

A note from the Editor

Fifty years ago, on 28 July 1951, a conference specially convened by the United Nations adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had been created by the General Assembly several months before. In tribute to the 50th anniversary of that organization for the international protection of refugees, this issue of the *International Review of the Red Cross* is devoted to it.

It is noteworthy first of all that within three years, from 1948 to 1951, the international community established and consolidated the legal bases redefining the position of the human being in the international legal order:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, laid down the fundamental principle of international law that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”;¹
- in 1949, States approved the four Geneva Conventions for the protection of war victims, thereby formally recognizing that even — or above all — in times of armed conflict human beings are entitled to respect for their well-being and dignity and to protection against violence;
- lastly, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees is intended to safeguard the dignity of those who have to flee their country for reasons closely associated with violence.

In the development of international law it was thus an extremely productive and even revolutionary period. It must be stressed, however, that the progress made by the law in those three domains has been surprisingly independent, without apparent links.

The Review has opened its pages to a debate on questions relating to the 1951 Convention, for refugees have become sadly symptomatic of our day and age, and the 50th anniversary of the Convention designed to protect them internationally is a reminder of that fact. There is furthermore an urgent need to heighten awareness of the links that do exist between international protection of refugees and the fate of war victims, who are protected primarily by the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

The Editor of the Review has invited several authors to consider a number of current refugee law issues and to select those which are concerned in some way with armed conflicts or similar situations. In other words, of interest to the reader here will be the points at which international refugee protection and international humanitarian law and action overlap.

The Editor thanks the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for kindly consenting to provide forewords for this issue of the Review. Special thanks go to the authors of the articles published in it, whether they belong to either of the two institutions or to the academic world.

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¹ Preamble, first paragraph. See also "1949-1998: Human rights and international humanitarian law", *IJRC*, No. 831, September 1998.