

## TOWARDS A CONSOLIDATED MOVEMENT STRATEGY

"Today, more than ever, we have to broaden our strategies for restoring family links to other groups; for example, victims of situations of violence and in the case of National Societies, the ever growing number of victims of natural disasters, and also the many economic migrants," said Michel Minnig, Head of the ICRC Delegation for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, who welcomed the participants.

The Conference, in which 28 National Red Cross Societies are participating together with representatives of the ICRC and the International Federation, supports the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in its efforts to strengthen the Family Links Network to cover the growing needs of those who do not know the whereabouts of family members. The results of the discussions of this meeting, as well as the meetings that have taken place in Nairobi and Kiev and the future meeting in Bangkok, will contribute to determine a common strategy that will be put into practice between 2008 and 2018.

During the opening ceremony, after reference to Argentina's tragic history



Michel Minnig (ICRC), Osvaldo Ferrero (CRA), Federico Villegas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Jacques Moreillon (ICRC), Belkis Gonzales de Castaño (CRA), Renée Zellweger Monin (ICRC).

of forced disappearances, Federico Villegas, Director of Human Rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Argentine Republic, congratulated the international community on taking important measures, such as the approval by consensus of the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance by the UN Human Rights Council. He underlined that meetings such as this Conference allow the development of doctrine, and, eventually, of regulations on the protection of persons.

The last speaker of the opening ceremony, Jacques Moreillon, Member of the Committee and President of the Conference, mentioned an article that he wrote in honour of Jean Pictet. He compared the Red Cross with a four stroke motor, which includes emotion, action, reflection and resolution. He pointed out that those terms are also applicable to restoring family links: "emotion, in the face of the invisible drama of separation; action, as the daily work of National Societies and reflection, which must precede and lead to action in favour of the victims. Resolutions are the result of reflection, that can result in a strategy or plan of action to be adopted by the Movement".

He concluded by pointing out a statement made by Nelson Mandela when he visited him in prison, which can also be applied to the field of restoring family links: "You should always remember that what matters is not only the good you bring but the bad you prevent".



Osvaldo Manuel Ferrero, President of the Argentine Red Cross and Honorary President of the Conference.

*"You need to be organized in normal times for abnormal times."*

Jacques Moreillon

Osvaldo Manuel Ferrero, President of the Argentine Red Cross, Honorary President of this Conference and host together with the ICRC, underlined that the challenge to this Movement is "to achieve a regional vision of the strategy that will guide our actions over the coming decade".

## Restoring Family Links Regional Conference



Gustavo Ramírez, Representative in Brazil of the International Federation.

### Two first hand testimonies

In an emotionally-charged speech, Irene Quaglia, who has worked for the ICRC for more than 25 years in the field of restoring family links, reflected on her experience:

"My first task in the ICRC was to put together a list of missing persons in Argentina. I was still not wholly aware of what all the names on the lists meant. Nobody seemed to know what was going on, and people were celebrating that Argentina had won the 1978 World Football Cup."

"If it is sad and painful to have a father, child or sibling in prison or dead, it is much more painful not to know what has happened to them."

"I have been thanked and my efforts recognized by some, but I have also received criticism from those that could not understand that I was unable to help them. However, there is no greater joy than that of being able to help people by restoring family links."

Gustavo Ramírez, Representative of the International Federation in Brazil spoke of his experiences in Chile at the beginning of the seventies.

"I am a personal witness to these facts and these sentiments. I was a beneficiary of this humanitarian work. I lived through many years of persecution and repression in the past."

"I was deported and went into exile. My family, as well as myself and thousands of others, suffered the desperation of disruptions, the pain of forced separations and loss of contact, in addition to the indescribable uncertainty of lack of communication and information."

"Silence and long nights of despairing sleeplessness ended in peace and joy brought by Red Cross messages. Those short messages that allowed the reunion of loved ones brought happiness and hope."

*"Several countries in the region are still facing the consequences of the human tragedy of missing persons."*

Renée Zellweger Monin

### The Challenge of Strengthening the Family Links Network

Renée Zellweger Monin, Deputy Head of the Central Tracing Agency and General Secretary of the Conference, said that the situations in which RFL activities are developed have got more diversified and complex and population movements have increased over time. In addition, players that act in this particular field have multiplied.

Referring to the regional context, she underlined that "we must not lose sight of the fact that several countries in the region are still suffering the consequences of the disappearance of people, which is a human tragedy".

After recognizing the fact that there is sometimes a gap between the projected ideal of the Family Links Network and the reality encountered in the field, she also underlined that, in spite of certain limitations, this network has an impressive potential to locate people and transmit news.

Preparation, professionalism, flexibility and speed are indispensable to respond to families without news of their relatives in cases of emergency.

The main challenges, according to Zellweger Monin, are the lack of human, material and financial resources and lack of visibility of RFL activities. The difficulty of accessing services is also an issue as well as the limitations of collaboration between the ICRC, National Societies and the International Federation.

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