

# THE XXII<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS

## Post-Conference Thoughts

### Exemplary organization

The Iranian Red Lion and Sun Society certainly did things properly: not only did it organize to perfection the conference for seven hundred participants; it spared no effort to create an atmosphere of cordiality and friendship. Incidentally, the Teheran conference centre is the equal of the official bodies of the international institutions; its staff is courteous, its hostesses efficient and charming, and the work is done smoothly and with a good grace.

Under the presidency of H.I.H. the Princess Chams Pahlavi, the Red Lion and Sun had done a fine job of preparation, for which the main responsibility was borne by H. E. Mr. Hossein Khatibi. The ICRC and League teams easily dovetailed into the whole system and proficiently discharged the essential functions devolving on them.

The meetings were held in the Majlis, the Parliament Building, with all necessary facilities and offices.

At the inauguration ceremony at the Opera, we were privileged to hear H.I.M. the Shahanshah Aryamehr deliver a speech full of wisdom and substance.<sup>1</sup>

H.E. Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda attended several meetings and delivered a message to the Conference closing session. At a magnificent reception in the Hilton, he greeted the Conference participants. A sumptuous dinner was offered by H.I.H. the

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<sup>1</sup> *International Review* published extracts last month, and others from speeches by Mr. Sharif-Emami, Lady Limerick, Dr. Eric Martin and Mr. José Barroso (*Ed.*).

Princess Chams Pahlavi, President of the Red Lion and Sun, while on another occasion the League and the ICRC invited all members to a cocktail in the Senate building. A word should also be said of the receptions organized by several embassies, the fully-booked excursions to Isfahan, a city of delightful charm, to Meched, a holy place of Islam, and to Persepolis whose ruins reveal Persia's privileged position as a meeting place of the great ancient civilizations.

In the course of the closing session, the ICRC President had the great privilege of announcing that the exchange of Israeli and Egyptian prisoners of war had begun, so that the Conference finished on a hopeful note. It certainly opened on an atmosphere of tension: the Middle East was plunged into war, and it had even been thought in some quarters that our international meeting would have to be called off. To do so would have been a mistake: the Red Cross must make itself heard, especially in conflicts and international tension.

### **Meetings**

After the Board of Governors and the Council of Delegates, the Conference met in plenary session under the chairmanship of H.E. Mr. Sharif-Emami, President of the Senate. It formed three commissions: the Commission on International Humanitarian Law, the General Commission, and the Commission on Community Services.

The Law Commission did good work. It usefully prepared for the Diplomatic Conference scheduled for February-March 1974 in Geneva, to discuss the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions.

The Commission on Community Services had recourse to a method which permitted a useful general discussion. It had prepared by working groups the following subjects: 1. Red Cross contribution to national development plans—community service (health, social work, youth); 2. the Red Cross and environment problems. Although it did not produce any new ideas, it did permit of a useful exchange of views among National Society representatives.

The General Commission devoted much of its time to discussions which were influenced by general political conditions. The introduction to the ICRC report, affirming the inviolability of the Conventions and their absolute character which admits of no conditional clauses and condemns bargaining, was applauded. In the discussions which followed, however, it was not always easy to have that principle confirmed in specific cases, in spite of its having been unanimously approved by the Commission. It is true that there was a noticeable desire prevailing in the meeting to be conciliatory and to remain true to the Red Cross principles, but often the underlying political tension prevented the passing of a truly satisfying resolution. As these discussions took no little time, the other agenda items—more specific to the Red Cross—unfortunately did not give rise to broad exchanges of views.

### **Remarks**

For a newly elected President of the ICRC it is difficult to form a well-grounded assessment of the usefulness of the Teheran Conference, as he has no standard of comparison. I may perhaps be permitted a few remarks nevertheless.

The duration of the Conference, eighteen days, seems too long. A fortnight should be enough. Participants were tired at the end of the session, which had lost some of its momentum.

Too much time was spent on elections; practical steps should be taken to shorten this procedure.

Too many subjects were discussed on several occasions by different organs. Valuable time was lost. Such repetition without any real purpose should be avoided.

No satisfactory understanding was reached on resolutions which should be better worded, shorter, and say only what is essential.

It may be difficult, but delegations should be given opportunities to exchange views and experience on Red Cross activities in such a way that the younger Societies may derive benefit from contact with those whose structure and tradition are strong. It is true that this occurs in regional meetings and in training courses organized by the League. Nevertheless, International Conferences could include on their agenda one or two items for discussion, introduced

by rapporteurs and about which views could be exchanged; one or more National Societies, for instance, could be appointed to present the chosen topics.

Less demanding meetings might permit informal contacts between delegates at less ceremonious receptions; talks would be possible on a more personal level.

From our Iranian friends we received particularly generous treatment. Some National Societies, bearing expense in mind, might hesitate to act as host to future Conferences. Could we not revert to a more simple standard?

In short, we must first thank the Iranian Red Lion and Sun for organizing, in difficult circumstances, an International Conference of the Red Cross which went off without a hitch, in an atmosphere of friendship, and which unquestionably produced worthwhile results. For the future, we must study how better to organize meetings and allocate subjects while shortening the session.

Everything should be done to maintain fully all Red Cross principles and the *raison d'être* of the International Conference of the Red Cross, now that it has become an international meeting like any other.

**Eric MARTIN**

President of the International Committee  
of the Red Cross

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## **The work of the Commissions**

### **GENERAL COMMISSION**

The Commission elected Sir Geoffrey Newman-Morris (Australia) as chairman, Dr. Werner Ludwig (German Democratic Republic) and Dr. Stephen Moosai-Maharaj (Trinidad and Tobago) as vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Fok Fook Choon (Singapore) as rapporteur.

A report on action taken pursuant to resolutions of the XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross was approved, as was