

The proceedings of the Twenty-fourth International Red Cross Conference

Before the opening of the International Red Cross Conference, the League General Assembly and then the Council of Delegates held their statutory meetings, also in Manila, from 2 to 6 November.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE

On 3 and 4 November, the League General Assembly elected the League President, Vice-Presidents, Secretary General and Treasurer General.

Mr. Enrique de la Mata Gorostizaga, President of the Spanish Red Cross, was elected President of the League of Red Cross Societies for four years, succeeding the outgoing President, Justice J. A. Adefarasin (Nigeria).

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Eight out of the nine Vice-Presidents of the League were elected the same day in accordance with the system of "fair geographical distribution", by which two vice-presidencies are assigned to each of the world's four main areas: Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe. The ninth post of Vice-President goes, *ex-officio*, to Switzerland, the League having its headquarters in that country.

The newly elected Vice-Presidents are: for Africa, Dr. Ali Fourati (Tunisia) and Dr. François Buyoya (Burundi); for Asia, Judge Shahabuddin Ahmed (Bangladesh) and Mr. Nihar R. Laskar (India); for Europe, Jonkheer G. Kraijenhoff (Netherlands) and Mrs. Stefa Spiljak (Yugoslavia); for the Americas, Dr. Jerome H. Holland (United States) and Dr. Guillermo Rueda-Montaña (Colombia).

The post of ninth Vice-President of the League will be occupied as before by Professor Hans Haug, President of the Swiss National Society.

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The Assembly elected to the post of League Secretary-General Mr. Hans Hoegh, former President of the Norwegian Red Cross, who succeeds Mr. Henrik Beer.

It renewed for a further four years the mandate of Mr. Eustasio Villanueva as League Treasurer General.

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On 4 November, a new Executive Council of the League was also elected. The General Assembly chose, from among the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, those who would become members of the Executive Council. This election is also based on the system of fair geographical distribution in the following way: five seats to Africa, four for Asia and Pacific, four for Europe and three for the Americas, in proportion to the number of National Societies existing in each area.

The following National Societies were elected: Benin, Egypt, Liberia, Libya, Zaire; Saudi Arabia, Australia, Japan, the Philippines; the Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, Turkey, USSR; Brazil, Canada, Nicaragua.

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The General Assembly admitted to the League membership two National Societies—the Qatar Red Crescent and the Tonga Red Cross—which were recently recognized by the ICRC. This brings the total number of members of the federation to 128 Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies.

Among other decisions of the Assembly was the approval of a development strategy for National Societies for the 1980s, which represents a turning point in Red Cross development efforts. The policy statement advocates a longterm view of development with the building of self-reliant National Societies as the ultimate goal.

The Assembly adopted a budget for the League of 13.1 million Swiss francs for 1982 and 14.3 million Swiss francs for 1983 and accepted a reduction of the quota to be paid by League members, in order to ease the financial problems facing small Societies.

The General Assembly of the League decided to hold its next session in Geneva, in 1983.

Closing of the League General Assembly

Addressing the General Assembly for the last time, the President of the League, Justice J. A. Adefarasin, made a stirring appeal for the continuation of the work of the Red Cross, "the only possible course for human dignity in a world beset by violence", he said. The outgoing President reiterated his faith in the movement which he had served to the best of his ability during his mandate at the head of the League, and assured the Assembly of his support for the Red Cross at all times.

Mr. Adefarasin extended his thanks to all the officials of the International Red Cross for their dedication and often unappreciated work. He also warmly thanked the Philippine Red Cross for the exemplary way in which the Assembly had been organized. Finally, emphasizing the fact that much still remained to be done to help mankind, the retiring President extended his best wishes to his successor, Mr. de la Mata.

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The General Assembly paid tribute to the Secretary-General of the League, Mr. Henrik Beer, who was retiring. As the President of the League had proposed at the opening of the Assembly, the honorary title of "Emeritus Secretary-General" was officially conferred on him.

In the name of all the National Societies, Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, Chairman of the Standing Commission, then presented Mr. Beer with a farewell gift, wishing him a long and happy retirement.

The President of the League, Justice Adefarasin, joined in these wishes, praising Mr. Beer's exceptional personality and dedication and the way he had inspired the entire Red Cross movement with his experience, his drive, his integrity and fair-mindedness during the thirty-three years of his career, twenty-one of them as Secretary-General of the League.

Mr. Adefarasin also announced that Mr. Beer had decided to set up a special fund that would bear his name and would be used to help families of Red Cross officials who die in service.

Deeply moved by these expressions of gratitude, Mr. Beer addressed the Assembly to express, once again, his attachment to the Red Cross, describing it as a unique and privileged organization because of its universality and, above all, because of the spirit of brotherhood which unites different peoples around the same ideals.

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

The Council of Delegates, in which representatives of the National Societies, of the ICRC and the League take part, met on 6 November under the chairmanship of Mr. Alexandre Hay, President of the ICRC. The Council reached a number of decisions.

In particular, it decided by consensus to extend until 1983 the *Commission on the Red Cross and Peace* without changing the Commission's composition and mandate. Created in 1977 at Bucharest by the Twenty-third International Red Cross Conference in order to oversee the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of peace, this fifteen-member commission has not yet, on its own admission, completed its work. The Commission will make proposals by consensus on its existence and future to the Council of Delegates in 1983 which will decide what action should be taken.

The Council of Delegates decided to bring to an end the activities of the *Working Group on the Emblem*. The problem of the emblem in the Red Cross movement goes back more than a century and, by its complexity, has given rise to numerous discussions. The Twenty-third International Red Cross Conference (Bucharest, 1977) had decided on the creation of a working group, with a view to finding a solution to a situation regarded as unsatisfactory. As President Hay has emphasized, the symbols of the red cross and the red crescent "are not the prerogative of a State, a people or a religion, but the sign of protection for victims in distress". A consultation of the National Societies in 1979, moreover, has shown that there are still differences of opinion regarding the coexistence of several different signs for one and the same movement. At that time, there were three signs but since the decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran to abolish the red lion-and-sun emblem and to adopt the red crescent, two signs remain.

The Council of Delegates was thus faced with the question of whether the Working Group on the Emblem should continue its research to find a solution acceptable to all or whether the *status quo* should be maintained.

After a debate, during which some thirty delegations were able to express their views, the Council of Delegates voted that the Working Group on the Emblem should not continue its work.

As a result of this vote, discussion on this subject within the movement can now be considered closed.

Several other subjects were then examined by the Council of Delegates which drew up draft resolutions for submission to the Conference in the days to follow.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Conference sat under the chairmanship of General Romeo C. Espino, President of the Philippine Red Cross. It was divided into three commissions, charged with studying various subjects on the agenda and preparing draft resolutions to lay before the plenary meeting.

Protection and Assistance Commission

This commission was presided over by Mr. D. G. Whyte (New Zealand Red Cross) and had as rapporteur Mr. V. T. Nathan (Red Crescent of Malaysia).

It heard a statement by Mr. Alexandre Hay, President of the ICRC, on the activities of the International Committee and studied various other reports relating to the Geneva Conventions and their additional Protocols, to the dissemination of international humanitarian law and the principles and ideals of the Red Cross, and to the use and protection of the emblem.

It adopted and passed on to the plenary meeting of the Conference a series of resolutions concerned with forced or involuntary disappearances, the application of the Fourth Convention in the occupied territories of the Middle East, the humanitarian activities of the ICRC in aid of victims of armed conflicts, the efforts against piracy, support for the activities of the ICRC, the wearing of identity discs by members of the armed forces, disarmament and torture.

General and Organizational Commission

The commission was presided over by Mr. M. A. Diop (Senegalese Red Cross); its rapporteur was Dr. Z. Darwish (Syrian Red Crescent).

It approved the reports on the work of the League and the statements of the ICRC on the attitude of the Red Cross regarding the taking of hostages, and on the Central Tracing Agency's role of co-ordinator and technical adviser to National Societies and governments.

In addition, the commission proposed a number of resolutions relating to the general policy of the Red Cross during relief operations in aid of refugees, to the financing of the ICRC by governments and National Societies, to the continuing co-operation of the League and the ICRC in matters of information, and to disaster relief operations.

Community Services and Development Commission

This commission was presided over by Mr. V. Semukha (Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR); the rapporteur was Mr. Neshnash (Moroccan Red Crescent).

The problems discussed by this commission were essentially of a technical nature and were primarily concerned with the activities of the League and the National Societies in various medico-social fields.

Several resolutions were proposed to the plenary meeting of the Conference concerning blood transfusion, health care, the handicapped, the contribution of the Red Cross to a better human environment, and the development of the National Societies within the context of national development.

Plenary meetings

All the resolutions submitted to the Conference were approved by consensus during the plenary meetings on 13 and 14 November. Only the resolution on the application of the Fourth Convention in the occupied territories necessitated a vote, obtaining 94 votes for, 2 against and 31 abstentions. Certain delegations, however, did not join in the consensus on some resolutions, especially on the resolution of support for the ICRC, mentioning its inability to act in the Western Sahara, Ogaden and Afghanistan conflicts.

Election of the Standing Commission

The Conference elected five out of the nine members of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross. This comprises two representatives of the League, two representatives of the ICRC and five other members elected on a personal basis. The five members chosen were Dr. Ahmad Abu-Gura (Jordan), Mr. János Hantos (Hungary), Mr. Kai J. Warras (Finland), Mr. Soehanda Ijas (Indonesia) and Mr. R. J. Kane (Canada).

The Commission then elected Dr. Abu-Gura as Chairman and Mr. Hantos as Vice-Chairman.

The next International Conference

The International Conference accepted the invitation of the Swiss Government and Red Cross to hold its next assembly in Geneva, in 1986.

According to its statutes, the International Red Cross Conference meets, in theory, once every four years. The next Conference should therefore take place in 1985, but as the elections of the League are scheduled to be held that year, it was decided to make an exception to the rule and to convene the International Conference one year later. From 1986 onwards, the meetings will again take place every four years.

Official records of the Conference

The official records of the Conference will be published as customary by the Red Cross Society that hosted the Conference, namely the Philippine National Red Cross Society.

As before, this report will contain the *verbatim* record of the discussions of the Council of Delegates and the plenary sessions of the International Conference. The work of the commissions that preceded the plenary sessions will be recorded in a summary report, which will be more extensive than in the past, however, so as to provide future readers of the official records with a proper working document.

Moreover, the full text of the resolutions and decisions adopted by the twenty-fourth International Conference and the Council of Delegates is printed in the November-December 1981 issue of the *International Review of the Red Cross*.



PRESS AND INFORMATION DURING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Daily Bulletin

Throughout the Manila meeting, a joint team of press staff from the ICRC, the League and the Philippine Red Cross issued a "Daily Bulletin" for Conference participants. The Bulletin came out in three languages, French, English and Spanish, during the Conference itself, with an additional issue in Arabic during the League meetings and the League General Assembly.

Modest though it was, this publication proved extremely useful to all participants in the Conference.

Film projections

A series of 16-mm films were shown every day at the Conference Centre throughout the League General Assembly, the Council of Delegates and the International Red Cross Conference.

All these films had either won prizes or been highly commended by the jury of the 9th International Festival of Red Cross and Health Films last June at Varna in Bulgaria.

There were also projections of video cassettes made by the ICRC, the League or National Societies.

Three exhibitions on the International Red Cross

In the hall leading to the meeting rooms were a series of panels with photographs illustrating the Red Cross at work throughout the world.

The first panels were four-colour prints of various activities carried out by the International Red Cross (either the League, the ICRC or National Societies), such as distributions of relief to Cambodian refugees on the Khmer/Thai border, assistance to Burmese refugees in Bangladesh, repatriation of wounded Iraqi and Iranian prisoners of war, assistance to the victims of an earthquake in Nicaragua, a distribution of food in Angola, etc.

The second exhibition consisted of ninety black-and-white photographs taken by Luc Chessex of « Another Africa », far removed from the tourists' paradise, an Africa of suffering caused by conflict, drought, hunger and sickness, where Red Cross assistance raises a glimmer of hope.

The third series of photographs was taken on the occasion of the International Year of the Disabled by Martine Franck to illustrate Red Cross work in aid of disabled persons in six different countries, i.e. Brazil, India, Lesotho, Morocco, the Philippines and the United States.

Visit to the Refugee Processing Centre

On 12 November, the Philippine Government and Red Cross Society organized for the participants in the Conference a visit to the Refugee Processing Centre opened in Baatan for Indochinese refugees. The Centre is run by the Philippine Government in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The visit, which included a tour of the premises and a show staged by the refugees themselves, was of considerable interest to all participants, who thus had an opportunity of realizing the extent and gravity of the problems facing the refugees and their countries of asylum.

Red Cross Photograph competition

On the occasion of the International Conference, the audio-visual Centre of the International Red Cross launched a « Red Cross Photograph » competition for professional photographers and will reward the best photograph(s) illustrating a Red Cross activity or operation and its principles of humanity or universality.

Professional photographers wishing to take part in the competition must present a maximum of ten black-and-white photos, size 24 × 30 cm, taken between 1 January 1981 and 15 March 1982. The topic illustrated must be either activities in one country or an international assistance operation. Each photograph must necessarily show the red cross or the red crescent.