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International Humanitarian Law, Australian Red Cross

Summary

As the International Committee of the Red Cross has been the 'guardian' of the Geneva Conventions on armed warfare, International Humanitarian Law is the basis of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. As a result, Australian Red Cross national Presidents and other leading women, such as Philadelphia Robertson, have been prominent in this field and in international conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.

Details

As 'guardian' of the Geneva Conventions, national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, along with government signatories, have had a unique mandate to disseminate these laws to the community. The dissemination of International Humanitarian Law has therefore been a core function of the national office of the Australian Red Cross, which responds to changes in these laws and protocols, as in the 1970s. In 1978, the Australian Red Cross formed a National Dissemination Committee, and both State and national committees, were particularly active from the 1980s. From this grew the national Department of International Humanitarian Law.

Dissemination has changed according to the Geneva Conventions in place, and the status of the Australian Red Cross. The Australian branch was first constituted as a branch of the British Red Cross Society in accordance with the 1906 Geneva Conventions. In 1919 the Australian Red Cross was accepted as a member of the new League of Red Cross Societies, with Lady Helen Munro Ferguson offering the highest support through her attendance the following year. In 1927 the Australian Red Cross became independent and recognised as such from the International Committee of the Red Cross. In 1938 the Geneva Conventions of 1929 were ratified by the Australian Government, and in 1957 the Geneva Conventions of 1949 were ratified by the Australian Government. The international treaties currently at the heart of International Humanitarian Law are the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and their two Additional Protocols of 1977. In the 1980s, expert national and divisional committees were formed in International Humanitarian Law, reporting to the relevant executive committees. The statute of the International Criminal Court, which has the power to act on International Humanitarian Law, came into effect in July 2002.

International Humanitarian Law, also known as the law of war, aims to limit the suffering of victims of armed conflict and prevent atrocities. International Humanitarian Law also protect those who are not, or are no longer fighting and restrict the means and methods of warfare.

Published resources

Report

Strategy 2005, Australian Red Cross, c2002

Australian Red Cross Society Reports, Australian Red Cross Society, c. 1973

Book

The More things change...The Australian Red Cross 1914-1989, Minogue, Noreen, 1989

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

The University of Melbourne Archives

Annual Reports of Red Cross Divisions and Blood Service

Annual Reports of the Australian Red Cross

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