

In the Red Cross and Red Crescent World

EUROPEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

“THE NEW EUROPE NEEDS THE NEW RED CROSS”

(The Hague, 18-22 May 1992)

The IVth Regional Conference of European National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was held in The Hague from 18 to 22 May 1992. Organized by the Netherlands Red Cross, which this year celebrates its 125th anniversary, the Conference, meeting for the first time since 1981 (in Budapest), was attended by some 200 representatives from 48 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Participants included delegates from 12 National Societies of the former Soviet Union, who were attending their first international gathering as independent societies, as well as the representatives of the three Baltic Societies and the nascent Red Cross of Malta. The ICRC was present at the conference with observer status.

The theme of the conference was “The new Europe needs the new Red Cross”. Participants were invited to consider the impact on the structure and work of European National Societies of the radical political, economic and social changes which have taken place in many countries of Europe.

The Conference was opened on 18 May by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Ruud F.M. Lubbers, who urged delegates to oppose violence and to build a society where every individual is equally valued. The Movement “can play an important role in fostering democracy and peaceful coexistence in the new Europe”, he told his audience, which included HRH Princess Margriet, Vice-President of the Netherlands Red Cross, and HRH Princess Juliana, its Patron.

At the beginning of the proceedings, on 20 May, came the news of the death of ICRC delegate Frédéric Maurice. In response to the suggestion by the President of the Netherlands Red Cross and Chairman of the conference, Mr. J.J. van der Weel, the Assembly adopted a message of condolence from the members of the conference to the families of those who have been killed in recent months in the accomplishment of their humanitarian mission and expressing their “profound admiration for all the delegates and other persons

who have, under ever more dangerous conditions, become involved in humanitarian activities, serving the Movement's ideals".

The President of the ICRC, after paying a tribute to ICRC delegates who are the victims of frequent security incidents, expressed the view that the new Europe needed a Red Cross stimulated by a new humanitarian impetus and motivated by true solidarity. Once again, he called for humanitarian mobilization, to be brought about by spreading knowledge of the fundamental principles of the Movement and the basic rules of international humanitarian law. Commenting further that any politicization or loss of independence of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies inevitably undermined the international credibility of the emblem, Mr. Sommaruga placed special emphasis on the need to be more strict with regard to the use of the emblem and to apply the relevant regulations to the letter.

The work of the Conference was assigned to three Commissions. Commission I, chaired by Mr. Haakan Hellberg (Finnish Red Cross), dealt with health and social welfare, AIDS and blood transfusion.

Commission II, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Carmen Mestre Vergara (Spanish Red Cross), considered matters relating to recruitment of members, voluntary work, youth, fund-raising and dissemination of the principles of the Movement and of humanitarian law.

Lastly, questions relating to the environment, technological disasters, cross-border operations, refugees and displaced persons were discussed in Commission III, with Mr. Rezso Sztuchlik (Hungarian Red Cross) as Chairman.

A number of resolutions were adopted by the three Commissions and endorsed by the Conference. The need to develop the work of National Societies in the areas of health, social work, blood transfusion, the fight against AIDS and programmes for refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons or returnees was reaffirmed. National Societies were urged, *inter alia*, to give priority in their programmes to the most vulnerable groups of the population, to help the new National Societies in eastern Europe to develop strategies in the above areas, and to strengthen their cooperation with relevant international and national institutions.

How can the work of the local youth groups be made relevant to the needs in their communities? How can other young people from different levels in society be informed of the role of the Movement and inspired to join in its work? What kind of training and support do young people need to ensure their effective involvement in decision-making at a local, regional and national level of their Societies? These are the questions that will be discussed at the Youth Summit, to be held in Austria from 12 to 26 July 1992. The National Societies and the Federation are called upon to act on the recommendations of the Summit.

With regard to voluntary work, National Societies were recommended, *inter alia*, to provide adequate training and continuous professional back-up and support to the volunteers providing services, or participating in other activities or in policy-making.

The Conference, particularly dismayed by the many instances of disregard for humanitarian law and indignant at deliberate attacks on persons and property bearing the Red Cross or Red Crescent emblem, adopted a resolution calling upon "the responsible authorities of the armed forces to do their utmost to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, to teach its basic guidelines to the combatants and to severely repress these violations" and expressing "its support for and solidarity with the ICRC in this particularly sensitive time for its humanitarian work in armed conflicts".

A resolution on the dissemination of humanitarian law and the fundamental principles requests the ICRC and the Federation:

- to pursue their efforts, in cooperation with the National Societies, in the field of training of dissemination leaders, in particular through training courses,
- to increase their cooperation with the National Societies for the preparation of suitable teaching material for various publics with due consideration of already-existing material".

All the components of the Movement, and in particular the National Societies, were called upon to organize dissemination programmes geared to young people and to ensure wide dissemination of the "Guidelines for the 90s".

Last but not least, by its resolution entitled "Strategy for Europe", the Conference decided to set up a working group, composed of representatives of six National Societies covering the different parts of the continent, to promote, inspire and monitor efforts towards implementation within individual National Societies and the region as a whole of the Federation's Strategic Work Plan, as updated by the Executive Council at its 29th session (Cordoba, May 1992).

COLUMBUS '92 EXHIBITION

THE ICRC AND THE ITALIAN RED CROSS IN GENOA

A large-scale specialized international exhibition entitled "Christopher Columbus: Ships and the Sea" was held in Genoa from 15 May to 15 August. It had four major themes: