

Remarks at the opening of the 10th MENA Conference

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Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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Your Excellency,

Dear leaders of the National Societies from the MENA region and of the IFRC, Distinguished observers and guests from the ICRC, the Movement, the (Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization) ARCO and other organizations, Sabah Alkhayr, Good morning, Bonjour, Buenos días, Buongiorno!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the regional Conference for the Middle-East and North Africa, on behalf of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the organizers of this conference, especially our host, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society and its President Dr Yaseen Abbas. And please, allow the Roman that I am to express the emotion of a traveller coming from the “eternal city”, to be here with you, in this Mesopotamian region full of multi-millennial history, one of the “cradles of civilization”, which has unfortunately had a rough chapter in its recent history.

This city, this country and this whole region that you all represent in this assembly, continue to symbolize, as in the few last years and decades, a field where the mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent finds every day its true meaning and where each National Society, their International Federation and the ICRC still have so much to accomplish in the name of Humanity and the ideal of Henry Dunant.

Your humanitarian challenges are immense in a troubled region where people suffer too much from conflict and violence as well as the lack of political solutions and prospects for lasting peace. Beyond the borders and differences that separate countries and peoples, the responsibility of our Red Cross and Crescent Movement, first and foremost of National Societies present in each territory of the region, but also of the ICRC and of the IFRC who support them, is **to make a united and singular voice heard which says: Red Crescent and Red Cross are one; we are one family; we are committed « to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found »**,

« making no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinion » and « being guided solely by the needs of individuals ».

I want to express **my admiration and the encouragement of the Standing Commission to all the staff, volunteers and leaders who, day in day out, work hard and tirelessly to alleviate human suffering and bring hope** to the affected populations, often in extremely difficult conditions. During the last statutory meetings in Antalya, we paid a moving tribute to **the too many volunteers and staff who paid their lives** in the line of duty at the service of people in need of their help. Today, I am thinking particularly of those who fell in your MENA region. Too many of them were the victims of armed violence, too often even the direct targets of this violence. These attacks make our mission of relief and protection of the wounded, sick and vulnerable populations even more perilous. **For these fallen heroes, we owe them a “cri du coeur” (a cry of the heart): we are “Not A Target”!**

Many issues proposed on your agenda or to be addressed in side discussions stem from decisions we made as a Movement in previous statutory meetings. Our last Council of Delegates in Antalya has already marked the **half-time of the working cycle which will take us to the 33rd International Conference and the statutory meetings of 2019** in Geneva. Issues and ambitions to be addressed in the privileged dialogue that our Movement has with the States must be determined. The International Conference remains a great **opportunity to demonstrate the Movement’s ability to shape the global humanitarian agenda**, raise its collective voice on pressing humanitarian concerns in order to have a positive and concrete impact on the lives of people we serve.

The next 18 months will pass very quickly! Here, I will be particularly attentive to the debates of your MENA Conference also to **hear the voice of your National Societies** and to better grasp the ideas, the issues, the concerns, the proposals that are related to the essential challenges of today and tomorrow that our Movement should deal with in priority. Further opportunities for exchanges and consultations with National Societies and governments will be forthcoming in the coming months to develop the agenda of the International Conference. I strongly encourage you to actively take part in it. First and foremost, **this is your Conference!** We at the Standing Commission welcome anytime your ideas and comments to make it more meaningful and relevant.

Dear colleagues, I wish you every success in the conduct of your work during the next days of the Conference here in Bagdad. Good luck!