

**Opening Speech at the Council of Delegates  
of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**  
by  
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Chairman  
Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent  
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Dear Presidents and leaders of the ICRC, the IFRC and the National Societies from all over the world,  
Fellow members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement,  
Distinguished observers and guests,  
Good morning, Bonjour, Sabah Alkhayr, Buenos días, Nínmen hǎo, Privet!

Bienvenue à tous dans ce Conseil des Délégués du Mouvement de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge! [Welcome to all in this Council of Delegates of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement!]

For many of us in this room, we are practically reaching half of our journey, through the statutory meetings of the International Federation and the Movement. I hope so far that this journey has been worthwhile, and that, despite the busy schedule, you have also been able to discover some things outside of this meeting room, nearby in the Humanitarian Village or a little further by following one of the Humanitarian trails created for this occasion in the city of Geneva.

I would like to open this year's Council of Delegates with a few personal thoughts about the purpose of the Council of Delegates, both for our Movement and for our global humanitarian work generally. I will then focus on the main challenge I see today as we strive to contribute to the Movement's purpose. I will finally provide some highlights of the resolutions before us. As all of you are aware, we only have one day and many important items on the agenda.

Before I develop these points, I am pleased to warmly **welcome the National Societies of Bhutan and the Marshall Islands** for the first time as new members of the Council of Delegates. Please rise and give them a warm welcome of applause.

Now, on to the business of the day.

The Council of Delegates has a tough role to play in our Movement. Some see it as an afterthought of the General Assembly of the Federation, a meeting where National Societies and the representatives of the IFRC sometimes rehash the same issues, but this time with the ICRC present as a voting member. This year, it has an even more difficult role to play, since some of you may be more excited about what comes next at the International Conference. Yet, the Council of Delegates plays an even more crucial role in years like this.

On the one hand, and as every two years, it remains the forum for all Movement components to **adapt – through policies, strategies or other action plans - to emerging humanitarian challenges and to improve their collective and individual impact on the vulnerable populations we serve**. It is also the place for our Movement to **strengthen the cohesion within the family of the Red Cross and Red Crescent**, and to foster mutual respect, cooperation and collaboration among the components.

On the other hand, it is also our collective responsibility today to formally determine the agenda of the humanitarian journey that we will undertake with the States these next four days. Tomorrow, we will begin our conversation with States who have pledged formally to support humanitarian action through the ratification of the Geneva Conventions and their agreement to respect the Movement's Statutes. In other words, we will be speaking for those we serve about issues on which they and we need to take more concerted action. Our voice will only be credible if we go into these meetings united in purpose and with clear and well-defended positions. **Today's Council of Delegates is about unifying us around who we are, how we work together coherently and about what we want to see improved.**

Over the years, the Standing Commission has made an enormous effort to highlight the uniqueness of the Council of Delegates in our regular rounds of meetings, by avoiding duplication and by really focusing the Council on issues that are common to ALL of us who make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and how EACH ONE of us here in this room affects these issues of common concern or is affected by them. The Council of Delegates is a place where we listen to and decide on proposals to make our collective action in all of our operations and our advocacy as effective and

relevant as they can be for people who would otherwise be destitute, alone or suffering. More importantly than the wording we agree on in the final form that the resolutions will take, we need **to ensure that this Council of Delegates is a place where a fundamental spirit of respect, unity, trust and gratitude should pervade our collective decision-making** and inspire us to do more and better when we return home. And in this spirit, let me thank each one of you for your many contributions to date to facilitate the humanitarian action in your own country and around the world.

Let me now share some thoughts with you about what I believe to be the main challenge we face as equal partners in our collective Movement endeavors. Gone are the days when we were practically the only humanitarian brand. I do not believe we should dwell about our glorious past. **We, as the Movement, have a long and proud history** of having put humanitarian ideals on the map. However, **what got us here, won't get us there!** We got to continue to be **taking action to be sustainably relevant.**

Nevertheless, I believe **one of our major challenges is competition, both internally and externally.** It is true that the growth of our Movement, and more recently that of the humanitarian sector overall, has been helped by competition. **It has given rise to greater accountability, more diverse programs and services, a larger funding pool and creative adaptation.** Today, our services reach out better to people who need them thanks, for example, to phone apps that assist in providing first aid, family links, personal safety, and cash transfers. None of these adaptations to technological change would have been possible if we had not egged each other on or had been needled by the innovations of humanitarian workers from other organizations.

Competition can be healthy when it challenges our complacency, but destructive when it becomes an end in itself. It is a fine-tuned balance that juggles the commendable pursuit of better performance with the desire to be the best performer, but not to the detriment of others. The number of people present in this room is proof that our achievements have come thanks to a collective effort, and that we have inspired each other to reach them on an equal footing, without any hierarchical structure between us as components of this Movement. Today and tomorrow, let's keep our competitive spirit healthy by focusing on the benefits we can bring to others by accomplishing our mission with **a commitment to excellence, mutual trust and enhanced cooperation and collaboration.** We know that **our competitive advantage as a Movement is our global-local structure.** Therefore, let us strive **to ensure that the work we do today through this unique structure is strong and relevant in every corner of the globe** where it is needed and that it supports the efforts of other principled humanitarian organizations.

Dear colleagues, I have a confession to make as Chairman of the Standing Commission on the number of resolutions we have to adopt today. I have always believed that **less is more**, and that **quality is over quantity.** But I am also a pragmatic realist. Therefore, I would like to say that the Standing Commission did not fail to reduce the number of resolutions. Rather, **we were convinced that the ones you have before you are presented because they seek to be truly impactful on people we serve and on our way of working.** But let us also be honest with ourselves when adopting these decisions, which are often the result of impressive work and intense consultation within the Movement. **Our decisions will only make a difference in our field operations and in our way of working and collaborating, if each of us, when leaving this Council of Delegates, feels responsible and accountable to implement them truly.** It is also the purpose of the Standing Commission to recall this simple truth and to ensure that important decisions do not remain dead letters on a dusty shelf - if I can still use this image in the digital age.

Let me highlight the logic behind presenting these ten resolutions. They are essentially divided into three groups. The first group of resolutions address our effectiveness as a Movement. The second group seeks to strengthen our action by unifying our programmatic and policy approaches. And the third group sets the agenda and chooses the officers of the International Conference, ensuring that WE choose the topics to raise with States and identify the officers to whom we entrust the management of the Conference in the days ahead.

Under the first thematic grouping, **the resolutions uphold high and transparent standards for integrity, accountability and gender parity.** They also identify ways to maximize our operational impact when we work together.

I am very pleased that **the questions of "Trust, Accountability and Integrity" have become a common thread through the agendas and programs of the General Assembly of the Federation, the Council of Delegates and the International Conference, to which I should add the Standing Commission itself, which has devoted a great deal of work to it in recent years.** The **Declaration on the Integrity of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**, which is being proposed to you today, aims to establish a link between all these efforts, to underline the **commitment of all the**

**Movement components for integrity and ethical behaviour** and to set a course for excellence of the Integrity approach across the Movement. I will come back on this subject later today.

You might be surprised at seeing two items under item 7 entitled Movement Cooperation and Coordination. The Standing Commission felt it important to involve the Council of Delegates in a debate not only on the implementation of the Seville Agreement, as required in its Article 10.6, but also on the current debate about whether the Seville Agreement is fit for purpose. **Our procedures and agreements have taken us far, but if we can serve people better by refreshing them, we need to consider that option, and consider it together, within the framework of our statutes and Fundamental Principles.** The Standing Commission remains at the disposal of the Movement to ensure that **discussions on this most sensitive of issues between components take place in an atmosphere of trust and respect.**

As I mentioned earlier, the second grouping of resolutions enables us to optimally align our services through common policies that are guided by our Fundamental Principles. I hope we can agree on strong resolutions such as on mental health and family links on which we will seek the support of State representatives participating in the International Conference so that we can **expand our professional care to people in crisis.**

**This Council must serve to unite us** in our commitment to help those in need and to address their humanitarian problems in a way that resonates within the international community. We have the duty to influence the global humanitarian agenda through the International Conference and to inspire all its members – us included - to live up to the overarching theme of these statutory meetings: Act today, Shape tomorrow. I challenge us all to set the agenda with the conviction of our collective experience and in the belief that **our unique structure and action is worthy of the trust that governments and individuals have placed in us over the years.**

Thank you for your attention, and thank you for your commitment to make this Council of Delegates and the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent a resounding success, impactful for the people we serve.