

# RCRC

Red Cross Red Crescent

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**Food security and the Horn of Africa**

The catastrophic convergence of climate and conflict

**Voices of the Arab Spring**

Could this be the dawn of a 'Red Crescent' spring?

**Banning the bomb**

Is the time right to end the era of nuclear weapons?



# The power of humanitarian diplomacy



THE MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

# **The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** is made up of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the National Societies.



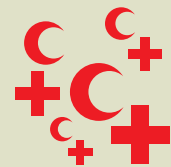
**ICRC**

**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 armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC 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 Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



International Federation of  
Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**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 IFRC 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 works to strengthen their capacity to carry out effective disaster preparedness, health and social programmes.



**National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in more than 186 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.

## **The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

is guided by seven Fundamental Principles:

**humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.**

All Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose:

**to help without discrimination those who suffer and thus contribute to peace in the world.**



# How to ensure respect for the rules of war?

**T**HE IMPLEMENTATION OF international humanitarian law (IHL) has endured mixed fortunes over the last two decades.

The creation of international institutions to enforce the concept of personal criminal responsibility for war crimes — from the ad-hoc tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, to the special court for Sierra Leone and the International Criminal Court (ICC) — raised expectations in the late 1990s about a new era in the implementation of the laws of war.

The optimism faded somewhat with the international response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The subsequent repudiation of fundamental norms, such as the absolute prohibition of torture, were certainly a setback in the implementation of IHL, as was the whole questioning of long-held tenets of the rules of war, such as the distinction between civilians and combatants, and the requirement of proportionality in military response.

In the context of the fight against terrorism and asymmetric warfare, some argued, the traditional laws of war, initially intended to address conflicts between states, looked outdated. One of the most blatant examples over the past decade came in the final months of the civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, when government efforts to eradicate once and for all the Tamil Tiger rebels led the army to indiscriminate shelling on a scale that killed tens of thousands of civilians.

Yet the past decade has not simply been one of setbacks. Somewhat paradoxically, the flouting of the law has made us more conscious of it. There is an increased

*Paradoxically, the flouting of international humanitarian law in the last decade has made many more conscious of its importance.*

awareness of IHL and its requirements both in military circles and among political leaders, as well as the general public. In some theatres, there have been increased efforts at compliance.

The way forward must build on these achievements by encouraging the rebuilding of a consensus on the norms. Consensus increases voluntary compliance, which is much more efficient than coercion as a method of implementation. The ICRC has the leading role to play in the preservation of the integrity of the norms of humanitarianism but also in their modernization. Civil society actors and academics are increasingly engaged in the debates.

Efforts should be focused on increasing the effectiveness of mechanisms of enforcement. This should include a renewed momentum for making the International Criminal Court a truly universal body. The ICC's effectiveness stems from its legitimacy, but this is difficult to achieve in an environment of perceived politicization and double standards.

## Your turn

If you would like to submit an opinion article for consideration, please contact the magazine at [rcrc@ifrc.org](mailto:rcrc@ifrc.org). All views expressed in guest editorials are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement or this magazine.



Photo: Jean-Marc Ferre/United Nations

There have also been sensible calls for a universal monitoring body. The idea, expressed by US author and associate professor of political science Charlie Carpenter and others, would be to establish an institution that does for IHL what the International Atomic Energy Agency does for non-proliferation and the World Health Organization does for medical standards by providing an independent authority to investigate claims of violations of IHL on the ground. This could serve to concentrate and professionalize the fact-finding and inquiry initiatives that have proliferated in recent years, at times with insufficient impact.

The ultimate objective must be, of course, the prevention of armed conflict. Political engagement, humanitarian presence and human rights protection all play a part in reducing the deadly consequences of warfare. But as long as war continues to be waged, the implementation of rules of universal application on the conduct of combat remains a significant and essential challenge.

By **Louise Arbour**

Louise Arbour is the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a former Justice of the Canadian Supreme Court and a former chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunals, for both the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. She now serves as president of the International Crisis Group, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)

# In brief...

## New National Society in South Sudan

With South Sudan gaining its independence at the beginning of July, the southern part of the Sudanese Red Crescent separated to form a new National Society, the South Sudan Red Cross.

Just as the new country faces many challenges to its development, with limited infrastructure for health services, the new National Society also needs to establish itself.

Many of the volunteers who have already signed up joined in the National Society's first official act — first-aid assistance during the independence celebrations. With sweltering temperatures, the volunteers attended to hundreds of people who fainted due to sunstroke or dehydration.

"We're looking forward to becoming a really well-functioning National Society," says volunteer Latio Kudus Clement, who served as branch manager for the Sudanese Red Crescent in Juba, South Sudan's largest city and the headquarters for the new National Society. "At the moment, we lack people and expertise. But it will come."



Photo: Connor Ashleigh/IFRC

## 1.5 million affected by Bangladesh floods

Bangladesh was battered by storms and floods in August and September, with approximately 1.5 million people affected. Families and individuals have had their homes devastated, forcing them to seek out alternative, ad-hoc accommodation. "What are we to do?" asks Tuhin, a local schoolteacher. "Every single house was flooded. There are hundreds of us forced to the edge of the roadside. We need help!"

More than 1,100 homes in these villages were either destroyed or heavily damaged and, with so much stagnant water, the risk of disease is high. At an evacuation centre in the village of Shener Ghati, a man named Fazular tells a familiar story: "I came here 20 days ago with my wife and three children," he says. "My home was totally destroyed. All is gone, all is gone."

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, with support from an IFRC appeal and emergency funds, has provided a wide range of assistance, from medical care to food, water, cash grants and provisional shelter.

## Volunteer gives life to save others

By the dim light of his torch, 32-year-old Han Sun Il could just see the two children hanging out of the window. The children were crying and desperately shouting for help as flood waters rose around their home during floods that ravaged the area in late July.

Seeing that the house could be washed away at any moment, the volunteer for the Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea jumped into the swirling water to rescue the children.



Women in Pakistan's southern Sindh province inspect their cotton crops after the region was hit hard by monsoon rains that started in August, affecting more than 5.3 million people. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society, the IFRC and other Movement actors responded by providing food, shelter, sanitation and medical assistance. Photo: Olivier Matthys/IFRC/PRCS

After managing to get the 3-year-old girl from the half-destroyed house — one of many that succumbed to floods in South Hwanghae province this summer — he returned to fetch the 11-year-old boy.

But the water was running deeper and faster. Stumbling, falling and being carried away by the churning stream, he reached the house across the stormy water. On the way back, the water rose almost to his chest and he struggled for another 30 minutes to get to shore.

After pushing the boy to land, the exhausted volunteer was swept away. "I don't feel as though Han has departed from us. He will be forever in the heart of my family and neighbours," said Ji Yon Ok, the children's mother. "From now on, his daughter is my daughter. My husband and I will become Red Cross volunteers to help other people."

## Movement deplors killing of Syrian Red Crescent first-aider

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement called for greater protection of health care workers after it learned of the death of Hakam Sibai, who was killed when the Red Crescent ambulance he was riding in was struck by 31 bullets in the city of Homs on 7 September.

The incident took place while Sibai and two other Red Crescent volunteers were on duty taking an injured person to hospital. The two other Syrian Red Crescent volunteers were badly wounded in the incident.

Volunteers and staff of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have been providing critical humanitarian assistance in recent months, including in the remotest areas of Syria.

The ICRC and IFRC "join together in calling all those involved in the violence to strictly respect and facilitate the work of the Red Crescent staff and volunteers at all times in order to enable them to carry out their urgent humanitarian mission in an impartial manner", according to a joint statement.

## Norwegian Red Cross mobilized after deadly shootings

In the wake of mass shootings on the island of Utøya, in Norway, volunteers from the Norwegian Red Cross helped search-and-rescue operations and supported relatives of those affected and young people across the country. "The youths and their relatives, friends and everyone around them have been through an experience in the last few days that is impossible for the rest of us to comprehend," said Sven Mollekleiv, president of the Norwegian Red Cross.

## Humanitarian index

**4:** Number of Libyan Red Crescent volunteers killed in the last six months

**30:** Percentage of population malnourished in drought affected areas in the Horn of Africa

**35:** Epidemics of cholera, polio, meningitis, yellow fever and other communicable diseases responded to by Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies in 2010\*

**50,000:** People on Colombia's registry of missing persons\*\*

**281,453:** People living with HIV and orphans who received psychosocial support by Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies during 2010\*

**440,000:** Approximate population of Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp near the Somali border

Sources: \*IFRC/Health in numbers \*\*ICRC

## Quotes of note

*"Our new Red Cross is born to shine in the heart of Africa, let's work for humanity."*

Excerpt from the new anthem of the South Sudan Red Cross, sung during independence celebrations to mark the birth of the Republic of South Sudan.



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## ■ Cover story

### Speaking up for humanity

Ever since Henry Dunant wrote *Memories of Solferino*, humanitarian action has had two fronts: direct relief and diplomatic action. As the Movement meets with governments during the 31st International Conference in Geneva in November, humanitarian diplomacy takes on international humanitarian law, health care, nuclear weapons, disaster law, support for National Societies, protection of volunteers and more. In the field, humanitarian diplomacy means speaking up for the vulnerable in the halls of power. Our coverage begins in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with a story about Movement diplomacy at the African Union.

### The art of persuasion

The dynamic team at the Australian Red Cross engages government, donors and the public in vital social issues without getting caught up in politics of the day.

## ■ Focus

### Desperate hunger

The tragic confluence of conflict and prolonged drought has made the food insecurity crisis in the Horn of Africa one of the Movement's most difficult humanitarian and diplomatic challenges: how to provide millions of people with life-saving aid while advocating for long-term, locally based food solutions?

## ■ Weapons

### Banning the bomb

The nuclear brinkmanship of the Cold War may be over, but worries over proliferation of nuclear weapons are creating a new opportunity for diplomacy towards their prohibition and eventual elimination. The Movement is playing a central role in the debate.

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## ■ Disaster preparedness

### Unnatural disasters

Oil spills, radiation leaks, chemical fires — these are just a few of the man-made emergencies that National Societies sometimes confront. In the wake of the Fukushima nuclear emergency, *Red Cross Red Crescent* magazine asked IFRC President Tadateru Konoé what the Movement should do to better prepare for technological disasters.

## ■ Humanitarian values

### Voices of the Arab Spring

As political turmoil and conflict continue to reshape societies throughout North Africa and the Middle East, Red Crescent National Societies have also had to redefine themselves as governments fell and National Societies were pushed to the limits of their capacity. First in a series.

## ■ Health care in danger

### Care along the Caguan

In remote areas of Colombia, ICRC teams travel by boat on the Caguan River to deliver health care to vulnerable communities in areas plagued by armed violence. Some people in these isolated river towns say they feel as if they "have no right to get sick".

## ■ National Society development

### Bridging the digital divide

When it comes to digital technology among National Societies, there is a big gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Nonetheless, some National Societies are doing a lot with a little, while the IFRC hopes to bridge the divide. A story in a chart.

## ■ Resources

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of researchers and support staff of the ICRC, the IFRC and National Societies.

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The maps in this publication are for information purposes only and have no political significance.

**On the cover:** Humanitarianism has always had two sides:

direct assistance to those in need and advocacy for humanitarian principles. Photo credit: Jakob Dall/Danish Red Cross; Mike Segar/Reuters, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org); MM Studios/Ian Nixon

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# Speaking up for humanity

**A voice for vulnerable people in the halls of power, Movement diplomacy ranges from rapid response during emergencies to support for long-term solutions and humanitarian values. Movement efforts at the African Union offer a case in point.**

As fighting erupted in Libya, the ICRC talked with all parties to gain access to areas of conflict and ensure that health-care workers were protected. Here, an ambulance passes rebel fighters in Ajdabiyah, Libya, April 2011.

Photo: REUTERS/Esam al-Fetori, courtesy www.alertnet.org

**A**S UNREST BOILED OVER into all-out civil war in Libya this past spring, the ICRC quickly deployed medical teams and sent other relief supplies to areas in the eastern part of the country where it could gain access.

Side by side with local medics and Libyan Red Crescent volunteers in Benghazi hospitals, ICRC surgical teams put on their light-blue scrubs and white surgical masks and got to work: performing triage,

removing shrapnel and treating the injuries of people wounded in the fighting.

At the same time, another lesser-known humanitarian response had also shifted into high gear. Roughly 3,700 kilometres (2,300 miles) to the south-east, at the headquarters of the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a team of ICRC delegates had been working on a different front, having urgent discussions with all parties to the conflict to obtain safe access to areas still unreached by outside medical or other humanitarian assistance.

At stake were the lives of thousands of people caught inside the escalating conflict, but with limited access to doctors, medical care or other help. Vincent Ochilet, the deputy head of ICRC delegation to the African Union, recalls patiently waiting outside a meeting in March held between the AU and representatives of the Gaddafi administration. "We just waited around all day in the AU corridors to talk with one of Gaddafi's representatives in order to







make sure that the ICRC extends its activities to the areas controlled by Gaddafi's troops," he says.

This was just one of many diplomatic efforts launched by ICRC internationally to gain greater access to the conflict zone and to ensure protection for health-care and other aid workers. At the AU, the ICRC's status as permanent observer affords unique access to decision-makers during emergencies.

That doesn't mean it's easy even to get an audience — or that you always get the results you hope for. "You have to be patient doing humanitarian diplomacy," says Ochilet.

### Humanitarian diplomacy in action

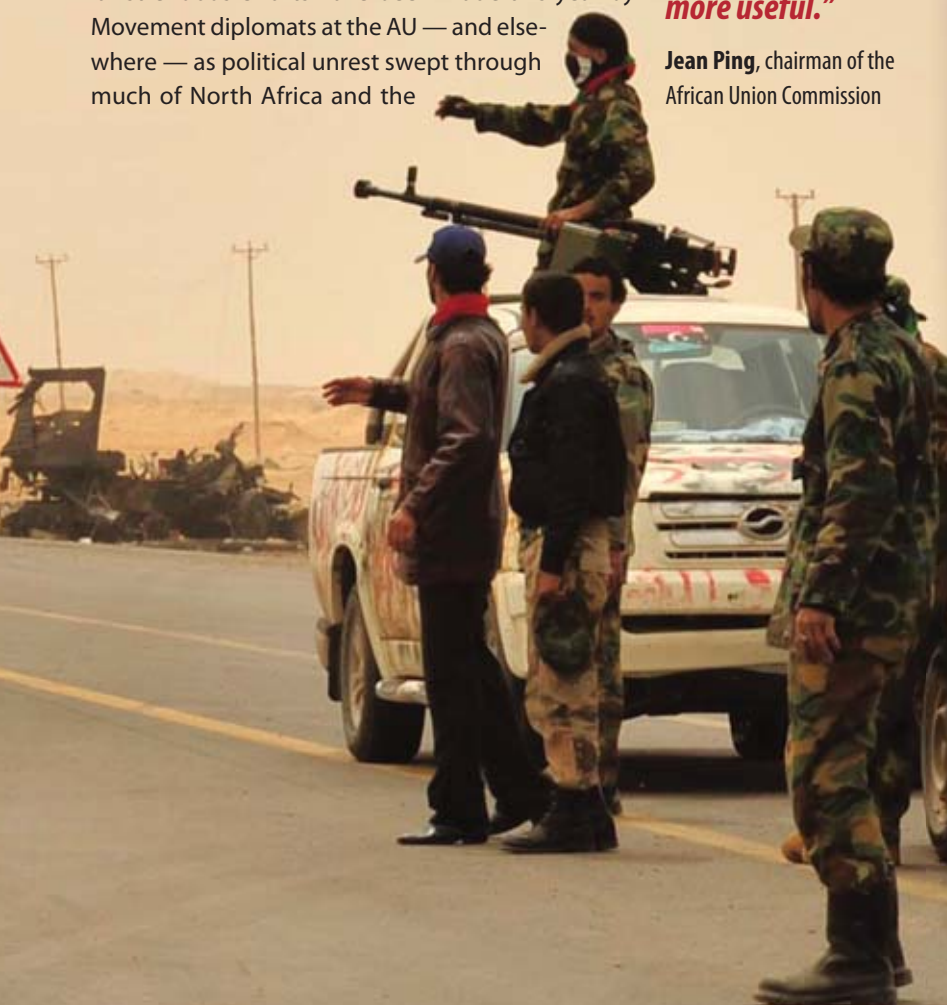
This is one example of humanitarian diplomacy in action during a rapidly evolving emergency. Similar strenuous efforts have been made this year by Movement diplomats at the AU — and elsewhere — as political unrest swept through much of North Africa and the

Protection for displaced people is a priority for the ICRC African Union delegation in Addis Ababa. Here, women displaced by fighting and famine in southern Somalia rush into a government feeding centre.

Photo: REUTERS/Stuart Price, courtesy www.alertnet.org

***"When you see anyone coming with proof... the impact is different and more useful."***

**Jean Ping**, chairman of the African Union Commission



# The two sides of humanitarian action



The term 'humanitarian diplomacy' has only recently entered the lexicon of international relief organizations. But the idea is far from new. One could say it

began as soon as Henry Dunant returned from Solferino, Italy in 1859, when the horrifying aftermath of war inspired what is now the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

Armed with what was in a sense the Movement's first advocacy report — his book *Memories of Solferino* — Dunant tirelessly lobbied friends, kings, generals, prime ministers and fellow businessmen to help him develop the framework for a volunteer movement and a system of codes to protect civilians and the wounded during battle.

"Since its inception, the Red Cross Red Crescent has been engaged in humanitarian diplomacy," notes Stephen Omollo, IFRC's lead humanitarian diplomat in Africa. "It is basically persuading key decision-makers to act at all times to alleviate human suffering."

Today, 152 years after Solferino, the issues we confront are more complex, the methods of persuasion more diverse and the messages we bring are based on a body of humanitarian law of which Dunant could only dream. Still, the fundamental message is the same — protect the vulnerable, care for those in need, respect the rules of war.

"ICRC humanitarian diplomacy is about raising awareness about the plight of the victims of armed conflicts and the necessity of all parties taking part in hostilities to respect international humanitarian law," says Vincent Ochilet, deputy head of ICRC's delegation to the African Union, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This year, humanitarian diplomacy takes on particular urgency as the Movement holds its 2011 statutory meetings: the Council of Delegates, the IFRC's General Assembly and, finally, the 31st International Conference, the "supreme deliberative body for the Movement" and a key chance to consult with state signatories to the Geneva Conventions.

At the top of the agenda: strengthening international humanitarian law, improving international disaster response law, protection of health workers during conflict, equal access to health services, supporting local humanitarian action and promotion of non-violence, among other key issues.

Faced with myriad new challenges, from climate change to new weapons technology or the rise of non-state armed groups, the Movement will need to bring all its diplomatic skills to bear as it seeks to address these issues and keep the fundamental humanitarian values — pioneered by Dunant and his followers — alive in the 21st century.

Middle East, as violence in Côte d'Ivoire led to massive displacement of people into Liberia, and as the ongoing Horn of Africa crisis descended into a regional, complex emergency.

In all cases, Movement actors have to work on two fronts: publicly and privately advocating for a robust response to urgent needs, while at the same time, promoting long-term solutions as well as adherence to international humanitarian law (IHL) and regional agreements that protect the displaced.

Fortunately, a more solid legal foundation for the protection of displaced people throughout Africa is emerging. In 2009, the AU (with ICRC assistance) adopted the Kampala Convention, the first-ever international treaty for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across an entire continent.

Otherwise known as "The AU Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced People", the treaty contains important provisions for respect of IHL that bind both state and non-state actors.

The ICRC's Addis delegation has been involved in the drafting process on IHL-related matters from the outset. But the work is far from over. The challenge now is to assist the AU in promoting and, ultimately, implementing the convention. At the levels of African Regional Economic Communities and member states, the ICRC is available to assist in the ratification, domestication and entry into force of the convention.

"This effort is unique and coming from the countries themselves," says Catherine Gendre, the head of ICRC's delegation to the AU. This type of diplomacy also takes patience even after most actors have agreed to the basic framework. For example, IDPs do not yet benefit from the landmark 2009 agreement "because it always takes time to have states sign and ratify instruments of law". Around half of the required 15 nations have adopted the convention so far, according to Gendre.

## Turning point

Established almost 20 years ago, the ICRC delegation to the AU was created with a view to advising the bloc on humanitarian issues based on both IHL and evidence gathered on the ground by its field operatives. It is also involved in a number of other activities, including working with key panels on the protection of conflict-affected women and children. Last year, it contributed to an international symposium on AU draft guidelines on the protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations.

The delegation is also able to raise and discuss humanitarian concerns with the Peace and Security Council (PSC) during monthly meetings and, through a legal expert seconded to the Peace and Security Department, help the AU Commission integrate IHL into policies and activities.

***"If civil society is not up at the forefront with these issues, then no action is taken. So we are trying to bring pressure to bear to influence change at the highest level possible."***

**Stephen Omollo**, head of IFRC's delegation to the African Union



📍 African Union Commission Chairman Jean Ping and Somalia's President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed arrive in Addis Ababa in late August for an African Union summit on famine in Somalia and drought across the Horn of Africa. Photo: REUTERS/Stringer, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

For El Ghassim Wane, director of the powerful PSC, a turning point in the arrangement was the coordinated 1995 effort for the union to ban all landmines. "We agreed to undertake three workshops, which led to a decision by the African Union calling for a total ban on all landmines," he says. "It was extremely helpful working with the ICRC combining its expertise and knowledge of landmines with our capacity to bring member states together. Since then we have continued to work together on a range of issues, especially humanitarian law."

## An underfunded crisis

The IFRC and National Societies also work closely with key institutions and decision-makers at the AU. This year, the IFRC established a permanent presence in Ethiopia's capital after moving its continental humanitarian diplomacy operation out of Johannesburg, South Africa into the corridors of the African Union.

"If I want to make a difference I need to engage at the very highest level," explains Stephen Omollo, the IFRC's top Africa humanitarian diplomat. "If civil society is not up at the forefront with these issues, then no action is taken. So we are trying to bring pressure to bear to influence change at the highest level possible."

This past summer, the Addis delegations faced another humanitarian test, one just as dire and difficult as the Libya conflict. As drought and conflict pushed thousands of people from Somalia into neighbouring countries and arid conditions exacerbated food

📍 In times of conflict, treatment of detainees is part of the ICRC Addis Ababa delegation's work on behalf of international humanitarian law. Here, fighters sit inside a prison in Benghazi, Libya. Photo: REUTERS/Suhaib Salem/courtesy, [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)





insecurity throughout the region, representatives of the AU's 54 member states gathered for a pledging conference for the estimated 12.4 million people in the Horn of Africa in need of emergency assistance.

Media coverage of the event lambasted the poor turnout of four heads of state and for the insufficient funds (US\$ 51 million) donated by African governments. For the Movement, the Horn of Africa crisis has posed a unique diplomatic challenge: a complex and neglected emergency that had been foreseen by many, but for which there has been a lethargic and somewhat jaded international media and donor response.

With IFRC's global emergency appeals still falling short of goals (the Kenya drought appeal was 28 per cent funded at press time), the organization's efforts at the AU dovetailed with IFRC's global and very public call for greater emergency response, as well as sustainable solutions to recurrent drought cycles that could and should become a greater staple of development aid (see Focus, page 12).

This message was echoed by Omollo as he continued to work behind the scenes at the AU to reinforce the message in one-on-one meetings. In one example, he and a colleague held a meeting with the president of Somalia, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, in which they raised the issues of government support for the Somali Red Crescent Society's operations and "ensuring we have a twin-track approach of relief work and development".

National Societies also play a role in raising public awareness, which can in turn inspire action in both the public and private sphere. The Kenya Red Cross, for example, worked with regional telecom companies to create 'Kenyans for Kenya', a campaign by which people donate via cell phones. At press time, the campaign had raised more than US\$10 million, offering a funding model for emergency relief and long-term food security that gives businesses and ordinary citizens a role in affecting change.

### Local credibility

One advantage of building close ties with regional bodies is that the diplomatic delegations are relatively close to the field. This enhances credibility and allows for a responsive, evidence-based approach.

"Our diplomacy is based on the reality on the ground, so it's something that is always linked to a specific situation — it's factual," Gendre says. "If I have to brief the president of the Peace and Security Council, I will try to have maximum amount of information from my colleagues in the field."

The chairman of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, confirms that embellishment and exaggeration are not part of the ICRC's modus operandi. "When you see anyone coming with proof, with information like the ICRC has, the impact is different and more useful," he says.



Thousands of people have been making the treacherous journey from the areas in Somalia worst-hit by drought, which are mostly under the control of rebels, to Mogadishu. An internally displaced man carries his son, suffering from cholera, into the paediatric ward at Mogadishu's Banadir hospital.

Photo: REUTERS/Alessandro Bianchi, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

***"If I have to brief the president of the Peace and Security Council, I will try to have the maximum amount of information from my colleagues in the field."***

**Catherine Gendre**, head of the ICRC's delegation to the African Union

The technique of speaking softly but carrying a big reputation allows the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement to address thorny subjects directly and effectively. "The quiet diplomacy approach does not mean that we are not able to talk about difficult issues," says the IFRC's Omollo. "We can talk about difficult issues, but in a less threatening manner."

### Less noise, more impact

Quiet diplomacy doesn't mean that the Movement is opaque in all its diplomatic efforts. For example, the ICRC often raises issues very publicly in cases where violations of IHL go unaddressed or access is impeded. Movement players are also often very public and transparent when raising the cry for an emergency appeal, shepherding new legislation or confronting world leaders.

Still, confidentiality is a critical diplomatic tool, particularly for the ICRC, which has a mandate to advise governments on compliance with IHL. "I believe the way the ICRC works is quite different from others in terms of confidentiality," Ochilet says. "Confidentiality opens a lot of doors for the ICRC. People are aware that we try and change things by talking face-to-face to governments, not going to Voice of America or CNN to disclose everything we have seen."

The Movement's position of political neutrality and its practice of advising governments confidentially sometimes invites criticism that it provides succour to malign governments by failing to disclose information of vital public interest.

"Yes, sometimes we are criticized, but the thing is to explain why we do it this way," says the ICRC's Gendre. "If you want to have access to detainees, you have to gain and keep the trust of those who are doing the detaining. You can't spoil this trust, otherwise you will not have access again."

The AU Commission's Jean Ping agrees that in Africa, this form of quiet diplomacy is more effective than the megaphone approach. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, he says, makes "less noise, but has more impact". ■

By **William Davison**

William Davison is a freelance reporter based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

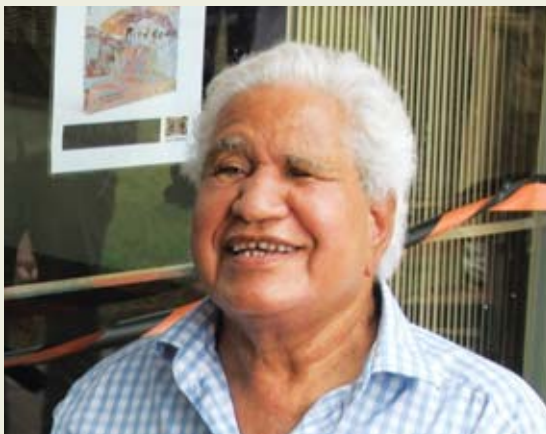
# The art of persuasion

The Australian Red Cross' humanitarian diplomacy team balances bold public campaigning with behind-the-scenes persuasion on issues ranging from asylum and migration to nuclear weapons, aboriginal issues and more.

**Y**AMI LESTER IS NEARLY 70, but being an Aboriginal baby from the South Australia bush, his exact birth date is unknown. His first language was and still is Yakuytjatjara — English came much later — so, even if he had heard them, he would not have understood the patrol officers who came in 1953 to tell the elders at his Walatina homeland that the British would be carrying out nuclear tests at Emu Junction, about 160 kilometres (100 miles) south as the crow flies.

What Lester, as a “wee high” child of 10, heard on the morning of 15 October was a big bang. He felt the ground shake and saw a shiny black plume of smoke heading his way from the south across the mulga bushes. He thought he was witnessing a *mamu*, an evil spirit. His ‘mob’, or tribe, fell sick: vomiting, diarrhoea and skin rashes. Lester had “really sore” eyes. Four years later, he was totally blind.

The Royal Commission into British Nuclear Testing in Australia in 1985 proved there was radiation fallout, but Lester, now white-haired, shows no rancour as he



70-year-old Yami Lester went blind after fallout from British nuclear tests blew through his Australian outback community in the 1950s. Photo: Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association



Forcing children to fight a war is criminal



EVEN WARSHAVE LAWS  
[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

sits, with his female carer and walking frame nearby, in the backyard of a private Alice Springs home in central Australia, to which he travels for medical care.

This soft-spoken elder has himself become a quiet diplomat of sorts on the issue of nuclear weapons. He wants to tell his story and help the Australian Red Cross to ‘Make Nuclear Weapons the Target’, a campaign embarked upon following a meeting in Oslo in May 2011 co-sponsored by the Australian, Japanese and Norwegian Red Cross societies that began





In addition to high-level humanitarian diplomacy, the Australian Red Cross takes its message to the streets. These life-sized posters, along with full-sized cut-outs, were placed in public squares as part of its 'Even Wars Have Rules' campaign.

try to highlight the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and encourage people to raise their voice on this issue via social media such as Facebook.

It will be a long campaign. Tickner, however, is hopeful that the Movement can agree upon a strong position on these weapons at the upcoming Council of Delegates. He notes that the Movement has often spoken out on this topic since 1945. Like much of the Australian Red Cross' work, particularly over the past decade, this is more than a public campaign. It's part of a broad approach to humanitarian diplomacy that involves persuading all sectors of society — from the general public to parliamentarians and decision-makers — to put into action the society's humanitarian concerns.

Undeniably, Tickner and Brisbane-based lawyer Greg Vickery, who was elected chairman of the Australian Red Cross in 2003 (the title changed to president in 2010), have worked hard to invigorate their national society, developing a nationally cohesive organization under the authority of a national board while remaining mindful of the talent at the grass-roots level.

Some of the bold work in pursuing a new level of humanitarian diplomacy has occasionally included graphic visual statements to highlight significant humanitarian concerns, such as the prohibition on torture or the illegality of using child soldiers. For instance, in the streets of Australia's state capitals, the Red Cross has placed cardboard cut-outs of children holding machine guns to draw attention to child soldiers, and blood-red-splattered white chairs and

a fresh push for further laws to confirm the illegality of using nuclear weapons.

"When they told me the big boss was Robert," says Lester, rubbing his hands and smiling generously, "I thought, 'Oh yeah, I'll talk.'"

Robert is Robert Tickner, the Melbourne-based chief executive of the Australian Red Cross since 2005. He was also the longest-serving minister in the nation's Aboriginal affairs portfolio and a member of the federal Labor Ministry from 1990 to 1996. He is thus well placed not only to lead the Australian Red Cross' ambitious push to put an end to nuclear warfare but also to draw attention to another Red Cross priority area: improving the poor health of many of Australia's often marginalized indigenous people, whose life expectancy at birth is on average 20 years shorter than other Australians.

### Speak softly, with a loud voice

That evening in the Alice Springs township, Tickner addresses one of dozens of public meetings the Australian Red Cross is holding around the coun-

## The responsibility to persuade

As the humanitarian landscape grows more complex — with more actors, more frequent disasters, greater competition for resources and growing dangers facing humanitarian and beneficiaries — there has been rising awareness of the need to enhance humanitarian diplomacy.

When the General Assembly of the IFRC adopted *Strategy 2020* in 2009, it identified humanitarian diplomacy as one of three enabling actions central to the strategy's success. The subsequent adoption of the IFRC's *Humanitarian Diplomacy Policy* reflects "a new institutional commitment to practise humanitarian diplomacy with greater consistency across the membership".

Meanwhile, more National Societies are investing in humanitarian diplomacy: adopting plans and policies, as well as hiring humanitarian diplomacy focal points. "National Societies are best placed to persuade decision-makers and opinion-leaders to act in the interests of the vulnerable," says Goli Ameri, IFRC's under-secretary general for humanitarian values and diplomacy. "As auxiliaries to public authorities, they have the access to national and local governments."

But National Societies also face many challenges, according to a recent IFRC survey of National Society diplomatic readiness. The external obstacles include lack of government transparency and misunderstandings about, or lack of interest in, the work of the National Society.

The internal challenges include retaining trained staff, making effective use of the auxiliary role, lack of resources, defining areas of focus, inconsistent evidence-gathering and reporting systems, and a need to improve networking, lobbying and communications skills. The IFRC is developing tools to help, some of which can now be found on FedNet, where National Societies are sharing diplomatic successes and frustrations.



📍 The Australian Red Cross humanitarian diplomacy team: CEO Robert Tickner and President Greg Vickery. Photo: Sebastien Calmus/IFRC

📍 Humanitarian law professor and adviser Helen Durham. Photo: Australian Red Cross

dummies with hooded heads and rope nooses to highlight torture.

### Thin red line

But such campaigns, say Tickner and Vickery, are staged at carefully chosen times to avoid being seen as partisan responses to debates in parliament. Helen Durham, the Australian Red Cross' head of international law and principles, says the aim is to focus the public discourse and analysis on the implications for international humanitarian law (IHL) and humanitarian issues — not on political considerations.

She's the first to admit it's only human to want to speak first with the heart. "Every now and then I think, 'Imagine the freedom to go out there and say what I feel,'" she says. "I'm passionate and committed to the work we do, but I deeply understand the need to have a line in the Red Cross. We can be as creative, innovative and exciting as we can, but always within the fundamental principles followed by the Red Cross and Red Crescent everywhere in the world."

The pay-off for keeping within those principles is that the Australian Red Cross can — and does — get to make more specific private suggestions and express concerns, and gains access to areas of government where other organizations that are publicly critical find the door closed. Working this way, these humanitarian diplomats argue, means the Red Cross is best placed to assert and protect the needs of the vulnerable.

Tickner lists as Red Cross successes the Australian government's support for ratifying the ban on landmines and the release of some women and child asylum seekers into community detention. The Red Cross recently mobilized to provide housing and support for these refugee applicants in several Australian cities, complementing its long-standing oversight role and unlimited access to detention centres. That role includes making confidential quarterly reports on conditions.

Tickner predicts the Australian government will also support a ban on cluster munitions, a project the



***"Sometimes when the Red Cross' commitment to particular principles may be so core, we have a duty to articulate the case and can perhaps push the boundaries of what is possible."***

**Robert Tickner**, Australian Red Cross CEO

Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has worked hard on with strong humanitarian diplomacy efforts. After a number of submissions to government committees and letters to relevant ministers from the Australian Red Cross, it appears that legislation on this topic will come before the federal parliament this year.

### How far can you go?

Despite Australia having a robust liberal democracy, there is always a "sensitive value judgement about how far you can go in publicly articulating a case for change, based on humanitarian principles, without taking sides, without becoming a partisan political player", says Tickner. Conversely, there are "also some times when Red Cross' commitment to particular principles may be so core, we have a duty to articulate the case and can perhaps push the boundaries of what is possible further in those particular cases".

Notably, while the Australian Red Cross has trained without controversy some 140 indigenous people to work in communities and deal with issues of Aboriginal violence, health and diet, the former government led by John Howard also asked the Red Cross to join its 'intervention' in the Northern Territory, a policy under which the army was sent into remote indigenous communities to combat child abuse, banning alcohol and pornography and restricting how Aboriginal people spend their social service payments.

The present government has continued the intervention. But the prospect of hitching the Red Cross' wagon to the army and accepting money that would otherwise have been destined for indigenous people's personal bank accounts were both clear deal-breakers for the Australian Red Cross.

"We thought that was a very polarized space," states Tickner. "Essentially, we were offered funds that had been quarantined [taken directly from Aboriginal people's bank accounts] as a result of the intervention, from individuals, and we took the view that was not the space that we could properly go into, consistent with our principles."

In Brisbane, Greg Vickery elaborates: "We did not want to be seen as playing a part in a compulsory intervention into communities. We thought the purpose was worthy but the method was inappropriate. So we didn't get directly involved... we basically said, 'No look, we'll work in the community ourselves, but we're not going to work as part of the intervention, we don't want to be working as part of the government on this matter'."

### Growing recognition

The Australian Red Cross' steadily growing profile in the humanitarian field has meant federal, state and territory governments are increasingly recognizing and calling upon the auxiliary role to public authorities that the society has always possessed. The National Society,



for example, made its presence felt strongly and swiftly during this year's Queensland floods, undertaking the large logistical exercise of running the shelters for the people whose homes were inundated.

Persuasion amid the *realpolitik* of parliament requires players of all political stripes. Although Tickner left the Australian Labor Party 15 years ago and Vickery, a former vice-president of Queensland's Liberal Party, has not been active in politics for 20 years, the national board includes Kate Carnell, a former Australian Capital Territory chief minister, who maintains a strong Liberal Party network, and David Hammill, a former Queensland Labor state treasurer, who still has Labor Party ties.

Sometimes, it's about persuading the government to act in a difficult international political environment. Geoff Skillen, a former senior lawyer with the federal Attorney-General's department and long-term member of the Red Cross IHL committee — he was appointed chairman last year — recalls that in 2001 and 2002 it looked as though the Australian government might not support the ratification of the International Criminal Court (ICC) given the staunch opposition of the US administration under former president George W. Bush.

Australia did eventually ratify the ICC, after the Australian Red Cross' comprehensive submission and appearance before a parliamentary committee. "I believe the Red Cross' attitude was instrumental in persuading [the parliamentary committee] to favour ratification," says Skillen.

### Informal channels

Often, diplomacy depends on fundamental relationship skills — building trust, keeping your word, respecting confidentiality. Having connections doesn't hurt either and phoning a friend is often part of the equation.

The co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of the Red Cross, federal Queensland Labor parliamen-

## The work ahead

Just as Dunant's real work began after Solferino, the successes of the Movement's diplomatic efforts from 2011's statutory meetings will be measured in the months and years that follow.

Effective diplomacy, many say, is not just about our ability to persuade, the access granted by the Movement's unique status or our connections to people with power and money. It's about follow-up.

The pledges made and resolutions adopted will require consistent monitoring and shepherding, both to ensure full implementation and to lay the groundwork for future refinements and strengthening.

A key part of that follow-up involves building the capacity of the Movement players to effectively gather, analyse and report on evidence from the field. The Movement message, many note, is only as good as its ability both to deliver and to convincingly show that it's making a concrete difference.

"We need to develop tools that go beyond the key messages and position papers," says Mirwan Jilani, who heads IFRC's delegation to the United Nations. "We need to provide governments with serious documentation that will support National Societies in doing this kind of diplomacy."

That means improving systems for getting quality information quickly to and from the field — and then to governments, the media and international and regional bodies.

Others interviewed about humanitarian diplomacy also said there is a need for better Movement cooperation and coordination, a disciplined, Movement-wide focus on key issues and better integration of humanitarian diplomacy into emergency response.

"Humanitarian diplomacy needs to be better integrated into initial emergency assessments," Jilani adds, "so that we can start tackling issues [such as customs, access, land use] from the beginning all the way through to recovery."

tarian Graham Perrett, says informal channels are key: he can readily call Attorney-General Rob McClelland or Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd to discuss pressing Red Cross concerns. "Kevin's my next-door neighbour and he's a big influence on my being in parliament in the first place," says Perrett of Rudd, who is also a former prime minister.

Those networks will continue to be crucial, as new challenges arise. For several months until the end of August, the Australian government under Prime Minister Julia Gillard was indicating it intended to press ahead with the so-called 'Malaysia solution' to send 800 new asylum seekers to Malaysia, in exchange for 4,000 already processed refugees, in a bid to deter people smugglers and new arrivals by boat.

"We've done our private advocacy on that," says Vickery. "We've let [the Australian government] know what we think. But nonetheless we will work with that... our humanitarian imperative is to help because they [the asylum seekers] are in need and someone needs to be looking after them."

That offer derives from Australian Red Cross work programmes with asylum seekers in Australia, and will be available in future for whatever other arrangements might be made for offshore processing in the wake of a six-to-one ruling of the High Court of Australia on 31 August which restrained the Australian government from sending the 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia. The Australian Red Cross will maintain its role as a strong persuader, a humanitarian diplomat, on behalf of these vulnerable voyagers. ■

By **Steve Dow**

Steve Dow is a freelance journalist based in Sydney, Australia.

Humanitarian diplomacy can boost a National Society's role as auxiliary in emergencies while ensuring independence. Here, Australian Red Cross first-aiders treat a fire fighter in an area affected by bushfires that claimed the lives of 210 people, in 2009. Photo: Rodney Dekker/Australian Red Cross



# Desperate hunger



Well before the most recent drought cycle, the ICRC and the Somalia Red Crescent Society were providing emergency medical and food assistance throughout Somalia, including areas controlled by rebels. Above, a worker for the Somalia Red Crescent constructs a shelter at a camp for displaced people in Puntland. Photo: Olav Saltbones/ICRC

Even before drought and conflict forced a massive migration into Kenya and Ethiopia, violence and food insecurity had already displaced thousands of people to makeshift camps in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, where they faced the prospect of famine. Below, a woman and child who have just arrived at a temporary camp in Mogadishu's Hodan district. Photo: REUTERS/Feisal Omar, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

Drought. Conflict and armed violence. High energy costs. Climate change. Inequities in food production and distribution. Changes to traditional pastoral and agricultural systems. Donor fatigue. These are a few reasons why 1 billion people go hungry or malnourished every day, despite ample global food production, according to IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2011*. The crisis in the Horn of Africa is an extreme example and it highlights why food insecurity is one of the Movement's most vexing humanitarian and diplomatic challenges. As the Movement deploys urgent life-saving aid to millions, it must also advocate for sustainable, local solutions in a world jaded by recurring natural and man-made crises. These photos, from the Horn of Africa and beyond, highlight the causes and consequences of hunger — and offer some images of hope for home-grown humanitarian solutions.







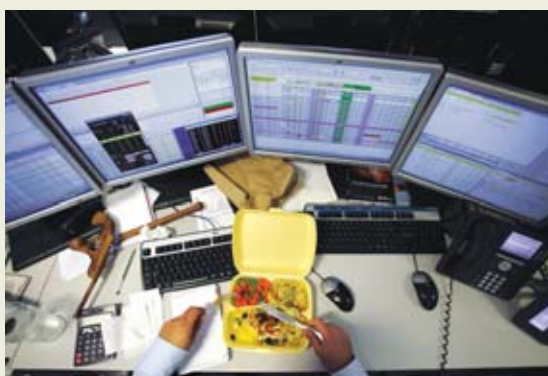
📍 In north-east Kenya, near the Somali border, the drought has lasted for four years. Water holes have dried up and people spend all their energy hauling water. Already facing competition for grazing land, nomadic people here have lost almost all their goats, cattle and camels — their primary investment and their only source of money and food.

Photos: Jakob Dall/Danish Red Cross

📍 With a population of roughly a half a million, Kenya's Dadaab camp is the world's largest refugee encampment. A testament to the chronic nature of armed violence in neighbouring Somalia and of food insecurity in the region, the UNHCR camp is more than two decades old; many teenagers here have known no other home. Right, refugees gather for prayer. Photo: REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst, courtesy [www.alertne.org](http://www.alertne.org)







⚙️ The Horn of Africa is not the only area where climatic events are causing food shortages. Around the world, floods, tropical storms and wildfires ruin crops that are essential to large populations. Lake Penuelas, on the outskirts of Valparaíso, Chile has all but dried up. Food prices have soared as a result, leaving the country's poorest citizens the hardest hit. Photo: REUTERS/Eliseo Fernandez, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

⚙️ Food insecurity is not always an issue of food availability. Globally, there is sufficient food to feed a growing population. But even though there is ample food, more than a billion people go hungry. One of the least understood causes are the commodities markets. Speculation in cities such as London, Tokyo or Chicago can affect food prices as far away as India, where food price inflation has recently been in double-digits.

Photo (right): REUTERS/Ajay Verma, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

Photo (above): REUTERS/Kevin Coombs, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)





➤ Despite the despair engendered by chronic food insecurity, there are reasons for hope. Sustainable food and livelihoods development is putting the power of food production in local hands. A big part of the US\$ 10 million raised by the Kenya Red Cross Society's 'Kenyans for Kenya' campaign, for example, goes towards agricultural development. In Somalia, ICRC projects have dramatically increased grain production and livestock health, while Movement efforts elsewhere have transformed aid-dependent communities into food producers. In the Maphungwane (right) area of Swaziland, members of the Swaziland Red Cross grow vegetables on small lots as part of a food-security and income-generating programme. Photo: Yoshi Shimizu/IFRC

➤ Below, the Tana River Drought Recovery Project in Kenya helps former pastoralists earn money by growing bananas, mangos, papayas, peppers, tomatoes and melons on 33 nearby farms. Still, armed conflict remains one of the most intractable barriers to durable food security in the Horn of Africa and around the globe. Both a cause and an effect of food insecurity, conflict poses perhaps the most difficult diplomatic challenge for those trying to find long-term food security solutions. Photo: Jonathan Kalan/IFRC





# Banning the

**Sixty-six years after two atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki — and two decades after the Cold War ended — some say the time is right to restart the drive towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.**

**A**S THE AUGUST SUN beat down, the still, sticky air was filled with the shrill hum of cicadas. It was only a few minutes after 08:00, but already the day was fiercely hot. In the grounds of Koi Primary School in western Hiroshima, the headmaster decided to give the sweat-sodden schoolchildren a few minutes break from their daily semaphore practice.

As the youngsters sat in the shade of the ginkgo and cherry blossom trees, one boy suddenly pointed up to a silver dot in the cloudless, azure sky. “A B-29!” he shouted. Reiko Yamada, sitting with her friends on the edge of the sand-pit, looked up, scanning the blue expanse for the American plane.

“I thought the plane was gone at first, but it started to turn and I remember thinking how pretty its vapour trail looked,” she says. “Then, all of a sudden, there was a blinding white flash and everybody instantly began to run for the school’s


air-raid shelter. I felt the hot sand on my back as I ran, and I was blown over before I reached the shelter.”

Struggling under the branches of an uprooted tree, 11-year-old Yamada managed to free herself and sprint down the steps to the crowded bunker. Although she didn’t realize it during those first disorientating moments, the United States had just dropped the world’s first atomic bomb 2.5 kilometres (1.5 miles) to the east, less than a month after successfully testing a similar device in the New Mexico desert. The date was 6 August 1945.

The Enola Gay dropped its deadly payload, containing 60 kilograms (132lbs) of uranium-235, at 8:15. At 580 metres (1,900 feet) above the centre of the city that was filled with people heading to work and school on a Monday morning, ‘Little Boy’ detonated.

## **Destructive effects**

A brilliant flash brighter than the sun temporarily blinded anyone looking in the direction of the explosion as a fireball of white heat, measuring thousands of degrees Celsius, instantly vaporized or

 The aftermath of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima August 1945 is chilling testimony to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. The sheer devastation serves as a stark reminder of why these weapons are inherently inconsistent with international humanitarian law, which requires fighting parties to protect non-combatants, humanitarian workers and the wounded. Photo: ICRC



# bomb

carbonized almost everyone close to the hypocentre. At the same time, intense heat rays and radiation were released and a powerful shockwave radiated out from the blast, obliterating buildings up to 4km (2.5 miles) away. A billowing column of white smoke, reaching up to 17,000 metres (55,770ft), formed a giant mushroom cloud over the shattered, burning remains of the city. A smothering blanket of smoke and dust turned day to night.

Yamada was heading towards the hills around Hiroshima when black oily drops of radioactive rain began to fall. "We were shivering and our teeth were chattering, it was so cold," the 77-year-old recalls. "We didn't know if we were shivering because of the cold or because we were scared."

Up to 80,000 people were killed instantly by the explosion. Another 70,000 suffered horrific burns and other injuries. But with a vast area of Hiroshima levelled, including most of the hospitals, there were few facilities and medical staff to help deal with the catastrophe. Chaos reigned.

Even before the ICRC's Marcel Junod became the first western medical expert to set foot

*"I felt the hot sand on my back as I ran, and I was blown over before I reached the shelter."*

**Reiko Yamada**, 77-year-old  
Hiroshima survivor



Photo: Nick Jones

in Hiroshima after the bombing, the ICRC had questioned whether atomic weapons were lawful in a 5 September 1945 circular to National Societies: "It is clear that developments in aviation and the increasingly destructive effects of bombing have made practically inapplicable the distinctions hitherto drawn, whereby certain classes of people had by right a special protection (for instance, the civil population in contrast to the armed forces)."

There was little doubt that the events of August 1945, as well as numerous other incidents during the six years of the Second World War, had ushered in a new era of warfare that would have serious implications for the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, the treaties that established the humane rules of war. Since humanitarianism was at the heart of the efforts of the ICRC, the organization was determined to ensure the protection of civilian populations during conflicts through international law.

While the 17th International Conference of the Red Cross, which met in Stockholm in 1948, took a firm stand against atomic weapons, the overriding message of the following year's Diplomatic Conference was somewhat ambiguous. Although the conference affirmed the principle of civilian immunity during wartime in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the delegation of the Soviet Union didn't believe it went far enough and called for a ban on the use of atomic weapons. The proposal was rejected.

A little over two weeks after the end of the conference, the Soviets successfully carried out their first nuclear test. A modern, deadly arms race had begun. The ensuing years of the Cold War were marked by hundreds of nuclear tests (which also resulted in serious humanitarian consequences), the development





of ever-more powerful weapons and an expansion of the so-called 'nuclear club'.

### Contrary to the rules

In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall — with Cold War brinkmanship at an end — the international community shifted towards containing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the major powers towards reducing existing stockpiles via Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and START II).

Although various agreements, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and numerous test-ban and arms-control treaties, have sought to reduce arsenals, prevent the spread of weapons and stop nuclear testing, none of these pacts has restricted the actual use of nuclear weapons.

While the nuclear superpowers have cut their arsenals significantly — from roughly 60,000 warheads to about 22,000 today — the number of countries in the nuclear club has increased. The destructive power of any one of those weapons is many times that of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The international community has tried to stem this proliferation with sanctions and intense diplomatic pressure. But in recent years, many among the world's diplomatic and military elite have suggested that these diplomatic efforts would be more effective if nuclear-armed countries took even bolder steps towards eventual disarmament, an important goal of the NPT.

"There's been a realization that the only way to stop this trend of proliferation is to have a credible process that leads to the elimination and prohibition of nuclear weapons," says Peter Herby, head of ICRC's Arms Unit.

Several former military leaders and statesmen — members of the diplomatic elite who in some cases were hawkish defenders of nuclear weapons during their careers — have recently made strong statements calling for reductions in and the elimination of stockpiles.

These calls are not entirely based on humanitarian concerns. Because nuclear weapons are extremely expensive to maintain, many political and military leaders question the value of weapons that effectively cannot be used — for political and moral reasons — and which are far from the weapon of choice in modern asymmetric warfare.

### "Catastrophic consequences"

At the same time, due to persistent advocacy by the ICRC and others, there is also growing recogni-

## A hero of Hiroshima

As streams of blackened figures clogged the roads out of the decimated city, hundreds of kilometres away in Japanese-controlled Manchuria a 41-year-old Swiss doctor visited Allied prisoners of war. Marcel Junod was on his way to Tokyo to take up his new post as head of the ICRC delegation. Arriving in the Japanese capital on 9 August, he was oblivious to what had happened in Hiroshima three days before and that morning in Nagasaki.

By the end of the month, an ICRC delegate, Fritz Bilfinger, managed to reach Hiroshima. His telegram detailing the extent of the "horrifying" devastation and "mysteriously serious" effects of the bomb prompted Junod to contact the Allied occupation forces and appeal for food and medical supplies for the victims in Hiroshima.

On 8 September, accompanying a special investigation team of ten Americans and two Japanese doctors, along with 12 tonnes of relief supplies, Junod set off for western Japan. In a paper entitled *The Hiroshima Disaster*, he described the scene as the plane flew over the port city: "The centre of the city was a sort of white patch, flattened and smooth like the palm of a hand. Nothing remained."

As the first foreign doctor to visit the former bustling prefectural capital, Junod, whom Reiko Yamada refers to as the "saviour of Hiroshima", toured the apocalyptic landscape. "In the midst of an indescribable pile of broken tiles, rusty sheet iron, chassis of machines, burnt-out cars, derailed trams and buckled lines, a few trees pointed their charred and flayed trunks to the sky," he wrote. "On the banks of the river, boats lay gutted. Here and there, a large stone building was still standing, breaking the monotony."

One such building that remained was the concrete-constructed Red Cross Hospital, situated 1.5km (0.9 miles) from the hypocentre. Heavily damaged and without much of its equipment, the hospital was inundated with 1,000 patients on the day of the blast; 600 died almost immediately. Junod witnessed many more similar scenes of hopelessness elsewhere.

After observing so much indiscriminate destruction and suffering, Junod was convinced that nuclear weapons should be banned in much the same way that poison gas had been after the First World War through the 1925 Geneva Protocol. "If this weapon is used in a future war," he warned, "we shall experience the annihilation of thousands of human beings in appalling suffering."

***"If this weapon is used in a future war, we shall experience the annihilation of thousands of human beings in appalling suffering."***

**Marcel Junod**



Photo: ICRC



Photo: Japanese Red Cross Society



tion of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. One of the key developments came in May 2010, when a review conference of NPT states drafted a resolution that “expresses deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the need for all states to comply with... international humanitarian law”.

This may come across as a rather bland statement in the face of the destructive power of nuclear weapons. But these 27 words are significant. They mark the first time in the treaty’s history that signatory states have made any official acknowledgement of the human toll of nuclear weapons. “Now all NPT states have recognized these catastrophic humanitarian consequences. And once you’ve recognized this, it entails a certain responsibility to act,” adds Herby.

While the NPT conference’s statement falls short of clearly stating that nuclear weapons violate humanitarian law, it does, says Herby, “raise a big question about the legality of nuclear weapons because IHL [international humanitarian law] is specifically intended to prevent catastrophic humanitarian consequences from warfare”.

It’s an important step as there is still no definitive legal consensus declaring nuclear weapons contrary to IHL. Although the International Court of Justice did conclude in 1996 that the use of nuclear weapons “would generally be contrary to the rules of international law”, the court was uncertain on whether using them in extreme cases of self-defence would be unlawful or not.

## Nuclear diplomacy

The statement from the NPT states, meanwhile, did not come by chance. Like much of the language contained in international accords, these two phrases were the result of intense diplomatic efforts by various parties, working independently, to develop a consensus among states party to the treaty.

In the days, weeks and months before the May 2010 NPT review conference, the Swiss delegation to the conference developed and lobbied for such language while Swiss federal councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey made a speech suggesting that nuclear weapons are essentially illegal under international law.

ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger’s address to diplomats in Geneva just weeks before the NPT conference added to the renewed emphasis. Coming exactly a year after US President Barack Obama outlined his vision for a nuclear-free world in a landmark speech in Prague, Kellenberger urged all countries to ensure that the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were never repeated.

“The ICRC today appeals to all states, and to all in a position to influence them, to seize with determi-



Known as the ‘Atomic Bomb Dome’, this building survived the Hiroshima bombing though it was at, or very near, the centre of the explosion. Photo: Nick Jones

***“Pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement, based on existing commitments and international obligations.”***

Text from a draft resolution to be presented to the Council of Delegations on the elimination of nuclear weapons

nation and urgency the unique opportunities now at hand to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end,” he said.

Timed just before the NPT conference, the speech was accompanied by a media communications effort that brought additional attention and pressure to bear.

IFRC President Tadateru Konoe has made similar speeches, decrying nuclear arms as a “weapon against humanity”. Earlier this year, he discussed nuclear weapons (and the Movement’s response to nuclear emergencies such as Fukushima) in a meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who also supports the call for a world free of nuclear weapons.

## A historic moment

While most of these steps have not been widely reported and the public seldom know about them, momentum is clearly building. “Right now is a unique moment in history, and some might say the last moment, to really address this issue before the genie is completely out of the bottle, before more states, and potentially non-state armed groups, have nuclear weapons,” says Herby.

Ironically, public awareness and concern over nuclear weapons is at a low point, having faded considerably since the Cold War era. “At the moment, there is not a large public cry for the elimination of nuclear weapons,” says Herby. “People think that it was solved at end of Cold War, which is not the case. Still, in the face of a lot of public apathy, there is something very positive happening right now.”

The way to seize the moment, says Herby, is to help “shape the environment so that states are under pressure not to use or acquire nuclear weapons and

# The Hospital of Hope still treats Hiroshima's survivors

Hiroo Dohy (below) points to a clump of blackened rock in a wooden cabinet and explains how the fossil-like mass was once roof tiles. "This was 350 metres [1,000 feet] from the hypocentre and it was melted into one piece," he says.

Lining the walls of the dingy, one-roomed museum off a nondescript corridor in the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital are glass-fronted shelves filled with pickled human organs. There are slices of femur bones in jars, revealing leukaemia-saturated marrow, alongside diseased livers, lungs and brains.

Sixty-six years ago, they all belonged to men and women who, on the morning of 6 August 1945, happened to be in the centre of Hiroshima — commuting to work, running errands, chatting with friends. When the world's first atomic bomb exploded above the city, they received massive doses of radiation and most likely appalling injuries from the fireball and blast wave.

Eventually succumbing to leukaemia and various forms of cancer, their deaths are recorded succinctly in English and Japanese on cards next to the jars. "Autopsy No. 84. Age 54, Male. Exposed (1.0km). Acute Myeloid Leukemia. Cryptococcosis. Date of Autopsy: February 1, 1959." reads one summary. Beside it sits a section of a grey, infected lung.

The room today serves as a stark reminder of that hot summer's day and the enduring effects of the weapon that fell from the cloudless sky.

Unlike most buildings in the vicinity of the hypocentre, the concrete-constructed Red Cross Hospital remained largely intact. Although the devastating shockwave blew out the windows and destroyed much of the interior, the facility owes its survival to its solid design.

Ken Takeuchi, an army surgeon who had studied medicine in Germany and the United States, oversaw the hospital's construction in 1939. "My mother used to say that her father was so involved in designing the hospital because, I think, he had such a precise, engineering mind," says Mitchie Takeuchi, the granddaughter of the hospital's first president.

Naturally, the hospital was inundated with hundreds of horrifically burnt and injured victims on that fateful day, many of whom died soon after. Marcel Junod, head of the ICRC's Japan delegation, arrived at the hospital on 9 September. "All the laboratory equipment had been put out of action. Part of the roof had caved in and the hospital was open to the wind and rain," he wrote in his journal of that time.

While the old building has since been torn down (a section of it has been placed at the entrance of the new hospital), the Hiroshima Red Cross and Atomic Bomb Survivors Hospital remains in the same location. A relief of Junod can be seen in the entrance of the hospital, while another monument to the Swiss doctor is located in the city's Memorial Peace Park.

"In my understanding, the Atomic Bomb Survivors Hospital is a symbol and a psychological support for the survivors," explains Dohy, the institution's present-day president who was born just outside Hiroshima less than a month before the atomic bomb was dropped. "The treatment of leukaemia and cancer is the same as at other hospitals, but some survivors choose to come here."

The hospital now treats more than 100 survivors, or *hibakusha* as they are referred to in Japanese, as inpatients and around the same number as outpatients each day. Naturally, many of the hospital's staff are experts in health matters related to radiation exposure, and the hospital has trained numerous doctors from abroad.

Following the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, a number of medical staff were dispatched to Russia, Belarus and Ukraine to provide support. And only this year, 15 advisers from the hospital travelled to Fukushima Prefecture to aid local Red Cross personnel after a devastating earthquake and tsunami crippled a nuclear plant there.

Although irrevocably linked to the atomic bomb, the Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital continues to use that legacy to help both survivors and those who fall victim to the potentially deadly energy that lay waste to the city one morning in 1945.

by Nick Jones



Photo: Nick Jones



through new international agreements.”

National Societies can help by creating more dialogue and awareness about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear arms and by persuading their governments to address nuclear weapons, through prevention and elimination.

This will be easier for some National Societies than for others. In some countries, the nuclear question is deeply connected to national identity and politics. But advocates say there is consensus that National Societies can play a role by focusing solely on the humanitarian consequences of the weapons and the implications they pose for IHL.

“We need to broaden the base of concern,” Herby notes. “For decades, this advocacy has been in the hands of nuclear weapons experts and associated think tanks, and civil society NGOs [non-governmental organizations], most of whom at the moment do not have a broad base of support.”

### “Human agency”

National Societies, however, do have a broad base. A consortium of National Societies — Australia, Japan and Norway — are running an international campaign on the issue. The Australian Red Cross is engaging younger Australians by using local celebrities and digital media, such as a web site that demonstrated the effects of a nuclear explosion on an Australian city by calculating the number of Facebook friends a user would lose.

Preben Marcussen, a policy adviser with the Norwegian Red Cross, says that the Red Cross Red Crescent, as a credible humanitarian organization, has the potential to reinvigorate an international campaign that peaked in the 1980s. “A stronger Red Cross Red Crescent voice will ensure that the global debate focuses upon nuclear weapons as an urgent humanitarian challenge, and that it will bring about the political pressure the world needs,” he says.

The next big chance to exert that pressure will come during November’s Council of Delegates, which is expected to adopt a resolution that will be reported to the International Conference.

The resolution is a result of consultations between the ICRC, National Societies and the IFRC in May 2011 in Oslo, Norway, where the elements of a possible resolution were presented to 21 National Societies. Organized by the Australian, Japanese and Norwegian Red Cross societies, the meeting was followed by further consultations that then became the basis of the draft resolution.

The draft presented to the Council of Delegates



➡ The Hiroshima Red Cross Hospital (shown here before 6 August 1945) withstood the atomic bomb blast, but it was heavily damaged.

Photo: Japanese Red Cross Society

➡ A section of the hospital was preserved as a reminder of the bomb’s effects and the hospital’s role in saving lives. Photo: Nick Jones

appeals to states to “ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again” and to “pursue in good faith and conclude with urgency and determination negotiations to prohibit the use of and completely eliminate nuclear weapons through a legally binding international agreement, based on existing commitments and international obligations”.

It also calls on all components of the Movement, “in light of our common commitment to humanitarian diplomacy”, to “engage in activities to raise awareness among the public, scientists, health professionals and decision-makers of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons” and to engage, to the extent possible, in dialogue with government and other relevant actors on the implications for IHL.

The resolution, it is hoped, will create a foothold for further discussion and pledges with governments towards support for the next step — perhaps eventually a new treaty calling for a prohibition and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

This goal may seem like a long shot. But the significant achievements made regarding a ban on cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines show that diplomacy and public campaigning can make a big difference.

Hiroshima survivor Yamada, who continues to campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons with her survivors’ group in Tokyo, says she has faith in diplomacy. “So long as talks go forward step by step, I am confident that something will happen... but maybe not in my lifetime,” she says. ■

### Nick Jones

Nick Jones is a freelance writer and editor based in Tokyo, Japan.

***“Right now is a unique moment in history, and some might say the last moment, to really address this issue before the genie is completely out of the bottle.”***

**Peter Herby**, head of ICRC’s Arms Unit

# Unnatural disasters



Photo: IFRC

## IFRC President Tadateru Konoé sees a need for greater humanitarian response to technological emergencies

**W**HETHER IT'S AN OIL SPILL destroying the livelihood of a coastal community, a radiation leak at a nuclear power station, or a chemical fire releasing toxic smoke, National Societies are often confronted with the fallout from man-made crises. Tadateru Konoé, president of both the IFRC and the Japanese Red Cross Society, is a long-time advocate for greater preparedness for these types of emergencies. The radiation release at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan this year added new urgency to his efforts. **RCRC Magazine** asked President Konoé what he felt the role of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies should be in preparing for and responding to these unnatural disasters.

### ***RCRC: In your view, what was learned from the Fukushima emergency and what does it tell us about how governments and humanitarian organizations need to prepare?***

In any country, promoting nuclear power plants is a delicate issue and the plants have been installed based on the conviction that they are safe. Thus, countries that possess them have traditionally been reluctant to deal with the possibility of an accident or inform the public of how to prepare for the worst. As long as nuclear power plants exist, it is necessary that information about these facilities is disclosed transparently.

Accidents are always possible, and formulating common safety measures and responses is an imperative. As regards safety measures for, and responses to, accidents at nuclear power plants, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has taken the initiative to come up with a wide variety of systems.

However, in terms of how to have residents in a disaster-stricken area cope with an accident — including education, drills and health manage-



ment, environmental monitoring, relief workers' risk management — we can not simply rely on existing international cooperative systems and standards. We need to involve local people and organizations such as Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies to ensure the highest levels of preparedness.

### ***After the Chernobyl disaster, the Movement pledged to play a greater role in preparedness and response to technological disasters. How would you assess the level of readiness now?***

The Red Cross Red Crescent's role is to enhance disaster prevention and preparedness capacities and to provide relief to the affected population. In this sense, there is no difference between the relief activity for natural disasters and that for technological disasters. In the case of the latter, however, nuclear disasters among others, technical expertise and equipment as well as long-term health management are necessary.

Individual National Societies need to identify the types of possible technological disasters and then consider their roles and develop measures accordingly. As regards a nuclear disaster, we have a few Societies such as those affected by the Chernobyl disaster that have been active for some time. However, we hope to be able to track the progress of domestic and international efforts and initiatives in this area, and to get more National Societies to factor this into their preparedness for response work. In terms of the level of preparedness against technological disasters, we have some work to do to identify specific hazards and related needs for capacities on our side.

### ***The issue of nuclear emergency and nuclear weapons will be discussed during the Statutory Meetings in November. What are your hopes for the outcome?***

With the number of countries that possess nuclear power plants on the rise, I see value in having a

☞ Smoke rises from the No. 3 reactor of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Tomioka, Fukushima Prefecture in north eastern Japan, March 2011.

Photo: REUTERS/Tokyo Electric Power Co., courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)







cident site, no accurate information could be obtained and messages delivered by authorities or experts were not unified. As a result, it gave rise to rampant speculation as well as harmful rumors. I assume that an easy-to-understand chain-of-command structure, a 'check-and-balance' supervision system, and government development of relief plans based on the worst-case scenario, may be incorporated into effective disaster laws. Ongoing IDRL efforts could be helpful in this respect.

***During a meeting earlier this year with Yukiya Amano, director general of the IAEA, you discussed the possibility of a closer working relationship. Can you comment on what IFRC and National Societies can contribute in such a scenario?***

The IAEA plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of nuclear power plants and taking various measures in the event of an accident. As regards the short- and long-term effects of an accident on people's health and the environment, as well as measures to address them, there are areas in which the IFRC can work in collaboration with the IAEA and the World Health Organization. The activities carried out by National Societies and the IFRC following the Chernobyl disaster will serve as an invaluable reference.

***What other roles might National Societies play?***

As humanitarian organizations, National Societies can carry out activities for those affected. In terms of education and training for local residents, National Societies can mobilize grass-roots volunteers and youth networks. Moreover, through humanitarian diplomacy, they can exert an influence on decision makers at various levels. We have a number of member Societies that have medical resources and capacities that could be put to good use in relation to nuclear issues.

***Japan is the only country that has suffered both from nuclear weapons and a peacetime nuclear-power emergency. As the president of the Japanese Red Cross Society, can you speak about how your National Society sees these two issues?***

The Movement has been involved in nuclear weapons issues for many years; it has stated, time and again, that its aim was their ultimate abolition. In contrast, the Movement itself has not tackled the question of whether to continue or abolish nuclear power plants and I believe that, for the moment, it should not do so. In this sense, it is self-explanatory that different approaches should be taken between nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants. As the National Society of the only nation that went through relief activities for both types of emergencies, I recognize that the Japanese Red Cross Society has a moral obligation to raise this issue from the perspective of humanitarian consequences and helping those affected. ■

resolution adopted to step up preparedness for the possibility of an accident. It is desirable for all National Societies of countries with nuclear power plants to share information about their preparedness measures and about their planned role in case of a nuclear accident, in order to allow for international comparison.

The most advanced national preparedness and response systems need to be identified and used as a reference for improving preparedness gradually and to realize common guidelines. As the initial step, we would like to start by agreeing on this roadmap. In terms of more specific National Society activities, the possibilities include public awareness enhancement, relief activities in disaster-stricken areas, support for evacuees, long-term public health management and environmental assessment.

Regarding efforts and initiatives to ban the use of nuclear weapons or abolish them, the Movement is proud of its long history and I believe it would be significant to make a strong new gesture with an eye toward recent changes in the international environment surrounding nuclear weapons.

***International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) is another area in which the IFRC could advise governments and international bodies. What has been learned from Fukushima in terms of IDRL?***

There are various types of technological disasters. Therefore, authorities and international organizations should take measures compatible with the respective characteristics of the disasters. As a nuclear disaster has an impact on a broad range of fields and across a wide area, it is essential to gather experts in each realm from both home and abroad to collect, analyze and share information in order to deliver a unified message internationally. In the case of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, as it was dangerous to access the ac-

Ⓔ A quarter century after the meltdown at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power station, people over a wide region still suffer serious health consequences. As part of their response, National Societies in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, along with the IFRC, began a program of regularly screenings for thyroid cancer and other ailments in rural areas. Tatiana Sueta, a doctor for the IFRC, checks a young girl's thyroid gland in a small village in eastern Belarus, April 2011.

Photo: REUTERS/Vasily Fedosenko, courtesy [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)

## Voices of the Arab Spring

The director of international relations for the Libyan Red Crescent, Muftah Etwilb has had a long career at the Libyan Red Crescent and at the IFRC. Based in Benghazi during the conflict, he spoke with Red Cross Red Crescent magazine about the challenge of holding a National Society together during civil conflict and the risks and opportunities in the days ahead.



In a country divided, the Libyan Red Crescent has stayed whole and remained independent. But the road ahead will not be easy.

# From revolution

### ***Did anyone in the Libyan Red Crescent see this uprising coming?***

No one in January 2011 thought that in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt there would be such dramatic changes — not in our wildest dreams. However, we did our best, through our volunteers, to cope and respond. The volunteers were really ready and did an excellent job.

This is particularly true in terms of first aid and evacuation. We had mobilized our volunteers to go to the hospitals, where services had essentially



Photo: IFRC

collapsed. In Benghazi, there are very modern hospitals but many were operated by foreigners who left, fearing for their safety. It was a state of near chaos because the system had essentially failed.

### ***How did the National Society react?***

We set up a task force at headquarters. But during the second week, all communications were cut off. There was no internet, no cell phones. The lesson that we learned in such a situation is that we needed to have a system in place for better volunteer man-





➡ A Libyan Red Crescent convoy brings medical aid and supplies for those displaced from the fighting in Sirte, eastern Libya, in October.

Photo: REUTERS/Esam Al-Fetori, courtesy www.alertnet.org

🔄 Several anti-Gaddafi fighters, injured amid heavy shelling in Sirte, wait to be transported in Red Crescent helicopters from Ras Lanuf to Benghazi in September. Photo: REUTERS/Esam Al-Fetori, courtesy www.alertnet.org



# to reconciliation

agement. We had been dealing with volunteers in very traditional way. Now we realize that we need to go with a proper volunteer management system — better training on the code of conduct and providing insurance, protection and security.

Overall, the volunteers did a great job sticking to the principles of impartiality and neutrality. But the revolution was a revolution of youth. We tried to give them as much guidance as we could, telling them that “you need to separate your function as volunteer and wearing a Red Crescent uniform from your self as a young person excited about this change”.

## ***What were the main dangers faced by volunteers?***

We had many volunteers who were injured on the front line and who risked their lives and were shot at indiscriminately while driving ambulances.

And of course, we also had several volunteers who lost their lives during this conflict. One of our volunteers was killed while driving an ambulance that was hit by a missile. Another was a volunteer who was in a car accident. Another two volunteers from our Tripoli branch were killed in an area east of the capital known as Zliten. The information we have is that they were in the front line helping with evacuation.

## ***What do you see as the major challenges the volunteers face now?***

We need to support and rehabilitate our volunteers, who have been doing such a hard job for a long time. They were students or doctors or professionals before the conflict and now they need to be offered psychological support and redirected back into regular life.

Number two is addressing the divide in the National Society between those who on a personal level were pro-revolution and those who were pro-

regime. So now, in the future, we need a kind of a national reconciliation.

## ***How do you keep the unity of a National Society during civil conflict?***

We did in fact keep the unity of the National Society in a very difficult situation. Now, it's less difficult, it's a matter of just bringing people together and discussing.

One of the things we face are volunteers who could come and say, “We want to change the head of our branch, he is from the past.” I think we have no option but to deal with that. But we have a system in place for changing the head of branch and that system needs to be respected.

This Arab Spring is something we cannot ignore. But so far, the example has been that the volunteers themselves have defended the integrity of the National Society from outside interference.

At one point, some volunteers were given an audience with the chairman of the National Transition Council to talk about the integrity of the National Society and the way it independently appoints or dismisses people in key posts.

The volunteers in fact said, “No, we are independent and we have a General Assembly and at that point, we can decide if we are happy with someone and we keep him, or not.”

## ***In the post-revolution period, what are the big challenges?***

With the return of fighters, one of the big challenges is to rehabilitate them to normal life. After the election, another big challenge, in addition to the economy, is national reconciliation. I think the Red Crescent will have some role to play in terms of spreading the culture of non-violence, forgiveness and reconciliation. This will be quite a challenge. It's not impossible, but not easy. ■

***“I think the Red Crescent will have some role to play in terms of spreading the culture of non-violence, forgiveness and reconciliation. This will be quite a challenge. It's not impossible, but not easy.”***



# Care along the Ca

**I**N A LITTLE VILLAGE on the banks of Colombia's Caguan River, people are standing in line outside a derelict building. It is in fact an abandoned medical centre, one of many up and down the river.

Inside the building, a makeshift clinic has been set up and, in 100 per cent humidity, as the generator roars outside, an ICRC medical team is working. At the end of a 14-hour day, the physician, Francisco Ortiz, has treated almost 100 patients. Tomorrow, after a 05:00 start, he and his colleagues will move on to the next village, where many more patients are waiting.

To explain why an ICRC medical team is out here in the Amazon basin, working in conditions that many health-care professionals in the developed world would dismiss as impossible, you need to go back up the Caguan River, to the start of the team's journey, the little town of Cartagena del Chaira. For that is where regular health care along the river ends.

Cartagena does have a hospital, though it is tiny and underequipped. Doctors and nurses there work long days in difficult conditions, but although they know the communities down river desperately need health care, health staff have been very reluctant to travel to those isolated areas.

## An ICRC team navigates Colombia's Caguan River to bring medical care to a region caught in conflict.

### Frightened to come

The reasons are linked to Colombia's long internal armed conflict, a decades-long struggle involving armed groups, drug cartels and the Colombian military. Increasingly in recent years, medical workers have faced various types of interference in carrying out field work and medical workers have been affected by a string of incidents. This comes on top of serious weaknesses in the health system in Colombia, particularly in remote, rural areas.

"We are in a conflict zone," explains ICRC delegate Abdi Ismail, "and this has had an impact on the presence of the government, [so there is] no health care."

Ortiz does go down the river, but his presence is only possible, he believes, because he works for the ICRC. "Colombian public medical staff are frightened to come here," he says. "And then often the army doesn't trust the medical teams — thinking that they are gathering information for the enemy."





***"A disease that is easily controlled in an urban setting could be fatal along the Caguan River."***

Francisco Ortiz, ICRC doctor



It was the absence of any national or local medical care along the Caguan that led the ICRC to begin medical missions in the region. One doctor was recently appointed to work along the river, which is 200 kilometres (125 miles) long, from a health post in Remolino. The ICRC team, after long and complicated negotiations with the armed group in the area, manages to go down the Caguan just once every two months to different areas along the river. Nevertheless, it makes a big difference to the local people.

Although the ICRC team has regularly visited this area in recent years, access cannot be taken for granted. As in any armed conflict, it is important to maintain a regular dialogue with all armed actors. Even then, it can happen that access may be restricted in some areas during certain periods.

A few weeks before the mission begins, villages are informed of which days the medical mission will visit and, as the ICRC boats set off down river, people are waiting all along the banks. Some have immediate needs: a pregnant woman with pre-eclampsia or a 17-year-old boy who has sliced open his foot on an old oil can — the two huge cuts need dozens of stitches. His only good fortune is the fact that the accident happened on the day of the ICRC team's visit.

GO Waterways are often the most effective way to travel into Colombia's interior, where armed conflict has made health care inaccessible in many areas. Here, an ICRC medical convoy motors down the Caguan River in southern Colombia. Below, an ICRC delegate performs a check-up at a makeshift riverside clinic.

Photos: M.C. Rivera/ICRC

What becomes very clear, as the medical team begins to treat patients, is that although the very young and the very old are especially vulnerable, everyone along this river lives in fear of illness or accident.

### **"Nothing I could do"**

Sandra and Ovidio are a case in point. This young couple has walked for more than an hour through the jungle, carrying their 7-month-old sick baby, but leaving their other two children at home.

"I worry all the time about the children getting ill," says Sandra. "We have absolutely nothing in our village, no clinic, no doctor, no nurse."

"The government doesn't care about us," adds Ovidio. "If I had an accident, there would be nothing I could do — I would just have to ask God for protection."

Their baby has diarrhoea and a cough — minor ailments in theory but, as physician Francisco Ortiz knows, potentially fatal without proper treatment.

"A disease that is easily controlled in an urban setting could be fatal along the Caguan River," he says. "I really worry a lot about the people here. It's so difficult for them to see a doctor, they only see one when we come. And so many of them have conditions that are preventable or that we could treat if we saw them in time."

Another example is Mercedes, the mother of four children. The last time the Red Cross team visited she was given a routine test for cervical cancer. Now, she is told it is positive. The ICRC provides her with money for the long boat trip up the river so she can have the hospital treatment she urgently needs, but it may not be in time.

"People here tell me they feel as if they have no right to get sick," says Ismail. "It's not considered an option. And yet people are still living here, and still smiling at you and offering you a cup of tea when you visit." ■

By **Imogen Foulkes**

Imogen Foulkes is a correspondent for the BBC based in Geneva, Switzerland.







## PUBLICATIONS



### World Disasters Report IFRC, 2011

This year's *World Disasters Report* focuses on the growing crisis of hunger and malnutrition. Small farmers who produce half the world's food are among the almost 1 billion people who go to bed hungry every night. Millions of children suffer the irreversible effects of undernutrition. Increasing food insecurity weakens people's resilience to disasters and disease, and people everywhere are experiencing increasing volatility of food prices.

This report analyses the causes and impacts of such vulnerability at community, national and international levels — both during and after emergencies, as well as from a longer-term perspective. It examines the challenges of the globalized nature of food-related vulnerabilities, and the need for a cross-disciplinary approach. What political action is needed to reform a failing global food system that is unlikely to provide sufficient food for a population projected to rise to 9 billion by 2050?

Available in English. Summaries in Arabic, French and Spanish.

### Protecting Civilians and Humanitarian Action Through an Effective Arms Trade Treaty ICRC, 2011

As long as weapons are too easily available, serious violations of international humanitarian law will be more likely and the provision

of humanitarian assistance endangered. States, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and civil society all have a role to play in promoting public awareness of the human cost of poorly regulated arms transfers. All states are encouraged to adopt a strong and comprehensive Arms Trade Treaty so that transfers of conventional arms and ammunition are not authorized if there is a clear risk that the arms will be used to commit serious violations of IHL.

Available in Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.



### Health care in danger: making the case ICRC, 2011

This brochure draws attention to one of the most crucial yet overlooked humanitarian issues of today: violence against health-care providers and those seeking medical assistance. Attacking health-care structures and personnel, and ambulances — as well as deliberately obstructing the efforts of the wounded to find help — are common features of conflicts throughout the world. The ICRC has also produced a brochure, *Health care in danger: a harsh reality*, and a series of posters, which make the powerful point that many people in conflict zones die not due to weapons wounds, but due to secondary causes (lack of medicine, blocked roads, damaged health facilities, or absence of health staff, etc.).

Available in Arabic, English and French.

## MEDIA

### IFRC Pakistan flood operation: 1 year on Four videos from the IFRC

The floods that inundated large swaths of Pakistan during July and August 2010 also destroyed sanitation and sewage systems, contaminated water sources, left millions of people homeless, caused long-term emotional scars and had a devastating effect on people's sources of income. These four videos describe the flood's effects and the IFRC's efforts to provide relief and foster recovery. The videos focus on water and sanitation, the shelter

programme in Sindh, psychosocial support and livelihoods. Available in English.

### Health-care void in western Côte d'Ivoire ICRC, 2011

Entire villages have been destroyed and health-care centres looted in western Côte d'Ivoire. As an uneasy calm settles, thousands of refugees and internally displaced people are starting to return home. ICRC mobile clinics provide the only health care for many villages in the area. Available in English, French and Spanish.

### Drought in the Horn of Africa – Preventing the next disaster IFRC, 2011

The way governments and humanitarian organizations have been approaching food insecurity in the Horn of Africa needs to change. According to this 22-page advocacy report, governments, donors and humanitarians must take a more integrated, longer-term approach and invest in solutions that address the chronic underlying causes of famine. Emergency assistance is critical to saving lives. At the same time, all actors must work together to build up the resilience of communities through locally owned solutions (small-scale farming and livelihoods development) along

with reforms to stabilize food prices and other actions. Available in Arabic, English and French.

### Restoring Links Between Dispersed Family Members ICRC, 2011

This revised leaflet provides a concise summary of the problem of families split up by war and describes methods used to restore family links, reunite separated families and ascertain the status of detainees and missing persons. Available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

### Violence and the use of force ICRC, 2011

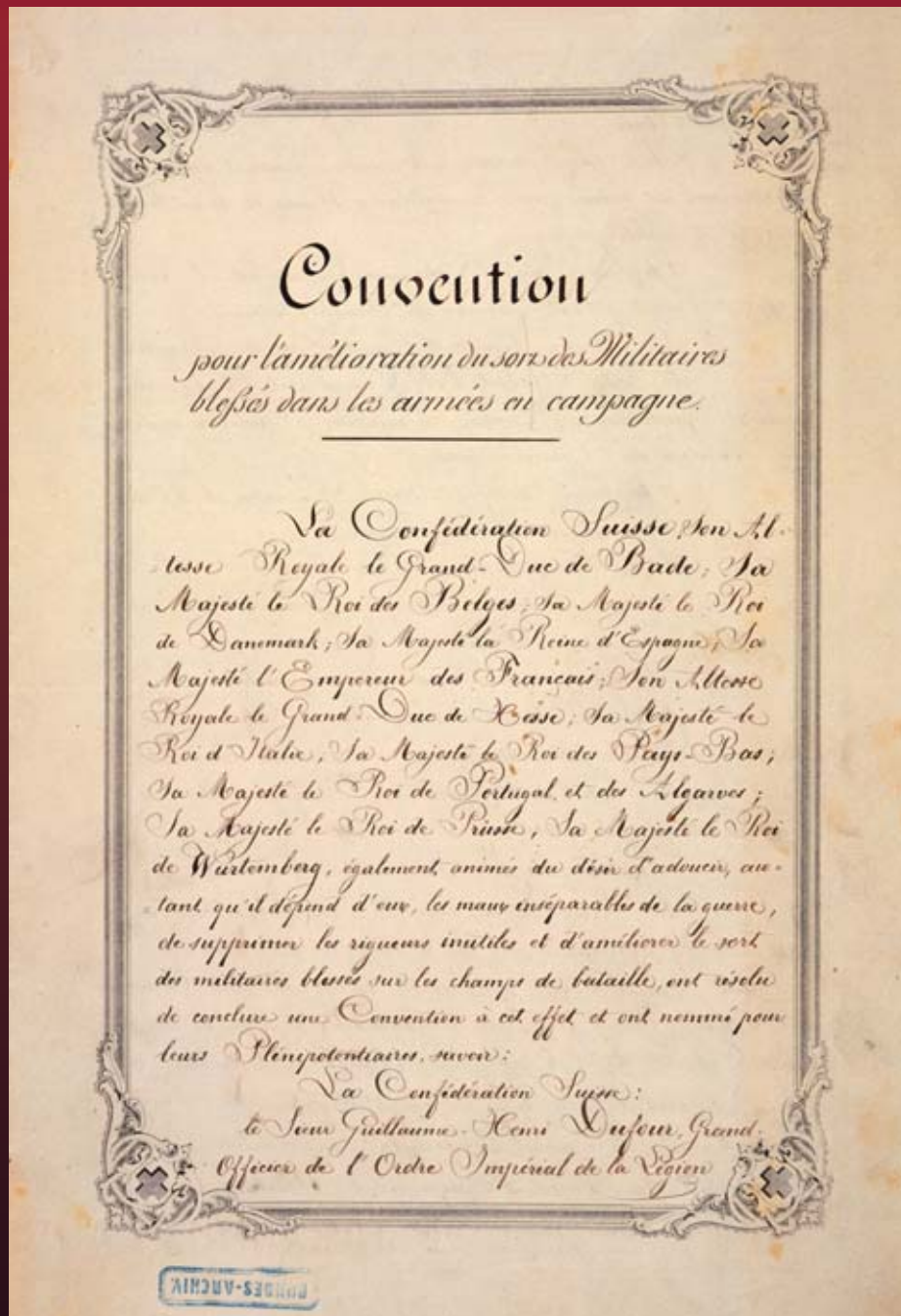
The line separating disturbances and tensions from armed conflict can sometimes be blurred and the only way to categorize specific situations is by examining each individual case. The way these situations are categorized can have direct consequences both for the armed forces and civil authorities and for the victims of the violence. It determines which rules apply and the protection they provide is established in greater or lesser detail according to the legal situation.

Available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish. Sfr. 2.



### Drought in the Horn of Africa Preventing the next disaster

[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org) International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



Humanitarian diplomacy has been integral to the Movement since its conception. An early result was the First Geneva Convention. Conceived by Movement founders and signed in 1864, it called on warring parties to protect wounded soldiers as well as civilians who come to their aid.

From the collection of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Museum.  
[www.micr.ch](http://www.micr.ch)