

Remarks at the opening of the Governing Board  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Chair  
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Mr Konoe,  
Vice Presidents of the International Federation,  
Members of the Governing Board,  
Mr Secretary General,  
Friends,

It is both an honour and a pleasure to stand here today, and address you at the outset of your meeting. It is an honour, as the International Federation is the largest network of humanitarians on the planet, and speaking to those whose responsibility it is to make it work for the world's most vulnerable is a privilege.

It is a pleasure, as it is not so many years ago I, myself, sat where you are sitting now, and coming here, for the first time in my new capacity, is like coming home.

Six months have passed since the statutory meetings here in Geneva in December. In my estimation – shared by the whole Commission – the Council of Delegates and the International Conference were both highly successful meetings. Essential issues were on the agenda, and we now have important new decisions, ready for implementation.

The meetings were also successful, considered as *events* – especially the International Conference, where a number of innovations in format and debates were introduced; the greater openness, and more inclusive preparatory process.

Can we do even better? Of course we can. That is why it is important that the Standing Commission – at its meeting three weeks ago – emphasised the need to consider the Conference not as points on a calendar, but as a continuous cycle of mutually reinforcing preparation, debate, decisions and follow-up. The last day of such a Conference is the first day of preparing for the next – and this work we have begun.

Before I share with you some thoughts about how we will proceed, let me offer some brief reflections of a broader nature.

We are increasingly aware of the complexity of the world around us, the many links, relations, contradictions between actors in that world, and the fast pace of change we have to cope with. The humanitarian dimension of that world is no different. Interdependence is increasing, and the transmission of shocks is more rapid than ever before. An example which is simple in nature, but an excellent illustration, is that when an Icelandic volcano erupted a few years ago, people in Kenya lost their jobs – within days.

In a world of this nature, it is important that we understand it, understand ourselves, and understand our place in the world. I have come to the position of Chair of the Commission in the conviction that the Commission offers a platform for reflection on such matters, *being the only permanent body in the Movement* where ICRC, the International Federation, and National Societies are all represented.

The Commission is not going to become an operational body, nor a policymaking one, its task is different. But it can – if done right – offer the space for discussions around the longer-term future of the Movement, the large-scale trends that shape both the humanitarian landscape, and the humanitarian world, and our own relative importance and position within that. Let me take a simple, a measurable example. What is our financial footprint trend over the last 10-15 years? If total humanitarian assistance flows, expressed in monetary terms, increased from 22 to 28 billion

dollars from one year to another, how did our collective performance on that score compare? We have a hunch. We don't know, but we need to know. And what are our prospects? Financing our operations are of course important, but the financial footprint is also an indicator of how healthy we are, how effective, where we are going. Here *everything* counts - from "being there" during a crisis to the integrity of each of us.

These thoughts lie behind an emerging view in the Commission, that it might offer something useful to the Movement if it, from time to time, acts like a think-tank, takes the trouble to obtain independent studies and evidence-based reports on issues of concern, study these, and discuss options for further action – which, to close the loop, could easily be to go back to the International Conference and ask States to remove an obstacle, create new instruments, or otherwise facilitate humanitarian action. Or - for Movement matters - we might use these think tank results as input to our own debate in the Council of Delegates. I believe that we will see increasing need for the Council of Delegates. *The Movement matters*. Increasingly, as with the Icelandic volcano, what one Movement component does can influence other components, on the other side of the world – or all of us, for good or bad. We have started a successful identification of Movement needs for synergy with processes like that of SMCC – Movement Coordination and Cooperation – and Movement Branding. More steps are needed.

Among topics mentioned, so far, as possible subjects for "think-tank" mode work in the Commission are thus strategic thinking around enhanced synergies between components of the Movement; the ten most important trends for the coming ten years and its consequences for us; further reflections on the Fundamental Principles, their opportunities and dilemmas; and "integrity" – but no decisions have been made, so far.

At our meeting, which took place in Istanbul immediately after the World Humanitarian Summit, which the Commission had the opportunity to attend, we had a long agenda before us. Some items had to do with aspects of the International Conference, including participation, the usage of the Red Crystal, and the Monitoring of the MoU between Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom, a task that has been taken up by the newly appointed Independent Monitor, Mr Robert Tickner of Australia, whom many of you know.

I already mentioned some of the discussions around the preparations for the coming, 33<sup>rd</sup>, International Conference. Apart from looking four years ahead – with the 2017 Council of Delegates as an important milestone on the way there - the Commission also agreed that there is a need to set *objectives* for the Conference. "Shape the global humanitarian agenda", is a proposal; more on that later.

Another issue the Commission spent time on is the follow up to the Vision that was adopted at the Council of Delegates. A vision's main purpose is to inspire and guide. Therefore, promoting the vision's spirit was seen as more essential than promoting the implementation of its letter. At our next meeting, we will agree on how to go about it.

Let me end by returning to the idea of the Conference as a cycle, rather than a series of discrete events. That will only work if National Societies engage throughout the cycle. We in the Commission would like to hear more from them – and from you. After all, the Council and the Conference are where we agree on our present and our future. Ideas for burning topics to include in the agenda of Council and Conference, issues that the Commission could consider, or priorities for its work are all valid subjects for National Societies to have an opinion on, and we should appreciate hearing about these. And: remember: a simple email to me, any other member of the Commission, or its Secretariat is sufficient to put something on the table. Finally, let us not forget the regional conferences as a forum to follow up from the former international conference, to discuss and come up with vital ideas for the next.

In the end it is about action on the ground becoming decisions in our statutory meetings. And the decisions becoming action on the ground again.

I wish you all the best for your deliberations here in the Governing Board and look forward to the next opportunity to meet.

Thank you for your attention.

