

The structure, organisation and procedure of the International Conference of the Red Cross

We are pleased to give below the report submitted by the Countess of Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross, to the Council of Delegates at The Hague on September 6, 1967.¹

The Standing Commission has given careful thought and time to the future organisation and structure of the International Conference of the Red Cross. In order to ensure that due weight and consideration was given to the question, the Standing Commission set up a Joint Committee consisting of representatives of the ICRC and the League to study the matter, and in addition a questionnaire was sent to all National Societies inviting their views on certain points.

At the meeting of the Standing Commission held on October 3rd, 1966, Dr. Geoffrey Newman-Morris presented a memorandum which served as a basis for the work of the Joint Study Committee.

The report of the Joint Committee was considered by the Standing Commission on September 1st, 1967, and the following points were examined:

I. Structure of the Conference

1. *Participation of Governments.* — It was agreed that the Statutes of the International Red Cross should not be altered as regards the participation of Governments in International Conferences. The suggestion that Red Cross conferences with Government attendance should be replaced by regular Diplomatic Con-

¹ See *International Review*, November 1967, pp. 596-601.

ferences was considered impracticable, since it was not for the Red Cross to instigate such Diplomatic Conferences.

It was noted that Governments had no right to propose items for the Agenda of the Conference except in accordance with Article 9 of the Rules of Procedure (which authorises the Conference Bureau to add items to the Agenda if requested to do so by five delegations each belonging to different countries). It was not thought justifiable to propose an alteration of the Rules of procedure to enlarge the powers of Governments in this respect.

It was agreed that the Standing Commission should, in future, take particular care to refer to the Council of Delegates, rather than to the Conference, matters which were of little interest to Governments.

2. *Powers of the Conference.* — It was considered by the Commission that no alteration of the Statutes on this point was necessary.

II. Organisation and Procedure of the Conference

1. As regards the *frequency, duration, time given to plenary meetings, number of commissions, documentation, interpretation and translation*, no changes in the present practice were considered necessary.

2. *Agenda.* — It was considered that the Agenda was a decisive factor for the success of the conference and that it qualified the questions raised by many other points in the questionnaire, i.e. number of commissions, composition of delegations, etc. The Standing Commission should, therefore, give particular attention to the establishment of the Agenda of the next International Conference, and should at the same time consider the comments on this subject made by the National Societies.

3. *Method of drafting resolutions.* — It was thought by the Standing Commission that a drafting committee of three persons, each one knowing one of the working languages of the Conference, should be set up for each conference commission. These three committees would later amalgamate to constitute the drafting committee for the plenary meeting which would thus be composed of at least 9 persons.

III. Questions Concerning the Standing Commission

1. *Method of election of members.* — It was felt that future conferences should adhere to the method of election laid down in the Statutes. The Chairman of the Conference would call attention to this at the opening of the Conference and circulate to delegations the procedures to be followed for this election. The Joint Committee was also asked to consider whether the Conference Bureau could undertake to examine the qualifications of candidates nominated for membership of the Standing Commission in order to ensure the highest standard of membership.

2. *Composition and number of members of the Standing Commission.* — It was agreed not to suggest any alteration to the Statutes in this respect.

3. *Powers of the Standing Commission just prior to the opening of Conferences.* — Experience has shown that during the period before the Conference, certain decisions relating to organisation have to be taken.

It was observed that in accordance with the Statutes and Rules of Procedure, the Standing Commission and the host Society are responsible for the organisation and preparation of the Conference, and it is, therefore, for these two bodies to make the necessary decisions on the spot before the opening of the Conference.

It was thought that whilst the Standing Commission could not be expected to be present in corpore at the seat of the Conference a week or two before its opening, the Commission should entrust its Chairman or one or more of its members with this duty.

Some of the conclusions reached require further study by the Joint Committee and the various points of procedure will be considered again at the next meeting of the Standing Commission.

The Standing Commission is very grateful to the 45 National Red Cross Societies who were good enough to send their answers to the questionnaire and their constructive suggestions, on which the above summary is based.