

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

international community. By analogy, and always with the consent of the governments concerned, it also takes action in situations of internal unrest.

What strikes our delegates working in the field is that, when all is said and done, absolutely nothing is gained by those who take up arms. On the contrary. The destruction wrought by war is, after all, not only material in nature. It tears apart the very fabric of society, the centuries-old traditions that hold a nation together and give it its vitality and creativity, that enable the arts to flourish, serve as a basis for development and tell us who we are; in short, the lifeblood of any civilization worthy of the name. The devastation brought by war is such that even the victor cannot emerge unscathed.

To the question "What are we to do?" I would reply that we must transcend the cultural, ethnic, racial and other distinctions that cause us to feel different from one another and concentrate instead on what we share, our infinitely more significant common humanity, our greatest strength. Let us respect the dignity inherent in every man and woman. Let us, at the very least, respect what jurists call the "hard core" of human rights, those rights that are inalienable whatever the circumstances.

The simple maxim "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" sums it up, on both the individual and the national scale. Surely the level of civilization attained by a State can be measured by the respect it accords to its own minorities? If it were accepted as a rule that minorities should be encouraged by being given a representative role in recognition of their contribution to cultural diversity within the community, the world would certainly be a better place.

As you know, this is the international year of the world's indigenous peoples. Allow me to express, before their many representatives here, the earnest hope that after so many centuries of incomprehension and suffering their voices will now be heard. I should also like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the non-governmental organizations for their tireless efforts to ensure respect for human rights all over the world.

It is safe to say that the worst infringements of human rights occur in times of armed conflict. The ICRC is required by its mandate to promote knowledge of international humanitarian law, in particular the 1949 Geneva Conventions by which virtually all States in the world are now bound, in an effort to prevent abuses against people protected by those treaties. We try to make sure that the law is known and understood by both those who have to apply it and those entitled to benefit from it. These activities focus on the armed forces, law schools, the medical profession, diplomats and specialized institutes, to ensure that individuals with a key role to play know the basic rules and do their utmost to see that they are respected. The States also have a legal obligation to spread knowledge of the law. Regrettably, some of them

take this responsibility less seriously than others, with inevitably disastrous results.

Experience has shown that when humanitarian law is properly implemented in the heat of battle, the vicious circle of excessive violence, reprisals and counter-reprisals and the ensuing mass displacement of civilians can be avoided. Compliance with the law also favours eventual reconciliation. By creating an oasis of humanity between the belligerents, it opens the way to negotiation and a possible return to peace. This same body of law confers on conflict victims the right to receive assistance, while stipulating that relief operations conducted by independent and impartial institutions can in no way be regarded as constituting interference in a State's internal affairs.

Proper knowledge of the law is therefore essential as a precondition for compliance with its provisions, but it is far from enough. Under the Geneva Conventions, States are required to set up mechanisms to repress grave breaches of humanitarian law, and we feel that these mechanisms should be used. Today this is simply not the case. The most barbaric acts go unpunished, and this only encourages further lawlessness. Moreover, these national systems must be complemented by a really effective international, indeed universal mechanism. The establishment of an international war crimes tribunal should also be encouraged for its deterrent effect.

The depositary of the Geneva Conventions, the Swiss government, is convening an *ad hoc* conference in Geneva in late August to review all aspects of the protection afforded to the victims of armed conflict. This must serve as an opportunity for all States to reaffirm their commitment to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law. The ICRC strongly supports this initiative, for the protection of basic rights can result only from the convergence of several different approaches which, far from being mutually exclusive, must support each other.

Each of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, that is, the ICRC, the 155 National Societies and their Federation, has its own special role to play in achieving that goal, guided solely by the Movement's principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.

As President of the institution that founded that Movement, I am pleased to join you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, in this remarkable demonstration of solidarity.

May humanity and peace prevail!

"Per humanitatem ad pacem!"