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# **The Centenary of the Red Cross**

In February, 1863, five men in Geneva decided to put into practice the ideas proclaimed in a booklet one of them had just published and which had shaken up public opinion all over Europe. The booklet's title was "A Memory of Solferino," and its author was Henry Dunant, who had witnessed appalling scenes during the war of 1859 in Italy, where the wounded were left to die on the battlefield for lack of medical assistance.

Dunant urged the necessity of establishing, even in times of peace, volunteer organisations for the aid to the wounded and, as the basis for their activity, an international convention to be signed by the governments of all countries. To this purpose, Dunant joined together with General Guillaume Dufour, commander-in-chief of the Swiss Army, Gustave Moynier, a lawyer, and with two physicians, Louis Appia and Theodore Maunoir. They convened an international conference in Geneva in October, 1863.

In the following year, delegates of 26 governments met again in Geneva. They signed the First Geneva Convention and chose, as a symbol, a white flag bearing a red cross—the reverse of the Swiss National Flag. This First Geneva Convention was then amended and revised several times and modernised at Geneva in 1949.

In 1963, one hundred years after the historic meeting of the five men in Geneva, the principles of the Red Cross—impartial relief to victims of war and disaster—are acknowledged by 156 million individual members of 90 national societies under the flags of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Red Sun and Lion. On all continents, these organisations strive to prevent or lessen human suffering in almost all its forms.

So the Red Cross can celebrate its Centenary, in Switzerland and all over the world, in a spirit of mutual assistance and understanding with no strings attached, in which all men of goodwill can participate.

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## **Our Debt to Henri Dunant**

Henri Dunant was a genius. His exceptional contribution to society was expressed not in letters, arts, sciences, industry, politics, but in moral and ethical spheres affecting all areas of living. His sensitiveness to the human predicament enabled him to see and to formulate truths that were largely hidden from others.

Dunant saw that as wars increased in ferocity and destructiveness the more urgent was the need for salvaging as much human life as possible. For the protection of life, the feelings

of compassionate people were not in themselves enough. It was necessary for people in positions of power, particularly political power, to act on behalf of the victims of war and of others in distress. To their influence must be added the strength of people organised and trained as volunteers who would assist in the rescue and protection of others. Both governments and volunteer citizens could, by acting together, reduce the amount and degree of human suffering.

Dunant was an enthusiast for the cause that he announced. His enthusiasm had an infectious quality that caught the minds and hearts of the other men. His ethical vision not only permeated the early Red Cross conferences in Geneva but also had persisted and spread until today nearly 90 national societies of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun are joined for achieving the humanitarian aims defined by Dunant.

The vitality of the Red Cross movement is a witness to the confidence of humanity in its own future. The faith behind the Red Cross says that the will of people to help one another is stronger than the will to mutual destruction. This faith is expressed not only in aiding victims of war and of other afflictions but also in guiding people to prepare against disaster and in helping individuals and whole populations to maintain their health and safety.

For all the steps in behalf of humanity that have been taken by the Red Cross the world over, humanity is indebted to the far-ranging vision of Henri Dunant.

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