

Conference of the Nordic Red Cross Societies

A Conference of the Nordic Red Cross Societies was held at Copenhagen from 25 to 27 August 1983. The theme for discussion was "The Red Cross and human rights". Some forty-five participants from the National Societies of Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the host and organizing Danish Red Cross Society took part in the Conference. Mr. Høegh, Secretary General, and Mrs. Camporini, Officer for Statutory Matters of the League, took part in the meeting. The ICRC was represented by Mr. Moreillon, Director for General Affairs, and Miss Lacroix of the National Societies Division. The Henry Dunant Institute was represented by Mr. J. Toman, Deputy Director.

The Conference of the Nordic Societies on the Red Cross and human rights was especially interesting as it was the first meeting held by a group of National Societies on this theme.

Three major questions dominated the general discussion at the Copenhagen Conference:

— How does the Red Cross define human rights and to which rights can it make a contribution? Certain participants emphasized that the two Covenants adopted by the United Nations on economic, social and cultural rights and on civil and political rights expressed an ideal that the Red Cross movement could adopt. Other participants sought to broaden this definition to include notions of peace and development.

— How can the Red Cross undertake to promote and establish human rights, taking into account its specific characteristics, national priorities, the needs of the population and the vital necessity for the Red Cross movement to respect its fundamental principles (neutrality, independence, etc.)?

— Of its numerous activities, some of long standing and contributing to the promotion of one or more human rights (sometimes without the National Societies being aware of it), which offer scope for the Red

Cross in the field of human rights? On the other hand, what are the National Societies' limitations in their contribution to human rights?

The various aspects of the problems of the Red Cross and human rights were then examined by five working groups. Following their work, the Conference formulated and adopted various recommendations and conclusions. The participants from the five National Societies represented unanimously approved a draft resolution on "The Red Cross and human rights", to be submitted to the Council of Delegates in October 1983.

This draft resolution placed particular emphasis on the correlation between the contribution of the Red Cross to peace and its contribution to human rights and, in consequence, the need to consider in greater depth the exact nature of this two-way relationship within the movement. The draft also requested that consideration should be given to the feasibility of adding human rights to the terms of reference of the Commission on the Red Cross and Peace.
