

What is Red Cross and how was it Born?



The Red Cross is an international humanitarian organization. Initially its field of activity was confined to looking after soldiers wounded in wars, but later it broadened its activity to alleviation of all forms of human suffering. Almost all the countries of the world have branches of Red Cross which work during both war and peace. It serves helpless people without any discrimination of caste, color, creed or nationality. During peace time, its activities are: to give first aid, to prevent accidents, to keep drinking water safe, to train nurses and midwives, to look after maternity and child welfare centers, to establish hospitals, to set up blood banks etc. This organization is a friend of the entire humanity.

The story of the origin of Red Cross is very interesting. The founder of this organization was Jean Henri Dunant, a Swiss Banker. On June 24, 1859, he had gone to the city of Lombardy (north Italy) in connection with his business. At that time, this city was the focal point of the continuing battle of Solferino between the French and Austrians. Thousands of men and women injured in the war were in great pain. Many of them were dying for want of first-aid. This heart-rending sight had a great impact on his mind. He forgot his own work and organized the local villagers to look after the injured of both sides in the battle. His efforts saved many lives.

In 1862, Dunant wrote a book 'A Memory of Solferino', in which he appealed to the people of the world to form special relief societies. As the soldiers wounded in war were helpless people and as human beings it was the duty of everybody to help them. This appeal had a great impact on the people and in the international conference held in Geneva in 1864; sixteen countries accepted the establishment of Red Cross. The flag of

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Switzerland had a white cross against red background. Changing it, a 'red cross' against a white background, was the name and flag given to this organization. Thus, Red Cross came into existence. A 'Red Cross' became the emblem of this international organization that works to relieve suffering called by natural disasters, etc. and to help the victims of war.

The Red Cross has three organs. The first is the International Committee of Red Cross. It is an independent committee of twenty-five citizens of Switzerland. Its main office is situated in Geneva. The second organ is the league of the Red Cross Societies, and the third is the National Red Cross Societies.

During wars, the International Committee of Red Cross works as an intermediary between the National Red Cross societies and the countries involved in the wars. It looks after the prisoners of war in their camps and arranges relief for them. It takes care of their mail and establishes contact with their relatives. This organization also serves the people affected by cyclones, epidemics, famines etc.