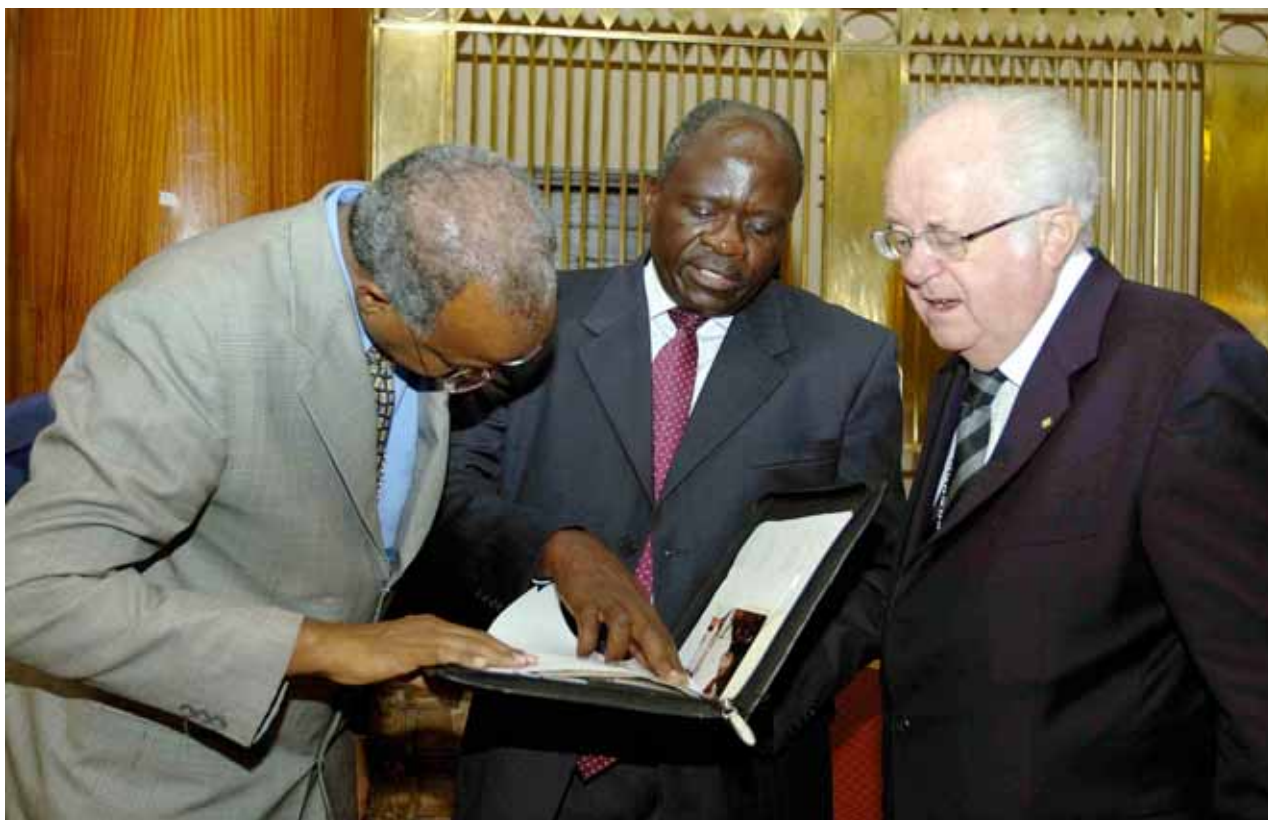




Daily Bulletin

ICRC Restoring Family Links Conference, Nairobi 2006



Abbas Gullet, Secretary-General of the Kenyan Red Cross (left) hosts the first regional RFL conference, which was formally opened in Nairobi on Wednesday by Kenyan vice-president Dr. Moody Awori. Here with Abbas at the opening are Francis Okello, chairman of Barclays Bank of Kenya, and conference chairman Dr. Jacques Moreillon, member of the ICRC.

“A hint of the immense need for an effective network”

“Africa continues to witness too many situations resulting in the separation and disintegration of families: upsurges in conflict and political tension across the continent. Many families have no closure in the aftermath and for them the agony will never end,” said the Hon. Dr. Moody Awori, Vice President of Kenya, at the opening of the regional Restoring Family Links conference in Nairobi on Wednesday.

He reminded the 70 conference delegates from across Africa that Kenya was still a host to thousands of refugees from its neighboring countries, many of whom had no recollection of their roots, having been born and raised in refugee camps. “The deep-rooted African concept of extended families continues to be fragmented,” he said.

“These and many more situations give a hint of the immense need to have a well functioning Red Cross/Red Crescent family restoration network.”

He concluded his opening remarks by saying: “It is now up to the governments in Africa to play a facilitative role by supporting the international and domestic humanitarian organizations to carry out their humanitarian assistance without restrictions.

As governments we must be committed to respecting and upholding human rights by ensuring that both domestic and international human rights defenders have full and unhindered access to all areas of support and assistance.”

An unofficial bulletin for delegates to the first regional RFL conference; not an official record.

The aim of the Movement RFL strategy

'Strengthen the network and improve service delivery'

The Movement RFL Strategy 2008-2018 grows out of the *Agenda for Humanitarian Action* adopted by the International RC/RC Conference in 2003. The draft up for debate at the four regional conferences aims at strengthening the overall response capacity of the Movement – the ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation. Following the regional conferences, and continued consultation within the Movement, the final strategy is expected to be adopted by the Council of Delegates meeting at the end of 2007.

Renée Zellweger Monin, the ICRC's deputy head of the Central Tracing Agency, gave a comprehensive overview of the ongoing process and the draft strategy at the opening of the regional conference in Nairobi on Wednesday.

"The aim is to strengthen the existing family link network and improve our service delivery around the world," she said.

"Large scale emergencies are more complex than they once were. Many people have no idea where parents, sisters or brothers have fled, are being held in prison or are lying dead under the rubble. The Movement is determined to do more to trace and restore contact with people who are still alive and throw light on the fate of those who are not.

The family links network, however, has major weaknesses. There is often little programme ownership and lack of shared vision of what the network should and could be. Important differences exist in terms of resources available to the different components.

The family links network is an asset but we do not always give it its full value. We need to explore ways to improve our capacities. That is what we are here for," said Renée Zellweger Monin.



Renée Zellweger Monin (left) discusses the draft strategy with Frieda Draisma, delegate of the Mozambique Red Cross.



Together again...

A beautiful task

"Restoring family links is a beautiful task. Not restoring them is a tragedy for those who suffer from separation."

Dr. Jacques Moreillon, member of the ICRC and Chairperson of the Conference, asked the delegates to use this statement as the *leitmotiv* for the conference.

To illustrate his request, he shared a personal anecdote with the audience. As the former Delegate General of the ICRC for Africa in the early 1970s he visited many prisons across the continent, among them Robben Island in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela was held at the time. The two men came to know each other well.

Dr. Moreillon remembers being disappointed during his last visit, as some of the recommendations on how to improve the conditions of the detainees had not been followed by the authorities. He therefore asked Nelson Mandela whether the ICRC should possibly suspend the visits until improvements had been obtained.

Mandela responded, "No, never do that! Always remember that what matters is not only the good you bring, but also the bad you possibly prevent," said the world's then most famous political prisoner.

This should be remembered by the conference delegates. "We have to keep our minds focused," said Dr. Moreillon, on "preventing the bad."

The strategic vision

"Whenever people need to restore family links, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement responds quickly and efficiently."

Closer cooperation needed

"With the strategy being presented and debated here, the International Federation commits itself to encouraging the inclusion of tracing activities in all National Societies' development plans," said Getachew Ta'a, the Federation's Head of Regional delegation (a.i.) for Eastern Africa in Nairobi in his opening remarks on Wednesday.

"The Federation will need to work closely with its member societies to ensure that their disaster preparedness plans emphasize the role and importance of tracing, and that the need for RFL in emergencies is reflected and ensured in the process of evaluating and assessing responses," Getachew Ta'a said.

"This can only happen if it is effectively backed by a close working relationship between the Federation and the ICRC at all levels, including cooperation in the field."



Sharing views in groups

The bulk of the work of the regional RFL conference in Nairobi will take place on Thursday morning, when the delegates will break into three groups to discuss the strategic objectives of the draft RFL strategy.

The groups will work into the afternoon. After lunch the 'Conference Bureau', i.e. the rapporteurs, will meet to discuss the outcome of the working groups and draft the Conference Report and Recommendations.

On Friday, the report and recommendations will be presented to the whole conference, a debate should follow before adoption and closure around noon.

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or visit our special ICRC webpage on family links: www.icrc.org/eng/rfl-conferences



Delegates from Eritrea and Ethiopia exchange views and news during the conference. Families in both countries have experienced loss and separation due to conflict.

Testimony

The Kenyan daughter in Prague

Francis Okello, the chairman of Barclays Bank Kenya was a guest at the opening of the conference on Wednesday and shared a personal story that demonstrates how severed links between family members touch every strata of society, the value of the RFL programme – and the fact that it does not always take conflict or disasters to cut the links.

"My elder brother went to study in the former Czechoslovakia between 1962 and 1970," Mr. Okello said. "The fruit of his relationship with a Czech woman was a daughter. My brother had to leave the country when the child was only 5 years old. Unfortunately the contact with her was not maintained and my brother had no news of his daughter for many years.

In the meantime the child was growing up but did not know where her father was and how to find him. As her mother did not help her, she decided to approach the hospital where she was born and found out that her father was from Kenya. She then approached the Czech Red Cross and asked for help to trace her father.

The Czech Red Cross referred the case to the Kenyan Red Cross and they traced my brother last March. Since then many e-mails have been exchanged between him and his daughter and our entire family is very happy that the contact was reestablished. We have invited our newly found daughter to Kenya and are currently organizing her trip," concluded Francis Okello.

Strategic objectives

- Improving capacity and performance in restoring family links
- Enhancing coordination mechanisms and the effectiveness of Movement cooperation
- Strengthening responsibility of the Movement in restoring family links