

**RED CROSS DENIES MAGEN DAVID EMBLEM**

By Professor Yoram Dinstejn

Basic humanitarian sentiments require, and international humanitarian law (embodied in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949) lays down, that the medical services of the armed forces of belligerent States

must be immune from harm while they are carrying out their mission of looking after the wounded and the sick. That being the case, all medical personnel should obviously wear a distinctive emblem

which would enable friend and foe alike to tell them apart from combatants. Only with such an emblem can doctors, nurses and others continue to do their best when the battle is raging and everybody else is doing his worst.

The need for the emblem (and the very concept from which it stems, that the wounded and the sick must not be left to their fate) first arose in the eighteen-sixties, at which time the civilized countries were all Christian. No wonder that they chose the sign of the cross - in red on white ground - as the emblem of mercy. However, when Moslem countries joined the club of civilized countries, they refused to let their own medical services be guided by this most Christian of all signs, and they

insisted on using the red crescent - as well as the red lion and sun (an emblem used exclusively in Iran) - instead. The Christian States conceded the logic of allowing Moslem countries to resort to emblems other than the cross. Yet, when the first sovereign Jewish State emerged and expressed the desire to use its own emblem, the Red Shield of David, it was felt that there were too many distinctive signs as it was and that there was no room for any addition. The Geneva Conventions pronounce that the red cross on white ground is formed

by reversing the colors of Switzerland as a compliment to that country. This is an ingenious explanation, designed to assuage the feelings of States such as Israel but it fails to address itself to the two key issues, namely (1) the religious significance of the cross, even in the context of the Swiss colors; (2) the incontrovertible fact that Moslems have a legally recognized alternative to the cross, actually two alternatives. Thus, of the three great monotheistic religions only one - Judaism - has been denied recognition of its traditional emblem.

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