

# **RED CROSS OF SLOVENIJA IN GRADAC IN BELA KRAJINA**

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# RED CROSS OF SLOVENIA IN GRADAC IN BELA KRAJINA

## History of the Red Cross organization

History tells us that in the last three millennia of its existence, humanity has spent only about 250 years in peace, despite humanity's eternal desire to live in peace and freedom. The history of mankind has always been accompanied by wars and severe consequences. Conflicts between nations have always been accompanied by suffering, poverty, famine, refugees and many wounded among civilians and direct participants in the conflicts. Even before the establishment of the Red Cross, history offered us a series of agreements and treaties that sought to improve the fate of the wounded and sick in war, but these agreements were more than short-lived or defined in a few regional areas. All these past events created the conditions for the realization of the ideas of Jelena Pavlova, Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant, which indicated some new relations between people and countries. During the Crimean War (1853-1856), Pavlova on the Russian side and Nightingale on the English side engaged in systematic work in caring for the wounded.

The biggest breakthrough in the permanent organization of aid and international protection of the wounded and sick occurred on June 24, 1859 during the Battle of Solferino, when the Habsburg army suffered a severe defeat against the combined armies of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and France. In the battle, 40,000 dead and severely wounded soldiers were besieged without any help. Henry Dunant from Geneva came to the scene of the fight during his business trip. When he saw the terrible situation in which the wounded soldiers found themselves, he began to organize civilian first aid for them, because the military ambulance was not ready at that time to take care of such a large number of wounded and sick people.



Photo 1: Jean Henri Dunant. Retrieved 17.06.2020 from the website [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri\\_Dunant](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Dunant)

From that time on, he devoted himself mainly to finding a way to prevent or at least alleviate such suffering in future wars. In 1862, Henry Dunant's book "Memories of Solferino" sought to stimulate the conscience of mankind and accelerate the establishment of national committees and societies to train nurses in peacetime to help and care for the wounded and sick on the battlefield. His great personal efforts penetrated ever deeper into the consciousness of the people of Europe at the time and, despite obstacles, opposition and misunderstanding of individuals, led to February 9, 1863, where the Geneva Society for Public Welfare agreed to help realize Dunant's ideas.

The Committee of Five, already called the Geneva Committee for Aid to the Wounded in 1863 (later called the Geneva International Committee and, since 1875, the International Committee of the Red Cross), organized an international conference on October 26, 1863 in Geneva. It laid the foundations for the establishment of the Red Cross as an international organization. The first societies were registered with the International Committee in the same year.

The following year, on October 22, 1864, under the auspices of the Red Cross and with the efforts of Henry Dunant, a diplomatic conference was held in Geneva. The First Geneva Convention was adopted, which provides for the protection of sick and wounded soldiers, regardless of nationality. European countries soon realized its usefulness, so they ratified the Geneva Convention one after another. Three more conventions followed, the last on the protection of the civilian population, adopted after the end of World War II.

As early as 1863, it was agreed that the Red Cross on a white background would be the hallmark of Red Cross societies. Muslim countries, following the example of Turkey, use the sign of the red crescent for religious reasons. Both signs, together with the red lion with the sun, chosen by Iran in the period 1923-1980 (today Iran also uses the crescent), were recognized in 1929 in The Hague. The use of the red crystal symbol provides additional protection for victims of armed conflict and for humanitarian workers in those areas of the cross where the other two symbols are not allowed to be used.

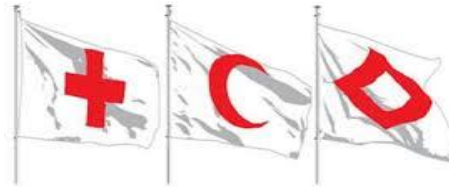


Photo 2: Symbols of the Red Cross  
Retrieved June 17, 2020, from the website:  
<https://www.24ur.com/novice/svet/kriz-polmesec-in-kristal.html>

## Red Cross in Slovenia

The beginning of the activities of the Red Cross in Carniola dates back to 1866. In that year, the Women's Society for the Aid of Wounded and Sick Soldiers and the Widows and Children of Fallen Soldiers began operating in Ljubljana. The society issued its rules, which were also confirmed by the provincial authorities, on February 26, 1870. In 1879, the Men's Patriotic Auxiliary Society was established in Ljubljana to support and serve the wounded and sick soldiers. It was established primarily to support and care for wounded and sick soldiers and was aimed primarily at collecting money and other contributions and gaining "members". In 1902, a women's and men's association was merged in order to prevent the fragmentation of resources and forces, the acquisition of new members, the collection of medical supplies and food, and the voluntary medical service. The association initially had two presidents, Ivan Murnik and Flori Rudež. In the period before the First World War, the activities of the Red Cross in Carniola were mainly related to the collection of clothing and footwear, they trained the population for first aid in the war, distributed aid to wounded soldiers, etc. In 1888, the RK numbered 17 branches with 566 members. In 1918, the Provincial and Lady's Auxiliary Society of the Red Cross for Carniola severed ties with the Austrian Red Cross and established the Slovenian Red Cross. In the newly established state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Red Cross Society of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was founded on 29 June 1921, which forced them to abandon the title of the Red Cross of Slovenia. In Slovenia, the district committee was organized first, then the banovina committee of the Red Cross of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later the Red Cross of Yugoslavia. In 1934, the Banovina Committee already had 25 district committees, 127 municipal committees and 150 municipal commissions. In 1940, there were already 18,460 members of the Red Cross in Slovenia, and the youth already numbered 29,811 members. On April 6, 1941, Yugoslavia was also engulfed in war. The country disintegrated, the government fled to London, and the leadership of the Yugoslav Red Cross emigrated there. With that, his

function officially ended, and the Red Cross societies were dissolved. By a decision of 6 February 1942, the High Commissioner for the Province of Ljubljana, Emilio Gradacioli, abolished the Main Committee of the Red Cross in Ljubljana and appointed an Extraordinary Commissioner, who acted as the Italian branch. After the capitulation of Italy, the pre-war Red Cross of Slovenia came to life again under the new name of the Slovenian Red Cross.

The then authorities, and especially the Gestapo, imprisoned the president of the DR on suspicion that the leadership was cooperating with the OF. Otton Fettich and some of his associates and sent them to internment in Dachau, from where they never returned. The Slovenian Red Cross came under German rule.

### Establishment of the Slovenian Red Cross in Gradac

The period after the establishment of the Red Cross of Slovenia on 18 June 1944 in the liberated territory of Gradac in Bela krajina is considered a special period in the development of the Red Cross in Slovenia. At that time, the Yugoslavian Red Cross Society was already operating, which was established by a decision of the National Committee of Yugoslavia on 13 May 1944 in Drvar.

At the assembly, which met on 18 June 1944 in Gradac in Bela krajina, the foundations and tasks of the operation of the Slovenian Red Cross during the war and in the post-war period were laid. Dr. Drago Marušič was elected president of the organization. Three more vice-presidents, three secretaries were elected and eight vacancies in the membership of the Main Committee were waiting for representatives from until than unliberated area of Slovenia.



Photo 3: Mazellet's house - the place where the Red Cross of Slovenia was founded on 18 June 1944. Retrieved 17.06.2020 from the website: <https://www.kamra.si/digitalne-zbirke/item/gradac.html>

In the entire territory of Slovenia, the establishment and renewal of local Red Cross committees began, and the need for more connected and regular operation became apparent.

By the end of the Second World War, the Red Cross of Slovenia had developed an extensive organization in the liberated places of Slovenia, and it also had activists in the areas, that were still occupied at the time.

After the establishment of the Red Cross of Slovenia, the headquarters of the Main Committee were in Semič, where an office was opened in mid-July to manage current affairs. The Red Cross of Slovenia was established as an integral part of the Red Cross of Yugoslavia, as there can be one Red Cross society in one country. After the end of the war, the Main Committee of the Red Cross of Slovenia moved from Bela krajina to Ljubljana on 11 May 1945.

## Museum of the Red Cross of Slovenia in Gradac

In memory of June 8, 1944, when the Slovenian Red Cross was re-established with the convening of the founding assembly, the first and still the only museum collection of the Slovenian Red Cross was arranged on 17 May 2014 in Sokolski dom in Gradac. The museum is located in today's Kulturni dom (former Sokolski dom). Visiting this historic place can be, due to the historical role of the space itself, an even more authentic experience for visitors.

Older residents of Gradac remember how Sokolski dom was a fully crowded by visitors during the Second World War. They can also point out that the visitors of Sokolski dom were wounded soldiers and civilians waiting to be transported to the evacuation airports near the villages of Otok and Krasinec. Mrs. Pavla Pavlinič remembers how, as a five-year-old child, she once visited that place with her mother and saw with her own eyes the entire Sokolski dom filled over maximum capacity with the wounded lying on wooden beds. If we are sarcastic and compare those times with modern hospitals in Slovenia nowadays we notice, that there is not much difference with overcrowding.

The museum presents a historical overview of the operation of the Red Cross, pictorial material and equipment used mainly by volunteers in the care of the wounded during the Second World War. Representatives of the regional association of the Red Cross of Slovenia prepare a warm welcome with drinks and belokranjska pogača for groups with prior notice.



Photo 4: Red Cross Museum in Gradac

Retrieved 17.06.2020 from website:

<https://www.rtvsl.si/lokalne-novice/rdeci-kriz-slovenije->



Photo: 5 Red Cross Museum in Gradac

Retrieved 17.06.2020 from website:

[https://www.rks.si/sl/Kje\\_smo/pomaga-ze-70-let/337121](https://www.rks.si/sl/Kje_smo/pomaga-ze-70-let/337121)



Photo 6: Quiz for young members of the Red Cross in Gradac, Source: RKS - Metlika Regional Association

Author: Zalka Klemenčič

1944 - 2014  
GRADAC-BELAKRAJINA  
70. OBLETNICA USTANOVNEGA ZBORA RKS

Organized by the Slovenian Red Cross, various preventive medical tests and education take place at the Gradac Cultural Center.

Also in these premises, during the Red Cross week, a traditional quiz of young members of the Red Cross takes place, where primary school students show their knowledge in the field of road rules, first aid and knowledge of the history of the Red Cross organization.

The building, where the Slovenian Red Cross Museum is situated, stands in a unique square, named the Red Cross Square. The Red Cross Square in Gradac is the only so-called square in Slovenia.

Today, the Red Cross of Slovenia is organized as a independent association, which operates in 12 regions, 56 regional associations and 887 local organizations. There are over 14,500 volunteers in Slovenia, who perform more than 578,000 volunteer hours per year.



Photo 7: Postage stamp issued on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the founding assembly of the SRC, obtained on 17.06.2020 from the website: <https://radio1.si/26628/tenen-rdecega-križa>

Among the most important areas of operation The Slovenian Red Cross includes blood donation (it has been one of the top European countries in this field since 1953), training in first aid, assistance in the event of natural and other disasters and the search for the missing. The Red Cross also performs some other, no less important, activities in the fields of logistics, social security, health education, the organization of free holidays and the dissemination of knowledge and organizational culture.



Photo 8: Genocide in Ruanca, 1994, obtained on 17.06.2020 from the website: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-150-years-humanitarian-action>

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