

**Address to the Governing Board of the
International Federation
Geneva, 28 September 2011**

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Chairman
Standing Commission of the RCRC**

I want to thank the Federation and you, Mr President, for giving me the floor again to address and update this distinguished Board on the work of the Standing Commission. It is not difficult for you to conclude that I will talk about the coming Council of Delegates and the 31st International Conference.

The Standing Commission met only last week and decided on the agendas for both these important meetings. It also approved for dispatch the formal working documents – all the reports and the draft resolutions – which will be sent to you on 12 October.

Before going into specifics, let me express my appreciation and thanks to the National Societies that have helped the Standing Commission prepare for this Conference by their active feedback and comments on the background document and the agenda for the Conference and the Council and on elements for all the draft resolutions, which now for the first time were shared already in July and August – that means, 3-4 months before the meetings.

This is a true novelty and a result of requests from National Society leaders to be involved at an early stage in the preparation of the outcomes of the statutory meetings.

We have also listened to your wishes to have shorter meetings. The Council this year is only one day, Saturday the 26th of November. Sunday will be your day-off although we have prepared interesting possibilities for you.

In spite of a one-day meeting, we still have important items on the agenda: our Movement's position on nuclear weapons, our cooperation with other, external humanitarian organisations, guidance for National Societies in armed conflict and other situations of violence and the evaluation of the Strategy for the Movement with some recommendations for the incoming, new Standing Commission on some final work to be done on this 10-year Strategy.

From this list alone you can see that the issues are significant when shaping our future work. Time does not permit me to go into detail. However, I urge you to carefully study the documents, including the draft resolutions that you will get in October so that we can count on true participation when it comes to the final outcomes.

We are living in a turbulent world with major changes taking place. Not only do we face grim financial constraints that may seriously impact our resources in the coming years; we also see a wave of changes sweeping through especially the Arab world.

I hope that the present clouds on the horizon will not turn into major storms at the Council or the Conference.

The Standing Commission has actively followed the implementation of the MoU between the MDA in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent. We met again with the Monitor last week. We have some concerns regarding progress achieved and our ability to see the MoU fully implemented. These concerns may also be voiced by the members of the Council and reach the Conference floor. We must now use every possible avenue to encourage the finding of acceptable solutions to the last remaining obstacles to full implementation, not least because of the enormous humanitarian needs the two Societies face in their immediate environment.

I want to remind you that the Nairobi Council in a resolution on the MoU – and 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 this regard I want to thank the National Societies of France, Indonesia, Turkey and the USA, which at the request of the Standing Commission made a most useful mission to the two Societies and certainly helped move the open issues forward. But we need more, also from your governments, to go the final mile.

Before moving on to the Conference, let me remind you that we will have three commissions after closing the Council to help us prepare for the Conference. There we can explore key issues from a Movement perspective and how best to ensure that we achieve the set objectives.

We will also remind ourselves of how the Conference will work this year and how to have strong National Society input in the most important body of the Conference – the drafting committee.

The International Conference has a very special history and role in promoting International Humanitarian Law. One of the important objectives in November is to reaffirm the continuing relevance of existing humanitarian law and to urge respect for it but also to discuss how we can develop IHL and close some gaps as revealed in an extensive ICRC study.

The ICRC has also prepared an extensive and thorough report on current challenges facing IHL in on-going conflicts and internal strife. I can certainly predict great interest in and very serious and intensive debate in both the thematic plenary meeting and in one of the 5 commissions, which will deal with access issues under IHL.

Another major area is health. We have heard many positive remarks welcoming it back to the Conference. We have Health care in danger – which really can be understood as the theme implies: health care *is* in danger and particularly in situations of conflict and other situations of violence. Further, it is not only the health facilities and services that face danger; also victims face restricted access due to violence.

The Conference will also debate equitable access to health, with a particular focus on mother and child health care. This is an area I know many of you are involved in and care about and it will be important for our government partners to hear about your experiences and concerns.

The third bloc is about disaster laws. Our Movement’s strength lies in it reaching deep into communities, which is especially important in disaster risk reduction. We can offer that dimension as a real added advantage when we cooperate with especially UN in this area.

IDRL counts as one of the big successes we achieved at the 2007 Conference. We have made progress but still need to reconfirm commitments from governments when it comes to national legal frameworks.

Recent experiences in Haiti and Pakistan revealed serious regulatory barriers to provision of shelter in these types of mega-disasters. This is essentially a national responsibility and may greatly vary from country to country but we want to draw attention to the serious humanitarian impact such barriers present and hope to achieve some progress towards finding practical tools to resolve the challenges.

The fourth major bloc of issues is perhaps ‘closest to home’ – how can we strengthen local humanitarian action and have a better enabling environment for the work we do? The most important actors in our Movement are the volunteers, to help us in our auxiliary role – another success story from 2007. This year, as you know, is the 10th anniversary of the Year of Volunteers and Volunteering – the core of our Movement, the essence of all action.

But 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, which makes this issue one of highest relevance at the Conference.

The Commission was approached earlier this year by National Societies with a request to include migration on the Conference agenda. Their drive was successful and we will debate this important activity, which involves a high number of National Societies. The main aim is to gain acceptance of our involvement and our principles of work along with granting us the right to work with any migrants, regardless of their legal status.

The National Societies were not as successful in pleading for the inclusion of drugs and violence on the Conference agenda. The Commission certainly understood the importance of the issue but found it too late to bring a totally new item to the agenda at a stage, when wide consultations were already underway on the other items. Also, we have already now 7 draft resolutions on the table plus one more to come, on the MoU. I'm very grateful to you, Mr President, for agreeing to take up the initiative in your working group for the General Assembly to look at the possibilities to include it somehow for discussion there.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to some important changes we have decided on when it comes to how the Conference will work.

There will be no general debate at this conference. In the past we have seen that they essentially have covered every subject between heaven and earth, which in the end have led us nowhere. In our reviews, National Society leaders wanted us to be effective, efficient and professional as well as focused on what we want to achieve. The result is that we will have thematic plenary meetings on two subjects: IHL and disaster laws. In addition we will discuss specific issues in 5 commissions, which will be repeated once, to allow for widest possible attendance also by small delegations. Parallel with all this we do still have the drafting committee.

Permit me to urge you to seriously prepare for each of the commissions and the thematic plenary discussions to contribute your specific experiences in a focused manner.

It is now easier than before to prepare well also for the drafting committee because you will receive all draft resolutions well in advance. Remember – all resolutions are open until finally approved by the last plenary meeting of the Conference! We sometimes feel overwhelmed by the professional government negotiators in the drafting committee; let's show them now that we come just as well prepared to push our Movement perspectives into the final outcomes.

Finally, let me congratulate Niki Rattle, your well-known colleague from the small Cook Islands Red Cross, on her nomination as Chairperson of the 31st Conference. It is the first time we will have a chair from the Pacific.

The Standing Commission also nominated Ambassador Maria Farani Azevêdo of Brazil to be the Chair of the drafting committee and Ambassador Peter Gooderham of the United Kingdom to help the Conference deal with highly politically sensitive issues such as the MoU. There are also several other officers from National Societies and states but we are still waiting for their acceptance why I cannot present them to you quite yet.

It is for the Council to decide on the list of officers to be proposed to the Conference but I trust that it will lend its support to these key nominations, along with the others, and wish them every success in leading the Conference to achieve the set objectives.

I thank you for your attention and wish you interesting times in preparing for this great humanitarian event, unparalleled in today's world. Through our work and contributions, we

have to ensure the Conference remains relevant not only to ourselves and our needs but also to the States.

Have a successful Board!

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