

Oslo Round Table on Migration **April 23 2007**

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Asked to reflect on "RCRC Movement on Migration", I want to underline that I'm not speaking on behalf of any of the RCRC institutions. My views and opinions have evolved during more than 30 years of RC experience; most of it internationally with NS the world over, part of the time in charge of my NS work with refugees and asylum seekers and now, more recently, during preparations for the up-coming 30th International Conference.

I would like to share my thoughts on :

- space and opportunities for RCRC in migration
 - the role of RCRC and the Movement and interplay within and without the Movement
 - partnerships with governments and others and
 - what might be needed within the Movement in addition to good humanitarian action?
- I want to begin by bringing the greetings and best wishes for this Round Table from Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. He said at the Mediterranean Conference in Athens a couple of weeks ago: "Migration and partnerships are the very themes that the Standing Commission has put at the centre of the coming International Conference, where the Movement meets with the States. The slogan for the coming Conference – Together for humanity – illustrates our conviction that challenges ahead of mankind cannot be addressed by States alone – or by us as a global Movement and part of Civil Society. They demand cooperation and partnership for lasting results".
 - The Conference is to define and agree on some of the most important humanitarian challenges in the coming years. National Societies and States will seek to analyse the humanitarian consequences of some pressing current developments, among them migration.
 - The RCRC is not concerned with passing judgement on the reasons behind these developments; the sole concern is and will remain the humanitarian consequences and the vulnerabilities they create for millions of people around the globe. It is in the light of these consequences we have to plan our strategies and action, including our work on migration issues.

- There is no need to go into the detail of statistics – they are well known to you: Suffice it to note that more people are on the move today than at any other time in human history; close to 200 million people are living outside their place of birth. This means about 3% of the world's population or one in every thirty-five persons. And this figure, according to the IOM, is expected to grow by about 3 % annually.

- There are various reasons for people to migrate – not all of them are negative or even problematic. Economic liberalization as well as economic decline have led people to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

- For us humanitarians, it is not difficult to understand why people from poorer regions wish to migrate to more prosperous regions or countries. People have since the beginning of time moved – within regions and from one region to another to improve their standard of living, to give their children better opportunities or to escape from poverty, war, and famine.

- Today it is not only the poor who choose to leave. Globalization and the spread of international business have created an increasing demand also for experienced professionals to move. Further, it is no longer a 'South to North' phenomenon; people move in all directions and within all regions.

- Opening the High Level Dialogue on migration last September in New York, Kofi Annan said that "... more and more people understand that governments can cooperate to create triple wins—for migrants, for their countries of origin, and for the societies that receive them". He referred in particular also to the remittances migrants send to their families back home: >300 billion dollars last year; an amount that exceeds the total of all international aid combined.

- What is of great concern in general and to the RCRC in particular with its mission to assist the most vulnerable is the dark side of migration – human trafficking or forced migration. A further concern is the fact that a significant number of those trafficked are women and minors. As the Italian RC says in its excellent working paper on 'Gender and Migration': "... women become the subject of double discrimination: both as women and as migrants". We know that half of all migrants – 91 million in 2005 – are women. Still - women have fewer opportunities than men for legal migration; many become irregular migrants with lack of support and exposure to risk. They are more vulnerable than men to violence and exploitation. Another sad fact which causes great concern is that according to a fresh US State Department study, around 50% of people smuggled and sold into forced labour are minors that end up working in the sex trade. The picture gets grimmer when we know that trafficking for sexual purposes is second only to drugs in its economic value to organised crime.

- Recently the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 was visibly observed. The director of the UN office on drugs and crime, Antonio Maria Costa, wrote in the International Herald Tribune that "Whatever history and law books tell us, slavery has not

been abolished. It is a booming international trade, making billions of dollars at the expense of millions of victims. People are still deprived of their liberty, duped or coerced into forced labour, locked up, abused and forced into servitude.” (Unquote)

- This is what concerns and should concern the RCRC Movement. It is the mission of the Movement to alleviate and prevent suffering of the most vulnerable people – whatever the reason for their misery. By any definition, trafficked and irregular migrants are amongst these most vulnerable people. And they are all around us, in the rich western countries as well as elsewhere and should be a primary concern for our NS.
- A lot of great work is being done to help these people by many NS in different parts of the world; Close to us here in Europe you have all seen and just heard about the great work that for example the Spanish RC and its 1500 involved volunteers do. Perhaps you also know of the Italian RC work in – just to mention a couple examples close to us here in Europe. But many more Societies are heavily involved, Cambodia for example with victims of human trafficking and others whose experiences you will hear about here at Holmenkollen. National Societies do substantial and very good work, out of ‘genuine compassionate humanitarianism’ – to paraphrase a well-known expression... They are excellent examples of putting the RCRC fundamental principles into action: humanity, impartiality, neutrality. Even independence – which I will revert to.
- While doing an outstanding job, its significance might be even more profound if we could be slightly clearer as to what the role of NS is in this work and if we could develop common criteria and principles and focus on specific target groups. Some individuals are more vulnerable than others among the most vulnerable when we talk about migration. Those are the ones we as the RCRC Movement should aim at reaching. They may not be the most visible groups – and therefore also difficult to access. But that is what our NS should attempt to do – assisting irregular or forced migrants would combine humanitarian assistance, concern and protection. It is most likely more challenging than some other forms of assistance carried out for registered asylum seekers and refugees as if often almost routine by NS. But who says RCRC work is or ever has been easy...? Sometimes public opinion does not view RCRC involvement with irregular migrants positively. It must be remembered, however, that work with and for them is not a statement on their legal status or on the motives which have forced them on the move.
- The strength of the RCRC lies in it being a Movement. It can do more than the sum of its components by performing as one, through advocacy, by negotiating a humanitarian slot or space for its work and by capitalising on the fact that it is a Movement, able to work cross-border, to form and use influential networks and – perhaps a most important additional opportunity – because NS are acknowledged auxiliaries to the public authorities in their countries. This is also why it is important to sometimes stop to reflect and conceptualize on what really are the role and the main target groups for NS when it comes to migration.

- An auxiliary role of course has its limitations: we can aim for a general understanding and acceptance of what we mean by auxiliary role – not clear to everyone! – but we should not look for a ‘one-size-fits-all’ –formula when it comes to work in different parts of the world, in different political and economical environments and contexts. Our special and recognised task is to act based on need – we don’t ask for the reasons behind that need. In adopting the Statutes for the Movement at an International Conference, states have accepted that NS have the right to act independently based on the fundamental principles. This of course is key when negotiating for the ‘space’ to work with for example irregular migrants, for which a RC contact and assistance can be a matter of life and death. Our concern is not and should never be, as stated before, the legal status of the migrants we can reach and assist.

- It would be naïve to think that we enjoy the freedom to act fully independently the globe over. Nevertheless, this is precisely what we as a Movement can promote and act on more forcefully than any individual NS ever can do.

- Another real challenge is advocacy. Again, something that can only gain in strength when we perform as a Movement. Advocacy without credible action is hollow. The RCRC can draw on important and efficient action. It can demonstrate results and impact of its work in a vast number of countries, which increases its influence and credibility when seeking to draw the attention of governments and public opinion to the plight of vulnerable migrants. It can raise its voice for development aiming at improved livelihoods that could prevent already vulnerable people from insecure ventures in an often desperate pursuit of a better future, where they risk losing their lives or becoming victims of modern slavery.

- Discrimination cannot be separated from a discussion on migration. The components of the Movement the world over can and do fight in various ways the spread and increase of racism, discrimination and xenophobia against people of different cultures and beliefs, against migrants but also against other people, who are marginalised for various reasons. An essential part of our mission is to defend human dignity. In the migration debate, emphasis should be put on the richness that different people and cultures bring to their new home lands and communities – and the RCRC is present in all those communities. They are best placed to invite and open their doors to all migrants. It can only be hoped that they do so wherever it is needed.

- The Movement has three main components – or actually 188 to be precise... We have the 186 NS, the ICRC and the International Federation – the UN of the RCRC world. In this particular debate on migration, NS are key actors. They act nationally, they can and do act regionally and internationally. They have effective and efficient practical cooperation and are also active members of important networks such as PERCO or the Platform for European RC Cooperation on refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants. One can only hope that similar networks would spring into active being also in other parts of the world.

- The representatives for the ICRC are here with us and they are the right persons to outline in more detail the ICRC mandate when it comes to migration. Its widely and formally ac-

knowledgeable mandate of protection and assistance is important in this debate, in particular in situations of armed conflict which so often lead to massive population movements, internal and external displacement, refugee problems and irregular massive migration as for example in today's Middle East. 4 million people or almost the population of Norway have been forced to leave their homes in Iraq; half of them also their country.

- The Federation of NS, also present here, has a powerful tool in seeking to define clear policies, strategies and guidelines in support of all its 186 members. It can do much more in particular in advocacy – not only on the issue we're discussing here but perhaps even more so in securing space for NS independent action.
- The different roles of the components of the Movement have to be complementary, to mutually reinforce the work of the other components and – above all – to be performed in concert to multiply the results of all efforts. It is when acting as one Movement that we can have an impact – and only then.
- The Movement also needs to establish a better understanding of its role and work in migration in relation to other major players – such as the IOM – and others involved. RCRC could sometimes do better at working with external partners, nationally and internationally – and not only in this particular field provided that it can safeguard its fundamental principles. However, when it comes to the quite common NS partnerships with UN organisations, it is important that they do not become 'implementing agencies'. Any cooperation should be based on mutually agreed roles and principles and on respect for the fundamental principles, in particular that of independence. The Movement has on its part adopted 'minimum standards' for such relationships.
- When the Movement meets the governments at the 30th International Conference in November this year, it must be clear about what it needs in terms of partnership with them when it comes to migration. NS can do much based on their general humanitarian mandate and within the framework of the fundamental principles. Not everything they do is done as an auxiliary to the authorities! When we move in a quite sensitive area such as migration it could greatly benefit the work being done were it better defined by ourselves and understood by and based on a common understanding with governments. Our responsibility, within our global mission, is to assist the most vulnerable amongst us and to try to prevent further vulnerabilities. It is as simple as that – and precisely as challenging as that!

Thank you.