

# IRCS shows modern face of Islamic altruism

Iranian Red Crescent Society's heroics continue to dazzle the world, the most recent instance of which was 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck southern Turkey and northern Syria in early February, 2023.

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## Social Desk EXCLUSIVE

As the sun rises on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, we are reminded of the unwavering dedication and selfless heroism of countless volunteers who, for over a century, have braved the frontlines of human suffering. Today, we celebrate their indomitable spirit and honor the life-changing impact of these humanitarian giants, whose tireless efforts continue to bring hope and healing to a world in need.

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The year was 1859, and the Battle of Solferino raged on in northern Italy. Amidst the chaos and carnage, a Swiss businessman named Henry Dunant bore witness to the horrors of war. Shocked by the lack of medical care for the wounded, Dunant took matters into his own hands, rallying the local population to tend to the injured soldiers. This experience would ignite a spark within him, leading to the conception of a revolutionary idea: an international organization dedicated to providing humanitarian aid in times of conflict.

In his book, 'A Memory of Solferino' (1862), Dunant wrote, "Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wound-

ed in wartime by zealous, devoted, and thoroughly qualified volunteers?"

Dunant's vision took shape in 1863 when he, along with four other visionaries, founded the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, which would later become the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The following year, the first Geneva Convention was adopted, establishing the rules of war and the protection of the wounded. The emblem of a red cross on a white background was chosen as a symbol of neutrality and protection, inspired by the Swiss flag's colors in reverse.

The idea was utterly humane, and therefore, the organization was universally welcomed. Soon, other individuals in different countries started to follow suit. Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, in her book 'The Red Cross: A History of This Remarkable International Movement in the Interest of Humanity' (1898), wrote that the organization was "an institution which, by its silent, unobtrusive, effective work, has won the respect and gratitude of all civilized nations, and has become the recognized agent of the world's sympathy and aid in the mitigation of human suffering."

As the Red Cross gained prominence, the Ottoman Empire, embroiled in the Russo-Turkish War of 1876-1878, sought a sym-

bol that would resonate with its Muslim population. Thus, the Red Crescent was born, symbolizing the same principles of neutrality and protection as its counterpart. The Red Cross and the Red Crescent would go on to work side by side, transcending cultural and religious boundaries to bring aid to those in need. Mahathir Mohamad, former prime minister of Malaysia, in his speech at the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 1995, praised both organizations for having done much to "alleviate the sufferings of the victims of both natural and man-made disasters. Their work is truly humanitarian, transcending race, religion, and political beliefs."

Throughout their storied history, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent have been at the forefront of countless conflicts, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises. Their members have displayed acts of heroism, often risking their lives to save others.

Today, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises 192 National Societies including the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

Iran's prominent humanitarian organization, the IRCS, is similarly dedicated to providing relief and assistance to those affected by natural disasters, armed conflicts, and health emer-

gencies. Established in 1922, the IRCS is a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and adheres to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement including humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. Since its inception, the organization has played a crucial role in responding to various disasters and emergencies in Iran and neighboring countries. The IRCS has grown significantly over the years, expanding its services and capacity to address the diverse needs of vulnerable populations.

Governed by a general assembly, IRCS provides a wide range of services and activities aimed at alleviating human suffering and promoting health and well-being including disaster management and health treatment.

The IRCS collaborates with various international organizations including the IFRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the United Nations to coordinate and implement humanitarian assistance programs. It also participates in regional and global initiatives such as disaster response exercises and capacity-building projects.

Throughout its history, the Iranian Red Crescent Society has made numerous sacrifices in the service of humanity. One of the organization's most significant landmark events came in the aftermath of the devastating 1935 earthquake in Quetta, which claimed tens of thousands of lives. The IRCS was instrumental in providing relief and assistance to the affected population, earning international recognition for its efforts. During the Iraqi-imposed war (1980-1988), the IRCS played a crucial role in providing medical aid and support to the wounded, often at great personal risk to its volunteers. The organization's commitment to neu-



In the battle of Solferino in 1859, the wounded were left on their own without medical care.



Henry Dunant, the founder of Red Cross

supplies to those in need.

As we reflect on the history of the Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations, it is essential to recognize the vital role played by the Iranian Red Crescent Society in alleviating human suffering. The organization's unwavering commitment to humanitarian principles, its willingness to make sacrifices in the service of others, and its dedication to providing aid and support to those in need, regardless of nationality or creed, make it a shining example of the Red Crescent movement's enduring legacy.

In the end, let's remember what Tadateru Konoé, former president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, once said. "The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is built on the belief that we can create a better world by alleviating human suffering, protecting life and health, and ensuring respect for human dignity."

IRCS has intra-continental activities.  
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