

*Suspension of the government delegation  
of the Republic of South Africa  
at the Twenty-fifth International Conference  
of the Red Cross  
(Geneva 1986)*

---

**DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE SAME EVENT**

*by Jacques Moreillon*

---

The author is Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross; the present article is a personal contribution and is in no way binding on the ICRC.

## INDEX

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	135
<b>2. Summary of the arguments for and against suspension</b> ...	137
2.1. Arguments for suspension .....	137
2.2. Arguments against suspension .....	141
<b>3. Conclusion: the situation after the Conference</b> .....	146
3.1. Taking stock .....	146
3.2. Public opinion .....	147
3.3. Was it a precedent? .....	148
3.4. Positive aspects of the crisis: a more tranquil view of the situation .....	150

*A great many of the conflicts which ravage our continents, countries and societies, at every level, are due to the fact that we do not try—because we do not dare to try—to put ourselves in the place of other people. However, there is no other way to establish a minimum level of mutual confidence, without which no agreement and indeed no common life is possible.*

André Fontaine  
*Le Monde*, Paris  
27 January 1987

*A conflict of opinions is not a catastrophe, but an opportunity.*

Alfred N. Whitehead  
(1861-1947)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In our opinion, the most important event at the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross was its adoption of the new Statutes and Rules of Procedure of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. These new texts are the outcome of a suggestion by the League and almost four years of negotiation with the ICRC. They set out guidelines for the Movement for the span of at least a generation, and the fact that they have been adopted by consensus is a guarantee of their soundness and their durability.

Besides these new Statutes, the International Conference adopted—likewise by consensus—some thirty resolutions which evidence the dynamic strength, the vitality and independence of the Movement, and its extensive links with the States party to the Geneva Conventions. Composed of delegations from those States, from the National Societies duly recognized by the ICRC, from the League and from the ICRC itself, the Conference has once again shown itself to be that unique and privileged place where the International Red Cross meets governments on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, which are at once their common denominator and their common heritage.

However, what public opinion will probably remember most about this Conference is the suspension of the government delegation of the Republic of South Africa, for after a point of order raised by the Kenya government delegation on behalf of the African Group at the Conference, the latter agreed, by an open vote and a simple majority, that the South African Government delegation be suspended. \*

While we feel that an article on this event is justified, it is in no way intended to re-open past wounds but on the contrary as an attempt to help them heal, in the greater calm and detachment of subsequent reflection.

Indeed, this majority decision by the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross to ban the South African government delegation from participating in its work was regarded in very different ways within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It was considered by some as a success and by others as a failure. What strikes the observer is this extreme diversity of views within a Movement whose components bear the same name and declare their adherence to the same Principles, the same Statutes and the same international humanitarian law. However, as the President of the ICRC stated in his closing address to the Conference: "... *however troubled our hours together may have been, they cannot possibly keep us divided and lead us to resignation, for we do not have the right to doubt either the importance of our mission or the strength of the Red Cross and Red Crescent ideal*".

One way to prevent the division which appeared at the Twenty-fifth International Conference from continuing and even becoming more accentuated is for everyone to try and better understand the opposing view—even without being able to share it—by attempting to see how others saw the same event. We can try to put ourselves in the place of others, to demonstrate our empathy with them, without having to renounce our own convictions. Until we can hope to reach a consensus on the fundamental subject, a conscious effort can certainly be made to understand better the attitudes and reactions of all members of the Movement—if we really want it to remain a Movement.

To promote such an undertaking is the purpose of this paper, in which we shall try to present as perceptively, clearly and completely as possible the way all the various sides felt about the suspension of the South African government delegation. In doing so we shall not be distracted by the ins and outs of the procedures followed—even though the difficult procedural questions undoubtedly affected the atmosphere of the discussions—but will

---

\* The text of the motion reads as follows: "... *that the representatives of the Government of the Republic of South Africa be suspended from participating in the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross.*"

take up the **fundamental** arguments used by those “for” and “against” the decision finally taken by the majority.

Finally, we wish to stress that in writing this text, the author—engaging in personal reflection—has sought to be as impartial an observer as possible. He has made a particular effort to show the maximum objectivity in recounting those arguments with which, personally or institutionally, he was least in agreement. At the same time he has tried not to give more weight to elements and arguments which he himself found particularly pertinent.

\*  
\* \*

## 2. SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST SUSPENSION

### 2.1. Arguments for suspension

The principal arguments of those who spoke in favour of suspending the South African government delegation can, we feel, be summarized as follows:

#### 2.1.1. Apartheid is a crime against humanity

Apartheid is a crime against humanity, an **institutionalized and openly declared** violation of the Principle of humanity which is the first of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross; it is a systematic debasement of human dignity.

#### 2.1.2. South Africa is barred from all other organizations

The condemnation of apartheid is universal and its “Government” is barred from all international bodies. It must also be barred *a fortiori* from the International Conference of the Red Cross.

#### 2.1.3. The Conference is competent to decide

The Conference is competent to take this decision, in particular for the following reasons:

- **first**, the South African Government is representative of only a minority of the population of its country, hence its “representatives” at the Conference do not “represent” this population as a whole;

- **second**, the Conference is the only body competent to interpret its own Statutes. The absence of a specific statutory provision on expulsion or suspension of a member must not be interpreted as a statutory impossibility to expel or suspend, but rather as a point which is left to the Conference to decide freely;

- **third**, this decision is in conformity with the Red Cross Fundamental Principle of humanity which was proclaimed by the Conference itself in 1965.

#### **2.1.4. Respect for the Fundamental Principles of the Movement**

A State which institutionally rejects the very essence of one of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement cannot possibly participate in the Conference of that Movement. Even if States are not themselves bound by them in the same manner as the components of the Movement, they cannot dissociate themselves from these Principles in a permanent and formal manner and nonetheless claim to continue taking part in a conference which has solemnly proclaimed and adopted them.

The new Statutes go farther than the previous ones and incorporate the Principles in their Preamble. Even though other States are probably rather lax in respecting some of the Fundamental Principles, the difference is that there is no other State which pursues an official policy of institutionalizing racial discrimination.

#### **2.1.5. It is not only a matter of law**

The question goes beyond law; it involves fundamental ethical principles and touches on a historic symbol of all forms of discrimination; in deciding as it did, the Conference wanted to respond to an age-old injustice. Apartheid offends a keen sensitivity which cannot but be taken into extensive account. We must put ourselves in the place of the Africans whose black brothers do not have the same rights as the Whites, because of the mere fortuitousness of birth.

#### **2.1.6. It is a situation which does not create a precedent**

The case of South Africa is unique. No other State sets up racial discrimination as a principle of government. No other government is systematically rejected by all international bodies. The argument justifying the suspension of South Africa from the International Conference of the Red Cross cannot therefore be used *vis-à-vis* other States or governments.

It should also be emphasized that in other international fora the suspension of South Africa has thus far not been used as a precedent.

(On the point that the proposed suspension would not create a precedent, some speakers at the Conference expressed themselves in less absolute terms).

#### **2.1.7. The Principle of universality remains intact**

The suspension does not in any way violate the Principle of universality of the Movement. The universality of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, of their ideals, in no way implies the existence of a "principle of universality of participation in International Conferences of the Red Cross". Were universality to be interpreted so literally, the inevitable conclusion would be that such "universality" has never existed, since there are other entities which could claim to be States and governments but are absent from the Conference.

#### **2.1.8. The loss of universality is the fault of South Africa, not of the Conference**

The intrinsic unity and universality of the International Conference of the Red Cross rests in universal adherence to shared and essential principles. However, on absolutely fundamental matters, the Republic of South Africa specifically proclaims its refusal to adhere to such principles. So, with or without suspension, this government places itself outside the ideals of the Conference. Accordingly, the suspension as such, which is nothing more than a symbolic and visible manifestation of an already existing circumstance for which South Africa is entirely responsible, merely acknowledges an existing division. In other words, such a decision by the Conference does not cause any loss of unity or universality; it merely places that loss on record, with the regrets of all.

#### **2.1.9. It is not a political question**

It is not a political decision and the Principles of neutrality and impartiality cannot be invoked, nor those Articles of the Statutes which forbid the Conference to deal with political questions.

#### **2.1.10. It does involve the credibility of the Conference**

If the Conference had **not** decided in favour of the suspension which had been proposed to it, it would have lost all credibility in

the eyes of the majority of countries and of the peoples of the world.

**2.1.11. The decision moves in the direction that history is moving**

This is a historic decision which demonstrates the capacity of the Movement to meet the legitimate expectations of today's world. The decision is historic above all because it proclaims for the first time a moral demand of the nations of the world as a whole, denouncing an inhumanity which only yesterday would have been passed over in polite diplomatic silence but today can no longer be tolerated.

**2.1.12. The South African Red Cross may remain**

This is a carefully qualified and moderate decision because it makes a clear distinction between the South African Red Cross, whose presence at the Conference is accepted, and the government delegation. Thus, the advocates of suspension demonstrate their intention not to reply to apartheid by a kind of tit-for-tat retaliation.

**2.1.13. It is no more than a suspension**

This decision is limited in terms of time. The day when the South African Government renounces apartheid it can return to the Conference.

**2.1.14. The "walk-out"**

For many delegations, African in particular but others as well, the aversion and revulsion inspired by apartheid are so strong that the non-suspension of South Africa from this Conference would have obliged them as a matter of conscience to withdraw from the meeting.

This does not constitute a threat or boycott but is merely the recognition of an impossibility. Today, the honour and dignity of an African no longer permit him to sit beside people who are the direct representatives of the leaders responsible for apartheid, a crime "against humanity".

\*

\* \*

## **2.2. Arguments against suspension**

The principal arguments used against the suspension were the following:

### **2.2.1. The subject of the discussion is not apartheid**

All the participants who spoke against the suspension of the South African government delegation simultaneously denounced apartheid, while stressing the fact that the question was not one of condemning apartheid nor even South Africa, but instead of determining whether the Conference could challenge the presence of **any** State party to the Geneva Conventions or dispute the representative character of the government of that State.

So although all agree on the condemnable nature of apartheid, not all draw the same conclusions. Those in particular who find that the South African Government should be excluded from **all** international bodies, since the extent to which it is representative of the nation is exceptionally small, should also draw the legal conclusions: this "government" would then have no legal capacity to be party to treaties under international law and consequently would not be bound by the Geneva Conventions and the obligations they entail. Is that what we want? Even for those most shocked by apartheid, some doubts at least are permissible.

### **2.2.2. The prestige of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is not where some believe it to be**

The Movement was born of a common desire to alleviate the suffering caused by war and other forms of conflict. Accordingly, it is within the Movement, by definition, that even violently hostile antagonists should be able to come together, because it is thus that one of the essential purposes of the Red Cross can be accomplished.

In times of conflict, it is "natural" for each party to hate the adverse party and hope for its military defeat. Passions may easily run so high that the enemy of the moment is considered the worst of all possible enemies. Within the Movement, however, it is essential that at this very peak of passions the dialogue must not be broken, because this is the most vital time of all for application in practical terms of what the Red Cross has led the hostile powers to commit themselves to.

Created to act in time of war, the Red Cross finds its true prestige in time of war and in the simultaneous presence within it of all,

friends **and** enemies. Without this capacity, the Movement would be nothing but another pious and well-meaning association, failing to fulfil its vocation of humanity in universality.

### **2.2.3. Suspension is contrary to the Statutes**

The Statutes of the International Red Cross do not provide for the possibility of suspending a State or challenging the representativity of its government.

If such a possibility had been envisaged, it would certainly have required a specific procedure and a qualified majority.

Conversely the Statutes do give an unrestricted and unqualified right to the delegations of all States party to the Geneva Conventions to participate in the Conference.

No organization has the right to violate its own Statutes, even by a qualified majority and even by a secret ballot, and much less by a simple majority and vote by roll call. The only admissible approach in this case would be that leading to an amendment of the Statutes, in accordance with the procedure and by the qualified majority required to do so.

Therefore, this suspension is contrary to the Statutes. It follows that the Movement may henceforth no longer be able to depend, in any domain, upon the protection of its own laws.

### **2.2.4. A dangerous precedent**

Having created this precedent, the Conference could in future suspend any delegation whatsoever or violate any Statute whatsoever, and do so by a simple majority.

To regard the present suspension as a potentially dangerous precedent is neither a leap of the imagination nor an example of excessive pessimism. Although any regime condemned by virtually all nations for various characteristics is hence bound to be unique in certain ways, the fact remains that many profoundly inhuman regimes have appeared throughout history at relatively brief intervals. Accordingly, no one can certify today that this suspension will not be invoked in future by others to justify other suspensions or exclusions, and for other reasons.

### **2.2.5. The interest of the victims**

Above all, the Conference should have at heart the interest of the victims whom it is the mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

to protect. A decision to suspend a government can only harm those whom the Red Cross and Red Crescent—and in particular the ICRC—must at all times be capable of protecting. In Red Cross terms, this means **all** victims, both present and future: it would be inconceivable for us to distinguish between “good” and “bad” wounded, or between “good” and “bad” prisoners and apply different treatment to them accordingly.

What would happen if South Africa—suspended from the Conference although remaining party to the Geneva Conventions—were to consider itself released from its commitments under these treaties? Or simply if it were to attribute—even without valid reason—the responsibility for its suspension to the ICRC?

#### **2.2.6. Universality and respect for humanitarian law**

Humanitarian law is universal, inherently and by definition. To suspend a State which has signed the Conventions, and which thereby alone has gained the right to participate in the Conference, amounts to a denial of the very basis of its entitlement to take part in the work of the Movement’s supreme body. This basis is specifically and uniquely the fact of being party to the Geneva Conventions. Can we expect a State to recognize its obligations under the terms of a ratified treaty if the international community contests its exercise of the rights which derive from this ratification?

#### **2.2.7. This suspension violates the Principles of neutrality, impartiality and abstention from politics**

The Principle of neutrality demands that the Red Cross abstain from taking sides in any controversy, especially one which is political, since it must have the confidence of all sides and be able to act everywhere, without discrimination and with complete impartiality.

The suspension violates this Fundamental Principle which has preserved the existence of the Movement for more than a century, since it is carried out in the context of a conflict. The conflict may perhaps be legitimate, but it is not for the Movement as such to recognize that legitimacy because it remains bound by its principles *vis-à-vis* all, whether the cause of a power is just or unjust.

### 2.2.8. **The politicization of the Movement**

This precedent of *in-casu* politicization presents the danger of a successive shift within the Movement towards a **general** politicization which would divest it of its specific Red Cross character and hence its efficacy in humanitarian action.

### 2.2.9. **The Red Cross must remain the ultimate place for dialogue**

The Red Cross is by its very nature **the** place for dialogue between hostile powers, whether they are currently belligerents or not. Here in the Red Cross and Red Crescent, however great the disputes may be, there is a common agreement to preserve minimum standards of humanity. The Conference of the Red Cross must be a place of truce amidst the sea of conflicts, a moment during which enmity is superseded by humane consideration. If the International Conference can no longer provide such a place and offer such a moment, there will be no other place which can do so and the Red Cross will have lost one of its reasons for being.

The delegation of the Government of South Africa must be able to sit at the Conference, if only to hear criticism of its system. There must be an exception for this forum to the general policy of exclusion pursued against this Government. The world needs at least **one** universal organization.

From this point of view the desire to align the Red Cross with other international organizations from which South Africa has been excluded or suspended does nothing to enhance the prestige of the Conference. On the contrary, the Movement derives its authority from the fact that it is **fundamentally different** and it can only lose by becoming "just like the others". If it were not essential for the Red Cross not to belong to the UN, there would be practically no reason why the Movement should not simply dissolve itself and turn over its functions and mission to the UN Secretary General or General Assembly.

### 2.2.10. **The Red Cross exists to help and not to condemn**

The purpose of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is to help and not to condemn. It must be able to help victims everywhere, which implies moderation in its criticisms. This does not prevent other bodies or organizations from condemning. Can one really claim to help and to condemn in the same country? The UN for instance,

and human rights organizations, can legitimately condemn. But the Movement is meant to be universal **in its action** and must be able to act everywhere, without the victims it is seeking to assist and protect having to pay for its condemnations.

### **2.2.11. The Movement's image**

In carrying out this suspension, the Movement compromises its image as a neutral and non-political institution and also loses credibility, particularly among hundreds of thousands of volunteers who have adhered to it precisely because of its concrete non-political, purely humanitarian, neutral and non-discriminatory action.

These volunteers are convinced of what the Red Cross really is and what it is for, and why, unlike other fora, it is precisely at the height of antagonism and hatred that its meetings take on their full significance. Alongside those who, doubtless legitimately, wish to be able to condemn, these volunteers have chosen the Red Cross for the very reason that it means to conduct its humane activities in a spirit of neutrality and impartiality.

Knowing that a large-scale conflict between South Africa and its neighbours may be imminent, there is only one conclusion to be reached: **now** is the time to ensure, by every possible means, that South Africa is represented at the Conference, at the precise moment when it may find itself faced with the obligations it has undertaken to fulfil by ratifying the Geneva Conventions.

These are the reasons why some considered this suspension as an incipient decline of the Movement.

### **2.2.12. The double standard**

Are not some of those who demand the suspension of South Africa themselves responsible for grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law? Who judges the judge? Is not a double standard being applied, which public opinion cannot fail to see?

### **2.2.13. The procedural aspect**

Even were it possible—and it is not—to ignore the illegality of the decision in the light of the fundamental issue, at very least the fact remains that the vote should have been secret. An imposed public vote can be an intolerable ordeal of conscience. Moreover, the

insistence on having the vote taken this way has led more than one person to think—rightly or wrongly—that with a secret ballot the results could have been different to those of the open vote. Also the representative of the “accused” government should have been given the floor to present its “defence”. The comment was heard that “when an assembly sets itself up as a court of justice, it ought to respect the elementary procedures”.

\*  
\* \*

### 3. CONCLUSION: THE SITUATION AFTER THE CONFERENCE

#### **3.1. Taking stock**

The task of assessing the event, so that lessons can be learnt for the future, lies primarily with the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The ICRC has prepared itself for the coming discussions, which may be expected to extend throughout the Movement both informally and formally. For this purpose it has studied everything it has been able to gather on the subject in the national and international press. It has discussed the matter with a score of diplomatic representatives directly concerned, especially those present in Geneva; it has had talks and has corresponded with several National Societies, most often on the initiative of these Societies; it has asked its delegates in some forty countries to engage in similar analyses with their interlocutors, both governmental and representatives of National Societies. In addition, it has carried out a detailed internal discussion.

All this combined has produced a very detailed picture, comparable to that of the Conference itself, but perhaps less clear-cut and with more nuances. At the risk of the kind of imprecision which is inherent in any generalization, we may extract the following significant elements:

### 3.2. Public opinion

In general, a distinction must be drawn between government reactions and those of the National Societies. The former are colder, the latter are often more emotional. For some National Societies, particularly those of the "Western" countries, including Australia and New Zealand, public opinion and especially **their** public opinion is decisive. In this connection, it is interesting to know that whereas the media in these countries have given considerable coverage to the event, much less was devoted to it in most other countries. Quite naturally, the particularly "telegenic" picture of the South African ambassador throwing down his badge as a member of the Conference on the table in front of the chairman appears to have been shown on television screens in many countries. On the other hand, the suspension of South Africa was usually treated by the press in Third-World countries as a mere item of information, with little comment. The ICRC found only a dozen or so newspapers in these countries which gave any detailed comment on the event, and most of these comments expressed their approval of the suspension. This is in great contrast to the volume of news coverage and comments in the newspapers of "Western" countries, which fill several filing boxes. In these countries, both the news and commentaries on it hit the headlines in most newspapers, and in virtually all cases the decision was criticized and the politicization of the Movement was denounced.

It should be noted in this connection that several African diplomats consider that the Western press "dramatized" the event and tended to present South Africa as a "martyr", without sufficiently stressing the favourable compromise constituted by the maintenance of the South African Red Cross in the Conference and the official support given by sister societies in Africa to the South African Society.

Analysis shows that this "dramatization" of the event in the "Western" press is due at least as much to questions of procedure as to those of substance. The refusal of a secret ballot and denial of the floor to the South African representative were regarded as violations of fundamental democratic rights and as an infringement of the National Societies' independence, and therefore gave rise to comments which were often more sharply critical than those concerning the suspension itself.

Even if these procedural aspects are dismissed, even though it is important for us neither to dramatize the situation nor to exaggerate its importance, and even though an attempt is being made to overcome the gap created at the Conference, it is nevertheless essential to make a sound analysis and not turn a blind eye to the distance which separates the two principal trends within the Movement. In this respect, the "public opinion" factor is decisive. For in the countries opposed to the suspension of South Africa, the National Societies are directly dependent on public opinion for their support, in particular financially but also and above all in the broadest possible sense. This support is largely based on the conviction that "Red Cross = neutrality = non-political = pure humanitarianism", an image seriously undermined in public opinion by the Conference, as evidenced for example by scathing caricatures in some newspapers. In the countries—mainly African—which voted for suspension, even though public opinion is not expressed in the same way, it must nevertheless be taken into account . . . but of course in reverse manner. A member of an African Red Cross Society said, for example, *"it would have been possible as at Bucharest in 1977 or Manila in 1981 to abstain from raising the question of the presence of South Africa and, in our country, perhaps nobody would have reproached us. However, once the question was raised, the whole Movement would have lost its credibility in Africa if the Conference had not suspended the Government of Pretoria, and our people back home would not have understood if we had voted other than for the suspension"*.

For a great many National Societies in "Western" countries, these events provided the opportunity to remind the **public in general**, as well as members of those Societies, what their Red Cross does, what neutrality means, and in certain respects to make up by active public relations work for the members' resignations which had been submitted in the heat of the moment.

### 3.3. Was it a precedent?

Another subject of concern to many people is whether or not this suspension has created a precedent.

The President of the ICRC has said that this situation without precedent must not constitute a precedent.

If the South African Government wishes to participate in the next International Conference, its suspension will probably be requested

again, unless there have been substantial political changes in that country. The real question of a precedent, however, is whether the "exception" constituted by the suspension of South Africa will be cited sometime in the future to demand the suspension of another country. Since the **material** motive for the suspension was the non-representativity of the South African government delegation, what other delegation in the future may not see its own "representativity" questioned?

These are typical of the concerns now being expressed in some diplomatic circles. The latter are, however, almost unanimous in agreeing that at the next International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, as at that of 1986, the governments will tend to follow current United Nations practice. In other words, as one of them put it "the Red Cross has no reason to fear that problems of participation will arise other than those experienced in the United Nations". This seems to imply that another suspension at the United Nations would logically be followed by the same effects at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

In fact, only two delegations at the Conference have explicitly stated that the case of South Africa could—or even should—create a precedent. The great majority of the other delegations which advocated suspension insisted, on the contrary, on the **unique** character of the South African regime, which they emphasized was "the only one in the world which institutionalizes racial discrimination as a system of government". This is a point of view which many African diplomats still maintain to this day, not only to explain their attitude at the Conference but also to make it clear that in their opinion the decision taken at Geneva cannot create a precedent for any other country.

Another point is also often emphasized in subsequent analyses of the event, namely that the reason cited for suspension was apartheid and **not** any allegation of failure to respect humanitarian law. This seems very important to us because if the suspension had been justified by failure to respect the Geneva Conventions, it would have been impossible not to consider it as the source of a precedent which might well have justified a great many empty seats at future Conferences. This was not the case, however, and although the Conference decision can be said to have had a political character as regards the representativity of the South African delegation, it had no such character as regards humanitarian law *pro se*.

Similarly, the bulk of the argument **for** suspension was rarely of a

legal nature and there was relatively little reference to the Statutes, which increases the difficulty of citing this as a precedent and tends to confirm the unique nature of the decision.

### **3.4. Positive aspects of the crisis: a more tranquil view of the situation**

Discussion on the suspension of the South African government delegation took up a disproportionate amount of time at the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross. But this time was not wasted. It not only revealed differences of opinion but also concordant opinions. For example, all the delegations which took part in the discussion condemned apartheid. Those who spoke against suspension of the South African government delegation cannot be regarded as advocates of apartheid.

It is also clear that those who advocated the suspension had no desire whatsoever to hamper the work of the Red Cross in South Africa. This work, for the benefit of victims of the situation, is recognized as more necessary than ever. Here again there is unanimity. The humanitarian and non-political activities of the South African Red Cross and the ICRC in South Africa will be observed with great interest and will be unreservedly supported.

Finally, every crisis, including the one which marked the Twenty-fifth International Conference, should give rise to in-depth consideration of the objectives of the Movement and the means of reaching them. It can result in a dialogue and a heightened awareness which, without the crisis, might not have come about. This dialogue and new awareness should be beneficial for the future of the Movement.

The situation may be quite different at the next International Conference of the Red Cross, but it may not differ appreciably from the one we have recently encountered. However, without yielding to any exaggerated optimism, we believe that with the experience gained at the Twenty-fifth Conference, the goodwill on both sides and the help of the revised Statutes and Rules, it will be possible to avoid a repetition of the October 1986 situation, in any case procedurally, for we do not doubt that the Standing Commission and the host Society will take the Geneva experience into extensive account to prepare for the Twenty-sixth Conference.

To sum up, by holding the International Conference in Geneva for the first time since 1925, the Movement could be said not only to have returned after half a century to the city of Henry Dunant and the cradle of the Red Cross, but also to have rediscovered the other Geneva, that of the United Nations European Headquarters. In other words, the humanitarian Geneva met the Geneva of great debates and political passions, and perhaps the Movement's rallying to an international community already mobilized and politically unanimous on the struggle against apartheid was then all too inevitable. The unique, exceptional nature of what happened last October, and hence the limited extent to which it can serve as a precedent, stems from that particular set of circumstances.

By restoring things to their true perspective and thanks to the Movement's keen sense of responsibility, testified by the broad consensus with which the Conference adopted its decisions, it can be hoped that the spirit of humanitarian Geneva will in time prevail in the wake of that eminently political decision.

We have sought to outline and consider the various points of view. From that consideration there emerges the paramount concern of some for humanitarian law and the Principles which derive from it, and the bolder, more assertive ambitions others have for that same law and principles.

At the next Conference, therefore, everything possible should be done to strengthen the Movement's unity in its pursuit of its intrinsic objectives, and to ensure that this recent experience, replaced in context and thus better understood and assimilated, proves purely beneficial for international humanitarian law and the victims it is intended to protect.

The will to accomplish this certainly exists on both sides. Moreover, reliance can be placed in the new guarantees and structure provided by the revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure which, by their fundamental nature, will ultimately be the most important element of the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross.

**Jacques Moreillon**