

41st General Assembly
Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organisation

Statement by
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Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Amman, 27 April 2016

Mr Chair,
Dear Dr Mohammed,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies,
And dear Friends,

It is, as always, a pleasure to stand before an audience of Sister Societies. We do, so often, think and talk about problems, difficulties, humanitarian challenges, and the complexities we experience in working together.

The people I see in the room today, and the organisations they represent, remind me of the opposite: the great efforts made for the most vulnerable in the world, and the significant success of these efforts.

It is impossible to be in your part of the world and not be highly conscious of the humanitarian situation that exists in a country only 70 kilometres away, Syria, and the heroic efforts of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society and her volunteers. A special thought goes to the volunteers of SARC, and those who have laid down their life in the line of humanitarian duty. We thank them and promise to carry on in their spirit.

Even closer, our host country for this event, Jordan, is hosting nearly 700'000 *registered* Syrian Refugees – in addition to a significant number of Iraqis and others, in addition to the large number of people of Palestinian descent who are also present as a result of displacement. Jordan Red Crescent, of course, is in the forefront in providing support to the refugees – in addition to her role in providing services to the population of Jordan – there are many needs to meet here, too. Again, the key is that Jordan Red Crescent has been able to recruit, train, organise and lead many and dedicated volunteers.

We heard, only this morning, how challenging the situation is for the millions of individual women, children and men affected by conflict – those who remain in their country of origin as well as those who have sought safety in neighbouring countries – in Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey – or farther away.

Your National Societies are facing these challenges with determination and effort, but the overall humanitarian system is struggling. Relying increasingly on the capacities of National Societies, other actors need to step up and offer support for the organisations they use to reach their own goals.

There is war in Yemen, with incredible and unacceptable suffering being experienced by civilians. Yemen Red Crescent has been – and is – doing its utmost to alleviate suffering, and like SARC has lost numerous volunteers in the process. Let us not forget that ICRC, too, has lost some of its workers in that country – again, and again, we see how humanitarian action depends not only on the good planning, organisation, and financing of operations, but also – in an absolute sense – on the courage and willingness to sacrifice of individuals in all walks of life, who offer to help their fellow human beings by volunteering with the Red Crescent and Red Cross.

Continuing conflict in Libya and Iraq; civil unrest in a series of countries; and the vulnerability of many Arab countries to natural hazards and the vagaries of social and economic dislocation: your National Societies must, and do, meet a very wide variety of challenges – at the same time as many of you are significant actors at the regional and international levels, reaching out to Sister Societies across the world to offer assistance, solidarity, and hope. To quote the Libyan Red Crescent “The situation is catastrophic and is deteriorating day by day”.

We have just concluded yet another International Conference. It was the shortest in history, it had many more events than any before, and it has a large and broad substantial agenda. We had introduced a number of changes to the way the Conference was organised – and broadly speaking, the participants were satisfied, even if opinions – as always- varied. One Movement leader said, afterwards, that there had been so much going on that he was completely overloaded and that the experience was dreadful. Another said there had been so much going on that he felt stimulated and that the experience had been wonderful.

Last week, an advisory Group created by the Commission to advise it on last year’s Conference met in London to sum up and look forward. It concluded that the preparations for the 2019 Conference must begin now, take into account the scheduled Council of Delegates in 2017, and be even more open and inclusive, of National Societies for certain, but also vis-à-vis our other partners and stakeholders. The Conference should aim to affect the life of individuals through its own decisions as well as through helping shape the international humanitarian agenda, and facilitate the development of even more partnerships.

To achieve this, we must reach out to the regional meetings of National Societies and offer them a real opportunity to share their thinking and priorities well in advance of any decisions being taken. And, that is why I am here, ready to listen.

One of the substantial issues we had before us in Geneva in December was “The safety and security of humanitarian volunteers”. Nearly 100 volunteers were known to have lost their life since the previous Conference, and Members were determined to update and improve the approach to protection of our people – as well as the people of other organisations. The resolution we adopted expressed a “Determination to Protect”; agreement on the need to “Enhance Knowledge” as well as “Understanding”; “Promoting insurance or equivalent protection” and – crucially – emphasising “Implementation and support”.

When I take this as an example of an outcome from the Conference it is because of the reasons it was on the agenda. It was on the agenda because National Societies needed and wanted it. They do care about their volunteers and staff, and felt that the instruments available to act on that should be modernised and improved. But the central fact is this: it was on the agenda because National Societies wanted it.

In too many cases, National Societies – probably government representatives too – grow too cynical about the manner in which such large, global, events are put together. And it is easy to suspect well established institutions of wishing to - and succeeding in - shaping the debate to suit their own requirements and priorities.

And some of that does happen – and it is not a problem, because it is on all our interest that the institutions of our Movement have the tools and conditions they need to carry out the work we expect of them.

But there is space, too, for other concerns, priorities, and ideas. That is what the example I give demonstrates.

So, I will end on this note: we in the Standing Commission place a great deal of importance on hearing the voices of all National Societies – individually or at meetings like this, or – as in your case – through your own regional network. For the first time in rather a long time there is neither an Arab National Society, nor a Society using the Red Crescent as its emblem, represented on the Commission. Of course we are all committed to the view that this ought not to be an issue, but it strengthens my wish to invite all Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies to engage with the

Commission – as a body, through individual members, or through its Secretariat, and let us know what you think, wish, or give priority.

The work to prepare the 33rd International Conference has already begun – the first small steps were taken in January of this year – and the Commission will have a first discussion in about four weeks.

The more we hear from you, the better the Conference will be!

I wish you a successful meeting and rich debates, and look forward to staying in touch with you over the coming months and years.

Thank you for your attention.