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Chairman, Standing Commission of the RCRC

150th Anniversary of Battle of Solferino
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"The best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it." With these wise words by Harry Truman I would like to firmly establish two important messages:

One – Volunteers especially the youth, are the backbone of our Movement and without them, there is no Movement.

Two – Listen to the youth. It is not enough to invite them to take part in all kinds of events and activities; they have to be included and involved in setting directions, formulating the agenda and planning the work we are carrying out all over the globe when responding to humanitarian needs locally, nationally and internationally whatever the cause might be.

I value very highly your invitation to be here with you at this impressive celebration of the 150th anniversary of the battle of Solferino. You have all read the story; you know how it all began. You are here to trace the footsteps of Dunant and the volunteers he mobilised to help those wounded in the battlefields, to extend human empathy to fellow human beings, regardless of their origin.

You know the challenges 150 years ago, which led Henry Dunant to redirect his life, to take action and to spread the message of impartial and neutral humanitarian action.

'A wounded soldier is a neutral soldier' was the essence in his strong message, which is echoed in the core of the body of international humanitarian law, resonating from the battle of Solferino.

We say in the "Our World – Your Move campaign" that our world is in a mess; it is time for your move. You are making an impressive move towards building a better world by being here. And, moreover, you are making a statement: there are still needs and they can be addressed and we can respond to them as a Movement. There are many Solferinos in today's world; small ones, where we all can help, big and complex ones, where cooperation and coordinated action are needed to fulfil our humanitarian mission: to alleviate human suffering in all its forms and wherever it may be found.

Dunant started organising assistance aided by the people in Castiglione. Today we count our active volunteers and members the world over in the tens of millions. In a big part of the world, youth form the majority of the RCRC volunteers – as well as the majority of entire populations. But their share in decision making be it within the RCRC or in countries and communities in general is way behind their numbers.

"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation" said Kofi Annan and continued: "Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline."

When the Movement gathers here 100 years from now to again celebrate its origins, what will the challenges look like? What will our Movement look like?

I dearly hope we will still be a true chain of humanity stretching through countries and continents, joined by our values and principles. I also hope we will still be perceived as "the common good" and as the major humanitarian force we aspire to be. However, these hopes and visions are not realistic unless we continue to forcefully call on not only the 'power of humanity' but also on the 'power of youth'.

We have such tremendous strengths that pull us together and make us different and unique: our emblems, our principles, our diversity, our auxiliary role, the IHL, and being the largest humanitarian global network. These have characterized us and remained strong through the last 150 years and I'm convinced they will bind us and identify us also in the future.

Influence and status is earned, it is not given. A strong and empowered RCRC youth is something you have to build, by forcefully adding your voice to our planning and decision making, by actively participating not only at events but at meetings and fora where the future of the Movement is being shaped. We don't want to be an old fashion conservative movement. We need your way of thinking, your innovation and your enthusiasm. You have to challenge us, the senior leaders, in what we do and how we do it – we may need your wake-up calls in many cases. I sincerely believe that the leadership in the RCRC Movement welcomes your involvement. We may just not be very good at finding the right ways of showing it and that's where you have to help us along.

In conclusion I congratulate you on this 150th Anniversary and would like to remind that this is a time for bold measures. "This is your Movement and you are the generation". I urge you all to make your move towards a better, more peaceful and tolerant world.

And remember that in the quiet hours when we are alone and there is nobody to tell us what fine fellows we are, we come sometimes upon a moment in which we wonder, not how much money we are earning, nor how famous we have become, but what good we are doing.

"All can, in one way or another, each in his own sphere and within his own limitations, do something to help the good work move forward". (H. Dunant)

Thank you.