

Address to the Governing Board of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Chair

Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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Via teleconference

Mr President, Mr Secretary General, dear colleagues and friends, buenas tardes from Madrid, good afternoon, bonjour, masa' alkhayr. I will continue in my own language, Spanish, as I always do when addressing this forum.

Thank you Mr President and my friend Francesco Rocca for once again inviting me to address the Governing Board on a number of topics that are of importance to all of us as representatives and leaders of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Warm greetings to all the members of the Governing Board and to ICRC vice-president Gilles Carbonnier, who is also present for the opening of your meeting.

Before continuing, I would like to mention all the volunteers who are working tirelessly for a better world, and for the people whom we serve. COVID-19 continues to be very much present in our lives, our work and our projects. In certain countries, such as Afghanistan and Haiti, humanitarian crises are exacerbating the consequences of the pandemic. In both cases, the National Societies, **their personnel and their volunteers remind us by their actions why and for what we are here**. We encourage them to continue on the same path and we feel a sense of solidarity with them.

We have been experiencing an unprecedented global situation since the beginning of 2020. It has now been almost two years since the Standing Commission was elected. Like you, the members of the Governing Board, we have not been able to meet in person.

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In May this year, the important and exceptional decision was taken to postpone the Council of Delegates and the 23rd General Assembly of the International Federation until 2022.

This morning, at the invitation of Mr Rocca, I attended his meeting with the Vice-Presidents of the International Federation to discuss the dates, venue and format of our statutory meetings. It is essential to take a decision as soon as possible, as the **Standing Commission** – which will meet next week – **must take crucial decisions** with regard to the Council of Delegates, and according to the Statutes of the International Movement we have to take all necessary measures to follow up on those decisions and despatch the notice of convocation for the Council of Delegates six months before it is due to take place.

This morning's discussions were not entirely conclusive as regards the venue and date of the forthcoming statutory meetings. Work is under way to move forward on the basis of the following:

- 1) Given the manner in which the pandemic is developing, it would appear possible to consider holding the General Assembly and Council of Delegates in 2022, preferably at the end of the first half of the year – perhaps in June.
- 2) For various reasons, it was not possible to confirm the Dominican Republic as the venue for the statutory meetings next year. It will be necessary to find another more appropriate venue.
- 3) Various options were discussed, involving holding the statutory meetings in Switzerland or elsewhere, but the Federation Secretariat will have to evaluate these within one month, in consultation with the ICRC, which co-organizes the Council of Delegates.
- 4) This means that the venue and date of the next statutory meetings will need to be confirmed during the coming month.
- 5) The Standing Commission expects to receive a first update next week and to discuss the way forward.

As soon as the Secretariat of the International Federation has finalized the risk assessment, the Standing Commission will be in a position to take a decision regarding the dates and venue of the Council of Delegates, so as to be able to despatch the notice of convocation to all members of the Council six months in advance.

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In the meantime, we will be taking a number of other important decisions at the Standing Commission meeting next week. I attach the greatest importance, not only to **ensuring the health and safety of participants, volunteers and staff**, but also to ensuring that **all components of the Movement have fair and equitable access** to meetings and **exercise the same right to participate in debates and decisions**.

The pandemic is still with us and the Standing Commission and the International Federation will have to decide how to limit the international movement of people. On this occasion, that is going to mean limiting participation in the Council of Delegates and the General Assembly, by reducing the size of delegations. At the same time, we will be learning from this experience for the future, as regards the Movement's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint. We are conscious that our forthcoming statutory meetings are not going to be as they have been in the past.

For me, it is very important to ensure that – both in 2022 and in the future – the Council of Delegates and the General Assembly of the Federation complement each other and are linked, while avoiding duplication and repetition in terms of organization and objectives, especially with regard to the formulation of policies, so that our "Red Pillar" speaks with one voice.

The Standing Commission has been working in recent months on the concept note for the Council of Delegates and the topics to be discussed, and is due to examine and approve the provisional agenda and programme next week.

Currently, we have eleven major issues that will be presented in the form of resolutions and/or for debate in the plenary session of the Council of Delegates. In addition, there will be approximately eight follow-up and progress reports, related to previously adopted resolutions.

In this exceptional context of the postponement of the Council of Delegates, the Standing Commission agreed to the introduction of a new practice, in the form of a **programme of workshops** that will take place exclusively online during the first few months of 2022. This programme will also be approved next week.

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It is intended to serve as a “**journey to the Council of Delegates**”, to complement the agenda for the Council’s plenary sessions. We hope that the proposed **workshops** will enable **Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff** to participate more fully in discussion of issues relevant to the entire Movement.

At the same time, the Standing Commission has decided to continue with the **reform** of the Henry Dunant Medal and of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Prize for Peace and Humanity. The reform aims to **foster diversity, inclusion and the highest standards of integrity and ethics** in the nomination and decision process, and to clarify the eligibility requirements and the desired qualities of nominees. Next week, the Commission will finalize its proposals for the **Council of Delegates to revise the regulations** of these two awards.

In addition to preparing for our next statutory meetings, the Standing Commission has been reflecting on **effective Movement policy-making** and on monitoring, accountability and compliance as they relate to those policies.

As part of this reflection, we organized a workshop last June during the meeting of the Commission, which was also attended by the Chair of the Compliance and Mediation Committee, Kristiina Kumpula, and the Chair of the Joint Commission for National Society Statutes, Malika Ait-Mohammed Parent. Their participation was very well received by all, in view of their Movement knowledge and experience.

We identified major challenges regarding the drafting of Movement resolutions and policies, **promotion and knowledge** of these within the Movement, their **life-cycles** and updating, plus **prioritization of policy rules**, all of which require careful attention in terms of responsibility and compliance. I hope that this reflection will deepen, and that it will lead to concrete proposals for improving the preparation of documents and the follow-up and implementation of our decisions.

To be as relevant as possible, preparation of the statutory meetings requires the utmost commitment of all **components of the Movement**, and this includes National Societies. Many of you will remember that this was one of my objectives when I joined the Standing Commission: to enhance the participation of the National Societies.

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In this regard, I would like to share my mixed feelings, or rather my concern, about our ability to relate effectively to all National Societies, especially as concerns global Movement issues and meetings. It could be accumulated COVID-19 fatigue, or the increasing number of virtual meetings, or too many sessions and messages about consultations, information exchange, surveys, requests for reports, etc. But whatever the cause, I am noticing low turnouts for meetings, little exchange between those who do attend, and a low rate of response to enquiries. I think the International Federation is facing similar difficulties with its members and we should probably look more closely at how to **revive and promote the participation of National Societies** in the global affairs of the Movement.

I do not have the answers to these questions, but I feel they deserve our attention. I wanted to alert you to my concerns and I would ask you to think about how we can better motivate and involve the National Societies.

In June, I urged you to become "influencers" and I am sure that you can play a role in **encouraging colleagues** in your own National Societies and other National Societies in your respective regions to **participate actively in Movement issues**. The commitment and efforts of all members of the Movement are key to achieving a **Movement fit for purpose**.

To conclude, I should once again like to thank you for this invitation and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you. I wish you every success in your deliberations and I reiterate the commitment of the Standing Commission to work together on issues of crucial importance to the entire Movement.

Thank you for your attention and good afternoon.