



32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Geneva, Switzerland: 8 – 10 December 2015

REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Commissioner, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen, friends of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, it gives me great pleasure to present this report on the 32nd International Conference to the plenary.

This has been an exceptional conference – exciting; extremely relevant in its choice of topics and full of energy.

The conference has also had a new format, with many more things happening at the same time, and a more informal atmosphere to some of the proceedings.

We have also had new guests with us throughout – people from the UN, NGOs, business, academia and the media. The great majority of people with whom I have spoken have enjoyed the new format. As always, friendship and internationalism have been at the heart of it all.

It is very challenging to do justice to the wide range of topics and different points of view in a brief statement. Nevertheless, I will humbly try to capture the process, spirit and key points of the discussions.

This report details – in brief – the overall choreography of the conference, the Plenary Sessions, the five Commissions, side-events, the Drafting Committee, Humanitarian Dialogue and Vision Lab and the General Debate.

I imagine that all of you got the same sense that I did of the sheer number of people committed to engaging and shaping the discussions, a registered total of 2284 delegates, which included 169 governments, 185 National Societies and 101 observers!

I cannot enter into the substance, but I recommend that you consult the full written reports which will be made available after the end of the conference and use them as a basis for future discussions and follow-up.

Our conference was opened on Tuesday by the Chair of the Standing Commission, and its overarching theme was the Fundamental Principles in Action. Next were the volunteer awards. These strongly demonstrated our principles in action. The tireless work of volunteers from the Red Cross Societies of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, involved in the Ebola response, was recognized with a special humanitarian award.

The President of the Swiss Confederation then gave a powerful address on the legacy of Solferino, placing the 32nd International Conference firmly within this 150 year history.

Then we attended to procedure. The conference officers were elected upon the nominations made by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, followed by a presentation on the organization of the work to come.

The elected Chair of the 32nd international conference, Mrs. Fatima Gailani, gave remarks on behalf of the Red Cross / Red Crescent. Keynote addresses by the President of the International Federation and the President of the ICRC were followed by three special messages of support delivered via video link. Each of these speeches made clear that the times in which we live required the conference members to redouble efforts to resolve issues of humanitarian concern.

We then had a panel debate on the Power of Humanity, moderated by Hala Gorani of CNN. This explored the concept of humanity from different perspectives. Each participant reaffirmed the principles that drive humanitarian action, recognizing that different actors contribute to our shared humanity by performing different roles and responsibilities and treating each other with mutual respect and complementarity.

A special plenary session called Focus on Migration put a spotlight on our shared humanitarian concern for the situation of vulnerable migrants throughout migration routes. Testimony was given in videos, and there were evocative statements from six members of the panel, chaired by Madame Gailani, who herself added a moving personal tone. Conference members were invited to take note of the progress report on the implementation of Resolution 3 of the 31st International Conference. Other speakers were encouraged to give their input via statements in the General Debate.

Let me now move on to the main body of this report, the work of the five Commissions, which function as thematic workshops.

All the Commissions were extremely well attended and the guiding questions provoked lively debate on the central themes, a debate which mirrored the discussion taking place in the Drafting Committee.

One main point was made by all the Commissions, which I would like to raise before entering into the substance of each Commission: there is a real need for members of this conference to work in partnership, both within the Red Cross Red Crescent and with external actors, to address issues of humanitarian concern. No single organization or sector can meet these challenges on its own.

The Commission rapporteurs will consolidate the final reports for their Commission within the next two weeks and these will then be available on the Conference website.

Let me now move on to **Commission A – Fundamental Principles in Action**

The Commission reaffirmed the continued relevance of the Fundamental Principles for effective humanitarian action, including the safety of volunteers and staff. Tailoring the Principles to every situation is crucial and requires a careful analysis of the context. Consistency, perseverance, courage and creativity were mentioned as key attributes for putting the principles in action.

The Principles have a universal appeal and influence that extends beyond the Movement to local and international organizations alike who have adopted the Principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence. Yet participants pointed out that there is still a gap between rhetoric and practice which at times fuels suspicions, hence the importance of demonstrating the Principles through our actions and having a nuanced understanding of their operational utility.

Embedding these Principles in institutional culture is crucial, and participants also emphasized the importance of internalizing the principles in the personal values and behaviours of leaders, staff and volunteers. Every humanitarian worker needs a principled disposition that guides her or him at every moment.

Participants welcomed the opportunity of sharing experience and examples of good practice by Movement components. They included dissemination to internal and external audiences, humanitarian education programmes and initiatives such as the *Safer Access Framework*, and *Agents of Behavioural Change (ABC)*.

It was emphasized that States play a key role in ensuring respect for the Fundamental Principles and creating a conducive environment for National Societies to carry out their auxiliary role in the humanitarian field. Some States pointed out that a healthy tension can and should exist between National Societies and Government, in which they can agree to disagree, keeping the Fundamental Principles in mind. Constant dialogue is vital.

The Chair of the Commission encouraged participants to seize this opportunity to take concrete steps to strengthen the application of and respect for the Principles by considering and proposing pledges

Commission B – Contemporary Challenges in IHL

This Commission discussed the contemporary challenges in IHL and how to address them. It served as an interactive forum for the participants of the International Conference. There was broad agreement on the challenges as identified in the Concept Note and the ICRC's Report on "International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts".

Among the main challenges discussed were: the increasing complexity of armed conflicts, notably due to the proliferation and fragmentation of non-state armed groups; the expanding geographical scope of the battlefield; the interplay between IHL and International Human Rights Law; and generating respect for IHL. The importance of ensuring the protection of humanitarian actors was also discussed.

The need to ensure respect for and compliance with IHL was seen by many as the main challenge in contemporary armed conflicts. Other important issues identified were challenges posed by urban warfare, including the practice of some parties of deliberately hiding among the civilian population, and the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The Commission also touched upon a number of other IHL challenges, and participants exchanged information on their own experiences and actions to promote IHL. The necessity for engaging in creative thinking in order to find new methods to address these issues, particularly relating to non-state armed groups, was emphasized, as well as the need for concerted efforts to disseminate and implement IHL in different contexts.

Commission C – Joint Action on the Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The Chair drew out the following key points from this Commission.

It has taken time to develop a sense of proactivity and priority around prevention of and response to SGBV in armed conflict and disasters; while progress has been made, efforts in all areas need to be accelerated. Victims/survivors of SGBV are still hidden and face barriers to speaking up, due to existing taboos, culture and tradition and a lack of outcomes when incidents are reported. This applies to women and girls, but also to boys and men of different ages and backgrounds.

Important practical solutions were discussed, including the need to ensure access by victims/survivors to free legal aid; financial support; physical structures to receive and provide care to victims/survivors; and simplified legal procedures with compensation/redress laws. Other practical solutions discussed included ensuring that civil society can represent victims/survivors in court and reinforcing complementarity and collaboration between different international and national actors with a common plan of action.

Additionally, participants urged practical steps to be taken by domestic disaster management authorities and local actors, including National Societies, on the prevention of SGBV in disasters. This includes disaster law and regulatory policies, as well as ensuring continuity of health and policing services in the aftermath of disasters.

A number of National Societies and States noted the importance of better coordination and collaboration within the Movement and between the Movement, States and international, regional and national organizations.

Commission D - Health Care in Danger: continuing to protect the delivery of health care together

The two Commissions more than reinforced the fact that the issue is still of major humanitarian concern. A number of moving interventions spoke of the deaths of health care staff and volunteers as striking examples of the urgency of the issue and of the need for all parties to the conflict to respect IHL.

While significant progress has been made since the last International Conference, speakers made a concerted call for further action, particularly at the local level and by all

stakeholders, including States, Movement components, health care organizations, armed actors, community leaders and civil society.

A total of 37 interventions spoke powerfully of a wide range of measures that are being undertaken or planned. Many of these are now at the heart of pledges coming out of this International Conference.

Major points from this Commission addressed prevention, community ownership and response. Providing high quality health services is an important factor in ensuring safety. Gender, diversity and cultural awareness need to be better understood and considered, as they have an impact on access to and provision of health care.

Everyone stressed the importance of adhering to the Fundamental Principles and, for health care personnel, adhering to the ethical principles of health care, equally applicable in times of peace and in times of conflict. There is also power in making things public, in having good data collection and in having observatories or other mechanisms to monitor attacks on health care, so that proper responses can be put in place.

Speakers emphasized the urgency of the demand for safe access to health care, and it is a call to all of us: the poor and rich nations, those who live in conflict areas and those who are fortunate to live in peace. We all have a role to play. There is no one solution that fits all contexts or issues; the interventions showed us that the most effective measures are those that are locally adapted.

The challenge ahead is to move from a community of concern to a community of action.

Let me now move on to **Commission E – Building resilience by scaling up local action and strengthening legal frameworks**. The Chair led a lively discussion on a range of resilience issues and presented an open invitation to join the One Billion Coalition for Resilience, which is committed to building the resilience of people and communities in line with the post-2015 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the outcomes of Paris CoP21 and the World Humanitarian Summit.

By 2025 this new initiative aims to have engaged and inspired one billion vulnerable people – in high, middle and low income countries – to take active steps to enhance their resilience. Participants in the session welcomed the 1BC initiative and agreed to work together to engage not only the Red Cross Red Crescent, but also governments, the United Nations, civil society, the private sector and academia, in creating a world where people in every community can survive and thrive in the face of increasing risks and vulnerability.

Session 2 of the Commission focused on the progress achieved by some States with the support of relevant stakeholders – such as the IFRC, the UNDP and Red Cross National Societies – in strengthening legal frameworks for disasters and emergencies, and identified further opportunities.

Three main topics were discussed by the panellists.

First, the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and the implementation of the International Disaster Response Law Guidelines. Second, the role of domestic law in promoting disaster risk reduction, particularly with regard to relevant

commitments in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the relevance of international instruments – such as the Checklist on Law and Disaster Risk Reduction and its Handbook – developed to support States in assessing and strengthening their domestic law.

And third, findings about gaps in domestic law related to the promotion of training and delivery of first aid by laypersons. Participants were asked for their views on how to measure and rate global progress in these topics and what to expect from States and National Societies in the next four years.

The scale and dynamism of this Conference were impressive.

Thirty-five side-events supplemented the official proceedings of the Conference, providing opportunity for further discussions and reflection on critical humanitarian issues related to the Conference themes and objectives. To further complement the proceedings, the inspirational Humanitarian Village on the ground floor had several interactive exhibition stands where participants could learn how humanitarian action is being conducted around the world from direct testimonies given by volunteers.

I will not report back to you on the Drafting Committee, as this will be handled in a separate report.

By midday today, 137 pledges had been received. Of these, 86 are specific pledges and 51 open pledges. Pledges can be submitted until March 2016, and I would like to use this opportunity to encourage you all to sign more pledges.

The Humanitarian Dialogue sessions gave participants an opportunity to discuss current and future humanitarian challenges and to work towards collaborative solutions. Drawing on input from vulnerable populations, staff and volunteers and policy makers from the *Voices to Action* initiative, people looked at Disaster risk and climate change, Risk in urban settings, Community-centred resilient health systems, Migration and Insecure environments. Two work streams ran continuously during the conference.

During the Vision Lab, a select group of participants took a longer-term view of humanitarian action and the Red Cross and the Red Crescent's distinctive modes of operation. The thematic sessions attracted great interest.

The General Debate, which ran throughout the three days, was very well attended. 179 speakers signed up to make a statement, which will be included in the official records of the conference.

This year, the conference has also drawn the attention of the media who have been very interested in the issues we have been addressing. The “hashtag” Power of Humanity drew attention on social media and brought some of the debate to a wider audience.

I would like to end by thanking all of you – the officers of the conference, the different Chairs of the Commissions, panellists, the delegates and, of course, our volunteers. Each one of you has worked so hard organizing, leading and participating in the commissions, committees, side-events and receptions. Thank you.

Every one of you has brought great personal energy, commitment and expertise to make this conference so impressive. I would also like to thank the Rapporteurs from each Commission

for their comprehensive written reports. Finally, I think we must all acknowledge the extraordinary hard work and patience of those involved and engaged in the Drafting Committee.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed delegates and friends, I trust that you found all these sessions as informative and engaging as I did.

I would like to leave you by echoing the powerful and simple message expressed by our Conference Chair: “what we do alone is not as important as what we do together”.

And I would add “with the power of humanity, everything is possible”.

Thank you.