

12 August 2009

**Message of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions**

The 60th anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions is an opportunity to reflect on these key agreements to counter the scourge of warfare that has destroyed the lives of so many people.

It is also an appropriate time to pay tribute to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and its primary founder, Mr. Henry Dunant, the Swiss humanitarian whose ideas helped bring states together to agree to the first Geneva Convention in 1864 to “protect individuals from the inhumanity of war.” Dunant's idea was not merely to make war more humane, but to create laws that would eventually end war forever.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are at the core of international humanitarian law, the body of international law that regulates the conduct of armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects.

They specifically protect people who are not taking part in the hostilities (civilians, health workers and aid workers) and those who are no longer participating in the hostilities, such as wounded, sick and shipwrecked soldiers and prisoners of war.

The Conventions and their Protocols call for measures to be taken to prevent or put an end to all breaches. They contain stringent rules to deal with what are known as "grave breaches". Those responsible for grave breaches must be sought, tried or extradited, whatever nationality they may hold.

These missions remain alive throughout the world today. The ICRC and all Member States of the United Nations should recommit ourselves to not only protecting individuals from the inhumanity of war, but also to taking steps to remove the threat of war.

This will require ridding the world of nuclear weapons forever.

This will require bringing war criminals, including those from the most powerful countries, to justice for their wars of aggression, their war crimes and their crimes against humanity.

It will require that all nations, large and small, be accountable for their obligations under the United Nations Charter and, without exception, respect the rule of international law.

And it will require taking action to ensure that one of the most fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations is respected: ensuring peaceful relations among all States.