

VIIIth session of the General Assembly of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

(Budapest, 25-28 November 1991)

The VIIIth session of the General Assembly of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies opened on Monday 25 November 1991 in Budapest, attended by delegations from 110 National Societies.

I. OPENING CEREMONY

In his speech, the President of the League, *Mr. Mario Villarroel Lander*, gave an overview of the League's position and of its activities since the previous General Assembly in 1989. He stressed the need for the Movement to adapt to present-day concerns and to meet tomorrow's challenges in a spirit of unity and in full compliance with the fundamental principles. The adoption in 1989 of the League's Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties was, he said, of key importance in this regard.

The League then described the relief operations undertaken in the previous two years, pointing out that in the first six months of 1991 the League had made 35 separate appeals (a number which equalled those launched in the whole of 1990) for relief operations that had enabled aid to be given to 4.5 million victims of natural disasters in various parts of the world, in addition to activities in favour of refugees and displaced persons during the Gulf War.

Mr. Villarroel was pleased to state that the League's activities worldwide had expanded considerably and that for the first time in over a decade large-scale programmes had been set up in Eastern Europe. Development programmes aimed at strengthening the capacity of National Societies were, he said, also on the increase: in 1991 over 320 development projects had been under way in 72 countries, requiring appeals for 61.5 million Swiss francs.

After reviewing his missions over the past two years to National Societies in various parts of the world, the President of the League called on its members to combine forces so as to meet new challenges in a constantly changing world. He urged them to do more to improve conditions for human beings by developing the National Societies' operational capacity to deal with emergencies and by intensifying preventive and training activities, since "poverty is an affront to human dignity".

After mentioning the possibility of changing the League's name to "International Federation", which would better reflect its purpose and its universal character, Mr. Villarroel paid tribute to the authorities and the people of Hungary, who were hosting the meetings of the Movement's statutory bodies.

The President of the ICRC, *Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga*, in his address, underscored the close cooperation between the League and the International Committee of the Red Cross, particularly in areas of common interest such as National Society development. He also stressed the importance of youth as a factor bringing renewed vigour into the Movement: "In today's world, young people are often involved in violence, either as perpetrators or as victims; yet some of them are the most ardent defenders of the fundamental rights of the individual. They represent the hope of new life for the National Societies, in particular for those going through a transitional period due to political upheavals in their countries. This is very necessary: we must not forget the moving message voiced by the youth of the Movement at the end of their Supercamp in Solferino and Geneva in 1989! The ICRC stands ready to help in expanding the role played by young people in the Movement, within the context of its statutory responsibilities".

Finally, the President of the ICRC asked the delegates to continue considering ways to strengthen the unity and effectiveness of Red Cross and the Red Crescent action.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY

1. New National Societies

The General Assembly admitted the Solomon Islands Red Cross by acclamation as a member of the League. In addition, the National Red Cross Societies of Lithuania and Latvia were readmitted to the League, which henceforth has 150 members.

2. League activities

After his report on the League's work since the previous General Assembly in 1989, the League's Secretary General, *Mr. Pär Stenbäck*, emphasized the need for National Societies to respond to competition in humanitarian assistance by making greater efforts to promote disaster prevention and preparedness and coordinating relief work at national level. He also pointed out that the Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties was "the tool to master the future of the Federation", and that the strengthening of the National Societies' operational capacity remained a priority.

The League Under-Secretary-General for Operations, *Mr. Stephen Davey*, reported on the appeals made since October 1989 for relief operations and development programmes.

3. League strategy for the nineties

The General Assembly debated the new directions indicated in the Strategic Work Plan of the League for the Nineties, which was adopted at the Assembly's VIIth session in 1989. The accent would henceforth be laid on strengthening the operational capacity of structurally weak National Societies and gearing activities more particularly to the most vulnerable communities.

The Assembly consequently adopted a resolution in which, among other things, it "urges all National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies:

- to intensify their efforts to focus programmes and services on the needs of the most vulnerable, as outlined in the Strategic Work Plan of the League for the Nineties, and to cooperate with the League, responding fully to its initiatives in this regard, it being understood that the most vulnerable are those at greatest risk from situations that threaten their survival or their capacity to live with a minimum of social and economic security and human dignity;
- to ensure that adequate resources for the League's implementation of the Work Plan are made available from their own means and, as appropriate, government funds."

4. Finance

The General Assembly approved the League's budget for 1992 and 1993, the total amounts being 25,875,000 and 27,285,000 Swiss francs respectively. It also approved amendments relating to the calculation of the National Societies' scale of contributions.

5. Youth policy and strategy

The Assembly adopted the "Youth Policy and Strategy of the League" submitted by the Youth Commission, with special emphasis on the following policy statements:

Policy Statements

- ***"Young people have a key role to play in the provision of the Movement's services."***

"Young people have contributed over the years as an exceptionally good volunteer force within the Movement. Again and again, they have worked hard in relief operations, emergency services and development programmes."

"They are in an ideal position to identify the needs of young people and others within the community. They develop and carry out programmes, see ways and means of reaching other young people in need. They add credibility to the Movement's work with many groups."

- ***"Young people are an important target group, both in the membership and in the wider community."***

"To succeed in many of its programmes, the Movement needs to work directly with young people. Many health programmes have young people as their main 'clients'. Young people are one group among others and are most threatened by disaster, underdevelopment and war."

- ***"Young people have a role in the leadership and management of the Movement today."***

"When fully involved in decision-making and in leadership, both in their own affairs and throughout the Movement, young people bring not only their experience but also a special creativity and idealism which complements the maturity of other members."

- ***“Young people of today will lead the Movement of tomorrow.”***

“In many National Societies, the leaders of today were the youth members of a generation ago.”

“When young people work side by side with the older members of the Movement in service programmes, emergency actions and the management of the Movement, they rapidly acquire the skills which will enable them to lead the Movement of the future.”

- ***“Young people need support.”***

“Young people can sometimes be marginalized within society because of their social position. If we are to realize their full potential within our Movement, special support in the form of Youth programmes and structures must be put in place.”

“Each of the partners in the process — young people, Youth leaders and representatives, National Societies, the League, its Youth Commission and Secretary General — are urged to ensure that the Policy and Strategy are implemented to the fullest.”

The Assembly requested all those involved in this process to do their utmost to implement the Youth Policy and Strategy.

In addition, the Assembly decided to set up an International Red Cross and Red Crescent Youth Fund intended to increase the involvement of young people in Red Cross and Red Crescent activities.

6. Development

The Assembly adopted the report of the Development Commission, which stressed the need for a clear definition of the idea of development within the Movement and for respect for the “Principles and Rules for Development Cooperation” adopted in October 1990 by the Executive Council, and pointed out that it was essential to have a clear strategy for the implementation of bilateral or multilateral framework development projects, while keeping costs within the limits of available resources. In this connection mention was made of the Development Fund, the purpose of which was to finance projects meeting the criteria of the Principles and Rules.

During the subsequent debate, it was emphasized that framework development projects should include disaster-prevention programmes and should extend to areas such as social welfare. It was also pointed out that, while development in general was not a direct responsibility of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the Movement nevertheless had a

crucial role to play as a factor for development in the humanitarian domain.

The Assembly adopted a resolution on the role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in development. It recommended, moreover, that the League should give priority support to programmes and structural development of the National Societies in countries having relatively large vulnerable populations. A further resolution concerning the role of women in Red Cross and Red Crescent development programmes was adopted, with the intention of submitting it to the Council of Delegates (*see above, page 35*).

7. Relief

The number of vulnerable people and hence the number of disaster victims is growing: this means that Red Cross and Red Crescent aid is required more and more often. If the League is to respond to this challenge, in a climate of growing interest in humanitarian aid and vigorous competition among relief organizations, then it must swiftly increase its effectiveness.

After this summary of the disaster relief scene, presented by the League's Disaster Relief Commission in its report to the General Assembly, the latter adopted two resolutions for presentation to the Council of Delegates. One dealt with the coordination of non-governmental relief in peacetime disasters, while the other was concerned with stimulating international humanitarian assistance for disaster prevention (*see above, page 39*).

In order to help strengthen the operational capacity of the League and the National Societies, the Rules for the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund were amended to authorize the withdrawal of an amount not exceeding 500,000 Swiss francs per annum in order to prepare for and provide relief and assistance in the event of disasters.

Another resolution relating to greater assistance to victims by the League stresses the importance of disaster preparedness and prevention assistance in disaster-prone countries.

8. Health and community services

AIDS, first aid, the health of women and children and voluntary non-remunerated blood donation were the main issues raised by the

Health and Community Services Commission, whose report was presented to the General Assembly.

The Assembly adopted a resolution on the *fight against AIDS*, which urged the National Societies to take a resolute stand against all forms of AIDS-related discrimination, both at national and international levels. It encouraged the National Societies to continue to improve their anti-AIDS programmes, making special efforts to inform, care for and support people living with HIV/AIDS, to facilitate their integration into the community and to involve them in HIV/AIDS-related activities. The Assembly also requested the National Societies to gather sufficient funds at national, regional and international level to enable each of them and the League to make a sustained contribution to the global fight against HIV and AIDS.

The Assembly adopted a resolution on *first aid* which, recognizing the important contribution that first-aid programmes of National Societies were able to make to disaster preparedness and response and the League's commitment to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, urged the National Societies, among other things, to review their first-aid training programmes and to ensure that their content was based on the priority health needs of vulnerable individuals, families and communities in terms of the common disasters and emergencies to which they are exposed in their everyday lives.

In a resolution on the *health of women and children*, the National Societies were asked to encourage heads of State and their governments to ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Societies were also urged to strengthen and develop activities to reduce the vulnerability of women and children.

The principle of *voluntary, non-remunerated blood donation* was reaffirmed by the Assembly, which supported the Hanover Statement on the Ethics of Voluntary Blood Donation, as slightly amended by the League and the International Group of Experts. This Statement specifies that "no coercion or pressure should be brought to bear on a potential donor to donate" and that "every transfusion service should have current detailed criteria for donor selection and deferral".

9. South Africa

The General Assembly adopted a resolution presented by the Red Cross Transitional Assistance Group (REDTAG) set up to help the

South African Red Cross; the ICRC contributes via its delegation in South Africa to the Group's work. According to REDTAG, progress had been made in the previous two years, favoured by the recent political developments there. The resolution invited the South African Red Cross to ensure that the recruitment of members was increased in particular among the disadvantaged communities by involving all racial groups in leadership at all levels of the Society, and to improve its capacity to offer services, especially in the large black communities.

The mandate of the League's delegation in South Africa was extended for another year.

CHANGE OF NAME FOR THE LEAGUE

The General Assembly voted in favour of changing the name of the League, which now becomes the *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*.

The organization began life in 1919 as the "League of Red Cross Societies". It soon became the "League of Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies", a name it retained until 1983, when the red crescent emblem was adopted by the National Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The change of name is intended to reflect more accurately the nature of the organization and its universal character.

This decision came into force at the end of the VIIIth session of the General Assembly.

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It should be noted that a number of statutory meetings were held within the Movement on and after 25 November 1991: the Commission for the Financing of the ICRC; the Commission on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Peace; the 28th session of the League Executive Council; the Finance Commission; and the League's four statutory Commissions on Development, Disaster Relief, Youth, and Health and Community Services.