

# Power of humanity

33rd International Conference  
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

9-12 December 2019, Geneva



## 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

### Chair's paper

During these days together, we have painted a picture of a future with many challenges. Yet we have identified solutions, commitments and ways of collaborating to help us address these together, and so my reflections are about how this International Conference can set the humanitarian agenda moving forwards, about **how we are shaping tomorrow**.

#### Creating an inclusive humanitarian environment

Firstly, a clear message echoed throughout the Conference, from the opening ceremony and via multiple spotlight sessions, side events and Red Talks, was that our humanitarian workforce must reflect the diversity of the communities we work with. We need to have an inclusive humanitarian environment. This is not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it leads to more relevant and effective humanitarian outcomes.

Naturally, as a Movement deeply rooted in communities and with millions of volunteers who are from and part of them, we reflect this diversity. But we too have a way to go, and there are many exciting initiatives that are paving the way to strengthening this inclusive environment. Pledges on disability inclusion, promoting diversity and women's leadership are still open for all of us to make a commitment for change. The resolution on women's leadership is particularly important for the success of our broader humanitarian ecosystem.

#### Addressing "invisible" people and reaching the hardest to reach

We have shed light on the suffering that often happens in silence. Mental health and psychosocial needs – the less visible wounds – have become a natural part of the humanitarian debate. Many of us are taking important steps to scale up efforts to address these needs.

However, significantly more resources need to go into mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian settings, and local community-based capacity requires sustainable investment. We must move from promises to action and all invest financial, human and political capital in this agenda.

There are challenges in reaching, assisting and protecting people, "walking the last mile" to address the needs of migrants and displaced people, restoring family links and strengthening community health and epidemic and pandemic preparedness.

Digital transformation provides us with opportunities for increased reach, one example being effective cash transfer programmes. However, the digital transformation of the humanitarian sector is not just a matter of technologies and their adaptation; it is first and foremost about people. It is about maintaining trust in the digital age and ensuring that we keep people firmly at the centre of any technology conversations in a way that upholds our Fundamental Principles. We need to co-create new models of partnerships with the private sector and governments so that humanitarian actors can use technologies with the highest ethical principles and standards of security and privacy in place. Protecting personal data is about protecting people. Growing insecurity linked to the digital age and the pervasive threat of unauthorized access to personal data are issues that require us to devote ourselves even more diligently to the protection of our Restoring Family Links activities.

### **Bringing IHL home**

A message I heard throughout the statements made during the Voices from the Conference session was that we all have a shared responsibility to make sure that international humanitarian law (IHL) is known and implemented in order to protect victims of armed conflict. States and National Societies can and must take concrete steps to implement IHL at the domestic level. In other words, “bring IHL home” – bring the ideas and solutions you have heard home with you and take steps to implement the resolutions and pledges from this Conference. IHL is about protecting people – women, men, boys and girls. We need to take into account the different impact of armed conflict and IHL on different people, and we need to think about effective – and at times innovative – ways to ensure respect for IHL.

IHL is highly relevant in today’s changing world – it matters and belongs to all of us. Seventy years ago, States came together to agree on the Geneva Conventions and, later, their Additional Protocols. Even in a changing world, these basic rules still apply and provide essential guidance for all parties to armed conflict. Of course, new realities also pose new challenges to IHL. However, what we have seen at this Conference is that IHL is up to these challenges, and there are examples of good practice in IHL implementation that the members of the Conference can share with each other.

### **Climate action today and for the future**

At this Conference, we have explored frightening future scenarios and current realities of the devastating humanitarian impact of extreme weather events, climate change and the multiplying effects of these developments. Many of us, while exploring these scenarios here at the Conference, are simultaneously dealing with the practical consequences in our home countries, cities and communities. The effects are here and now, and we must scale up and speed up action urgently.

While I hear this alarming message loud and clear, I have also heard and experienced our strength and commitment to finding solutions together. For example, we will be developing effective disaster laws, policies, strategies and plans that take climate change into account and protect the people most at risk. Going forward, we need to connect the local and global levels to work together. As a Movement, we have a relevant role as a connector. I especially liked how we connected this International Conference’s humanitarian community and the COP 25 climate community through a lively side event. You can also join the open pledge on climate-smart humanitarian action to support transformative change across the sector and consider pledges for climate action in your own domestic contexts.

## Trusted local action and sharing the risk

People's trust is our strongest currency and the best licence for us to operate. At the heart of trust is community engagement and accountability, and National Societies are the frontline of this engagement. The Conference identified the importance of States supporting the development of the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society of their own country, in line with the Statutes of the Movement, and strengthening the auxiliary role. To this effect, we invite States and National Societies to contribute to strengthening the global network of strong National Societies by signing the model pledge available in the Conference pledge database.

I experienced a more sombre moment during the Conference when I walked through the Humanitarian Village and saw the display of t-shirts representing more than 90 volunteers who have been killed on duty in the past four years. We need to protect our volunteers and ensure that they (or their families) are properly compensated in the event of injury or death while on duty. This is an initiative we are taking forward, and your support, which you can show, for example, by signing up to the different pledges on volunteer safety, is essential.

We, as a Movement, are taking active steps to ensure that we live up to the expectations of our partners and safeguard our work. I strongly believe that the Movement's integrity statement, adopted at the Council of Delegates, shows our commitment and will be implemented by all Movement components.

We need a continuous dialogue between States and the Movement to preserve principled humanitarian action in complex environments affected by sanctions and counterterrorism measures. Let's continue to talk about how we share risk to make sure we do not just transfer it.

Finally, let's maximize this privileged engagement with you – States, Red Cross and Red Crescent partners and observers – for the next Conference. I specifically choose the word **engagement** because, at this Conference, I have seen many innovative ways for us to get closer to the humanitarian reality on the ground. I would like to finish by reflecting back to the beginning of the Conference when Genevan school children challenged us to "heal the world". I feel proud of the steps we have taken together; let's continue to "act today, shape tomorrow".