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Redefining the auxiliary role for stronger National Societies

Governments should set up laws to protect volunteers and recognize their humanitarian work, concluded the commission on the auxiliary role of National Societies. "Volunteerism is described in Strategy 2020 as being at the heart of community development," recalls Bosko Jakoljevic, president of the Red Cross of Serbia. Some Governments are leading the way; in Mozambique, for instance, a draft law on volunteerism is already at its Parliament. Aside from volunteering, Zhao Baige, executive vice president of the Red Cross Society of China, emphasized that a well managed partnership with authorities can be conducive to an enabling legal environment, for example, to ensure faster entry into countries when international emergency assistance is needed.

Violence against health care must end: It's a matter of life and death

A commission yesterday explored ways to improve respect and protection of health care in armed conflict and other situations of violence. Several eminent speakers from states, NGOs and the Movement outlined the issue as one of the biggest and yet most overlooked humanitarian problems today. The theme resonated with most delegates who subsequently took the floor, many describing instances of health structures, personnel or vehicles being attacked in their countries. The government of Sweden stated that it: "strongly supports the proposed resolution on Health Care in Danger and encourages other states to do the same." Others stressed that the scope of the initiative concerned not just the Movement but also governments, their armed forces and the health community at large.

Can health inequities be eliminated?

At yesterday's commission on inequitable access to health, participants agreed with the joint IFRC and WHO report, "Eliminating health inequities: Every woman and child counts", that there have been significant recent developments in global health. However, it is possible and necessary to do more to close the remaining gap, especially for women and children. National Societies of Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Ecuador and Egypt provided valuable insight and shared experiences on the issue while advocating for states and the Movement to do more, particularly in utilizing the Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer network to access the most hard-to-reach populations and complementing the efforts of governments.

In support of a greener conference, the Daily Bulletin has been reduced to two pages, with fewer photos to reduce paper and ink consumption. To supplement this and the Video Daily Bulletin, photo galleries and additional information are available on the conference websites.

Humanitarian law pervades conference debate and discussion

Private security forces, gender-based violence as a weapon of war, detention, high-tech weapons, the growth of non-state armed groups and the enduring problem of compliance. These are just some of the challenges confronting international humanitarian law that have been the subject of workshops, side events and hallway conversations during the first two days of the International Conference. As governments and Movement representatives focused on finding common ground on resolutions regarding implementation and detention, various workshops looked at how to better implement existing bodies of humanitarian law. The Italian Red Cross detailed its extensive training and awareness raising activities, while another side event discussed the implementation of IHL in situations of gender-based violence.

Working together to reach vulnerable migrants

Two events on migration this week made calls to governments and National Societies to adopt migration policies and practices that ensure humanitarian access, dignity, respect for diversity and social inclusion. A side event led by the Swedish Red Cross, and attended by the Swedish Ambassador, used examples from the National Societies of Indonesia, Mexico and Tunisia to demonstrate the range of practical work being done. At the commission, the governments of China and the Philippines joined National Societies in calling for increased dialogue to reduce anti-migrant sentiment and greater partnerships. The chairman and CEO of the Philippines Red Cross, Richard Gordon, said: "We have talked a lot; now the Movement must be more assertive in its action".

From relief to development: sustainable humanitarian action

A side event brought together panelists from the Nepal and French Red Cross Societies as well as DARA and WFP. Participants looked at the challenges and opportunities of reducing the divide between relief and development funding. Panelists agreed that the divide was, in Philip Taminga's (DARA) words "artificial".

"True sustainable humanitarian action must feature three components: Pre-crisis planning, immediate relief and a post-crisis response," said Jean-François Mattei, president of the French Red Cross. With a view to overcoming the gaps, it was recommended that organizations approach humanitarian and development activities not as mutually exclusive fields, while appealing to the responsibilities of donors to ensure that all components are adequately funded.

In the community

Throughout the course of the statutory meetings, our communication team has been engaging online communities via social media. In our latest poll we asked our Facebook fans which health-care issue means the most to them. Here's how they responded: Emergency health care 45%, mother and child health care 25%, promoting healthy behaviors 18% and mental health 12%.