



**Our world.
Your move.**



31ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

GENEVA 2011

3.4 SUMMARY RECORD

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Geneva, 28 November–1 December 2011

OPENING SESSION AND FIRST PLENARY MEETING

9.05 a.m.

Opening session

Mr Barra (Chairman of the Standing Commission), delivering his keynote address, recalled that the Council of Delegates was the only forum in which National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC came together to discuss “family” matters. At the International Conference, governments would join the family to discuss future courses of action and issues of joint humanitarian concern. The Oxford Dictionary defined “movement” as an “act of moving,” but also as a “general activity,” a “group of people working together to advance their political, social, or artistic ideas,” or even as a “campaign undertaken by a political, social, or artistic movement.” Working together to advance shared ideas was particularly appropriate for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the word summed up its ethos of taking action to help, deliver, build and advocate. When coordinating joint operations, delivering emergency response, lobbying governments for recognition of its role and mandate and advocating humanitarian values, the Movement was seen as one, acting for the common good as one of the best known brands in the world. However, traditional patterns of disaster and conflict were changing and tomorrow’s problems could not be solved with yesterday’s answers.

The Council’s agenda included: defining a Movement position on nuclear weapons; relations with other, external humanitarian actors; adopting guidelines for National Societies in preparing for and responding to armed conflict and other situations of violence;

evaluating the Movement Strategy; and making recommendations for the incoming Standing Commission. An update on the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the Agreement on Operational Arrangements (AOA) signed between the Magen David Adom of Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society was also on the agenda. The two National Societies faced tremendous humanitarian needs and the Movement must be able to focus on its main mission to deliver humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people, wherever they were.

The Movement was expected to speak at the International Conference with one voice, but he was concerned that its components preferred to work as independent actors, favouring their own agenda, possibly influenced by national interests. A National Society could be strong internationally only if it were strong at the national level. When operating at the international level, the Movement must deliver services as one entity, which might give rise to coordination problems or major challenges, but the joint response must be to set common priorities and aims. To remain the main humanitarian force globally, aside from working better together and improving service delivery, the Movement must strive to be the main auxiliary to governments in the humanitarian field. There was growing concern about independent humanitarian action and access to victims, and all components had to ensure adherence to the Fundamental Principles, especially with respect to independence, impartiality and neutrality.

The International Conference would focus on two main blocks of issues: strengthening international humanitarian law (IHL) and humanitarian action. Without its volunteers, the Movement would be nothing, yet volunteerism had never been on the agenda. It would now be discussed and governments would be asked to recognize the value of the work of

volunteers and provide them with better protection and a more enabling working environment. He invited the Council to join in a minute's silence in memory of staff and volunteers who had lost their lives in the service of humanity. The major new challenge was the dramatic change in the nature of conflict, making it more urgent than ever to reaffirm the basic rules of IHL and their applicability in modern conflicts. However, the core humanitarian values embedded in IHL must remain unchanged and the Movement must stand firm in defending those values at the Conference and in its everyday work. The Geneva Conventions still protected the victims of war and were as necessary and relevant today as they had originally been, saving lives, alleviating suffering, giving comfort to thousands of prisoners of war, helping to reunite millions of families and contributing to the restoration of peace.

The financial crisis was having an impact on the Movement's efforts and it must be prepared for less support from governments and the public. It should ensure that its actions lived up to its image as the most effective and efficient operator, working as one and adhering to principles and rules that had not been compromised, and that it could play its role of preferred partner both to the United Nations and governments, while keeping its doors open to cooperation with others, especially non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He disliked the expression "humanitarian market"; the Movement's work could not be compared to a market, where actors competed in their own interests to the detriment of other actors. Being the most important humanitarian network was both an honour and a burden for the Movement. It had the responsibility of fostering cooperation among all actors engaged in alleviating human suffering. In an increasingly globalized world, it was inconceivable to act alone, and interacting with different bodies had become vital.

Lastly, the Movement should look to the future. As a global movement working with local actors, its impact was felt at grassroots level, but it could also help shape thinking nationally, regionally and internationally through advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy, promoting its values and speaking for the most vulnerable worldwide. The slogan "think globally, act locally" was also very apt.