

2022 Council of Delegates

22 June, Geneva

Opening speech

Mercedes Babé

Chair

Standing Commission
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Final version (original in Spanish)

Dear all, dear friends,

Dear President of the International Federation, Francesco Rocca,

Dear President of the ICRC, Peter Maurer,

Dear leaders of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,

Distinguished observers and guests,

Dear colleagues, Good morning, Bonjour, Buenos días, masa' alkhayr, Dobroye utro.

Welcome to the 2022 Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement!

It is a pleasure to see you all here again in person! I would also like to greet those of you following this meeting online; we miss having you here, and I look forward to seeing you in person next time.

I will now continue in my mother tongue, Spanish.

As Chair of the Standing Commission, whose function it is to promote and ensure harmony within the Movement and coordination among its components on matters of concern to us all, it is an honour and a privilege for me to address you at the opening of the 2022 Council of Delegates, a key forum for discussion for our International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic and its wide-ranging consequences meant that this Council of Delegates, originally scheduled to be held in December 2021 in the Dominican Republic, had to be postponed until now.

Allow me here to reiterate my sincere gratitude to the Dominican Red Cross for being understanding about the decision to cancel the holding of our meetings in the Dominican Republic on this occasion. Thank you!

I would also like to take this opportunity to give a warm welcome to the newly elected and re-elected leaders of the International Federation, to its President, Mr Francesco Rocca, to its Vice-Presidents, Mr Bolaji Akpan Anani, Mr Miguel Villaroel, Ms Maha Barjas Al-Barjas and Ms Natia Loladze, and to all the members of the new Governing Board (who are too many to name here).

If I may, I would like to especially congratulate the 12 women who were elected two days ago to represent their respective National Societies on the Federation's Governing Board. Thanks to the commitment shown by you all, the leaders of the Movement, and the work of GLOW Red to support the many valuable women, our Movement is becoming increasingly inclusive and diverse.

All the members of the Standing Commission are looking forward to working closely with you during your tenure. I wish you all the best and every success in meeting the challenges ahead.

I would like to open this year's Council of Delegates with some reflections on our Movement and our humanitarian work around the world, especially in today's context, which is one that would have been difficult to imagine just a few years ago.

These are sad and complicated times we are living in globally. In this period of uncertainty in the world, the Movement must act as one, showing hope and unity and proving that we are fit for purpose, to address growing humanitarian needs effectively and efficiently.

I would like us all to remember and think for a moment here today about the millions of people who are suffering the consequences of all kinds of disasters and conflicts in different parts of the world, for example, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sri Lanka, the Sahel and Haiti, to name but a few.

I would like to express my admiration and the Standing Commission's support for the volunteers and staff of National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC who are making enormous efforts to provide an effective, neutral and impartial humanitarian response to the many crises occurring around the world.

Unity, solidarity and trust within the Movement are critical today in the face of new threats to humanitarian action.

When one of the components of the Movement is the target of deliberate cyber attacks or disinformation campaigns, as occurred recently, the whole Movement is affected as it undermines our collective reputation and our ability to engage with all parties and take action while maintaining the trust of vulnerable people.

Regrettably, the neutral role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has been questioned. It is crucial for us to continue promoting our Fundamental Principles and international humanitarian law both internationally and locally so that there is a clear understanding of what our role is.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent is seen as one, with no distinction. Together we form the Red Pillar.

We are strong and, in the face of such attacks, we must stand united, show courage and speak with truth, conviction and coherence, both individually and collectively, to defend and reaffirm our Red Cross and Red Crescent principles and values.

The Presidents of the ICRC and the Federation and I are keen to listen to you over these days and close this Council of Delegates with an appeal for respect for neutral and impartial humanitarian action, which we would like all of you to support.

We, as today's leaders, and young people, the leaders of tomorrow with their quest for improvement and their non-conformity, have the responsibility to speak out clearly, honestly and transparently, according to our principles and values, and set out our concerns in order to ensure better assistance and protection for the people we represent.

It is our responsibility to promote equity in the delivery of assistance to the hundreds of millions of people around the world caught up in situations of conflict or disaster. Our principles and values require us to engage in advocacy to raise awareness about these crises which have terrible humanitarian consequences and tend to be pushed out of the spotlight as all attention is focused on more recent or more newsworthy emergencies.

Humanitarian diplomacy is therefore now more important than ever before.

The Council of Delegates is the forum of us all, as components of the Movement. It is a forum for discussing major issues and finding points of synergy to deal with both external and internal challenges.

As you know, the process to prepare the Council of Delegates was driven by two main objectives:

1. The first is to ensure that the Council of Delegates is a forum for discussion that builds consensus in the Movement, as part of the cycle leading up to the International Conference.
2. The second is to ensure that it is a place where the components of the Movement come together to clarify, where necessary, functions and responsibilities within the framework governing cooperation and define operational strategies.

Turning now to the overarching theme of this meeting: "Movement fit for purpose", there will be discussions and decisions over these days on key issues relating to two main areas:

- WHAT WE DO, that is, our work addressing global and local needs and vulnerabilities; and
- HOW WE WORK, that is, the way in which we carry out our activities, focusing on Movement accountability, cooperation, transparency, unity and sustainability.

On this occasion, we have been creative and innovative in the approach to our Statutory Meetings. New options have emerged for remote involvement in Movement activities, for example, with the programme of online workshops and consultations held over the past few months and, for the first time, online participation in the Council of Delegates.

The items on the agenda are of special relevance in view of today's humanitarian landscape.

The items I am referring to are proposals on prevention and the response to the humanitarian impact of war in cities, the adoption of a new action plan for the Movement on eliminating nuclear weapons, the strengthening of anticipatory action in the Movement and the endorsement of the Climate and Environment Charter, which has already been signed by many National Societies and numerous international organizations and entities.

I would also like to highlight the issue of safeguarding humanitarian data. The resolution on this subject could represent a step towards a solid consensus, both in words and action, on ensuring that humanitarian data cannot be misused and that humanitarian activities are protected online as well as offline. Our Movement has a strong voice and should be listened to on this matter.

We are also going to discuss, over these days, the new agreement to enhance the collective impact of the Movement (Seville Agreement 2.0), which will replace the 1997 Seville Agreement and the 2005 Supplementary Measures.

In 2020, the Standing Commission welcomed the launch of the process for the joint work of the ICRC and the International Federation on this and acknowledges the efforts made by these two components to build consensus on positions and finalize the text now on the table, which we all recently received.

The Standing Commission is at the disposal of the Movement for the monitoring and implementation of the Agreement and for any subsequent reviews at future Council of Delegates meetings.

Another issue of concern to the Standing Commission that we will address here is the effective implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement between Magen David Adom in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society signed in 2005. We fervently hope that it will soon be finalized.

In addition to being an internal forum for discussion within the Movement, the Council of Delegates represents a milestone on the road to the 34th International Conference and an opportunity to put forward, examine and test ideas and themes to be presented in 2024.

Although you have already been informed, I take this opportunity to confirm that the Standing Commission has taken the decision to postpone the 34th International Conference, originally scheduled for December 2023, to October 2024.

The various technical and legal consultations and verifications carried out confirmed that this postponement was the right decision. It will allow us to prepare properly for the International Conference and enable commitments to be established between the components of the Movement and the States party to the Geneva Conventions.

Evidently, this postponement will affect the scheduling of the next International Federation General Assembly and Council of Delegates.

It is important to start work early on this next Movement meeting with the States Parties. We must choose the issues to be addressed carefully, with emphasis on ensuring their relevance so that, through joint commitments with governments, we can make a difference and do our bit to improve living conditions for the people we serve.

I would therefore ask you to be ready from this time to contribute to preparing for this unique forum for humanitarian dialogue, including the preliminary work that all National Societies are called on to carry out with their respective governments before an International Conference takes place.

But now let's get back to the Council of Delegates.

Dear friends, I reiterate the commitment and desire of the Standing Commission for us all to work together on the issues of crucial importance to the Movement, enhancing harmony among the 194 members of our International Movement.

Let's together make this Council of Delegates a real, valid and relevant discussion platform for the Movement to address and agree positions on questions that are of paramount importance to all members and, most importantly, directly affect the people we work with and let's do it with the highest guarantees of security and access.

All that remains now is for me to wish you great success in the discussions we will have over the coming days and to declare this Council of Delegates open.

Thank you very much!