

# The Malta Red Cross

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**The beginning of the Malta Red Cross occurred in response to a refugee crisis that hit the Maltese shores in 1991, when two ships entered our seas with Albanian refugees. The Malta Red Cross was established on the 24th October 1991. By Act of Parliament it was recognised as an autonomous voluntary Relief Society auxiliary to the Public Authorities and allowed to carry out its activities in the Maltese islands in accordance with the rules and principles of the International Red Cross movement.**

The Malta Red Cross obtained international recognition when on 21st October 1993 it became officially recognised by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) thus joining an international network of some 175 National Societies comprising over 250 million members and volunteers. The headquarters of the Society are located in St. Ursola Street, Valletta. A branch was officially opened in Gozo on 16 February 2002.

## The International Red Cross Movement

The Red Cross grew out of the activity of a Swiss banker named Henri Dunant. On 24th June 1859 a fierce battle raged in the northern Italian town of Solferino between the Franco-Sardinian forces and the Austrians which left 40,000 men dead or wounded. That same evening Dunant, passing through the area on business, was horrified by the sight of thousands of soldiers from both armies left to suffer for want of adequate medical services. He appealed to the local

people to help him tend the wounded, insisting that soldiers on both sides should be cared for. On his return to Switzerland, Dunant published his experiences in a book entitled "A Memory of Solferino", which caused an immediate reaction in many European countries. In Geneva, in 1863, a committee of five (including Dunant) which later became the International Red Cross Committee convened an international conference to consider how Dunant's ideas might be implemented. A total of 16 nations responded and agreed to adopt Dunant's proposals that volunteer aid societies be formed in each country to assist army medical services and that voluntary personnel wear a distinctive sign, a white armband with a red cross. Indeed the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblem can only be used by National Societies with official authority.

## What is the legal status of the International Red Cross?

The International Red Cross is a neutral, impartial and independent

humanitarian organisation. Its nature and membership are non-governmental. Its mandate to protect and assist the victims of armed conflicts has been conferred on it by States through four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. Through these agreements, which are subject to international law, the International Red Cross enjoys certain privileges such as immunity from legal process, which protects it from administrative and judicial proceedings, and inviolability of its premises, archives and other documents. Such privileges and immunities guarantee the neutrality and independence of the organisation.

The activities of the Red Cross movement are essentially humanitarian and their main purpose is to help those that suffer without discrimination. In time of peace, millions of volunteers all over the world involve themselves in health programmes and social welfare. In time of war, the Red Cross strives to protect and assist the civilian and military victims of armed conflicts and internal disturbances on a strictly neutral and impartial basis.

## Mission and Purpose of the Malta Red Cross

The Malta Red Cross (MRC) builds its identity on the fundamental humanitarian principles of the Red Cross movement. The mission of the Malta Red Cross Society is to prevent and alleviate human suffering, improving the situation of the most vulnerable people with absolute impartiality and without discrimination as to race, nationality, gender, class, religious beliefs or political opinions both in peace time and in time of war or internal strife.

At a local level the Malta Red Cross organises regular First Aid courses and training programmes in Malta and Gozo according to recognised international standards both in factories and in schools. Highly trained Land and Water Rescue teams are available. There is an Ambulance service and First Aid posts are set up in areas where there is most

need e.g. large public gatherings and sports events and other sensitive areas. The MRC is very active in the refugee or illegal immigrants scenario both in the initial management as well as the ongoing process of humanitarian support, tracing lost relatives and friends and relocation of these people. It has an ongoing programme of dissemination of International Humanitarian Law and participates in international relief appeals. Hopefully in the future our national society may be in a position to send trained delegates to help in regional and national disaster areas. The local Red

Cross society works as much as possible in conjunction with national relief organisations as well as other non governmental organisations in a spirit of mutual cooperation and respect.

### **Crucial role for Red Cross Volunteers**

The above mentioned activities would not be possible without the

sterling work of hundreds of local volunteers who sacrifice a good part of their time to support the society without remuneration. The spirit of volunteering is the cornerstone and backbone of the Red Cross humanitarian service world-wide.

Although our membership is growing every year there is always a need for more volunteers to join the various sections of the Malta Red Cross. Non-active members are also very welcome.

**For further information contact can be made with the Malta Red Cross by phone: 2122 2645 or e-mail: [redcross@waldonet.net.mt](mailto:redcross@waldonet.net.mt) Enrolment forms for membership or participation in specific activities will be sent on request.**