

**H.E. Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid
Chairman – Standing Commission**

**90th Anniversary Governing Board of the
International Federation**

Paris, 4 May, 2009

It is humbling to address this distinguished Board here in Paris, at the beginning of all the 90th Anniversary Celebrations, knowing the impressive history and track record of our great Federation.

In 1918 there were 38 National Societies, formed to respond to needs arising from wars and serious health threats, disease and poverty. These and other new Societies rapidly joined the five founding members who created the League. Already in 1924 it comprised 50 members.

I found it highly interesting to read now, 90 years later, the statement of purpose of 'the Committee of Red Cross Societies' adopted at a meeting of scientists, doctors and nurses in early April 1919, convened by Henry Davison as part of his decisive steps and hectic activities leading to the founding of the League. Let me quote:

A central organisation, which shall stimulate and coordinate the voluntary efforts of the peoples of the world through their respective Red Cross Societies; which shall assist in promoting the development of sound measures for public health and sanitation, the welfare of children and mothers ... the control of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, malaria and other infectious and preventable diseases ... and which shall endeavour to spread the light of science and the warmth of human sympathy into every corner of the world and shall invoke ... the daily efforts of men and women of every country, of every religion and of every race.

Health was at the core of the mission of the new organisation but was from the onset linked to the greater humanitarian ideals. It was in direct response to Henry Dunant, who so very accurately said "The enemy, our true enemy, is not the neighbouring nation; it is hunger, cold, misery, ignorance, routine, superstition and prejudice."

However, I also find it somewhat shocking to realise that we in so many respects still today face those same challenges in many parts of the world and within many individual countries.

The achievements of the League, later on the Federation and its National Society -members, are nonetheless impressive. We nowadays count the number of beneficiaries in tens of millions in the 186 National Societies and in joint international operations, when we are assisting people in need to alleviate suffering in all its forms.

In those early days, we were fairly alone. Today we face challenges, not only in the ever increasing numbers of people affected by disasters and calamities but also in the competition we face for resources, human as well as material. We certainly still offer the most impressive humanitarian network, reaching into all corners of the countries and territories, as partners

and auxiliaries to governments and other organisations. We are respected; we enjoy an image of being 'the common good'. We are privileged in benefitting from the support of tens of millions of volunteers and members, people committed to our humanitarian values and principles, from the smallest distant villages to the biggest cities and metropolis. That is and always will be our greatest strength – we are there, on the spot, all over the globe, prepared and ready when something happens.

Our strength also lies in our diversity, in our ability to work together in partnership. We come together regularly; we share experiences, the same ideals, the same programmes and challenges. We are friends from the moment we meet – we speak the Red Cross/Red Crescent language.

The Standing Commission met last week and adopted the provisional agenda for the upcoming Council in Nairobi. The process towards this agenda was marked by very good cooperation between all components and by broader participation from National Societies than before – something we are very proud of. We come committed to listening and discussing more at this Council than before. We have one full day of workshops set aside in the programme to deliberate and debate important themes in a highly informal setting and with a clear future oriented focus. You will be the first ones to receive this agenda here in Paris and I'm quite eager to hear your feedback!

Being strong internally is a prerequisite for being strong externally. We have to take care to continue to maintain our unity and our ability to work together. We need it to strengthen our position as preferred partner, not only nationally but also as a responder in international emergencies. We are doing a good job but *even* good performance can grow and improve! Good Humanitarian Donorship statistics from 2006 tells us that 8% of the official humanitarian assistance was channelled through the RCRC Movement, while 23% went through NGOs and 43% through UN agencies and international organisations. I believe we can increase that figure and we should aspire to do so to better reflect our true importance as a global humanitarian network and force.

Einstein said "it's a dangerous world we live in. Not because of the people who do evil but because of the people who watch and do nothing."

"Our world is in a mess. It is time to make your move" we are told by the very inspiring and dynamic campaign. To honour the great traditions of our Movement and of our Federation, let's keep our hands joined together to make our world a better place. The best way we can predict our future is to create it.

On behalf of all the members of the Standing Commission I want to express our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to the International Federation on this important Anniversary, to all its National Societies and to the volunteers, members and staff of this great organisation.