

The story of an idea

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement from 1859 to the present day



moebius



Missions

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance.

It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Movement.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people. By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

The International Federation, the National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

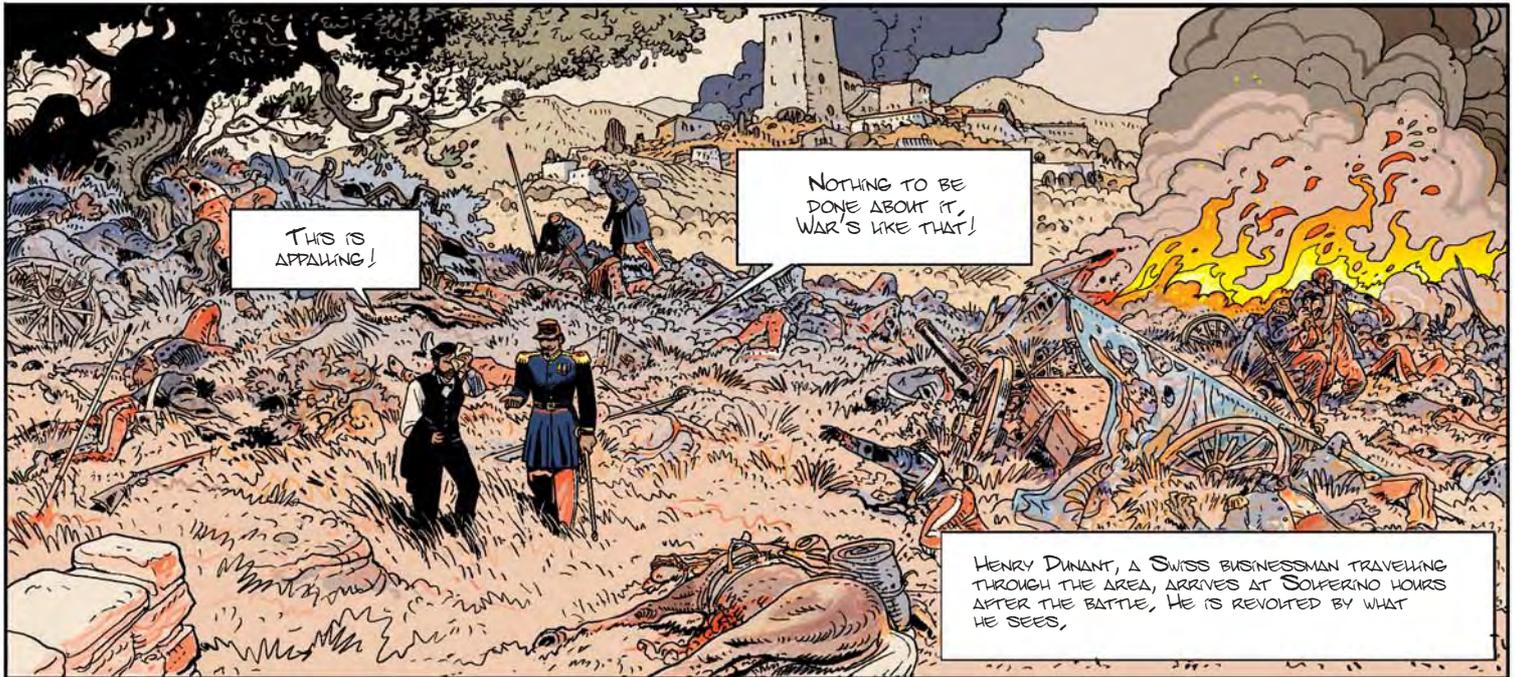
National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in more than 185 countries. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief, health and social programmes. During wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and support the army medical services where appropriate.

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SOVERINO, NORTHERN ITALY, 24 JUNE 1859, THE FRENCH AND AUSTRIAN ARMIES FIGHT A BLOODY BATTLE, BY THE END OF THE DAY, ALMOST 40,000 SOLDIERS ARE EITHER DEAD OR LYING WOUNDED AND ABANDONED ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THE MEDICAL SERVICES ARE UNABLE TO COPE, AND THEY HAVE NO SPECIAL PROTECTION,



THIS IS APPALING!

NOTHING TO BE DONE ABOUT IT, WAR'S LIKE THAT!

HENRY DUNANT, A SWISS BUSINESSMAN TRAVELLING THROUGH THE AREA, ARRIVES AT SOVERINO HOURS AFTER THE BATTLE, HE IS REVOLTED BY WHAT HE SEES,

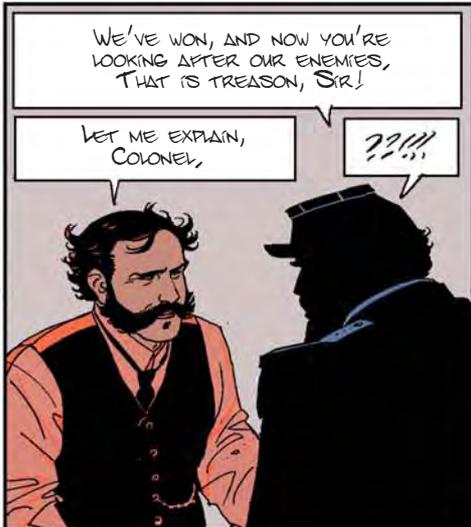


DUNANT ORGANIZED FIRST AID, CONVINCING LOCAL PEOPLE TO LOOK AFTER ALL THE WOUNDED - BOTH FRENCH AND AUSTRIAN,

WE ARE ALL BROTHERS IN SUFFERING,



YOU THERE! WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?



WE'VE WON, AND NOW YOU'RE LOOKING AFTER OUR ENEMIES, THAT IS TREASON, SIR!

LET ME EXPLAIN, COLONEL,

??!!



... AND HOW DO YOU INTEND TO GET HOLD OF THE DRESSINGS AND MEDICINES YOU'LL NEED?

I'M PREPARED TO PAY FOR THEM MYSELF! BUT THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO, ...



SPEAK! WHAT DO YOU NEED?

RELEASE THE AUSTRIAN DOCTORS, ORDERLIES AND SURGEONS YOU TOOK PRISONER AND SEND THEM TO ME!



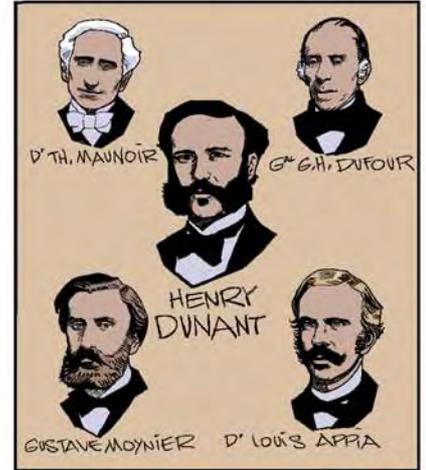
OH, IS THAT ALL? YOU'RE AUDACIOUS IN YOUR REQUEST, DUNANT! HRRMPH, NOT A BAD IDEA I SUPPOSE, BUT I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO,

THANK-YOU COLONEL, ALL I CARE ABOUT ARE THE WOUNDED,

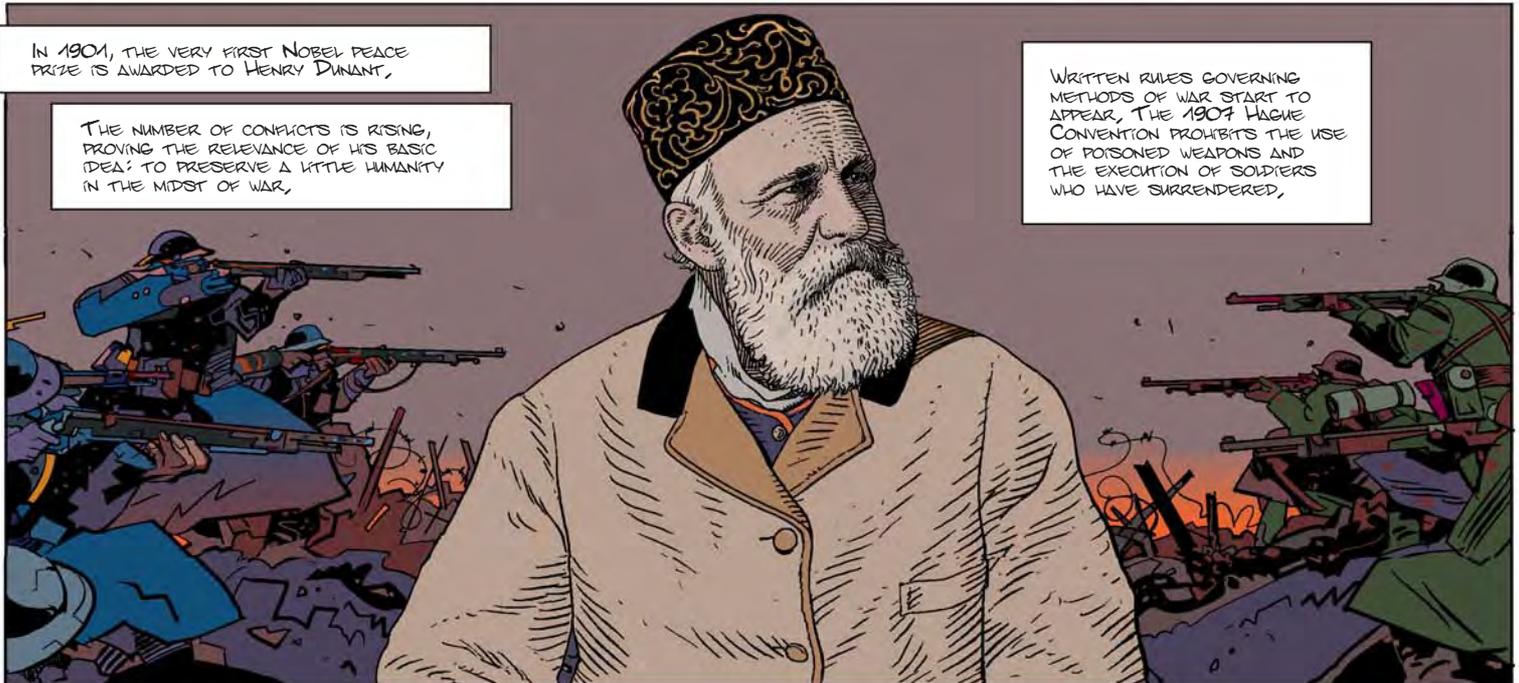
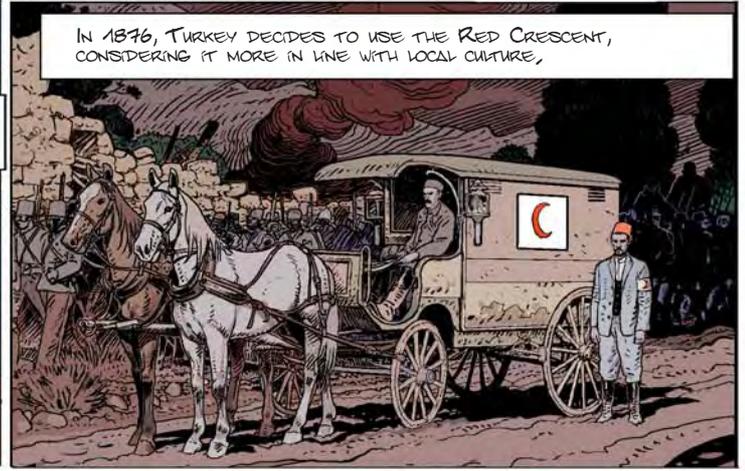
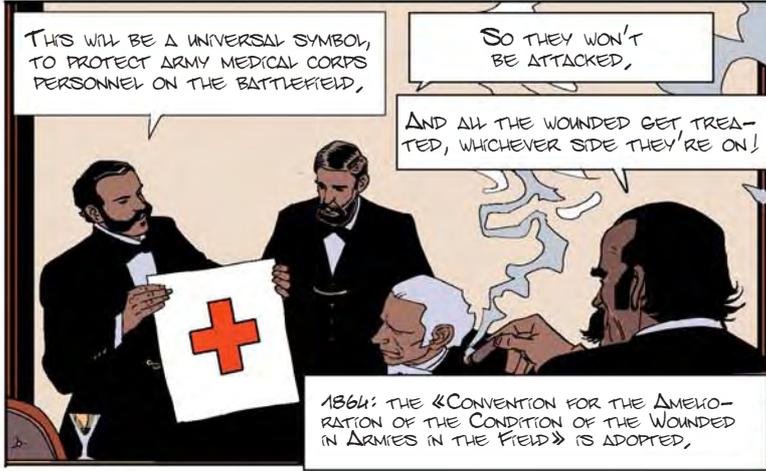
BACK IN HIS NATIVE GENEVA, DUNANT DOESN'T FORGET, IN 1862, HE PUBLISHES A MEMORY OF SOLFERINO. THE BOOK CONTAINS TWO MAJOR IDEAS:
 - SET UP RELIEF COMMITTEES IN TIME OF PEACE TO TRAIN VOLUNTEERS WHO WOULD TREAT THE WOUNDED IN TIME OF WAR (1),
 - DRAW UP AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT THESE COMMITTEES (2).



IN 1863, DUNANT AND FOUR OTHER CITIZENS OF GENEVA FOUNDED THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC),



(1) THIS LED TO THE NATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES,
 (2) THIS FORMED THE BASIS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL).





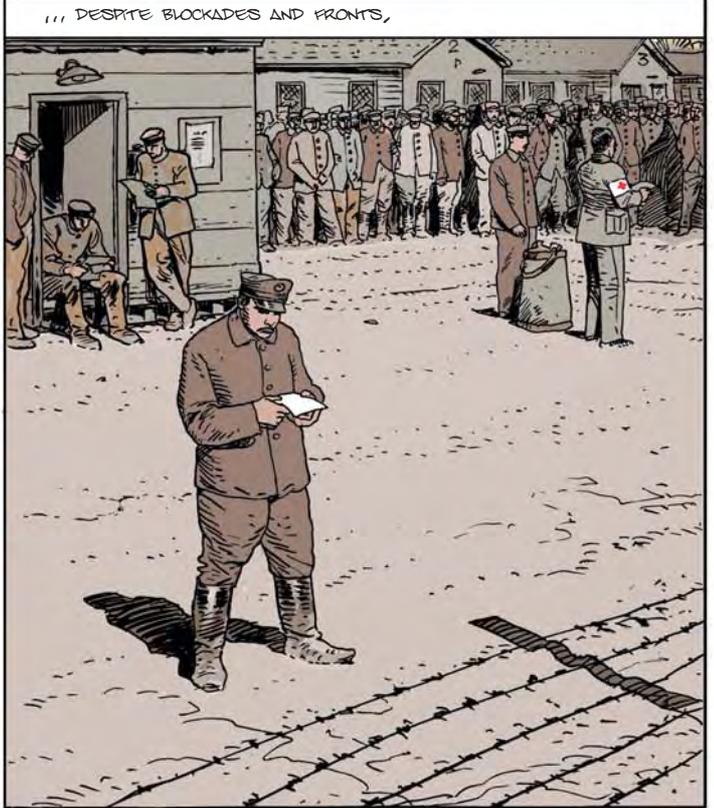
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR, MODERN INDUSTRY IS ABLE TO PRODUCE WEAPONS IN SUCH QUANTITY THAT MILLIONS ARE KILLED, BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIAN, GAS IS USED ON A LARGE SCALE,



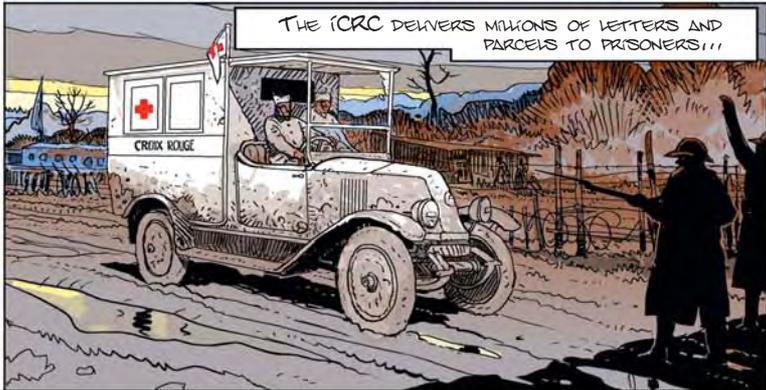
SOME VOLUNTEERS WORK AT THE FRONT,



OTHERS ASSEMBLE PARCELS OF CLOTHING, FOOD, TOBACCO, GLASSES OR MEDICINE,



... DESPITE BLOCKADES AND FRONTS,



THE ICRC DELIVERS MILLIONS OF LETTERS AND PARCELS TO PRISONERS!!!



THE WAR ENDS IN 1918, BUT IT IS FOLLOWED BY A HEALTH DISASTER:

SPANISH FLU KILLS MORE PEOPLE THAN FOUR YEARS OF WAR!



IN 1919, THE NATIONAL SOCIETIES SET UP A «LEAGUE», TO COORDINATE THEIR WORK,

WE HAVE TO LOOK AFTER DISPLACED PERSONS!

... FIGHT FAMINE!...

... AND EPIDEMICS!...

... REBUILD THE HEALTH SERVICES!



THE MOVEMENT BECOMES MORE AND MORE UNIVERSAL,

NEW CONFLICTS BREAK OUT IN SPAIN, ETHIOPIA AND CHINA, CIVILIANS ARE ATTACKED REGULARLY,



THESE VIOLENT CONFLICTS FORESHADOW THE MASS DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1939-1945),

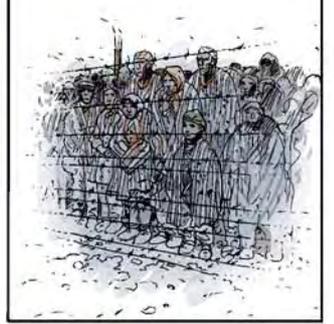
PRISONERS OF WAR RECEIVE OVER 36 MILLION PARCELS AND 110 MILLION LETTERS,



ICRC DELEGATES VISIT PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS TO VERIFY THAT POWS ARE BEING TREATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE 1929 GENEVA CONVENTION,

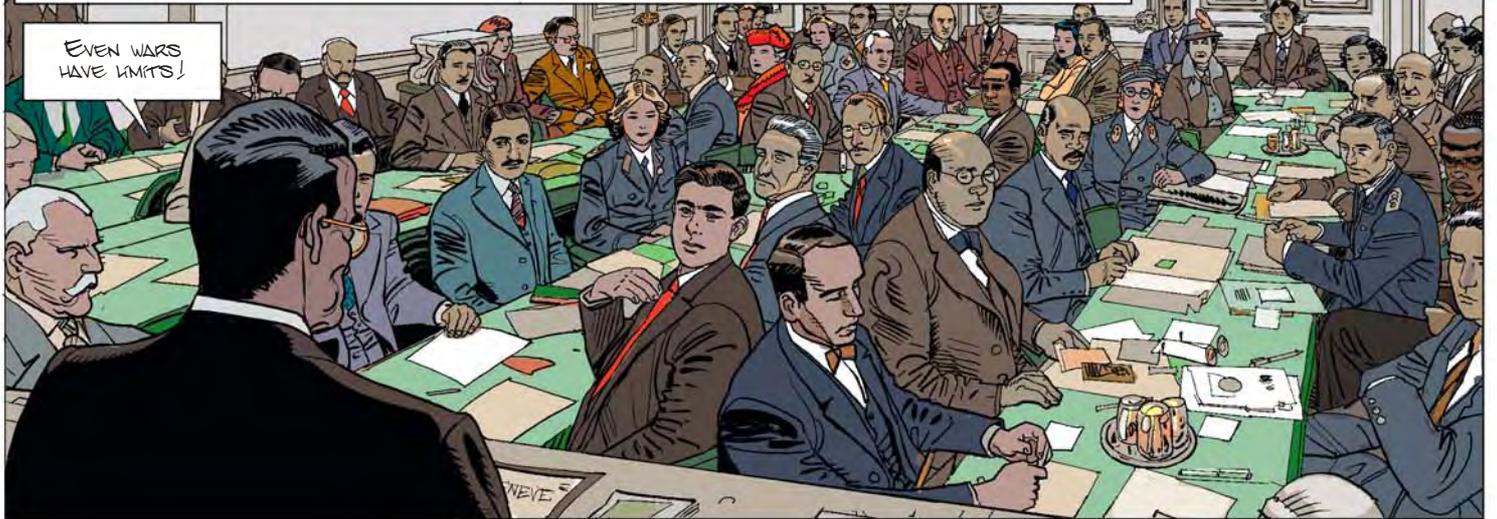


BUT NOBODY PREVENTS THE DELIBERATE KILLING DURING THE WAR OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE, NOTABLY JEWS, THE WORLD REACHES NEW LEVELS OF BARBARITY!!!



IN 1949, STATES REVISE EXISTING HUMANITARIAN LAW TREATIES AND ADOPT A NEW ONE, TO PROTECT CIVILIANS IN TIMES OF WAR, THESE ARE THE FOUR GENEVA CONVENTIONS IN FORCE TODAY,

EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS!



IHL IS BASED ON TWO FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS:

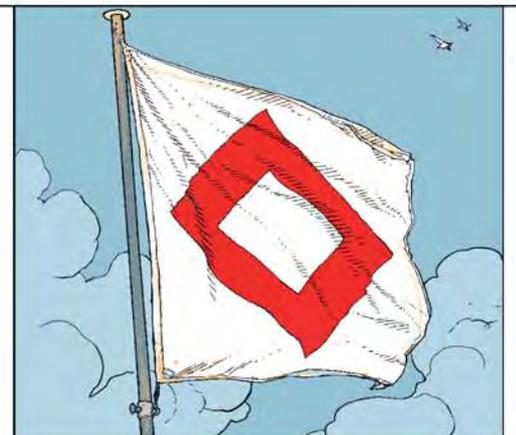


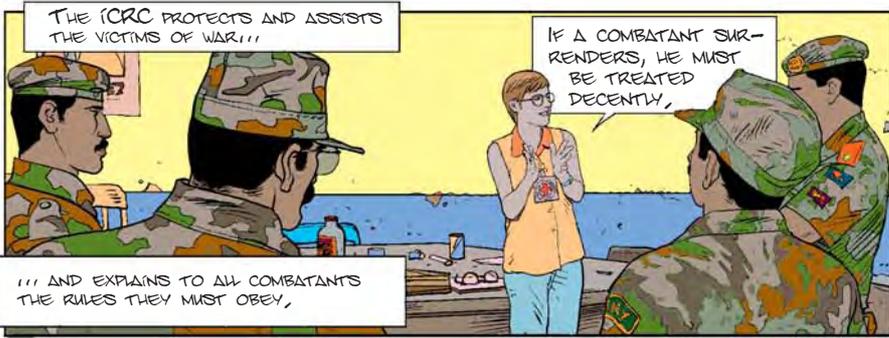
1 PEOPLE WHO AREN'T FIGHTING ARE TO BE PROTECTED,

2 THE CHOICE OF WEAPONS, AND OF METHODS OF WAR, IS LIMITED,



TWO PROTOCOLS ARE ADDED IN 1977 TO THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS, A THIRD PROTOCOL IN 2005 GIVES NATIONAL SOCIETIES THE POSSIBILITY OF USING AN ADDITIONAL EMBLEM: THE RED CRYSTAL,





THE ICRC PROTECTS AND ASSISTS THE VICTIMS OF WAR!!!

IF A COMBATANT SURRENDERS, HE MUST BE TREATED DECENTLY,

... AND EXPLAINS TO ALL COMBATANTS THE RULES THEY MUST OBEY,



VICTIMS OF WAR RECEIVE THE FOOD AND OTHER ITEMS THEY NEED TO SURVIVE,

THERE'S ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE!



WE'VE HEARD THAT SOME OF YOUR FIGHTERS BURNED DOWN A VILLAGE NEAR THE RIVER,

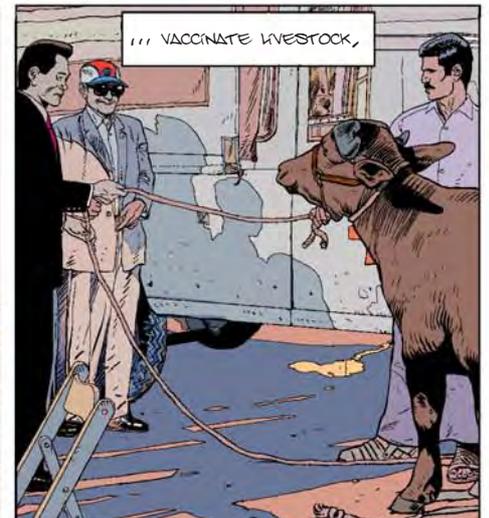
WE'LL DEAL WITH WHOEVER WAS RESPONSIBLE,



MEDICAL TEAMS OPERATE ON CASUALTIES AT THE FRONT,



DELEGATES DIG WELLS!!!



... VACCINATE LIVESTOCK,

ORTHOPAEDIC CENTRES CARE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE LOST LIMBS, OFTEN THROUGH LANDMINES,



SEE, YOU CAN DO IT!

FAMILIES SEPARATED BY WAR USE SATELLITE PHONES OR WRITE RED CROSS MESSAGES TO KEEP IN TOUCH,



AT LAST!

ICRC TRACES MISSING PEOPLE AND REUNITES THEM WITH THEIR FAMILIES,



I MUST REMIND YOU THAT TORTURE AND M-TREATMENT ARE PROHIBITED,



WHERE NECESSARY, DELEGATES TRY TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF DETENTION,

THIS IS HOW WE INTEND TO RENOVATE THE CELLS,

DURING A CONFLICT, THE ICRC MAKES SURE THAT THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF CAPTURED SOLDIERS AND DETAINED CIVILIANS IS RESPECTED,

WORKING AS A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY, THE ICRC CAN REPATRIATE PRISONERS OF WAR AND CIVILIAN INTERNEES AT THE END OF A CONFLICT,



FOR THE ICRC, NATIONAL SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS PLAY A VITAL ROLE, BECAUSE THEY KNOW THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND, WHEN VIOLENCE IS AT ITS WORST, THEY MAY WELL BE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN GET TO THE VICTIMS,



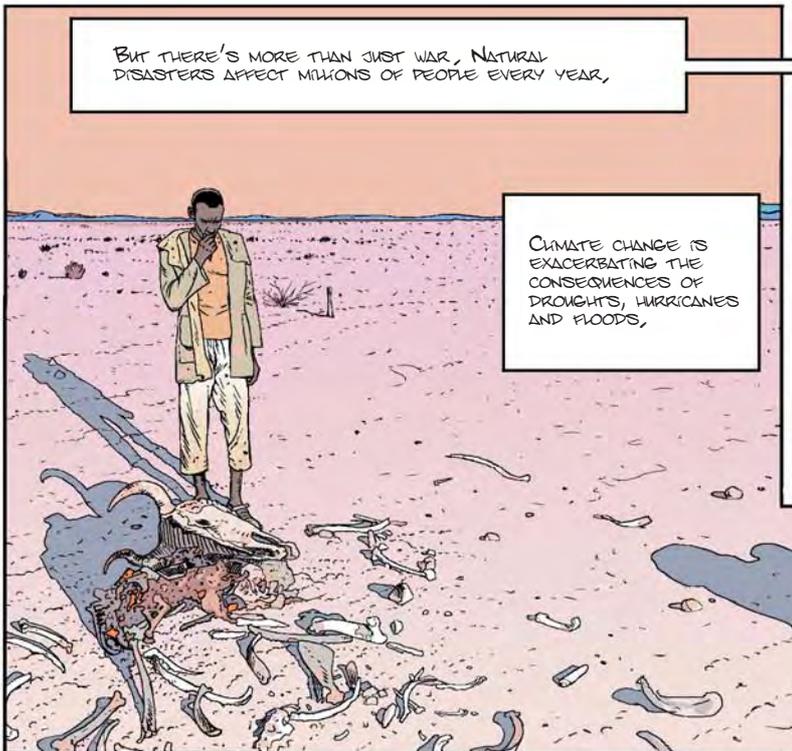
BUT THERE'S MORE THAN JUST WAR, NATURAL DISASTERS AFFECT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE EVERY YEAR,

CLIMATE CHANGE IS EXACERBATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF DROUGHTS, HURRICANES AND FLOODS,

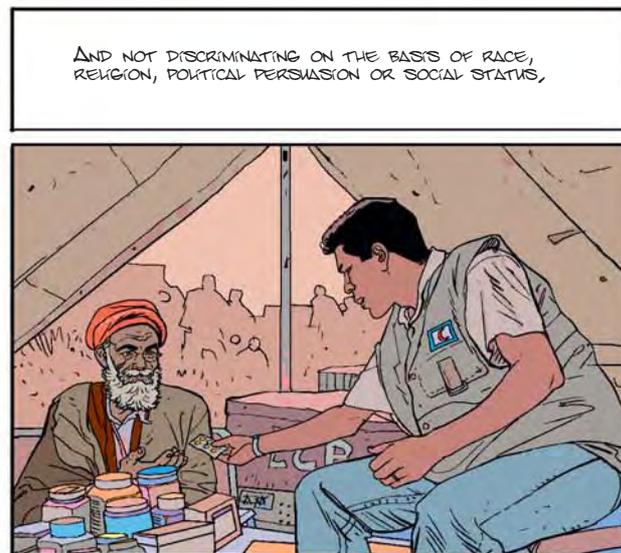
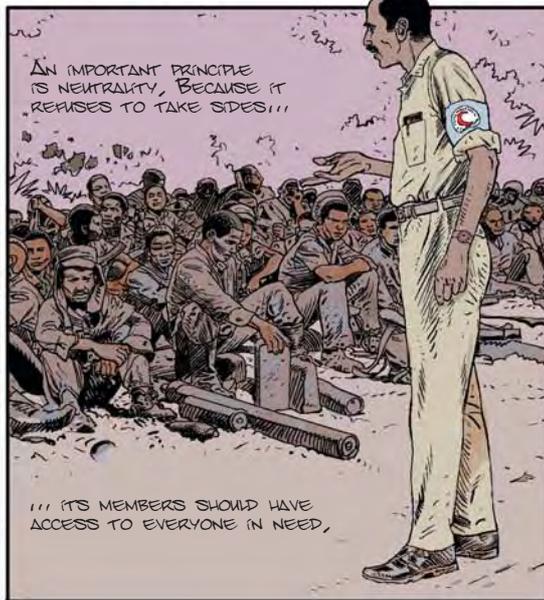
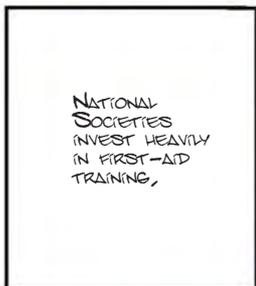
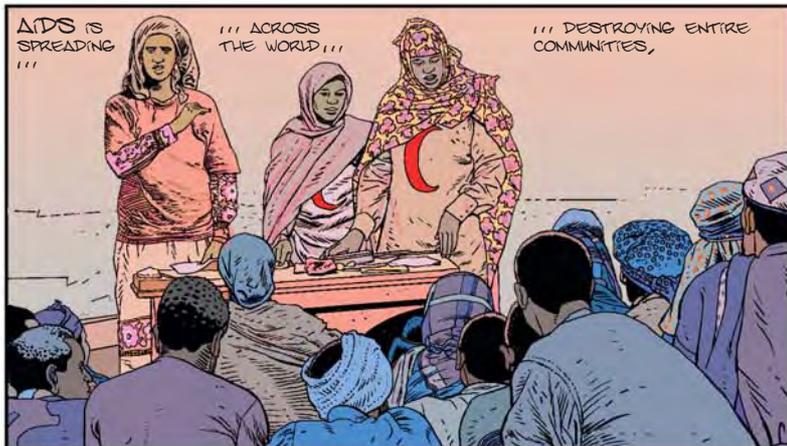
... INCLUDING EARTHQUAKES,



MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THE BASIC RULES OF HYGIENE, THEY HAVE DIFFICULTY OBTAINING ENOUGH SAFE WATER, AND HEALTH CARE IS INADEQUATE,



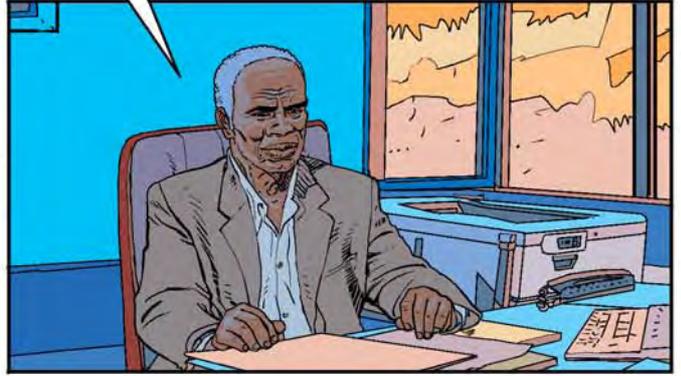
THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES, WHICH SUCCEEDED THE LEAGUE SET UP IN 1919, COORDINATES THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETIES, IT HELPS THEM TO PREPARE FOR AND RESPOND TO EPIDEMICS AND DISASTERS, BOTH NATURAL AND MAN-MADE,



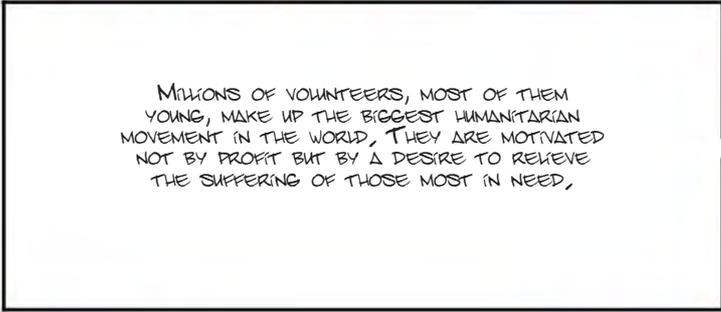
TO ENSURE THAT HELP IS PROVIDED TO ALL, THERE MUST ONLY BE ONE NATIONAL SOCIETY IN ANY GIVEN COUNTRY,



BY BEING OPEN TO ALL, THE NATIONAL SOCIETY AVOIDS ANY TEMPTATION TO HELP ONLY ONE GROUP,



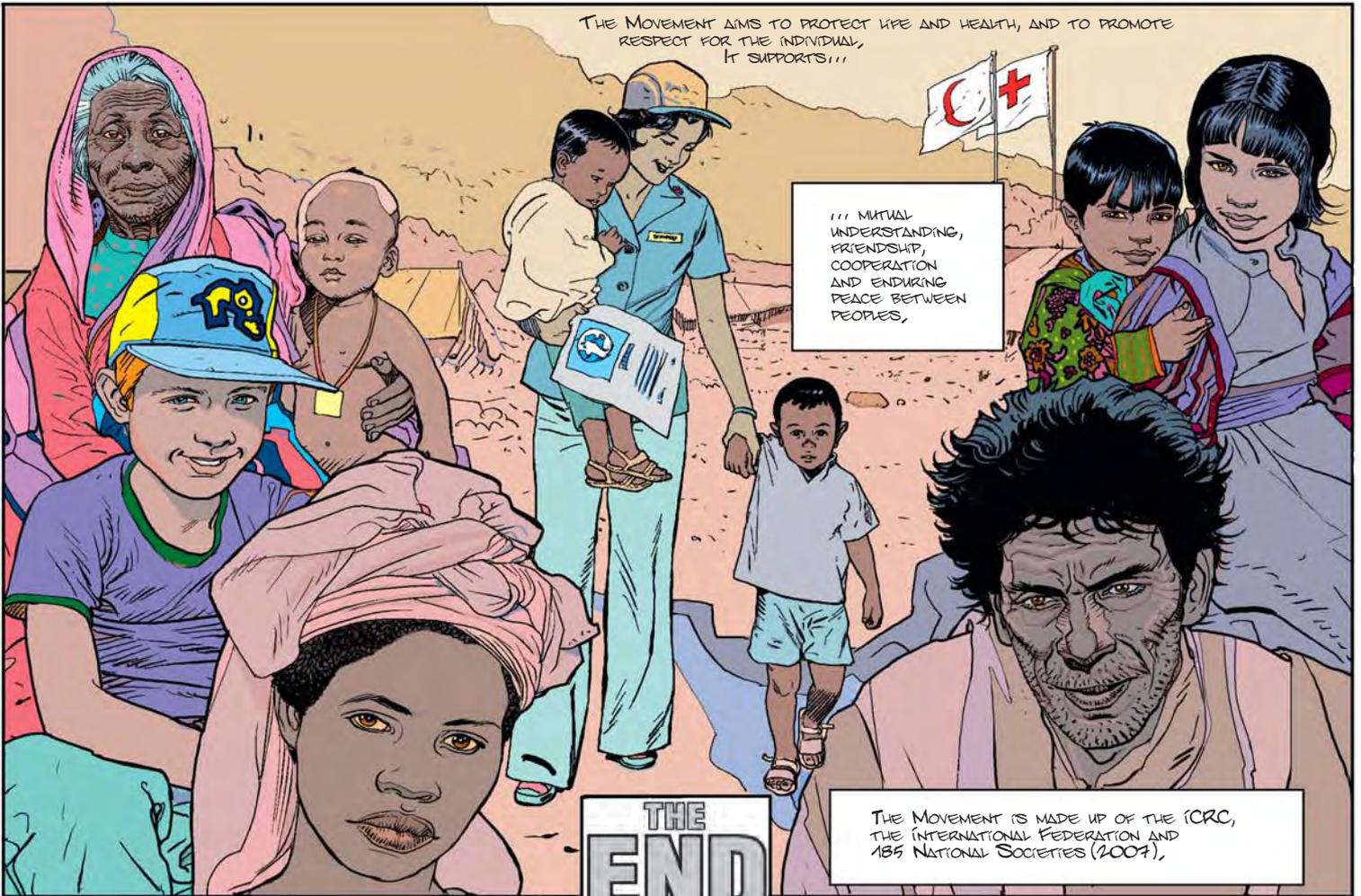
MILLIONS OF VOLUNTEERS, MOST OF THEM YOUNG, MAKE UP THE BIGGEST HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT IN THE WORLD. THEY ARE MOTIVATED NOT BY PROFIT BUT BY A DESIRE TO RELIEVE THE SUFFERING OF THOSE MOST IN NEED,



NATIONAL SOCIETIES HAVE A DUTY TO HELP EACH OTHER,



THE MOVEMENT AIMS TO PROTECT LIFE AND HEALTH, AND TO PROMOTE RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL. IT SUPPORTS:,,,



,,, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, FRIENDSHIP, COOPERATION AND ENDURING PEACE BETWEEN PEOPLES,

**THE
END**

THE MOVEMENT IS MADE UP OF THE ICRC, THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION AND 185 NATIONAL SOCIETIES (2007),

Henry Dunant (1828-1910)

The man whose vision led to the creation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; he went from riches to rags but became joint recipient of the first Nobel peace prize.

Henry Dunant, who was born in Geneva on 8 May 1828, came from a devout and charitable Calvinist family. After incomplete secondary schooling, he was apprenticed to a Geneva bank. In 1853, he travelled to Algeria to take charge of the Swiss colony of Sétif. He started construction of a wheat mill, but could not obtain the land concession that was essential for its operation. After travelling to Tunisia he returned to Geneva, where he decided to approach Napoleon III to obtain the business document he needed.

At the time, the Emperor was commanding the Franco-Sardinian troops fighting the Austrians in northern Italy, and it was there that Henry Dunant decided to seek him out. This was how he came to be present at the end of the battle of Solferino, in Lombardy.

Returning to Geneva, he wrote "A Memory of Solferino", which eventually led to the creation of the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, the future International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Dunant was a member and acted as secretary. He was now famous and was received by heads of State, kings and princes of the European courts. But his financial affairs were floundering and he was declared bankrupt in 1867. Completely ruined, he was in debt for almost a million Swiss francs (1860s value).

As a result of the scandal which this bankruptcy caused in Geneva, he resigned from his post as secretary of the International Committee. On 8 September 1867 the Committee decided to accept his resignation not only as secretary but also as a member. Dunant left for Paris, where he was reduced to sleeping on public benches. At the same time, however, the Empress Eugénie summoned him to the Tuileries Palace in order to consult him on extending the Geneva Convention to naval warfare. Dunant was made an honorary member of the National Red Cross Societies of Austria, Holland, Sweden, Prussia and Spain.

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, he visited and comforted the wounded brought to Paris and introduced the wearing of a badge so that the dead could be identified.

When peace returned, Dunant travelled to London, where he endeavoured to organize a diplomatic conference on the problem of prisoners of war; the Tsar encouraged him but England was hostile to the plan.

Years of poverty

An international congress for the "complete and final abolition of the traffic in Negroes and the slave trade" opened in London on 1 February 1875, on Dunant's initiative. There followed years of wandering and utter poverty for Dunant: he travelled on foot in Alsace, Germany and Italy, living on charity and the hospitality of a few friends.

Finally, in 1887, he ended up in the Swiss village of Heiden, overlooking Lake Constance, where he fell ill. He found refuge in the local hospice, and it was there that he was discovered in 1895 by a journalist, Georg Baumberger, who wrote an article about him which, within a few days, was reprinted in the press throughout Europe. Messages of sympathy reached Dunant from all over the world; overnight he was once more famous and honoured. In 1901, he received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Henry Dunant died on 30 October 1910. The date of his birth, 8 May, is celebrated as World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day.



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