

# IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

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## VIIIth INTER-AMERICAN RED CROSS CONFERENCE

It will be remembered that the VIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference was held at Puerto Rico in 1962. The *International Review* gave an account of the proceedings.\* The VIIIth Conference was held in Bogota from November 6-12, 1966, under the aegis of the League of Red Cross Societies. The Conference was organized by the Colombian Red Cross and its very success demonstrated how useful such meetings are. Numerous delegates of National Societies in the following countries attended: Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, El Salvador, United States of America, Uruguay. Observers were also present from France, the Netherlands and Spain.

The League was represented by its President, Mr. J. Barroso Chavez and by Ambassador W. Stevenson, Vice-President; Mr. K. J. Warras, Executive Chairman of the Development Programme; Mr. H. Beer, Secretary-General; Miss Y. Hentsch, Director of the Nursing Bureau; and Mr. J. Gomez Ruiz, Assistant-Director of the Junior Red Cross Bureau. The ICRC had delegated Mr. P. Jequier and Mr. W. Löthisberger, ICRC delegate in Colombia, to represent it. The Conference was presided over with competence by Professor J. Cavelier, President of the Colombian Red Cross<sup>1</sup>; the meetings were attended by that National Society's leading members both from the capital and the provinces.

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\* See *International Review*, January 1963.

<sup>1</sup> *Plate*. Opening of the VIIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference.

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of several dignitaries, including the President of the Republic of Colombia, Dr Carlos Lleras Restrepo, who delivered an address of welcome. This was followed by an expression of thanks from the League President, Mr. J. Barroso Chavez, to the National Society delegates whose presence testified to the vitality of the ideal of solidarity and peace which inspires the whole Red Cross movement. In his turn, Mr. P. Jequier, on behalf of the founding institution, recalled the permanence in the world today of the humanitarian principles and the need to defend them by making the Geneva Conventions ever more widely known.

The first working session of the Conference took place on the same day ; three commissions were formed to deal with :

- (a) Relief in disasters
- (b) Health, nursing services, youth
- (c) News and public relations.

Many were the subjects examined ; particular mention should be made of the League Development Programme. The resolutions which had been passed at the Inter-American Seminar on the Junior Red Cross and Health Education were adopted ; this seminar had been held a few days earlier at Quito and it was the subject of Resolution No. IX adopted by the Conference. The final resolution specified that the next Inter-American Conference would take place at Managua in 1970. The titles of the other resolutions were : *Independence — Respect for the Geneva Conventions — The Red Cross and Peace — The League Development Programme and Its Implementation in American Countries — Relief in the Event of Disaster — Medico-Social Activities — Blood Transfusion — Nursing Services — Youth — News, Publicity and Public Relations.*

The second resolution, which was submitted by the Brazilian Red Cross, assures the ICRC of National Society support for the pursuit of its mission. The fifth refers to Red Cross wireless telephony and the signal service this renders in the event of disaster. In this connection, Mr. Jequier mentioned the ICRC's radio station in Geneva, which proved invaluable for the relief action in the Yemen.

We give below the texts of the first three resolutions, which are general in scope :

### 1. Principles of Independence

*Whereas, the United Nations General Assembly, at its 49th Plenary Session, approved a recommendation to the effect that " at all times the independent voluntary nature of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies be respected in all circumstances, provided they are recognized by their Governments and carry on their work according to the principles of the Geneva and The Hague Conventions and in the humanitarian spirit of the Red Cross and Red Crescent " ;*

*Whereas, likewise the National Societies of the Red Cross are auxiliaries of the public authorities and in order to be able to comply with their avowed tasks, in conformity with the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, should enjoy absolute independence and strict neutrality ;*

*Whereas, furthermore, condition 4, for recognition of the National Society of the Red Cross, stipulates that each National Society must have the character of an Institution which enjoys autonomy permitting it to carry on its activities according to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, formulated by the International Conferences of the Red Cross ;*

*Reaffirms its complete adherence to the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross, approved by the International Red Cross Conference of Vienna in 1965, and particularly to the principle of Independence which reads as follows : " The Red Cross is independent. The National Societies while auxiliaries in the Humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with Red Cross principles ", and*

*Recommends that the National Societies make all necessary efforts to the end that their independence be safeguarded and respected, bringing to the attention, without loss of time, of the international organizations of the Red Cross any governmental interference constituting an infraction against the independence and neutrality which are indispensable in Red Cross action throughout the world.*

## 2. Respect of the Geneva Conventions

*The VIIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference,*

*Referring to the resolution of the Executive Committee of the League of Red Cross Societies, recommending that National Societies give their full support to the International Committee of the Red Cross,*

*Referring to the presentation made during this Conference of the tasks and activities of the ICRC,*

*Taking into account the world situation of today in which the services of the ICRC are of major importance,*

*Recommends that all National Societies of the Americas lend their full support to the work of the ICRC and assure through co-operation with their governments, that the Geneva Conventions be respected under all circumstances.*

## 3. Red Cross and Peace

*The VIIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference,*

*Taking note with great satisfaction of the Resolutions adopted by the 86th Meeting in Geneva of the Executive Committee of the League of Red Cross Societies, concerning Peace, as well as Respect of the Geneva Conventions,*

*Taking note that the Resolution concerning Peace was immediately communicated to all the heads of state, and that the Resolution concerning Respect of the Geneva Conventions was also transmitted to the interested parties,*

*Congratulates the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies, Mr. Jose Barroso Chavez, for his constant efforts in promoting these Resolutions,*

*Requests that the National Societies of the Americas intensify their efforts in order that these Resolutions become widely known, thus constituting the best proof of the efforts made by the Red Cross in the promotion of Peace and thereby contributing toward an attitude of respect toward the Geneva Conventions among the leaders of all nations,*

*Also requests that the National Societies make the Resolutions known to the general public by means of the existing public information media,*

*Requests especially that all Red Cross members work intensively toward the implementation of these Resolutions and, finally, that the National Societies inform the League of all action taken in this respect.*

The VIIIth Inter-American Conference was a pronounced success for the Red Cross. No one could explain better than Mr. Beer, League Secretary-General, the reasons for this success and point out the lessons to be derived from this experience. We therefore quote below the major part of an article of his.<sup>1</sup>

“ I have returned from this 1966 Conference, which was held in Bogota, with the most positive impressions of the development of Red Cross in most parts of the Americas.

Latin America is far away and it is not easy for us in Geneva to get a comprehensive picture of the progress of its Societies. But here, at this “ family gathering ”, in which the Spanish language predominated, I myself and other members of the League delegation grew much closer to the problems and aspirations of these Societies. Bogota warmed also to the stimulating presence of the League Chairman, who is also a Latin American—the first in the League’s history. As well, one of the League’s Vice Chairmen, Amb. William E. Stevenson (USA), took part in the meetings . . .

. . . The larger Societies in the Americas, notably the American Red Cross and Canadian Red Cross, have been very helpful in bringing about an exchange of information and views through the various seminars and training courses, several in Central America, but also in Peru and Chile. As a result of these meetings, study visits have been arranged, new friendships have come about, and a better understanding of the problems of the area has been effected. We are specially pleased with the progress made in the field of relief, one of our primary responsibilities. I am thinking of Chile and Colombia in particular as Societies that have made giant strides in pre-disaster planning.

The dynamic spirit of the Colombian Red Cross whose President is the distinguished physician, Prof. D. Jorge E. Cavalier was admirably shown throughout the Bogota Conference. The League

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<sup>1</sup> See *Panorama*, League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, November 1966.

delegation learned much of great interest and value. We now feel more confident about our work in Latin America and the steps we need to take to be of better service to our Societies in that area. In the field of health education and training of medical and paramedical personnel, which is of such great importance in the rural areas of Latin America, Bogota represents a great step forward.

It was also fascinating to note that a Conference of this type is no longer dominated by one or two of the more experienced Societies but is now a matter of real exchange of information between all of the participants. It is true that several of the Societies have now special strengths such as in the fields of public information, fund raising, etc. where for instance such Societies as Mexico have so much to give. This exchange of experiences is bringing about an inter-lacing of co-operation almost without precedence and is one of the major contributions of the Bogota Conference. Another was the necessity of organising close co-operation between the Societies and Branches in the Caribbean. As an example, the Curaçao Branch of the Netherlands Red Cross has an excellent relief plan and organisation and can move a hospital to any other island in the area in less than two hours.

The presence of representatives of WHO and other international organisations acting in the area added to the value of the Conference. This also emphasized the importance of our Societies' planning their programmes in co-operation with all interested authorities and organisations, with, of course, full respect for the traditional independence of the Red Cross".

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