

# IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

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## **The First Geneva Convention of 1864 : a historic document**

The First *Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field*, which was concluded on August 22, 1864, less than one year after the founding of the Red Cross, whose centenary has already been celebrated, is now no more than a venerable museum piece.

In recent times it was still binding on one State : the Republic of Korea. As the Government of this country acceded to the four 1949 Conventions with immediate effect on August 16, 1966, the ancestral Convention ceased to be operative.

No one will deprecate its passing, for the 1864 Convention is kept alive in the treaties which succeeded it—the Geneva Conventions for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and the Sick in Armed Forces in the Field—which reiterated its essentials and are constantly being supplemented and brought up-to-date. The years 1906, 1929 and 1949 were stages in its development.

The States which are now parties to the 1949 Conventions, by ratification, accession or declaration of continuity, number 111, in addition to which there are about ten countries which are bound to the Conventions by the signatures of the Powers which previously exercised sovereignty over their territory. There are two countries which are bound only by the 1906 Convention (Costa Rica and Uruguay) and three by the 1929 Convention (Burma, Bolivia and Ethiopia). When these nations accede to the more recent Conventions, those of 1906 and 1929 will, in their turn, become relics of a bygone era.

Although the noble Convention of 1864 is no longer applicable, it still remains a valid landmark and symbol. Let us not forget

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the rôle of capital importance which it played in the development of international law and of the Red Cross movement.

When the nations which presided over world destiny a century ago ratified this "sacred treaty principle" which Henry Dunant sought, they agreed, for the first time in history, by a solemn written pledge, to incursions into national sovereignty for the benefit of individuals even in the midst of war, which, at that time, was held to be the irresistible surge of violence which brooked of no restraint.

This was a breakthrough which gradually extended to the benefit of other categories of war's victims. The influence of the law of Geneva was even felt well beyond its own sphere, for the impetus given in 1864 did not come to a halt when it achieved the objectives which the founders of the Red Cross had aimed at. Other men followed in their wake and they in their turn promoted the laws of war or The Hague Convention, Human Rights, and institutions for the maintenance of peace and the settlement of conflicts by peaceful means.

This progressive self-limitation to power and this priority to the individual, were at the same time breaches in the formerly unassailable ramparts of State sovereignty. These were not isolated instances; they were the landmarks of a slow but sure evolutionary process reaching back to the philosophies of the 18th century and carried forward on the international and national levels through the liberal and social movement of the last century. This evolution has today reached a stage which is a logical outcome; nowadays the belief is ever more widely held that the aim of international law is to ensure for all men the guarantee of at least a minimum of rights, in time of peace, in time of war, in their own country or abroad.

This evolution is undoubtedly continuing, for it is in complete harmony with social necessity and human nature, and what is useful to the majority will always prevail in the long run.

*J. P.*

**Great-Britain.**  
The Florence Nightingale Medal  
awarded to Mrs. Folke.



**Honduras.** Distribution of diplomas to Red Cross first-aiders.

