

11th Mediterranean Conference of the
Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
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It is a pleasure for me to be here with you this morning in beautiful Cavtat. I am proud to be a “Mediterranean” and here I feel at home. Thanks especially to brothers and sisters from Croatian Red Cross for this invitation, which is a real pleasure and gives me the valuable opportunity to be with you at a moment in time, when we again are facing a range of issues with severe humanitarian consequences: the tragic earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, the ever continuing movement of people seeking a better future and the sometimes confusing effects of climate change.

The time to address these challenges is opportune also in that the Standing Commission is starting the preparations for the next International Conference. It will take place in November next year and there we have again the opportunity to speak directly to our most important partners: the States.

In the scene of the international meetings of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, the Mediterranean Conference has a relevant and unique role: the majority of the sub-regional conferences are generally based on geographical proximity and similarities, while this Conference is based on geographical proximity and on diversities. That makes the Mediterranean Conference even more important in our eyes, as a practical exercise on enforcing our principles of the respect for diversity, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cooperation among the Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies, which are different in terms of history, culture and life habits.

The Mediterranean area is a laboratory where all the current tensions of the world are represented: they go from migrants drama to armed conflicts. From the issue concerning the respect for human rights to discrimination. From poverty to the increasing number of victims of natural catastrophic events. For what concerns the Movement, the auxiliary role of National Societies to their respective governments and the degree of independence from the governments, whether it is high or low.

Your slogan for this meeting – “Values in action” – is certainly well chosen for a Red Cross/Red Crescent gathering. Our organisations and above all, our network of millions of volunteers, live the principles and values every day in their contribution to humanity. I want to pay tribute to them and I also want to congratulate the work of Barcelona Secretariat, which was created under the leadership of the Spanish Red Cross.

Over the last few years of activity, with a small amount of human resources strongly committed and well led, the Secretariat has succeeded in giving a sense of continuity to the Mediterranean Conferences, increasing communication and a spirit of ownership among the Members of the Movement within the region.

The recent Council of Delegates in Nairobi adopted many important resolutions. I want to mention the resolutions on internal displacement, and the one welcoming the Federation’s policy on migration. Both contain essential and valuable principles and guidelines for National Societies in their work with migrants and displaced people. Here in our Mediterranean

region all National Societies are involved to lesser or greater extent. I'm sure we will hear more about their first hand experiences from these human and humanitarian tragedies during the coming days.

According to the International Organisation for Migration, one of the defining global issues of the early twenty-first century is migration. More people are on the move today than at any other point in human history, the estimate for today is 214 million international migrants, which is roughly 3 % of the global population. Almost half of them are women. If they were all in one place, they would constitute the fifth most populous country in the world!

People migrate for different reasons – and not all of them are negative or problematic. Economic reasons are usually the most common – people seek better opportunities elsewhere. Demographic changes in many countries, especially in Europe with its ageing populations, will 'pull' immigrants to secure production and keep growth on track. On the other hand, economic difficulties combined with strong population growth will 'push' people to leave.

For example in my home country, Italy, the population is projected to decline from the current 57 million to 41 million by 2050. This will undoubtedly influence the decision makers to consider the option of "Replacement Migration."

Large-scale movement of people does not show any signs of slowing down. With it, undocumented migrants have become a major challenge. Smuggling of people now matches drug trafficking as a source of income for organized crime. Trafficking in human beings is a worldwide concern. It is something we as Red Cross/Red Crescent must be very concerned about as the victims are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable.

A significant number of women are trafficking victims – and remember – half of all migrants are women, about 100 million. They have fewer opportunities than men for legal migration, why many become undocumented migrants with lack of support and exposure to risk. They are more vulnerable than men to violence and exploitation. Another sad fact according to a US State Department study a few years back is that around 50% of people smuggled and sold into forced labour are minors that end up working in the sex trade.

A lot of women, actually the majority of them, shoring on the coasts of Italy from the southern side of the Mediterranean Sea tell us that they have been subjected to violence during their long dramatic trip.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent International Conference in 2007 acknowledged in its Declaration the role of National Societies, based on the principles of humanity and impartiality, in providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable migrants *irrespective of their legal status*. This was a great victory for the Movement and especially for us in this region. It now even formally welcomes our work with the many undocumented and very vulnerable migrants. I'm sure we will hear later today what kind of impact this has had on the work of the National Societies in the Mediterranean region transforming principles and values into action.

We should not be content with the results we have achieved so far. From being the crib of ancient civilizations, we should not accept that the Mediterranean region is now becoming a sea of death. There is plenty of space to foster the collaboration among all National Societies in the area through bilateral agreements which can be helpful to follow migrants' path with an integrated action.

When a migrant sees either a Red Cross or a Red Crescent sign, he changes his expression immediately, because he feels protected. We should use more than symbolic power linked to the emblem.

We cannot discuss migration without discussing discrimination. How can our Movement effectively fight racism, discrimination and xenophobia against people of different cultures and beliefs, against migrants and others, who are marginalised for various reasons? We have lately all seen signs of increasing intolerance, even xenophobia in our Mediterranean region. Part of our mission is to defend human dignity. While I'm sure we are all committed to it, I think we are particularly lucky to have very well organised and influential youth in our midst. They are well

placed to act as change agents in their communities to build a more tolerant general climate. Remember, all change begins at home!

The 2007 International Conference also addressed the humanitarian consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. Two years later, one of the workshops in Nairobi discussed the challenges for the Red Cross/Red Crescent in dealing with this issue. The workshop report states – and I quote – “It is not science fiction. We see climate change, we feel climate change and we forecast more climate change. It is real and close to all of us in different ways. Seasons and weather have turned uncertain and there has been a change of patterns, increased intensity of events and also frequency, generating more humanitarian consequences.” Unquote.

But the participants also expressed a degree of uncertainty: the awareness of climate change and its impact is growing but National Societies still find it difficult to translate it into actionable policy and programmes. We need more discussion, more creative thinking and strong vision to ensure that our risk reduction work is progressing and filters down to community level practical action. We also have to improve, expand and adapt our disaster preparedness to cope with the increasing scale of disasters.

We have a forceful mechanism in the auxiliary role. We have access and status and can inform and influence governments and their climate change policies. We can bring to their attention the reality on the ground, where our volunteers work and see the real impact of the changes on people and their lives.

I wish you success in your deliberations analysing the interesting themes you have chosen for this gathering. Youth is one of them – although I think youth has an important role to play in all the other areas as well. We always talk about the youth, which is understandable and even necessary. But permit me to say that it is time that we turn also those words into action. The Movement cannot survive without involving youth in all phases of its work. That includes governance and participation in decision making, in shaping the future of the National Societies – not only projects that need to be well implemented.

The experience of Atlantis Camps is a good example of empowerment of young volunteers within the Movement and I believe we should give an adequate follow-up to suggestions and resolutions, expressed by Atlantis participants every year.

Kofi Annan has said "No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off its youth severs its lifeline."

I'm happy to see so many youth members engaging here in Cavtat; I hope to see you again next year as full members of your National Society delegation to the Council and the International Conference.

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