



ICRC

## International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

**Establishment:** 1863

**President:** Peter Maurer

**Areas of Work:** protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and violence

**Areas of Cooperation with the OAS:** assistance for victims of armed conflict and violence and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles

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### BACKGROUND

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been created in February 1863 in Geneva, Switzerland. Then, in August 1864, the ICRC convinced governments to adopt the first Geneva Convention. This treaty is the manifestation of the influence of the organization throughout the globe; it required armies to assist wounded soldiers independently of their allegiance. Also, this treaty instituted the unified emblem for the medical services: a red cross on a white background.

Mr. Henry Dunant is recognized among historians to have inspired the creation of the Organization. He published a book called "A Souvenir of Solferine" which argued for enhanced care for wounded soldiers in wartime.

Member States of the four Geneva Conventions have mandated the ICRC to protect victims of international and internal armed conflicts. These treaties state that the word victim must be defined as war injured prisoners, refugees, civilians, and other non-combatants.

The ICRC is a body of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which also includes International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and 187 individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies members of the Federation.

The ICRC is the oldest body of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and it received prestigious awards, such as the Nobel Peace Prize in 1917, 1944 and 1963. The motto of the International Committee of the Red Cross was *Inter Arma Caritas* ("In war, Charity"). The ICRC has four official languages, namely: Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

It is interesting to point out that the Red Cross official symbol is a red cross on a white background, which is the inverse of the Swiss flag – a neutral country. The symbol of the Red Cross is circled by the words "Comite International Geneve".

## OBJECTIVES

The prime objective of the ICRC is to ensure protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and violence. In order to accomplish its mission the ICRC has put in place field actions throughout the world and strives to ensure the respect of international humanitarian law. The ICRC must remain an independent and neutral organization. It has part of its legal mandate to guarantee humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. In addition, the ICRC has the mission to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

The ICRC has a strict legal framework under which it must comply in order to take actions to fulfill its mandate<sup>1</sup>:

- The four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I confer on the ICRC a specific mandate to act in the event of international armed conflict. In particular, the ICRC has the right to visit prisoners of war and civilian internees. The Conventions also give the ICRC a broad right of initiative.
- In non-international armed conflicts, the ICRC enjoys a right of humanitarian initiative recognized by the international community and enshrined in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions.
- In the event of internal disturbances and tensions, and in any other situation that warrants humanitarian action, the ICRC also enjoys a right of initiative, which is recognized in the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Thus, wherever international humanitarian law does not apply, the ICRC may offer its

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/mandate/overview-icrc-mandate-mission.htm>

services to governments without that offer constituting interference in the internal affairs of the State concerned.

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## PRESIDENT



Peter Maurer is a Swiss national. He was appointed President of the ICRC on July 1, 2012. He started his international career when he joined the Swiss diplomatic service in 1987. He was based in Bern and Pretoria, where he held various posts. Then, in 1996, Mr. Maurer was reassigned to New York as deputy permanent observer at the Swiss mission to the United Nations. In 2000 he was named ambassador and head of the human security division in the political directorate of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs in Bern.

In 2004, Mr. Maurer was appointed ambassador and permanent representative of Switzerland to the United Nations in New York. Then, in June 2009, the UN General Assembly elected Mr. Maurer chairman of the Fifth Committee, in charge of administrative and budgetary affairs. In addition, he was elected chairman of the Burundi configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. In January 2010, Mr. Maurer was named Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Bern. This position led him to be in charge of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, with its five directorates and some 150 Swiss diplomatic missions around the world.

He obtained degrees in history and international law in Bern, where he was awarded a doctorate.

## GOVERNING BODIES

The ICRC is composed of three main bodies in charge of governing the organization; the Assembly, the Assembly Council and Directorate. Both Assemblies are composed of a maximum of 25 appointed members of Swiss nationality.

### **Assembly**

The Assembly is the supreme body governing of the organization. It is mandated to supervise the activities of the ICRC and to formulate policies, general objectives and strategies. Also, the Assembly is in charge of approving the budgets and accounts. The Assembly nominates the directors and serves as head of Internal Audit. The General Assembly is composed of a President and two-Vice-Presidents

The President, Mr. Maurer, of the ICRC is responsible for the ICRC's external relations, representing the ICRC on an international level and, in close cooperation with the directorate

general, handling the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy. Internally, his main concern is to achieve consistency, good governance and development of the organization.

### **The Assembly Council**

The Assembly Council is a subsidiary body of the Assembly. Its role is to organize and set up the activities of the Assembly. It is entitled to adopt resolutions with respect to the competence it holds. Usually these decisions concern strategic options relating to general policy on funding, personnel and communication. The Council is also mandated to ensure good communication between the Directorate and the Assembly, to which it reports periodically. The Council is composed of five members, who are appointed by the Assembly. The chairman of the Council is the President of the ICRC.

### **The Directorate**

The Directorate is the executive organ of the ICRC. It is in charge of the quotidian management of the Organization. This body is composed of a Director-General and five directors. The five directors are specialized in different areas, namely: Operations, Human Resources, Financial Resources and Logistics, Communication and Information Management, and International Law and Cooperation within the Movement. The members of the Directorate are appointed by the Assembly to serve for four years.

## **MAIN AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE RED CROSS AND THE OAS**

Through the Department of International Law, the OAS cooperates with the ICRC in the organization and execution of events created to disseminate International humanitarian law among diplomats and policymakers. These activities include seminars, courses, training sessions and the preparation and distribution of *ad hoc* publications. The OAS also coordinates its activities with the International Committee of the Red Cross in order to support decisions adopted by Member States on matters of international humanitarian law. A Memorandum of understanding<sup>2</sup> was signed between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the OAS on March 12, 2004, with the objectives of strengthening the bonds and cooperation uniting both Organizations.

### **Delegation to the XLII OAS General Assembly**

Also it is important to mention that ICRC sent a delegation composed of Elena Ajmone Sessera Deputy Head of Operations for Latin America and the Caribbean, Giuseppe Renda, Delegate for Bolivia, Patrick Zahnd, Legal Adviser for Latin America and the Caribbean, Regional Delegation for Mexico, Central America and Cuba, Mexico City, Margarita Studemeister, Principal Advisor for the Inter-American Affairs Regional Delegation for United States and Canada, to the OAS General Assembly, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, on June 3-5, 2012, to maintain strong ties with

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.oas.org/dil/AgreementsPDF/41-2004\\_MemorandumofUnderstanding\\_fulltext.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/AgreementsPDF/41-2004_MemorandumofUnderstanding_fulltext.pdf)

the OAS.

## SOURCES

[Department of International Law Website](#)  
[The ICRC Website](#)

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