Henry Dunant

Henry Dunant was born into a devout Christian family in Geneva involved in charitable work, which ingrained in him a sense of social responsibility. Inspired by his parents’ dedication he became an active member of Christian associations supporting the sick and poor. In 1856 he founded a colonial company and ran a mill in French-occupied Algeria. Following disagreements with the colonial authorities Dunant decided to appeal directly to Emperor Napoleon III. Thus in 1859 he followed the Emperor to Italy where he witnessed the Battle of Solferino. On his own initiative he erected field hospitals to care for the thousands of wounded on both sides. This experience led to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863 with Guillaume-Henri Dufour as its first president. The 1864 Geneva Convention established the neutral status of the wounded and medical personnel in wartime. Dunant travelled extensively in Europe to promote the ideals of the Red Cross. In 1901 he shared the first Nobel Peace Prize with the French pacifist Frédéric Passy.