

Switzerland and the international Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent: Review and Outlook



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1. Introduction

The International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are held ordinarily every four years. They bring together the components of the International Movement of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent (the Movement) – the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the National Societies), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – and the States Parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. These Conferences afford an opportunity to define guidelines for the Movement's activities over the coming four years. The present publication is intended to provide information about some of the humanitarian commitments Switzerland has entered into since the 28th International Conference, held in Geneva in December 2003, as well as to present a selection of its initiatives addressing some of the most urgent humanitarian challenges of our age.

Continued support for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The Movement is unique in its relevance and its universality. The essential role of the Movement's components in humanitarian action around the world remains unequalled. The Movement acts as a solid reference point within a humanitarian community in constant flux. The growing humanitarian needs of civilian populations, resulting in particular from the increased complexity of armed conflicts and a growing number of natural disasters, lead to serious challenges. Fully conscious of these dynamics, Switzerland is committed to helping those who are most vulnerable. Amid such fast-paced events, Geneva, as the humanitarian capital, offers a privileged venue for dialogue, collaboration and discussion, of which the 30th Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is an excellent example. Switzerland intends to continue lending the Movement its whole-hearted support in years to come.

Together for humanity: towards a greater collaboration between public authorities and National Societies.

The National Societies contribute to the Movement's vitality and universality. Therefore, cooperation between these Societies and their respective national governments is all-important. For its part, the Swiss Red Cross provides invaluable services in areas such as prevention and the promotion of health, rescue, home care and voluntary medical aid during armed conflicts. The Swiss Red Cross is also one of the partners of "Swiss Rescue".

2. Steadfast humanitarian commitment: some examples

Following the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Switzerland began to make good on its commitments and to implement the Agenda for Humanitarian Action.

Promoting the protection of civilians and reducing the humanitarian impact of certain types of weapons

As a High Contracting Party and Depositary of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the promotion of the respect for international humanitarian law and of its implementation continue to be principal goals of Switzerland's activities in this field. This commitment is particularly reflected in the recent ratification of a number of related legal instruments, including those for the protection of cultural property in times of armed conflict and regarding explosive remnants of war.

Switzerland joins the international community in its endeavours to prohibit or limit the use, production and sale of certain types of weapons. It supports international efforts to draft a legally binding international ban on the production, transfer, stocking and use of cluster bombs, which cause unacceptable suffering to civilians, and to create a legal framework for victims assistance.

Switzerland works hard to promote the universal adoption and implementation of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines. It is particularly committed to combating the production and use of anti-personnel mines by means of financing de-mining projects, assisting victims, and through the deployment of experts in mine affected countries. Multilaterally, and in particular through implementing Action #46 of the Action Plan adopted at the 2004 Nairobi Review Conference, Switzerland is committed to exploring ways and means of sensitizing armed non-state actors to the devastating effects of anti-personnel mines, as well as to promote mine action and its five pillars in areas under the control of such actors.

Constructive humanitarian diplomacy

As Depositary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, Switzerland undertook the preparatory work and meetings which ultimately led to the adoption of Protocol III at the Diplomatic Conference held in December 2005, creating the Red Crystal as an additional emblem. The adoption of Protocol III led in turn to an amendment of the Movement's statutes at the 29th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in summer 2006 in Geneva. Switzerland's active involvement in the adoption of Protocol III and the preparation of the International Conference led to a global and sustainable solution to the question of the protective emblems.

3. Addressing imminent humanitarian challenges

Actors involved in armed conflicts: the privatization of warfare

The increasingly frequent recourse of States and non-state actors to private military and security companies (PMCs/PSCs) for the performance of security assignments and to carry out military activities (interrogation of prisoners, technical weapons expertise etc.) raises a number of issues, principally legal and regulatory, regarding the liability of such companies and of their employees, as well as with respect to supervision of their activities. International legal norms, in particular those provided by international humanitarian law, do indeed require clarification, and experts agree that relevant national legislation is often non-existent. Furthermore, there is no international regulatory framework specifically designed for this type of companies, or for their activities.

In this light, and considering the absence of a formal inter-governmental process on the issue, Switzerland has joined the ICRC in launching a discussion of the challenges posed by the recourse of States to PMCs/PSCs, including the clarification and re-affirmation of the obligations incumbent upon States and other actors with regard to international law, in particular humanitarian law and human rights law. Best practices are currently being reviewed and developed at expert meetings organized by Switzerland to assist States in their relations with PMCs/PSCs.

Armed conflicts are increasingly characterised by a multitude of actors, particularly armed non state groups. Although the latter are bound by international humanitarian law, they show insufficient respect for it. One of our century's major challenges, therefore, will be to improve the application of, and compliance with international humanitarian law by armed groups.

Disaster Risk Reduction and adaptation to climate change

There is a marked increase in the number and intensity of disasters through the world. The impact of these disasters is unevenly distributed, with the most disadvantaged groups typically being the hardest hit. Switzerland has substantial experience domestically with the management of natural risks (landslides, avalanches, floods etc.). It is directly confronted with the effects of climate change, and is engaged in the search for sustainable solutions based on a participatory and integrated approach to risk management. Internationally, Switzerland supports efforts to establish, through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, appropriate regulations for the mitigation of this global phenomenon. Switzerland also continues to support the implementation of the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters", adopted by 168 Governments in Kobe (Japan) in January 2005, as well as the institutional strengthening of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). Switzerland also acknowledges the Movement's specific and valuable contribution to disaster risk reduction activities worldwide. The activities of the International Federation as well as of numerous National Societies for the benefit of those communities most at risk, contribute to making a distinct difference on the international, national and local levels. In view of the urgency and the scale of these challenges, Switzerland will take a more systematic approach to disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change in its international cooperation programmes.

Armed violence: a major obstacle to sustainable development

In June 2006, Switzerland and the UN Development Programme organised a ministerial summit in Geneva, in order to raise awareness of the negative impact of armed violence on development. The summit resulted in the adoption of the *Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development* by the participating States. Recognizing that the struggle against the scourge of armed violence is intimately linked to the prospects for sustainable development, the participating States agreed to step up their efforts to mainstream the reduction of armed violence and the prevention of conflict within their national, regional and multilateral development strategies and structures, as well as within their humanitarian aid. The signatory States pledged to contribute to reducing armed violence until 2015. To date, 69 States adopted the *Geneva Declaration* and the number is rising.

A core group of thirteen States, coordinated by Switzerland, promotes the aims of the *Geneva Declaration* by way of devising and implementing practical measures. To this end, a framework for the implementation of the *Declaration* was adopted in June 2007, enhanced by regional consultations on armed violence and development inspired by the *Geneva Declaration*. Regional declarations were adopted for Latin America and the Caribbean, as well for African countries in April and October 2007 respectively. Consultations for the countries of Asia, Southeast Europe and the Middle East are planned for 2008. The aims of the *Geneva Declaration* are being tested in pilot countries. In parallel research is being conducted in order to measure the phenomenon of armed violence, and its costs in terms of social and economic development. A ministerial review summit meeting on armed violence and development will take place in September 2008 in Geneva.

Methods and means of warfare: clarification of existing norms

Air and missile warfare has evolved considerably since the Commission of Jurists informally drafted rules of air warfare in 1923. The impact of developments in the use of new technologies as a strategic means of warfare, particularly in recent years, is not adequately reflected in the current normative framework. In light of these facts and with the support of other governmental partners, Switzerland joined in 2003 the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University (HPCR) and a wide range of experts in launching a project aimed at a methodical, contemporary reaffirmation of existing law on the issue of air and missile warfare. The goal of this project is to strengthen the law by precisely identifying the legal instruments applicable to the new technological realities and by seeking consensus on the application of current norms. The final product will take the form of a manual containing existing rules in this field, together with an interpretation of those regulations in light of contemporary exigencies.

As with air and missile warfare, "information warfare" also creates new challenges, particularly in the field of international humanitarian law. Sweden, Finland and Switzerland have decided to initiate a process aimed at clarifying relevant applicable norms in response to the problems created by so-called "computer network attacks" (CNA). An initial meeting of experts was held in Sweden in 2003, and Switzerland will host the next meeting in 2008.

4. Conclusion

Switzerland and its humanitarian commitment: more than a tradition, a reality

Switzerland's humanitarian commitment for those most vulnerable, is marked by its diversity and continuous adaptation to current and emerging challenges. Its involvement in the field and its political action in various multilateral organizations allow Switzerland to promote an approach to human security aimed at limiting the suffering of civilian populations affected by war and disasters. It also strengthens local and national institutions and networks providing support to those persons and groups that are most vulnerable.

Together for humanity: Switzerland intends to continue to work for improved collaboration among all committed partners, not only in the area of emergency response but also in the promotion of sustainable development, peace and conflict prevention. An inclusive rather than an exclusive approach should be pursued. Switzerland will continue to promote greater respect for human dignity throughout the world.

Humanitarian Geneva

A space for dialogue in the interest of humanitarian action

Over the years, the humanitarian tradition and the spirit of Geneva, born of the altruism and humanist thought of some pioneers, have been embodied in benchmark institutions such as the ICRC and the International Federation, which are to this day pillars of humanitarian action worldwide.

As the home of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the centre of the United Nations' humanitarian action, Geneva hosts hundreds of international NGOs. The resulting dynamism and the variety of actors present there, make the city the principal meeting place of the global humanitarian community. The dissemination and teaching of international humanitarian law also enjoy a place of honour in Geneva, a first-rate academic centre. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum also helps to raise public awareness of humanitarian issues.

Finally, Geneva's humanitarian dimension is underscored by its will to create a neutral space for dialogue, for exchange of knowledge and experience, and for discussion on current and future challenges. The recent creation of the Global Humanitarian Forum in Geneva is an expression of this same constructive spirit.



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