



Bulletin

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The following statement concerning the International Red Cross Conference held in Istanbul from September 6 to 13 was issued by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Mitchell Sharp, on October 22:

...Three decisions of far-reaching importance were made. The first was embodied in a Declaration of Principles on International Humanitarian Relief to Civilian Populations in Disaster Situations. This declaration was drafted by Canada and Norway, after consultation with the Canadian and Norwegian Red Cross, and was adopted without any opposing votes. The Declaration affirms that human suffering in all of its manifestations is of deep concern to the conscience of mankind; recognizes that further steps must be taken by the international community to ensure prompt and effective relief action to civilian populations in both natural and other disaster situations; and goes on to lay down six important principles, namely:

- (1) The fundamental concern of mankind is the protection and welfare of the individual and the safeguarding of basic human rights.
- (2) Relief by impartial international humanitarian organizations for civilian populations in both natural and other disaster situations should be treated as humanitarian and non-political.
- (3) Effective co-ordination of action by impartial international humanitarian organizations is essential.
- (4) Disaster relief should be provided without discrimination and should in no circumstances be regarded as an unfriendly act.
- (5) All states are requested to facilitate the admission, transit and distribution of relief supplies

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by such organization for the benefit and welfare of civilian populations.

(6) All other authorities should also facilitate disaster relief activities.

This resolution is not merely a collection of pious platitudes. Passed as it was by a conference grouping both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies, the organizations best qualified to claim the title of impartial international humanitarian organizations, and at the same time those with the greatest experience in providing relief to both natural and armed conflict disaster situations, the Declaration represents not merely a cry from the conscience of mankind but a demand for concrete action.

The other two related decisions adopted at the Conference go a step further towards concrete action by states to incur actual legal, in addition to moral, obligations to facilitate the provisions of disaster relief.

SWISS-CANADIAN INITIATIVE

One of these resolutions, sponsored by Switzerland, actively supported by Canada and drafted together by the two countries, was adopted unanimously. It is entitled "The Reaffirmation and Development of the Laws and Customs Applicable in Armed Conflicts".