

daily bulletin

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Protection of women in war an obligation

“Protection of women in war is an obligation, not an aspiration.” These were the words of the ICRC’s president, Jakob Kellenberger on the occasion of the opening of the Women facing War photo exhibition during the 28th International Conference.

The *Women Facing War* project came into being following the ICRC’s pledge to the 27th International Conference in 1999 to ensure due respect for women and girls and better assessment of their needs throughout its activities, placing particular emphasis on the prohibition of all forms of sexual violence.

Cont. p5



Queen Rania with the Presidents of ICRC and the Federation
 at the opening of the photo exhibition

Election of chairman

The first plenary session of the 28th International Conference elected Jaime Ricardo Fernandez Urriola (Panama Red Cross) as conference chairman.

Four conference vice-chairmen were also elected: Ambassador Yolande Biké (Gabon), Abdelkader Boukhroufa (Red Crescent – Algeria), Hisham Harun Hashim (Red Crescent – Malaysia) and René Rhinow (Red Cross – Switzerland).

Ambassador Johan Molander of Sweden was elected chairman of the conference drafting committee. Norma Nascimbene de Dumont (Argentina), Ambassador Valentina

Rugwabiza (Rwanda) and Dr Heike Spieker (Red Cross – Germany) were elected committee vice-chairwomen.

Ambassador Amina Chawahir Mohamed (Kenya) and Martine Letts (Red Cross - Australia) were elected chairwomen of commissions A and B respectively which will hold discussions on the final Conference Declaration and the Agenda for Humanitarian Action.

The plenary session also elected Ambassador Thomas Kupfer (Switzerland) as secretary general of the conference and Marie Gervais-Vidricaire (Canada) as its rapporteur.

Hidden threats cause immeasurable suffering

Juan Manuel Suárez del Toro, president of the International Federation urged participants at the International Conference to remember that people, not abstract concepts, are the true subjects of discussion in the days ahead.

Suárez del Toro acknowledged the radically changed landscape in which humanitarian work must now be done and pointed to the alarming erosion of respect for the impartial work of alleviating suffering. "One of the most disturbing trends we have seen in recent years has been the politicization of humanitarian assistance," he asserted. "Too often the flow of humanitarian assistance is determined by media attention and political concerns, rather than on the basis of who is most vulnerable or has the most need."

Suárez del Toro stressed that hidden threats, those that are not deemed newsworthy but are instead the cause of everyday misery – forgotten conflict, poverty, inequity and discrimination – cause immeasurable suffering.



Chris Black/Federation

He also named disease and disaster as among the most serious threats to human dignity.

"Disasters and disease not only destroy lives but also increase the vulnerability of entire populations by undermining development gains, unraveling social structures and reducing the ability of communities to cope with crises," he noted, adding the bur-

den of these two evils falls disproportionately on the poor and the marginalized.

Suárez del Toro talked of the stigma and discrimination against those who live with HIV and AIDS, and admitted that the Federation has had to confront its own fears and attitudes when initiating care and support programmes. He stressed that the global community's commitment to the crisis remains "woefully inadequate," and called for increased funding for intervention.

As with disease, an effective plan to reduce suffering from disasters must include both better response mechanisms and stronger planning and prevention. Suárez del Toro stated improvements to policies, laws and procedures would be instrumental in saving lives and alleviating destruction.

"These threats to human dignity are not new. Simple investments, even small ones, can pay huge dividends in protecting human dignity," he said. "The challenges we face are enormous, even overwhelming. But they are not insurmountable." The solution, he concluded, lies in working in partnership with governments and civil society. ■



Thorir Gudmundsson/Federation

Existing rules will work for new challenges

Chris Black/Federation



The basic nature of war has not changed, but the challenges of contemporary armed conflict and a disregard for international law increasingly threaten human lives and human dignity. Dr. Jakob Kellenberger, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), made this point during his keynote address on Wednesday morning.

He condemned the growing trend, particularly in internal conflicts, that attacks on civilians and property now occur “not only as an indirect effect of combat, but as its very objective.” Kellenberger expressed his outrage at the murders of ICRC staff, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society volunteers, and members of any other humanitarian organization.

He also noted that suffering outlives armed conflict, especially when a country’s natural resources garner more attention than its population’s needs. Too often, conflict’s legacy is a lack of access to medical care, water and knowledge about missing loved ones, as well as ongoing

friction between factions and explosive remnants of war.

Kellenberger did describe successes. He noted the increased number of nations bound by the instruments of humanitarian law, and detailed specific areas in which the ICRC has

improved its understanding and consequently its operations, such as the impact of war on women and girls. However, he cautioned: “These positive points cannot mask the scale or the persistence of the suffering.”

Kellenberger also spoke of the difficulties brought about by the changing dimension of terrorism. While he acknowledged the

“criminal blindness” of those who commit acts of terror and the necessity to fight against it, he strongly charged that “this must not undermine the values on which society must be founded – in particular the respect for IHL and the preservation of human dignity.”

He continued: “Never before have the means of warfare – whether conventional weapons or so-called weapons of mass destruction – been available to such a broad range of groups. The lack of effective controls on the availability of arms and on the development of new weapons constitutes a genuine menace for humanity.”

The ICRC remains convinced, he said, that international humanitarian law in its current form, while not perfect or immutable, is more than adequate as a legal basis to respond to the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts. He committed the ICRC to continued efforts to maintain the relevance and advocate for the implementation of international humanitarian law. And he called upon States to meet their obligations by respecting the integrity of the law. ■



Thierry Gassmann/ICRC

Workshops get underway

At the end of the first plenary session of the conference delegates had the opportunity to attend four of the eleven workshops planned during the week. These are not part of the formal agenda of the conference but allow discussion on a range of very specific issues, in an open environment, which could nevertheless contribute to the deliberations of the drafting committee on the final outcome of the conference – *the declaration and Agenda for Humanitarian Action*.

Workshop 1 on international humanitarian law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts.

This workshop was organized by the Swiss government and the ICRC and chaired by Ambassador Paul Seger, director of international law in the Swiss department of foreign affairs. Invited speakers included Professor Marco Sassòli of Quebec university, Brigadier Titus Githiora, chief legal advisor in the Kenyan defence department, Dr. Jean-Marie Henckaerts of the ICRC's legal division, Dr Kak-Soo Shin, director-general of the treaties division of the Republic of Korea's foreign ministry and François Bugnion, the ICRC's director of international law.

The workshop discussed clarifying the challenges to legal definitions in armed conflict, ways of enhancing the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, customary IHL and the means of improving compliance of IHL.

Till Meyer/Federation



Workshop 2 on children and armed conflict – protecting and rebuilding young lives.

This workshop was organized by the Human Security Network (Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa as an observer, Switzerland and Thailand) in cooperation with the Canadian Red Cross.

It was chaired by Georg Mautner-Markhof in the Austrian ministry of foreign affairs. Invited speakers included Sylvia Ladame, policy advisor on children and war at the ICRC, Eric Laroche a deputy-director at UNICEF, Judi Fairholm, national manager of the Canadian Red Cross' RespectED programme and Anica Mikus-Kos director of Slovenia's child rehabilitation centre.

The workshop discussed practical difficulties in child protection in armed conflicts, possible new approaches to overcome them, ways of improving cooperation between the actors involved and child rights training.

Workshop 3 on National Societies in civil-military cooperation.

The workshop was organized by the Red Cross Societies of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, the governments of Denmark and Germany and the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV) of Bochum University, Germany.

It was chaired by Professor Horst Fischer, executive director of IFHV. Invited speakers included Gerhard Putman-Cramer from OCHA, Major-general Per Ludvigsen of the Danish defence command, Johanna Van Sambeek, director of international relations at the Netherlands Red Cross, Susanne Wasum-Rainer of the German foreign office, Max S. Johnson, legal advisor at SHAPE, NATO headquarters and Mark Payne, also for SHAPE.

The aim was to consider the challenges and conditions for civil and military cooperation, the concerns of those involved and the specific question of such action in the area of protection.

Workshop 4 on biotechnology, weapons and humanity.

The workshop was organized by the Canadian Red Cross with support from the Norwegian Red Cross and the Canadian and Norwegian governments.

It was chaired by Jonas Gahr Store, secretary-general of the Norwegian Red Cross. Invited speakers included Peter Herby from the ICRC's mines-arms unit, Professor Malcolm Dando from Bradford university in the United Kingdom and Bob Lawson, senior policy advisor in the Canadian foreign affairs ministry.

It aimed to identify risks in the evolution of new technologies, prevention of their misuse, promoting the ICRC's initiative in this area, and the establishment of effective controls and national implementation in conformity with IHL.

A report on the outcome of all 11 workshops will be presented to the last plenary of the conference.

Correction

Correction: Please note that a quote attributed to Julian Hovs in yesterday's bulletin should have read "Access to antiretrovirals for my brothers and sisters living with HIV/AIDS is needed now".

Broad perspective on human dignity

In their interventions during the deliberations on human dignity Wednesday morning, representatives from States and National Societies touched on a broad range of issues that are central to the protection of people worldwide. Disease, especially HIV/AIDS, disaster management, terrorism, armed conflict, gender and social power imbalances, risk reduction, access to resources and improved capacity were all addressed. Many echoed the concerns expressed by the keynote speakers about the respect for international humanitarian law and lauded the goal of maintaining independence and credibility in a challeng-

ing world. All concurred that security for humanitarian workers is paramount.

The World Food Programme and the World Health Organization shared their perspectives on delivering assistance in an increasingly dangerous world, and praised the work of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. Noting the similar ideals that inform the activities of these organizations, each expressed a desire to work in closer coordination with Movement players. ■

Continued from p1

Four years on, the ICRC has implemented a number of measures in an effort to fulfill that pledge. It has conducted a study *Women Facing War*, produced

films and fact sheets, participated in conferences and made representations to governments and parties to conflicts to raise awareness of the adverse effects of armed conflict on women. Kellenberger nevertheless lamented the fact that although laws exist to protect women, failure to implement them was a persistent problem.



The Women and War photo exhibition, whose patron is Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan, is part of the effort to protect and assist women in war.

Opening the exhibition, Queen Rania lauded the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, noting "In wars and famines, outbreaks of disease, and earthquakes, the Red Cross and Red Crescent are always there - putting lives on the line for others, replacing horror with hope."

The photo exhibition is an eloquent testimony to the many facets of women's experiences of armed conflict and to their resilience. The Queen evoked this when she said, "How can we comprehend the strength of the human spirit? For in the faces of the women in these photos, and the words alongside their images, we witness their struggles, their sorrow, but also their will to carry on. From female amputees in Angola, awaiting medical care, to Bosnian women, praying at a memorial for missing relatives, they seem to be saying, 'We will not give up, so don't give up on us'."

She ended her opening remarks with an impassioned plea, "Let us offer the women in these photos our promise: We see you. And we care." ■



Chris Black/Federation

"Face the challenges" conference told

In his speech to the first plenary session, Jan Egeland, of the United Nations Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, brought the Conference warm greetings from the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan. The UN totally subscribes, he told delegates, to the call of ICRC to rally round in times of new conflict. "We can either face the challenges, or ignore them" he added.

Egeland said that it is all too easy to forget that human dignity is the central pillar of humanitarian endeavour, though we often see it as the movement of goods. We should construct a stronger humanitarian agenda with human dignity at its heart. In addition he warned governments that they must provide a secure environment for humanitarian workers, and must be aware of, and do more to prevent attacks on humanitarian workers.

He did not confine his diagnosis to conflict, however. "In 2003 there are still countless forgotten victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other diseases. Moreover, seven times more people are affected by natural disaster than by conflict."

He also expressed concern about the funding of humanitarian work in the future. "The rapidly growing economies of Asia and South America must accept responsibility for a proportion of the cost of humanitarian intervention in proportion to their share of the global economy," he said. "It is wrong that the top 10 contributors include among their number some countries which have shrinking shares of the world's economy."

Tom Buruku, President of the Uganda Red Cross, assured Egeland that national societies will work hard to maintain good relations with the UN for the benefit of the peoples of the world. It is imperative, he told delegates, that there is a more effective relationship between governments and national societies, and better understanding of the societies' role as auxiliaries of government.

Mrs Anne Petitpierre, Vice President of the ICRC, told delegates that the goal of the draft conference declaration is simply "to protect human dignity". She reminded delegates that the increasingly serious violation of IHL affects the most vulnerable. All necessary action, she added, should be taken against those who perpetrate these violations. Petitpierre went on to insist that protection against infringements of IHL should be universal: those who break the law deserve punishment, no matter what side they are on.

Dr Kak-Soo Shin, from the Republic of Korea's foreign ministry, spoke of the increase in conflict since the release of ethnic, religious and racial hatred kept dormant during the Cold War. He spoke of the extensive loss of life and property, and said that terrorism and the war against terrorism requires us to bring this type of conflict into line with IHL. Since 1990, he said, nearly five million civilians had died in conflict, nearly 90 per cent of the total casualties - most of these being women and children.

The matter is urgent, though IHL faces the impediment of poor awareness, notably among soldiers and opinion makers, and belligerent parties prefer to avoid the responsibility of compliance. The political will must be created, he stated, so that governments and armed groups respect IHL. Public opinion must be mobilized to disseminate IHL, and at the end of conflict the means to bring to justice those who do not comply must be strengthened. "It is vital," he ended, "that the international community use its best efforts to deal with the results of breaches of IHL." ■

Today's Health Tip

To prevent headaches

Be properly hydrated (drink up to three litres of water per day). Get plenty of fresh air. Splash fresh water on your face regularly. Spend sometime alone in a quiet dark place. Breathe slowly and deeply.

Thierry Gessmann/ICRC



Delegates are kindly requested to empty their pigeon holes on a daily basis.

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