

Criteria for awarding the Henry Dunant Medal

Adopted by the Standing Commission at its meeting
of 20 and 21 April 1998

1. Intent of the Henry Dunant Medal and criteria for awarding it

“The Henry Dunant Medal is intended to recognize and reward outstanding services and acts of great devotion, mainly of international significance, to the cause of the Red Cross [and Red Crescent] by any of its members.” It may be awarded on the basis of “risks run and arduous conditions endangering life, health and personal freedom [or ...] for a long period of devoted service to the International Red Cross [and Red Crescent Movement]”. In addition to the above criteria, the Standing Commission announced publicly that it would not award the Medal to persons still working within the Movement. Only a very small number of Medals are to be awarded at one time. The Medal may be awarded posthumously.

The Standing Commission takes the view that the Henry Dunant Medal should be awarded to individuals who belong to the Movement and who have distinguished themselves either by their long and outstanding service to the ideals of the Movement, or because they acted with exceptional courage and dedication in a given situation or situations. Furthermore, the Standing Commission will evaluate candidates according to the following interpretation of the Regulations.

1.1 Member

A “member” of the Red Cross/Red Crescent may be an individual volunteering his or her time without thought of pecuniary gain, or a paid professional (delegate, staff member) earning a living from his or her work for the Movement. When putting forward or judging a candidate, the accent should be on the exceptional nature of the act rather than on the member’s status.

When the Standing Commission decided that persons still active in the Movement should not receive the Medal, it was in order to judge candidates more even-handedly, to avoid using the award simply to recognize long careers, and to eliminate any actual or perceived exertion of personal influence by certain leaders. This rule is maintained, and applies to all candidates still occupying a senior position within one of the Movement’s components or statutory bodies.

The Medal will not be awarded to a member of the Red Cross/Red Crescent who is also engaged in activities outside the Movement in a field that could be contrary to the Fundamental Principles of neutrality and independence.

1.2 International significance

The Regulations state that the Henry Dunant Medal should mainly recognize acts or services of “international significance”. This is to distinguish the Henry Dunant Medal from other medals that individual National Societies have established or may establish to pay tribute to their members on the national level. Thus candidates should be put forward and judged in terms of their specific contribution to the international aspects of the Movement’s work, be it in the field of general policy, governance or operations.

1.3 Risks run and arduous conditions endangering life, health, and personal freedom

When the Henry Dunant Medal was established, it was primarily meant to recognize acts of great courage during a field operation. Indeed, many of those who initially received the Medal distinguished themselves through their exceptional courage and devotion to the humanitarian ideal during major operations. Over time, and particularly in recent years when respect for humanitarian personnel has declined in many contexts, the Medal has been awarded to delegates or personnel who were killed or seriously wounded in the line of duty. While there is no doubt that it is important and necessary to recognize those who have given their lives or suffered serious physical or psychological harm in the course of their duties, it would be preferable that each component of the Movement establish its own award in order to preserve the unique character of the Henry Dunant Medal.

Naturally, if a member of the Red Cross/Red Crescent who has been killed or wounded in the line of duty also acted with great courage and devotion and took risks in order to help others, he or she could be awarded the Medal. In judging a candidate, the accent must be placed on the exceptional merits of the individual rather than on the danger inherent in many operational activities.

2. Posthumous Henry Dunant Medals

A candidate for a posthumous award of the Medal should be judged according to the criteria outlined above. Posthumous Medals should not be automatically awarded to those who have died in the service of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, unless they personally distinguished themselves (see point 1.3). The Medal should be awarded to the living, rather than the dead, as it is important that the individuals receiving it know that their peers valued their contribution to the humanitarian cause and consider them as an example to others.

3. Tributes to members of the Movement killed in the line of duty

Considering the growing number of volunteers and delegates who have been seriously wounded or killed during an assignment, the Standing Commission encourages each of the Movement’s components to establish its own medal or other award to pay tribute to those who have given their lives or sacrificed their health to the Red Cross/Red Crescent cause, according to the following main criteria.

4. Conclusion

The Standing Commission will award the Henry Dunant Medal to members of the Movement in accordance with the intent and criteria laid down in the Regulations, as interpreted in points 2 and 3 of the present document. In addition, it recommends that components of the Movement which have not already done so establish their own form of recognition for members who have died or suffered serious bodily or psychological harm in the course of their duties.