

English version

ERNA Meeting

Introduction First session speaker Massimo Barra,

M.D. President of ERNA

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Introduction

First session

speaker

Massimo Barra, M.D.

Dear friends, this introduction speech to the fifth ERNA meeting is done also on behalf of the Vice-President Dr. Peter Duchaj and of the Head of Secretary Zina Ankova, who have been intensively working with me this year and without their intelligent contribution of work ERNA wouldn't be what it has become today.

During last ERNA meeting in Bratislava, when Almaty was nominated to host the next conference, somebody raised a concern saying that Kazakhstan was too far away.

I would take apart here any consideration on "being too far", which implies a concept of subjectivism. Who thinks to be the centre of reference evaluates the distance of all others.

The broad participation of National Societies here demonstrates that the choice we took on that day, was the right one.

National Societies from Central-Asiatic Republics believed in ERNA since the meeting in Paris. They gave us the honour to play an active role in this European network and I feel to thank them at first for this commitment given.

I would like to address special thanks to the whole Red Cross and Red Crescent of Kazakhstan, in particular to its President dr. Erkbek Argymbaev, to its Vice President dr. Kadyrbaev, to the Director of International Department, Karlygash Amandosova and to the Director of Youth Section who did strong efforts to organize and to contribute to the success of this meeting.

Who works in international relations fields perfectly knows that it isn't easy at all to gather a large group of people with either language, age, cultural and professional differences, though with common aims and goals.

Preparing a seminar such as this, it implies a strong commitment made of meetings, faxes, letters, calls, emails, with the need to solve any kind of problems.

This is for us a sort of exercise of development. But it permits to create new links and new friendships and it strengthen up existing ones. It makes us to “work as a Federation”, that it's one of the slogans from the Movement which we always have to keep in mind.

All those messages we had to exchange to be here on time for this welcoming session were an overall effort for

our group, a chance of growth for all of us present here today. If we just consider all ongoing difficulties on travelling there are in these days, due to the hard international situation.

The Red Cross and the Red Crescent in Europe and in Central Asia are a big family where all members have equal dignity, same rights and musts. We all work together to share resources, attitudes and experiences.

This is the main meaning of a network such as ours.

This meeting wouldn't probably take place and it wouldn't be so important without the hard work of the Secretary of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, besides ERNA management.

On this, it isn't only a formal recognition the one I would address to dr. Getachew Gizaw, Responsible for HIV/AIDS in Geneva, whose I have appreciated the professional and human qualities during several years of common experiences all around the world and to the Regional Delegation in Budapest, from which the health delegate Ingrid Udden has accepted to organize and to run the

Seminar on peer education among young people, on 2 full days of this meeting.

When dr. Duchaj, Zyna and I came for the first time in Almaty this May to co-ordinate the organization of the fifth ERNA meeting, we had many interesting dialogues and exchange of opinions with the Head of Regional Delegation for Central Asia, Per Jensnaes. We were was in touch also with the delegate to health, Dr. Manan and with the delegate to development, Oscar Alfonso Zuluaga Abdala, whom I know for 25 years and I feel him as a brother. He's one of the few in the world with the best knowledge of our Movement, to which he's dedicating with all of his energies of his professional career.

The Regional Delegation has accepted since the beginning with much enthusiasm the idea of this meeting. We all thank them for this.

I would like to give a special welcome to representatives of National Societies of Albania, Bosnia Erzegovina, Estonia, Holland and Turkmenistan to participate for the first time to an ERNA meeting, as observers. I wish you to become members just after the end of this meeting, as it

was for National Societies from Denmark and Norway, when, after an evaluation period, they accepted to be part of this network.

We will become are 27 members: a good success if we think to the 12 National Societies who founded this network at its first ERNA meeting in Rome 1997.

ERNA works on HIV/AIDS, on other diseases as Tuberculosis, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, on drugs: they all are issues concerning the health and the society.

For those reasons our institutional reference at Federation level is the Health and Community Service Commission, whose President, dr. Javornik closely follows our work. This is a first demonstration how much the high instances of the Federation give to networking as a method of work, to strengthen links of solidarity, which need to be kept between members of a broad common family, such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

Dear Friends, many things have been happening, since the last ERNA meeting in Bratislava one year ago.

The convocation of a Special Session of the General Assembly of United Nations on HIV/AIDS. The adoption of

a final compulsory UN resolution for the overall humanity, which it was hard to draft, but it reached to achieve a large consensus. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent as the only official NGO nominated in the document.

The fight to have a right to medical treatments with generic medicines at highly reduced prices and accessible to a broader range of countries.

The worrying expansion of the epidemic to Eastern countries.

The progress but with side effects of therapies.

The awareness to face the worst epidemic of the human history.

The efforts still without a certain result to find a vaccination to completely cut off the virus from affected people.

The belief that with enlarging and multiplying prevention only we could stop and reduce the entity of this virus, which today is becoming a planetary disaster and the more will forecast for the next future:

they are all events and considerations that directly touch our Movement and our minds.

We can say that in this year the relations between HIV and humanity faced an impressive growth in awareness. Those are results of an unseen campaign, supported by efforts of hundred thousands of researchers, doctors, nurses and social workers. But also affected people, who reached to create an adequate and more realistic attitude for politicians and decision-makers, with their activism.

We may ask what was the role of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent in this campaign and if in the future we all would do more and better actions.

As you certainly remember, our Movement since nineteen-eighty six took a clear and exact position with the resolution of Rio de Janeiro, to which Oscar Zuluaga and I had the honour to be part of. Since then many National Societies have started projects that had to face problems and loss of funds and lack of resources.

As you know, also ERNA had problems to cover its core budget at the beginning, by some contributions, sometimes relevant, sometimes symbolic only from

National Societies from France, Monaco, Slovakia, Sweden and Italy. The operational budget was very poor and permitted us to finance concrete actions in Latvia and Slovakia only.

Some other projects were presented. I remember some in Armenia, Bulgaria, Kazakstan and Kyrgyzstan, but they are still waiting for support from western Societies. Whose ones I would like to recall for a more active involvement to this network.

This isn't an economic problem only. It depends also from the priority level given from each National Society to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Clearly speaking, some National Societies still think that this epidemic isn't of its competence, because "somebody else is working on it yet". Or, even worse, the affection gets only to people with misbehaviours or behaviours out of common moral, that is better to keep at a certain distance from the Red Cross.

Together we can do a lot to overcome those prejudices.

At next General Assembly in Geneva the HIV Governance Group, established by the Federation to give the right strategies and improve the global response by the Red Cross and the Red Crescent to pandemic world-wide, will propose the adoption of a solemn “Geneva Declaration” to commit the entire Movement toward the whole humanity.

It is also our responsibility to let the “Geneva Declaration” will be applied by consensus and with enthusiasm. It will be even more important that it will be immediately applied and implemented into practice.

At the same time, the Secretary of the Federation is about to launch a “global campaign” against stigmatisation with the involvement of all the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies world-wide in the next two years.

We all can do a lot in the advocacy field, in respect of human dignity and to the right of non-discrimination.

Let's open local chapters of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to make them to become a “welcoming home” for HIV affected people and their activist movements.

Let's forward requests to Governments to abolish discriminatory laws regarding also visa authorizations to their countries.

Let's be aside to affect people for the right to care. These are all important actions, which implementation don't need relevant amounts of money, but a clear political will only.

An implementation of this advocacy role could also follow the works at the Conference of Berlin, scheduled on March two thousand and two. One main issue will in fact be the HIV/AIDS.

Berlin Conference could also be the ideal place for an exchange of projects and financing between operating and participating Societies.

Prevention is the privileging field among other Red Cross activities, due to its overall presence on the local field, to the motivation of thousands of young members of the Red Cross Youth, to traditional training courses on First Aid.

It's not difficult to insert in our First Aid courses notions for the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases: few minutes are enough to remember to people that it's possible to avoid transmission simply with abstinence or

with fidelity or with the use of condoms. Inviting everybody to choose between those three options, according to their beliefs.

We all know that a suggestion of a peer-age is much more effective than many other paternalistic digressions.

For this reason we have put a Seminar on peer-education in our schedule and we have invited representatives from the Red Cross Youth, whose have an historical responsibility on actively and practically contributing for the fight against HIV / AIDS.

Another field where the Red Cross can play as privileged referent to governments is the relations between the use of intravenous drugs and HIV diffusion, by considering the trust that most vulnerable people place on our emblem as guarantee of protection and respect regarding their sufferings.

As you know the use of intravenous drugs is dramatically increasing in Eastern European countries and in Central Asia as well. The spread of HIV is directly related to this

way of transmission, if we also consider that drug addicted communities aren't categories epidemiologically isolated.

Each drug user may in fact have sexual relations with several partners, spreading in this way all his diseases shared by extremely dangerous practices such as the exchange of syringes, needles or even more, of the same blood.

It is a priority for each country to contact and to know each drug user. This strategy is the more or the less difficult. It depends on other strategies related to increase or to lower down the risks of damages by drugs, but also from the kind of legality or illegality that drug users are compelled with.

Violent actions, repressions and police operations turn out drug users from the society, while other damage-reduction and humanitarian strategies help sunk realities to emerge, reducing besides violence and wickedness in our towns.

In this field, European National Societies are very active: in example I recall the Spanish Red Cross, able in few years to start from zero and to become the most important

Anti-drugs Agency in the country, giving a service of incredible value by helping every day suffering people and caring thousands of drug addicted.

I remember also the activities of “Pierre Nicole Centre” by the French Red Cross, the street units of the Croatian Red Cross, the night shelter of the Finnish Red Cross and, last but not least, the work done in Rome by Villa Maraini Foundation of the Italian Red Cross, which in 25 years has met and taken care of over twenty five thousands of drug addicted.

The commitment of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent in the drugs related fields isn't so at year-zero, but it finds its roots in a fertile ground of behaviours, consuetudes, pragmatism and attitudes which already gave a relevant service to our communities and which can be replicated and applied to different contexts.

Dear friends, in a newsgroup on the internet to prepare the fifth Conference on Home and Community Care, which will take place in Thailand next December, by initiative of the Federation and of the Thai Red Cross, a nurse from

Botswana directly involved in home caring to AIDS addicted people, wrote on September 11th this sentence:

“There are more reports written and discussions about Home and Community Care than the care giving itself.

While the talk and discussions seem very urgent the action is lax”.

It is our common responsibility to avoid that this sentence will be true for ERNA as well.