

THE XXth INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS¹

The XXth International Red Cross Conference was held from the 2nd to the 9th October 1965 in the striking setting of the Hofburg at Vienna. Well organised by the Austrian Red Cross with the help of personnel from the international organisations of the Red Cross, the Conference was cordially welcomed by leaders of the Austrian Government. Mr. Hans von Lauda, President of the Austrian National Society, presided with both authority and tact. The Secretary General was Mr. Hans Sevcik. The Conference was attended by 580 representatives of 92 National Societies and 84 governments.²

This Conference was of particular importance in that it was the first to be held in eight years. Its results were not disappointing. Those who attended agree that it was a magnificent demonstration of the unity and universality of the Red Cross. On numerous items of the agenda understanding was quickly established, and the spirit of agreement during the debates resulted in almost all resolutions being adopted practically unanimously.

Most significant results were without doubt achieved in the field of humanitarian law, a subject dealt with by one of the three Conference Commissions. Implementation and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions, as usual, drew a great deal of attention. The belief of the community of nations in the authority of these fundamental charters and the need to ensure their application in all circumstances was never more strongly evident.

¹ *Plate* : A plenary session; a meeting of the General Commission; vote during plenary session; the ICRC President visits two exhibitions.

² For its part, the ICRC prepared a basic documentation of 24 reports, several of which have been reproduced in the *International Review*.

In this regard the Conference appealed to all nations to assure the widest possible instruction in the Geneva Conventions among their armed forces, including those made available to the United Nations, and to take appropriate measures to repress violations of the Conventions, particularly by completing legislation to this effect.

Another major field was the protection of civilian populations against the dangers of modern warfare. The Conference encouraged studies by the ICRC in three directions: legal protection of these populations against indiscriminate warfare, the status of civil defence personnel, and improvement of consideration due to civilian medical and nursing personnel. It was recommended that the ICRC call together one or several important conferences of experts in the very near future.

Meanwhile the Conference recalled some great humanitarian principles which benefit the civilian population and which remain valid despite enormous technical advances. In the present obsolete condition of the laws of war which, as is well known, date from 1907, it is no exaggeration to consider the rules thus recalled as general principles of common law applicable today. They may be summarized as follows:

- Parties engaged in conflict do not have unlimited choice of methods to inflict damage on the enemy;
- it is forbidden to attack the civilian population per se;
- a distinction must be made, at all times, between persons taking part in hostilities and the civilian population so that the latter may be spared as much as possible;
- the general principles of the laws of war are applicable to nuclear and similar weapons.

In a brief report it is impossible to analyse all the resolutions adopted and published in the present number. We would mention here only that they deal also with the protection of victims of internal conflicts, the tracing of military graves, and the training of specialised personnel to supervise the application of the Geneva Conventions.

There was much work done by a General Commission as well as by the Health and Social Welfare and the Junior Red Cross Commissions.

XXth INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS

VIENNA, OCTOBER 1965



First plenary session in the banqueting hall of the Hofburg Palace.

Photos Schikola, Vienna

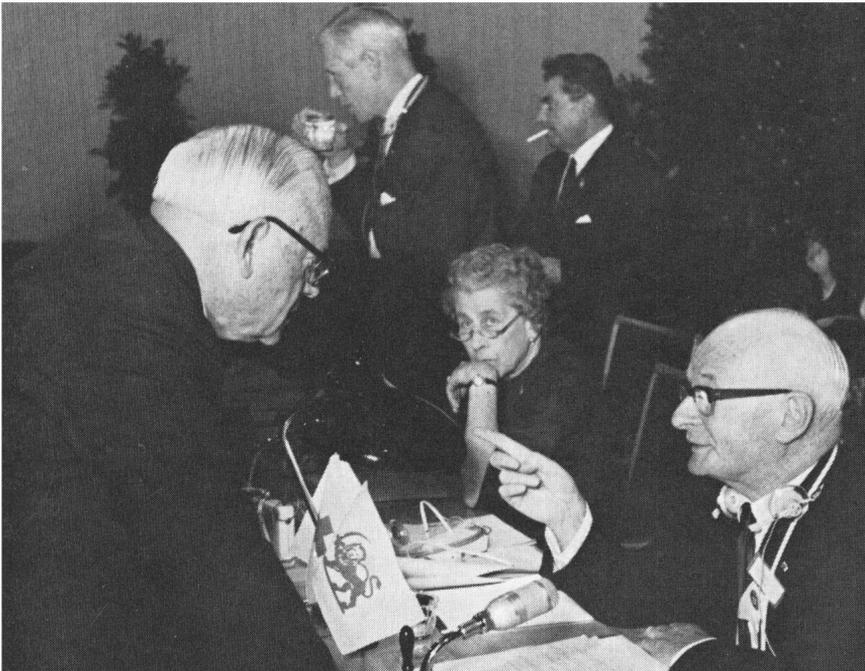


A vote during the last plenary session.



Commission meeting.

Mr. MacAuley, former Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League (on left), in conversation with the Countess of Limerick, President of the Standing Commission, and Mr. von Lauda, Chairman of the XXth International Conference.





The President of the ICRC and Mrs. Gonard (centre), accompanied by Mr. von Lauda and Mr. Sevcik (right), visiting the exhibition organized on the occasion of the XXth International Conference by the Austrian Red Cross.

Later, they visited that of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the U.S.S.R., presented to them by Mr. Miterev, President of the Society.



The Conference formally adopted the Declaration of Red Cross Principles which will hereafter be solemnly read at the opening of each Conference. The movement thus possesses a universal doctrine, a humanitarian basis common to all peoples.¹

“The Red Cross as a Factor of World Peace” is a traditional subject, now more topical than ever. Despite opinions which, at the beginning, appeared divergent, agreement was finally reached on a constructive text in which the Conference “urges all governments to settle their international differences by peaceful means in the spirit of international law” and “encourages the International Committee of the Red Cross to undertake, in constant liaison with the United Nations Organisation and within the framework of its humanitarian mission, all efforts which might contribute to the prevention or settlement of armed conflicts”.

Relief actions, radio communications, the creation of the Henry Dunant Institute, reuniting of families, preventive medicine, the donation of blood and nursing care were also among the questions discussed.

The Conference also elected the five members of the Standing Commission who join the four *ex officio* representatives of the ICRC and the League. Those appointed for a period of four years are: General Collins, President of the American Red Cross, Mr. von Lauda, President of the Austrian Red Cross, the Countess of Limerick, Vice-Chairman of the British Red Cross, Professor Miterev, President of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR, and Dr. Newman-Morris, President of the Australian Red Cross. During its constitutive meeting, the Commission elected the Countess of Limerick as its Chairman.

For the location of its next meeting, three National Societies declared themselves ready to act as host. The choice of the Conference fell to Turkey. Thus the XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross will be held at Istanbul in 1969.

* * *

¹ See *International Review*, November 1961, in which the Red Cross Principles are already been set forth.