



CHRISTINE BEERLI

Christine Beerli, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was born in 1953. A member of a law firm in Biel, Ms Beerli began her political career on that city's municipal council, where she served from 1980 to 1983. From 1986 to 1991 she was a member of the legislative assembly of the Canton of Bern.

In 1991 she was elected to the upper house of the Swiss parliament, where she remained until 2003, chairing the foreign affairs committee (1998-1999) and the committee for social security and health (2000-2001). Ms Beerli chaired the caucus of the Free Democratic Party in Switzerland's federal assembly from 1996 to 2003. She also served on committees dealing with security policy and economic and legal affairs.

She retired from politics in 2003. Since 1st January 2006 she has headed Swissmedic, the Swiss supervisory authority for therapeutic products. She is former director of the School of Engineering and Information Technology at the Bern University of Applied Sciences.

In January 2008, Ms Beerli was appointed permanent Vice-President of the ICRC. As such she is a member of the ICRC Assembly – the institution's supreme governing body – as well as the Assembly Council and the Presidency, where she works closely with the President and deputises for him whenever necessary. Her tasks concern i.a. :

- manage the external relations of the ICRC, represent that institution on the international scene and conduct, in close cooperation with the relevant Directorate-General, the humanitarian diplomacy of the ICRC,
- ensure the cohesion, the good functioning and the development of the internal control and the governance mechanisms,
- reinforce and develop the mutual relations inside the Internationale Movement of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS OF 1949 AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

The Geneva Conventions have their origin in the experience of Henry Dunant at the battle of Solferino in 1859. Horrified by the neglect of the sick and wounded on the battlefield, he organized, with four colleagues, the diplomatic conference that led to the adoption of the First Geneva Convention in 1864. This convention has developed into the 4 Geneva conventions of 1949 and its 3 additional protocols (on the amelioration of the wounded, the sick and the shipwrecked members of armed forces, on the treatment of prisoners of war and on the protection of civilian persons in time of war) .

The ICRC acquired a unique mandate under the Geneva Conventions, giving it access to places of detention to assess the condition of those deprived of their freedom. It makes detailed and confidential recommendations to the detaining authorities and on occasions assists in improving facilities. ICRC visits to people deprived of their freedom cover some 70 countries and reach almost 500,000 detainees each year.

The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization. The supreme body is the Assembly, composed of 15-25 Swiss co-opted nationals. The Assembly Council (5 members of the Assembly), the office of the President (at present M. Peter Maurer) and the ICRC-Directorate prepare the decisions of the Assembly.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies regroups the 191 national societies.
