

**Address to the Governing Board of the
International Federation**

Geneva, 13 April 2011

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Chairman – Standing Commission

November is fast approaching, why I believe information about the coming Council, and in particular about the 31st International Conference, will be relevant for you in view of preparing for your General Assembly. We have to avoid duplication and improve our agenda coordination between the various meetings. The Council meets on Saturday, November 26th, just for the day. Before a Conference, a short Council means shorter overall meeting time and it makes sense to focus on the Conference, as requested by many NS during the Strategy review on Movement fora.

The draft agenda for both the Council and the Conference will be mailed to you on May 21st. Your comments on them are welcome and should reach the Commission by the end of August, before our September meeting, where we will finalise all the working documents. Let me give you a quick summary of the topics we agreed upon for the *Council* and where we look forward to good debates:

Nuclear Weapons will be talked about. Coming from a resolution by the Nairobi Council, the aim is to define a *Movement position* on these terrible weapons. I think we can expect an interesting discussion.

As follow-up from *workshops* in Nairobi, we have two topics: How to cooperate with actors external to the Movement and guidance for National Societies in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The latter came from the workshop on collective responsibility and partnerships.

Then we have the Strategy for the Movement. The Nairobi Council asked for an evaluation of the Strategy – how well have we achieved the three strategic objectives and the expected results from the 10 actions? We will share the evaluation report and its recommendations with the Council. We need guidance on work that still should continue on Movement fora and the review and revision of National Society statutes, as examples. We also need the Council's opinion on what kind of Movement level strategic guidance is needed for the future. This would be based on the evaluation findings and recommendations and could serve to direct the new, incoming Standing Commission.

How to better preserve Red Cross Red Crescent heritage will come up. I believe we have wide agreement, not only consensus, that this is something that concerns us all. Finally, as you know, it is the Council, which adopts the agenda of the Conference and proposes a list of officers.

Last but not least we expect a report on the Memorandum of Understanding between the PRCS and the MDA in Israel, an issue which also will be on the Conference agenda. It already now raises interest, particularly among States. The Commission heard from the Monitor, Pär Stenbäck, about areas of progress and areas, where we still have challenges.

If unresolved, the remaining challenges may turn into a stumbling block, not only in the Council, but also at the Conference. It is therefore essential that between now and October, in less than 8 months, we do everything in our power to find solutions to the open issues.

The Nairobi resolution on the MoU – I quote – “requests National Societies to favourably respond to any request for help and support that the monitor may ask of them in the fulfilment of his task up to the next Council”. In the spirit of this request, the Commission asked the Federation, in consultation with the Monitor, to invite a group of National Societies to engage with the MDA and the PRCS and other stakeholders to help find solutions to the outstanding issues, which prevent the Monitor from declaring that the MoU has been satisfactorily implemented.

We want consensus and unity at the Council and at the Conference. Anybody who blocks the full application of the MoU takes an enormous responsibility and will be accountable for that.

Moving to the Conference, the main objective is to strengthen IHL and humanitarian action under the slogan – “Our world, your move – for humanity”

‘Our world’ is full of unaddressed vulnerabilities in armed conflicts and other situations of violence, with consequences such as migration picking up, both in terms of numbers and reach. Natural disasters continue to increase, with ever wider impact, both in terms of destruction and number of victims.

We don’t need to look far to see this trend: The Conference will convene at a time when the world is facing unprecedented new developments. We are right now witnessing strong political movements in the Arab world, often spearheaded by youth using the modern communication channels of today. It is too early to predict what impact this ‘Arab Spring’ will have on the Conference. What we can say already now is that the National Societies in the affected countries have been able to function true to our principles, which has met wide esteem among their own nationals. We have seen this in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. The respect paid by all fighting parties to the RC/RC reflects positively and is important for the Movement’s credibility as a whole.

The other day we heard in the news about the drowning of migrants from North Africa in the Mediterranean Sea. It was not noted as a major news item. No-one seemed to pay much attention to this or to the fact that thousands are on the move from this region, presently in turmoil, in search of a better future for themselves and their families. It seems that public opinion in Europe is more concerned with the struggling economies, their financial institutions and with closing entry points for migrants, without being too much disturbed for the next holiday season. The political atmosphere and attitudes are hardening all over Europe, with xenophobia and discrimination against diversity orienting many political interventions.

Even if all of us know well the difference existing among political priorities and humanitarian priorities, this should be a call for the Red Cross/Red Crescent to actively raise its voice and loudly speak out for tolerance and non-discrimination. In the end, fears direct attitudes against people like migrants. That’s why news of more than 200 drowned hardly causes an eyebrow to rise.

The disastrous earthquake and tsunami in Japan – for which I would like to express to President Konoe and his Japanese staff my sincere solidarity – awakened the world to the fact that no-one is today safe from the destruction nature can cause. A highly developed, rich country, with a strong and capable National Society, is struggling to come to terms with the impact.

It is precisely why the Conference is important for us. Issues touching upon our core mission are there debated, directly with governments. Gaps in the enabling environment for humanitarian work will be the central theme of the deliberations, both in terms of legal frameworks, such as IHL and disaster laws, and in strengthening local humanitarian action.

Let me give you some headlines from the Conference agenda: We will analyse challenges to IHL in contemporary armed conflicts as well as look at gaps in the law and at areas, where IHL may need development. Again, we only need to look to the on-going crisis in different parts of the world today to understand why this is on the agenda.

Risk reduction, especially at community level, is an area where the Red Cross/Red Crescent can add real value. Another aspect of gaps in disaster law, are the barriers and obstacles for providing proper shelter for thousands of people left vulnerable after the earthquake in Haiti or after the floods in Pakistan. We owe it to these people to seek solutions.

Endangered health care and equitable access to health services are distressingly everyday occurrences in conflict and other situations of violence. Health care *is* in danger, as we have seen, most recently in Cote d'Ivoire.

Violence, especially in urban settings, causes suffering for millions of people across the world. It is most generally linked to drug trafficking, in particular in urban slums, which are growing rapidly on all continents, turning them into key places for drug deals and crime. Perhaps it would be time for the Conference to review and update a resolution on drugs, which last was debated in a RCRC Conference in 1986?

Strengthening local humanitarian action means enhancing the partnership between National Societies and governments, to build the capacity of Societies to perform as auxiliary to the public authorities. We can build on the strong declaration from the last Conference and the auxiliary role resolution. Under this item, we also included the issue of migration, which was raised by 15 Societies in letters to the Commission. The letters clearly reflect deep concern for the recent wave of migrants, not least within my own Society, which is heavily involved beginning from the island of Lampedusa.

Last but not least, 2011 is the 10th anniversary of the Year of Volunteers and Volunteering – the core of our Movement, the essence of all action.

As I already said at the last MENA Conference in Abu Dhabi, volunteers need protection; they need an environment, which allows them to be active and efficient without risk to their lives or livelihoods. They need recognition of their valuable work, socially and economically as well as support from authorities. From a Movement point of view, this issue is one of highest relevance at the Conference.

Pledges are popular with National Societies and States. I encourage you to already now start planning your pledges and to engage in dialogue with your governments on how the issues we will deal with at the Conference can be turned into commitments for action in your own countries. In closing, a few words about the Group of Ambassadors which met for the 1st time last week.

The general feedback on the objectives and planned items for the Conference agenda was very positive. This Group has been invited to advise us on substance and procedure and how to tackle potential problems. We have to listen to it. The advice we heard told us to further clarify what *exactly* we seek as *outcomes* and *priorities* and to be clear about where we as a Movement *add value*. We were also urged not to duplicate the work of other fora.

In September, when the legal advisors meet in Geneva, there will be an open consultation meeting for National Societies and the Permanent Missions. I hope as many of you as possible will take that opportunity to contribute to the process towards a successful Conference.

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your deliberations over the coming days.

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