

23 November 2009

Red Cross and Red Crescent honours remarkable humanitarians

Nairobi/Geneva (ICRC and IFRC) – The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement paid tribute to the remarkable work and achievements of five of its members by awarding them the Henry Dunant Medal at a ceremony in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on Monday night.

First bestowed 40 years ago, the Henry Dunant Medal is named after the Movement's founder and is awarded every two years to a select few people in recognition of their outstanding dedication to the world's largest humanitarian network.

"This is the highest distinction that anyone who's involved with the Red Cross and Red Crescent can aspire to," said H.E. Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid, Chairman of the Movement's Standing Commission, in charge of the Medal. "The world needs more people like these individuals, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help others."

This year's recipients are:

Dr Muctarr Amadu Sheriff Jalloh of Sierra Leone – a specialist in pediatrics, who served as President of the Sierra Leone Red Cross from 1996 until this year. Having joined the Red Cross in 1985, Mr Jalloh chose to remain in Sierra Leone as many other medical professionals fled the extreme violence and atrocities that enveloped the country when civil war broke out in 1991. Eight years later, at the height of the conflict, he was attacked and nearly killed when armed men tried to cut off his hands. After recovering abroad, Dr Jalloh returned to Freetown, determined to continue helping those made vulnerable by the fighting.

Mr Cornelio Sommaruga of Switzerland – former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Mr Sommaruga's presidency spanned a historic period marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Rwandan genocide and the Balkan war. He strove to promote solidarity, responsibility, tolerance and respect in a time characterized by genocides and ethnic cleansing. Mr Sommaruga is also known for his initiatives leading to the creation of an additional emblem – the Red Crystal – which was adopted by the States party to the Geneva Conventions in 2005, officially making it a part of international humanitarian law.

Mr Sommaruga could not be present in Nairobi to accept his medal, so H.R.H., Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, who is former Chair of the Movement's Standing Commission, received it on his behalf.

Mr Pär Stenbäck of Finland – former Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Finnish Red Cross. Mr Stenbäck took over the leadership of the IFRC in 1988, as the Cold War was drawing to a close and a new geopolitical scene was emerging. As a political scientist, parliamentarian and government minister, Mr Stenbäck championed the needs and rights of vulnerable people across the globe. He is known for his determination, vision and belief in the importance of cooperation.

Mrs Zoy Katevas de Sclabos of Chile – who served the Chilean Red Cross for 55 years until stepping down from its presidency in 2004. Mrs Katevas de Sclabos started out as a volunteer and worked her way up, developing new programmes and policies to improve the

health and quality of life of vulnerable people in her country. She successfully rallied the business and financial sectors to support Red Cross activities, such as first-aid training and blood donation, and became an expert at raising money for sister National Societies responding to emergencies in nearby disaster-prone countries.

Dr Fouad Hamza of Syria – an orthodontist by profession, who was first elected President of the Syrian Red Crescent in 1978 and who was reelected several times before stepping down in 1998. He remained active with the National Society until retiring in 2005. A strong believer in the importance of social support for at-risk groups, Dr Hamza worked vigorously to develop Red Crescent activities in this field. He also played an important role in defining the IFRC's current strategy and vision for assisting people affected by disasters, disease, poverty and strife.

The 2009 Henry Dunant Medals were given out on the opening day of the Movement's Council of Delegates meeting in Nairobi, which brings together representatives from the ICRC, IFRC and 186 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide. This is the first time the entire Movement has come together in Africa.

During the ceremony, the Council also recognized Datuk Datin Paduka Ruby Lee, the former Secretary General of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, who was exceptionally awarded a Henry Dunant Medal in 2008 while battling a terminal illness. Mrs Lee championed the plight of the displaced and uprooted, having lived as a refugee in India during the Second World War. She was known as a staunch supporter of programmes for women, youths and the disabled. She passed away in June 2009.

The Henry Dunant Medal is a red cross embossed with the profile of the Movement's founder, attached to a green ribbon.