Yesterday’s opening of the 27th International Conference by the chairman of the Standing Commission, Princess Margriet, was followed by a moment of silence for Red Cross and Red Crescent workers who had recently lost their lives.

The International Conference then elected the following office holders:

**Chairman of the conference:**
- Dr Mamdouh Gabr (Egyptian Red Crescent)

**Vice-chairmen (National Society):**
- M Franz E Muheim (Swiss Red Cross)
- Sra Zoy Katevas De Sclabos (Chilean Red Cross)

**Vice-chairmen (government):**
- Ambassador Yolande Biké (Gabon)
- Ambassador Philippe Kirsch (Canada)

**Co-chairman of the plenary commission for theme I:**
- H E Mr Boris Shikhmuradov (Turkmenistan)

**Co-chairman of the plenary commission for theme II:**
- Ambassador Christopher Lamb (Australia)

**Co-chairman of the plenary commission for theme III:**
- Sr Teofilo Siman (Salvadorean Red Cross)

**Rapporteur of the plenary commission for theme I:**
- Mr Tom Buruku (Uganda Red Cross)

**Rapporteur of the plenary commission for theme II:**
- Dr Tahar Cheniti (Tunisian Red Crescent)

**Rapporteur of the plenary commission for theme III:**
- Ambassador Anne Anderson (Ireland)

**Chairman of the drafting committee:**
- Ambassador Philippe Kirsch (Canada)

**Vice-chairwoman (government):**
- Ambassador Marika Fahlén (Sweden)

**Vice-chairmen (National Society):**
- Sir Alan Munro (British Red Cross)
- M Jean-Pierre Cabouat (French Red Cross)

**Secretary general of the conference:**
- Ambassador Jean-François Kammer (Switzerland)

**Assistant secretaries general:**
- Mme Yolande Camporini (Federation)
- M Jean-Luc Blondel (ICRC)
“As an African and an Arab I am very honoured, and I promise to serve the goals of the conference to the best of my abilities”, said Dr Mamdouh Gabr after he was elected as chairman of the conference. Dr Gabr

A powerful declaration in the spirit of humanity

“This conference must make a powerful statement of concern and solidarity, and adopt practical and measurable action points to improve the implementation of international humanitarian law and to make humanitarian action in general, and that of the Movement in particular, more effective,” said Princess Margriet, chairman of the Standing Commission in her introduction. She added, “The Declaration is meant to convey a message to the world, in the spirit of the power of humanity, as a challenge to all of us. We should not be overwhelmed by the immensity of problems we face, rather, we must work together for a better future. It is a united appeal to halt excesses of inhumanity and to bring the world to act with greater humanity. We, the Movement, hope that this conference can adopt the Declaration as it stands.” She concluded her speech by saying that the Plan of Action for the International Conference is a broad ranging document and is a reflection of the scope of the action of the Movement and cooperation with governments.

The humanitarian commitment

In her keynote address Federation President Astrid Heiberg focused on natural disasters and disaster preparedness saying: “Even if war is a killer, nature can be even worse.” She added that natural disasters hit the most vulnerable hardest. Over 90 percent of all deaths caused by natural disaster occur in developing countries and the economic losses are, relative to the size of the economy, 20 times greater than in industrial countries. Dr Heiberg called for a greater emphasis on disaster preparedness and invited governments to unite with the Movement in a partnership of preparedness. “Together we can prevent a lot of misery. We always say we want to make a difference to the lives of the vulnerable people. Our challenge is that we actually can. We can take on this humanitarian commitment. Let us do it.”

Reflecting on the past, the president of the ICRC, Cornelio Sommaruga, pointed to the ending of the cold war, which he said “unleashed tension and hatred which culminated in exceptionally violent conflicts, especially in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia.” Mr Sommaruga also spoke of the adoption of the Ottawa Convention, concerns over trade in light weapons and the flight of innocent victims caught up in the turmoil of war. “Human beings and respect for human dignity must be placed back at the heart of the political thinking and decision-making, for human beings are still the main concern of both states and the international community.” The president concluded that the “victims of war have placed their hopes in us, let us live up to their expectations.”

“Throughout its history, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been the world’s standard setter in humanitarian action. You have been an inspiration to the community of nations, and an indispensable partner to the United Nations,” said Louise Fréchette, deputy secretary general of the United Nations in the opening of her powerful speech. Ms Fréchette spoke of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions,
in this anniversary year, this final year of the final decade of a century of war, genocide and immense suffering, we cannot say that the Conventions are universally respected. Nor can we say that, in the conflicts of the past decade, civilian populations have been spared,” she added. “In the nineties civilians have become the very targets of warfare, in campaigns of genocide and so called ethnic cleansing.” She spoke of the Security Council’s report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and of the International Criminal Court before concluding: “May this last International Conference of your Movement in the twentieth century be a source of inspiration to all of us in the twenty-first.”

Partnership, the changing nature of conflicts and protection of humanitarian workers were the themes chosen by all three guest speakers. Director General of the World Health Organization, Gro Harlem Brundtland said: “in our world, partnership is the key to success in so many areas. We need to focus on how we can work together in the future and add to our past achievements.” Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF, pointed out that four years ago, her organization was working with partners in only 15 conflict situations, a number which has now more than tripled. “All involve situations that profoundly threaten the lives and welfare of women and children,” she said, “as well as the future of the very societies in which they live.”

The ruthless victimization of women and children in war was also underlined by Catherine Bertini, the executive director of the World Food Programme. “Men wage war. Women and children suffer the consequences,” she said. Ms Bertini applauded the International Conference’s emphasis on the issue of compliance by parties to an armed conflict with their obligations to protect the civilian population, but lamented the development of yet another category of victim - humanitarian workers. She suggested the adoption of an optional protocol to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel, adding that early ratification of the Rome Statute on an International Criminal Court was imperative. “We believe that the actual entry into force of this treaty will have a major deterrent effect with regards to attacks on humanitarian staff,” she said.

Lessons learned from listening to people on war

Listening to the views expressed by people who have seen and experienced the worst effects of war will help us discover how to better protect people in war. This was the central idea behind the year-long People on War project, the results of which were tabled at the International Conference by the ICRC’s director of international law and communication, Yves Sandoz. He said: “It was both ambitious and risky to try to communicate the views of those affected by war, but the ICRC decided to commit itself to such an undertaking.

I take this opportunity now to thank everyone involved for their hard work and devotion.”

In all, over 20,000 people - civilians and combatants - were interviewed for their thoughts on what basic rules should be implemented in war and why those rules are so often violated. Hundreds of questionnaires, in-depth focus groups and individual interviews were carried out by the ICRC and opinion-research firm Greenberg Research Inc., with the help of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers in 17 countries. Participants were chosen according to set criteria, debates and discussions followed strict guidelines and all were translated and recorded for future reference.

Mr Sandoz presented a summary of the most striking results of the project, explaining that a more detailed analysis would be undertaken at a later date. “This survey is a very precious tool,” he said, “and provides valuable information on how we can improve understanding of humanitarian law and principles.”

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed, between 87 and 98 per cent, are of the opinion that in war, civilians should be spared from attack. The survey shows that there is great awareness of the fact that standards exist, but also that it is very difficult to enforce these standards: 26 per cent of respondents claimed that combatants attack...
Pledge update

HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, on behalf of the Thai Red Cross, pledged to extend their health projects, establish a disaster operation centre, intensify their dissemination activities and encourage the government to adhere to the 1977 Additional Protocol I.

During yesterday the following pledges were presented:

**Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:** Albania, Australia, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Dominican Republic, France, Indonesia, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sao Tome and Principe, Spain, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, United States

**Governments:** Austria, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, European Union (representing member states), Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, Mozambique, Niger.

**Observers:** Kazakh Red Crescent and Red Cross.

To date, 134 National Societies, 13 governments and five observers have presented pledges.

Author’s presentation

A new manual on the law of armed conflict for armed forces has been produced by the ICRC after an in-depth assessment with military experts from all continents. The author will present the manual at 1.00 pm today in hall A of the EFTA building (opposite the CICG).
Appeal for northern Caucasus

The ICRC, on behalf of the Movement, has launched an appeal for more than 18 million Swiss francs to step up relief operations for thousands of people affected by the renewed fighting in Chechnya. The appeal follows recent discussions in Moscow and Geneva during which the Russian Red Cross Society, the Federation and the ICRC together drew up a humanitarian plan of action. The plan provides for the distribution of aid to some 150,000 victims of the crisis in the northern Caucasus during the coming winter months.

Appeal for Orissa victims

The Federation has appealed for four million Swiss francs to provide vital aid to the thousands of people left homeless and without livelihoods by the devastating cyclone that hit the eastern coastline of India over the weekend. This was the worst cyclone to hit this region for 30 years.

Disaster relief experts from Delhi and Dhaka have travelled to Orissa with the Indian Red Cross to assess the needs.

The cyclone was the second to hit the area in two weeks – a double blow for this already impoverished region. During the earlier storm, thousands of people sought refuge in Red Cross purpose-built shelters. Teams of Indian Red Cross volunteers, sent to help after the first cyclone, are currently working with local authorities to distribute emergency food, clothing and shelter materials to the latest victims.

Today’s workshops

Working in partnership: government support to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement - from 5.00 pm in room A, EFTA building.
The workshop will examine strategic partnerships with a view to providing a mechanism to build coherence and consistency in Movement programming as well as meeting the critical challenges of improving dialogue with donor governments.

The humanitarian challenge of small arms proliferation - from 5.00 pm in room B1, ITU building.
The workshop will focus on how the proliferation of small arms and light weapons facilitates large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. It will highlight the need for states to ensure strict control of the flow of small arms and light weapons as well as the role of the Movement in raising awareness of the humanitarian consequences.

Health tip of the day

Do you have a long journey home across several time zones at the end of the conference? You can prepare yourself to reduce the effects of jet lag. Start a couple of days before your return flight to adjust your meal times and sleeping pattern. The Federation’s senior first aid officer, Eric Bernes, can devise a personalized plan for you. Just go along to the first aid room (behind the coffee bar) and answer three questions: What is the time difference between Geneva and your home country? At what time do you normally get up? Are you travelling east or west? You will then be given an individual plan to help you arrive home in the best possible form. Bon voyage!