

# daily bulletin

27th International Conference  
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent,  
Geneva, 1999

XXVII<sup>e</sup> Conférence internationale de  
la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge,  
Genève, 1999

XXVII Conferencia Internacional de  
la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja,  
Ginebra, 1999

## The *power* of humanity

On the final day of the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, delegates adopted a *Declaration* described as “inspirational” by the Chairman of the Standing Commission, Princess Margriet of The Netherlands. (See the full text of the *Declaration* on page 5)

F. Borst / Federation



Before reading the conference *Declaration* at the closing ceremony, Nadia Isler, a volunteer from the Geneva Red Cross youth spoke of the need for everyone in the Movement to work together: “You have the experience and knowledge and we have the energy,” she added.

The report of the drafting committee – which worked on the texts of the *Declaration*, the *Plan of Action* and the resolutions – was presented by Ambassador Philippe Kirsch, who said that the texts reflected the views of all participants, and were an attempt to strike an acceptable balance. “At times it was a slow and lengthy process, but the atmosphere was excellent, characterized by a spirit of accommodation and cooperation,” he said.



## Plan of Action

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A *Plan of Action* for the years 2000-2003 was also adopted. Covering three main themes – **Protection of victims of armed conflict through respect of international humanitarian law; Humanitarian action in times of armed conflict and other disasters; and Strategic partnership to improve the lives of vulnerable people** – all members of the conference were urged to implement the actions set out in the document, with a view to reaching the goals defined.

In theme one, the final goals are:

- Full compliance by all the parties to an armed conflict with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect and assist the civilian population and other victims of the conflict and to respect protected objects.
- An effective barrier against impunity through the combination of relevant international treaties and national laws concerning the repression of violations of international humanitarian law, and the examination of an equitable system of reparations.
- Universal acceptance of international humanitarian law and the adoption of all necessary measures by states at the national level to ensure the implementation of their obligations under international law.
- Integration, by states, of their obligations under international humanitarian law in relevant procedures and training. Promotion of this law among relevant persons and bodies.

- Conformity of weapons with international humanitarian law, the establishment of effective controls on the availability of arms and ammunition, and an end to the human tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines.

The final goals in the second theme are:

- Effective response in disaster situations through improved national and international preparedness.
- Strengthened mechanisms of cooperation and coordination amongst states, the Movement and other humanitarian actors.
- Provision for the rights and acute needs of the most vulnerable people as the first priority for humanitarian action.
- Understanding of the respective roles of political, military and humanitarian actors, and protection of humanitarian personnel.

In the third theme, the final goals are:

- Improved health for vulnerable people based on strengthened cooperation between states and National Societies.
- New initiatives to meet the needs of vulnerable people and to reduce discrimination and violence in the community.
- Increased National Society capacities and effective partnership with states, and cooperation with relevant humanitarian and development organizations.

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## A conference with a difference

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Addressing the closing session of the International Conference, Princess Margriet of The Netherlands told delegates that with 'The *power* of **humanity**' the conference had claimed its place as one of the foremost international humanitarian forums, and shown the world that the Movement and states are ready to provide even more and better care to victims of conflict and disaster.

“It is up to each of us to take charge of the conference decisions, to bring them to our communities and to all the people in all parts of the world who need our help,” she declared. “As a Standing Commission we pledge to do our utmost to live up to your expectations.”

Princess Margriet added: “We have shared our perspectives of today's humanitarian problems and we now have to be guided by the principles that inspired the Geneva Conventions which were so eloquently phrased in the 12 August appeal – respect for human dignity, compassion for those who are suffering and solidarity.”

This had been, as planned, a conference with a difference, where workshops and pledges had been introduced and a measurable *Plan of Action* adopted. “Humanity is as powerful as an outstretched hand,” she concluded. “Let us seize this chance to take action.”

## Pledging for the future

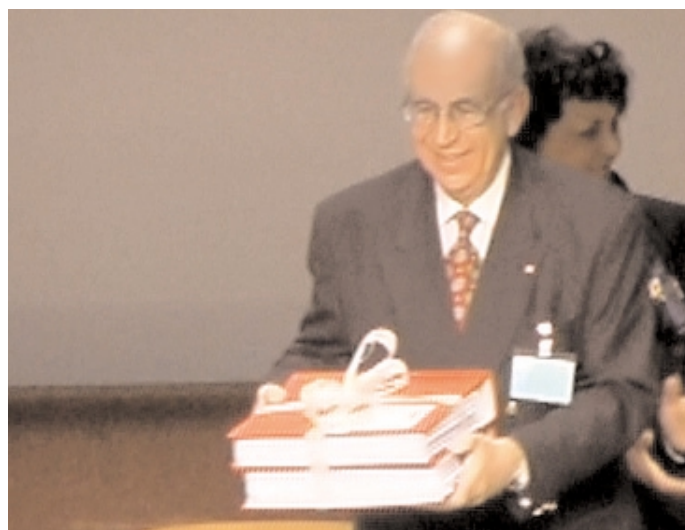
One of the important innovations of the conference was the pledges initiative. In her presentation today, vice-chairman of the conference, Ambassador Yolande Biké, announced that a total of 387 pledges had been made by 163 National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation, 85 governments and nine observers.

The concept of pledging is a new one and, prior to the conference, it was the subject of intense debate within National Societies and governments, as each sought to determine appropriate and measurable pledges. As Ambassador Biké said: "Not only can we see that the pledging has been a success in terms of numbers recorded, but also in terms of how practical and realistic they are". She explained how National Societies and governments made their own individual commitments or developed joint pledges; the latter, she said, underlined the will to "work together towards a common goal".

The scope of the pledges was broad, but Ambassador Biké summarized the main trends as follows:

- prohibition of the military recruitment and participation in armed conflict of persons under the age of 18;
- protect and assist women and children, both in legal and practical terms;
- increase promotion of international humanitarian law and commitment to ratification of the Additional Protocols and/or withdrawal of reservations to the Geneva Conventions;
- promotion and ratification of other treaties, such as the Ottawa Treaty on the banning of anti-personnel mines and the Statutes of the International Criminal Court;
- promote the role and responsibilities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as auxiliary to the humanitarian services of government;

- strengthen national laws to protect the red cross and red crescent emblems;
- build the capacity of National Societies through the implementation of *Strategy 2010*;
- increase involvement and representation of women in decision-making bodies;
- implement new health and social programmes in response to changing needs;
- strengthen the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in disaster response and preparedness;
- recruit and train volunteers and motivate young people to ensure their active participation in the design and implementation of programmes.



Dr Mamdouh Gabr receiving the pledges

Ambassador Biké concluded by thanking all delegates to the conference for their active support for this new initiative and reminded them that "putting these pledges into practise is now the challenge ahead of all of us." Upon receiving the two bound folders of pledges, the chairman of the conference, Dr Mamdouh Gabr said that "these pledges not only support, but are more ambitious than our *Plan of Action*. We now look forward to their implementation."

## 'Comprehensive solution' sought on emblems

The International Conference adopted a resolution on the emblems in which it accepted the proposal made at the Council of Delegates to establish of a joint working group on the emblems, with representatives from both the Movement and states. The group has a mandate to find a comprehensive solution, as rapidly as possible, which is acceptable to all parties in terms of resolution and substance.

► The conference also adopted resolutions on the 12 August Appeal and the Empress Shòken fund.

## Workshop's success

Presenting the report of the workshops, the vice-chairman of the conference, Zoy Katevas de Sclabos said that the 14 workshops had covered a wide range of topics from armed conflict and international humanitarian law through to internal Movement issues. "The workshops were designed to complement the work of the conference and not to reach consensus. These exchanges of opinion are indispensable if we are to move forward," she said.

## Chairman's closing remarks

In his closing remarks to the 27th International Conference, chairman Dr Mamdouh Gabr expressed his pleasure at being part of such a distinguished gathering. "I have never been as proud as I am today," he said, "of what we have accomplished together. We have pledged to overcome any obstacles we may encounter on the highway towards the third millennium." The *Plan of Action* adopted by the conference would, he said, "turn theory into practice and ambition into reality."



F. Borst / Federation

Dr Gabr stated that the 27th International Conference would remain a milestone in the history of the Movement. Thanking delegates for their enthusiasm, devotion and commitment, he said: "What matters now is how to implement our pledges so we can say that what we did in Geneva in 1999 really made a difference."

Dr Gabr's chairmanship was roundly praised by Ambassador Franz Muheim, president of the Swiss Red Cross, who described him as a man with "the irresistible charm of a grand seigneur, the main crafter of the success that the conference enjoyed."

## Fond farewells

The final day of the 27th International Conference was also a time for farewells and tributes. Special thanks were expressed to the Federation's Secretary General of seven years, George Weber, to the Federation's under-secretary general Margareta Wahlström, to the Federation's head of governance support Yolande Camporini, to ICRC director Yves Sandoz and to ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga.

"He is a tireless and courageous leader who will always be remembered for his friendly, charismatic and trustworthy character," declared Dr Gabr. On behalf of the conference, Princess Margriet presented Mr Sommaruga with a pair of binoculars, which Dr Gabr said: "would give him a vision which goes beyond our short and binding horizon."

Responding to a standing ovation, Mr Sommaruga quoted the Baron de Montesquieu: "the present of the past is memory, the present of the past is action; the present of the future is imagination." His memory, he said, is Solferino, his action is ICRC and his imagination a world of peace and justice.

# Declaration of the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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## “the *power of humanity*”

The approach of a new century is a time for reflection. For the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the governments committed to the Geneva Conventions, it is also a time for concern.

In spite of positive changes in recent decades, conflicts still rage in many countries. Attacks on civilian populations and objects are commonplace. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes. International humanitarian law is often flouted. Highly destructive natural disasters continue to shatter the lives of large numbers of people. New and old diseases cause widespread suffering. Health services and social and economic systems struggle to cope with increasing demands. The weakest around the world continue to suffer most.

In the face of this we commit ourselves:

- to bring real help and comfort, wherever it is needed, to save and improve the lives of millions;
- to reinforce our collective commitment to international humanitarian law;
- to campaign for human dignity and the responsibility of each one of us to help others, without discrimination, to mitigate the consequences of disaster and war;
- to support the millions of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers across the world who daily embody the humanitarian commitment.

“The *power of humanity*” is the strength of individual commitment and the force of collective action. Both must be mobilized to relieve suffering, ensure respect for human dignity and ultimately create a more humane society.