

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

(Vienna, 14-25 June 1993)

The second World Conference on Human Rights, marking the 45th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was opened on 14 June 1993 by United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Some 5,000 persons, representing various entities such as States, States members of the United Nations, observers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took part in the Conference, which concluded its work on 25 June.

In his address, the United Nations Secretary-General stressed three imperatives: the universality of human rights, guaranteed application and democratization. The Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Alois Mock, elected Chairman of the Conference, also underscored the importance of the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Other eminent persons such as Mr. Thomas Klestil, President of the Republic of Austria, Mr. Franz Vranitzky, Chancellor of Austria and Mr. Ibrahim Fall, Director of the Centre for Human Rights and Secretary-General of the Conference, also delivered addresses.

The ICRC was represented at the Conference by a delegation led by Mr. Yves Sandoz, member of the Executive Board and Director for Principles, Law and Relations with the Movement. It drafted and circulated a report entitled: "Human rights and the ICRC - International humanitarian law" (see under the heading "ICRC", p. 300).

The proceedings of the Conference were conducted in three principal fora:

- The Plenary, where government delegations and organizations with observer status at the United Nations delivered their statements. The ICRC belongs to the latter group and President Cornelio Sommaruga, who joined the delegation on 23 June, delivered an address the text of which is published hereunder (see p. 326).
- The Main Committee, which reviewed the progress made in the area of human rights. It also took stock of the obstacles to the

exercise of those rights and studied the links between development, democracy and the universal enjoyment of all human rights.

- The Drafting Committee, whose task it was to draw up a provisional final declaration based on the report of the preparatory committee and the observations of participants. Excerpts from this Declaration, focusing on aspects of particular interest to the Movement, are given below (p. 329).

Before the official opening of the Conference, a meeting of all participant non-governmental organizations was held from 10 to 12 June. The Austrian government gave a reception for Nobel Peace Prize winners, including the ICRC which was represented by Professor Dietrich Schindler, member of the Committee.

ADDRESS BY MR. CORNELIO SOMMARUGA,
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
OF THE RED CROSS

This is indeed a rare occasion. We have gathered here from all corners of the world to acknowledge our common humanity.

The time has come to ask ourselves whether all the treaties signed and all the mechanisms set up can stand firm against violent passions and even deliberate policies designed to annihilate the innocent.

In other words, is moral authority enough to hold barbarity in check?

We should be able to answer these questions with an unqualified "Yes". But history goes on repeating itself. The terrible sequence of war, massacres, torture and rape by no means belongs to the past; it is going on at this very moment, practically before our eyes.

So what are we to do?

For the past one hundred and thirty years the International Committee of the Red Cross has been trying to make the most cruel aspects of armed conflict less inhumane by urging the belligerents to spare non-combatants and by coming to the aid of the victims, thereby helping to defend some of the most fundamental human rights.

In the context of the hundreds of armed conflicts that it has witnessed, the ICRC has offered its services as a neutral intermediary on the basis of its mandate and its right of initiative, which are now recognized by the entire