

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

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

From 5 to 16 June 1972, at Stockholm, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was attended by representatives from 113 States, and from many specialized agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The League of Red Cross Societies was represented, as activities for the protection of the human environment naturally have their place in the programmes of the Red Cross. As stressed by Mr. H. Beer, League Secretary-General, in his address to the Conference:

"The concept of the Red Cross as an integral part of modern community development and its emphasis on a new approach to its work in the rapidly-growing agglomerations of millions of people are a direct proof of a "total environment" approach."

"While, initially and traditionally, Red Cross activities aim to alleviate the horrors of warfare—the most serious man-made threat to a decent human environment—", Mr. Beer stressed that "in peace time, Red Cross activities merge toward, modern and integrated approaches to environmental problems". He reminded delegates that a resolution voted at last year's meeting of the League's Board of Governors on future Red Cross action emphasized the importance of keeping the public well informed on environmental dangers and on adequate counter-measures that need to be taken.

"Participation in preventive environmental health campaigns, Red Cross youth action in sanitation work, co-operation with the United Nations to create a new system of pre-disaster planning, new means to prevent traffic accidents, and positive contributions in

family planning—these are some examples of Red Cross activities, not only in industrialized countries but also in developing areas where the League concentrates its work ", Mr. Beer added.

Mr. Beer concluded by saying : " Our greatest task in the future will be to awaken and activate the public's motivations and its awareness, to help in creating enthusiasm at both national and international levels, for the necessary reforms which have to be accomplished ".

In order to ensure continuity in international action for environment conservancy, the Conference recommended the United Nations to set up a new UN body: an administrative council for environment programmes with representatives from fifty-four States, a fund for the financing of such programmes, a small secretariat, and a set of procedural rules for the co-ordination of the many activities of the United Nations bodies concerned with environment. In addition, the Conference adopted a seven-paragraph Declaration expressing mankind's common interest in world environment conservation. The Declaration contains a preamble and a number of principles stating, *inter alia*, the conviction that:

Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality which permits a life of dignity and well-being, and bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.

Paragraph 6 of the Declaration states:

A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world with a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well-being depend. Conversely, through fuller knowledge and wiser action, we can achieve for ourselves and our posterity a better life in an environment more in keeping with human needs and hopes. There are broad vistas for the enhancement of environmental quality and the creation of a good life. What is needed is an enthusiastic but calm state of mind and intense but orderly work. For the purpose of attaining freedom in the world of nature, man must use knowledge to build in collaboration with nature a better environment. To defend and improve

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the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind—a goal to be pursued together with, and in harmony with, the established and fundamental goals of peace and of world-wide economic and social development.

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The Conference, which voted recommendations combined in a practical plan of action, reflected universal awareness of the urgency of environment problems, and the necessity for worldwide co-operation and prompt action by international and national organizations for the benefit of all mankind.
