

Introduction

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are fully conscious of the duties that they would have to carry out in the event of natural disasters or armed conflicts, in the way of aid to be given to the wounded and sick and to inhabitants in need of food and shelter. If they are to be ready to take upon themselves at any moment the role of assistants to public services, they must train teams and lay up stocks of supplies.

But it is not enough to relieve physical pain. The moral suffering endured, caused by separation and by the uncertainty of the fate of those dear to us, is not less cruel, and National Societies should endeavour to alleviate it, too.

National Societies may find themselves called upon to play an important part in obtaining news of victims and in re-establishing and maintaining links between prisoners and their families.

It is therefore desirable that National Societies should, already in peacetime, study the foundations of a **tracing service** that could be **swiftly** set up if circumstances make it necessary. Such a service cannot be hastily improvised, without the risk of spending several months in groping around, and of being snowed under with lengthy and complicated tasks.

Even countries not affected by war may, at one time or another, find themselves taking in large numbers of refugees, or may become the theatre of natural disasters or of more or less serious domestic disturbances.

With these considerations in mind, we did not wish this modest handbook to be drawn up solely with reference to the regulations laid down in the Geneva Conventions relative to the obligations of the official information office in time of war towards the Central Tracing Agency and the Protecting Power. We therefore preferred to put forward to National Societies some fairly simple methods which could be suited to all circumstances.

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It is therefore desirable that National Societies should, already in peacetime, study the foundations of a tracing service that could be readily set up if circumstances make it necessary. Such a service cannot be readily improvised without the risk of spending several months in getting started, and of being snowed under with lengthy and complicated tasks.

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