

## THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE ORGANISATION (ICDO): FROM 1931 TO DATE



In 1931 the French Surgeon-General Georges Saint-Paul founded in Paris (France) the "**Lieux de Genève Association**" from which the present International Civil Defence Organization (ICDO) originated. Under "**Lieux de Genève**" or "**Geneva Zones**" (Geneva : Henry Dunant's birthplace, home of the Red Cross, headquarters of the League of Nations), the Surgeon-General meant neutralized zones or open towns in which some categories of the civilian population could seek refuge during wartime. He particularly had in mind women, children, and sick and aged persons.

The idea of the founder of the "**Geneva Zones**" was in effect to create in all countries well-demarcated safety zones or localities established on a permanent basis or moreover recognized as such, already in peacetime, by bilateral or international agreements. This programme was presented for the first time by Georges Saint-Paul, as early as 1929, in a medical journal. It was then developed in newspaper articles and at numerous conferences.

Later, in 1935, on the initiative of the "**Geneva Zones Association**" the French Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution inviting the League of Nations to study the means of creating in every country, according to the agreements ratified by the League of Nations, localities, places or zones which would in case of armed conflict be preserved from all combat and use for military purposes...".

The Surgeon-General Saint-Paul died in 1937, the same year as, at his request, the Association was transferred from Paris to Geneva and became The International Association for the Protection of Civilian Populations and Historic Buildings in Wartime. It was one of his most faithful colleagues and friends, the Genevese Henri George who from then on took over the Association as its Secretary General. It was on his initiative that the "**Geneva Zones**" intervened between the belligerents in the Spanish Civil War (1936) and in the Sino-Japanese conflict (1937) and were able to obtain the creation of neutralized zones for some categories of non-combatants in Madrid and Bilbao as well as in Shanghai and Nanking. Although the experience had been very limited, it had shown that, under certain conditions, the safety zone idea could be applied in some form.

During the Second World War none of the belligerents agreed to create, and least of all recognize, safety zones for the benefit of anyone at all. Georges Saint-Paul had repeated many times in his articles and at conferences: "**It is before the war, before hostilities are declared that it is necessary and worthwhile to determine in which way the lot of combatants and the population may be alleviated... when war has begun, when violence strikes, it is too late**".

The Founder of "**Geneva Zones**" had stressed the essential: prevention, the idea which was from then on taken up and enlarged upon by his successors in all areas relating to population protection.



In 1947, Henri George published an important work entitled "**Modern War and Civilian Protection**" with the following reference: "**published by the General Secretariat of the "Geneva Zones" "Truce Areas" International Association for the Protection of Civilian Populations and Historic Buildings in Wartime or Armed Conflicts**". A true manifesto aimed at public opinion, the work recalled the action of the Surgeon-General Saint-Paul, and the experience acquired but in particular presented a preliminary draft of an international Convention relating to the creation of "**safety areas called Geneva Zones**".

The ideas and principles developed in this manifesto were the fount of inspiration for the drafting of texts presented to the Geneva Diplomatic Conference held in that city from May to August 1949 to revise the first three Geneva Conventions and to adopt a fourth : the one precisely "**relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war**". Whereas the draft Convention of the "Geneva Zones" envisaged vast zones, combined with the protection of monuments, and even historic or artistic cities, able to be used as refuge simultaneously by the wounded and sick in armed forces and some civilian categories such as women, children, sick and aged persons and invalids, the Diplomatic Conference itself divided the draft into two distinct parts. It ratified on the one hand the existence of "**hospital zones and localities**" for the wounded and sick in the armed forces (Article 23 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Convention) protected by the Red Cross emblem and created, on the other hand, "**hospital and safety zones and localities so organized as to protect from the effect of war, wounded, and sick and aged persons, invalids, children under fifteen, expectant mothers and mothers of children under seven**" (Article 14 of the IV<sup>th</sup> Convention); these safety zones - themselves being protected by a new sign consisting of oblique red bands (Article 6 of Annex 1). There can be recognized the two oblique red bands which constituted the emblem of the Geneva Zones and which included in the ICDO emblem until 1998.



In 1951, twenty years after its creation the International Association of Geneva Zones was still trying to implement the ideas of its founder aimed at preparing and developing, already in peacetime, refuge places for the civilian population, these "**safety zones**" that the belligerents would accept to respect by virtue of the Humanitarian Law, explicitly expressed in the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

On the basis of protection provided for in the Geneva Conventions, the General Secretariat of the Geneva Zones then devoted itself to the study and preparation of future safety zones.

To this end plans for evacuation and population transfer to the zones to be developed were studied and perfected with the cooperation of the municipal authorities of various European cities. From then on an exchange of ideas and planning proved useful and indeed necessary. It was for this purpose that an international Conference was held in Berlin in 1954 on the problem of the protection of civilian populations in wartime by the creation and recognition of neutralized zones and open cities. In the annals of the ICDO this meeting later became known as the **"First World Civil Defence Conference"**. Following the resolutions adopted by the Berlin delegates, the International Association endeavored to spread to many countries the principle of preparation of refuge places whilst collaborating with the national Civil Defence institutions and organizations which were formed in the face of the threat of a new generalized conflict.

In July 1956 the **"Geneva Zones Information Bulletin"** was entitled **"CIVIL DEFENCE"** and its editorial foreshadowed the Association's development : ***"The resumption of General action by the Geneva Zones Organization for the protection of children, mothers, the aged and invalids in case of war coincides with the development of national Civil Defence bodies in different countries... The Geneva Zones continue their efforts in instigating the evacuation of non-combatants to refuge places and zones known as "Geneva Zones" to work out development plans for these places and to promote at an international level Civil Defence measures, thus acting as a clearing house between the different national Civilian Defence bodies."***

The Second Civil Defence Conference of an international character took place in 1957 in Florence. During this meeting the delegates assigned to the International Association of Geneva Zones the task to extend its activities to all questions relating to the protection of man and his environment by becoming an international organization specialized in Civil Defence matters.

### **From "Geneva Zones" to Civil Defence**

In January 1958 the International Association of Geneva Zones, a private body, was changed into the International Civil Defence Organization and given new statutes allowing membership in the Organization to individuals as well as corporate bodies such as associations, societies or even Governments. The aims of the Organization were extended and while it continued to deal with refuge places and safety zones, it was also assigned the responsibility of establishing liaison between national Civil Defence Organizations, undertaking and promoting studies and research on population protection matters and facilitating the exchange of experience and the coordination of efforts in the area of disaster prevention, preparedness and intervention.

On the basis of its new statutes the ICDO convened in May 1958 the Third World Civil Defence Conference at Geneva. The Agenda of the Conference included: atmospheric radioactivity, decentralization, evacuation and shelter of populations in wartime; international status of Civil Defence personnel; protection of cultural property. Compared with the anxieties of that time, it can be noted that now later nuclear tests in the atmosphere are prohibited, atomic shelters have increased in many countries, the

Civil Defence personnel enjoy international status entered in the International Humanitarian Law and that cultural property is protected by international agreements.

From the beginning of the 1960's the ICDO considerably altered its horizons by undertaking its aims for population protection in wartime to concentrate its approach on the problem of natural and technical disasters in peacetime.

In 1966 at Monaco following the Second International Conference on Radiological Protection, the representatives of the Member States of the ICDO, at its Constituent Assembly, adopted the text of the present Constitution which conferred on it the status of an intergovernmental organization. This Constitution is in fact an international Convention binding the High Contracting Parties and thereafter each country which, by depositing its ratification instruments, adhered thereto as a Member State.

The preamble to the Constitution defines the aims of the Organization expressed as follows : ***"to intensify and coordinate on a world-wide scale the development and improvement of organizations, means and techniques for preventing and reducing the consequences of natural disaster in peacetime or of the use of weapons in time of conflict"***. The Constitution effectively came into force on 1 March 1972 at the first General Assembly of Member States. Thereafter, the Constitution of the ICDO was registered in 1975 at the United Nations Secretariat in New York according to Article 102 of the Charter and published in the United Nations Treaty Series. Finally, the Agreement signed on 10 March 1976 between the Swiss Federal Government and the ICDO settled the juridical status of the Organization in Switzerland.

The 1966 Constitution conferred on the ICDO a certain number of tasks aimed in fact at assuming, on an international scale, the responsibility of promoting protection and safety of persons and property faced with all types of disasters and gathering within itself the national Authorities of the members countries, entrusted with the implementation of these measures. It is worth mentioning that the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its resolution 2034 adopted in 1965 called upon ***"governments to establish an appropriate planning and executive body, best suited to their particular circumstances with a view to defining the scope and nature of the necessary assistance and centralizing the management of relief operations"***.

Furthermore, the ICDO was associated with the preparation of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions by taking part in meetings of experts which led to the final drafting of these Protocols in 1977. The role of the ICDO and its Member States in defining Civil Defence in the new Humanitarian Law and the precise tasks assigned to it had been decisive. In addition, a specific article (Protocol I, Chapter VI, Article 64) extends the protection granted by the belligerents to national Civil Defence Organizations as well as to ***"relevant international organizations"***. As can be seen, the idea of International Civil Defence had also been introduced into the Humanitarian Law. However, this International Humanitarian Law, as an outcome of the Geneva Conventions, only applies in wartime. Many efforts therefore remain to be done to facilitate and, if necessary, legalize humanitarian operations in peacetime, namely international disaster assistance.

The ICDO which, by decision of its Member States, has become a specialized organization in the protection of man and his property in all disaster situations has therefore mainly concentrated on working towards intervention and international assistance in peacetime and consolidation of international cooperation in this field. The ICDO has indeed designed the **“Framework Convention on Civil Defence Assistance”** which was adopted during an international conference held in Geneva on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2000.

Summarizing the progress achieved during the time which separates the **“Geneva Zones”** of General Saint-Paul and the International Civil Defence Organisation of today, it can be stated that the idea of protection of civilians in wartime has extended to that of protection and safety of the population in general thanks to the increase, coordination and planning, at an international level, methods, means and technology of a kind to prevent, fight and mitigate the consequences of accidents, disasters and calamities of all types, in peacetime or warfare.