Council of Delegates  
1 December 2003  
Mrs Christina Magnuson  
Report on Resolution 6 from 2001 on the emblem

The search for a solution to the problems surrounding the emblem has remained the focus of our attention since the International Conference of October 1999, as evidenced by the two reports, which the Standing Commission has submitted to you.

One of these reports follows on from Resolution 6 of the November 2001 Council of Delegates. The second, drawn up for the 28th Conference, takes thorough stock of the action in response to Resolution 3 of the 27th Conference which asked the Standing Commission “to establish a joint working group from the Movement and States on the emblems with a mandate to find a comprehensive solution, as rapidly as possible, which is acceptable to all parties in terms of substance and procedure”.

Together, they present the culmination of work I have had the honour to chair for the Standing Commission since the creation of the first working group in this phase of our work in 1995. Given the importance that we all attach to this matter, I am sure that you have devoted great attention to studying these two documents. I will therefore focus my remarks on the essential points and conclusions that, it seems to me, emerge from these reports and that should guide us in directing and organizing our future action. But before discussing the relevant points in the reports, I would like once again to very warmly thank all those among you who have taken part in the activities of the three working groups set up by the Standing Commission and which I had the privilege of chairing. As you have been able to see from the reports issued by them, these groups have done outstanding work in bringing us a decisive step closer to our goal of enabling the Movement to achieve full universality, which is of course closely linked to the first and greatest of our principles: humanity.

This represents a considerable achievement since it entailed finding solutions to problems that had proved intractable for over half a century. The challenge was to work out proposals acceptable to all in terms of both substance and procedure. It was a major challenge to find solutions which, without leading to a proliferation of emblems, would nevertheless meet the expectations of National Societies that could not be recognized owing to the difficulties they face with the existing emblems.

It was no easy task to reconcile the contradictory positions regarding this matter, which in the past had surfaced within our Movement and even threatened its unity. We not only had to conduct a thorough and rigorous analysis of a highly complex question but we had to show creativity as well as diplomacy in order to produce proposals that involved our principles, our statutes and humanitarian law itself. It was therefore necessary to devise measure that would be acceptable not only to the Movement but also, ultimately, to the States party to the Geneva Conventions, since they would also have to be incorporated into international humanitarian law.

These are the considerations which underpinned the work of the Standing Commission working group, which followed directly from Resolution 6 adopted by this Council in November 2001 and involved 10 National Society members drawn from around the world.

This Working Group started from the baselines set by Resolution 6. They in turn derived from the outcome of the work of the Joint Working Group set up after the 27th International Conference, in which seven representatives from the Movement and 15 from governments...
concluded that the sole possibility for a comprehensive and widely acceptable solution was to propose the adoption of a third protocol additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. This protocol would have created an additional protective emblem free of any national, political or religious connotation but designed in such a way as to enable National Societies using it to insert a symbol that they already used – but to do this only for indicative purposes.

It was on the basis of this proposal, and following intensive consultation with all concerned governments, that a draft protocol was drawn up to serve as a sound working basis for negotiations within the framework of a diplomatic conference that was to have been held in Geneva on 25 and 26 October 2000 at the invitation of Switzerland, the depositary State for the Geneva Conventions. We thought then that we were about to achieve our goal; that a solution was at long last at hand. Unfortunately, as we all know, the planned diplomatic conference had to be postponed owing to the deterioration in the international political climate caused by serious events in the Middle East only a few weeks before the meeting was to have taken place.

Was the draft protocol itself called into question as a result? Fortunately not. The Swiss government did not postpone the diplomatic conference because our approach was considered flawed or lacked support. On the contrary, our draft had received broad support from the international community while it was being drawn up, since it met all the basic requirements for a solution acceptable to all the parties concerned.

And indeed the draft protocol provides a solution for National Societies that have difficulties with the existing emblems. It does this without opening the door to a proliferation of different emblems, which would result in a weakening of their ability to protect. On the contrary, everyone agrees that the availability of an additional emblem devoid of any national, political or religious connotation would, in some circumstances, be an effective tool with which to enhance protection for war victims.

Moreover, the adoption of such an emblem would in no way call into question the continued use of the existing red cross and red crescent emblems by National Societies and States that use them and wish to go on doing so. Nor would it have any effect on the names currently in use within our Movement. The preamble to the draft protocol provides a clear response to such fears, noting “the determination of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to retain their current names and emblems”.

As the Standing Commission's Special Representative on these issues I have engaged in emblem discussions with a wide range of personalities and officials, from both governments and National Societies. I am convinced that a strong message can be sent about the way this issue can and should be handled.

The message is simple. There is no dispute that the objectives of the draft Protocol are sound and that when they are adopted by States, the Fundamental Principle of Universality will be assured. There is also no doubt that there is an urgent need for an additional protective emblem, which could be used in those circumstances where the existing emblems do not provide the necessary protection.

By means of Resolution 6 the Movement reaffirmed its conviction that the draft protocol stands as a sound basis for the resumption of negotiations as soon as circumstances permit. It also reiterates that this is the only possible way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting solution improving protection and guaranteeing universality.

Resolution 6 also asked the ICRC and the Federation to pursue operational cooperation with the National Societies awaiting recognition and admission.

Christina Magnusson
Council of Delegates 2003 re Resolution 6 /CoD 2001 on the emblem
And this cooperation has indeed been growing tremendously, and not just because of the work of the ICRC and the Federation, as you have seen in the reports submitted to you. I am very pleased about this and particularly happy to extend a warm welcome to the representatives of those Societies who are among us today in this Council. We have together, established relations of solidarity and friendship with these Societies, a relationship that gives them a stronger sense of belonging to our family as they await a recognition that we all hope will soon materialize, when the remaining obstacles have been overcome. And we will resolutely pursue our cooperation with those Societies.

These considerations prompt me to say that it is no exaggeration to consider the progress made since the 27th International Conference as decisive. We have reached a point of no return; we have demonstrated that where there is a will there is a way. As stated in the report on the follow-up to the 27th Conference's resolution on the emblem, "the way is open and the necessary mechanisms are in place. The Movement has acquired the means to resolve a pressing problem that has threatened its unity and undermined the effectiveness of its operations, and that for more than 50 years has prevented it from achieving the full universality to which it aspires." However, despite this major progress, the edifice we seek to construct remains unfinished. It still lacks the cornerstone that only the States can lay through the adoption of the new additional protocol.

We must therefore now pursue our efforts by means of dialogue with the States. We are well aware that the grave circumstances in the Middle East that led to the diplomatic conference's postponement have not been resolved, and I would like to express our solidarity with all the victims of that tragically violent situation which so urgently requires resolution.

Indeed, every passing day makes the search for a solution to the emblem problem more urgent. Delegates in the field are increasingly confronted with threats to their safety and challenges in a growing number of conflicts where the red cross and red crescent emblems are no longer perceived as symbols of neutral and impartial humanitarian action. This altered view erodes respect for them, and the resulting lack of respect means that they cease to guarantee the immunity so vital to our work and to the protection of the victims of conflict. A harmonious resolution of the emblem issue is thus of great importance, both for us and for the States.

Mr Chairman, dear friends, I would like to say in conclusion that we have progressed a long way down the road toward the resolution of this question. We the members of this Movement have shown determination in contributing our part to that progress. The working groups have ably completed their task. It is now up to each member of our Movement to tirelessly persevere toward our objective. It is my hope that our unity will help us make the States understand that it is now up to them to take us there. By adopting an additional protocol that creates an additional emblem devoid of any political, national or religious connotation, they will not only be shouldering their responsibility toward our Movement by enabling it to achieve the full universality to which it aspires, they will also be strengthening its very foundation: the effectiveness of its action and its moral authority.

Those seem to me to be the main conclusions, which can be drawn from the reports that have been submitted to you, and I thought it important to highlight them in my address today. All are reflected in the draft resolution that has been placed before you for approval by this Council of Delegates and which, once adopted, will be referred to the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which will begin its work tomorrow.

It is with gratitude for the unfailing support that you have given me that I ask you to express your continued determination to work towards our common goal by adopting this resolution.

01/12/03

Christina Magnuson
Council of Delegates 2003 re Resolution 6 /CoD 2001 on the emblem