

## XXth INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS

*Our November 1965 issue outlined the main aspects of the Vienna conference from October 2-9, 1965, and it also gave the texts of the resolutions adopted.*

*The importance of the proceedings and the team spirit which prevailed at the meetings of the three commissions are well known. The constructive work at their sessions never failed to ensure a full attendance by all delegates, and it was accomplished thanks, inter alia, to the valuable contacts established both during sessions and at the several receptions so generously offered by the host to the conference. Upon their return to their own countries, the National Society and government delegates will be able to examine the results achieved and draw conclusions from the relevant texts, particularly from those on the problem of dissemination of the rules of humanitarian law. It is also in this field that the ICRC has an enormous task before it, one which it hopes to complete in time for the next International Conference to be held in Istanbul in 1969. The International Review will revert to this subject in subsequent numbers, with studies on the wide issues involved in Vienna.*

*The XXth Conference was an assertion on a practical plane of the Red Cross spirit ; this was already felt at the official opening. This ceremony took place on October 2 in the reception hall of the Hofburg Palace and was enhanced by a performance of works by A. Bruckner, Mozart and Beethoven. After the Austrian National Anthem, the assembly was addressed successively by Mr. H. von Lauda, Mr. A. François-Poncet, Mr. S. A. Gonard, Mr. J. A. MacAulay and Mr. J. Klaus. We could hardly better convey the atmosphere of the conference than by reproducing extracts of their speeches :*

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*Mr. Hans von Lauda, President of the Austrian Red Cross :*

The Austrian Red Cross has the honour to act as host to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna. As President of this Society, I welcome you warmly and thank you for your participation.

This Conference has important and difficult tasks. At a time of great tension in the political sphere, representatives of Governments and organisations from all parts of the world are meeting here with the aim of together serving the cause of humanity. Some 156 representatives of Governments and about 350 Delegates of National Societies from 106 countries will discuss questions of undoubted importance to mankind. In the age of atomic weapons we must recognize that the spirit of humanity is at the very basis of our existence. Whereas earlier it was a question of giving at least a minimum of help to people suffering in war, now we have to fight for the very preservation of the human race . . .

An International Conference of the Red Cross has already once been held in Vienna. Since then almost 70 years have passed. The world of those times has completely changed as has our homeland. Austria is today a neutral State whose main aim it is to act as an intermediary between people of opposed views. I think that Vienna is today more suited than ever before to be the site of an International Conference of the Red Cross. It is to be hoped that the fact that we are meeting on neutral ground will contribute to promoting friendly co-operation.

This Conference will be a milestone in the history of the Red Cross. We all feel that a heavy responsibility lies on our shoulders. It is my wish that regardless of all differences in outlook we shall unite in the spirit of the Red Cross.

*Mr. André François-Poncet, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross :*

. . . In coming to Vienna the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross was therefore assured of finding a place well-suited to its work. In addition, the fact that it is meeting in this city has special significance. Neutrality is one of the principles on which the

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Red Cross bases its action. It refuses to allow politics to interfere with its undertakings. Faithful to the rules which constitute its strength, it continues its work, transcending controversies and rivalries which divide nations or human groupings.

Here, on the shores of the Danube, this concept of neutrality is outstandingly observed. The modern Republic of Austria has made it its law. This law has been freely adopted and put into practice with sincerity and in a dynamic way. Whilst ensuring the future destiny of the country, it has earned it the respect of all peoples . . .

. . . We are therefore very grateful to the Austrian Red Cross for acting as host to the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross in the capital of its country. It was here in Vienna, as early as 1897, that the VIth Conference was held. But to organize such a Conference in 1965 means a much greater burden than 68 years ago. We cannot thank, praise and congratulate President von Lauda enough for having assumed this difficult task in addition to managing the Austrian Red Cross with such distinction and authority. In spite of his many responsibilities as one of the most prominent personalities in Austrian industrial and economic life, he has made a great personal effort in preparing, with the assistance of his Government, the meetings of this Conference. In doing so he has displayed unparalleled devotion and self-sacrifice. We wish today to pay tribute to him and to his collaborators who have all joined in this excellent work of preparation.

Eight most eventful years have now elapsed since the last International Conference. Our Organization has had to employ considerable means to alleviate the suffering left in the wake of those events. But, at the same time, the prestige and presence of the Red Cross in the world have been extended and consolidated. The movement created by Henry Dunant and his colleagues on the Committee of Five celebrated its Centenary in Geneva two years ago. It has now come to embrace the whole world. Its authority is recognized everywhere. The number of affiliated National Societies is steadily increasing. And yet the tasks it faces are enormous. Everywhere in the world the need for assistance remains in one form or another, in spite of the tremendous progress of science. This calls for perseverance on our part so as to be better equipped to accomplish our task.

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Our role continually gains in importance as we are an indispensable element of support to governments which are becoming increasingly aware of their social responsibilities. Undoubtedly, our civilisation is marked by extraordinary material progress and by breath-taking discoveries. The control man has over matter has reached overwhelming proportions. Our life is dominated by the precision of such sciences as mechanics, physics, chemistry and mathematics. But science is inexorable. Its laws are inescapable. There is no pity in them. Machines and robots have no soul. A society enjoying the utmost material perfection may still be a barbaric society.

This is the danger which threatens the future of mankind.

To combat this danger we have to cultivate moral values, to place more emphasis on the heart in our everyday life, to still with all our might the winds of violence sweeping the world of today. This is the goal which the Red Cross has voluntarily set for itself and which it strives to attain with the zeal inspired by faith.

As our movement enjoys the support of vast sections of the population, of youth and people of all social classes and denominations, the Red Cross will not fail to achieve excellent results. Although human nature is too often dominated by the forces of evil, it also has a natural instinct for good, which must find expression in action . . .

*Mr. Samuel A. Gonard, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross :*

. . . At no time in the history of mankind has there been an institution, a political or religious movement which has been able to assemble the representatives of such a large number of countries in one hall in support of the same ideal.

I would like each one of you to realize the significance of this event and its solemnity. It is in fact the consummation of one of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, that is its universal character. It answers Henry Dunant's appeal, an appeal which you will remember is made " to all mankind " and, in a more restricted sense, " to each race, country and family, since no one can say that he is safe from the hazards of war."

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Imagine that at this very moment the attention of the peoples of the whole world is focused on this very hall where we are sitting. Imagine that everyone is asking whether we will once again accomplish our undertaking that is none other than adopting or improving, by common agreement, the principles limiting man's suffering and guaranteeing the respect due to him. Is it then permissible for us to disappoint everyone's hope and neglect the unique chance offered to us to come closer together? The only effective way of denouncing the horrors of war is for us to agree on the work common to us all, which is a work of humanity.

Man, with whom we are concerned today, who counts on our help and can only count on it, must not be deceived. By coming to Vienna we have implicitly promised to come to his aid. That is an immense and serious task. We are not too numerous to accomplish it.

The work of the Red Cross must be universal. This means above all that no people, no human being, should doubt the reason for its existence. And it also means that every single person must be convinced of its impartiality. All of us here present have interest in admitting that there exists an institution in the world acting above political, racial or religious considerations, outside all influences and pressures and which is consequently regarded as being impartial in all places and in all circumstances. Yes, it is indeed in our interest and is our chance of salvation! And if this institution were not to exist, we would have the moral duty of creating it.

Present-day technology enables the inhabitants of the remotest countries to learn of pleasant or unfortunate events as they take place in any corner of the globe. These events extend and also determine our responsibility and never have threats of war or hopes of peace preoccupied so many men at the same time.

Everyone knows, having heard it day after day, that peace is a vulnerable and fragile edifice. Each person thinks he knows that he possesses a means of protecting and consolidating it. It is not for the Red Cross to judge means or decide between methods. It would have indeed been presumptuous on the part of its founders to wish to set up a court and believe that all peoples would submit to its judgment. However, the Red Cross has taken upon itself a more immediate and consequently a more effective task: that of giving aid. We see that this is at the same time a means of fighting for peace. If all govern-

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ments which are represented here have admitted, by signing the treaty, that they recognize the humanitarian principles of the Geneva Conventions and approve their application, then they have at the same time recognized the loathsome character of war.

We thus have every reason to think that our work is good and based on solid foundations. When all international organizations have been disbanded and all meetings have failed, the Red Cross remains the only living link between the peoples. This is because we believe, because we ought to believe that its action is impartial.

The International Committee of the Red Cross in whose name I have the honour of speaking here, expects this Conference to fulfil the hopes of all those who have placed their confidence in our institution and that it will reaffirm its determination, everywhere and completely, to accomplish the humanitarian mission with which it has been entrusted . . .

*Mr. John A. MacAulay, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies :*

. . . The League of Red Cross Societies was founded on May 5, 1919. The League is described in its Constitution as the International Federation of National Red Cross Societies, an association of unlimited duration. The League acts as the permanent organ of liaison, co-operation and study between the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies, with a view to assisting them in the organisation and exercise of their activities, both national and international. The League co-operates with the Red Cross Societies in all aspects of their activities, particularly in the improvement of health, the mitigation of suffering and the prevention of diseases . . .

. . . The League represents millions of voluntary workers to whom the movement owes an extreme debt of gratitude. The officers of the League have the honour to represent these volunteer members on this very important occasion.

Since the birth of the League, it has seen wars and major human catastrophes. The blind forces of nature have, on many occasions, overwhelmed the puny breastworks of man. In each and every

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instance, from every corner of the globe, the response came flooding in to meet the challenge . . .

. . . In all these disasters to which I have referred, the worldwide Red Cross has mobilized through the League to speed relief to the victims. It is a matter of record that during the last ten years every individual Society contributed to disaster relief in other lands. This is an amazing demonstration of international solidarity . . .

. . . Perhaps the greatest drain on finances and personnel in the last few years has been the refugee problem.

The largest refugee operation ever undertaken by the League was in 1959 when we were asked to act as agent for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in looking after 285,000 Algerian refugees in Tunisia and Morocco. This operation continued from 1959 to 1963 when the refugees were able to return to their homes. With the League's organisation and experience it was able to carry out the operation at a minimum cost . . .

. . . Reference could also be made to various other activities of the League which have not been mentioned. The Development Programme of the League is more particularly designed to teach and help new Societies. It was accepted with fervour and enthusiasm, first by a small number of Societies and ultimately was adopted unanimously by the Board of Governors. It is presently planned on a five-year basis. All necessary support must be given to this important programme by League members. I know that the National Societies will meet this challenge.

One of the most important roles of the League is to do everything in its power to foster the cause of peace in the world. We must continue and we must accelerate our activities for which the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded. The League must give dynamic leadership in this respect.

I referred in my earlier observations to the fact that the gift of great and continuing institutions was a splendid gift. We are the inheritors of a great tradition and in our hands is responsibility that the lustre does not dim nor shrink in the shadows.

*Mr. Josef Klaus, Chancellor of the Austrian Federal Republic :*

In a letter to Henry Dunant about his famous book, *A Memory of Solferino*, Victor Hugo wrote: " You have a love of humanity."

These words also portray in a striking manner the pursuit of that great movement, the Red Cross.

At Solferino, Henry Dunant realized that increasing danger must be met with greater help; more effective means of destruction with more effective and general relief; organized killing with organized charity. Thus did he create the Red Cross. And the Red Cross undertook this vast task and accomplished it in exemplary fashion. In a world in which the forces of mass destruction—indiscriminate and ever increasing—do not spare those who would have escaped the consequences of war in previous centuries, the Red Cross has become a powerful moral force for the safeguard of human dignity and life.

Therein lies the profound significance of the unselfish relief given to the wounded and prisoners, the tracing of missing persons during and after the world wars and the re-uniting of families. This force, going beyond frontiers, differences in uniform, nationality, race and religion, is the force of all people of good will and at the same time it was admirably symbolic of a living solidarity even when hate and terror threatened completely to overwhelm humanity and make man forget that the enemy too was a man.

Born of the horrors of war, the Red Cross also tackles other important tasks. Wherever natural disasters, epidemics, earthquakes and floods have inflicted suffering, the Red Cross is present. It brings aid and by so doing often averts yet worse disaster. It has also made reality of another great idea, namely, solidarity among men, for help to one's neighbour in distress no matter who he is. It has given fresh significance to traditional family and community mutual aid by transforming it into brotherly aid of man to man within the international community.

In order for these ideas, which are so important in a world where shrinking distances bring contrasts into the limelight, to be of lasting good and a moral force for humanity, it is now imperative that they be inculcated into the youth of all nations. And the education given to the Junior Red Cross is, as it were, a guarantee that those ideas will be implanted in the hearts of future generations . . .

. . . Humanity began to understand that it is a single community and to give proof of this understanding, not only by sharing the same sufferings, but also the same idea of mutual assistance: to

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see in the person of a foe, as well as in a friend, a man, and give him succour when he is in need. The ICRC and the Geneva Conventions are as the first steps towards a united world, a future we can glimpse where humanity lives in peace and security.

Our country is keenly aware of the honour bestowed on it by your meeting in Vienna. Austria has been sorely tried by the disaster of the two world wars. But it has also particularly benefited from the blessed work of the Red Cross. I would therefore not wish to let pass this opportunity of expressing the profound gratitude of the Austrian people towards the members of the Red Cross, both national and international, for the immeasurable humanitarian work accomplished for their benefit in times of great distress. We extend the wish that your work here be completely successful, for the good of all humanity. This is the sentiment I have uppermost in declaring open the XXth Conference of the Red Cross.