

The Emblem

Statement by Christina Magnuson, co-chair, Joint Working Group on the Emblem

Two years ago, the Council took an historic decision for the future of our Movement by mandating the Standing Commission to set up a joint working group, composed of representatives of both States and the Movement, responsible for finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of the emblem.

The working group has submitted its report to you and, as the group's co-chair, I should like to thank everyone who has taken an active and creative part in its work.

In terms of both procedure and substance, the working group's proposal is capable of achieving our objective, which is to allow the recognition and admission into our Movement of National Societies that have difficulty in using the existing emblems.

The proposed adoption of a protocol to the Geneva Conventions providing for an additional emblem devoid of any political, cultural or religious connotations will meet the requirements of those National Societies, while preventing a proliferation of emblems that would detract from their protective value.

Having submitted this overall proposal, the working group has fulfilled its mandate. Indeed, no one could criticize the group for not having foreseen that serious events in the Middle East would prevent completion of the process intended to culminate in a diplomatic conference in Geneva on 25 October 2000.

The postponing of the conference places us in the paradoxical position of having finally found a solution without being able to implement it, in the absence of ratification by the States. Should we conclude that this sends us back to square one? Is this another failure? Not at all. And there are several reasons why not.

- First, a majority of the governments with which we have been in close contact while working on the draft additional protocol agree that our objective would have been achieved last year had it not been for the events in the Middle East. The postponing of the

diplomatic conference calls into question neither the validity of the draft protocol, whose content has received wide support from the community of States, nor the relevance of the process initiated. If we are to resolve the emblem issue, there is currently no alternative to the proposed Protocol III.

- Second, the process has allowed us to get this matter onto the diplomatic agenda of the international community. The depositary State has sent each government a copy of the draft protocol with the request that they examine it, so that when the time comes it will be possible to re-launch the diplomatic process which, although suspended, is not dead.
- Third — and this is something I have observed personally during my many discussions with the National Societies — in the face of the challenges of a world torn apart by ethnic and religious conflicts, and in the face of fanatical acts of violence that some consider symptomatic of even more serious divisions, many National Societies are now aware that it has become more urgent than ever for our Movement to achieve true and unassailable universality, in full accordance with our fundamental principles. Preserving and strengthening the unity of our Movement is of crucial importance in this context. With so many threats looming over us, the very survival of the human values we seek to defend, the values that guide our work, depend on this unity.
- Fourth, we must recognize that in a number of conflicts the red cross and red crescent emblems are perceived by the combatants and the local people as having a religious connotation that we never intended. This problem has very grave consequences for the safety of our delegates and of all the volunteers in our Movement, and it also hampers their work. The adoption of an additional emblem with no political, cultural or religious connotations would therefore respond to pressing operational imperatives. We would gain an additional instrument, one that we desperately need so that we can act more effectively in such situations.

In this Council I do not need to remind you of our responsibilities of disseminating the distinction between the two aspects of our emblems: the indicative and the protective aspects. But the continuous

lack of knowledge and misunderstandings of this most important element of our uniqueness as humanitarian organisations force us to, again and again, explain to our partners and indeed to everybody outside our movement, the difference between the two.

These considerations strengthen my conviction that we must continue on our present path. The horrific events of September 11 and their tragic consequences which we are seeing unfold every day before our eyes — in particular the threat of polarization between nations and peoples — serve to confirm my belief that our Movement and the international community as a whole more than ever need a comprehensive and lasting solution to the emblem issue, that is, the adoption of an additional emblem free of any political, cultural or religious connotation. We must therefore move forward with determination, building on the very substantial progress already achieved. And we must take the two types of action indicated by the Standing Commission in the draft resolution submitted for your approval.

The first is to demonstrate strongly and with one voice, support for the draft additional protocol, to act as its advocates in our contacts with governments and to remind them that this is an issue of the greatest significance for the future of our Movement, its credibility and the effectiveness of its work. By adopting this common approach, we will help maintain the momentum of the process and we will prepare States to react immediately to a renewed invitation to a diplomatic conference. While it is true that the situation in the Middle East dictates caution, as resumption of the diplomatic process is still held hostage by the tragic events that started in September 2000, it is also true that in their efforts to find a solution to the emblem question the components of the Movement must not align their positions with those taken by governments in reaction to these very serious developments. The emblem issue must not be allowed to stir up emotion if our emblems are to remain the symbols of humanity, neutrality, solidarity and peace in the midst of conflict.

The second type of action involves our Movement itself. Until the new protocol has been ratified we should, without departing from our Statutes, take concrete measures to establish and develop closer and more brotherly relations with those National Societies which, for

reasons related to the emblem, or for other reasons, cannot today become the full members of our Movement we would wish them to be. We must invite them to work with us in the field, we must consult them, share our concerns with them, help them to develop, and support their activities.

In this spirit, we say to our friends the Eritrean, Israeli, Kazakh and Palestinian societies: we know you share our ideals, we have seen the commitment of your volunteers. We are happy to see you among us in this Council of Delegates.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Emblem

Statement by Jacques Forster, Vice-President, International Committee of the Red Cross

First of all, I would like to heartily congratulate the members of the Joint Working Group on the Emblem, set up by the Standing Commission pursuant to Resolution 2 of the 1999 Council of Delegates, for their remarkable achievements. In just a few months, they devised a comprehensive and lasting solution to the emblem question, which is likely to bring about a broad consensus; they proposed a widely accepted shape and name, the red crystal; they placed their solution within a legal framework that has received substantial support, namely the draft Third Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, an instrument with which you are all familiar; and they led the negotiations that garnered the support of the majority of States and National Societies. More progress was made on this issue in just a few months than in all the preceding years. A diplomatic conference was convened to examine and adopt the Third Additional Protocol, and success was within reach, when the resumption of hostilities in the Middle East brought the consultation process to a temporary halt.

The ICRC nevertheless remains convinced of the relevance of the path chosen by the Joint Working Group, that is the adoption of a