lies in the ICRC which continues to be the neutral mediator and the organ of the Red Cross specialized in wartime operations.

- *A determined drive to cooperate in development*

One of the most effective vaccinations against war is the well-being of the community, and the only road to peace is the elimination of injustices and of the chronic segregation of so many countries.

Social well-being does not, of course, eliminate the risk of conflict, but it does avert its outbreak and may reduce its violence.

Cooperation for development is a tool in the hands of the communities to advance and to raise their level by means such as health care, education, jobs and housing.

5.2. Red Cross action in face of natural disasters.

This second area of service is of the very nature of the Institution, and everyone recognizes that this is one of the tasks that fall specifically to the Red Cross.

The situation produced by natural disasters awakens an immediate feeling of solidarity. Disasters occur without warning, and the reaction must be immediate as the period of recovery cannot be extended. This spontaneous solidarity allows the Red Cross to apply its Fundamental Principles and the code of conduct acquired by the organization. [9]

The problem of applying the Principles becomes more difficult when the generation of the disaster is slower, the reaction more complex, and the recovery period is longer. An example would be that of famine caused by drought. In these cases the Principles come up against social, political and cultural factors – in the afflicted community as well as in those providing support.

---

[9] Code of conduct for the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and NGOs in programmes motivated by catastrophes :

1. The first is humanitarian duty.
2. The aid provided is not conditioned by the race, creed or nationality of the beneficiaries nor by any other discrimination of an adverse nature. Priority is given solely as a function of the degree of need.
3. Aid will not be used in favour of any political nor religious opinion.
4. Every effort must be made not to act as instruments of governmental foreign policy.
5. We will respect local culture and customs.
6. We will try to encourage the capacity to deal with catastrophes by making use of local aptitudes and the means available on the spot.
7. Ways will be sought to make the beneficiaries share in the administration of the aid.
8. This rescue work will be directed towards filling the basic needs and will also try to reduce the susceptibility to future disasters in the region.
9. We are answerable to those we try to help and to the people and the institutions from whom we accept resources.

The Red Cross is having to devise programmes for the aftermath of catastrophes, facing new risks of political pressure on the provision of aid, and obstacles to the distribution of food and clothing.

The perseverance of the Red Cross to cling to its ideological Principles in these new circumstances, especially in the last decade, has shown that its total independence is a guarantee of the continuance of its aid programmes.

The application of proportionality.

The proportionality inherent in the Principle of Impartiality is particularly difficult to apply.
Local forces, official and unofficial, raise obstacles to the fair proportional distribution of aid.
This is one of the worst dilemmas facing the national societies, the ICRC and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Another phenomenon that is more and more widespread is to prevent the arrival of aid to certain groups or communities, using this abject system as a new weapon. In wars such as that of the former Yugoslavia, the armies held up the convoys of humanitarian aid, to weaken the enemy and cause hardship among the civil population. Not only that, but they tried to capture part of the humanitarian aid for their own use. To avoid these contretemps, the Red Cross has to find more sophisticated systems of distribution and ensure previous agreements with both sides for the safe transport of the humanitarian aid.

The application of the Principles implies finding a way through the labyrinth of these difficulties and the Red Cross has to recur to new systems of distribution, better and better communications and transports, and advanced specialization of its envoys.

New disasters.
One of the new man-made disasters is the tragic displacement of masses of people. Wars, violence, famine are among the causes of this forced migration in search of a better future. These movements provoke enormous mobilisations of humanitarian aid, tremendous upheavals in the life of the displaced persons, and very often their rejection by the countries that receive them.

The difficulty at present is that it is still easier to get money and help of every kind for urgent humanitarian action than to attack the causes of the migrations - economic, social and political.

---

10. In our news reports, publicity and propaganda we will present the disaster victims as dignified human beings and not as objects to inspire compassion.

The ideology of the Red Cross advocates the need for prevention before it becomes necessary to intervene in tragic situations. The Red Cross will have to bring its arguments to bear on the communities of the world, and on those who make decisions on their behalf, to demonstrate the importance of investing in the prevention of disasters, of whatever kind.

5.3. Red Cross at the service of the most vulnerable

A slogan recently coined by the Red Cross reads : "A commitment to the most vulnerable". In a sense, this is a new approach that tries to join what has been done in the past to the wider undertaking we must assume in the future in favour of those who are excluded or separated from the dynamics of society.

The commitment to the weakest members of society implies an analytical approach to the causes of their vulnerability, an approach that will lead us to a subjective and an objective knowledge of the underlying causes of their situation.

This knowledge generates contradictory feelings within the organization. The first reaction is, of course, to go into action to mitigate or eliminate the effects of these people's vulnerability, but then there is an immediate urge to act on the causative factors, and these are very often provoked or condoned by governments.

> **Not to take up a position with regard to the causal factor of vulnerability can be interpreted as a lack of responsibility or as indifference to social problems.**

The application of Neutrality.

The Principle of Neutrality is the most controversial. The impossibility on the part of the Red Cross to specify one or other side as solely responsible for social situations as they arise creates divergent opinions within the organization, or the conviction that we are unnecessarily silent in the face of these problems. As we said in the reflection on the Principle of Neutrality, our neutral attitude never implies indifference, so it also generates an endless number of obligations and the development of skills to deal with both ends of the problem – attention to the effects, and the elimination of the causes, and in consequence the prevention of the condition of vulnerability.

The difference in the Red Cross lies in the way a position is taken up, and the tools that are used to make it known.

When we want to denounce the causal factors of any vulnerability, we must always ensure that this will not pit one social or political sector against another. A Red Cross censure must

serve to arouse awareness of the problem, indicating ways to mitigate it by means that involve, whenever possible, the greater part of the population.

Imputation of responsibility

The Red Cross has no wish to blame anyone for these social problems ; we must only try to prevent injustices, and whatever the circumstances we must attend to the victims.

The proof of our commitment is our effort to keep ahead in everything that will intensify the aid, revising and updating the techniques of intervention and of arousing response, and improving methods of mediation.

The best system the Red Cross has found for showing up an injustice has always been to take action to right it and to spread information as widely as possible about the effects it is producing.

When we go to help an elderly person, it is not only for the sake of making him feel less alone and cheering him up; we also show the importance of not forgetting the old, and that we have a corporate duty to attend to their well-being.

Mediation.

The need to exercise neutrality has led the Red Cross to develop more and more its capacity as a mediator. Nearly all the meetings of members of the Institution insist on the growing importance of our role as mediator in situations of need and of social conflict.

Social inequalities are usually due to the intransigence of those in power towards those who have no possibility of improving their situation. Mediation between the two groups by the Red Cross is a demonstration of our humanitarian task and of the existence of peaceful methods of solving problems.

The Red Cross does not always come out well from these attempts at mediation. Negotiations nearly always leave one side better satisfied than the other, and the immediate consequence is a state of tension and of mistrust of the attitude of the mediator, particularly if one of the parties has brought pressure to bear on the Red Cross to show a preference in one or other direction.

As we saw in the reflection on the Principle of Neutrality, it will take a long time for this neutrality of the Red Cross to be understood. We have to try to be understood and accepted in the long term, not in individual situations.

To come back to the purpose of mediation, we must remember that it is an effort to shorten the distance between attitudes that are very remote from each other, and lessen the injustices that will ensue for want of understanding and negotiation.

From this point of view, the National Societies will have to reconsider their strategy of intervention. The traditional provision of assistance, strictly limited to medical care for victims, has to give way to a wider range of intervention that implies :

- The preparation of volunteers so that in addition to their training in first aid they learn methods of psychological support for the victims.
- The incorporation of the local communities into this preparation as a means towards preventing and coping with natural disasters.
- A greater capacity of observation of disasters so that new skills may be brought into service in such cases.
- Rehabilitation of the affected zones after the period of emergency.
- Adaptation of the resources available : psychological support, community support, flexibility of the medical services, etc.
- A change from an impulsive and compulsive reaction to one that is fast, proportionate, and in keeping with the nature of the catastrophe.

5.4. Red Cross protection of the environment

The inspiration of the Fundamental Principles was the desire to assist humankind, following certain criteria and rules that would help to relieve suffering.

The environment does not in itself produce an immediate damaging effect, nor does it injure people in the normal course of events. So it is not easy to to examine the problem in our usual direct way:

Causal agent → harm caused → humanitarian response required

In the case of the environment, the harm caused by its destruction is not always evident, and it is nearly always in the long term that noticeable damage is caused to mankind.

Man is mainly responsible for the deterioration, contamination and destruction of the environment, often by mistaken or ill-intentioned behaviour repeated over and over again.
And since, as we said above, the effects of this degradation are not immediately evident, we are not aware of the **damage caused** nor of the **human response required.** We could easily think that our function centres on attending to people when the final effects have become obvious.

The problem here – of explaining our task of protecting and improving the environment – is the long time that elapses before the arrival of the suffering caused by its destruction; the effect is not normally detected, and we are not used to working with effects whose cause is not recognized.

The ideological justification, derived from the Principle of Humanity, of our duty to protect the environment, is that we have to prevent whatever makes man more vulnerable. Obviously the destruction of the ozone layer, the cutting down of forests, the contamination of the oceans, open the way to new catastrophes, new diseases, and to a disastrous change of the whole ecosystem if remedies are not applied.

So much for the basic justification ; now we must look at ways to integrate this new humanitarian duty into the catalogue of Red Cross responsibilities. In practice this means identifying the agent that will bring vulnerability, studying the eventual damage, and then finding a suitable humanitarian response. We can examine each of these steps in the context of the environment :

The causal agent of vulnerability

Threats to security come from man's abuse of the environment. Indiscriminate felling of trees causes greater erosion of the soil when it rains ; what would have been merely heavy rain fifty years ago is now a risk of flooding that is disastrous for the population of the region. This new vulnerability arose with the remorseless depredation of forests, sometimes due more to the wrong use of the wooded areas by the local population rather than to a deliberate operation.

As we see, man is not the direct agent - in this case the agent is the flooding – but he is the indirect cause of the tragedy. This is what distinguishes this Red Cross intervention from the others : that here it is man himself who creates the situation of vulnerability.

The damage caused.

The damage can be considered from two points of view :

- damage to the environment
- resultant damage that affects human life.

The result of the action is the destruction of the habitat. This in itself is a sign of poor human development and a lack of common responsibilities. The first thing shared by human beings from the moment of their birth is the wealth of natural resources, and this is also the only tangible value we can leave to future generations.

To study the effects of the deterioration of the environment is a way of showing the attack that it represents on coexistence. The innumerable ill-effects on human health – not forgetting the malformations caused by nuclear radiation -, the disappearance of marine life due to excessive fishing, are only some of the facts to be considered in formulating the humanitarian response to each fiasco.

Better knowledge of nature – of its weak points among other considerations – promotes the cataloguing of harmful agents and of their short-term and long-term effects. And we have to distinguish between sustainable development – crops that do not impoverish the land, control of tree felling, and so on – and practices that are purely lucrative.

The humanitarian response.

Oddly enough, we have to call it a humanitarian response although the action is in favour of nature. From the point of view of the Red Cross, nature is inseparable from human existence and what we do has a positive or negative effect on human life.

Our action, therefore, is the humanitarian one of preventing mankind from becoming the victim of his irrational treatment of the environment.

5.5. The Red Cross in the prevention of violence.

We have come to associate violence with war and conflicts, but it enters other spheres. In times of peace, violence is seen as a part of delinquency and/or antisocial or anticultural behaviour. This simplification, reducing violence to physical aggression resulting from conflict, conceals the presence of 'everyday violence' - more subtle and undercover – that emerges in social relations and in the generation of new 'contra-values' that come into circulation.

Violence as a social phenomenon can take many forms. We must lay stress on the new methods. Physical aggression was the usual form, but the 'new violence' adopts less obvious forms : psychological aggression, petty persecution, threats, extorsion, etc.

The problem is that once these violations are set in motion, they tend – like all social phenomena – to weaken society to the point at which differences are settled by recourse to open violence.

Violence as a social phenomenon can only be counteracted by adopting new ways of life :

primary attention in certain sectors of the population to basic needs - educational and neighbourhood development, among others. Here we find one of the new responsibilities of the Red Cross, that of eliminating and reducing the factors that generate any kind of violence.

The Red Cross often acts reactively, responding to needs after they have arisen and preparing in the traditional way to relieve suffering as it appears. In this case, reactive measures do not serve for much ; the better way is to prevent the causes of violence by adopting long-term strategies.

The Principle of Humanity, in referring to the avoidance of all forms of human suffering, also implies the avoidance of imminent suffering, whether it be physical or psychic.

All our preventive action rests on the responsibility of reducing the chances that suffering will ensue. This interpretation of the Principle of Humanity is the first argument in favour of the duty of the Red Cross to develop and extend the task of avoiding the consequences of violence in our society.

The Red Cross function of mediation becomes apparent when we act as a catalyst and promoter of peaceful coexistence to allow development in a non-violent and tolerant coexistence. In these circumstances, the actors are not clearly definable : society in general is involved, with special strategies for the groups at risk.

We mediate between the situations of violence and those of peace, by means of :

- Education for peace.
- Action for the weakest and most marginal sectors, tempted to resort to violence as a way of escape or as a road to bettering their circumstances.
- Action directed to those in power, to secure that the authorities do not generate social differences nor adopt extreme solutions or proceed without consultation with their own community.
- Collaboration in the processes of restoring peace.
- Collaboration in strengthening the structures designed to bring agreement and mutual understanding.

The Principle of Impartiality lays down the ideal formula for coexistence, in which confrontation among human beings would be impossible, a world in which differences would not give cause for discrimination, intolerance and injustice.

Violence can come from social, religious, political, economic discriminations, so we must adopt the message of impartiality. This Principle provides valid arguments for avoiding

violence. We can apply the same reasoning that we used to show the utility of this Principle to convince and to give motives that will smooth things over between those leading the way to violent dialogue.

We must not only act impartially ; we have to convince people of the substance and the philosophy of impartiality, and show from there that differences need not lead to confrontation and that they can serve as a base of mutual respect.

The prevention of violence brings us to the end of our reflections on the application of the Fundamental Principles in the five great areas of Red Cross intervention – three of them are traditional in the whole Institution and the other two are recent challenges.

Together the five represent the pillars of the Greek temple we took as an illustration. The pillars stand on the seven Principles that make up the foundations of the temple, thanks to their solidity.

The columns are a witness to the viability of the ideology, an ideal from which we have built up an action, and this action is upheld by the validity of its ideological framework. The number of columns is the number required by our present intervention, and it allows enough space for the development of our organization within their limits.

6. THE RESULTS

Our temple is not yet complete ; we still have to finish the building of the upper part - the ceiling and the roof.

The results of our action are the improvements brought to the life of the people, and these can be considered in a very general way. The Red Cross intends the Fundamental Principles as a mandate for definite results.

6.1. Setting up processes

In addition to palliating human suffering, Red Cross action has to create processes among people or communities that will change their unsatisfactory circumstances for better conditions of health, living standards, social services, etc.

The Red Cross gives great importance to this aspect of service, insisting that reform depends on a multitude of elements within the individuals or communities or in their surroundings.

Any process must have a starting point for transformation. Change never comes from a simple injection of means or resources but from our incorporation and participation in a series of operations that make it possible. It is this logical and coherent sequence of tasks that the Red Cross chooses as its method of work.

The advantage of working by a process is that it allows a choice of actions to be carried out in a single territory, and these achieve partial objectives along the way to the global end in view. Whatever the sector of intervention, our vocation is to initiate, promote, develop and participate in the processes aimed at improving the living conditions of the people.

As an example, any international cooperation set up by the Red Cross in a country that needs it, must be planned with the proviso that it will support, promote or consolidate processes that will guarantee a a sustainable upgrading of living conditions.

If we provide resources for education, for example, without attending to health services, it is not likely that a global improvement will be achieved. A wide view of the real situation will require us to undertake a range of tasks, or to assist and participate in processes already started by others.

A previous study of the processes we hope to set in motion will ensure that our activity will develop along lines leading to personal and social betterment.

6.2. Objectives of Red Cross operations

The aim of our interventions is to prevent, avoid, eliminate and relieve human suffering wherever it may arise.

PREVENT : by proposing strategies and methods to individuals and to communities, devised to prevent suffering and its consequences.

AVOID : taking action, when we have information and means, aimed at neutralizing and avoiding the causes of suffering.

ELIMINATE : in the face of suffering, offering assistance for its immediate relief and elimination.

RELIEVE : if we cannot completely eliminate the causal agents of suffering when it occurs, or the damage caused by these agents, the most we can do is to relieve the suffering.

This cycle, which begins with prevention and ends with relief, can be faced in various ways and with different methods, through one or other philosophy of intervention, and it is in the application of these methods that the Fundamental Principles come into play.

Our intentions when we intervene in cases of necessity are :

- to set up processes to solve the problems of the sector,
- to reduce the vulnerability of the person or community,
- to reach fair conditions of human dignity.

6.2. Access to dignity to which everyone has a right.

Human dignity is a concept that can be oversimplified, and this conceals its depth and its significance.

To achieve dignity is the aspiration of everyone who has lost the chance of feeling at ease in his social and economic situation, of everyone who has been denied the rights enjoyed by the majority (or by a powerful minority) of his own society.

As we see it, the concept of dignity is too closely linked to the handing out of charity so that others may live with dignity. (How often we hear the expression “Let’s give him something so that he can live with dignity”!)

This confusion, and the need to know the conditions for providing access to dignity, leads us to consider two angles of the question :

- material dignity
- moral dignity.

Material dignity

"Material dignity" appears when we have the necessary to live in conditions similar to those of our community.

Access to this material dignity enables a person to live without feeling humiliated nor inferior to others, and this may help him to maintain or raise his self-esteem.

A lot of our actions (distribution of humanitarian aid, rehabilitation of zones razed by catastrophes, etc.) try to create the conditions for restoring this kind of dignity.

In cases like this there is a donor and a receiver. The donor distributes or furnishes aid intended to provide for the needs of the recipient. The donor is trying to satisfy the receiver. This is when the problem arises if we try to solve material difficulties without remembering or realizing the significance of what we are doing. To hand out humanitarian aid is not only to attend to material needs ; it must also give access to 'material dignity'.

A careful appraisal of the satisfaction produced by our aid may serve to show the importance of how we do things. We refer to the satisfaction felt by the individuals or communities.

The momentary satisfaction on receiving material aid for survival is intense but short-lived. Survival is the more important feeling, so it is not the moment for worrying about access to human dignity.

The continuance of material aid is felt at the beginning in a similar way to that of receiving immediate aid, but this diminishes when the beneficiaries see no solution to their chronic difficulties. Access to material dignity depends wholly on the wish of the donor. Then the communities regard the aid as an obligation or as the corollary of their chronic needs. And this shows the importance of having receiver participation in identifying their needs.

A programme of material aid that sets out to be no more than a material solution will eventually be seen as such by the population. It produces neither satisfaction nor rejection in the short term, but if can bring a much-needed cohesion to a long-term engagement [10].

Obviously, the way we practise our solidarity determines the sentiment of the recipient. Depersonalised distribution, aid and support do nothing towards boosting the dignity of the recipient. On the contrary, they confirm him as a mere consumer of the aid, making him feel like a down-and-out.

Donations given in this spirit generate a passive, submissive attitude on the part of the recipient, thus eliminating his option to express an opinion; he becomes a dumb creature, subjected to the whim of the donor.

The donor also loses his dignity in this process since it boosts his pride and dominance. There is no interchange - only a discipline imposed by the donor.

When the Red Cross decides to convey its solidarity, it must do so in such a way that the recipient feels that he has a better chance of reaching material dignity and more freedom to make his own decisions.

How to dignify aid.

To dignify assistance implies a series of steps aimed at showing our respect for others and for ourselves. The steps could be expressed as follows :

- Not to underestimate the capacity and skill of our recipients,
- To accept and value the knowledge they have of their own needs,
- Not to make a premature judgement of the problems, nor of their causes nor the situation,
- To think that we may have to be there for only a short time,
- To consider the personal and group feelings that our actions could arouse,
- To bring them into the tasks of assistance and distribution,
- To withdraw when the needs are satisfied.

The effect of procuring aid with dignity awakens a deep attachment and affection on the part of the recipient, and eliminates the danger of our receiving the kind iof gratitude conveyed by the “humanitarianly colonized”, which always has an undercurrent of anger at having had to depend on others to ensure their survival.

[10] Material aid, as dealt with in this paragraph, would hardly provide the ‘material dignity’ mentioned in the earlier paragraphs. It is a type of aid distributed without following the ideas of the Red Cross as to its motivation and distribution.

“Interior dignity”

Now we turn from the material factors that help to bring dignity to the provision of aid, and we consider the other angle – “interior dignity”, sentimental, emotional, in-grained, a part of our personality and that makes us feel (emotionally speaking) more or less as strong as the rest of men.

This interior dignity comes from a set of adjustments to ourselves and to others :

- the feeling of acceptance, comprehension or adhesion to our personal circumstances,
- the feeling of giving and receiving love,
- the feeling of belonging to our milieu.

We ourselves acquire the dignity that lets us feel capable, though others may help. Our work puts us in contact with people who are forgotten, excluded, outcast, disabled, that is, those whom society has placed apart, where normal dignity is denied them.

In these circumstances we have to use strategies to make interior dignity possible. It comes from contact and interaction with our milieu and it grows when we are treated with trust, kindliness and respect.

It serves for nothing to work as a home help if we do not show respect for the privacy and the circumstances of the assisted person, trying to put ourselves into his or her situation.

If we do not show enough attention to the person we are trying to help, he could become a mere recipient of services, so we have to become involved in his personal life as we go about our task.

Most people suffering need or ailments feel humiliated by their weakness. The humiliation, which starts at the water-line of the “interior dignity”, has to be countered or eliminated by our manner of acting and by the attitude we adopt towards the problems.

We come up against many difficult situations in our work as home helps. The old person receiving the help would probably prefer to be cared for by his family, or feels that it is an injustice that he should be in a situation of need. As care-givers we must share in his problems, confidentially and with respect, avoiding the smallest detail that could endanger his self-esteem.

By showing respect for those we meet, we help to raise their sense of dignity.

There are some key points to be observed so that our work is respectful :

- Our humanitarian acts must not become mechanical nor purely material.
- It is important to maintain confidentiality and friendliness.
- We must claim the rights of the most vulnerable.
- We must put ourselves in the place of those we are assisting.
- Their personal problems must be regarded as temporary, not as a situation doomed to continue.

6.3. The elimination or mitigation of vulnerability.

Another result that we try to achieve is that people strengthen themselves to face up to possible suffering, eliminating the causes and fighting against them.

The elimination or mitigation of suffering as advocated by the Principle of Humanity goes beyond facing up to it [11]. People's attitudes may vary : coping with it by doing everything possible to reduce its effects, resigning oneself or preparing to face it, regarding it as merely temporary or intermittent, etc.

For the Red Cross, suffering is not an unavoidable component of living that has to be borne, not something inseparable from human life.

This is a fundamental statement of the fact that suffering is neither justifiable nor acceptable, nor is it a means of earning eternal reward.

The aim of any member of the Red Cross is to eliminate it by direct or indirect action directed to the victims or against the causal agents.

It is also important to bear in mind that a reduction or elimination of the suffering of an individual or a group can never justify passing it to others.

> **We struggle to be of service to some, without harming others. Otherwise we would be taking sides and judging actions that are beyond our competence.**

Suffering can be eliminated only if people and communities can be capacitated to fight against it.

The strengthening of people and of their communities calls for :

- An understanding of the meaning of suffering.
- The cultivation of an attitude of refusal of suffering.

- Knowledge of the causes of suffering.
- Confidence that our action can improve the situation.
- An awareness that the energizing of people and communities is a personal and group activity.

Vulnerability

This could be defined as the measurement we use for the level of protection in existence against possible suffering. Vulnerable people or communities are those are incapable of dealing with situations of exclusion, poverty, catastrophes, violence, intolerance, etc.

In the terms of the Fundamental Principles, 'vulnerable' refers to those more likely to be afflicted by suffering, and in which this would become chronic and progressive.

Repeating what we said earlier, our aim goes beyond acting on the effects of exclusion or poverty ; it includes the search for ways and means of attaining better human development so that communities may find strength and the necessary preparation for eliminating the causes of their misfortunes.

Forms of vulnerability

Vulnerability is a blend of economic, social, cultural, educational, geographic factors among others.

For many years, the Red Cross was centred on tracking physical suffering to palliate it as far as possible. This was nearly always successful but it overlooked a number of other things that affect the well-being – future and present – of communities.

It was a service based on a too literal reading of the Fundamental Principles. Physical and/or psychic suffering does not always require symptomatic treatment. It makes no sense to distribute food aid, which reduces suffering in the short term, if we do not ensure that the community looks for ways to be self-supporting.

The actions that really reduce vulnerability are those that are based on the assumption that vulnerability is the consequence of interrelated factors.

Health deficiencies are often remedied when we carry out parallel actions related to basic necessities - (access to clean water, drainage, primary health care, vaccination, training in hygiene, etc.), and working up from there with the consciousness that any step missed will

[11] In simple words, to rise against suffering, to meet it head on, not to side-step the problem.

mean an immediate return to a state of vulnerability. The aim must be to create sustainable socio-economic spaces.

Continuous commitment.

The Red Cross may sometimes give the impression that our readiness to work in any kind of emergency somehow limits our participation and commitment in medium- and long-term projects.

An emergency can be the maximum expression of suffering, particularly one due to man-made causes, and it reveals the degree of vulnerability of the area and of the victims. All the hidden weaknesses and incompetences suddenly come to light. Behind its day-to-day activity, the Red Cross must see the state of emergency as a situation to be handled, and also as a mirror reflecting needs that have to be faced after the first emergency call.

The same proactivity that keeps us on the alert to attend to an emergency also gives us a privileged watchtower from which we can see what is happening around us and detect the origins of social ills.

It would be erroneous to say that Red Cross obligations arise only after an emergency. The fact that an emergency can arise imposes responsibilities of cooperation with the community to undertake – through the community – measures of prevention as part of its commitment. These have to be set up before any state of emergency, will continue during any possible crisis, and will remain in place to assist the setting-up or the return to normal justice.

In conclusion we can say that just as in the normal course of any life, there are periods of normality, of crisis and of a return to normality, the obligation of the Red Cross is to be involved in all of these circumstances. The strategies and methods of intervention are different in each one, with weightings that vary according to the actual conditions.

Finally, and to close the circle, our own activity must intensify our commitment to social needs. It will give more and more validity to our Fundamental Principles and bring our activities into accordance with the realities of the moment.

It is up to us to find our place in a complex assemblage devoted to prevention and preparation in readiness for any possible emergency.

7. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The philosophy of the Red Cross is extremely wide-reaching and evolving, and this book does no more than present a small part of the thought of the Institution.

The key to the ideological analysis is to accept that yesterday's concepts must be brought up to date for their use in the changing context of present-day conditions.

Wars are not like those of the past, and the behaviour of men and women of today is not that of fifty years ago. The people of the Red Cross must respond to this reality and not react compulsively without examining the ''why'' and "how" of their activity.

The times we live in demand a constant reflection on the way we are, on our character and way of behaving. That is why the Fundamental Principles must not be used as repressive nor as doctrinal. They should open our eyes to what is happening around us and help us to reflect on the road we should take.

The wisdom of the Principles comes from their coming from all the members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, for all of them without exception, so we are all responsible for their application and for their better understanding.