

Daily bulletin

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XXXe Conférence internationale de
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XXX Conferencia Internacional de
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Ginebra, 2007

المؤتمر الدولي الثلاثون
للصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر
جنيف، عام ٢٠٠٧

Auxiliary role: Be straight with States

Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society roles as auxiliaries to public authorities in humanitarian matters went to the heart of the Movement, the International Conference was reminded yesterday, but states had to understand and respect their independence.

Clarification of the role was critical, Ibrahim Osman, deputy secretary-general of the International Federation, said. Sometimes governments mistakenly believed that all National Society activity fell under the auxiliary banner and sought to exert a degree of control that placed independence in jeopardy.

Speaking at the start of commission A discussions on the auxiliary function, Ibrahim Osman went on to say, "To define the role, serious dialogue is necessary." Governments might declare National Societies to be main players in disaster assistance, or auxiliaries in health, "but other activities are for National Societies to do in freedom. It is an important distinction."

What was required, he said, was a balanced relationship defined in a 2003 International Federation report that was a milestone in framing the discussion. The relationship, he said, had to be based on dialogue and preferably a written agreement.



"In many cases we have seen National Societies asked to sub-contract by government on something outside the agreement. If they have the capacity and the resource to do so they may accept the responsibility. But they have the right to say no." Governments had to realize that programmes did not fall under the term "auxiliary" unless they had been defined and agreed upon in advance.

The conference document explores the consequences of a lack of clarity and the misunderstanding and confusion that occurs between States and National Societies. "Some governments," it says, "have unilaterally altered the composition of the National Society governing body by decree. Others have amended a National Society's statute without consulting with the society in question. National Societies may also be obliged to

conduct operations and activities at home and abroad that are inconsistent with the Fundamental Principles and disregard the Movement's rules and procedures."

Ibrahim Osman's advice to National Societies was to define the capacity they could offer, and what they could do very well. "Then you can say to government, we feel we can be a good partner on this. If you claim a role and do not have the capacity to do it, you fail the auxiliary concept."

The rapporteur's report on commission A will be presented during the Thursday plenary session and reported in *Daily Bulletin* no 10. ■

Together for humanitarian law

International Conference members must find ways to make the theme “Together for humanity” applicable during armed conflicts, Ambassador Nicholas Thorne (United Kingdom) urged when opening commission B yesterday, where participants had the opportunity to renew their unequivocal commitment to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law (IHL).

The chairman’s opening statement gave a clear picture of why it is necessary to reaffirm support for IHL, noting that it has been criticized as being inadequate to meet the challenges of modern conflicts. On the other hand, he observed that the Movement has seen an increased interest in IHL in recent years.

Commenting on the unique nature of the Conference, which brings together representatives from National Societies, governments, the International Federation and ICRC, he chal-

lenged participants to find ways to work together to reinforce IHL so it continues to be fully recognized.

Professor Daniel Thürer, member of the ICRC, opened the debate by drawing attention to two reports the ICRC has submitted to the conference.

The first, a report on the ICRC study on customary international humanitarian law applicable in international and non-international armed conflicts, is based on practice from more than 150 States as well as consultations with experts around the world over a period of 10 years.

Professor Thürer stated: “The main outcome of the study is that the gap between the regulation of international and non-international armed conflicts is closing. This is an important conclusion as the majority of conflicts continue to be non-international and the treaty regulation of these conflicts is less extensive.” (The report is available from the publications desk in the main lobby.)

The second report, *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, argues that implementation of IHL remains an abiding task for all States and parties to armed conflicts. “A number of issues, in the ICRC’s view, pose challenges for humanitarian law... such as terrorism, ...security detention, the conduct of hostilities, including the notion of ‘direct participation in hostilities’, non-international armed conflicts, regulating private military and security companies, occupation... cluster munitions and ending impunity for war crimes and other serious violations of humanitarian law.”

The rapporteur’s report on commission B will be presented during the Thursday plenary session and reported in *Daily Bulletin* no 10. ■



Disseminating IHL.

IDRL: Tightening legal loopholes



Representatives from a wide cross section of governments and National Societies gathered yesterday afternoon in commission C of the International Conference to discuss Federation-led efforts to address and eliminate the legal failings that can so easily interrupt and obstruct emergency relief operations.

The guidelines were published prior to the International Conference in a report titled *Law and Legal Issues in International Disaster Response*, and are one of the key items being debated by delegates. They are the result of six years of research and consultation with governments, National Societies, UN agencies and other like minded actors.

“We know that problems with customs, visas, taxes, legal personality and professional qualifications, among others, are consistently hampering the effectiveness of international relief,” said Dr Raymond Forde, president of the Barbados Red Cross Society and chair of the commission, in his opening address.

“Specific laws cannot solve everything,” he cautioned, “But many of the problems are avoidable if we take the necessary steps to prepare our regulatory systems to handle them in advance.”

Picking up on this theme, the keynote speaker for the session, Sálvano Briceño, director of the UN’s international strategy for disaster reduction urged delegates also to consider the value that pre-emptive efforts such as these, could have on facilitating and ensuring the pre-emptive reduction of disaster risk.

“The guidelines provide an excellent framework to facilitate, enhance and coordinate international response to disasters so that emergency relief is not only fast and effective, but contributes to longer-term recovery and capacity development.”

Senator Richard Gordon, chairman of the Philippine National Red Cross shared the experiences of Red Cross Societies in South-east Asia.



Law and legal issues
in international disaster
response: a desk study

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

“When time is of the essence, we cannot afford to be sitting for too long at the negotiating table talking about administrative matters that could have been addressed prior to the strike of disasters,” he said. “We must never allow bureaucracy to defeat urgency.”

The commission also heard from Dr Charles Agbo, a director of the Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Dr Agbo outlined the legal challenges hindering international responses to disasters in his country.

“We fully accept that it is time that relevant laws and regulations [...] be improved in such a way that when disaster exceeds the capability of our nation, assisting agencies or humanitarian organizations will come into Nigeria with minimum restrictions.”

The rapporteur’s report on commission C will be presented during the Thursday plenary session and reported in *Daily Bulletin* no 10. ■

Standing Commission elections

On Thursday afternoon the election of **five** members of the Standing Commission will begin. Please be in the auditorium for the roll call. The candidates are as follows (in the order of their presentations on Tuesday night):

- Mr Tissa Manilal Abeywickrama, Sri Lanka Red Cross Society
- Dr Massimo Barra, Italian Red Cross
- Mr Steven E.Carr, American Red Cross
- Mr Eamon Courtenay, Belize Red Cross Society
- Mr Adama Diarra, Mali Red Cross
- Lady Jocelyn Keith, New Zealand Red Cross
- Mr William A.Eteki Mboumoua, Cameroon Red Cross Society
- Dr Freddy Karup Pedersen, Danish Red Cross
- Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid, Jordan National Red Crescent Society

A powerful balancing act

Building consensus in the drafting committee

Language is a powerful tool. At the International Conference, the language that will ultimately be included in the draft declaration and corresponding resolutions will be a snapshot of what the Red Cross Red Crescent is today and of its approach to the challenging issues it faces. Fostering inclusion and building consensus across diverse languages, cultures, and backgrounds is no easy task. However, the firm leadership of the chairman of the drafting committee seems to be working miracles in that busy room of nearly 200 delegates.

Ambassador Masood Khan is carefully managing a powerful balancing act. “There are several key elements that help this process to work,” he says. “As chair, I need to have no personal agenda, only the goal of ending up with an aggregation of the interests of the Red Cross Red Crescent community.”



Ambassador Masood Khan (left), chairman of the drafting committee, chats to a delegate during a pause in proceedings.

“Then,” he continues, “we have to establish an environment that encourages active participation for all of those in the room, while recognizing that we’re working against deadlines.” That’s a difficult task, but Ambassador Khan accomplishes it through oc-

casional unforced humour, firmness of tone and focus, and strategic flexibility when more work needs to be done. Homework on the major issues being discussed done before the conference both by himself and by the delegations also helps.

When asked about the balance between inclusion and efficiency during a process like this, he passionately believes that “participation is not the cause of inefficiency. Every point of view must be heard. We realize efficiency when we

hear, identify and put together the right ingredients to build critical mass.”

Clearly, Ambassador Khan has a special talent to guide such a process. “Multi-lateral diplomacy,” he says, “is not just

about defending our own beliefs or positions. It is about reaching out to others and hearing their points of view. Consensus building is the best form of decision making ever invented.” ■

Exhibitions

(Level minus 1 of the conference centre)

“I love you, Red Cross” is the message of the Philippine National Red Cross display. Four large exhibition stands promote their helpline number, which reaches the health and welfare team, disaster response team and blood donation information.

The Cambodian Red Cross features nearly two dozen pictures of its work, including primary health care, water and sanitation and blood donation. As part of its objective to have no more mine victims, it has also published the Cambodia Mine/UXO Victim Information System annual report, which notes there were 450 mine/UXO victims in 2006, a 48.6 per cent fall from 2005.

As the IFRC increased measles vaccinations in Africa, deaths from the disease fell by 75 per cent. Jocelyne Barbe, part of knowledge sharing at the Federation’s health department, said: “By 2010 we expect to reduce deaths by 95 per cent.” The stand has information on a variety of health programmes, as well as several new publications, including the first aid policy, health strategy and health and care programme.

A second stand run by the Federation’s health department highlights an incredibly moving book called *Our world: AIDS and childhood in southern Africa*, which was launched on 27 November. Dr Getachew Gizaw, senior officer on the Global HIV and AIDS programme for the IFRC, explained: “We gave or-



phans a camera and asked them to document their lives.” The cover shows a sixteen-year-old ironing his clothes for his mother’s funeral.

The Romanian Red Cross stand includes several pictures of its work, including its humanitarian response to floods in several counties in Romania this year. A particularly moving picture shows a boy clutching two loaves of bread he was given.

Stop by the Ecuadorian Red Cross stand to buy jewellery, brought here by Ana María Guacho from her village. Ana María was invited to the Conference by the Ecuadorian Red Cross to give a presentation at today’s workshop on principles and values. She said: “I’m very happy to see so many people and I thank the organizers for inviting me to bring information on diversity. The world has many different people and I’m presenting the indigenous people, especially indigenous women.”





The Algerian Red Crescent stand holds information on a wide variety of topics – from protecting human dignity to stopping smoking. It also has several beautiful posters showing families what to do before, during and after a disaster.

Encouraging cooperation between all parts of the Movement is the goal of the International Conference. The Federation's Movement cooperation stand has valuable information on strategies for co-operation and operational alliances.

displayed is a provocative poster showing an obituary page and encouraging people to save a life by taking a first aid course.

Preparing communities for disasters is at the heart of the Movement's work. It's no wonder, then, that the Federation's disaster preparedness table includes a wealth of useful information, from good practice guides to case studies to reviews of operations.

The Iraqi Red Crescent display includes several posters warning people of the dangers of explosives and showing children what they should do if they come across unexploded ordinances.

Want to read more about the humanitarian consequences of climate change? The Swiss Red Cross table has copies of its newsletter "inter.actio", full of

fascinating and timely articles on the subject.

The Fundamental Principles bind the Movement together but how do they work in practice, when faced with all the challenges of the modern world? The Federation's principles and values department has case studies on issues like tolerance and discrimination, as well as fundamental principles screen-savers so there's never an excuse for forgetting them. ■



In front of the large flag of the Azerbaijan Red Crescent, there are several brochures as well as a couple of beautifully illustrated posters on HIV prevention.

The Chilean Red Cross stand includes valuable information on what to do before, during and after a disaster. Also



All photos: International Federation or ICRC

The dismantling of the exhibitions on level minus 1 will begin on Thursday evening.

So if you have not visited them, you still have all day Thursday to do so.

Would all delegations that have an exhibition please ensure that they collect all their materials before lunchtime on Friday.

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

This bulletin is for information purposes only. It does not constitute an official record.