

**7<sup>th</sup> Conference Middle East – North Africa**  
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I congratulate you and the organizers for the excellent preparations and for the interesting debates.

You have shown how it was possible to sharply and effectively modify an agenda which had been conceived, since long time, in order to respond to sudden and rapid changes in both the scenario and the humanitarian needs.

What we have listened to and discussed in these last two days shows that RC/RC Movement best works in emergency situation because it was born in such a context. It also shows that NS's preparation makes the difference in critical events as well as our common friendship, strengthened from all the experiences that we have shared on the ground.

We have witnessed the emergence of new youth-led movements in the past weeks, which should lead us to pay much attention to draw that energy also into the Movement. Humanitarian diplomacy is vital for the Movement at large to secure our position and to ensure our values and principles are acknowledged and respected among our peers and external interlocutors. Movement coordination is an ever present issue and rightly so: without it, it is difficult to claim that we are a real Movement, something more than the sum of its components, as we should always remember.

This meeting is held at a crucial time when we are surrounded by new and grave challenges in the region, calling on us to practice our fundamental principles when assisting people in need, regardless of the origin of those needs. All the National Societies in the region have shown their compliance and adherence to the principles, in particular impartiality and independence, and have been recognized as neutral actors by all the parties in conflict. It is with pride that I have heard the sentence pronounced by the President of the Yemen RC: *we do not stand for neither the government nor the opposition: we are Yemeni!* In the same way we all can say: *we do not stand for neither the government nor the rebels. We help vulnerable people! We are the RC/RC!* In situations of internal turbulence it is vital to maintain the confidence and trust of the people and the victims.

Earlier this week, the Standing Commission agreed on the main themes for the agenda of next International Conference in November. We come together under the theme and slogan "Our world. Your move for humanity" calling on us to strengthen IHL and humanitarian action. There are unaddressed vulnerabilities in armed conflicts and other situations of violence. As a consequence, migration is picking up both in terms of numbers and reach. Natural disasters continue to increase and their impact is widening, both in terms of destruction and number of victims.

The challenge we face as a Movement is gaps in the enabling environment for humanitarian work. This challenge will be at the core of the deliberations at the coming Conference, both in terms of legal frameworks, such as IHL and disaster laws, and in strengthening local humanitarian action.

I will not go into the details of these focus areas as my Standing Commission colleagues Philip Spoerri and Bekele Geleta are here and far better placed to do so. Suffice it for me to say that we will analyse major challenges to IHL in contemporary armed conflicts as well as look at gaps in the law and at areas, where IHL may need development.

Risk reduction as well as obstacles for providing shelter in mega disasters, as we have seen especially in Haiti, has brought issues to the fore, which need solutions.

The Conference will also be asked to examine issues endangering health care and equitable access to health services. Health care is in danger in many conflicts and in other situations of violence – we have seen recent examples to that effect.

Under strengthening local humanitarian action, the Conference will seek to enhance the partnership between NS and governments and to strengthen NS as auxiliaries to the public authorities. We have

a very strong agreement on this role from the last Conference; now we have to enhance the possibilities of the NS to take on vital responsibilities and to have the resources needed for it.

Last but not least, 2011 is the Year of Volunteers and Volunteering, the core of our Movement, the essence of all action. Volunteers need protection; also they need an enabling environment allowing them to be active and efficient without risk to their lives or livelihoods. They need recognition of the value of their work, socially and economically. And volunteering needs promotion and support from authorities. From a Movement point of view, this theme is of highest relevance to be deliberated at the Conference.

As before, pledges will be part of the expected outcomes. I encourage you to already now start planning your commitments under these main themes and to engage in dialogue also with your governments on how the challenges I've highlighted could be addressed in your own countries. You can pledge on your own, together with your government, neighbouring National Societies, regional friends and partners.

Before leaving the issue of the Conference, I will briefly touch on an item of particular importance in this region and for us all: the MoU. The Standing Commission heard from the Monitor, Pär Stenbäck about areas of progress and areas, where challenges remain.

The remaining challenges may, if unresolved, turn into a stumbling block for an otherwise smooth and, most likely, highly engaging Conference with many high-profile items on the agenda. We must do everything in our power to find solutions to the remaining challenges – before the Conference. We have 8 months. We also have a resolution from Nairobi which – 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 the spirit of this resolution, the Standing Commission asked the Federation, in consultation with the Monitor, to invite a group of National Societies, who enjoy the respect of all parties involved, to engage with the MDA and the PRCS and other stakeholders to seek solutions to the still outstanding few issues, which prevent the Monitor from declaring that the MoU has been implemented.

We want consensus and unity at the Conference. Anybody who blocks the full application of the MoU takes an enormous responsibility and sooner or later he will account for that.

The National Societies in the MENA region are strong, well organised and enjoy good and influential relations with their respective governments. I'm sure you will continue to use your open communication lines with them and exercise your influence towards the common goals we set for the Movement and for our Council and the International Conference.

I conclude by warmly thanking our Host and organisers for this excellent conference.

I have been intimately touched when we were told that here we were at home. This is the way the Conference went. The Emirates' RC has been able to make us feel as we were at home. The deliberations have yet again addressed our work and actions to better provide help and support to the vulnerable.

This remains our basic task - our Mission. As leaders of Red Cross/Red Crescent, we will be judged by how well we respond to challenges and humanitarian needs around us – not by anything else.

Thank you.