

*Statutory Meetings within the International Red Cross
and Red Crescent Movement in Rio de Janeiro*

**SIXTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES**

The sixth session of the League General Assembly, which was held in Rio de Janeiro from 22 to 27 November 1987, was attended by 450 delegates representing 134 National Red Cross and Crescent Societies.

The Assembly was honoured by the presence at its opening ceremony of Mr. José Sarney, the Brazilian President, and members of the Federal Government and local authorities.

The delegates were welcomed by Mrs. Mavy A.A. Harmon, President of the Brazilian Red Cross which was the host for the occasion, and heard speeches by Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, ICRC President, and Dr. Ahmad Abu-Goura, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Dr. Mario Villarroel Lander, who had been named interim President of the League by its Executive Council, paid a ringing tribute to Enrique de La Mata Gorostizaga, former League President, who died on 6 September last.

The following is a summary of the Assembly's work.

1. Election of a new League President

The General Assembly elected **Dr. Mario Villarroel Lander**, President of the Venezuelan Red Cross Society and Vice-President of the League, to the post of League President by 69 votes in the first ballot. Addressing the Assembly, Dr. Villarroel emphasized the essential unity, universality and neutrality of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. "I shall strive", he said, "to represent

every one of our National Societies. I pledge myself to the unity which is so essential to our work”.

Dr. Villarroel is 40, married and a lawyer by profession. He holds both a doctorate and a professorship in law.

He joined the Venezuelan Red Cross in 1967 as a volunteer and has been its President since 1978.

He was elected a Vice-President of the League in 1985 and the following year was appointed Chairman of the General Affairs Commission of the International Conference of the Red Cross.

Dr. Villarroel has taken part in many Red Cross and other international conferences and has received a substantial number of awards from the National Societies. He is very interested in Latin-American cultural matters and has published articles on these and legal matters.

The other candidates for election as President were Judge Darrel D. Jones, League Vice-President and Advisor to the Canadian Red Cross Society, Mrs. Mariapia Fanfani, League Vice-President and Chairman of the National Women's Committee in the Italian Red Cross. A fourth candidate, Dr. Mouloud Belaouane, President of the Algerian Red Crescent, withdrew in favour of Dr. Villarroel.

2. Appointment of the new Secretary General of the League

Mr. Pär Stenbäck, Secretary General of the Finnish Red Cross, was appointed Secretary General of the League, following his nomination by the Executive Council.

Mr. Stenbäck is 46 years of age and is a Master of Political Sciences. He was a member of the Finnish Parliament from 1970 to 1985 and during that time was Minister of National Education from 1979 to 1982 and Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1982 to 1983. He was appointed Secretary General of the Finnish Red Cross in 1985.

From 1970 to 1979, he was a member of the Nordic Board for Development Cooperation in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. From 1979 to 1985, he was Chairman of the government Advisory Commission for Economic Relations to the Developing Countries and has been Expert Advisor since 1985. He has thus established many contacts with countries in the Third World.

Upon his election, Mr. Stenbäck said: "I commit myself to making this organization a vivid and active institution in accomplishing its work to help the victims of our world". "Our Movement", he added, "provides a chance for all of us to put our respective skills at the service of humanity".

The General Assembly named Mr. Stenbäck's predecessor, Mr. Hans Hoegh, Secretary General Emeritus of the League.

3. Admission of a new National Society

The General Assembly confirmed the admission of the Red Cross Society of Grenada as the 145th member Society of the League. It had been granted provisional admission by the Executive Council at the latter's April 1987 session.

4. Revision of the League Constitution

The General Assembly unanimously adopted a draft revision of the League Constitution and Rules of Procedure submitted by the Commission on the Revision of the Constitution chaired by Dr. Janos Hantos, Chairman of the Executive Council of the Hungarian Red Cross.

5. 1988 League Budget

After approving the financial reports for 1986 submitted by the Finance Commission, the Assembly adopted the League's budget for 1988 totalling just under 20 million Swiss francs. The budget was slashed by 14% over 1987. At the same time, however, the proposed increase in statutory contributions by the National Societies was reduced from 12 to 9%.

The members of the Assembly expressed their heartfelt gratitude to Mr. George Elsey, who had decided to step down as Chairman of the Finance Commission after serving in that capacity since 1977. The new Chairman is Mr. Neal Boyle, Vice-President of the American Red Cross.

6. Commission reports

The Assembly adopted the reports and recommendations of the League's advisory Commissions:

- *Disaster Relief Commission*: After reviewing the relief operations carried out by the League since 1986 and studying the difficulties

faced by the Movement in three major current emergency operations (Mozambique, Ethiopia and Sri Lanka), the Commission drew attention to the pressing need for the League to continue to keep records of disaster operations and to try to improve them; to develop flexibility and pragmatism in executing and planning its relief operations and to further League and ICRC cooperation in this field. The Assembly emphasized the importance of developing and improving tracing activities in the wake of natural disasters and recommended that the National Societies' tracing services be reinforced.

- *Development Commission:* The Commission's report stated at the outset that the development concept was not well understood within the League. The time-frame was unrealistic, efforts sporadic, funding inadequate and the needs of the least developed Societies overlooked. The Assembly adopted a Commission proposal to set out a complete, general development policy based on the Movement's fundamental principles and integrating the concepts of development and peace. In a second resolution, the Assembly urged the Movement to recognize the role of women in development and to draw up a plan of action making full use of women's resources and potential in Red Cross and Red Crescent development work.

A third resolution urged action to fulfil the objectives set by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Finally, the Commission called for support for National Society tracing services as part of the general development of their services.

- *Health and Community Services Commission:* The Commission's report particularly stressed the increasing social problems arising from unemployment, poverty and hazardous conditions, and the psychological and social needs of disaster victims and their families. It also examined the problem of migrant workers. All of these issues were an integral part of National Society programmes and should also be dealt with by the League Secretariat, acting as an advisory body. The Assembly, for its part, stressed the need to expand primary health programmes and to fight drug abuse and AIDS.

- *Youth Commission:* The Youth Commission called on the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for greater commitment to, and

more action on expanding the contribution of young people to the organization.

The General Assembly adopted two resolutions. One approved a "Supercamp" to be organized in Solferino in August 1989 as one of the highlights of the programme commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Movement. This camp will bring together young people from around the world for a programme based on the fundamental principles of the organization.

A second resolution calls for a study by the League, in cooperation with the Henry Dunant Institute, of the role and status of young people within the Movement; it further recommended that an international youth policy be proposed to the next session of the General Assembly in 1989. Finally, an appeal was made to reinforce the Youth Service in the League Secretariat.

7. League AIDS Programme

The General Assembly adopted a worldwide programme to fight AIDS. Indeed, National Societies are in a particularly good position to take action and several of them have set up national AIDS programmes in the following key areas:

- promoting health education and information;
- ensuring high-quality blood transfusion;
- caring for people who have both the virus and AIDS, and supporting them and their families;
- fighting discrimination against AIDS victims.

The resolution adopted by the Assembly requires the League to make a "long-term commitment" in the fight against the pandemic. It accepts the global coordinating role of the World Health Organization and stresses the need for Red Cross and Red Crescent action to be coordinated with government control programmes at national level.

The main role of the League Secretariat would be the development of appropriate policies and strategies and active coordination throughout the Federation and with governmental and non-governmental organizations.

8. Regional meetings

The General Assembly heard a report from the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR on the *International Red Cross and Red Crescent Seminar on Health as a Factor of Peace*

and Development, which was held in Moscow in September 1987. The Seminar was organized jointly by the Soviet Red Cross and the League Secretariat with active support from the ICRC, the Henry Dunant Institute and the WHO. It dealt with the four following subjects:

- health, human rights, development and peace;
- the work of National Societies within communities affected by war and civil unrest;
- community-based health programmes as a contribution to peace and development;
- other Red Cross and Red Crescent activities (e.g. first aid, social welfare, food assistance and protection of the environment) as a contribution to peace.

An account of the Seminar's work and resulting recommendations is given in the September/October 1987 issue (No. 260) of the *International Review of the Red Cross*.

The Assembly also received the report on the *XIIIth Inter-American Red Cross Conference*, organized by the Ecuadorean Red Cross and held in Quito in July 1987.

The Conference was the scene of discussions on various aspects of Red Cross work in the region: voluntary service and youth, development of National Societies, relief in cases of natural disaster, financial aspects of operations in response to League appeals, fundamental principles and international humanitarian law, assistance to refugees, problems of drug addiction, etc. An account of the Conference's work may be found in the July/August 1987 issue (No. 259) of the *Review*.

At the end of the session, the delegates heard a message to the League by President José Sarney of Brazil. President Sarney said that "the humanitarian role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is of the highest significance in today's divided world". They then paid warm tribute to Mrs. Harmon, President of the Brazilian Red Cross, and to the 150 Brazilian Red Cross volunteers who through their devotion and skill had contributed to the success of this session of the Assembly.
