

REGIONAL CONFERENCES

**TWENTY-FIRST CONFERENCE
OF THE ARAB RED CRESCENT
AND RED CROSS SOCIETIES**

(Damascus, 25-27 August 1991)

The 21st Conference of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies took place in Damascus from 25 to 27 August 1991. This meeting brought together representatives of 18 Arab National Societies, the ICRC and the League (now International Federation) of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The ICRC delegation was led by Mr. Claudio Caratsch, the institution's Vice-President. It included Mr. François Bugnion, Deputy Director, Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement, Mr. Angelo Gnaedinger, Delegate General for the Middle East, Mr. Roland Huguenin, head of delegation in Cairo, Mr. Alain Lennartz, head of delegation in Damascus, and Mr. Ameer Zemmali, member of the Legal Division.

The League was represented by Mr. Mario Villarroel, its President, Mr. Pär Stenbäck, Secretary General, Mr. Solayman Eleghmary, head of the Middle East/North Africa Department, Ms. Yolande Camporini, Technical Adviser on statutory matters and dissemination, and Mr. William Cassis, senior League Adviser.

In addition, delegations from Asian, American and European National Societies as well as the President of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law took part in the Conference as guests.

The consequences, in humanitarian terms, of the Gulf war, unity among Arab National Societies and peace in the Middle East were the themes of the opening speeches given by Dr. Fuad Hamza, President of the Syrian Red Crescent, Mr. Abdel Ghani Ashi, Secretary General of the General Secretariat of Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies, and Mr. Yasin Rajjuh, Syrian Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs.

In his report to the Conference, the Secretary General spoke of the protection and assistance operations launched during the Gulf war and paid tribute to the ICRC and the League for the way they helped the civilian victims of

the war and for the support they had given to the work of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti Red Crescent Societies.

The ICRC and League reports on their activities in the Middle East were then presented respectively by Mr. Caratsch and Mr. Stenbäck. These were followed by a detailed discussion of such subjects as prisoners of war, relief coordination within the National Societies and between them and the ICRC and the League.

Other items on the agenda included the occupied Arab territories, cooperation between Arab National Societies in the 1990s, National Society development (in particular blood-donation programmes and the role of women and children), the Strategic Work Plan of the League for the Nineties and the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent scheduled for November in Budapest.

Both the National Societies taking part in the Conference and its observers were invited to present reports.

The Conference ended with the adoption by consensus of 23 resolutions and recommendations. They included the following:

- ***The Gulf crisis and its consequences from a humanitarian point of view***

The Conference made a pressing appeal to States concerned for the release of all prisoners of war and civilian detainees, and called for the protection of civilians in each country, for the safeguard of their basic rights and for their treatment in a humanitarian manner.

- ***Role of the ICRC***

The Conference invited the ICRC to continue its humanitarian activities in the Arab countries for the benefit of the victims of armed conflict, in particular prisoners of war.

- ***Occupied Arab territories***

The Conference invited the National Societies to step up their support and assistance to the inhabitants of the occupied Arab territories and encouraged the ICRC to continue its efforts for the protection of the inhabitants thereof in accordance with the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

- ***Occupied Lebanese territory***

The Conference called on the ICRC and the League to assume the responsibility of running the health centres taken over by the Israeli occupation forces.

- ***Assistance for the people of Iraq***

The Conference appealed to the international community to take such measures as may be necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people caused by the shortage of food, medicines and other basic commodities.

- ***Lebanese Red Cross***

The Conference invited the Secretary General of the General Secretariat of Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies to continue urging the Lebanese Government, the ICRC and the League to do what they can to strengthen the Lebanese Red Cross.

- ***Role of the League***

The Conference, recognizing with gratitude the efforts made by the League Secretariat to support humanitarian activities in Arab countries and initiate development programmes for the Arab National Societies, called on those Societies to cooperate with the League for the success of the projects they intend to implement in their respective countries and affirmed its support for the plan of action prepared by the League for the next ten years.

- ***Support for National Societies***

The Conference urged the Arab National Societies to extend their support and assistance to the National Societies of Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Mauritania and called on the League to step up its support for these National Societies.

- ***Expression of gratitude to the Syrian Red Crescent***

The Conference extended its thanks and appreciation to the Syrian Government, people and Red Crescent Society for their warm welcome and hospitality. It expressed its pleasure at the success of the Conference, which had once again crystallized Arab unity in the humanitarian field.
