

- permitting relief operations of a strictly humanitarian character in States under sanctions;
- recognizing the specific role of their countries' National Society in disaster response activities;
- helping create a beneficial environment for the overall development of their National Society;

from external agencies:

understanding and respect for our independence;

partnerships in common causes, including adoption of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations.

The Copenhagen Declaration — Action and advocacy

adopted by the 5th regional European Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference, on 20th March 1997

“The people of Europe and their governments have a high expectation that you, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, will use your unique position of neutrality, impartiality and independence to be a key force in promoting positive change in the situation of the most vulnerable. You are challenged to be the social conscience of the new Europe.”

Quote from key-note speaker

The Conference has provided an opportunity to learn from expert speakers, the media round table and each other. We have risen to many of the new challenges but we must continue to seize the opportunity to

renew our commitment to change and to constantly search for ways of improving the effectiveness of our action with the most vulnerable people.

How the Red Cross and Red Crescent sees Europe today

Europe is changing dramatically. It has more democracy — but less order, more free markets — but less employment, reduced fear of international war — but greater insecurity for the individual.

Violence — and the deprivation and suffering associated with it — touch the lives of millions. Armed conflicts are once again part of the European reality. Internal strife with no clear distinction between the combatants and non-combatants. Wars where the rules and norms of international humanitarian law are flagrantly disregarded. Individuals, families and communities flee within their own countries or across borders. For many, this is today's reality.

In past years the State played a key and direct role in providing safety nets and services. Today, many welfare systems in Europe are being radically altered or swept aside. In many States, governments are looking for organizations and commercial undertakings to deliver services to the most vulnerable people, often providing the legislative and financial resources to help them do so. Civil society and non-profit-motivated organizations are increasingly important in providing support to the most vulnerable people.

Many people in Europe face a deterioration — maybe an imminent crisis — of health and well-being not seen on the continent for 50 years. Life expectancy is decreasing in many countries whilst communicable diseases and those related to life-style are on the increase.

In our countries, vulnerability is individualized and changes over time. Not all elderly people are vulnerable, but many isolated and poor ones are. Not all ethnic minorities are vulnerable, but asylum seekers and migrant workers may be so. Not all children are vulnerable, but those affected by armed conflict or fleeing violence are. Men and women suffer differently in disaster and have different vulnerabilities.

The challenge for Europe's National Societies

The mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is to improve the situation of the most vulnerable. We believe that individuals are vulnerable

when they are at risk and when they have neither the personal, family, community nor public resources to ensure their continued good health and well-being.

The challenge for Europe's National Societies is to identify those who are the most vulnerable people and to be the social conscience for their plight. We will go on to develop appropriate strategies for working with them in the most accessible, effective and efficient manner. These services will be focused on decreasing the suffering caused by both creeping and acute attacks on people's health and well-being.

At the same time, European National Societies will not lose sight of their international obligations inside and outside of Europe. Provision of assistance to the most vulnerable people in other countries, through their National Societies, is also a priority.

Services and action in the community

We believe in, and will campaign for, the values of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The Fundamental Principles and the Federation's mission to assist the most vulnerable — which form the basis of these values — will underlie all our work. As National Societies we will be seen to live these values through our work.

We will vigorously champion the rights and interests of the most vulnerable, carefully choosing our main areas of advocacy, then building our cases on high-quality data, our experiences, the Fundamental Principles and Federation policies.

We will target our services to the most vulnerable people, when they are most vulnerable. To do this, each National Society will assess, on a continuing basis, who the most vulnerable are in their country, and what services the Society is most suited to deliver. In particular we will seek to play a role in the prevention of conflicts, health crises and other grave assaults upon human dignity.

We will provide the services the most vulnerable need most urgently, services which provide direct physical assistance, services that support them emotionally and psychologically, services that give them information, or use information to lobby for their needs. We recognize that addressing vulnerability in this way will have a profound effect on all National Societies.

Wherever possible we will involve vulnerable people in the delivery of services, building on their capacities and recognizing the skills they can bring to the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

We will promote international humanitarian law and respect for the emblem, and the spirit that lies behind them. We will encourage the full implementation and understanding of that law in our own countries.

We will continue to support the actions of the ICRC and all components of the Movement in favour of victims of armed conflict and violence.

Platform for action in the Red Cross and Red Crescent

We will always link action to ideals. People coming into the National Societies should be inspired by our values and given the opportunity to put them into practice by providing vital services to the most vulnerable.

As National Society leaders we are the guardians of our mission. We recognize the need to constantly adjust our organizations and their services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people and to demonstrate responsibility in ensuring that our activities are in conformity with the Fundamental Principles and the Federation's Strategic Work Plan.

We are committed to high-quality leadership and recognize the need for leadership training in governance and management.

We will increase the awareness and commitment of National Society leadership to the need to integrate a gender perspective into our governance, management and actions.

We will encourage the participation of young people in the development of national plans of action, and are committed to the involvement of youth at all levels of our Societies.

We are committed to carrying out local and national vulnerability and capacity assessments and to sharing with one another our experiences of such assessments and their methodologies. We call upon the Federation's Secretariat to develop additional tools for carrying out such assessments and we commit ourselves to carrying out our own national assessments within the next five years.

We call upon the Secretary-General of the Federation to systematically develop the Secretariat's role as the architect of cooperation, thus supporting us in our endeavour to work as a Federation, and in establishing long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.

We will build partnerships between National Societies in Europe, partnerships based upon shared needs and support, not the one-way flow of finance. In particular, we will support the initiatives of the National Societies of the Commonwealth of Independent States to form partnership systems based on the Almaty Declaration.

We request the Secretary-General of the Federation to develop within the next six months a plan of action for the European National Societies and the Federation to address the impending health crisis in Europe. The plan of action should be presented to the Societies of the region through whom resources for its implementation will be secured.

Working with others

We will use our unique relationship with the governments of Europe to promote the interests of the continent's most vulnerable people and we will continue to appeal to the European Union to develop its funding mechanisms in favour of the most vulnerable people.

We need to clarify and understand the nature of our auxiliary role with governments today and the nature of our independence. All National Societies need an appropriate legal basis — in accordance with the principles of a well-functioning National Society — an active and appropriate volunteer base, good management, and responsible governance (the voluntary, elected governing body). We commit ourselves to thoroughly reviewing our legal status, volunteer base, management structures and governance mechanisms in the next five years.

Reliance on public and government donations to fund our work is no longer sufficient. We must rapidly seek new sources of revenue and be willing to explore commercial as well as non-commercial avenues of financial support, even though we recognize that there are risks in such a process. We must also develop and support global fund-raising initiatives from which all National Societies can benefit.

Special attention needs to be paid to the opportunities for the National Societies of Central and Eastern Europe. There, the corporate sector has grown to a level where it should be ready to contribute to humanitarian funding.

We will seek to ensure that our fund-raising work is carried out in the context of the code of ethics currently being developed for this purpose.

We will continue to vigorously support our sister Societies in other countries beyond Europe, with their institutional development and programmes for the most vulnerable.

The Conference requests the Secretary-General to investigate the practicality of organizing an annual high-level round table for media leaders, editors and journalists to share our common concerns on humanitarian issues.

Monitoring follow-up

We commit ourselves to taking this Declaration back to our own Societies and to working on its implementation.

The Conference requests the European members of the Executive Council to form a committee to monitor the follow-up of the Declaration.

We further request that the Conference Organizing Societies and the Secretary-General of the Federation put in place a plan of action and an appropriate support mechanism which will report to the monitoring committee on the follow-up of the Declaration.