

daily bulletin

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Commission hears "AIDS most serious threat to human dignity"

"The issue is to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS on vulnerable people", said Dr Tito Fachi, President of the Zambia Red Cross Society, at the start of a powerful address to the Commission. "It is the most serious threat to human dignity." In 2002, he told delegates, there were five million new infections around the world, and three million died of the disease, the highest annual figures yet seen. Now 40 million people live with HIV/AIDS, 95 per cent from developing countries, 75 per cent of them in Sub-Saharan Africa. "This pandemic threatens the viability of our societies, but worse, it even threatens the viability of our countries."

People will continue to die until drugs are freely available, he insisted. Also in 2002, six million people in developing countries need antiretroviral drugs urgently, over four million in Sub-Saharan Africa. "But only 50,000 get them, less than one per cent of those in need. We can't allow this to continue," he said.

Dr Fachi went on to discuss the groups he identifies as vulnerable – women and children; migrants, prisoners and the internally displaced; people living with HIV/AIDS; and the general population. He reminded delegates that in Sub-Saharan Africa HIV is mostly transmitted by heterosexual contact, which puts the whole of society at risk.

Anandi Yuvaraj, of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, said that she has been living with HIV for seven years. She made a very telling point when she said:



Princess Astrid of Belgium signs the Belgian Red Cross pledge on HIV/AIDS watched by Ambassador Michel Adam.

"Stigma and discrimination kills us before AIDS does." And the worst discrimination, she noted, takes place in the health-care setting. "The denial of treatment, including anti-retroviral drugs, is discrimination" she added.

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Here, she feels, is where Red Cross and Red Crescent can make a real difference. It must update the skills of medical workers to end discrimination. There is a huge gap of knowledge, she said, between clients and healthcare workers. To be an active partner in the management of their own treatment is important for people living with HIV/AIDS, and with their knowledge and experience these people can play an important role in combating the disease. "We can be part of the solution".

Marika Fahlen, director of social mobilization and information for UNAIDS, spoke of the improved methods of establishing with accuracy the spread of the virus, and added further challenging statistics. UNAIDS latest figures show that there are 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS, an annual increase of five million. The rate of increase is growing, she said, with no check in the rate of new infections in Sub-Saharan Africa. The one encouraging number concerns young women between 15 and 24 years of age in urban areas in some developing countries, where

there has been a small decline in the rate of growth. But to illustrate the dramatic spread of the disease, Ms Fahlen pointed out that the number of new infections in 2002 was the entire number of cases just 15 years ago.

Access to appropriate facilities across the world is dismal, according to Ms Fahlen. Only one person in nine has access to testing, and care for orphans is non-existent, even though there are 14 million children in the world orphaned by HIV/AIDS; a figure which will rise to 20 million in the next seven years.

She spoke then of the huge cost of combating HIV/AIDS. "When UNAIDS was set up in 1996, some US\$200 million was available annually. Now the annual sum is US\$5 billion, though that is only half what is needed for prevention, access to drugs and education. By 2007 no less than US\$15 billion will be needed each year, and that level will have to be maintained for several years beyond that date." ■

Reducing the risk and impact of disasters

Conference delegates today engaged in a wide-ranging debate on ways of reducing the risk and impact of disasters and improving preparedness and response mechanisms.

Representatives from many disaster-prone countries described the impact of earthquakes, floods and droughts that continue to claim the lives of increasing numbers of people worldwide each year. All participants emphasized the importance of devising more effective risk reduction strategies based on education and awareness-raising activities at the international, national and community levels.

Participants in the discussions, held in Commission B2 as part of the debate on an *Agenda for Humanitarian Action*, stressed that it was essential for States to fully integrate disaster risk education into national and international development planning and policy. Measures discussed to minimize the impact of disasters



included the implementation of early warning systems, ensuring that appropriate building codes are enforced to limit structural damage, and increasing the capacity of disaster-response teams at community and national levels.

Particular emphasis was placed on the need to direct efforts towards populations that are most at risk, including those marginalized because of poverty, discrimination or social exclusion, or those that do not have access to disaster preparedness and response services as a consequence of

their circumstances or legal status.

The debate was chaired by Martine Letts (Australian Red Cross). The discussions got underway after statements by panelists Edgardo Calderon Paredes (Peruvian Red Cross), Chairman of the Disaster Preparedness and Relief Commission of the International Federation, and Minoru Endo, special assistant at the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Japan. ■

People missing in armed conflicts

The commission on humanitarian aspects of people missing in armed conflict was opened by Ambassador Amina Chawahir Mohamed (Kenya). She introduced the issue to National Society and government delegates emphasizing that the conference had the opportunity to promote effective measures to prevent people going missing in conflict, to clarify the fate of the missing and assist their families through the adoption of the Agenda for Humanitarian Action. She encouraged those who had a contribution to make to do so in the conference drafting committee which was working on a final draft.

biggest barrier to psychological recovery. Socially, the lack of awareness of the mental agony suffered by families of missing people led to isolation. While families of servicemen missing in action might receive compensation or a pension, civilian families that have often lost the breadwinner can face severe hardship. Legally, families may not have access to money in the missing person's bank account and may face other legal barriers.

She also spoke of the importance of people in similar situations coming together to help and support each other through organizations and social clubs.

And finally she emphasized recognition of the overriding need for families of the missing of the "right to know."

Professor Marco Sassòli of the University of Quebec then made a presentation to the commission, beginning with families' needs including information, assistance, accountability, mourning and commemoration. Solving the problem of

missing people may make a peace settlement more difficult in the short term, he observed, but in the end makes a contribution to peace.

He then covered various aspects of IHL as applied to missing people including the responsibilities of authorities and belligerents. When considering the issue as a human rights question he too spoke of the violation of the families' right to know.

Professor Sassòli then reviewed the mechanisms available to tackle the problem of missing people, including the UN system, the ICRC, international human rights organizations, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, NGOs, as well as regional and national bodies. He ended by

presenting a series of recommendations on cooperation and coordination between those mechanisms dealing with the missing, prevention, identification of remains, and dealing with family needs as they come to terms with the realities of their situation.

The third panelist was Jacques Forster, vice-president of the ICRC. He said that violations of IHL and human rights law was at the origin of most disappearances in conflict. He recalled that preventing and dealing with the consequences of people missing in conflict had been a role of the ICRC since its inception. Often, he said, that mission was hindered by a lack of political will to deal with the issue or the general disorder that often characterized armed conflict or situations of internal violence.

Referring to the two previous speakers he reminded delegates that the missing issue was a painful humanitarian problem, but also one where compliance or non-compliance with the law was a key factor.

He believed action was urgent which was why the ICRC had taken the initiative to call the international conference on the missing which was held in Geneva in February 2003. Some 355 people from 86 countries took part. It adopted a document *The Missing and their families – action to resolve the problem of persons missing as a result of armed conflict or situations of internal violence and to assist their families*.

He concluded by referring to the importance of the Agenda for Humanitarian Action which the conference would adopt in tackling the missing problem, the ICRC's own pledge to the conference, and the commitment of the ICRC to follow up the Agenda commitment and its own pledge with continued action to resolve the problem. ■



Thoralf Thorkelson/Federation

The first contribution from the podium came from Visaka Dharmadasa of the Sri Lankan organization Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action. She began by saying that although internal violence was categorized differently to armed conflict, it was no less violent and often very brutal. She described the pain of not knowing the fate of a loved one as "different from any other experience one may have in a lifetime."

Dharmadasa continued by speaking of the social, economic, psychological and legal problems faced by families of missing people. Anxiety, she said, was intense and tended to increase with the years rather than fade away. She thought this was the

Human costs of certain weapons

Delegates at the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent today called on the international community and individual governments to work together to strengthen the global legal framework aimed at curbing the potential threat of the use of life sciences for hostile purposes.

Many pointed to recent successes in efforts to prohibit anti-personnel landmines and ban blinding laser weapons, as well as the conclusion only a few days ago of a new international agreement on explosive remnants of war, as examples of how international humanitarian law can provide "common ground" for progress on weapons issues.

"It is in the hope of encouraging this trend that the sensitive, but crucial issue of weapons has been chosen as one of the central themes of the 28th International Conference", said Ambassador Amina Chawahir Mohamed (Kenya), chairwoman of commission A3, during a debate on confronting the human costs of the use of certain weapons in armed conflict.

Amina Chawahir Mohamed noted that the vast majority of civilian deaths in armed conflicts and in their aftermath were caused by small arms and light weapons. "Unregulated arms availability represents a threat to peace. Controls on the availability of weapons must be strengthened to ensure that those who want to use them to violate human rights and international humanitarian law find them more difficult to obtain," she said.

Turning to the question of what she described as "one of the great challenges of this new millennium", Amina Chawahir Mohamed said that ways must

be found to ensure that developments in the life sciences serve exclusively the benefit of humanity and are not used for hostile purposes.

Guest speakers Dr. Patricia Lewis, Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, and Dr. Malcom Dando, professor of International Security in the Department of Peace studies at Bradford University in the United Kingdom, emphasized the potential dangers of failing to set in place

international forums with a firm and agreed basis in international humanitarian law. Several debate speakers pointed out that the issues of landmines, explosive remnants of war and small arms reflect realities that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the communities it serves, confront on a daily basis.

Amina Chawahir Mohamed asserted that these are fields "in which action by the International Conference can make a real difference". She invited all participants "to



a global legal framework aimed at preventing dual-purpose technology from falling into the hands of people intent on hostile acts. Dr. Dando gave disturbing examples of how some scientific knowledge that could be misused was readily available on the Internet.

The discussions concluded that the conference should focus on arms issues which are currently being addressed in

keep in mind the high moral purpose which IHL has served and must serve in protecting human dignity. Success in the elaboration of the Conference's Agenda for Humanitarian Action in the arms field will depend on the capacity of all participants to consider these issues not only from a traditional arms control perspective but also from the viewpoint of victims, who most frequently are civilians." ■



The unique reach of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies was highlighted at the signing of a cooperation agreement, between the International Federation and the Netherlands Red Cross. The agreement concerns the Centre on Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness, established in the Hague in June 2002.

An assessment is made of local capacities and vulnerabilities, in cooperation with local authorities. Then practical risk reduction projects can be planned, such as building community shelters, elevated food and seeds storage platforms and stronger homes, or reinforcing riverbanks, planning evacuation routes and sites, and setting up simple early warning systems for the population.

Two more pilot programmes are planned in the near future, in Mozambique and the Pacific.

Local volunteers are trained to implement the programmes and mobilize the population. Maria del Socorro, programme director of the Nicaragua Red Cross, underlined their essential role in these community-based actions because they know the people they are working with and are therefore the most effective.



In his remarks, Federation Secretary General Markku Niskala pointed out that the creation of the centre was rooted in evidence pointing to an increase in the number of weather-related disasters and in the number of people affected.

Last year alone, more than 600 million people were affected by floods or drought. He referred to the study presented by the centre at the signing ceremony, on the impact of climatic changes. "It points to the important role that Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can play by including climate change perspectives in their disaster preparedness and response programmes."

Madeleen Helmer, head of the climate change centre, explained that two pilot projects have been initiated with local branches of the Red Cross, in Nicaragua and in Viet Nam, whose aims are to strengthen the resilience of communities, and set up new partnerships with climate experts, meteorological institutes and ministries.



Jan Pronk, chairman of the climate change advisory council sums up the necessity for these risk reduction programmes in this way: "You can haggle about whether climate change is happening or not, but you cannot argue about the impact extreme weather conditions have on populations. So we say – go for action, in a manner as integrated and as comprehensive as possible." ■

Movement career

"written in the stars"

At the end of two four-year terms on the Standing Commission, Tadateru Konoe, Vice President of the Japanese Red Cross, looked back with great affection on a career which began by chance – though he admits it may have been in the stars. "My birthday, 8th May, is Red Cross Red Crescent Day, so my working for the Movement may have been inevitable," he said.

His first involvement with the Red Cross came when, in a break from his International Relations studies at the London School of Economics, he came to Geneva, where he knew the Japanese ambassador. "I had nowhere to stay, so I just knocked on the door of his residence and asked," he says, smiling at the recollection.

"The ambassador said he could find me somewhere to stay, but in return he needed a favour. This was days before the Red Cross Centenary procession in Geneva, and he had no one to carry the Japanese flag. So I borrowed a kimono, found a flag and joined in a cold, wet procession from the University to Eaux Vives."

After graduating, and back in Japan, he first volunteered for the Japanese Red Cross and within months was offered a full-time job. "I knew little about the Movement at that time - perhaps I was naïve, if idealistic," said Konoe.



Chris Black/Federation



Yoshi Shimizu/Federation

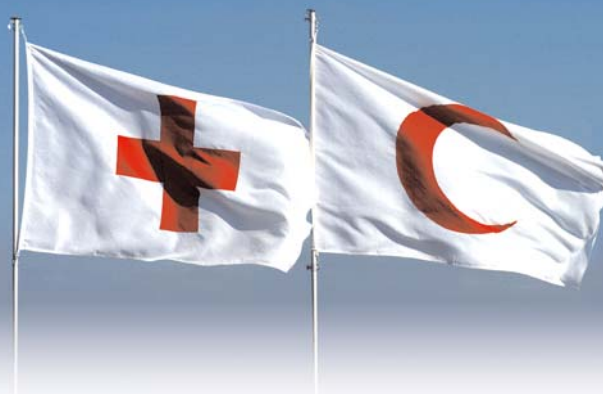
"But I was inspired by a place where people from all over the world could gather together for one purpose. This was during the Cold War, of course, but even though the world was in two groups, people could still get together with their common goals." Close observation of conflict in Cyprus and the Middle East, "made me more convinced that a movement like Red Cross Red Crescent could do something about it.

"The world has changed much since then, and people seem frustrated, with no sense of direction. However, I'm optimistic for the Movement, with its basic common understanding of humanitarian values."

Then, with another broad smile, he added, somewhat enigmatically, "the more the world is divided, the more we reach a common understanding." ■

The conference organizers would like to thank the Flower Council of Holland for providing the floral arrangements at the opening ceremony.

Mrs. Magnuson hails Movement's maturity



Her reports this week to the Council of Delegates and at the 28th International Conference will mark Christina Magnuson's last official tasks as a member of the Standing Commission.

In the many years she has been coming to meetings in Geneva, Magnuson says she has noted an increase in the maturity of the Movement. "I see much more of a dynamic interaction now. Everybody shares their views. Everyone asserts themselves."

She believes that far from creating problems, this brings a refreshing diversity of perspective to the debates. "I think we've grown up. My impression is that we respect each other more, we listen more to each other, we are more open to one another's ideas and concerns."

Listening is a crucial component of what she feels the Movement is about. "Red Cross Red Crescent means meeting people—really listening and understanding them, hearing them."

This critical human connection must happen in all our work, she stresses. "When we meet those who need us, we have to listen to what they want us to do, and what they can do. We have to listen very carefully and not just go in with solutions."

Among the achievements Magnuson has witnessed during her tenure is the significant increase in the capacity of National Societies at all levels. "They are better equipped to do the work today. It's very encouraging."

Magnuson was President of the Swedish Red Cross for nine years before stepping down in 2002. However, she was asked to continue as a member of the Standing Commission, for which she chaired the emblem working group.

Now, she is ready to leave the governance to others. "I think it's important that we have a change of faces around the room. Some of us have been coming here for many, many years."

She notes that making space for new delegates broadens the perspective and help increase knowledge in National Societies.

"Until you have the chance to be part of this, it's hard to understand how it all fits and what it means. After you've been part of it for a while, you begin to understand how small steps can really mean something important." ■



Thierry Gasmann/ICRC

Second round of workshops attract strong participation

Workshop 5 on small arms and humanity

This workshop was organized by the Human Security Network (see workshop 2) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD). It was chaired by Lassana Traore, foreign affairs minister of Mali and moderated by Martin Griffiths, director of the CHD. Invited speakers included Arthur de-Winton Cummings, secretary-general of the Sierra Leone Red Cross; Camilo Reyes Rodriguez, vice minister of foreign affairs from Colombia; and Dennis McNamara, inspector-general UNHCR.

The workshop discussed the humanitarian impact of small arms and light weapons, their availability and misuse, and the momentum that is building up globally on the issue. It worked on identifying options and strategies for States and the Movement.

Workshop 6 on health and HIV/AIDS



The workshop, organized by the Ethiopian, French, Italian, Kenyan, Spanish and Swedish Red Cross societies, was chaired by Anders Milton, president of the Swedish Red Cross and mod-

erated by Professor Marc Gentilini, president of the French Red Cross. Speakers included Shimelis Adugua, president of the Ethiopian Red Cross; Mary Kuria, secretary-general of the Kenyan Red Cross, Massimo Barra, Italian Red Cross; Stu Flavell GNP+; and Ton Smits from the Harm Reduction Network.

It discussed the different prevention efforts underway and best practices. The role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent as auxiliaries was considered in the context of prevention. It also looked at ways of mobilizing support for far-reaching counseling and treatment schemes and ways to decrease stigma and discrimination.

Workshop 7 on domestic implementation of the statutes of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The workshop was organized by the Netherlands government and chaired by Hans Bevers, senior legal advisor in the Dutch justice ministry. Harry Verweij also from the ministry acted as moderator. Invited speakers included Silvia Fernandez de Gurmendi from the ICC; Franc Miksa, Slovenian minister of foreign affairs; Karim Amégan, from the Canadian department of foreign affairs; Ariane Acke of the Belgian Red Cross; Thomas Läufer from the German ministry of foreign affairs and Cristina Pellandini from the ICRC.

The main aim of the workshop was to look at the obligations imposed by the statutes of the ICC on national legal systems, using the Netherlands experience as a base.

Workshop 8 on the role of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in disaster risk reduction.

The workshop was organized by the Nepal Red Cross, the Uzbekistan Red Crescent, the International Federation, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) ProVention and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). It was chaired by Der Rathn Dhakhwa, secretary-general of the Nepal Red Cross, co-chaired by Oktamkhon T. Vakhidova, president of the Uzbekistan Red Crescent and moderated by Professor Ian Davis, Cranfield University.

The workshop looked at how stronger partnerships could be created between governments, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and other actors in disaster risk reduction. ■

Today's Health Tip

To prevent a 'chill' and limit its consequences

Wear clothing appropriate to the weather (especially when going outside). Stay away from people with flu (if you are sick, avoid infecting people around you). Drink a lot of liquids, but avoid alcohol. Stop smoking and avoid passive smoking. Get plenty of rest.

If symptoms appear:

In addition to the above, drink fresh fruit juices and hot liquids during the day. No medicines are needed (except anti-fever for comfort).

The chill should improve in a couple of days.

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

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