

**American Red Cross National Convention  
May 12, 2006**

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

**Chairman, Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent**

Madame Chair – my friend Bonnie,  
Respected members of the Board,  
Representatives of the Chapters,  
Dear Red Cross, Red Crescent friends,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm deeply honoured to address you at this very important 125th anniversary convention of one of the most important National Societies in our Movement – the American Red Cross. Please accept my warm congratulations for your unstinting work to the benefit of Humanity! I also want to thank you, Bonnie, personally and the American Red Cross for welcoming us so warmly to your country to be with you at this milestone in your Society's history.

Your convention meets at a time when the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is preoccupied preparing for its crucially important statutory meetings in Geneva in about five weeks from now. 183 National Societies will come together at the General Assembly of the International Federation on 19 June; they are joined by the ICRC at the Council of Delegates later that same day to set the scene for the International Conference that opens the next morning, on the 20th of June.

192 States Party to the Geneva Conventions will join us then as equal members and participants at a conference, which is a truly unique humanitarian forum in today's troubled world, which is full of challenges.

The most pressing one is how can we as a Movement better promote tolerance and respect for diversity and fight all kinds of discrimination? I feel it is more urgent than ever to engage in working out different and new ways and means to promote tolerance and multiculturalism

as part of our everyday lives and realities and as a basic value in the name of our fundamental principles, indeed in the name of humanity. The Movement can here be a strong driving force and voice in local communities as well as on international fora.

We need to focus our attention on promoting better understanding among people and cultures. We should not deepen gaps, which often are based on ignorance on all sides. Instead we should encourage dialogue and concrete action to develop better mutual understanding among all people and all different cultures.

All of us here today take pride in being part of the greatest humanitarian Movement in the world. A Movement, which reaches out to all peoples of local communities world wide uniting them regardless of their colour, race, creed, social or political standing. You know from your own experience that when disaster strikes, it is the Red Cross that is automatically called upon and that goes into action - locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Vulnerable people, victims of disasters and conflict, expect us to do so. It is our ultimate mission and we should not fail them. Expectations create a demand to deliver and to do so competently, efficiently and professionally.

Victims and beneficiaries don't distinguish between the components – to them Red Cross/Red Crescent is one. We have the best known brand in the world – our emblems. To millions of people they represent a guarantee of help and assistance, hope, comfort, solidarity and trust. It is imperative that we retain that trust and credibility and that we act as a whole to meet humanitarian challenges that are numerous in today's world and to coordinate our international efforts. Staying true to our Fundamental Principles is an essential part in that effort, which is perhaps one of the most important tasks of the Standing Commission in its aspirations to promote the Movement and to ensure harmony and coordination.

Friends,

An issue that preoccupied the Movement for a very long time was that of the emblem. However, this issue was finally resolved last December through the adoption of the third additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions establishing the additional emblem, the 'red crystal'.

Since 1995, the Standing Commission and the Movement have been actively involved in finding what was always referred to as "a comprehensive and lasting solution" to a problem which had been with us for far too long. In the year 2000 the draft protocol introducing the additional emblem was completed. It sought to enhance protection especially in situations of war and conflict, where the present emblems – the cross and the crescent - are incorrectly perceived as having religious connotations. The second aim was to allow the Movement to achieve the principle of universality, paving the way for National Societies, which could not use the existing emblems, to join the Movement. One such Society is well known to you – the Magen David Adom in Israel.

Progress towards the end goal was repeatedly disrupted mainly by political developments and events beyond the control of the Movement. But at a diplomatic conference of states last December the protocol was finally adopted – 5 years after the draft was completed. The road has been difficult and at times quite bumpy – the complicated political situation in the Middle East

has for years created challenges and at times stalled all developments for the resolution of this essentially humanitarian issue. We still face testing times in the weeks to come. However, the adoption of the Protocol essentially closed the debate on the emblem.

What remains is to finalise the process by integrating the new additional emblem into the Movement statutes. This is the aim and primary objective of the International Conference in June. But there is more to it than achieving a necessary change in the Statutes. The International Conference in June is a Movement Conference. We should seek to achieve the expected result in unity of purpose and by consensus. We should focus on the humanitarian necessity to conclude the process through this purely consequential and technical amendment. It is the obligation of all of us, all components, the Standing Commission, National Societies to work towards consensus in June by ensuring a better understanding among participating governments of the underlying aims and objectives behind the amendment.

Furthermore, we need to restore consensus as the way we do business in the Movement and to convince our most important partners, our governments, that it is to the benefit of those we serve.

I'm optimistic – by nature and because I believe that humanitarian concerns and values in the end will prevail.

Once we have cleared this remaining hurdle and the amendments are adopted – the Movement can finally welcome two additional members into its midst: the MDA in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society – both here with you also at this convention. That will be an historic moment and of tremendous importance for those vulnerable groups and victims who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance in the on-going conflict there and elsewhere. A humanitarian victory over political interests. The full implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding focusing on humanitarian needs and services between the MDA and the Palestine Red Crescent will demonstrate the power of humanity and that two Societies can work together even in such difficult circumstances when the work stems from humanitarian needs and is firmly based in the fundamental principles of the Movement.

Unity of the Movement is non negotiable. It is important for the world, for all its peoples. It brings hope and lights the darkness in wars and conflicts, in all disasters that cause suffering for millions of people worldwide. To preserve and underline the importance of Unity, I also want to emphasize that our global humanitarian Movement needs the American Red Cross. And – dare I say – as much as the American Red Cross needs the Movement.

May I once again congratulate the American Red Cross on this 125th Anniversary and wish it continued success in its work ahead, nationally and internationally. Your participation is not only needed, it is something everyone counts on to help make a difference, to save many lives and to contribute to the services the Movement provides to vulnerable populations around the globe.

In conclusion I recall a statement made by a Brazilian thinker and I quote: “When I dream alone it is only a dream; when we dream together, it is reality.”

So let's all dream together. May peace be upon you, salam, shalom, take care and may your God be with you.