

IN THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT WORLD

125th ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day 1988

JOINT MESSAGE OF THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

This year marks the 125th Anniversary of the beginning of a *worldwide movement* prompted by the publication of a *Book* entitled “A Memory of Solferino” by a *man* (Henry Dunant), whose ideas were taken up by a *private group* (the Geneva Public Welfare Society) of a *small canton* (Geneva) in what was—and still is—a *small country* (Switzerland). Today, 146 countries have either a Red Cross or a Red Crescent Society and the full membership of the Movement is estimated to be more than 250 million people.

Born on the battlefield of Solferino, Dunant’s essentially simple idea was that the dignity of people must be respected at all times—even in war. As a result of his vision and determination, there have been two significant developments: first, the Geneva Conventions—by which governments pledge themselves to respect and protect victims of armed conflict—and secondly the establishment of a worldwide neutral movement united by its commitment to the basic principle of people helping people.

Each year on 8 May the birthday of Henry Dunant is celebrated throughout the world as World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. In its 125th anniversary year the Movement has adopted the slogan “125 Years at Work... and still developing”. The growth of the Movement and the scope of the activities resulting from its concern for the victims of conflict and disaster—whether personal, local, national or international—have meant a new life for many people worldwide.

The term “development” can mean many things. For the Red Cross, it can be reduced to two basic ideas. The first is the continuing development of the

Movement itself. The second is constant vigilance to ensure that the assistance which it offers is adequate—neither excessive nor insufficient, and in no sense creating a state of individual or communal dependence—and, above all, impartial. These two simple principles have been responsible for bringing about a change from strictly emergency aid to programmes designed to attack the root causes of continuing disasters.

Immediate assistance to the victims of conflicts and natural disasters will of course remain a primary obligation for the Movement, but attempts to find durable solutions fully independent of any political pressure and with the participation of local populations must continue and indeed grow. Only in this way can the long-term goals of the Red Cross and Red Crescent be achieved. The Movement still has a lot of growing to do both in size and, even more, in understanding its own potential. For this to be achieved it needs a great increase in public interest and support in every country.

Statutory meetings in Geneva

The XXIst session of the Executive Council of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies took place in Geneva on 21 and 22 April 1988 under the chairmanship of League President Mario Villarroel.

The delegates heard a report by the Secretary General, Mr. Pär Stenbäck, on the activities of the League Secretariat since November 1987.

Among the Council's major decisions were the provisional admission to the League of the Red Cross of Chad, 146th member of the federation (see below), and the creation of a nine-member commission with a mandate to review the "Strategy for the Development of National Societies in the Eighties", adopted in 1981 by the Twenty-fourth International Conference of the Red Cross, and to draw up development guidelines for the coming decade.

After reviewing the progress of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society action against AIDS, the Council voted to address a statement to the World Health Assembly voicing support for the WHO Global Programme on Aids and reiterating the commitment of the League and the National Societies to preventive measures, assistance for AIDS victims, and co-operation with all those involved in combating the pandemic.

The Commission on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Peace, reporting to the Council, detailed plans to devote its next meeting, due to take place in the