

## CENTENARY CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

### COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

In place of the International Red Cross Conference, which has been postponed for two years, the Council of Delegates met in Geneva from September 2 to 9, 1963, in the spacious premises of the Palais des Nations<sup>1</sup>. The Council and the Board of Governors of the League together constituted the Centenary Congress. As is known, the Council of Delegates includes the International Committee, the League and the National Societies, that is to say, the constituent bodies of the International Red Cross other than government representatives. Usually it meets just before the International Conference for the purpose of settling questions of procedure. This was only the second occasion upon which it met between Conferences and discussed basic questions. The first time this occurred was the 1961 assembly in Prague.

The meeting of the Council of Delegates was opened by Mr. A. François-Poncet, Chairman of the Standing Commission and presided over by Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Four hundred representatives of National Societies from 90 countries were present. The basic documentation prepared by the ICRC included no less than 18 reports.

Judging from the comments of all the participants, this Council was a fine demonstration of Red Cross unity and universality. Agreement was reached on all points and it is significant that nearly all resolutions were adopted unanimously. By refraining from asserting points of view which might have been of partisan interest

---

<sup>1</sup> *Plate.*

to some delegations, the Red Cross Societies, on the threshold of the movement's second century, sought a common denominator and endeavoured to bring into prominence humanity's general inheritance.

It was in the field of humanitarian law—dealt with by one of the Commissions of the Council—that the most important results were achieved. An urgent appeal was addressed to all States as well as to the United Nations for the full application and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions. In this connection, the main resolution was as follows :

The Council of Delegates,

Considering that the States parties to the Geneva Conventions have undertaken to respect them and to ensure respect for them under all circumstances,

Considering that it is necessary that the United Nations emergency forces shall observe and be protected by the Geneva Conventions,

Expresses its appreciation for the efforts already made by the United Nations in this direction and recommends :

1. that the United Nations be invited to adopt a solemn declaration accepting that the Geneva Conventions apply to their emergency forces in the same manner as they apply to the forces of States parties to the same Conventions ;
2. that the Governments of countries supplying contingents to the United Nations should as a matter of prime importance give them before departure from their country of origin adequate instruction on the Geneva Conventions as well as orders to comply with them ;
3. that the authorities responsible for these contingents should agree to take all necessary measures to prevent and restrain any infringements of the same Conventions.

Another important item was that concerning the privileged status of civil defence personnel. As States showed no inclination to implement the Draft Rules submitted by the ICRC in 1957 to the XIXth International Red Cross Conference in New Delhi, with a view to offering better legal protection to civilian populations against the dangers of indiscriminate warfare, we must today consider conferring at least some measure of protection to the personnel who dedicate themselves to the population and endeavour to ensure their survival by material means.



**Council of Delegates: Opening Session...**

## CENTENARY CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

... one of the General Commission's Sessions.

*Photos*



The Council of Delegates requested the ICRC to carry further the consultations it has already undertaken with governments and, in the event of obtaining the support desired, to draw up in co-operation with expert consultants, a set of draft rules for submission to the XXth Conference two years hence.

As regards the protection of medical and civil nursing personnel as well as the safeguarding of the victims of conflicts not of an international character, the ICRC was encouraged to continue its studies.

There is no doubt but that the extension to further categories—to civil defence and civil medical personnel—of protection laid down by Conventions, as well as the adoption of a new and purely indicatory sign—the staff of Aesculapius—for medical personnel unauthorized to wear the emblem of the red cross, is beset with difficulties which, as was felt during debate, are preoccupying the Red Cross Societies. However, it is certain that the ICRC will not venture into such a complex field without carrying out a thorough study in association with international experts and that, furthermore, the greatest possible circumspection will, as usual, have to be applied.

At the 1961 meeting of the Council of Delegates in Prague, the ICRC had submitted a draft set of rules relating to the use of the red cross emblem. After redrafting this in a manner which was considered by the National Societies to be an improvement, the ICRC submitted the draft to the 1963 meeting of the Council. The latter, after making some further changes, decided to raise the matter at the XXth Conference for final approval. In the meanwhile, National Societies are invited to apply the draft rules by way of a trial.

Two other commissions were appointed by the Council of Delegates: one to deal with health and social affairs, the other with the Junior Red Cross. On the recommendation of the first of these commissions, the Council tabled resolutions relating in particular to first aid, blood transfusion, accident prevention and nursing care. At the suggestion of the second commission, the Council ratified the proposals of the World Conference of Educators, which was held in Lausanne from August 19-23, 1963 under the auspices of the Red Cross. Two of these proposals dealt with

instruction in the principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions to youth, which calls for greater emphasis.

In plenary Session, the Council examined the problem of "the Red Cross as a factor for world peace" as well as many motions tabled by various Societies. Finally, these were covered in a single text which was adopted and worded as follows :

The Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross, meeting in Geneva on the occasion of the Centenary of the foundation of the Red Cross movement, considering

a) the ever more merciless and frightful character assumed by war during the last century,

b) that all the peoples of the world are unanimous in their desire for lasting peace based on law and justice, and that the Congress welcomes the efforts being made by governments to dispel the menace of armed conflict by the reduction of armaments, the banning of nuclear tests and weapons and the resort to peaceful methods of negotiations,

c) expresses the fervent hope that governments will persevere unremittingly to seek appropriate means for restoring confidence between peoples and thereby lay the foundation for friendly co-operation and peace between States,

urges the National Societies to continue ceaselessly to foster peace through the fraternal links that bind them so that their examples of humanitarian service may bring home to all peoples the realization that the time has come to open a new era when fear and violence shall be replaced by hope and peace.

In the same order of ideas the Council of Delegates devoted its attention to the rôle which the United Nations had requested the ICRC to play at the time of the Cuba crisis by ensuring that vessels bound for that island contained no thermo-nuclear missiles. This matter had been the subject of a report by the ICRC which roused particular interest.

Many delegations stressed that the ICRC had on that occasion made a major contribution to the cause of world peace and upon a proposal by the President of the French Red Cross, the following resolution was adopted :

The Council of Delegates,

After having taken cognizance of the conditions in which the ICRC was invited by the United Nations Organization, with the agreement of the parties concerned, to intervene in the Cuba incident,

Considering it is desirable that the Committee respond to the call made upon it simultaneously by States in conflict to act as intermediary or assist in the proper discharge of the obligations they have undertaken, thus contributing to the maintenance of peace,

Approves the action taken by the ICRC in the Cuba incident and congratulates it for having accomplished that action.

The President of the Swiss Red Cross, in the name of the three institutions which had convened the Congress, announced a project for the setting up of a " Henry Dunant Institute ", which would be a suitable tangible and lasting memorial to the Red Cross Centenary celebrations. Thanks to the generosity of the Swiss Confederation, which would make available the necessary premises in Geneva, the purpose of the Institute would be the promotion of the principles and the ideal of the Red Cross and also of humanitarian law. As a genuine " University of the Red Cross " it would offer each year a series of courses and seminars, both theoretical and practical to the personnel of National Societies and to the general public. A museum and library would contribute towards making it a centre of study and inspiration.

In addition, on a proposal by the Australian Red Cross, the Council has in principle approved the creation of a " Henry Dunant Medal " intended as a reward for services rendered in the cause of the Red Cross. The Standing Commission has been entrusted with the examination of the practical aspect of awarding such a distinction and to submit a report on the subject to the next Conference.

It was also for the Standing Commission to decide where the Red Cross would hold its next Conference two years hence. Seven National Societies generously declared themselves willing to receive the delegates. The Commission's choice fell upon Austria in view of the latter's central position. It is therefore in Vienna that the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross will be held in 1965.

*J. P.*