



150 years of humanitarian action
**Council of Delegates of the International
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**
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Council of Delegates 2013

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

MAKING THE MOST OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: OUTCOMES OF THE 31ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (2011) AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE 32ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (2015)

Chair: Nikki Rattle, former Secretary-General, Cook Islands Red Cross Society, and past chair of the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Rapporteur: Jelena Darmonovic-Dubak, Secretary-General, Red Cross of Montenegro

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SPEAKERS:

- Knut Dörman, Head of International Law, ICRC
- Elise Baudot, Legal Counsel, IFRC
- Emilie Gollier, Austrian Red Cross
- Steve Carr, American Red Cross

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The International Conference is a unique opportunity for the Movement to set an agenda for high-level discussion with States. We have seen important success stories, such as in small-arms control and disaster law, where the Conference has played a powerful role in creating momentum on humanitarian issues. However, many participants in this workshop did not feel that the Conference was meeting its full potential.

Participants acknowledged the importance of thorough preparation before each Conference, and serious work on implementing resolutions and pledges between Conferences, to make them as effective as possible. In addition, agenda items must be chosen very carefully to reflect core concerns of the Movement and include issues of interest to States. To the extent possible, States should be involved in the process of setting the agenda. We should try to avoid duplicating topics already being addressed in other fora. We should aim for a Conference that is globally relevant and distinctive but also linked to other international developments.

National Societies shared their challenges and good experiences in preparing for the Conference and in implementing resolutions and pledges. National Societies also shared lessons learned in finding effective ways to engage with States. They called on the Standing Commission, the International Federation and the

ICRC to ensure that a highly consultative approach is taken in setting the agenda for the 32nd International Conference, in 2015.

KEY POINTS RAISED:

- Over time, the International Conference can create new humanitarian norms, such as in international humanitarian law (IHL) and disaster law, as well as specific commitments on humanitarian issues.
- We need to decide what image we want for the Conference: Is it an expert meeting or a political event?
- The topics of discussion at the Conference need to be more focused and truly relevant to the Movement and to States. For this reason, States need to be brought into the process of setting the agenda sooner than is happening at present.
- The commitments we make in resolutions and pledges need to be measurable and achievable, and expressed in a short format.
- Key obstacles to the implementation of resolutions and pledges include: a difficult political climate, staff changeovers in relevant government departments, and a mismatch between commitments and available resources.
- Pledges are seen as useful for engaging with governments, including on topics that extend beyond the resolutions.

CONCLUSIONS:

- There is a need to reinvigorate the International Conference, to make it feel more vital to States and Movement components and to arouse public interest in key humanitarian issues.
- The agenda for the Conference should not simply be 50% relevant to the ICRC and 50% relevant to the International Federation; it should also reflect the interests of States.
- We must invest more in the preparation of the Conference – both at the international level, through permanent missions, and at the national level, making full use of national IHL committees.
- We must also invest in implementation, and reporting on implementation, as a demonstration of our commitment to the cause.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage higher-level representation of States at the International Conference and engage a broader spectrum of government agencies.
- Give consideration to regional coordination, both in preparation for and during the Conference.
- Make the Conference a permanent agenda item on national IHL committees; extend the membership of these committees to include ministries engaged with topics relating to the Conference.
- Convene preparatory meetings for permanent missions, not only in Geneva but also in New York, to ensure that all States are involved.
- Eventually move the Conference to an earlier date in the year, so as not to compete with other key international meetings.
- The International Federation and the ICRC should develop guidance on how each resolution can be best implemented. They should also provide training to National Societies on how to participate effectively, particularly in the drafting committee.
- Make greater use of the Internet and social media to stimulate pre-conference discussions of draft resolutions and to promote dialogue at the Conference itself.