

# **THE XXIst INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS**

The International Red Cross held its meeting in Istanbul from 6 to 13 September 1969. No less than 610 delegates, representing 77 States and 83 National Societies of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun, as well as 51 observers, gathered in the fine new Culture Palace. Generously welcomed by the country's high authorities and organized by the Turkish Red Crescent with the assistance of the international institutions of the Red Cross, the XXIst Conference was presided over by Mr. Riza Cerçel, President of the Turkish Red Crescent. He asked Lady Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission, to assume the actual direction of most of the proceedings. Both acquitted themselves of their delicate task with distinction.

The Istanbul Conference will certainly be a landmark in the annals of the Red Cross in view of the importance of the subjects dealt with and the results achieved. A common horror of the evils of war and determination to remedy them were predominant throughout the proceedings. As usual, the international Red Cross institutions had drawn up the appropriate documents as a basis for the discussions. The ICRC had issued no less than 19 reports, 4 of them jointly with the League of Red Cross Societies.

It was in the field of humanitarian law—entrusted to one of the two Commissions of the Conference—that the most significant progress was undoubtedly made. The application and dissemination of the Geneva Conventions was, as customary, one of the first items on the agenda. The ICRC had supplied considerable documentary material in this connection: the report on its activity in this field

included inter alia two texts drawn up at its request by the *Commission médico-juridique de Monaco*, one on medical aviation and the other on standards of detention for non-delinquents. The ICRC also submitted a proposed system of standard telegram messages to and from prisoners of war. This was in compliance with a recommendation by the 1949 Diplomatic Conference in Geneva. The International Committee also produced a second compendium of laws passed in various countries to repress breaches of the Conventions and its illustrated school textbook intended for the teaching of the Red Cross and Geneva Conventions' principles to children in Africa and Asia met with considerable success, as did also the exhibition devoted to it in the Conference entrance hall.

But above all, for the first time, and following up a resolution adopted at the Vienna Conference in 1965, the ICRC conveyed to the meeting, in a copious report, the measures taken in many countries to disseminate knowledge of the Geneva Conventions. Efforts to that end, which States undertook when signing these treaties, are making progress throughout the world. They are however still very inadequate and must be actively continued.

One resolution of the Conference requested that in 1970—the “Education Year”—stress be laid on the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions. This, incidentally, could be combined to good effect with the celebration on 8 May of World Red Cross Day, the theme of which next year will be the development of humanitarian law under the slogan: *Protect Man : Thwart War*.

Such a motto could well have been adopted by the Istanbul Conference itself, for development of humanitarian law was the main line of its proceedings and the centre of its work. The ICRC submitted to participants several substantial reports on this subject, the main one being entitled *The Reaffirmation and Development of Laws and Customs Applicable in Armed Conflicts*, which was introduced by the President of the ICRC.

The proposals set forth in this document met with general approval. It was therefore unanimously that the Conference adopted Resolution XIII in which it underlined “the necessity and the urgency of reaffirming and developing humanitarian rules of international law applicable in armed conflicts of all kinds, in order to

## **XXIst INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS**



The flags of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun in front of the Culture Palace, Istanbul, where the Conference was held.

Photo Rudy Vetter, League of Red Cross Societies



Photo Ve Stüdyolari, Ankara

**The President of the Republic, H. E. Mr. Cevdet Sunay (on his left the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Çağlayangil ; on his right ICRC President Mr. Naville) coming to open officially the International Conference.**



**Opening Ceremony:** (*right to left*) The Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League, Mr. José Barroso; the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs; the President of the Turkish Red Crescent, Mr. Rıza Çerçel; the President of the Republic; the Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross, the Countess of Limerick; the President of the ICRC.

Photo Ve Stüdyolari, Ankara



The Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross presenting the Henry Dunant Medal to Mr. Pierre Tacier.



Photo Rudy Vetter, League

Voting in plenary session.

strengthen the effective protection of the fundamental rights of human beings, in keeping with the Geneva Conventions of 1949". The Conference also requested the ICRC to continue its efforts to that end with a view to drawing up the necessary draft rules, with assistance from governmental experts, and to recommend the appropriate authorities to convene one or more diplomatic conferences in order to elaborate appropriate international legal instruments. The prohibition of weapons of mass destruction or needless cruelty was the subject of Resolution XIV.

In the same field other aspects were considered. The first of these was the protection of victims of non-international conflicts. There again the ICRC has been asked, by Resolution XVII, to continue its studies with a view to developing humanitarian law, for while article 3 which is common to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions has rendered great service, experience has revealed certain points on which that article should be more specific or supplemented. Resolution XVIII dealt with the status of combatants in non-international armed conflicts.

In the same connection mention must be made of Resolution XV requesting the ICRC to continue its work to reinforce legal protection for civil defence personnel, and Resolution XVI on the protection of civilian medical and nursing personnel. This resolution advocates the extension of the red cross sign—rather than the introduction of the special emblem of the staff of Aesculapius—at least provided such personnel are organized and duly authorized by the State.

The Conference hardly touched upon procedural problems; to do so would have been premature. In general, however, it may be said that it discarded—at least for the moment—any idea of revising the Geneva Conventions. On the other hand, it did advocate supplementing them by new agreements and treaties.

As can be seen, therefore, the ICRC is on the job, facing up to an immense task. There is no doubt that it will apply all its force thereto, with faith in the future of mankind and the rule of law.

Other more specific legal problems were raised in Istanbul, but we can do no more than list them here: the application of the IV<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention (X), the protection of prisoners of war (XI), the imprescriptibility of war crimes (XII).

The General Commission also put in fine work. The item entitled *The Red Cross as a Factor in World Peace*, whilst by now traditional, is more topical than ever. In this connection, the ICRC and the League submitted a lengthy report on the two Round Tables which the ICRC had organized. Agreement was reached on a long resolution covering a great deal of ground (XX); it laid emphasis on education, particularly of young people, in favour of peace. Another resolution worth mentioning (XXI) was entitled *Contacts between National Societies in cases of Armed Conflicts*. This recommends that "in cases of armed conflicts or all situations which are a threat to peace the ICRC shall, if necessary, ask the representatives of the National Societies of the countries concerned to meet together or separately with the ICRC to study the resolving of humanitarian problems involved and in agreement with the Governments concerned to examine what contribution the Red Cross could make to preventing the outbreak of the conflict or achieving a cease-fire or cessation of hostilities".

The *Principles and Rules for Red Cross Disaster Relief* (XXIV) were approved by the Conference. They will no doubt prove to be a valuable guide to Societies which, with their usual generosity, participate in assistance work.

The organization of health teams (XXXI) was an item on the agenda made topical by recent events. The Conference recommended National Societies to establish in their respective countries a pool of health personnel who could be made available to the ICRC and the League for work in conflict or disaster stricken regions.

Other interesting questions which were with advantage examined included: The Red Cross and the Developing Countries, assistance from voluntary workers, Red Cross Youth, and the International Disaster Relief Air Transport.

The Conference also had to elect the five members who, with the four ex-officio members representing the ICRC and the League, constitute the Standing Commission. The following were elected for a period of four years: General J. Collins (American Red Cross), Dr. A. Djebli-Elaydouni (Moroccan Red Crescent), the Countess of Limerick (British Red Cross), Professor G. Miterev (Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR), Sir Geoffrey

Newman-Morris (Australian Red Cross). At its first session, the Standing Committee in Istanbul requested Lady Limerick to continue in office as Chairman, which she agreed to do.

It was at this Conference that the Standing Commission made the first awards of the Henry Dunant Medal—the highest Red Cross distinction, instituted on the initiative of the Australian Society. The Commission wished to honour those who had fallen in the service of the institution. Three of the first recipients of the medal were, alas, no longer living, namely Dr. Franticek Janouch, former President of the Czechoslovak Red Cross Society, Dr. Dragan Herćog of the Yugoslav Society and Mr. Robert Carlsson of the Swedish Society. The latter two were killed in Nigeria where they were working as members of relief teams under ICRC responsibility. The fourth recipient, to whom the medal was presented by Lady Limerick, was Mr. Pierre Tacier, ICRC delegate; he was seriously wounded during the conflict in the Near East when on a refugee relief mission.

It is of course for the League of Red Cross Societies to report on the session of the Board of Governors which was also held in Istanbul. We shall merely say here that Mr. José Barroso-Chavez was re-elected Chairman of the Board, and that the new agreement of 25 April 1969 between the ICRC and the League on the division of functions was unanimously ratified as it was two days later by the ICRC itself. In our next issue, we shall give the full text of the Agreement.

Such, in a few lines, was the Conference which, thanks to the good will of all concerned was a decided step forward in the crusade undertaken a century ago against human suffering.<sup>1</sup>

*J. P.*

\* \* \*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Plate.*—The flags of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun in front of the Culture Palace, Istanbul, where the Conference was held.

The President of the Republic, accompanied by the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs and the ICRC President, coming to open officially the International Conference. Opening Ceremony.

The Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross presenting the Henry Dunant Medal to Mr. Pierre Tacier.

Voting in plenary session.