International Review of the Red Cross (2024), **106** (925), 1–4.
Fundamental Principles
doi:10.1017/S1816383124000651

IRRC

EDITORIAL

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Bruno Demeyere, Editor-in-Chief

Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality: these seven Fundamental Principles are the ethical, operational and institutional framework that underpins the humanitarian activities of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the components of which are the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world.[1]

The last time the *International Review of the Red Cross* dedicated an issue to this subject was in 2016.[2] Since then, lively conversations as to the Fundamental Principles' contours and operationalization have continued, including against the background of changing features of contemporary armed conflicts and the humanitarian challenges they raise for those not, or no longer, taking direct part in hostilities. Though often tested and sometimes challenged, time and again the Fundamental Principles have proven their enduring relevance for the times we live in.[3]

Through ten articles and an interview, this issue of the *Review* seeks to further inform and enrich these conversations so as to ensure that the Fundamental Principles remain fit for purpose in present and future armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies alike.

As announced in my editorial in our previous issue on "Protecting the Environment in Armed Conflict", this issue also contains five more articles contributing to the analysis on how to enhance environmental wartime protection.

The advice, opinions and statements contained in this article are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ICRC. The ICRC does not necessarily represent or endorse the accuracy or reliability of any advice, opinion, statement or other information provided in this article.

1 For further information regarding each of the seven Fundamental Principles, see ICRC, "Our Fundamental Principles", available at: www.icrc.org/en/our-fundamental-principles (all internet references were accessed in November 2024).
2 Thematic issue on "Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 897–878, 2016, available at: https://international-review.icrc.org/reviews/irrc-no-897898-principles-guiding-humanitarian-action.
3 Olivier Ray, "Principles under Pressure: Have Humanitarian Principles Really Stood the Test of Time?", *Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog*, 11 July 2024, available at: https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2024/07/11/principles-under-pressure-have-humanitarian-principles-really-stood-the-test-of-time/.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of International Committee of the Red Cross. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383124000651 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the period during which this issue was under preparation, Cornelio Sommaruga, ICRC President from 1987 to 1999, passed away. In Annex 1 to this editorial, the *Review* joins in honouring his legacy through the tribute paid by the current ICRC President, Mirjana Spoljaric.

Finally, a subject close to the *Review*'s heart: Annex 2 to this editorial contains a statement by the *Review*'s Editorial Board and staff on diversity and inclusion of voices and perspectives represented in our journal's pages.

The *Review* invites you to discover the rich reflections in all pieces featured in this issue, and is always happy to receive your feedback and ideas for future contributions!

Annex 1: Mirjana Spoljaric, current President of the ICRC, pays tribute to Cornelio Sommaruga[4]

Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross from 1987 to 1999, died in Geneva on Saturday 18 February 2024. He was 91.

Cornelio Sommaruga was at the helm of the ICRC during the major geopolitical upheavals that followed the end of the Cold War. A man of conviction with great charisma, he modernized the ICRC to deal with new types of conflict and armed violence, as it responded to the humanitarian consequences of the Gulf War and of the conflicts in the Balkans, Chechnya, Somalia and Rwanda.

Cornelio Sommaruga was known for his commitment and his exceptional personality. He bore the voice of the victims of war to governments, strengthening international humanitarian law to better protect them while defending neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action.

His commitment to the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines was a striking example. Scandalized by the testimonies of ICRC surgeons regarding the mutilation and unspeakable suffering that landmines were causing indiscriminately, he decided to launch a public appeal for a total ban on these weapons in 1994, followed by a public campaign – a first for the ICRC. The proposals put forward contributed to historic progress in the protection of war victims, with the adoption of the Ottawa Convention in 1997.

At the end of the Cold War, some questioned the need to maintain neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. Cornelio Sommaruga defended respect for these fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and their application. Today, more than ever, these principles remain essential if we are to take action at the heart of conflict and serve as a neutral intermediary.

Profoundly convinced of the relevance of the ICRC's role within the Movement, he anchored it in the field, in the midst of conflict, and in dialogue

4 Also available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/cornelio-sommaruga-president-icrc-1987-1999.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383124000651 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with belligerents. In 1992, Cornelio Sommaruga was one of the first leaders to alert the world to the internment camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in 1994 he was one of the first to sound the alarm regarding the targeted, systematic attacks on sections of the population in Rwanda.

He invested much effort in supporting the humanitarian community and the international position of Geneva. Internally, he devoted particular attention to the transformation of the ICRC and the careers of its staff. Their number swelled from 3,500 at the start of his presidency to 10,000 by the end. Where previously all delegates had been Swiss, they now came from increasingly diverse nations and backgrounds.

Cornelio Sommaruga was deeply affected by the murders of ICRC colleagues, notably in 1996 when six were killed in Chechnya and three in Burundi. To better protect the staff of humanitarian organizations and improve access to civilian populations, Cornelio Sommaruga became even more committed to dialogue with parties to conflicts – both governments and non-state armed groups.

As he said, "the purpose of humanitarian aid is not only to meet immediate needs but also to restore hope". Cornelio Sommaruga leaves us a precious legacy that we must maintain and nurture in the face of today's humanitarian challenges.

Annex 2: A statement from the Editorial Board and staff of the *International Review of the Red Cross* on diversity and inclusion[5]

The Editorial Board and staff of the *International Review of the Red Cross* are committed to diversity and inclusion among our authors, readers and members of our team.

We note that the *Review* has historically not managed to build an author- and readership that represents the diverse and intersecting backgrounds we see in the world, especially in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, age, gender, profession and geographic location. We are determined to address this imbalance. We recognize the value of hearing from, including and promoting different voices, perspectives and experiences among our contributors to further enrich the journal's analysis of international humanitarian law, policy and action. We firmly believe that the *Review*'s multi-disciplinary approach to these issues is strengthened by expanding the pool of talent from which we draw to include authors of these very backgrounds.

Our "Emerging Voices" edition served as a microcosm of this larger phenomenon. Prior to the Emerging Voices call for papers, there was a dearth of earlier-career scholars represented in the *Review*. The quality of the submissions received in response to the call for papers speaks to the power of inclusion and reinforces our conviction that featuring diverse voices enhances the publication's academic rigor. In addition, issuing a public statement calling for emerging voices

5 Also available at: https://international-review.icrc.org/commitment-to-diversity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383124000651 Published online by Cambridge University Press

then gave those facing barriers to publication a clear entry point – and the assurance that their perspectives are welcome here. We hope this statement has a similar, but broader, effect.

Given that the *Review* is a specialized IHL journal, it is even more incumbent on us to ensure that authors from diverse backgrounds are included in our pages. Armed conflict and other humanitarian crises disproportionately impact the very same groups of people who have historically been underrepresented in the *Review*. In other words, the voices and perspectives of those most affected by the law, policy and action the IRRC discusses have historically not been heard by our readers. We are committed to changing that.

In order to actively demonstrate our commitment to these values, we have already taken steps to remove barriers to inclusion of a diverse range of authors and to proactively seek to improve their access to the publication. For example, in the past, the *Review* worked nearly exclusively by soliciting submissions from established experts. The current Editorial Team has implemented a new approach, releasing an open call for papers for each edition and disseminating those calls widely, thus casting a much wider and less proscriptive net. In addition, we disseminate calls for papers and accept submission in six languages (English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian and Chinese) and conduct outreach in academic and practitioner communities in every region of the world.

These efforts have begun to bear fruit, but the work is not done. Committing to improve diversity and inclusion is a continuous task that requires daily, renewed attention, and the *Review* will keep working to improve access to and inclusion in the publication's pages. We commit to report back publicly by the end of 2025 – both on our progress, and on our next steps at that point.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383124000651 Published online by Cambridge University Press