

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

XVth INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL WELFARE

It is well known that social welfare forms a not insignificant part of the activities of numerous National Societies. It is therefore useful to follow up the work of those conferences, the first of which had taken place in 1928 under the title of International Conference of Social Service, drawing together social workers from all over the world.

The XVth International Conference on Social Welfare was held in Manila in September 1970, and was attended by 1,800 delegates, including experts in social administration, education, public hygiene and community services from 73 countries. The League of Red Cross Societies was represented by its Secretary General, Mr. H. Beer, and by Miss Hickey, Deputy to the Chairman of the American National Red Cross and Vice-Chairman of the League's Health and Social Service Advisory Committee.

At the Conference, delegates from various countries and members of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had the opportunity of meeting and of getting acquainted with many aspects of the work carried out by Philippine Red Cross volunteers, besides taking part in a panel discussion on the following topics:

- a. "Red Cross Volunteers in an Emergency Setting";
- b. "The Role of the Red Cross in Youth Activism";
- c. "Innovations in International Volunteer Service".

The general theme of the XVth International Conference on Social Welfare was chosen in the context of some of the many weighty problems facing us today: *New Strategies for Social Development—Role of Social Welfare*. In addition to the topical aspects of this theme, it should be emphasized that many of the subjects studied at the General Meetings as well as at the meetings of the

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five commissions were of particular interest to Red Cross social welfare workers. The following were among the subjects discussed:

- a. Processes used and innovations in community development in developing and developed countries;
- b. Innovations in international voluntary services;
- c. Youth in national and international development.

The very techniques of social involvement change with growing rapidity. For that reason one of the important questions to be examined in Manila was to find out what kind of influence the innovations and recent trends appearing in the field of social welfare might bear on the work of the Red Cross. In an address, a shortened version of which has appeared in *Panorama*¹, Mr. Beer gave a reply to this question when he spoke very fully on the subject of "Innovations in international voluntary services". We believe it is of interest to quote here Mr. Beer's concluding words, for, drawing a lesson from the XVth International Conference on Social Welfare, he demonstrated clearly that social development cannot be separated from economic and political development and that the work performed by the voluntary services cannot be isolated from, but should be considered as a part of, all the various aspects of social welfare:

... And now to some specific points on innovations in Red Cross—and similar agencies. Although National Societies have basic aims and principles in common, policies, plans, techniques and innovations vary enormously. What is a pioneer effort of great importance in one country can be an old routine activity about to be abandoned in another.

One recent trend, which many societies will certainly adopt, is the community approach to recruitment and training. We shall have to recruit more volunteers within the communities where we find new priorities. We shall also have to fit the overflow of volunteers from the traditional recruiting grounds to new tasks. They must now be given a basic, "polyvalent" training. Specialisation must come second.

Our whole outlook must change. In the field of health we must switch over to a preventive approach, seeing the community as a whole, and our task as a positive, creative activity, forging opportunities for a better life.

¹ Published by the League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, 1970, No. 7.

To make this possible, Societies, even the most conservative, must follow the new trend towards broader participation in the social welfare field, which implies a significant departure from the notion that. . . . the pioneer role of our organisation will become more significant than before. It will mean a painful reappraisal, in some cases, and the abandoning of certain traditional activities, as responsibilities for the basic necessities of life are taken over by the authorities. But this will liberate forces for pioneering services to meet new needs created by the rapid changes we ourselves have produced. The new ghettos, the frozen suburbs, the under-privileged, isolated country regions without young people—all need pioneer services from organisations like the Red Cross.

The implications of longer life have forced us into innovations of work with the aged, the handicapped of all categories, with mental patients and ex-prisoners, as well as with drug addicts. More and more voluntary organisations will find new tasks here for personnel with training for rehabilitation tasks within their capabilities. Opportunities will become more varied and bolder. Already properly trained volunteers are doing jobs in and outside institutions nobody would have given them before—partly for reasons of sheer necessity (lack of personnel) but also because a new look has been taken at their capabilities.

One specific and pressing innovation concerns youth—youth as participants, as real colleagues in planning and execution. We have witnessed this year manifestations of a profound crisis of confidence, a malaise in contacts between generations. . . . But this is also to the good. The involvement of young people, their hatred of the hypocrisy of which we are, often both the authors and the victims, can be of significant help for a renewal of our approaches during the coming decade. This is easy to say—we have a lot of good resolutions on the subject—but very difficult to do. If, however, we cannot motivate today's youth to take part in Red Cross work, we shall soon be "out of the market".

We are very much aware of how the population problem affects our work. It is important to think of this problem in terms of new approaches. The poor integration of modern technology with environmental requirements is shown by the unplanned expansion of urban areas and the deterioration of agricultural lands. The last innovation I want to mention is the need for voluntary agencies to become more deeply involved as "activists" and pressure groups in the work to improve human environment as a whole. Environment is now almost painfully popular, with everybody wanting to get on the bandwagon. It is easy, if you just stick to general principles. But if you take

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problem by problem, you find how very difficult it is to do anything in practice. Here lies one of our great tasks : to retool our machinery so that we can be pioneers in this field. . . which has, under a more old-fashioned label, always been ours.

To conclude, all our innovations are based on adaptation to changes and to the positive needs of the community. But, at the same time as the agency must understand the community, the community must try to understand the agency, its character and its possibilities. Co-operation must work both ways. When this is so the voluntary agencies can give both leadership and labour to help not only to meet, but also to prevent, the new problems which we shall always have and which we ourselves create in our maddeningly changing world.

At about the same time, the XVth International Congress of the International Association of Schools of Social Work was held in Manila. A discussion group examined a subject which is of interest to the Red Cross—"Employment of volunteers, and the role of schools of social work in training them"—and which retained the attention of the representatives of institutions which work towards furthering a full understanding between professional and voluntary workers.

WORLD HEALTH DAY

The theme of World Health Day this year, on 7 April, will be A Full Life despite Diabetes. Dr. M. G. Candau, Director-General of the World Health Organization, issued for the occasion a message of which we quote below the main passages :

At the beginning of this century diabetes mellitus was a formidable disease. Its diagnosis in a young child was a notice of premature death. Its discovery in a man or woman in the prime of life meant a complete change in the way of living, and a greatly reduced expectation of life.