

YOUTH AND PEACE

by Leon Stubbings

In the beginning...

Peace was part of the vision of Henry Dunant when, having seen the human suffering and misery on the battlefield of Solferino, he was inspired to create a humanitarian organization that would aid all people affected by war. His ultimate objective was not merely to relieve the suffering caused by war but to instil in mankind a spirit of peace. He believed that if we instil humanitarian ideas in people, and inspire everyone with a horror of the spirit of vengeance, hatred and destruction, we shall counteract the terrible scourge of war and perhaps avert it completely.

The quest for peace has been an integral part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement since its inception. The Movement has many other goals but in pursuing them all it tries to spread the spirit of peace.

International Red Cross/Red Crescent resolutions

At International Conferences held since 1921, the International Red Cross has passed in excess of 75 resolutions on peace. Furthermore, it has held two World Conferences on Peace, in 1975 and 1984.

A study of these resolutions reveals the main themes that the Movement considers important to pursue, some of which require further examination. It has been stressed on many occasions that the Red Cross is a force for international fraternity and understanding. This theme will be developed more fully below.

Another basic tenet which was first expressed in 1932 is that "a firmly united Red Cross can not only achieve greater success in its work but also exercise on the spirit of peoples an influence favourable to harmony and better relations".¹

¹ XIIIth session of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies, Paris, 1932, Resolution No. 25.

As moral, social, political and religious values and beliefs are inevitably involved in any discussion on peace it was appropriate for a Red Cross definition of peace to be enunciated at the first World Red Cross Conference on Peace held in Belgrade in 1975. For the Red Cross, such a definition must fall within the parameters of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement. The definition is: "The Red Cross does not view peace simply as the absence of war, but rather as a dynamic process of co-operation among all States and peoples: co-operation founded on freedom, independence, national sovereignty, equality, respect of human rights, as well as a fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet the needs of peoples".²

The task that confronts the Red Cross, therefore, if the Movement is to be an effective agent for peace, is to be prepared to promote international co-operation actively and to tackle the problems that confront humanity at all times.

Many of the resolutions on peace demonstrate that the Red Cross is, or has the potential to be, a moral force in the world. These resolutions call on governments or the United Nations either to take some given action or to cease acting in a certain way. They relate to types of weaponry, types of warfare, the treatment of prisoners of war and the well-being of people affected by conflicts. In some instances these resolutions do not call for direct action on the part of the Red Cross. It is laudable and in fact imperative that a worldwide humanitarian organization such as the Movement should express itself forcibly in this way.

The Red Cross is recognized as contributing to the spirit of peace in the domains of disaster relief, development, protection of health, international humanitarian law, the relief of the suffering of war victims and other programmes carried out by National Societies, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC.

All Red Cross Youth sections working in all these different fields of activity contribute to the essential element of peace. When one scratches the surface of the practical services that Red Cross Youth provides at the national and international level one is filled with admiration for the ingenuity and dedication of our young people; at the same time one is amazed that the Movement as a whole and the public at large are not aware of the contribution that young people are making to humanity today. In general it is the negative aspects of youth that receive the attention of the media.

The resolutions that are addressed to the young people of the Red Cross are indeed exciting and provide a great challenge, not only for the young people themselves but for all members of the Movement. Encouragement and practical

² World Red Cross Conference on Peace (Belgrade, June 1975)—*Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of peace*—Final edition, Geneva, August 1978, p. 23.

support are essential if positive results are to be achieved. One cannot build a substantial house without being provided with the building materials.

What is expected of Red Cross Youth in its commitment to peace? In brief, some of the main tasks are:

- to promote international friendship and understanding;
- to extend knowledge, dissemination, understanding and application of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement (in 1948 this was recognized as the greatest contribution that youth could make to the cause of peace);
- to create greater mutual respect among millions of young people in all parts of the world;
- to create programmes that will stimulate the spirit of self-sacrifice and service to others, including international programmes of co-operation among sister Societies;
- to educate youth in the spirit of international fraternity, solidarity and the maintenance of peace;
- to take part in relief teams, relief activities, anti-hunger campaigns and other humanitarian services.

The League and the ICRC are requested to organize joint training periods and research seminars for young people on methods of disseminating knowledge of the humanitarian principles and the activities of the Movement.

What young people do and think about the Red Cross and Peace

To examine how young people from National Societies have reacted to the challenge of these resolutions, “Gumbooya”, an International Youth gathering held in Alice Springs, Australia, in April 1988 may serve as a benchmark. This meeting was attended by 81 delegates from 18 countries. Europe, Africa, Asia, North America and the Pacific were represented. Some of the observations made by the delegates after they returned home are a significant indication that the true spirit of peace is flourishing among the young people of today:

“The ideals and principles of the Red Cross can be understood by everybody—but it is not enough to understand at a *cognitive* level—you will find the opportunity only in activities, in exercising humanity, to do it again and again on an *emotional* level, where the Red Cross can occupy the hearts... The Red Cross is a ‘faith’. Use its ‘power’.”

“It has helped me to realize the struggle Red Cross Youth faces in its efforts to provide services to our people in countries all over the world and to see the vision of Red Cross Youth towards the year 2000.”

“Many vigorous ideas and suggestions concerning the future vision of the Red Cross Youth Movement have been put forward by delegates. These activities will promote the positive role of Red Cross Youth in the International Movement at present and in the future. Friendship and understanding among youth has been strengthened.”

“We keep saying Red Cross Youth is the future, but I know we are a reality and a working force *now*.”

“I have recognized that the Red Cross spirit is similar all over the world. Now, the Red Cross and Red Crescent should work together worldwide for this priority—Peace.”

“Let us make a better world, for us and for the rest of Red Cross Youth. We can do it. Let’s try it again for the rest of our lives.”

“The most important part of the camp was to build up a friendship base for the future.”

“The friendship that I developed at Gumbooya will have a lasting effect and has strengthened my devotion to the Red Cross and to humanitarian law.”

“I felt the reality of being a citizen of the world, not merely of one place.”

Such statements were made not in a highly emotional context but in the privacy of the participants’ homes, days or even weeks after the sand of Central Australia had been washed out of their hair. Surely the older Red Cross members, those in authority in this vast organization, must pause and reflect on the responsibility they have to ensure that such dedication, enthusiasm and motivation is not allowed to dissipate. From discussions at Gumbooya it became clear that to attract more young people the Red Cross and the Red Crescent must simplify their approach and appear less formal. They must be shown to be practical, colourful and enjoyable. It can be fun to be a Red Cross member!

The comments given above are from one recent example of an international seminar. However, it is now common practice in most regions of the world to organize similar gatherings. Each meeting is valuable not only for the individual but also for the National Societies and the Movement as a whole.

The role of National Societies

Perhaps more should be published on the work done by the Youth Sections of National Societies for the promotion of peace. Wider dissemination of such material would provide a sharing of ideas and experiences and, equally impor-

tantly, would contribute to the unity of the Movement. To develop greater unity would indeed be a highly significant contribution to peace.

Let us now consider the programmes for peace of several Red Cross Society Youth Sections.

The *Swedish Red Cross*, together with other organizations, has produced material for peace education to be used at different levels in schools. The programme is called "Peace, Liberty and Justice" and it takes up different aspects of the peace question. This Society has provided material for young children, for example, games about Red Cross history, the Geneva Conventions and the Fundamental Principles. There is similar material for older children. The goal is to promote peace by disseminating knowledge and understanding of civil rights, human rights and the basic principles of the Red Cross through education, information and practical work. It is of great importance that theory and practice should be closely linked. The purpose of the Swedish Red Cross Youth is to give young people the possibility of changing the situation of people who are suffering; to promote contact between young people of different countries and continents and thereby to increase understanding and knowledge of other peoples' culture, way of life and national customs; and to increase young Swedish people's knowledge of international issues.

The *Austrian Red Cross Youth Section* has been engaged in the dissemination of the Geneva Conventions and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement for many years. Its teaching material is imaginative and innovative, and a new campaign is presently being planned in connection with the 125th anniversary of the original Geneva Convention. Schools will be supplied with videos and other audiovisual materials during the 1989/90 school year.

On the other side of the world, the *New Zealand Red Cross* has developed a number of resource kits for use in schools, intended for the age-group 11 to 15 years. The resource kits cover a range of issues relating to international humanitarian law and fit into the school curriculum. For young members, the Red Cross Youth Programme also has award courses relating to the Geneva Conventions and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

This Society's national Emergency Relief Teams project is focused on young people aged between 18 and 35 years. Every year in Auckland the youth auxiliary organizes and runs a special camp for children from families covered by the Family Support Service, a service for families that have difficulty in coping for a variety of reasons.

The *Canadian Red Cross Society* has a National Youth Adviser for Youth Services who spends a considerable amount of time addressing young schoolchildren on what they can do to create peace at home and in school. The Adviser believes that people should be working towards peace in three general interrelated areas: individual development, education and public awareness. These

three areas hold the key to true peace. Peace must begin in the hearts of individuals; it must apply to the family and the neighbourhood and exist within the nation as well as on an international plane. Individuals in today's world must feel at peace with themselves and comfortable with society generally. Individuals and communities should not be totally consumed by fear of nuclear weapons or concern about the global economic situation.

Hope for the future and love and mutual respect for one another should be restored to a prominent position in the lives of all. As the Canadian National Youth Adviser said, "I feel that if peace is going to be attainable, youth is the key. Youth is a very special time of life. Young people are idealistic and willing to think the unthinkable; they have lots of energy, usually a lifestyle that gives them extra time, and honest concern for the future. The most important ingredient is that they need to know that they can make an impact on this huge world. If we can develop the youth of today as people who matter then they will feel some responsibility and concern for the future of this world. When young people care about the future then they will want to educate themselves about humanitarian and global issues and they will want to make others aware of them too. For this reason I believe individual development is the most important issue; then education and public awareness will follow naturally".

Clearly, there are many youth sections of National Societies throughout the world which are, in various ways either directly or indirectly implementing the Resolutions on youth and peace.

The role of the League and the ICRC

International Conferences of the Red Cross and the World Red Cross/Red Crescent Conferences on Peace have called on the ICRC and the League to assume significant responsibility for the promotion of peace in a variety of ways, including youth activities. For example, the Guidelines which emerged from the Second World Red Cross/Red Crescent Conference on Peace urge: "the components of the Movement should pay great attention to educating young volunteers in the spirit of peace and friendship among people. They should actively encourage the development of Red Cross Programmes for strengthening mutual understanding and solidarity among youth, together with the exchange of information of different countries. In particular, Red Cross must fight all attempts to imbue children with contempt or hatred for other peoples".³

Turning the clock back 40 years we find that in 1948 the International Red Cross was asked to make every effort to establish, extend and strengthen the

³ Second World Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on Peace (Aaland—Stockholm, September 1984)—*Report on the Conference*, ICRC, League, p. 159.

Junior Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement in all countries, with a view to creating better understanding and mutual respect amongst millions of young people in all parts of the world.

At International Conference level the Red Cross world has been prepared to call on Red Cross Youth but, as asked earlier, has the Movement as a whole provided the materials? A comparison of the resources that are allocated to Red Cross Youth by the League with those assigned to other League programmes is deeply disappointing. Cogent arguments can be presented for the situation in 1988, but there are many who would remain unconvinced, especially in view of the fact that in the past the Youth Department at the League Secretariat has had a staff of five or six. How can one officer, no matter how dedicated, efficient and enthusiastic, achieve single-handedly all that could and should be done?

Notwithstanding the limitations mentioned, the League and the ICRC singly and jointly have been able to produce valuable material for National Societies, in particular the *Teaching Guide* which has been so useful for secondary school and college teachers. The ICRC has also produced comics, posters and other material on the subject of the Geneva Conventions and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

Furthermore, regional training courses for youth leaders continue to be organized by the League with the participation of the ICRC.

All National Societies need and expect greater support from our world headquarters. For instance, a highly developed Society like the Swedish Red Cross believes that the League and the ICRC have a key role to play when it comes to assisting National Societies in youth and peace matters:

- The League and the ICRC have, as international organizations, a very clear view of what is going on within different National Societies and within other international bodies on this issue. Both bodies could work more closely with National Societies in making information available for dissemination.
- The League and the ICRC could co-ordinate or help co-ordinate initiatives that go beyond national boundaries.
- Promoting contacts between National Societies and between other international NGOs working on this issue could also be a concrete way of assisting.
- The two bodies could provide National Societies with specific information concerning the situation of children and young people in different League and ICRC operations.

It must be recognized that it is futile to plan for the future if one is not prepared to invest in that future.

The role of governments

Since the foundation of the Junior Red Cross, National Societies have endeavoured to forge a link with governments, particularly Ministries of Education. It is quite natural for National Societies to seek this co-operation and to use the educational infrastructure to develop Red Cross/Red Crescent Youth programmes in schools. The report from National Societies to the Peace Commission following the International Year of Peace indicated that this collaboration ranges from the official endorsement of the Red Cross Youth programme by the educational authorities to their limited encouragement to schools to take up such activities. In the most positive cases Ministries of Education have proclaimed official decrees authorizing the establishment of Youth Red Cross/Red Crescent programmes in primary, secondary and high schools and have co-operated in making the necessary material available to students. It is interesting to observe that, without losing their independence, Red Cross/Red Crescent programmes are thus integrated into the school curricula in some countries.

To be successful within the school system, it is essential to win the support of the teachers and to provide them with the appropriate material. There may also be opportunities for co-operation with other government ministries concerned with young people.

In some countries, such as *Botswana*, where the Youth Section is keen to develop all its services and thereby to contribute to peace, financial assistance from the government is an imperative if progress is to be assured. In Botswana, where the Red Cross Youth Section has a highly motivated and enthusiastic leader, government support is probably the only way for plans to become reality. This situation is undoubtedly common in many other Societies. Governments, by facilitating the development of the Red Cross, would at the same time be contributing to the development of their nations as a whole.

During the International Year of Peace many Ministries of Education produced material for schools that proved to be of value to the Red Cross Youth programme for peace.

One government education department held that the bases of peace education were:

- a) a positive notion of peace as a way of living which deals creatively with the maintenance of human rights and the satisfaction of human needs;
- b) the belief that the determination and actions of individuals and groups can influence the outcome of major events;
- c) the belief that people have the potential to develop alternatives to violence in its broadest sense and that peace education can help people elaborate those alternatives;

- d) the understanding that it is feasible to introduce appropriate aspects of peace education into schools at all levels in a productive way.

The Red Cross in many countries was encouraged and assisted by such attitudes on the part of their respective Ministries of Education.

It emerged clearly from the League's Summary of Red Cross Youth Actions on Peace that the young people in some National Societies did not quite grasp the forms that the fight for peace might take within the parameters of the Red Cross. This is in itself a challenge for the League, the ICRC and other National Societies to help those who need and seek further clarification of the Red Cross role in this respect.

Youth in decision-making

One of the conclusions of the Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of peace states that National Societies should "involve young people in their decision-making bodies to the fullest extent possible, give them important responsibilities and consider revising the Statutes of the National Society to include youth in Central, Regional and Local Committees".⁴

Information from National Societies reveals that Red Cross Youth involvement in the decision-making bodies of National Societies ranges from full, systematic and structured integration to merely *ad-hoc* involvement in making decisions concerning youth-related programmes.

Since 1922 the Austrian Red Cross has had a separate and self-governing Youth Section which is responsible for its own decision-making process. The Austrian Red Cross Youth is not only integrated within the school system but also has viable out-of-school groups. Furthermore, the chairpersons of Austrian Red Cross Youth in the districts and provinces and at federal level are members of Red Cross Boards and Assemblies, and are therefore fully integrated in the decision-making processes of the whole National Society.

Austrian Red Cross Youth has its own Rules of Procedure within the National Red Cross Society, guaranteeing clear autonomy for decisions relating to programmes as well as financial and personnel decisions.

The *Swedish Red Cross Youth* forms a special organization within the Swedish Red Cross, and has its own structure for making decisions. The Red Cross Clubs at the grassroots level elect their own executive committees. Together with other Clubs in their region they elect a RCY Regional Executive,

⁴ *Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a factor of peace, op. cit.*, p. 28.

which has the authority to make decisions about youth activities within the region. At the RCY annual meeting a RCY National Executive is elected which has overall responsibility for RCY activities in Sweden. There are only two issues on which the Swedish Red Cross Youth cannot take its own decisions: the membership fee and modification of the rules and regulations of the Society.

A number of other Societies operate a similar system: Austria, Canada, Denmark and France, to name but a few. Bearing in mind that William Pitt the Younger was Prime Minister of England at the age of 21 and Alexander the Great had conquered the whole of the civilized world before his death at 32 years of age, one should not be timorous about giving responsibility to young people.

The above examples of what the Red Cross and the Red Crescent can do when afforded the opportunity have been given in detail as an inspiration and a challenge for other Societies.

Conclusions

1. Youth and peace must be considered as top priorities for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In this respect the Red Cross at the international level has been strong on rhetoric but not so strong on action.
2. Many examples can be cited to give ample proof that young people are just as capable as the older generation of serving the Red Cross in every way, from holding philosophic discussions to providing practical health and welfare services. Red Cross/Red Crescent Youth should not be perceived as the members of tomorrow; they should be recognized as most valuable members *today*.
3. At both national and international level the supreme Boards and Councils should show vision, courage and faith in the Youth Section. There is another Latin motto that should perhaps be adopted by the Movement and repeated regularly by all delegates at international meetings of the Red Cross: **sapere aude**—Dare to be wise.
4. All countries need peace; all countries would gain from further development. In both the UN Charter and in the plethora of Red Cross resolutions there is a determined expression of the wish to save coming generations from the scourge of war. If young people are encouraged to fulfil this mission it could achieve an impact beyond our wildest dreams.

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