

Red Cross, International

(International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC), private non-governmental humanitarian organization, founded in 1863, staffed by citizens of neutral Switzerland. The ICRC's goals included maintaining contact between national Red Cross societies, acting as a neutral go-between for enemy countries during war, and ensuring the development and implementation of humanitarian law.

By the time World War II broke out in 1939, the ICRC had extended its domain from helping wounded troops on the field of war to protecting prisoners of war, as well. However, it had not yet extended this protection to civilians during times of war. The ICRC used this as an excuse for not aiding the millions of Holocaust victims who were civilians.

By the spring of 1942, the ICRC was made aware of the true meaning of the "final solution." However, it did not publicly condemn the atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jews, and never even asked the German government to respect the human rights the ICRC supposedly stood for. Furthermore, the ICRC did not want to bring up the subject of discrimination based on race. As a rule, the ICRC did not try to rescue the Jewish victims of the Nazis or even intercede on their behalf. Individual representatives of the ICRC sometimes made efforts to help, but achieved little on their own.

At the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, as the ICRC decided that rescue was impossible to achieve, they chose instead to send aid packages of food, medicine, and clothing to deportees in Nazi-dominated countries. However, the ICRC never obtained the necessary documents from the Allies to pass through their war blockade, so the results of their efforts were quite limited.

In spring 1944 the Germans launched the deportation of the Jews of Hungary. At this late point, the ICRC, led by representative Friedrich Born, finally interceded on the Jews' behalf. In early 1945 the ICRC also attempted to negotiate with the German authorities regarding the exchange of civilian prisoners. However, their activities were woefully few in the face of the Nazis' flouting of human rights - which on paper, at least, were the ICRC's domain.

