

The Mexico Meetings of the International Red Cross

THE COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

The thirty-first session of the League Board of Governors was held in Mexico from 12 to 16 October 1971¹. As customary, the International Red Cross Council of Delegates met beforehand; it started on 8 October¹. Such a Council, it will be recalled, comprises the constitutive elements of the Red Cross, namely the International Committee, the League and the National Societies.

After being declared open by Angela, Countess of Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission, the Council, composed of representatives from 60 National Societies, elected as its Chairman Mr. Jean Pictet, Vice-President of the ICRC, in the absence of Mr. Marcel A. Naville, President of the ICRC, who had been prevented by illness from going to Mexico. Mr. Salvador Lopez Chavez, President of the Mexican Red Cross, was elected Vice-Chairman of the Council of Delegates.

The first item on the agenda drawn up by the Standing Commission concerned the *development of humanitarian law*.

On behalf of the ICRC, Mr. Jean Pictet submitted a report on the progress of work in that field. He reminded the delegates that the International Conference at Istanbul, in its resolution XIII, requested the ICRC to continue its efforts with a view to putting forward specific draft rules to supplement prevailing law and with a view to inviting government experts to a meeting in Geneva in order to examine those draft rules. It had been for that purpose that, from 24 May to 12 June, there took place in Geneva the Conference of Government Experts on the Reaffirmation and

¹ *Plate.*

Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts, attended by nearly 200 experts from 40 nations.

Mr. Pictet then gave an account of the results achieved at that Conference, or at least at its first session, for, as not all the field had been covered, the Conference almost unanimously expressed the wish for a second session to which the ICRC would submit new and complete draft provisions. The second session, therefore, was to be held from 3 to 30 May 1972 and open to all governments bound by the 1949 Conventions. National Red Cross Societies and non-governmental organizations interested could send observers.

It was gratifying that so many governments had responded favourably to the ICRC's appeal and had delegated so many qualified experts to Geneva. The proceedings had progressed without a note of discord, in the best team spirit and it could be said that results had been significant; even though there was still much to be achieved, they were an important phase in the great undertaking upon which the ICRC, and with it the whole Red Cross movement, had embarked for the development of the law.

While availing itself of the opportunity which the Mexico meetings gave it to acquaint National Societies of the progress made in this work, the ICRC was equally pleased to obtain their opinions at that stage.

One point which was of interest specifically for the Red Cross movement was the strengthening of Red Cross bodies in international law in order to enable them, in time of war, to carry out and develop their activities, particularly their relief work, under the best of conditions. In that respect, proposals put forward, particularly by the Yugoslav Red Cross, were widely approved by participants.

In general, National Societies gave their support and encouragement to the ICRC for the work in which it was involved. A great number of votes were cast in favour of the idea of holding, before the second session of the Conference of Government Experts, a meeting of National Society representatives, similar to the meeting which had taken place in March in The Hague.

The resolution which was adopted on that topic was as follows:

RESOLUTION No. 1

Role of National Societies in the Development of Humanitarian Law

The Council of Delegates:

Convinced that there is an increasing need for a worldwide consciously humanitarian attitude ;

Recognizing the importance of the Geneva Conventions and other humanitarian legislation as a base for this attitude ;

Aware of the interest shown by many governments in promoting the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian law in armed conflicts and recalling, inter alia, the discussions in the XXI International Conference of the Red Cross in Istanbul 1969 and in the General Assembly of the U.N. 1971 ;

Appreciating the efforts of the ICRC to prepare a diplomatic Conference in order to reaffirm and develop international humanitarian law in armed conflicts ;

Accepting fully the responsibility of all National Red Cross Societies for maintaining, spreading and deepening the involvement of the public in humanitarian work and humanitarian law ;

Urges all National Societies to reconsider their role, methods and efforts in this field in order to make them as well planned, directed and controlled as their other activities ;

Requests the ICRC to intensify its co-operation with National Societies in defining the role which the latter should play and in helping them in the production of materials, the development of techniques and the training of their personnel who are responsible in this field.

Expects National Societies to report to the ICRC their plans and results thereby enabling the Committee, based on this worldwide experience, to fulfil its ever more important role as a leader and co-ordinator in this field ;

Expects further that the ICRC will present its observations and recommendations to the Executive Committee at its meeting in 1972, and later to the next Council of Delegates.

The Council then examined how National Red Cross Societies could contribute to the development and dissemination of humanitarian law. On that point, Mr. Pierre Gaillard, Assistant-Director of the ICRC, delivered a paper and the following recommendation was adopted:

RESOLUTION NO. 2

Teaching of International Humanitarian Law

The Council of Delegates,

Recognizes that it is absolutely necessary to intensify the exhaustive study and the diffusion of knowledge of the Geneva Conventions and the principles of international humanitarian law in all quarters,

Affirms that university courses offered in schools of law, political science, social sciences, and medicine should include systematic instruction in these subjects,

Wishes that universities would also institute postgraduate courses in these subjects so that a supply of highly qualified and specialized personnel will be available,

Invites National Societies to request the co-operation of competent authorities in their respective countries in achieving these objectives,

Requests National Societies to inform the ICRC and the League of all legislative and statutory measures that may be taken in this direction.

The second item on the agenda concerned *joint relief*. As the largest operation of that type to take place in recent years had been the one carried out in Jordan, the ICRC and the League requested Mr. Kai Warras, Secretary-General of the Finnish Red Cross, who had been the co-ordinator of that operation, to submit the final report which has just been sent to the National Societies. He did so with moderation in an excellent although perhaps over modest fashion.

After discussion, the Council passed the following resolution:

RESOLUTION NO. 3

Relief operations in armed conflicts

The Council of Delegates,

Referring to the revised agreement between the ICRC and the League which was confirmed in Istanbul in 1969,

Recognizing the increasing interest in implementing this agreement in the spirit of better co-operation and co-ordination in relief matters,

Recalling and having regard to the Jordan relief operation in 1970 where the co-operation and co-ordination by the ICRC, the League

and the National Societies as the International Red Cross was very successful and showed the unity of the Red Cross and achieved its aims,

Recommends the preparation of a joint relief operational plan between the ICRC and the League taking also into consideration the resources of the National Societies in personnel, material equipment and funds.

The remaining item on the agenda was the re-appraisal of the Red Cross role and structure. At that time, all that could be done was to give an interim report on the progress made in this so-called Cannes study. It was submitted by the general-secretaries of the ICRC and the League, Mr. Jean-Louis Le Fort and Mr. Henrik Beer.

The meeting noted with satisfaction the ICRC's convening in Geneva, for 6 April 1972, a meeting of leaders and senior officials of the League and of the ICRC.

LEAGUE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Delegates of 86 National Societies then took part in the thirty-first session of the League Board of Governors which was held in Mexico from 12 to 16 October 1971, under the chairmanship of Mr. José Barroso Chavez.

The Board of Governors passed 38 resolutions, and we give below the text of those dealing with matters which concern the League and the ICRC jointly.

RESOLUTION NO. 2

Study on the re-appraisal of the role of the Red Cross

The Board of Governors,

Having heard the report of the Committee of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen on the study of the re-appraisal of the role of the Red Cross,

Approves the report and confirms the decision of the Executive Committee to carry out the study,

Authorises the Committee of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen to implement the study as soon as possible and to this end to appoint a sub-committee of its members who would be directly responsible for the study and for appointing a Director,

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

Expresses the hope that the study may in due course be linked to that already started by the ICRC so as to extend to the whole of the International Red Cross,

Authorises an appeal to selected charitable Foundations and other non-Red Cross sources for the provision of funds, pending the receipt of which the Secretary General is empowered to advance such sums as are necessary to cover initial costs.

RESOLUTION No. 4

Presence of observers at statutory League meetings

The Board of Governors resolves that,

- a) *National Societies members of the League may be represented by not more than three observers at sessions of the Executive and Advisory Committees of the League of which they are not members. The names of such observers shall be notified in advance to the Secretary General,*
- b) *The International Committee of the Red Cross may be represented at sessions of the Board of Governors and those of the Executive and Advisory Committees,*
- c) *Other institutions, namely recognised National Societies which are completing their formalities for admission to the League and international governmental and non-governmental organisations with which the League maintains special working relations and co-operates in the humanitarian field in which it specialises, may be invited by the Chairman of the League to be represented by observers at sessions of the Board of Governors and those of the Executive Committee,*
- d) *Observers shall not participate in the debates. Nevertheless the Chairman of the meeting may give them the floor as an exceptional measure, and*
- e) *Observers shall not present resolutions or vote.*

RESOLUTION No. 20

Improvement of League disaster relief operations

The Board of Governors,

Recognizing the increasing interest in bringing relief to disaster victims, and the efforts being undertaken by numerous international bodies related to disaster relief, and

Noting the proposals under consideration by the United Nations for the creation of a focal point for disaster relief matters and for the appointment of a Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to mobilise, direct and co-ordinate the relief activities of the various organizations of the United Nations system and to receive on behalf of the Secretary General contributions offered to him for disaster relief, and

Having regard to the references made to non-governmental organizations and voluntary agencies in the field of international disaster relief in Resolution 1612 of the 51st Session of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and

Taking into account the fact that the League of Red Cross Societies has been recognized by the United Nations Secretary General as having a leading position among major international voluntary agencies and should therefore give a leadership in this effort, and

Taking into consideration the increasing demands upon the League by its member National Societies for improved operational response to major disasters along with improved information regarding the scope of the disaster, the resulting needs, and the actions of the affected National Society and the League, and

Being aware that the world at large expects that the Red Cross will respond promptly and efficiently in disaster situations,

Resolves:

1. That immediate action be taken to strengthen the capability of the League to deal with relief in case of disasters, notably:

- a) by the improvement of the existing operations unit within the League,*
- b) by strengthening the pre-disaster planning activities of the League,*
- c) by the establishment of an improved relief supply and storage network to ensure the efficient provision of supplies to the Societies in need,*
- d) by the development of procedures to ensure prompt and effective reporting and disseminating of information in cases of emergency, with the full collaboration of the affected member Societies and*
- e) by arrangements for the provision of personnel and other material support from sister Societies in response to requests from the affected member Societies.*

2. That in support of the above actions by the League, National Societies be urged to give increased attention to the development of realistic disaster plans, to the appropriate stockpiling of relief supplies and equipment and to the provision of financial aid.

RESOLUTION No. 32

The Red Cross and Peace

The Board of Governors,

Considering that the League and National Societies are making efforts to bring about peace, mutual understanding, friendship and co-operation among nations,

Noting the way in which these aims are being realized by International and Regional Red Cross gatherings including meetings of young people,

Recognizing that one of the most important tasks of National Societies is to educate their members, and firstly young people, in the spirit of peace, international co-operation, respect for the human being, abhorrence of war, the observance of international humanitarian law and the promotion of equal rights for all peoples and all nations,

Recalling the resolutions previously adopted by the governing bodies of the League, promoting peace and human rights and deploring the settlement of international disputes by the use of force and weapons,

Requests the League Secretariat and National Societies to mobilise public opinion as widely as possible through all the mass media in support of Red Cross actions for peace, the protection of human life and health and the prevention and mitigation of human suffering,

Recommends the League Secretariat and National Societies to co-operate more actively with other international organisations whose activities are aimed at strengthening peace and preventing new outbreaks of war, and firstly with the U.N. and its Special Agencies,

Requests the League Secretariat to take all suitable occasions, including Regional meetings of National Societies, to draw attention to resolutions already passed on this subject, and to urge their implementation.

RESOLUTION No. 33

Racial Discrimination

The Board of Governors,

Bearing in mind that racism and racial discrimination in the world are still widespread,

Considering that racism and racial discrimination debase human dignity, violate the fundamental human rights, impede friendly and peaceful relations among nations and endanger international peace and security,

Considering the Declaration and the Convention of the United Nations on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and

that on this occasion the Red Cross should strengthen its action and contribute to and join in the general struggle against racism,

Convinced that racism and racial discrimination work contrary to the Principles of the Red Cross, and that elimination of any discrimination based on race takes a prominent place in those Principles,

Recalling the provisions of the Geneva Conventions which prohibit discrimination based on race, and various resolutions of International Conferences of the Red Cross condemning racism and racial discrimination,

Believes that all Red Cross organizations should engage themselves to the maximum in the struggle against racism and racial discrimination,

(1) Calls upon all National Societies to bear in mind that their activities should always be in accord with the principles of non-discrimination as to race,

(2) Urges all National Societies to intensify their struggle against racial discrimination by undertaking positive actions and enlisting the support of their members and the general public,

(3) Calls on the League Secretariat to set a clear example in this regard and to give as much publicity as possible to the action of the National Societies,

(4) a) Invites the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League to establish a working group to study the problem of Red Cross action in the struggle against racism and racial discrimination and submit proposals concerning Red Cross action in this field to the next session of the Council of Delegates or the International Conference of the Red Cross,

b) Invites the ICRC to join this working group.

RESOLUTION No. 34

Reaffirmation of previously adopted resolutions on the reunion of dispersed families

The Board of Governors,

In order to implement the intent of previous resolutions on the subject of reunion of dispersed families, and in view of the changing world conditions which result in such dispersals,

And recognizing the humanitarian aspects of such separations as they affect the health and welfare of the individual family members involved,

And taking note that in some cases National Societies have not responded to requests for assistance from sister Societies and that reunions, although requested, have not been accomplished,

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

Urges all National Societies and invites the International Committees of the Red Cross to assist in every possible way to effect such reunions and in particular,

Urges all National Societies to take into account the compassionate aspects of "non-involved children" and serve as their "natural intermediaries" with their respective governments to facilitate their reunion with their parents, wherever the parents choose to live.

STANDING COMMISSION

The Standing Commission of the International Red Cross also held its meeting in Mexico, under the chairmanship of Angela, Countess of Limerick. After preparing the meeting of the Council of Delegates, the Commission requested National Societies ready to act as host to the XXIIInd International Conference of the Red Cross in 1973 kindly to put their names forward so that the Standing Commission could reach a final decision before the end of the year.

The Commission awarded the Henry Dunant Medal, founded by the XXth International Conference of the Red Cross on the initiative of the Australian Red Cross, to Mr. ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS-PONCET, a former president of the French Red Cross and of the Standing Commission, Mrs. SACHIKO HASHIMOTO, Director of the Japanese National Junior Red Cross, and Miss KATALIN DURGO, a nurse of the Hungarian Red Cross. International Review takes pleasure in congratulating these three laureates.

* * *

A final word must be said on the cordial welcome which all delegates received from the Mexican Red Cross and its President, Mr. Salvador Lopez Chavez. Participants also had the honour of being received by His Excellency the President of the United States of Mexico. Nothing was neglected to ensure that their sojourn was both pleasant and interesting. Delegates will long remember with pleasure their welcome to Mexico.