



AMERICAN  
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### **Peter Maurer - 2014**

President, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

« Present & Future Challenges to Humanitarian Organizations »

Addressing the AIC Club, Peter Maurer, said the spirit of humanitarianism lives on at the Red Cross, in spite of the many new challenges it faces. Founded 150 years ago, the Red Cross was founded by private citizens horrified by the sight of wounded soldiers left dying in the battlefields in Solferino. Peter Maurer reaffirmed that the organization's original principals and approaches remain valid 150 years later; neutrality, impartiality, independence from any religion or political affiliation.

Peter Maurer, studied history and International law in Bern, Switzerland, where he was awarded a PhD. In 1987, he entered the Swiss diplomatic service (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs). In 2004, Peter was appointed Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations in NY. He endeavoured to integrate Switzerland, which had only recently joined the UN, into its multilateral networks. In 2010, Peter Maurer became Switzerland's State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, a position he held until being elected President of the ICRC.

The ICRC remains a Swiss organization, although worldwide, fewer than 30 percent of their staff are Swiss, given a mandate by 193 countries to play a special humanitarian role. The past 150 years have seen a major transformation of the Red Cross from a charity into a professional humanitarian organization. Its role of helping people affected by war is complicated by new developments, he said, that were not in the picture, when the original Geneva Convention, setting rules for treatment of war victims, were adopted in 1864. One of the prime concerns, is simply having access to people in need and having security for our workers., a situation best illustrated by Syria.

For example, because of the fragmented nature of the Syrian conflict, the Red Cross has had to deal with 45 to 60 roadblocks between Damascus and Aleppo, each one in the control of different groups. Another change is the radicalization of arms bearers, who do not respect humanitarian values. Red Cross workers have been the subject of abductions and deliberate targeting. Some people in control of war zones, intentionally deny the Red Cross access to civilians in distress.

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