

Keynote address  
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Chairman, Standing Commission of the RC/RC  
Council of Delegates  
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It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Standing Commission, to this Council of Delegates. My warm congratulations to our new Federation President, my dear friend Tadateru Konoe, whom I also welcome into the Standing Commission, and to the vice presidents and incoming members of the Governing Board.

My thanks and appreciation also go to our Host Society, Kenya Red Cross, to its leadership and to all its staff, volunteers and collaborators, who have worked for months to enable us as a Movement to meet in beautiful Nairobi. I'm sure their efforts have not been in vain and we will have an inspiring 3 days also at this Council.

The Movement meets now for the first time in Africa, at a time when National Societies, on this vast continent in particular but also elsewhere, face strenuous external demands and pressure stemming from climate change, food crisis, financial difficulties and population movements.

This year we have celebrated our Movement's historic milestones: 150 years since Henry Dunant witnessed the battle in Solferino and laid the foundation for our world-encompassing network; 90 years since the founding of the International Federation and 60 years since the Geneva Conventions came into effect in 1949.

Both in light of our impressive history and of the present humanitarian challenges, the Solferinos of today, the time is opportune for in-depth deliberations of the many and important items on our agenda. To provide more opportunities for exchange and discussions, we have, for the first time, set aside a full day for workshops, which will deal with some of the most pressing issues and challenges we face. I'm sure your input will help draw useful roadmaps for the future and for tackling the issues ahead of us.

It is time to think boldly, and at the same time, analytically: because we want to remain the leading humanitarian Movement, we have to stay ahead of the continuous changes in the external environment.

Competition out there for resources, human as well as material, is fierce. We cannot afford to be, or even be perceived, as stagnant and conservative – as one of the findings in interviews with National Society leaders indicated earlier this year.

The International Federation has just adopted Strategy 2020 and committed itself to *do more, do better, and reach further* by building on past achievements and established comparative advantage. Congratulations and my best wishes for this achievement!

The three strategic objectives in the Strategy highlight well the main tasks and mission of the Federation with its National Societies. They focus on the basic tasks of saving lives and working for healthier communities. I want to point out the particular importance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> objective: to promote social inclusion, and a culture of non-violence and peace. In our troubled world this is sorely needed and particularly well suited for the Red Cross/Red Crescent, anchored in the fundamental principles.

The Code of Good Partnership, which is on our agenda at this Council, helps us in this context in addressing the need for more efforts towards even better functioning partnerships. It calls for respect among equal partners, for promoting a better understanding between cultures and so concretely contributing to improved tolerance and non-discrimination. We can set an example for others by living up to these ideals in our own internal cooperation by upholding our basic principles – impartiality , neutrality and independence. Credibility does not allow anything less.

At the last International Conference, one of its most important outcomes was the accepted auxiliary role of National Societies to the public authorities. That role builds on National Societies' right, as defined in our Movement statutes, to adhere to the fundamental principles in their work. Governments have accepted this vital right when they adopted the present Statutes. The principle of independence is, as you well know, among the most important principles – and it is crucial when discussing what auxiliary means in our different cultures and countries.

We will discuss Red Cross/Red Crescent roles and responsibilities in policies on migration and in dealing with displacement. As we gather here, the world is facing a pandemic – the H1N1 – which may become a challenge for authorities as well as for our National Societies. When it comes to displacement, I know from my own region the challenges we

are up against: resources dry out but the people stay. They still have the same needs for health and other services we cannot provide because there is no funding.

We are still expected to provide assistance. Work with migrants in many Societies face similar challenges. In addition to fighting prejudices and outright opposition, there are also legal constraints that have to be dealt with.

We do have an additional important task on top of what I've mentioned. We speak for those, who have no voice – the vulnerable, the victims of wars and disasters. Humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy are tools that have to be deployed in tune with the environment we want to influence. They help us demonstrate the power of humanity and contribute to strengthening the good image of the Red Cross/Red Crescent as the 'public good'.

We still experience serious problems with access – access of both *provision* of medical and other services to victims and vulnerable populations and *access by* the victims and people in need for these services, as has been the case in recent conflicts. We cannot as a Movement but deplore the persistent violations of International Humanitarian Law in today's conflicts and we need to even louder voice the need for increased respect of the law. This vitally important issue is before this Council under the agenda item "Respecting and protecting health-care in armed conflict and other situations of violence".

As we are celebrating 60 years of the Geneva Conventions, it is a shame that we cannot celebrate in the same way respect for these important Conventions, which remain the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law.

Today it may seem that the Conventions have a problem in being acknowledged only when they have been violated. Some critics have even gone further and suggested that they are approaching retirement age and are no longer suited for the kind of temporary wars that pit regular armies against armed groups, and in an era when most wars are fought *within* states, not between them. No doubt, there is room for improvement, for strengthening respect for the conventions and this should be our work in the years to come.

Our message to the world has to remain unchanged: the Conventions still protect victims of war and are as necessary and relevant today as they were 60 years ago. They have

saved numerous lives, alleviated much suffering, given comfort to thousands of prisoners of war, helped reunite millions of families and contributed to the restoration of peace.

Albert Einstein once said, and I quote, " the world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who do nothing about it."

The obligation to respect IHL cannot be fulfilled without domestic implementation. States need to adopt all the legislative, regulatory and practical measures that are necessary to incorporate IHL into domestic law and practice. National Societies have an important task in contributing and ensuring that this happens.

There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems – we cannot solve humanitarian problems with relief. So while the Geneva Conventions provide a fundamental legal framework for the needed restraints to prevent human suffering in armed conflict, the political will to fully implement them is absent.

Which brings me to another item on our agenda: We also need the political will to fulfill the commitments made in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Palestine Red Crescent and the Israeli Magen David Adom. We in the Movement know that the aims in this MoU are strictly humanitarian; however, they are influenced by political decisions. It is my sincere hope that two years from now, we can report back to the International Conference that the mission is accomplished. It would indeed demonstrate a resounding victory of humanitarian will over political considerations.

Our ultimate commitment is, without any doubt, within the Red Cross/Red Crescent, with our beliefs and principles, with providing protection and assistance to the most vulnerable and people in need. Institutions and structures, important as they are, should remain, by definition, tools for getting a job done. But allow me to suggest that it is important that our governing structures and our leadership ensure focus on the right priorities.

Within the Standing Commission's work on the Strategy for the Movement and its action on our Movement forums, we have earlier this year carried out an extensive round of interviews with National Society leaders, as I already mentioned, about Movement forums: how we prepare them, how they are perceived and how the outcomes are used.

I admit that I was somewhat taken aback by some of the findings, which suggest a lacking feeling of ownership of meetings like this Council and the International Conference. Decisions taken are perceived as unclear and, to some extent, distant and lacking

relevance from the viewpoint of the everyday needs and priorities that govern the realities of most National Societies.

I hope we can explore together and in our working group, how to develop better planning mechanisms so that when we meet next time, we do discuss issues that are crucial, topical and relevant for National Societies and their work – as well as for our Movement-wide aspirations on the international scene. But for this to happen, I ask you to speak out, talk to us! Let us know where we must improve and how we should change. This is a joint venture.

The eyes and ears of Africa, and of the world around us, are looking onto us in Nairobi right now.

The political world has recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall as a symbol of change. We saw another winning movement for political change a year ago in the Obama campaign – “yes, we can”. Martin Luther King had a dream. We also have a dream, a dream of a more humanitarian world. To realise our dreams and ambitions, we should not oversleep and should aspire to inspire in order not to expire!

We, as a non-political global Movement, can send from Nairobi strong humanitarian messages, focusing on essential values like equality, justice and peace. We know what the universal common denominator for all human beings is: people want peace and security; they want to live their normal lives without fear of conflict, hunger, discrimination or injustice. They want safe jobs, secure access to food, water, health care, and resources, which are essential for a decent and meaningful life, worthy of human beings.

And I firmly believe that they need our voice, a strong Red Cross/Red Crescent voice to speak for them, to convey the message of hope combined with concrete supporting actions.