

English version

***E.R.N.A.***

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and dear colleagues from the Red Cross and Red Crescent International Movement, this is the sixth time I have the honour to talk to you in a meeting of this network that we have founded in Rome during the winter 1998 (nineteen-ninety eight).

At that meeting only 12 National Societies from Europe were present. They were concerned for this epidemic, which is becoming the worst in the history of human being.

Well aware of what responsibility lies on the hands of the world's largest and important volunteer organisation, they decided to join together all their efforts to better prepare themselves fighting against this new unknown plague, which is different from other Red

Cross traditional fields of action, such as a war, floods and earthquakes.

In a few years later we have today 29 member National Societies of ERNA, 22 of which are now here in Yerevan, as concrete demonstration of their will to widen their knowledge while being actively committed in HIV/AIDS and other transmitting diseases, like Tuberculosis above all.

In these years we demonstrate that ERNA isn't a funds delivery agency, but a tool to enlarge communications and knowledge. It reinforces National Societies capabilities to properly operate, and being able to find resources by themselves, using their privileged channels with governments. With international solidarity, internal and external to the Movement, National Societies now finance concrete

actions both in prevention, in therapy and in a complete care and treatment of infected people.

The international community put lots of efforts in a few time towards awareness of this global tragedy such as AIDS, which implies many proper resources. The settling up of a United Nations fund is a concrete action to the need to activate all sectors of Society against all infections to people's life, to social systems' stability, to economical development, to everybody's security and to peace.

But it's not enough yet.

National Societies must acquire a level of skills, practice and reliability towards public authorities, to become qualified partners with respective governments

in their national intervention plan, to be able to ask for financing from Global Funds.

Other ways of funding have been activated in the last months like at the European Union, because financing isn't restricted to member states only, but to joining countries as well.

To access to those funds it's fundamental to know bureaucratic procedures and to be able to submit and to develop interesting, sustainable in the long term, effective plans.

To encourage such skills on project management, we've organized at Jesolo, in Italy near Venice, for the first time a P.P.P. (Project Preparation Process) Seminar, for 20 of you too, during next month, together with the Regional Office of the Federation in Budapest

and the Italian Red Cross.

After Yerevan and after Jesolo I hope we all will be able to present more properly our skills to raise funds for wider actions.

While for the Global Funds domestic relations with own government is crucial, for the European Union international networks represent a main value added. It is necessary in our meetings to create and to reinforce bilateral or multilateral agreements to develop common plan. It will contribute to acquire more knowledge and integration of people. Keeping this direction it will go to a better unifying of Europe and it will have a better chance to get financed.

If it's positive to say that ERNA have been increasing Society members from 12 to 29, it's a matter of concern

to see that geographical distribution isn't enough because many sister Societies from western countries do not join the network yet.

Another point of concern lies on the core budget of ERNA that is funded by 4 Societies only (Sweden, Italy, France and Monaco) with the fundamental and irreplaceable support from the Slovak Red Cross. I would address my warmest wishes to them, or their efficiency on managing a permanent secretary of ERNA under the leadership of our friend Peter Duchaj and with the work of Zina Ankova. I think you all have got the chance to know and to appreciate her work, to whom ERNA has been investing resources to be of use in this next future.

It's very important that ERNA will gather together all European countries. I would submit to this aim our

particular attention.

The recent European Berlin conference has been recognizing HIV/AIDS, TB and other transmitting diseases with a high priority for activities of our Movement.

It's important that every National Society is officially enabling this direction into own board decision-making process. You as specialists in this field should look in your National Society to point out in every international activity to refer to this priority subject.

20 years have been passing from the discovering of first AIDS cases. This is not time anymore for waiting in uncertainty.

In Berlin several authoritative statements, first of all the one from the President of the French Red Cross,

have been criticizing the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, with other international bodies, have been hesitating and late reacting against this diseases without understanding the scope of what in this world was happening.

If time has been lost and if somebody may have said that this field wasn't of our competence, because "somebody else would make it better", it's our task now to regain that time back with a more effective and wider action on the field than before.

One of our frequent mistakes we made is self-fulfilment and self-praise. If it's true that in the United Nations' Special Session final document on Aids (UNGASS), the IFRC is the only nominated NGO, this isn't a reward for our commitment to rate our action as satisfactory for what has been done so far. We did a

lot, but this is just a few if compared to the world's needs.

Statistics with figures of at least 40 millions of HIV positive people confirm how enormous needs are.

The epidemic increase in eastern countries, from Eastern Europe to Central Asia, the scepticism to discover a real vaccine in a few time, the concern to the diabolic skill of this virus to change its structure, with consequences on resistance and to the recent issue of possible super-infections.

On all these subjects the international community was discussing in Barcelona 2 months ago during the worldwide conference on Aids, where Red Cross and Red Crescent delegates for the first time participated as one "joint" delegation, with top governance and not only

experts as members.

Those are now not only scientific conferences for the civil, ethical, social and political implications to which participants move.

For the first time in the history, patients gathered together and organized themselves in groups of pressure. They were asking new and more effective medicines, and they were fighting to achieve a better price for medicines and to get the worldwide right to care.

It's important that the International Movement stays beside patients, will open their locations to hiv-positive groups, especially to most emarginated ones, by fighting attitudes and prejudices towards stigmatisation, and against discrimination that affects as much as the

virus to let the life being more difficult and unbearable.

In Barcelona it was clear the misleading position of whom is putting disease and prevention against one another, as an excuse to neglect to million people the right to therapy and then to survive.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent have to lobby towards governments to have access to care to be everywhere respected.

Therapy reduces the viral load and this is for sure one of the best ways of prevention.

Avoiding people to die means, above every ethical assumption, to save costs of each death. In an overall evaluation we have to cut off those saved costs to the ones of therapy, which is also much less after the introduction of generic preparations.

All those notorious change of attitude have become true in just few years. Maybe Red Cross and Red Crescent could have been daring some more to speed up the process, giving as example what the French Red Cross offered as therapy in African Countries, as concrete prove on how difficulties might be overcome if there's a clear political will behind.

I know very well our limits. But I know also that if we gather our efforts all together we can make the difference.

This afternoon's session is completely dedicated to TB: as you know the Berlin conference has been underlining TB as a core activity of this network

Being here in Armenia, where the International and the Armenian Red Cross are settling programmes

against TB, and the presence here of IFRC chief for TB disease related problems, Terhy Heinasmaki, they push us more than in the past to concentrate ourselves upon this subject where poverty, jail imprisonment, lack of respect of human rights and discrimination represent the place where the Kock bacillus lives and spreads around.

In the other main theme of this meeting, the harm reduction, which we will focus in depth tomorrow and on Wednesday, emargination and neglected right to citizenship, ghettoization and the lack of therapeutic response, make an explosive cocktail to get worse health conditions not of drug users only, but the population as a whole.

Harm reduction strategies demonstrated around the world their effectiveness. They aren't difficult to be

enabled and Red Cross and Red Crescent, for the recognized respect of their emblems, are in a privileged position to bring forward specific actions in this field, as it is already doing with first steering projects.

A draft of the new Federation policy has been prepared from dr. Getachew Gizaw, one of the fathers of ERNA, perhaps the most important, who has been participating to every meeting of this network and that I wish to thank him to be here to explain us about the meaning of this new relations we are committed to hold on harm reduction.

For this strategic purpose we wanted the youth to take part of this meeting. Youngsters with their enthusiasm, their lack of prejudices have to become promoters of a change to let the Red Cross and Red Crescent to be more aggressive and committed in those new fields of

activities.

Dear friends, when we came here to Yerevan one month ago, with Zyna Ankova and Peter Duchaj to see if it was possible to organize in Armenia the 6<sup>th</sup> ERNA meeting, we have begun visiting hotels, as usual.

We came then to meet the President of Armenian Red Cross who's the director of this Rehabilitation Centre as well, which it was built with the help of international solidarity for the disastrous earthquake of 10 years ago.

It was impressing to see how do this centre work and the enthusiasm that moves the Director with his staff in this job.

We are proud to hold our meeting in the welcoming land of Armenia. Above all in this building, because it's a Red Cross place and then we feel at home here.

Furthermore because this centre represents an example, as a post-disaster intervention becomes the beginning of a stabile development process in the long term and within the time gives its outstanding results.

Thanks to the Armenian Red Cross to be hosting us.

Thank you too for answering to ERNA invitation.

Have a pleasant stay and a productive work here in Yerevan.

**(Massimo Barra)**