

**6th Pan African Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference
Algiers, September 9, 2004**

**Opening Address
H.E. Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid**

Chairman, Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be here amongst you, leaders and representatives of African National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and of guests from Sister Societies the world over. It is a privilege to address you at this very important 6th Pan African Conference in the beautiful city of Algiers. I would like to congratulate our host, the Algerian Red Crescent Society, for the excellent preparations and the very warm welcome that we received upon our arrival to this statutory Conference of the International Federation.

In the coming days we shall together seek to «Consolidate the RCRC role as a reliable and effective civil society partner». As key partners to our governments, we have first hand knowledge and experience as how to best bridge the role between governmental and non-governmental institutions. As a Movement comprising 181 National Societies along with the Federation and the ICRC, we represent a real force on local, national, regional and international levels, which can significantly contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

HIV/AIDS, the biggest threat to the achievement of any development goals in Africa, remains to be the major contributor to increased vulnerability and poverty on this continent. This was the major theme at the previous Pan African Conference held in Ouagadougou four years ago. It still requires us to look at how to further develop ways to contain it and to support those, who are infected and affected by it.

During the cold war and the tensions between the two super powers, Africa was unacceptably used as the testing ground for their interests. Africa was then labelled the <forgotten continent>. But Africa will not be forgotten. I will do my very best as chairman of the Standing Commission to ensure that our Movement addresses the tremendous needs in Africa and brings it back to the forefront of our interventions and assistance as a priority region in terms of humanitarian needs.

Having said that, it is with great concern that I follow the on-going and spreading conflicts in Africa. I am convinced that I speak for all of us in the Movement in expressing our deep distress with the situation in Darfour. It is presently the Movement's biggest on-going humanitarian assistance operation. We feel for the victims and we will do our utmost to bring relief and support to the largest possible number of beneficiaries and help them return to a path of peace.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has a role to play in promoting peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts, especially in their work locally and nationally.

20 years ago, in 1984, the last Red Cross / Red Crescent Peace Conference took place on the Aaland Islands, co-hosted by the Finnish and the Swedish RC. I quote: <Peace is not just the absence of war but a dynamic process of cooperation among all states and peoples>. Unquote. Using today's language and terminology, peace is a process of building societies based on respect for diversity, tolerance and non discrimination; on respect for basic human rights and humanitarian values and the equality of all people. The aims of contributing to bringing about peace and to promote peaceful solutions along these principles are still relevant and topical on our agenda as a Movement. We have repeatedly highlighted them and will continue to do so in a world, which seems to increasingly contribute towards the erosion of these noble principles and humanitarian values.

Conferences such as this one provide us with excellent opportunities to analyse our role as actors in this great Movement. What are our successes, which we should rightly be proud of? What are the lessons learnt for future improvements? How are we carrying out our mission and mandate in a constantly changing environment?

Viewing developments and changes around us, I cannot help but sometimes feel a bit concerned.

The external world is changing: more actors, more complexities, increasing numbers of victims, increasing threats - not only in terms of conflicts and tensions.

Thinking of our National Societies and the priorities they have set for their mission and work, I want to cite one example to illustrate a changing world: around half of the world's population now live in urban areas and centres, where poverty and vulnerability to disasters and disease are dramatically increasing. What does this mean for us in our mission to assist the most vulnerable people?

The Movement has changed. In the last 15 years we have seen a tremendous growth in NS capacities around the world. The risk - and the challenge! - is to prevent internal competition that this may lead to, and of which signs are emerging for example in the implementation of the Seville Agreement. Rather than compete, we should complement each other's work. Let's not squabble over who does what but concentrate on how to best meet the needs of the victims. The world sees us as one entity, not as separate actors. If one fails, all fail.

We have 52 new NS in 11 years (1990 - 2001). The volume of assistance has grown, as have the number of victims of disasters and conflicts.

When we look at some of the external trends and changes, which will influence our future work we can observe for example, that needs are constantly increasing. Yet this seems to have no tangible effect on improvements in key areas of human life such as poverty, health, vulnerability, gender equality and access to education - especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. All these are among the targets for major efforts in the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Secondly, donor behaviour is changing, especially within governments in the way they allocate resources; in decision-making processes and in the criteria they set for selecting partners, where credibility and accountability have become increasingly important. We have to watch out in not becoming only implementing agencies for governmental policies - nationally

and internationally – which may overrule our independence and overlook our principles. Any partnerships should be within the context of our principles and within our humanitarian values – while ensuring that we improve our competence and performance and strive to remain equal partners.

What is the added value we as National Societies, as partners to our governments, as components in this Movement, as players in the international arena, bring to the fore?

At times we have to pose hard questions to arrive at the right answers.

My message, my appeal, to this Conference, and to all Movement components present here, is to get our act together as a Movement in order for us to remain a relevant major humanitarian global organisation and player. That means serious and concerted action along the lines we have already staked out in a number of tools from the Federation's Strategy 2010 to the Movement Strategy.

Talking about the Movement Strategy, I want to congratulate the South African Red Cross on the great work carried out in implementing it under the guidance of its President, Ms Mandisa Kalako-Williams. I see it as an inspirational example for everyone that a NS can make a difference in promoting overall Movement cooperation. The Sierra Leone Red Cross under the leadership of Dr Muctarr Jalloh is another excellent example on active furthering of Movement cooperation. We have encouraging reports also from Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda on how they have promoted the objectives and the actions in the Strategy.

About working better together - another observation: I was shocked to read in a recent Federation study that in 1919 Henry Davison reflected that an international assistance operation in those days had given rise within the then League to the «old question of direct operation, operation through separate national societies or through the local red cross». If the question was old in 1919, how would we describe it today? And we are still searching for the right answers....

It is imperative that we build our capacity to work together collectively as a Movement - that we finally agree on the right modes of coordination, cooperation and delivery of assistance where everybody's legitimate interests are taken into account.

This, however, might also mean a <give and take> exercise, which we have to be prepared for.... At times we may, as NS, as Federation Secretariat or as ICRC have to overlook some of our institutional identities in the interest of the victims and to benefit unified Movement action, to retain a strong Movement image. This will not be an easy ride for some but I'm sure many will welcome it, as we have to respect the specific roles and mandates of each component. Red Cross/Red Crescent has always to me been a synonym for action. Action and visibility guarantee a place in the sun, make us look good and provide us with a position of influence. However - it is time to turn our attention from <action> to <impact> and <outputs>. Our supporters and donors, who provide us with resources, are now asking - what are the results of our efforts?

Much strength can be gained by opening up to cooperation with outside partners - locally, nationally, and internationally. We can form critical and strategic partnerships to promote our own work and goals - ranging from the UN in response to Kofi Annan's invitation to participate in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, through regional organisations to local and national networks & NGOs.

Mechanisms for interaction, such as the ones you have established in Africa through ACROFA, the Southern Africa Partnerships of Red Cross Societies, the RC-Net for the Eastern African Societies are valuable regional networks for more focused deliberations and relationship building within and outside our formal structures.

We can reinforce our commitments to the basic principles and values, and - as a question of priority - strengthen our volunteer base, without which we are just another bureaucratic

structure. In Africa, youth represent not only the majority of many countries' population but a major volunteer force within the Red Cross/Red Crescent. Be careful! They are not only a resource; they are a force for change and continuity when we open our doors for their active and equal participation.

There are presently a number of important processes going on which will help us focus on the needs for change: The Federation of the Future -process, the evaluation of Strategy 2010 and the review of the Movement Strategy, our Standing Commission working group on the Seville agreement - to mention but a few. All these will produce the food for thought and for our statutory meetings in Seoul in November 2005 when we are invited to decide on how we want our Movement to perform in the future.

Being in Africa and addressing a Pan African Conference as Chairman of the Standing Commission, it is regretful that once again we have a Standing Commission, without a member from Africa.

This was the outcome of the vote at the last, 28th International Conference, which was very disappointing – to say the least. To compensate and to ensure that the voice of Africa is heard in the Commission, we have a strong African NS representation in our four advisory working groups. Three of the four groups have vice chairs from Africa. 30 NS are represented in these working groups, which were set up to prepare and advise the Commission on the Emblem, the Seville Agreement, the Strategy for the Movement and up-coming statutory meetings.

I would encourage you to use the opportunity of Standing Commission members' presence here to discuss your concerns and share your views. We have with us Janet Davidson, vice chair of the Commission and also chairing the Seville Agreement group, Philippe Cuvillier, Chairman of the Emblem and Freddy Pedersen, chairman of the Movement strategy working groups. I'm sure they are eager to hear from you on these and other Movement issues.

In conclusion, I wish this 6th Pan African Conference every success, courage and boldness in tackling its weighty agenda. Action speaks louder than words. If we know where we want to go, it is easier to get there.

A friend once told me that when there is a disaster, it is good to have a friend, a friend with a plan, a plan that you know.

We have to set our goals and objectives, devise our strategies and develop good working plans. Our credibility as National Societies, as a Movement, rests with our commitment to walk our talk, to live our principles.

Don't forget - big ships usually turn very slowly but they can sink very fast!

Thank you.