

2024 Council of Delegates

27 October 2024, Geneva

Opening address

Mercedes Babé

Chair

Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Dear Presidents and leaders of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from all over the world, dear Presidents of the ICRC and the IFRC,

Members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement,

Distinguished observers and guests,

Dear all, dear friends,

Good morning, Bonjour, Buenos días, masa' alkhayr, Dobroye utro!

It is an honour to see you all here and welcome you to this 2024 Council of Delegates.

Many of you have already been in Geneva for several days attending the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and I hope that, after a day's rest and a tour of historical sites connected to our organization, you are full of energy and ready for the days of intense work still ahead of us.

As chair of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, it is an honour and a privilege to address you at the opening of the 2024 Council of Delegates, a key forum for discussion for us all, as components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and especially important today as it is taking place, as prescribed, before the 34th International Conference.

Before continuing, I would like to congratulate all those elected to serve on the IFRC's Commissions and Committees. It is a pleasure to see how we keep increasing the number of women in leadership and governance positions in our Movement.

Having started my career in Red Cross Youth over 50 years ago, I am particularly pleased to see a woman at the helm of the Youth Commission. **Congratulations Michelle!** I wish you and all the young people elected all the very best! One way of fulfilling our humanitarian commitment is to ensure that young people are directly represented on governance and management bodies and participate in decision-making. Involving young people is an example of the Movement pursuing its pledge to work "Together for humanity".

I would like to open this Council of Delegates with a few reflections on our Movement and our humanitarian work around the world in a context we would never have imagined just a few years ago. The world is currently going through a complicated period, gripped by violence and uncertainty. However, it is in troubled times such as this, when the outlook is bleak in so many respects, that our Movement must stand as a beacon of hope and act as one, united by our Fundamental Principles and our commitment to respond to growing humanitarian needs effectively and efficiently at all times.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent is at the service of people in distress. Before I go on, it is important that we all bear in mind the millions of people who suffer the consequences of conflicts and disasters of all kinds in different parts of the world.

I would also like to express my admiration and the support of the Standing Commission for the volunteers and staff of the National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC for the tremendous effort they put into delivering an effective, neutral and impartial humanitarian response to the multiple crises around the world.

As I mentioned yesterday, over the last year, the IFRC President has had the heart-breaking duty of writing letters of condolence to the families of selfless Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff who lost their lives in the course of their work.

Let me be very clear. **Nothing** can justify killing anyone, especially humanitarian workers who have a mission to deliver peace, assistance and compassion that transcends all borders. Health-care and humanitarian personnel and all related facilities **must be protected and respected at all times**, as must the red cross and red crescent emblems. We must raise our voice and refuse to accept and normalise such acts!

Today's world **needs** a strong Movement that **sends out a consistent** message of HUMANITY. This Council of Delegates should serve to **unite us** in our commitment to work to help people in need and address humanitarian issues in a way that has positive repercussions for the international community.

All the components of the Movement are gathered here for the Council of Delegates to pursue a new opportunity to engage in dialogue, adopt policies and strategies and, above all, strengthen the cohesion of the Red Cross and Red Crescent family.

The issues included on the Council of Delegates agenda are particularly relevant in today's humanitarian context. The content of the resolutions submitted to the Council for consideration has been developed during various rounds of consultative meetings with you all. I do not intend to list all the resolutions proposed in our agenda, but we have some very good examples of texts that will become reference documents for our Movement, such as the Movement Protection Framework and the Migration Strategy 2024–2030, which is the outcome of years of effort to advance in the same direction in this area.

We also have before us two proposed calls to States and other interested parties. One is an appeal to prevent the dramatic humanitarian consequences of war in cities, and the other is a call for respect for impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action. These appeals refer to issues that are core to our work as a Movement, given current world events, and will

therefore be brought before the States at the International Conference, as further work is needed on them.

In this international context, we have a responsibility to preserve the International Conference as a neutral space for strictly humanitarian dialogue. I know that you have worked closely with your respective governments, and I am sure that this will be reflected in the discussions during the conference.

We have a few days of intense work ahead of us, as we will be focused on achieving the desired outcomes after years of discussion, consultation and negotiation to develop the resolutions now before us. I would like to thank everyone for their contributions and participation in preparing this Council of Delegates.

Dear friends, I reaffirm the Standing Commission's commitment and desire to promote our work together on matters concerning the Movement as a whole and foster harmony among our Movement's 193 members.

Let's work together over the next few days, making this Council of Delegates an effective deliberative platform of the Movement and a relevant and valid mechanism for discussing and agreeing positions on questions of vital importance to us all in preparation for the 34th International Conference.

Thank you for your attention, and **thank you** for your commitment to ensuring this Council of Delegates is a resounding success and will make a real difference to the people we advocate for and who rely on us to improve their lives.

Dear friends, let me end by wishing you every success in the deliberations over the coming days, with stimulating debates and fruitful decisions.

Thank you very much!