

Citation of HRH Princess Margriet

On this, the 24th day of May, 2014, the International Four Freedoms Medal is presented to

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

and the

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

It was just over 150 years ago that a small group of individuals gathered in Geneva to form one of the most important humanitarian organizations in history: The International Committee of the Red Cross. A young Swiss businessman, Henry Dunant, was the initiator of this remarkable organization. He was shaken by the confrontation with the suffering of the 40,000 wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefield of Solferino in Northern Italy in 1859. He was determined to help, to do something to alleviate the pain and misery of the helpless victims of war.

Dunant conceived the idea that each nation should form a relief society to provide medical care for those wounded in battle. The challenge was how to found such an organization. In 1863 his Committee issued an appeal to the nations of Europe to form such societies. A year later, the organization convened an international conference to sanction the creation of these national relief societies. At this conference the first body of international law dedicated to the protection of the victims of armed conflict was created: the 1864 Geneva Convention. The signatories of this historic treaty agreed that all sides in a conflict had an obligation to care for wounded soldiers; that medical personnel operating in theatres of war should be protected; and that a special emblem—a red cross on a white background—should serve as the universal insignia to identify medical workers.

The Red Cross movement soon spread worldwide, adding the Red Crescent Symbol for Islamic nations later on. By 1914 the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement had become the most respected humanitarian network in world history.

The unprecedented suffering of the First World War presented the ICRC with a number of enormous challenges. To provide relief and facilitate communication between millions of Prisoners of war and their families, the ICRC set up the International Prisoners of War Agency. To ensure that each warring party adhered to the expanded Geneva Conventions, the ICRC monitored national compliance. It also vigorously protested the introduction of chemical weapons, and thanks to The Hague Conventions of 1899 and

1907, was able to inspect POW camps and offer assistance to the civilian populations in occupied territories.

World War I had also demonstrated the need for close cooperation among the various Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Moreover, thanks to the work of their millions of volunteers, it had also demonstrated that collectively they had built up a large body of expertise in humanitarian relief work. When the guns fell silent, it seemed natural to expand the scope of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to include natural disasters and other types of emergencies not caused by war; to work to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever and whenever it may occur.

And so, in 1919, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was born. Initiated by Henry Davidson, president of the American Red Cross, the founding members of the Federation included Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States. Today, the IFRC includes 189 national member societies, supported by seventeen million volunteers, serving over 150 million people, making it the largest humanitarian organization in the world. A unique network of national societies; the only network which gains its strength through its combination of local, national and international action.

Together, these two independent but interrelated organizations, both based in Geneva, have helped—and continue to help—an almost incalculable number of people, based on their shared fundamental principles. It is thanks to the ICRC that all States are bound by the Four Geneva Conventions that protect the victims of war—be they combatants or civilians. It is thanks to the IFRC that the world community is able to respond to such natural disasters as the recent typhoon Haiyan or the Tsunami in 2004 - with such speed and compassion. Both organizations have also helped increase the level of humanitarian expertise in response to natural and man-made disasters. Both play a key role in coordinating the governmental and non-governmental response to the all-too-frequent wars and humanitarian crises we face today.

In the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt urged his fellow citizens to collectively embrace the principles of “faith, hope and charity.” Years later, reflecting on the scale of human suffering brought about by the Second World War, he urged each of us “to do all in our power to conquer the doubts and the fears, the ignorance and the greed,” that made the horror of war possible; to cultivate what he called “the science of human relationships—the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace.”

For decades, the ICRC and the IFRC have worked hand in hand with their members and millions of volunteers in the same spirit to bring us a better world; a world guided

by compassion and protected by the sanctity of international law, in common with the values championed in Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms.

Sadly, the struggle to bring us this better world is not over. But for millions of people from the streets of Aleppo to the remote islands of the central Philippines, the Red Cross and Red Crescent give hope, reassurance that their plight has not been forgotten. Thus, the Movement has an important role to play in working towards a more humane world.

On behalf of all of us, it is an honor to present this award to you today.