

Remarks at the Opening Ceremony 11th Asia Pacific Regional Conference

Mercedes Babé

Chair

Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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Check upon delivery

Excellencies, authorities,

Madam President of the Vietnam Red Cross Society, Thi Hoa Bui,

Madam Vice-President of the IFRC for Asia Pacific, Maha Barjas Al Barjas,

Mister Vice President of the of the IFRC, Manuel Bessler,

Mister Vice-President of the ICRC, Gilles Carbonnier,

Dear friends of the Red Cross Red Crescent,

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

Let me first thank our friends and hosts, the leaders, volunteers and staff from the Vietnam Red Cross Society who are offering their welcome in Hanoi.

Cammonne!

Thank you to you and to the IFRC, for having invited the Standing Commission to attend as an Observer and address the 11th Asia Pacific Regional Conference.

It's all the more of a pleasure to be with you as I'm accompanied by most of the members of the Standing Commission, having had a meeting here in Hanoi over the last two days.

Regional Conferences provides a special occasion to meet and discuss matters that are important to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement from a regional perspective.

Before we continue, let me remember our colleagues at the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom in Israel and express the deep sorrow and the solidarity of the Standing Commission.

We can only be horrified by the massacres and kidnappings in Israel on October 7, and no less terrified by the immense number of victims of bombardment or deprivation of the most essential supplies for survival, in Gaza.

I am sure you join my thoughts today, that are with the Magen David Adom in Israel, the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), the ICRC, IFRC and other partner National Societies who are striving to carry out their vital mission of relief and bring a little humanity to the chaos and horror of this war, at the risk of the dead and wounded, as we have already had to deplore among their teams. Let me, as well, remember the volunteers and staff members from the UN and other organizations who also lost their lives and/ or their loved ones.

From here, I want to express my warm affection with all my heart.

I am the Chair of the Standing Commission since 2019. As the trustee of the International Conference, the Standing Commission is responsible for preparing the next Council of Delegates and International Conference in 2024. We are also committed to promoting harmony within the Movement and encouraging efforts to strengthen coordination and collective impact across all components.

The months and years since our last International Conference in 2019 have been a very trying time, illustrating this ambiguity and the dramatic consequences it has had for humankind.

This very conflict should not blind us to other theatres of terrible war and violence in Eastern and Central Europe, in Africa and elsewhere, or to the succession of natural and climatic disasters, as in recent times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by a number of climatic catastrophes, some highly visible and, others more insidious with disastrous effects for the survival of large populations.

At the same time, new divides have re-emerged against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized world, culminating in the outbreak of murderous new wars whose main victims are civilians.

Our Movement cannot but be alarmed about the immense human toll for civilian population and we must remain extremely vigilant and mobilized in the face of the rise in hate speech that dehumanizes the "other side", justifies violations of the most elementary rules of humanitarian law and humanity.

As you all know, the proposed theme for the 34th International Conference is "Navigating Uncertainty - Strengthening Humanity", with three main pillars:

- **Pillar I:** Building a global culture of respect for IHL;
- **Pillar II:** Standing by our Fundamental Principles in responding to humanitarian needs and risks; and

- **Pillar III:** Enabling sustainable, locally led action.

Through the various topics we will be bringing to the Council of Delegates and the 34th International Conference, it is to these uncertainties and threats that we must respond through the outstanding voice of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which should also be a voice of Unity and identified by the strong commitment to principled humanitarian action.

We cannot be struck by the news or by our operations of the importance, and even the urgency, for the Council of Delegates and the International Conference to take a stance on essential humanitarian issues, such as respect for IHL, preventing the consequences of war in cities, anticipating and preparing for climatic disasters, strengthening the Movement's action in protection, promoting sustainable peace and community resilience, and dealing with migration and others.

The reaffirmation of our humanitarian principles will, for sure, be at the heart of next year's statutory meetings.

Initial proposals for resolutions are now being shared with all Movement components and I urge you to take an active part in this new stage of consultation, and in the subsequent ones that will continue during 2024.

A stated ambition of the International Conference is to produce actionable outcomes for positive impact for the those living in vulnerable situations.

Through your contributions, and also through the privileged dialogue you should have with your respective governments, you play an essential role in the preparation and success of the Council of Delegates and the unique forum as it is the International Conference.

All members of the Standing Commission present in Hanoi are ready and will be happy to talk with you and discuss any issues regarding the role of the Standing Commission or next year's Statutory Meetings.

Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a very successful Asia Pacific Conference in Hanoi.

Cammonne!, Merci, Shukran, Gracias!