



# EMBLEMS OF HUMANITY



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The red cross and red crescent emblems are a universal sign of hope for people in humanitarian crises. For communities enduring the trauma of armed conflict and other situations of violence or the hardships of natural disaster, the emblems signal that help is on its way.

Whether displayed on the badge of a doctor working in a field hospital, the side of a vehicle transporting wounded people in war, or a plane delivering relief supplies, these emblems symbolize impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action to people around the world.

But they are also about much more. In times of armed conflict, the red cross and the red crescent together with the red crystal, are internationally recognized symbols of the protection that is due to the armed forces' medical personnel, facilities and vehicles and to authorized civilian medical services. This

includes the medical services of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) when acting as auxiliaries to armed forces' medical services or when duly authorized by the authorities in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

The emblems are free of any religious, political or cultural association. They may be put to two different uses:

- A sign of protection, which informs the parties to an armed conflict that the people, vehicles or facilities displaying these emblems must be protected at all times and may never be targeted or attacked. This is known as the protective use of the emblems.
- To indicate the affiliation of a person, vehicle or facility with the organizations that make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This is known as the indicative use of the emblems.

## THE EMBLEMS

There are three emblems in use today:



the red cross



the red crescent



the red crystal

# HOW CAN THE EMBLEMS BE USED?

Use of the emblems is strictly regulated under the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005. They can be used in two ways.

## FOR PROTECTIVE PURPOSES

In times of armed conflict, they can be used for protective purposes to ensure the safety of:

- medical services and religious personnel of the armed forces;
- medical personnel, facilities and vehicles of National Societies when placed at the disposal of the medical services of the armed forces and subject to military laws and regulations;
- with the express authorization of the government and under its control, civilian hospitals, all civilian medical units and other voluntary relief societies and medical facilities, their staff and civilian medical personnel, as well as vehicles assigned to the treatment and transport of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked.

All three emblems have equal status and may be used individually as a protective device. They must be displayed on a white background, without wording or additional graphics, designs or inscriptions.

During times of peace, the emblems may be also displayed individually and in their pure form, as a symbol of protection by:

- medical services and religious personnel of the armed forces;
- National Society staff, medical facilities and vehicles that could be mobilized in the event of armed conflict, with the authorities' consent.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) may use the emblems at all times (in times of peace and armed conflict alike).



## FOR INDICATIVE PURPOSES

In times of peace the emblems can be displayed for indicative purposes by:

- volunteers, staff or property affiliated with the Movement (the National Societies, the ICRC or the International Federation);
- as an exceptional measure by ambulances and first-aid stations exclusively assigned to providing free treatment to the wounded and sick in line with domestic legislation and

with the express authorization of the National Society.

When used as an “indicative device” by any of the Movement’s organizations as part of their logos, the emblem must always be accompanied by their name or initials, and not simply the words “red cross” or “red crescent.” The emblem must also be displayed in small dimensions and may not be placed on armlets or on roofs of buildings in order to avoid any confusion with the emblems used for protective purposes.



# MISUSE OF THE EMBLEMS

Any misuse of the emblems may diminish their protective value and erode respect for them in times of armed conflict. This could endanger the lives of those entitled to display an emblem for their protection while providing medical care, and undermine the safe access of the Movement's humanitarian workers and relief. Here are some of the ways in which the emblems must not be used:

## IMITATION

The use of a sign which, owing to its shape and colour, may be confused with one of the emblems.



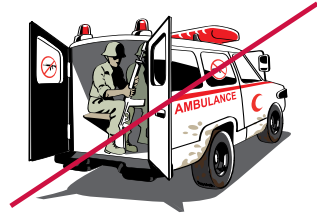
## IMPROPER USE

Any use of an emblem inconsistent with international humanitarian law. The use of an emblem by unauthorized people or entities (commercial enterprises, pharmacists, private doctors, non-governmental organizations, individuals, etc.) or for purposes that are likely to undermine the prestige or the respect due to the emblem.



## PERFIDY

The use of the emblem during an armed conflict to protect combatants and military equipment and with the intent to mislead the adversary. When causing death or serious personal injury, perfidious use of the emblem is considered a war crime.



In order to ensure universal respect for and protection of the emblems, each State party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions has an obligation to enact national legislation with the aim of regulating the use of the emblems and of preventing and punishing their improper use both in times of war and peace.

National authorities must also take steps to inform the public, businesses and the medical community of the proper use of the emblems.

National Societies also cooperate with the authorities to ensure proper use of the emblems.

# SYMBOLS OF THE HUMANITARIAN ACTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

By displaying the emblems of the red cross or the red crescent to show their association with the Movement during armed conflict, natural disasters or other emergencies, a National Society's staff and volunteers are sending a very important message: the work they are carrying out is purely humanitarian and their safe access to people and communities affected by crisis must be respected at all times.

Those in the Movement who display these symbols are committed to carrying out their humanitarian mission in accordance with the Movement's seven Fundamental

Principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. People understand that their work is not linked to any political, religious, military or economic agenda and should therefore be accepted, trusted and respected by all.

This understanding is critical because it means that people of all backgrounds, and on all sides of an armed conflict, have trust in these workers' intentions. This in turn helps Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers to reach all people and communities in need safely even during wartime and other humanitarian crises.



Audika/ICRC

# ENDURING EMBLEMS

In 1859, Henry Dunant, a Swiss businessman travelling through northern Italy, witnessed the grim aftermath of a battle in and around the city of Solferino. Deeply moved by the suffering of thousands of wounded and dying soldiers left without any medical care, he published *A Memory of Solferino*, in which he put forward two proposals for improving assistance for war victims:

- to set up in peacetime, in every country, relief societies composed of volunteers ready to take care of wounded soldiers in wartime;
- to get countries to agree to the idea of protecting the wounded and sick on the battlefield and those caring for them.

The first proposal led to the establishment of a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in almost every country around the world.

The second proposal set the stage for the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 are today accepted by, and binding upon, all States. That proposal also led to the adoption of a single distinctive sign that would help to protect military medical services, volunteer

aid workers and wounded people during armed conflict. The sign – or emblem as it was eventually called – had to be simple, identifiable from a distance, known to everyone and always identical.

A diplomatic conference that met in Geneva in August 1864 adopted a red cross on a white background, the colours of the Swiss flag in reverse. Then, during the 1876–1878 war between Russia and Turkey, the Ottoman Empire declared that instead of a red cross it would use as its emblem a red crescent, a symbol that was formally recognized in 1929 in an amendment to the first Geneva Convention.

In 2005, States party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions adopted an additional emblem: the red crystal. The red crystal enjoys the same legal status as the red cross and the red crescent and may be used in the same way and under the same conditions. It provides an alternative for States and for National Societies that do not wish to use the red cross or the red crescent.

For further information, please go to [www.icrc.org/en/our-embblems](http://www.icrc.org/en/our-embblems)

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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