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Founding of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Society:

The idea was born in 1859 when a Swiss man, Henry Dunant, witnessed the aftermath of a bloody battle in Italy over Italian unification. He was shocked to see 40,000 soldiers lying on the battlefield with no organized assistance being provided for the wounded. He was haunted by this experience. Four years later, in 1863, Dunant and several others organized an international committee to aid victims of war. Later that year, the new organization adopted the name and the symbol of a red cross.



The symbol of a red cross on a white background was adopted because, as the symbol of Switzerland, it represented neutrality. In addition, the red and white contrast and clear, simple image is easily reproduced and shows up well across a distance.



In the 1876-1878 war between Russia and Turkey, the Ottoman Empire decided to use the symbol of a red crescent, instead of a red cross. While indicating their respect for Christian symbolism, Ottoman authorities pointed out that both the symbolism and color scheme have very negative connotations in the Middle East. Muslims from that region of the world remember that medieval Crusaders, wearing uniforms with a red cross on a white background, massacred thousands of Muslim people and destroyed Muslim towns and cities, leaving a permanent strain in relations between the two peoples. Therefore, the Ottomans – and later other Muslim countries – proposed a modified version of the symbol: a red crescent on a white background. Today, the international organization is called the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

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