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Council of Delegates opens in Seoul Growing challenge of protecting human dignity heads agenda

In his welcoming address during the opening ceremony of the Council of Delegates, the president of the Republic of Korea National Red Cross, Han Wan-Sang, highlighted the fact that access to needy people is imperative for the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

“Drawing on our collective experience and wisdom, we must find desirable and effective ways to realize our commonly-held vision,” he said.



General photo of delegates at the Council of Delegates

“Allow me to share my national and international vision”, he said, “which is to cultivate a life-garden of human flowers where the next generation will grow in an atmosphere of hope and joy.”

The importance of the effective implementation of the Movement’s humanitarian mission was further highlighted in the address by Mohammed Al-Hadid, chairman of the Standing

Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, who urged delegates to concentrate to find appropriate and effective solutions to the new and emerging humanitarian challenges on behalf of vulnerable people.

“We should not lose sight of the fact that only action with an impact, focused on real needs and carried out in a professional, credible and coordinated way can in the long run further strengthen our position – and bring the much needed resources”, he said.

Every two years the Council of Delegates brings together all Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to debate and agree action points to implement their global humanitarian mission.

Referring to the work of his National Society, Han Wan-Sang said they had been guided by the humanitarian spirit for 100 years despite the ongoing challenges to the people of the Korean peninsula.



Han Wan-Sang, President, the Republic of Korea National Red Cross.

Toe Kyung Rhu



Mohammed Al-Hadid, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Mohammed Al-Hadid spoke of the importance of involving young people and the

strength gained from highly-motivated and committed volunteers and staff.

"I see potential for much stronger regional cooperation, taking responsibility for development, building on common cultural values and knowledge of local circumstances," he said.

Declaring the Council of Delegates officially open, under the theme of Protecting Human Dignity, he called on the Movement to build on its current reputation and become an even stronger humanitarian force in the new Millennium.

The Council of Delegates then elected as chairman, Jakob Kellenberger, president of

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Jakob Kellenberger, President, ICRC (and Chairman of Council of Delegates)

the ICRC, and as vice chairman, Han Wan-Sang, president of the Republic of Korea National Red Cross. ■

Humanitarian actors alone cannot ensure the protection of civilians in war

In her guest keynote speech to the Council of Delegates, the president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Sadako Ogata, said humanitarian actors striving to alleviate human suffering while ensuring respect for human rights and humanitarian law face serious challenges. She highlighted terrorism as one of the main threats in today's complex environment. States, she argued, should be given effective tools to confront this threat. Yet they "should also be bound by existing sets of norms and laws particularly the Geneva Conventions that constrain their use of force and their conduct in war."

The former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deplored continued attacks on humanitarian workers and highlighted the danger to the security of civilians presented by the militarization of refugee camps as was the case in the Great Lakes region of Africa in the 1990s.

For humanitarian organizations to succeed in this challenging environment they

must be clear about their objectives and the means employed to achieve them. Mrs. Ogata identified the protection of civilian victims of war including refugees and internally displaced persons as the essence of humanitarian action.

To achieve this, humanitarian organizations must work in the field alongside those they are trying to help and activities such as distributing relief aid must be rooted in the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. "Timely and effective delivery is always necessary, but distribution has to be based on the needs of the victims, not on political expediency."

But humanitarian actors alone cannot ensure the protection of civilians in war. In the Balkans and the Great Lakes the lesson to be drawn was that "humanitarian problems cannot be tackled through humanitarian means alone and that the underlying political and security problems must be addressed by political leaders with military support



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Sadako Ogata, Japan International Cooperation Agency.

when necessary." Mrs. Ogata also stressed the importance of cooperation between humanitarian actors and human rights organizations, not only to address existing crises better but also to prevent conflicts from developing in the first place.

Protecting civilians requires human rights advocacy based on the quick and decisive public exposure of violations but also humanitarian action that entails being close to the victims in efforts to ameliorate their plight, even if this means negotiating with perpetrators. ■

Addressing today's humanitarian challenges

Speaking at the opening plenary session of the Council of Delegates, Susan Johnson, the Federation's director of operations, referred to the Federation's commitment to scale up operations within the framework of a Global Agenda.

The key issue, Susan Johnson said, was how to achieve it. The answer was better access to all communities, a more integrated and longer-term approach to helping people, such as supporting and developing livelihoods as well as the development of new approaches, new skills and new resources.

She also stressed the importance of an international presence. "We must remember that neutrality does not mean silence. We must call attention to needs and press governments to live up to their own obligations to their citizens."

Susan Johnson underlined the need to work together effectively and efficiently, both within the Movement and with other partners, and to forge operational alliances, with the host National Society clearly in a leadership role.

She reiterated the need to protect the ICRC's special mandate and encourage governments to respect the ICRC's role and the Geneva Conventions.

"We need unhindered access to those people we are mandated to serve. The foundation of our Red Cross Red Crescent action rests on our continued ability, in increasingly politicized and militarized contexts, to be and to be seen as neutral and independent humanitarian actors," Ms. Johnson pursued. She also reaffirmed the need to avoid too close relationships with military or partner governments, which could jeopardize the Movement's perceived neutrality and impartiality. We must, she explained, ensure the independence of National Societies is respected by their public authorities and that partnerships with other humanitarian actors safeguard the special nature of the Red and Red Crescent Movement. ■



Susan Johnson, director of operations at the International Federation.

Joe Kyung Rhu

Challenges of a shifting conflict environment

In his opening speech to the Council, Pierre Krähenbühl, the ICRC's director of operations, gave a detailed analysis of recent evolutions in armed conflict, and the challenges they now present to the Red Cross Red Crescent.

He described a shift in the nature of armed conflicts, most of which are now internal, often characterized by a crisis of legitimacy of the State and involving a greater diversity of warring parties with equally diverse objectives. Conflicts also last longer and initially political motives degenerate into plundering and anarchy. The local, regional and global factors affecting conflicts have become more intertwined.

The situation is complicated by other elements such as the 'war on terror', widespread proliferation of weapons, mass

migration, competition for resources and a collapse of public services.

He recognized that there had been a marked improvement in a number of conflicts in terms of "stabilization, containment or transition", although large-scale operations had stretched the resources of the international community.

Six main challenges

"The overriding challenge," according to Pierre Krähenbühl, "is to address the multiple needs of populations affected by extremely diverse situations of conflict and violence, and to respond rapidly and effectively to new emergencies."

This required action by the Red Cross and Red Crescent in six main areas: ensuring a professional response to needs, taking a universal humanitarian



Pierre Krähenbühl, director of operations at the ICRC

Joe Kyung Rhu

approach, providing good security management involving a "constant search for dialogue with all actors in a conflict", safeguarding neutral and independent humanitarian action, defining a clear and distinct role when working with the UN and other bodies, and strengthening coordination within the Red Cross Red Crescent network. ■

Customary law and weapons

The first debate in the Council was on the promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL). Delegates were presented with two documents, with resolutions, prepared by the ICRC, one covering customary IHL and the other, weapons and IHL.

Customary IHL

In introducing the recently-published study on customary IHL, ICRC director, François Bugnion, said that its length, over 5,000 pages, should not conceal its importance. It reaches back to the very roots of IHL.

Treaty law, he pointed out, is well developed although limited to the States that have ratified such law and to any armed opposition groups active within them. Customary law, on the other hand, is less well known, but is binding on all States.

The study on customary IHL is the first of its kind. It is the result of almost ten years of research into the "widespread, representative and uniform practice of States" that has established a body of customary law. It was undertaken as the request of the 26th International Conference in 1995.

The study shows:

- That agreement on the rules and principles contained in humanitarian treaty law is more widespread than the ratification of those treaties would lead one to believe. There exists an extensive body of law common to all States that forms customary international humanitarian law.
- That the framework applicable to current non-international armed conflicts has been strengthened and is more extensive than that contained in treaty law.
- That many of the rules applicable to internal armed conflicts are the same as those applicable to international armed conflicts. The same rules have to be respected in any armed conflict.

François Bugnion said the publication of the study was just the beginning of a process to develop understanding and application of customary law. He hoped it would form the basis for "a rich discussion on the implementation, clarification and possible development of the law".

Weapons and IHL

Jean-Philippe Lavoyer, the head of the ICRC's legal division, introduced the document that outlined the main developments that have taken place since the Council's last meeting and the opportunities for action over the next two years.

It refers to the crucial role played by the ICRC and National Societies in the adoption, in November 2003, of the new Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War. Governments are still considering further regulations, including restrictions on the use of sub munitions and a possible new protocol on anti-vehicle mines. The

Third Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in late 2006 will provide opportunities to raise awareness of the Convention, to promote adherence and to introduce new issues.

The terrible human costs of the unregulated availability and frequent misuse of small arms and light weapons have received increased international attention and States have taken some steps to strengthen con-

trols. Further measures could include, in particular, enhanced national arms transfer regulations, global controls on arms brokers and common standards for international arms transfers. The ICRC and National Societies have opportunities to advance these proposals in 2006.

The ICRC has continued to promote awareness of the risk that advances in the life sciences may be put to hostile use and of the need for preventive action especially by governments, industry and the scientific community. The review conference of the Biological Weapons Convention in 2006 will be of paramount importance and National Societies can help by involving their governments, scientific associations and industry in this process.

Jean-Philippe Lavoyer also announced that the ICRC is about to publish a *Guide to Legal Reviews of New Weapons, Means and Methods of Warfare*. ■

Centennial concert



The centennial anniversary of the Republic of Korea National Red Cross was marked by outstanding performances at Tuesday night's concert. Guests were entertained in wonderful fashion by some of the most prominent artists in Korea. The Korean Symphony Orchestra, led by the renowned conductor Sung Kwak and brilliant violinist Chee-Yun, set the scene for exceptional performances by the soprano, Young-Mi Kim and the tenor, Nam-Du Kim. The programme included pieces from Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Puccini and Rossini.