

Council of Delegates - Seoul, November 2005

Introduction to the Report on the Emblem

Ambassador Philippe Cuvillier
Special Representative of the Standing Commission on the Emblem

Mr Chairman,
Dear Red Cross/Red Crescent Friends,

The Emblem: No concept has been the object for so long of so much debate in our conferences, working groups, informal discussions...

This is no surprise: behind the concept lie two basic obligations of our Movement: to ensure effective protection in zones of conflict and to permit admission of established Societies who have difficulties with the existing emblems.

For the first obligation, added protection, it was never envisaged to accept a proliferation of national signs, leading to confusion and lack of visibility. For the second obligation, universality, the idea emerged of resorting, besides the cross and crescent, to a new geometrical figure with no reference to existing signs of religious, ethnic or national significance. This new emblem was never intended to replace the cross and crescent but to be placed on the same footing as the existing ones.

Then, the designers and legal experts went to work and came out with a «red frame in the shape of a square on edge» and, much later, to a name for it, the «red crystal».

The Standing Commission renewed by the 26th International Conference in 1995 set up its first working group, which reported to the Council of Delegates in Seville in 1997, then to the Council and International Conference in 1999 which adopted a resolution requesting the Standing Commission to set up a Joint Working Group with representatives from the Movement and from governments with a mandate to find as rapidly as possible a comprehensive solution ac-

ceptable to all parties in terms of substance and procedure.

This working group, co-chaired by Mrs Christina Magnuson and Ambassador Diallo from Senegal, comprised members from 15 States - among them the permanent members of the Security Council - 4 members of the Standing Commission, two representatives of National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation. During the year 2000, the group drafted its proposal for an additional third Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 - since then known as the draft Protocol. Extensive consultations took place and wide agreement was achieved on the draft. Wide enough to convene a diplomatic conference for the 25th of October that same year to adopt the additional Protocol to be almost immediately followed by an International Conference in mid November to make the needed changes to the Statutes of the Movement.

The rest is history, as the saying goes, not a pleasant one. The diplomatic conference had to be postponed due to political developments. Although hopes at the time were high for a rapid resumption of the process, it is only now that we have a date set for the needed diplomatic conference.

Let me once again recall that an additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions can only be adopted by States. It is an international treaty procedure involving all 192 States Parties. The Movement therefore has no operative role in this process, in spite of having initiated and driven the process and having drafted the Protocol text in cooperation with the States in the mentioned Joint Working Group. But the Movement has its stakes in the process and cannot stay aloof from it.

The text of the draft Protocol has not changed. So what exactly has happened in the meantime? Since the Movement defined its goal regarding the emblem process, it has tirelessly worked on keeping the issue on the international agenda in order to attain its aim: improved protection and the principle of universality. It has not stopped its efforts to overcome obstacles in the way towards achieving these goals.

The Council in 2001 adopted by consensus Resolution 6 confirming again the Movement's commitment to find a comprehensive solution to the question of the emblem, repeating its firm belief that an additional emblem devoid of any political, national or religious connotations would strengthen protection. The Council further noted that the draft Protocol of 2000 «constituted an acceptable working basis for the resumption of negotiations when circumstances permitted»; it also requested the Standing Commission to continue consultations and expressed its wish that a diplomatic conference could meet as soon as possible to complete the work started. The new aspect, which the 2001 Council introduced into the process, was operational cooperation with the National Societies that were not yet recognised due to their inability to use the existing emblems.

At the end of 2003, the Council again adopted a resolution recalling the fundamental principle of universality, underlining the urgency of reinforcing protective measures and requesting the Standing Commission «to continue to give high priority to securing, as soon as circumstances permit, a comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of the emblem». That same resolution was endorsed by consensus by the 28th International Conference, meaning that also all States agreed to it.

The International Conference elected a new Standing Commission which in turn appointed a new Working Group in January 2004. With a great deal of voluntary optimism, we set to work immediately, looking for a window of opportunity. As Chairman and Special Representative, I undertook already in the first part of 2004 consultations with governments involved, in Geneva and in the Middle East. The approach of the ICRC leadership to various governments and to the Swiss authorities was decisively important as were the Federation secretariat's work with and through the National Societies and using other fora available to it. I also visited and met with representatives of many National Societies concerned.

All these approaches together with activities of some governments resulted in March 2005 in the appointment of an Ambassador at Large for the Emblem by the Swiss Government, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Conventions. Ambassador Didier Pfirter has since conducted extensive consultations and negotiations with States Parties, which were invited to an informal consultation meeting in mid September in Geneva. Those consultations concluded with the commitment by the Swiss Government to convene the diplomatic conference before the end of the current year.

We now have that convocation: the diplomatic conference will take place on 5-6 December 2005. This is a decisive, long awaited development. We extend our deep appreciation to the Swiss government for their efforts. Now the conference must succeed. No other opportunity will arise for a long time. It is of utmost importance that National Societies convey to their government the message that the Protocol must be adopted.

In parallel, extensive consultations took place with National Societies who expressed their will to be admitted into the Movement. To this end, they must qualify for recognition, by fulfilling the ten conditions listed in article 4 of the Statutes of the Movement. So far, two Societies enter this category, the Eritrean and the Israeli. Last Sunday, November 13, the Emblem Working Group invited representatives of those Societies to expose the steps they are taking internally to achieve this qualification. I am glad to report that the progress they are making is highly encouraging.

I must add that, in the case of MDA, extensive talks with their neighbouring Society, the Palestinian Red Crescent, are under way in, I am told, a spirit of cooperation and a common will to apply the values of our Movement. We wish them full success.

Immediately after the adoption of the Protocol, hopefully on December 6, the Movement will do its part to complete the process. The Standing Commission decided last Monday here in Seoul that it will convene the 29th International Conference - governments and National Societies - to integrate the new emblem into our Statutes. This conference will take place at the earliest possible date, namely 20-21 of March next year. It will be preceded by a General Assembly of the Federation and a Council of Delegates, but all those meetings will have a formal task to fulfil and will be very short. After the International Conference, the General Assembly of the Federation will resume its session to admit the candidate Societies, provided they have at that date successfully qualified for recognition.

The Standing Commission, with the ICRC and the International Federation, will lose no time in driving the process towards its full completion. The Movement has been ready for many years. Now we count on governments to do their part.

Mr Chairman,

I submit to the Council the draft resolution for adoption and am ready to respond to any questions and give any further clarifications as needed.

Thank you.