**Remarks at the opening of the Governing Board**

**International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

**George Weber**

Chairman

Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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Mr. President, Mr Secretary General, dear colleagues and friends, good afternoon *(other languages)*.

Thank you Mr. President for giving the Standing Commission, and me in particular, the opportunity to address the Federation’s Governing Board.

On behalf of the Standing Commission, I take this opportunity to **warmly congratulate you, the newly elected leadership of the International Federation**, especially President Francesco Rocca, his Vice-Presidents and all members of the new Governing Board. I am very pleased to see so many friendly faces here, and also happy to meet new members taking on this governance role for our Federation.

I have no doubt that your induction these last two days has been particularly informative and intense. The challenges for your Federation will not be lacking during your term of office and you will find in me and in the Standing Commission faithful partners to support your work.

Many of you certainly know about the Standing Commission which was established in 1928 in the very first Statutes of our Movement. It consists of 9 persons, including 4 ex-officio members from the IFRC and the ICRC and 5 ad-personam members from National Societies elected by the International Conference. They presently include :

* Francesco Rocca and As Sy, your President and Secretary General who represent you,
* As well as Peter Maurer, President, and Balthasar Staehelin, Deputy Director General, from the ICRC and five individuals from Italy, Australia, Sudan, the Seychelles and myself from Canada.

Originally, the Standing Commission was considered first and foremost as a conciliation body entrusted with settling any differences of opinion that might arise between the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies (now the IFRC). Today, our role and functions are essentially defined in Article 18 of the Statutes of the Movement, which I would briefly summarize as follows:

* As trustee of the International Conference, we are **primarily tasked to prepare the agenda and program of the International Conference and the Council of Delegates** and to encourage the development and implementation of their decisions and Movement-wide policies and strategies;
  + The Commission, which has no operating role, is also responsible for **promoting harmony** and **encouraging coordination in the work of the Movement’s components**, leading it to examine matters which concern the Movement as a whole and if needed to settle any difference of opinion which may arise as to the interpretation and application of the Movement’s Statutes.

With these few introductory words on the role of the Standing Commission, you will better understand the special importance that I attach to having an harmonious, balanced and constructive working relationship with all of you. Given you are a new Board, today marks a **new start of our collaboration**, which I very much look forward to encouraging and enhancing.

This collaboration is all the more necessary as I believe that **in their differences and in their respective areas of responsibility, the Standing Commission and your Governing Board must ensure that the IFRC and the Movement as a whole share the same vision, speak with one voice to the public and make consistent progress on the essential issues facing the Red Cross and Red Crescent in the future** - thereby being able to help more people more effectively and efficiently.

In this respect, let me underline four subjects that illustrate **the strong correlation that exists in our respective work and the responsibility to maximize convergence and coherence** between us.

1. While we have just left the very intense and successful episode of our meetings in Antalya our priority attention and action is now turning to a **new working cycle which will take us to the 33rd International Conference and the statutory meetings of 2019 in Geneva**. The next 22 months will pass very quickly! The agendas of the next General Assembly, Council of Delegates and International Conference need to be developed. Issues and ambitions to be addressed in the **privileged dialogue that our Movement has with the States** must be determined.In doing so, we must be particularly attentive to :
   * **Demonstrating the Movement’s ability to shape the global humanitarian agenda**, raise its collective voice on pressing humanitarian concerns that have a positive and concrete impact on the lives of people we serve. The world will be watching and depending on us.
   * We must focus our efforts on results as ambitious and forward-looking as possible, but also those that are **achievable and realistic** in terms of negotiation, implementation and accountability.
   * **We must set priorities**, avoid duplication and emphasize complementarity and coordination in the preparatory decisions we will take.

Reinforcing the relevance and the ownership of discussions and decisions in 2019 **will require a very high level of engagement first and foremost with the whole network of National Societies as well as with the States and external influential partners**. And we share a special responsibility **to ensure that National Societies are properly informed and actively involved in consultations.** Considering the busy schedule of meetings of the Federation in the coming months, especially in **regional and sub-regional conferences**, **let’s not miss these opportunities to strengthen, as much as possible in a coordinated and integrated manner, the engagement and mobilization of National Society leaders** in anticipation of the 2019 meetings and of our critical and privileged collective dialogue with States.

1. I would also like to quickly flag another issue related to the Vision of the Movement that the Council of Delegates adopted in 2015, and the call to all components to take it into account in their own strategic planning processes. The time has come for your Governing Board to give impetus to the **development of the next Strategy 2030 of the Federation**. At the same time, the **ICRC will review its own institutional strategy** that will likely include broad sections dedicated to its cooperation with Movement partners. Let me just point out that **we have a unique opportunity in the next few months to build inclusive and open visions and strategies that are consistent, complementary and mutually supportive**. Achieving better strategic alignment and strengthening the Movement's cohesion is within our reach for the next decade and it is incumbent on us not to let this opportunity slip.
2. In another area, I know how important it is for the IFRC leadership and indeed all of the Movement’s leaders, to continue building a culture of greater transparency, integrity, compliance and zero tolerance on fraud and corruption. And I welcome the great and steady progress that has been made in recent years with the establishment of more comprehensive standards and compliance mechanisms in the IFRC. For its part, the **Standing Commission is particularly keen to support the consolidation of this work but also to contribute to its strengthening where issues of compliance and integrity affect the entire Movement.** I will give two very concrete examples:
   * Firstly, the IFRC Constitution allows suspension of one of its members that would fail to comply with applicable integrity policies and rules… No sanction of this kind exists in the Statutes of the Movement to suspend the participation of this same member in the bodies of the Movement for the same breach of integrity. **Discussions are ongoing to provide more alignment and coherence on this matter.**
   * Secondly, the Standing Commission is particularly attentive to the development and evolution of frameworks and rules supporting stronger cooperation and coordination among the components of the Movement, in full respect of the roles and responsibilities of each. Everyone knows that **exposing the failure of one component involved in an international Movement operation can potentially discredit the collective reputation of other components involved in this operation, if not the entire Movement**. I**t is timely and urgent to question the effectiveness of control measures, rapid response and sanctions to protect international operations and the whole Movement from serious breaches of the integrity rules, especially those related to coordination.** The Standing Commission wishes to take its part in this reflection, of course in close collaboration with the ICRC and the IFRC.
3. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the **celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of the Federation** which you will prepare for in 2019. Although the Standing Commission will obviously not be involved in the design and organization of these festivities, I am sure that it will be keen to support your possible requests to extend the festivities into the next international conference and we will certainly need to synchronize our decisions in this regard.

Dear colleagues, let me conclude by reiterating the availability of the Standing Commission to strengthen collaboration with you and with the rest of the leadership of the Federation. I wish you every success in the conduct of your work during the next four years of your term. Good luck.