

## TENTH INTER-AMERICAN RED CROSS CONFERENCE

The Inter-American Conference which in principle takes place every four years is intended to strengthen the ties linking the National Societies on the American Continent, promote solidarity among them, offer an opportunity for the exchange of information, and allow each of them to pass on the lessons of its experience in humanitarian action. The ninth Conference had been held at Managua in 1970, while the tenth took place in Asunción from 18 to 23 November 1974, the Paraguayan Red Cross acting as host to that important meeting organized under the auspices of the League of Red Cross Societies.

The National Societies of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela were represented, and the as yet unrecognized Red Cross of Barbados sent an observer.

The League delegation was led by Mr. José Barroso, Chairman of the League Board of Governors, while the ICRC delegation was led by Mr. Eric Martin, its President. Observers from several international governmental and non-governmental organizations which had programmes in that part of the world were also present.

The official opening was attended by General Alfredo Stroessner, President of Paraguay, all the government ministers, and representatives of the diplomatic corps. Addresses were delivered by Dr. Miguel Angel Maffiodo, President of the Paraguayan Red Cross, Mr. J. Barroso, Mr. E. Martin, and religious and government representatives. Mr. Martin's speech is given below:

It is a very great pleasure to gather in Paraguay's capital and take part in the Tenth Inter-American Red Cross Conference. As President of the International Committee, I should like to thank the Paraguayan Red Cross and your country's authorities very warmly for the splendid welcome they have given us. In such auspicious circumstances, I feel confident that this important meeting will be a pronounced success.

We are living in a difficult and distressing period, one in which a great many countries have experienced violent conflict, internal strife and political tension, and in which many regions of Latin America, Africa and Asia are, or have been, the scene of devastating and deadly natural disasters. The world today is governed by violence and arbitrary action. Even the most elementary humanitarian acts are neglected, and the world sees a gloomy future ahead.

In these tragic circumstances, the Red Cross is at work, repairing ruins, feeding the starving and protecting the weak.

In the duties entrusted to it by the international community, the International Committee of the Red Cross looks after the wounded, the civilian and military prisoners, and the victims of conflicts between nations. It has been active in Indo-China, in the Asian sub-continent, the Middle East and Cyprus.

It is present wherever there is internal disorder or deadly political tension. It affords relief to the victims. It visits political detainees. Without taking sides in the struggle it witnesses, it performs its independent, neutral and charitable task.

In its endeavours, the ICRC has always been able to rely on the essential support of National Societies, which do not hesitate to ease its contacts, aid in the distribution of relief supplies, and co-operate in the dissemination of humanitarian principles, with a dedication to which high tribute must be paid.

Every country in this immense continent, full of generosity, enthusiasm and devotion, must have a strong, independent and well organized National Society, exercising its medical mission in dispensaries in the most remote areas, bringing social and charitable help to all who are in need, and combating disasters by immediate and effective action. It must also, in close co-operation with ICRC delegates, be able to render aid to victims of conflict and to disseminate the principles of the Red Cross, which assure peace and the brotherhood of man.

That is our wish at the beginning of this Conference. May it contribute to a strengthening of the Red Cross ideal in all countries of America.

The main topic of the plenary meetings was the necessity of developing the Red Cross movement's potential to permit it to give more effective assistance in emergencies arising from either natural disasters or armed conflicts. In addition, the Sixth Inter-American Public Relations meeting which was proceeding at the same time gave its attention to public relations, news, publicity and fund-raising.

Like the League, the ICRC reported on its work over the last four years and on its plans for the future. The second plenary meeting discussed the dissemination of knowledge of fundamental principles and of humanitarian law, and it voted a resolution which was subsequently adopted by the Conference, namely:

The Tenth Inter-American Red Cross Conference,

*Noting the frequently recurring acts of violence and disorder in many areas of the world;*

*Conscious of the fact that the Geneva Conventions are effectively applied in practice only inasmuch as governments and peoples are aware of them;*

*Recalling Resolution I of the Ninth Inter-American Red Cross Conference (Managua, December 1970) and Resolution XII of the XXIIInd International Conference of the Red Cross (Teheran, November 1973) on disseminating knowledge about the Geneva Conventions;*

*Recommends the National Red Cross Societies in the Americas to step up their efforts to spread information about the principles of humanitarian law, particularly by:*

- (a) acquiring documentary material produced by the ICRC and exhibiting it in the local branches of the Red Cross and in government departments,*
- (b) seeking new ways of spreading information and of implementing the proposals of the ICRC in this field,*
- (c) relaying to neighbouring sections and to the ICRC information about the results of their efforts in the field of publicity,*
- (d) organizing regional seminars on international humanitarian law, for the purpose of instructing National Society personnel;*

*Thanks the ICRC for its renewed efforts, following the XXIIInd International Conference of the Red Cross, to support government and National Society endeavours in this field.*

The Conference also adopted a resolution on the dissemination of knowledge of the Geneva Conventions among youth, and pointing out the usefulness in this connection of the ICRC's school textbook and teacher's manual. The resolution reads as follows:

*Aware that a widespread dissemination of and instruction in Red Cross principles and the Geneva Conventions are particularly important among youth;*

*Convinced that this form of education constitutes a significant contribution to the development of the spirit of peace among nations;*

*Welcoming the work already carried out by the ICRC for devising and issuing suitable dissemination material for youth, in particular the school textbook and teacher's manual;*

*Requests all National Red Cross Societies in the Americas to undertake or continue a vigorous campaign for the diffusion of the humanitarian principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions among youth and, in particular*

- those National Societies which have not yet done so to
  - (a) *introduce in their respective countries the ICRC school textbook and teacher's manual in sufficient number to produce an effective impact, and*
- all National Societies to
  - (b) *seek the support of their Ministries of Education in this endeavour, in order that those books be regularly used in primary schools,*
  - (c) *prepare a long-term programme of this dissemination campaign, in conjunction with their authorities,*
  - (d) *seek the financial support of the Ministry of Education for the printing and distribution of those books,*
  - (e) *inform the ICRC regularly of the development of their campaign, in accordance with the wish expressed in Teheran Resolution XII.*

Several commissions shared the work of examining such important subjects as "Planning and Preparation for Relief in case of Disasters or Conflicts", "Health and Social Affairs", and "Red Cross Youth". The ICRC delegation, comprising Mr. Nessi, delegate-general for Latin America, and Mr. Leemann and Mr. du Plessis, regional delegates, took part in the work and explained the ICRC's functions in these various fields.

The President of the ICRC received groups of National Society Presidents with whom he raised the question of the current work of the ICRC and the usefulness—as underlined also by several of those Presidents—of closer co-operation between Red Cross Societies and the ICRC. He also took the chair at a meeting of Presidents and Secretaries-General of the Societies represented at Asunción. At the same meeting, Mr. Nessi described the work being carried out by the ICRC in Chile. As mentioned in our previous issue, the ICRC President, concurrently with the Conference, had talks with the President of the Republic and with several ministers of the Paraguayan Government.

The Conference decided to hold the next session in Caracas in 1978.