

Message from the President

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Objektyp: **Preface**

Zeitschrift: **Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross**

Band (Jahr): - **(2000)**

PDF erstellt am: **23.07.2024**

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The year 2000 was not marked by any crisis of a magnitude comparable to those that occurred in the Balkans or East Timor in 1999, and yet the ICRC operated on a record budget and with an unprecedented field presence. The reason for this lies to a large extent in the nature of today's armed conflicts. It is worth pausing here to review some of their salient features.

Contrary to what is often stated, the 1990s did not see an increase in the number of wars worldwide, Africa being an exception. The most striking change was the fact that the vast majority of wars were no longer fought between States, but within State borders. In 2000, this was the case for all but one of the 25 major ongoing armed conflicts. Furthermore, these wars were no longer fuelled by the ideologies underlying the East-West confrontation of the past. Conventional wisdom points to political motivations – that is, the sheer struggle for power – and economic and identity-related issues as being the predominant factors. As regards the last of these, however, there is some doubt as to whether it is truly a major factor, and if so to what extent. Indeed, one is often struck by the fact that many supposedly "ethnic" conflicts occur in regions or countries where different ethnic or religious groups had lived together peacefully for years. Further features of armed conflicts in 2000 were easy access to weapons and modern communications, which allowed small groups to operate independently and without much external political support, and thus to remain largely impervious to outside pressure. These conflicts were also notable for their length and, in several cases, for the limited prospects they offered of early political settlement. The wars in Afghanistan, Angola and Sudan are prime examples. On the other hand, the peace accord between Eritrea

and Ethiopia and certain developments in the Balkans gave grounds for hope.

The combination of factors outlined above has also influenced the consequences of conflict. Civilians are no longer just the victims of "collateral damage". They are increasingly the direct target of violence, their fate being the very reason for the hostilities. In such conflicts the impact on the population is much greater than suggested by the number – not always high – of dead. People are expelled, or *cleansed*, by the tens of thousands from land their families have inhabited for generations. Relatives are separated from each other, thousands go missing and are often presumed killed. In addition, the effects of internal conflicts tend to spill over into neighbouring countries and cause widespread instability.

For an organization like the ICRC these developments inevitably have repercussions in terms of activities and human resources. In 2000 the ICRC had a permanent presence and was working in 60 countries, including the 25 ravaged by major armed conflicts. With its staff of 12,000 worldwide, it continued to conduct protection and assistance activities for victims of armed conflict and internal violence. Let me give two brief illustrations, one relating to protection, the other to assistance. In the year 2000 ICRC delegates visited some 216,000 individuals detained in 65 countries, including Myanmar, Afghanistan, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Algeria, Peru and the Russian Federation. At the same time assistance was provided for some five million internally displaced persons in countries like Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia and Sierra Leone.

A significant networking effort is crucial to this endeavour. At the heart of the ICRC's operational philosophy lies the notion of proximity, in other words, striving to be as close as possible to the men, women and children in need. In Colombia, for instance, delegates not only operated out of the central office in Bogotá but also set up a network of 15 sub-delegations throughout the country. In Afghanistan there are 10 such offices. At the same time, the deeper one moves into conflict zones, the more acute becomes the need to establish contact with all parties involved. This may mean State and non-State actors, paramilitary units, and so forth. Operating in such contexts entails considerable security concerns, as was brought home to the ICRC when three of its staff were abducted in Georgia last summer, and even more tragically when colleagues working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were murdered in West Timor and West Africa. As President of the ICRC, I felt throughout the year that my primary responsibility was the safety of staff – expatriate and national – working in the field.

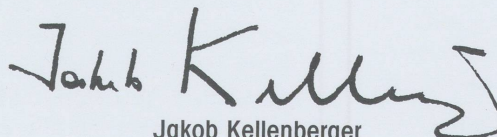
Operating in situations of armed conflict requires the ability to listen to those involved, both warring parties and victims. In 1999 the ICRC carried out a large-scale survey entitled "People on War", during which 20,000 people gave their views on war and international humanitarian law. In 2000 the ICRC completed the research phase of a study designed to give a better understanding of how women and girls are affected by armed conflict and how the organization could take fuller account of their needs in its assistance and protection programmes. Some of the findings of this study have already led to practical action. In parallel, the ICRC continued to examine the effects of certain types of weapons, such as small arms and unexploded ordnance, and to propose further developments in the law where required.

The year 2000 also saw renewed emphasis on cooperation and coordination among humanitarian agencies in order to improve the relevance and effectiveness of the emergency response. One example was the dialogue within the humanitarian community regarding the respective core competencies and expertise of various organizations in responding to the needs of internally displaced persons. As the central agency working for people displaced by armed conflict, the ICRC warmly welcomed dialogue aimed at increasing coverage of their vast needs.

More broadly, the ICRC's principal partners for cooperation were within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the ICRC sought to develop the Movement's full potential by further strengthening the National Societies and enhancing their operational capacity. In 2000 the ICRC and its partners continued to contribute to the process of evaluating field operations, such as the integrated operation in the Balkans. The aim of the process was to improve accountability, vis-à-vis both the donors and the people the ICRC seeks to protect and assist.

2000 was a year in which the ICRC made a dedicated effort to promote the adoption of a third protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions introducing an additional emblem. This initiative was designed to enable the Movement to achieve full universality by allowing Societies unwilling to use either of the existing emblems to join. The goal was to have the protocol adopted and the Movement's Statutes amended accordingly before the end of 2000. By early September many of the obstacles had been overcome and prospects for a favourable outcome were good. Regrettably, the deterioration of the situation in the Middle East after 28 September created a climate that was no longer conducive to a settlement within the anticipated time-frame. Resolving this matter has been a primary concern for me ever since I assumed the Presidency of the ICRC, and will remain so.

The present *Annual Report* covers a wide range of issues and priorities that marked the year 2000, and thus reflects the growing complexity of managing humanitarian operations around the globe. I am convinced that a subtle balance between a strong identity and an active commitment to cooperation is the key to the ICRC's approach. The heart of the ICRC's mission lies in the field. To be close to those in need remains its very *raison d'être*.



Jakob Kellenberger
President of the ICRC