



# RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT EMBLEMS



# DID YOU KNOW?

## THREE PROTECTIVE SYMBOLS

Most people are familiar with the red cross and red crescent emblems. They are seen every day by people all around the world, primarily in connection with the services offered by their country's National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. Many associate the emblems with first aid or healthcare. But they are often unaware of the purpose of the emblems.

The red cross emblem dates back over 150 years. It was developed to protect wounded and sick soldiers on the battlefield and the military doctors and nurses that cared for them. The red crescent emblem came to be used shortly afterwards for the same purpose. The red crystal emblem was also adopted more recently.

First and foremost, the red cross, red crescent and red crystal are internationally recognized symbols of the protection that international law confers on the wounded and the sick and those caring for them in times of armed conflict. Their primary function is to protect armed forces'

medical services. We call this the protective function. In this case, the emblems used should be as large as possible.

The emblems also show that a person or an object is linked to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement). As such, the emblems also symbolize the independent, neutral and impartial assistance delivered by the Movement. They are used in combination with the name or initials of the relevant branch of the Movement and incorporated into logos. We call this the indicative function.

These life-saving symbols can only protect people suffering during armed conflict if they are understood and trusted by all. It is therefore crucial that the emblems are used correctly, and only by those authorized to do so by law.



# WHO CAN DISPLAY THE EMBLEMS?

**THE USE OF THE EMBLEMS IS GOVERNED BY THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS OF 1949, THEIR ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS AND BY NATIONAL LAW.**

States are responsible for ensuring that they are used correctly both in peacetime and during armed conflict. National rules governing their use are also included in domestic legislation in most countries. In the Czech Republic, that means primarily Act No. 126/1992 Coll., on the protection of the emblem and name of the Red Cross and the Czechoslovak Red Cross. This law provides that the Czech Red Cross is the official national society of the Red Cross in the Czech Republic.

In times of armed conflict, these emblems can be displayed as a protective symbol only by the following:

- the military medical service for its facilities, vehicles and staff, and also military chaplains;
- state-owned or state-assigned civilian hospitals and medical facilities, vehicles and staff assigned to care the wounded and sick.

Medical staff, vehicles and medical units of duly recognized national societies of the Movement can operate both in the first and second of the above groups. Other persons, vehicles and facilities of the national society can use these emblems in times of armed conflict only as indicative, and only in a relatively small size at this time.

**THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES CAN USE THESE EMBLEMS FOR BOTH PROTECTIVE AND INDICATIVE PURPOSES WITHOUT RESTRICTION DURING TIMES OF ARMED CONFLICT AND IN PEACETIME.**

In peacetime these emblems can only be used by the following:

- the military medical service for its facilities, vehicles and staff, and also military chaplains;
- national societies the Movement (indicative function);
- ambulances and first-aid stations intended solely for free-of-charge treatment of the wounded or sick, but only with the express authorization of the relevant national society of the Movement (authorisations issued by the Czech Red Cross are published at [www.cervenyrkiz.eu](http://www.cervenyrkiz.eu)).

**PEOPLE SOMETIMES USE THESE EMBLEMS EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NOT AUTHORIZED TO, FOR EXAMPLE:**

- **A HEALTH PRACTITIONER DISPLAYING AN EMBLEM AT THEIR CLINIC.**
- **A PHARMACY DISPLAYING A RED CROSS OR A RED CRESCENT ON A SHOPFRONT SIGN.**
- **A COMPANY INCLUDING AN EMBLEM ON A PRODUCT OR ADVERTISEMENT TO BENEFIT FROM THESE SYMBOLS' REPUTATION.**

**NONE OF THESE USES ARE PERMITTED.**

# WHAT IS EMBLEM MISUSE?

Emblem misuse occurs when the emblems are displayed in peacetime or during armed conflict by someone not lawfully entitled to do so or when they are used in a manner that could undermine respect for the emblems or be misleading. The types of misuse can be categorized as imitation, improper use and perfidy:

## IMITATION (A)

The use of a symbol that, by its shape and its colour, could be confused with the red cross, red crescent or red crystal emblem.

## IMPROPER USE (B)

When a person or organization that is not entitled to do so displays the emblem on a sign marking their establishment, for example, or on some object. It is not uncommon for commercial enterprises, medical centres, pharmacies,

non-governmental organizations and others to be unaware of the rules and display the emblem in a manner contrary to the law.

## PERFIDY (C)

The deliberate use of these emblems during armed conflict to deceive the enemy by disguising combatants or military equipment. This is the most serious misuse of the emblems and may constitute a war crime.

**IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, THE PUNISHMENTS FOR MISUSE OF THE RED CROSS EMBLEM ARE LAID DOWN BY THE AFORESAID ACT ON THE PROTECTION OF THE EMBLEM AND NAME OF THE RED CROSS AND ON THE CZECHOSLOVAK RED CROSS AND BY THE CRIMINAL CODE.**

A



B



C



# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO PROTECT AND ENSURE RESPECT FOR THE EMBLEMS?

Misuse of the emblems could jeopardize their protective function during armed conflict because the warring parties and weapon bearers lose trust in what the emblems stand for: i.e. that they mark out persons and objects protected against attack under international law.

Misuse of the emblems undermines their status both during armed conflicts and in peacetime, which may hamper or jeopardize the safe access of military medical staff or Red Cross or Red Crescent staff to people and communities in need during humanitarian crises.

Even in countries that are not experiencing any crisis, it is important to ensure that the emblems are used correctly so that people and communities understand their purpose. If an emergency strikes, including civil unrest or a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a major flood, people need to know that the staff and volunteers displaying the emblem while responding to the affected communities' needs are neutral, independent and impartial. These are the values associated with the red cross and red crescent emblems and ensuring safe access.



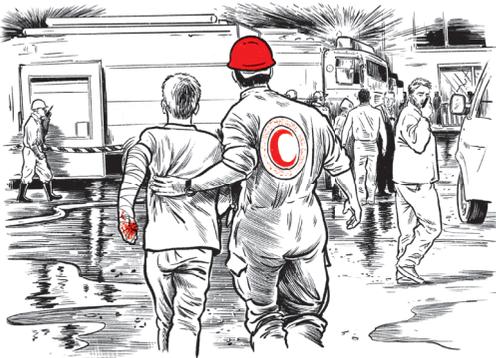
# WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF THE EMBLEMS ARE MISUSED?

Misuse of the emblems can have many serious consequences, above all for the people who are in need of help during emergencies. In the worst-case scenario, lives can be put at risk if the emblems are displayed by anyone not authorized to do so. Consider the following examples:

An armed conflict has broken out in your country. Massive shelling is taking place in populated areas. Men, women and children are wounded and houses destroyed. Health workers displaying the red cross arrive to care for the wounded but are stopped at a checkpoint and not permitted to enter the area. For what reason? Before the conflict broke out, the emblems had been widely used by the medical community and by private companies for commercial purposes. Then, during the armed conflict, some fighters had been

unlawfully transporting weapons and ammunition in ambulances marked with the red cross emblem. As no one understands or trusts the red cross emblem, the medical workers were prevented from providing help. Countless lives are lost...

A major flood strikes your village. Your home is destroyed, your family is injured and you need help fast. Red Cross personnel try to reach your village but they are barred from entering. Local officials are suspicious that the emblems are associated with a political agenda, as a symbol closely resembling the red cross had been used by one of the political parties during the recent electoral campaign. They don't understand that the care offered by the Red Cross is neutral and impartial. As a result, your family and numerous others in your village do not receive the care they need...



# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PROTECT THE RED CROSS EMBLEM?

You can make sure that the red cross emblem is not used in ways it was not intended for. Alternative symbols should be used to prevent confusion and misuse.

For example, the medical community could use one of the many internationally recognized symbols to identify ambulances, hospitals, first aid posts and pharmacies.

If you see the emblems being used by people or organizations that are not entitled to do so, you should alert the Czech Red Cross, which will decide what course of action to take. In most cases, the person or organization misusing the red cross emblem do so simply because they are not aware of its significance and the rules governing its use.



HOSPITAL



PHARMACY



FIRST AID



CLINIC



Marek Jukl

## **RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT EMBLEMS**

SAFEGUARDING THEIR POWER TO PROTECT  
AND PREVENTING MISUSE

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You can learn more  
about the Red Cross  
emblem at:

