

daily bulletin

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Declaration and Agenda for Humanitarian Action adopted

The 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent came to an end on Saturday with the adoption of a series of resolutions. The most important was on the *Declaration and Agenda for Humanitarian Action*.

The *Declaration* recognizes that “millions of people are unable to meet their basic needs because of armed conflicts, disasters and disease”, and commits the States and the whole Red Cross Red Crescent Movement to tackle the problem through “enhancing respect for the relevant law and reducing the vulnerability of populations to the effects of armed conflicts, disasters and disease.”



The *Agenda for Humanitarian Action* focuses on the main theme and overall goal of the International Conference of **protecting human dignity**. It sets out action-oriented goals and measures to be taken by both the States and the components of the Movement:

- Respect and restore the dignity of persons missing as a result of armed conflicts or other situations of armed violence and of their families.

- Strengthen the protection of civilians in all situations from the indiscriminate use and effects of weapons and the protection of combatants from unnecessary suffering and prohibited weapons through controls on weapons development, proliferation and use.
- Minimize the impact of disasters through implementation of disaster risk reduction measures and improving preparedness and response mechanisms.
- Reduce the increased vulnerability to disease arising from stigma and discrimination and from the lack of access to comprehensive prevention, care and treatment.

The full texts of both the above documents will be posted on the ICRC and Federation web sites.

A report on the success of the 11 workshops held in parallel to the conference will also be available.

An overview of the pledges made by States and National Societies during the conference was given to the delegates. In total 360 pledges were made, 124 by National Societies, 65 by States and six by observers. Sixty were joint pledges. They covered a wide range of subjects including people missing in armed conflict, the use and control of certain arms, various means of improving disaster preparedness, reducing the stigma of HIV/AIDS and the implementation and respect for IHL. An honour book of pledges has been compiled and details will be available on the ICRC web site. ■

Standing Commission update

Following the election of the Standing Commission on Friday it met to elect its officers. The chairman of the conference, Jaime Ricardo Fernández Urriola, announced that Mohammed Al-Hadid of the Jordanian Red Crescent had been elected chairman and Janet Davidson of the Canadian Red Cross had been elected vice-chairman. ■

Other resolutions

Resolutions on revision of the regulations for the Empress Shôken Fund, adopting the Council of Delegates resolution No. 5 of 1 December 2003 on the emblem and on the date and place of the next International Conference were adopted. ■

Chairman congratulates drafting committee

Ambassador Johan Molander of Sweden, chairman of the drafting committee, told the Conference of the long hours and hard work which had gone towards negotiating the documents placed before them and in reaching a consensus with a view to their adoption by the plenary.

He said that yesterday (Friday) evening, by 23:15, the committee was able to adopt all documents by consensus. Two delegations, he added, had expressed their national positions on resolution 3.

“Although negotiations were often difficult, and sometimes exposed diverging

views, the atmosphere in the drafting committee and other groups was excellent. I was impressed by the spirit of co-operation and accommodation, and the constructive approach which enabled the committee as a whole to arrive at texts that would be acceptable to all.” ■

Report on the Commissions: four urgent issues examined

On 4 December parallel debates brought together delegates from diverse parts of the globe to examine solutions on four issues of urgent humanitarian concern.

Commission A2 explored the *Humanitarian aspects of the issue of persons missing in connection with armed conflict*. After presentations on the trauma experienced by those whose loved ones are missing, and on the existing legal frameworks, participants discussed the need to strengthen action, but stressed that the primary responsibility for this belongs to governments. The importance of providing information and support to families and the special needs of children were highlighted.

Participants called for increased cooperation among the international community with regard to the missing, noting that a lack of resources and the need for capacity building impede the resolution on the missing that is essential to peace and reconciliation.

Commission A3 confronted the *Human costs of the use of certain weapons in armed conflict*. Participants heralded recent suc-

cesses, such as the treaty prohibiting landmines and the use of blinding laser weapons, as well as the new protocol on the explosive remnants of war. While they believe these prove international humanitarian law (IHL) still works to reduce the devastation of certain weapons, they stressed that IHL must be considered when developing new weapons. In particular, the group discussed the risk that new technology and life sciences pose in developing new, deadly weapons, and urged that prevention efforts be targeted toward the scientific community.

In addition, noting small arms cause more deaths than all other weapons and are linked to the use of child soldiers and regional insecurity, they urged National Societies to strive to raise awareness on this issue.

Commission B2 examined *Reducing the risk and impact of disaster and disease*. Working from the premise that the poor are disproportionately affected by disasters and disease, they called for greater involvement of the most vulnerable in preparedness planning, and recommended community-based participatory approaches to strengthen local response capacity. The partici-

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pants concluded that the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement could act as a catalyst for improvement through educational initiatives and legislative advocacy. Noting that disasters affect development, they also emphasized the importance of taking a holistic approach that incorporates preparation, response, rehabilitation and development.

Commission B3 discussed *Reducing the risk of HIV/AIDS on vulnerable people*. In asking that the alarming magnitude of the pandemic not be underestimated, the group concluded that HIV/AIDS not only kills people, it kills nations. It strongly supported a comprehensive approach to HIV/AIDS be undertaken

by the Movement, including advocacy to enhance access to treatment and care and to do away with discriminatory policies; the involvement of vulnerable people in programmes; and active support of the global anti-stigma campaign. After hearing that infection is currently concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa but is growing in Eastern Europe, Asia and the Caribbean, the group recommended increased efforts on prevention that entail sensitively dealing with difficult issues and implementing harm reduction aimed at intravenous drug users. The need to empower women, who bear the brunt of the disease, to deal with child sexual exploitation and to alleviate economic impact were also stressed. ■

Conference closes with commitment to continue to uphold human dignity

In their addresses to the closing ceremony of the international conference, the presidents of the International Federation and the ICRC, as well as the outgoing and the new president of the Standing Commission, all expressed thanks and hope in the collective resolve shown by all participants to protect human dignity.

Federation President Juan Manuel Suárez del Toro reaffirmed the organization's long term commitment to help reduce the effects of disasters, disease and discrimination on the most vulnerable. "We have much work ahead of us. We must put into practice what we have agreed – the lives and the dignity of millions of people are at stake," he stressed.

ICRC President Jakob Kellenberger expressed his thanks at the common reaffirmation of the relevance of international humanitarian law and of concerns about its violations. "Let us join forces to ensure that methods and means of combat do not exceed the limits set by humanitarian law, and that persons protected by humanitarian law do indeed benefit from such protection."

Princess Margriet of the Netherlands had special thanks for the volunteers for their hard work and ready assistance. She expressed her hope that the humanitarian commitment expressed in the agenda and the final statement will be transformed into concrete action. "The Movement and governments must begin the work of implementation now. Together we can make a difference to humanity."

As the new president of the Standing Commission, Dr. Mohammed Al-Hadid reaffirmed his commitment to the "values of our great Movement, and to serve with the Fundamental Principles guiding the way." The plan of action adopted by the conference would guide the Commission's work until the next conference in 2007, he said.

The Conference's chairman Jaime Ricardo Fernández Urriola, mentioned the various challenges faced by humanitarian action in the world but ended on a message of hope: "Never has humankind mobilized so much against adversity. I ask you never to stop your daily fight to uphold human dignity", he said, before formally declaring the 28th International conference closed. ■