

**Address at the Opening  
48th General Assembly of the ARCO**

**Mercedes Babé  
Chair  
Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent**

**Madrid, 26 June 2024  
Live online**

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His Excellency the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent,  
His Excellency the Secretary General of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Organization  
Her Excellency, Mme Maha Al Bargas, IFRC VP  
His Excellency the Chairman of the 47th Session - Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Qatar Red Crescent Society,  
His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Dear Leaders of the Red Crescent Societies and guests,  
Dear colleagues and friends: warm greetings from Madrid!

Sabah alkhayr, good morning,

For those whom don't know me, my name is Mercedes Babé and I am the Chair of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent since 2019 when I was elected at the 33rd International Conference.

First of all, let me apologize for not being present in Damascus. I regret that prior engagements prevent me from joining you, as I would have liked.

I would like to thank you, Dr. Saleh bin Hamad al-Tuwaijri Secretary General of Arab Red Crescent & Red Cross Organisation, for offering me the opportunity to address this ARCO 48th session of the General Assembly. I would also like to extend my congratulations to the leaders, volunteers, and staff who have made possible this event, (the 48th General Assembly of ARCO).

It is an honour for me and the Standing Commission to have been invited to attend and address this forum. in which you will discuss issues of relevance to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

I would like to first take a moment to acknowledge the difficult situation we have in our world today, and express the deep concern of the Standing Commission for the devastating consequences for all civilians affected by the dramatic escalation of the armed conflict in Israel and Gaza since 7 October 2023 and in Sudan, Yemen or Ukraine just to mention a few, among the many other places in the world, where violence and conflict are causing countless damage to the population.

The Standing Commission voices its solidarity with all the volunteers and staff of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement involved and we share our grief for those who had been killed or injured in the line of duty while rescuing and assisting victims of the violence.

I would especially like to express the Standing Commission's admiration and support for National Societies in this region, and the immense efforts you are making to provide effective, neutral and impartial humanitarian response to too many crises.

As you know, the Standing Commission is the trustee of the International Conference, and one of its main functions is to prepare the next International Conference and the Council of Delegates. We will talk later, more in detail, about it-

We are living in sad, divided and complicated times at the international level.

I would only highlight now the proposed theme for the 34th International Conference, "**Navigate uncertainty, Strengthen Humanity**", based on our current reality in which we must navigate an uncertain environment, while, at the same time, aspiring to strengthen our commitment to Humanity.

Beyond the divisions and polarization that afflict people, the conflicts and the disasters remind us of the importance for the 193 Red Cross Red Crescent Movement components, to always be ready to act quickly and effectively, and to be in a position to reach those, in need of protection and assistance, in a spirit of Unity and with full respect for our principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence.

We must ensure that each of the Movement components is fully equipped and robust, so as to preserve and strengthen the individual and collective integrity and our space for principled humanitarian action.

Unfortunately, realities mentioned above, are illustrations of today's major humanitarian challenges, underlining the relevance of the many topics listed for the discussions at the next Council of Delegates and for the dialogue we must have with governments at the 34th International Conference.

Over the next two days, you will discuss topics of interest to the region and beyond. I wish you wisdom in your discussions and I wish you a successful 48 ARCO General Assembly.

I will conclude here and I look forward to come back again to the session on your programme dedicated to the Statutory Meetings.

Thank you very much for your attention. Shukran, Merci, Muchas Gracias!