

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has two main dimensions, that are Action and Advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable ones. These two dimensions are strongly linked, as it is well explained by the Federation Strategy 2010, stating that “*advocacy is on a safer ground when supported by activity*”.

Red Cross action is seen and Red Cross voice is heard all over the world, and this give us the “Power of Humanity” that distinguish our National Societies from any other NGOs.

If we make a comparison between contemporary times Ages and the Middle, we can see that the only reality that has almost not changed since then is the living condition of detainees, both in war times and in peace times, both in developing countries and in developed countries claiming to be human rights defendants.

During the centuries human beings have conquered their rights, prisoners have not. In war or in peace, they are too often treated without any respect for fundamental human rights. It is for this reason that we have to consider this as a real humanitarian emergency, to whom we have to answer, all of us. None Country, neither the most civilized, can in fact presume not to be involved. Just a few weeks ago, an Italian citizen arrested in Greece reported on his notes an experience of violence and inhuman conditions of life, that have signed his life forever, even now that he is free.

The situation in Italy, my own country, is not better. Italy is a developed and modern democracy, but with a system that is not at the level of civilization it should be, with only 45.000 places for a population of 60.000 detainees. This leads to promiscuity and the possibility of violent living conditions. Internal code of conducts are in fact based on the “law of the strongest”, the most criminal ones who rule, and it is for this reason that drug users, who are sick persons entering jails for small crimes, could turn to be criminals themselves once they are free.

In Italy, one third of detainees are drug users. Those who are sentenced for less than 4 years can have their term converted in therapeutic treatment. This system has proved extremely effective at the Italian Red Cross Villa Maraini Foundation in Rome, and this demonstrates that if there is the political will things can be done, and can be done well.

My believe is that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement should play a role not only with the ICRC in war times, but also with National Societies in time of peace. Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have to advocate for alternative treatments and punishments anytime. And this not only in the interests of individuals, but also in the interest of Governments and civil societies in which drug users live.

In Rwanda, the ICRC financed the construction of jails, because that was an humanitarian emergency. Everything we say or do can help increasing the living conditions of detainees. It is not about taking the side of Cain, nor the one of Abel. It is about taking the side of Humanity.

We do not have to forget we are talking about human beings at first place, because by naming them “prisoners” we don’t deny their belonging to human race and we cannot allow the system to turn the punishment into violence and unhealthy condition of life, where the punishment is only supposed to be a limitation of freedom.

I personally have visited several prisons around the world, and I can tell you that living conditions are unacceptable in almost all of them. In prison terrible things happen and it is not by chance that the last number of the Red Cross Red Crescent magazine is dedicated to this topic. I am not only talking about prisoners, but also about thousands of asylum seekers and irregular migrants, detained in temporary centers across Europe.

The Italian Red Cross is assisting thousands of irregular migrants in temporary centers in Italy, providing them with medical assistance, psychological and legal counseling, and

trying to improve their living conditions with dedicated activities. But our action is not enough.

A Movement like the Red Cross and Red Crescent is obliged to denounce and to solve this node. Otherwise our nature itself, as most vulnerable people's advocates, is betrayed and our "no actions" is properly condemned. It is under this knowledge that we look at the recent quarrel between the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Government of the United States, that don't allow our delegates to visit prisoners charged of terrorism, while proclaiming themselves as human rights ambassador in the world.

I do respect the ICRC, that I consider as a light in the darkness. The ICRC plays a very important role, but is its confidentiality still up to date, nowadays? We have to consider that the horrors of Abu Graib finished when the Wall Street Journal unveiled them, not thanks to our Movement.

Our mission is not to judge, our mission is to ensure the protection of International Humanitarian Law in prisons. We can not tolerate that there are detainees around the world who are outside the protection of the Geneva Conventions. If in 50 years somebody will ask us what we have done in their favor, we can not repeat our silence during the Nazi regime. We can not accept that, if we do, we are to be blamed as partners in crime.

In order to ensure the protection of IHL, I personally believe that a larger presence and a more active role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in jails is needed, not only in situation of war, but also during peace time, as my dear friend Dr. Nenad Javornik, who I personally thank for having organized this important event, has stressed in more than an occasion.