UNIT 15 WHAT DO THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES DO?

Structure
15.1 Introduction
15.2 Objectives
15.3 The Red Cross Movement
15.4 What does each Member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Do?
15.5 Emblems of Humanity
15.6 Summary
15.7 Terminal Questions
15.8 Answers and Hints
15.9 References and Suggested Readings

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present and active in almost every country and comprises around 100 million members and volunteers. It is united and guided by the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – which provide a universal standard of reference for all its members. Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose: to prevent and alleviate human suffering, without discrimination, and to protect human dignity.

15.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the different organisations under the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and the parts played by them; and
- discuss the significance of the Red Cross Emblems.

15.3 THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT

The Mission

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the largest humanitarian network in the world. Its mission is to alleviate human suffering, protect life and health, and uphold human dignity especially during armed conflicts and other emergencies. It is present in every country and supported by millions of volunteers. The Movement is dedicated to preventing and alleviating human suffering in warfare and in emergencies such as epidemics, floods and earthquakes.
What is the Role of ICRC in the Application of IHL?

Units of the Movement

The Movement is made up of:

- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- National Societies;
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation).

The ICRC, the International Federation and each country’s National Society are independent organisations. Each has its own status and exercises no authority over the others. They meet every two years in the Council of Delegates and gather every four years, in principle, with representatives of the States party to the Geneva Conventions for an International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Recognition and Responsibilities

The Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement define the relationship between the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions. The responsibilities of each of the Movement’s components were further clarified and refined by the Seville Agreement adopted by the Council of Delegates in 1997. The Seville Agreement confers on the ICRC the role of lead agency for international operations conducted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in situations of armed conflict and internal strife, including activities for displaced people. The ICRC is responsible for verifying that future National Societies meet the criteria for membership of the Movement and that they are in a position to conduct their activities in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. If so, the ICRC grants them official recognition. The National Society concerned may then apply to join the International Federation. In practice, however, applications are reviewed jointly by the ICRC and the International Federation.

Self Assessment Question

1) Discuss the various units of the Red Cross Movement and briefly examine their functions.

15.4 WHAT DOES EACH MEMBER OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT DO?

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the Movement’s founding body. In addition to carrying out operational activities to protect and assist victims of armed conflict, it is the promoter and custodian of international humanitarian law. It is also the guardian of the Fundamental Principles. In cooperation with the International Federation, it organises the Movement’s statutory meetings.
National Societies embody the work and principles of the Movement in more than 180 countries. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief and health and social programmes. In wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and, where appropriate, support the army medical services.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies works on the basis of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to inspire, facilitate and promote all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies to improve the situation of the most vulnerable people. Founded in 1919, the International Federation directs and coordinates international assistance of the Movement to victims of natural and technological disasters, to refugees and in health emergencies. It acts as the official representative of its member societies in the international field. It promotes cooperation between National Societies and strengthens their capacity to prepare effectively for disasters and to carry out health and social programmes.

15.5 EMBLEMS OF HUMANITY

From the very beginning, the ICRC’s founders recognised the need for a single, universal and easily recognisable emblem familiar to all. To their mind, the emblem had to protect not only people wounded in battle but also those bringing them aid. It was also to protect all medical units, including those of the enemy. The idea was that the mere sight of it would prompt combatants to show restraint and respect. The red cross on a white background (the reverse of the Swiss national flag) was adopted by the International Conference of 1863 as the distinctive sign of societies bringing relief to wounded soldiers (the future National Societies). A year later it was recognised by a Diplomatic Conference as the distinctive sign of army medical services and sanctioned by humanitarian law with the adoption of the Geneva Convention of 1864. However, in 1876, the Ottoman Empire decided to use a red crescent instead of the red cross. Several States followed suit and in 1929 the red crescent in turn was granted official recognition, along with the Iranian red lion and sun (not currently in use).

Over the years, the Movement has been considering the possibility of introducing changes relating to the use of the emblem in order to tackle specific problems. Some Societies that wished to join the Movement were not comfortable with either of the existing emblems. The Magen David Adom, the Israeli Society, wanted to use its own symbol – the red shield of David – whereas other Societies preferred to use both the red cross and the red crescent. Neither were possible under the Geneva Conventions rules. In addition, in some conflicts, the use of the red cross or the red crescent could have created problems if misinterpreted by either party.

To solve these problems, the Diplomatic Conference of December 2005 brought together the States party to the Geneva Conventions and adopted additional Protocol III, creating a new emblem, the red crystal. This emblem, free from any religious, cultural or political connotations, gives States and National Societies greater flexibility in the use of the emblems and puts an end to the question of proliferation of emblems.

The National Societies already using the red cross or the red crescent can continue to do so. Today, all of the 186 National Societies use the same emblem as the
What is the Role of ICRC in the Application of IHL?

medical services of the military forces in their country during conflict – the so-called protective use.

| Red Cross | Red Crescent | Red Crystal |

15.6 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we discussed

- The background and components of the Red Cross Movement.
- The adoption and the significance of the Red Cross Emblems.
- The obligations/duties of the members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

15.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1) Explain the role played by the various organisations of the Red Cross Movement in the application of IHL.

2) Elaborate on the Emblems of the Red Cross Movement - the background and the disputes.

3) Discuss the role played by the members of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement.

15.8 ANSWERS AND HINTS

Self Assessment Question

1) Refer for Section 15.3

Terminal Questions

1) The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is present and active in almost every country and comprises around 100 million members and volunteers. It is united and guided by the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality - which provide a universal standard of reference for all its members. Activities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies during disasters include prevention activities, relief and rehabilitation activities, tracing activities, collection of information etc. Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose: to prevent and alleviate human suffering without discrimination and to protect human dignity.

The Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement define the relationship between the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions.
The responsibilities of each of the Movement’s components were further clarified and refined by the Seville Agreement adopted by the Council of Delegates in 1997. The Seville Agreement confers on the ICRC the role of lead agency for international operations conducted by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in situations of armed conflict and internal strife, including activities for displaced people. The ICRC is responsible for verifying that future National Societies meet the criteria for membership of the Movement and that they are in a position to conduct their activities in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

2) The ICRC’s founders recognised the need for a single, universal and easily recognisable emblem not only to protect the wounded in battle but also those bringing them aid. It was also to protect all medical units, including those of the enemy. The idea was that the mere sight of it would prompt combatants to show restraint and respect. The red cross on a white background (the reverse of the Swiss national flag) was adopted by the International Conference of 1863 and was recognised by a Diplomatic Conference as the distinctive sign of army medical services and sanctioned by humanitarian law with the adoption of the Geneva Convention of 1864. However, in 1876, the Ottoman Empire decided to use a red crescent instead of the red cross. Several States followed suit and in 1929 the red crescent in turn was granted official recognition.

Over the years, the Movement has been considering the possibility of introducing changes relating to the use of the emblem in order to tackle specific problems. Some Societies that wished to join the Movement were not comfortable with either of the existing emblems. The Magen David Adom, the Israeli Society, wanted to use its own symbol – the red shield of David – whereas other Societies preferred to use both the red cross and the red crescent. Neither were possible under the Geneva Conventions rules. In addition, in some conflicts, the use of the red cross or the red crescent could have created problems if misinterpreted by either party.

To solve these problems, the Diplomatic Conference of December 2005 brought together the States party to the Geneva Conventions and adopted additional Protocol III, creating a new emblem, the red crystal. This emblem, free from any religious, cultural or political connotations, gives States and National Societies greater flexibility in the use of the emblems and puts an end to the question of proliferation of emblems.

3) The International Committee of the Red Cross carries out operational activities to protect and assist victims of armed conflict. It is the promoter and custodian of international humanitarian law and the guardian of the Fundamental Principles. In cooperation with the International Federation, it organises the Movement’s statutory meetings.

National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief and health and social programmes. In wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and, where appropriate, support the army medical services.

Founded in 1919, the International Federation directs and coordinates international assistance of the Movement to victims of natural and technological
What is the Role of ICRC in the Application of IHL?

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15.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS


6) Leslie C. Green, “The Contemporary Law of Armed Conflict.”