

**Statement by His Excellency
Dr. Mohammed Al Hadid**

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

At the Opening Ceremony of the

General Assembly of Arab Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Doha, February 14 – 15, 2007

Mr Chairman,
Representatives of Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies,
Mr President of the International Federation,
Representatives of the ICRC,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Red Crescent and Red Cross friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate with you at this General Assembly of Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies. This important meeting is held at a time allowing us to sum up our work and achievements since we met last year and to prepare to address new and grave challenges ahead of us. As a Movement we continue with our main mission, to alleviate suffering based on our Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values.

Last June, we met at the Council of Delegates and the 29th International Conference in Geneva and took the concluding steps to give effect to the Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, which established the new, additional emblem, the Red Crystal. The Protocol, now signed by 84 States and ratified by nine, entered formally into force on 14 January. The task that still remains is a proper dissemination campaign to ensure that it will become well known, understood and respected.

In June we also recognized and admitted the Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom into our Movement. This was in response to the "will" expressed by the international community at the Diplomatic Conference in 2005 as well as by the Palestine Red Crescent and the MDA in Israel when they concluded their Memorandum of Understanding in late November 2005. That agreement could at the time be described only as revolutionary when considering that it was brought about by two National Societies in a situation of conflict and occupation. It represented a forceful expression of the will and intention to secure humanitarian services for people suffering from the on-going conflict. It would not have been possible had it not been for a spirit of real goodwill and deep understanding of the humanitarian principles of our Movement.

However, implementing the agreement has been slow, partly because of the political situation in both Israel and Palestine. I regret to say that there has not been much advancement since June. Both National Societies remain committed to see it through. But they can only do so much when the final decisions to put it into practise are formally in the hands of the respective authorities. It is not for me to seek those guilty; I see a genuine will by both Societies to see the agreement come into full force. But I also see a need to remind both governments to respect the commitments made at the 29th Conference and to do everything in their power to ensure full implementation of the MoU in order not to create any unnecessary hurdles for the coming 30th Conference. Allowing for full implementation of this essentially humanitarian agreement would also send a strong signal of 'good will' so sorely needed to build confidence and seek a way out of this tragic conflict that has ruled the political scene in the Middle East for far too long.

On Monday this week in the Standing Commission the ICRC, in cooperation with the Federation, communicated their preparedness to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the

MoU with hopefully positive emerging results before too long.

Looking ahead towards the 30th International Conference and the preceding Movement internal statutory meetings in November this year:

The Standing Commission on Monday set the framework for the up-coming Conference. This year, we are looking at a two-fold and slightly renewed approach:

The first part of the Conference will seek to identify main humanitarian challenges for the next 5 -10 years during a general debate, which aims at defining what are the humanitarian consequences of climate change, of migration, of violence and of re-emerging diseases and new health threats. Conference participants will be asked to address each of these areas through the lenses of 'partnership' based on the auxiliary role of National Societies and other components of the Movement. It is hoped that we can have some form of consensus outcome on encompassing humanitarian challenges, which will impact our work as a Movement and set the agenda for the coming years.

In its 2nd part, the Conference will address issues aiming at resolutions on – for example – the definition of the auxiliary role, guidelines for National Societies and Governments for forming partnerships and on issues relating to IDRL and to challenges facing International Humanitarian Law.

In the coming months we will involve National Societies as well as Governments in a thorough consultation process. A Group of Ambassadors will help us prepare both substance and procedure. We are also looking at organizing an open consultation meeting with both National Societies and governments in early September.

I urge you to closely follow the preparations through the Standing Commission Newsletter and its website – we'll have everything there and we would welcome your feedback and comments.

Problems regarding auxiliarity can indeed be complex depending on the context – national, international or conflict related – where the situation affects the delivery of services to victims and vulnerable groups. But at all times neutrality and independence must be safeguarded to enable us to deliver protection and assistance with credibility. This is essential in any privileged partnerships with our governments.

Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to reconfirm to you that by decision of the Standing Commission, Arabic is now a working language of the Movement. You will see this at work when you receive the documents for the upcoming Council and the International Conference in Arabic. This is already established practice within the Federation; now this privilege is extended to all Movement level meetings.

I am convinced that this will improve and facilitate our communication and exchanges when preparing for meetings as well as at the actual gatherings, where full interpretation services will be available.

A year ago this meeting passed a resolution requesting the Standing Commission "to form a working group to follow up and evaluate the programmes of the components of the Movement pertaining to the adherence of the fundamental principles, disseminating the culture of

tolerance and non-discrimination and to submit the result of its work to the Council of Delegates in 2007.”

This important resolution was carefully studied by a small group commissioned by me as Chairman of the Commission and led by Professor Freddy Pedersen, member of the Commission. It was part of comprehensive background work during last March-April looking into promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination as part of preparing a proposal to convene a third RCRC Peace Conference, the aim of which would be to strengthen RCRC work towards a ‘culture of peace’. However, the political situation was not encouraging to organise such a Conference. On Monday, when reverting to the Resolution from last February, the Standing Commission agreed that the ICRC and the International Federation would here report on work being carried out within the Movement on these issues.

Let me now turn to this region and to the great challenges we face.

It continues to be a sad fact that hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Palestine are daily suffering from the effects of war and conflict. It is imperative that International Humanitarian Law in its full extent is respected by all parties to these on-going conflicts. It is also the obligation of all parties involved to ensure unhindered access to victims, who have the right to enjoy protection and assistance to ensure that at least their basic needs are met. We must show our Sister Societies in all these affected areas our full support and solidarity when they carry out their humanitarian mission. I also hope this meeting will reflect on how the RCRC can effectively fight the spread and increase of racism, discrimination and xenophobia against people of different cultures and beliefs, including religious beliefs. Looking at the environment in which we work and live in our vast and diverse region, I find this challenge immensely important.

My ambition and wish for our Movement is that one day we can “deliver as one” – to borrow from the recent High Level Panel of the UN Secretary General on “System-wide Coherence” setting out an agenda for the UN to better coordinate and streamline its functions.

Here we can learn from the UN – provided they will follow the suggested recommendations! We already have our Seville Agreement and it’s Supplementary Measures; they provide a good tool to direct our internal cooperation and coordination. But we are still looking for optimal ways of delivering “as one”, as a Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, which draws its strength from its fundamental principles and values and builds on jointly agreed standards and methodology.

The external world characterizes us as “the global public good”. That is how we are perceived, that is what we have to live up to. We have to constantly ensure that this perception also turns into a reality among victims of wars and conflicts, who trust us to provide not only concrete and accurate assistance but also hope.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the President of the Red Crescent in Qatar and likewise to the Red Crescent Society in Qatar for hosting this meeting. I wish all my brothers and sisters in the Arab group success in their endeavors.

Thank you.