Address by the President of the International Committee
to the London Conference.

Monseigneur,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As at previous Conferences, the International Red Cross Committee submits for your consideration a general report on its work and a series of special reports on specific problems which concern the Red Cross. I hope you will allow me to lay before you not a commentary on these reports as a whole but a few general ideas on the work of the Red Cross and, more particularly, of the International Red Cross Committee.

I ventured to address a similar message to the Tokio Conference, which I was unfortunately prevented from attending. Referring to the upheavals that had occurred, since the foundation of our institution in 1863, in the social structure and constitutions of many States, I endeavoured to examine the influence such events might exert on the work of the Red Cross in general and also on the development of relations between each nation and the community of States and, finally, on changes in philosophical and religious ideas.

The events of the past four years have not lessened either the importance of the urgency of these questions. On the contrary, in a world that is split by politics and ideologies, a universal movement such as the Red Cross, which tends towards a common moral aim, must be confronted by the most serious situations.

I deem it essential, of course, that in each national Society due regard should be had to those moral factors
which impel the public to co-operate, by personal effort
and by financial support, in the work of the Red Cross.
But it is no less important that there should be a clear
discernment of the common heritage, over and above
the divergencies revealed in the concepts and senti­
ments of each nation, — I mean a perception of the
ies and duties which the Red Cross creates between
those who work beneath its emblem, amidst the tragic
antagonisms of warlike conflicts. The red cross on a
white background is not merely a sign that protects
persons and property; it is also the symbol of a great
and universal idea.

I wish to-day, however, to lay before you a problem
which is more concrete and, in one sense, more com­
monplace, but which at all times weights heavily on
every national Society and also on the international
organisations of the Red Cross. This problem has, in
recent years, become particularly acute for the Interna­
tional Committee and for the Red Cross community.
For us, it has arisen in an urgent, even disquieting
manner. I have in mind the relationship — or rather,
I am bound to say, the disproportion — that exists
between, on the one hand, what the Red Cross ought
to accomplish, what the world expects of it and, on the
other hand, the means at its disposal in staff and in
material. This lamentable lack of proportion is accen­
tuated particularly when the work of the Red Cross,
going beyond the national setting, has to be under­
taken on the international plane. Let us consider the
situation together.

The greatness and the strength of the Red Cross
come, of course, from the fact that the idea and the
sign of the Red Cross are known throughout practically
the whole world, that millions of men are familiar with
its name and what that name means — disinterestedness,
impartiality, relief to the wounded, to the sick and
to the persecuted. In our disunited age, the Red Cross
is one of the few ideas by which men are brought together,
above and beyond national, religious, social and racial differences. Nevertheless, the notion commonly entertained of the Red Cross remains extremely indefinite. Mankind is thus apt to expect from the Red Cross services which either lie entirely outside its domain or which — and this is more frequently the case — go beyond its practical possibilities. But what is especially lacking is a comprehension of the fact that the Red Cross cannot accomplish what is expected of it unless it is furnished with the means for its accomplishment, in human energies and in money.

For a long time past, and more particularly since the Great War, the national Societies have directed very great efforts, frequently their chief efforts, to peace-time activities. The foundation of the League of Red Cross Societies not only gave a great and beneficent impulse to this branch of the work, but it also led to its international development.

It is not for me to deal with the financial aspect of this work of the Red Cross in peace-time. It is carried out in conditions that differ appreciably from those of the so-called "wartime" activities. What are known as "peace-time" activities call for financial resources that are no less considerable, for their field is no less extensive. They nevertheless offer this advantage — except in regard to relief in the event of disasters — that they are not exposed to certain surprises and may therefore be more accurately forecast and more readily adapted to the means available. The two branches of the work of the Red Cross and the two international organs by which they are served have an equal need of vigorous support — though on different lines. But these two branches remain interdependent, for neither of them will enjoy all the vitality and all the prestige that are essential unless the other has at all times proved equal to its task.

* * *

— 3 —
May I be allowed to refer, in the first place, to the situation of the International Red Cross Committee. This is particularly difficult because the calls made on its services are as variable and as unforeseeable as the circumstances which give rise to them, whereas the means at its disposal — in persons and especially in financial resources — do not possess a corresponding elasticity. I would venture to recall the fact that the underlying principle of the International Committee is that of the voluntary and disinterested work of its members. Moreover, by reason of its neutrality, it is limited in the choice of its members and collaborators. It is therefore not easy for us to adapt our organisation to work which may in a very short space of time, according to circumstances, have to be increased twofold, threefold, fivefold or even more. Nevertheless, the International Committee has, in recent years as during the Great War, succeeded in finding the extra staff called for by the situation and has, to the extent of the means at its disposal — and only to the extent of those means — added them to its services. It cannot, however, even during quiet periods, reduce its permanent secretariat below certain limits without its current work suffering and, above all, without running the risk of reducing its potential utility and thereby incurring the danger of no longer being able, at any moment, to face the unforeseen.

It will be remembered that the budget of the Committee includes two kinds of resources — ordinary and extraordinary. The ordinary resources consist of the annual contributions from national Societies and the income from the securities held by the Committee. These securities are, as to four-fifths of them, grouped together in an inalienable fund, which, since the time of the donation from the Swiss Confederation, has not increased in the proportions expected. I desire, nevertheless, to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the national Societies that have contributed towards the increase of this fund.
Furthermore, contributions from the national Societies have, since 1928, decreased considerably. This fact is all the more disquieting because, since 1936, the value of the Swiss currency has fallen by comparison with many other currencies. In the same connection, we would venture to point out that, during the last seventeen years, ten national Societies have made no financial contribution at all towards the expenses incurred by the International Committee in the discharge of its duties, that 50% of the contributions received come from five national Societies, whilst 40% is provided by fifteen Societies and the remaining 10% by some thirty Societies. Moreover, the size of the contributions is not always proportionate to that of the States to which the Societies belong or, more especially, to the services expected of the International Committee.

The ordinary income derived from the two sources I have mentioned is barely sufficient to meet the current expenditure of the International Committee. That Committee, nevertheless, works in the most economical way, quite apart from the fact that a considerable portion of its work is done by its own members, without any remuneration whatsoever. If this work had to be given to paid secretaries, the budget would have to be increased by at least 25%. It is, moreover, not reasonable to expect that members who are prepared to give their services, and who are called on to work more or less continuously, can be indefinitely recruited. As you are aware, the members of the International Committee must come from Geneva or its neighbourhood. In Switzerland, as elsewhere, however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find persons who are not compelled to earn their livelihood and that of their families and who can afford to devote a large part of their time to work of a purely voluntary character. In consequence of these circumstances, the International Committee will, in course of time, if it wishes to maintain its present working capacity, be inevitably compelled to increase
its paid secretariat. And, even after these sacrifices, it would still remain, among international organisations, an exemple of an institution that works in an extremely economical way.

As I said just now, the first result entailed by the fact that the ordinary resources available are not even sufficient to meet the ordinary expenditure is that the current work is handicapped. A further result is that any extraordinary work, whenever need arises for the Committee to undertake such work, is rendered more difficult if not, indeed, dangerously hampered. Thus, its mission to the Chaco cost the Committee about 40,000 Swiss francs, its mission to Ethiopia about 45,000 francs and the despatch of a temporary delegate to China about 20,000 francs. All this expenditure had to be met by drawing upon the capital constituted by the balance of the donations which the International Committee had received during the Great War. This sum which, for some years past, had sunk to 300,000 francs, has decreased so rapidly in recent years that we are faced with the question of how we can discharge our duties in the future. We should be guilty of culpable imprudence if we were entirely to exhaust this reserve. It is indispensable to us for initiatives we are bound to take, almost always immediately and in a way that is entirely unexpected.

The national Societies would certainly think it strange if the International Committee and to apply to them at any and every moment, before undertaking any work whatsoever. Such a procedure would, moreover, as a general rule, entail very harmful delays. It usually happens that the International Committee has to take immediate action and then submit to the national Societies a plan for action on a wider scale, whether national Societies themselves subsequently undertake, relief action outside their own country or support a national Society involved in distress or whether they back the efforts of the International Committee in work which it will
itself carry out or direct. Such pioneer work and such initiation of action constitute an essential task of the International Red Cross Committee.

It is certain that the International Committee cannot undertake or carry out any work on a considerable scale unless the National Societies and other groups or the Governments place the appropriate means at its disposal. This was done, in a striking manner, during the Great War and also, more recently, in regard to Spain. The national Societies, however, generally expect that their donations, whether solicited or spontaneously offered for special and new work, should be used exclusively for that work and should not be utilised to meet the initial expenditure already incurred as a matter of urgency by the International Committee. Such action, therefore, even though generously supported by the National Societies is, under the present system, far from being of any financial assistance to the Committee. On the contrary, it constitutes an additional burden on its budget through the fact that any work undertaken on a considerable scale involves an almost automatic increase in the general expenditure of the International Committee.

Such a situation will soon become untenable. The only way in which it can be remedied is by finding means by which the International Committee can be enabled not only to meet its ordinary expenditure but also to set aside reserves for its extraordinary work and constantly to reconstitute them. If this result is not achieved, the International Committee will soon be no longer in a position to act at any moment, at a time when wars or internal political complications call for the rapid preparation or carrying out of Red Cross work. The Committee felt that it was its duty to direct the attention of the Sixteenth Conference to the situation as it actually is at present.

** * **

— 7 —
It is the national Societies which are responsible for almost the whole of the work of the Red Cross, in so far as such work does not come within the province of the military medical services. It is only in the National Societies, that it is possible to find large numbers of voluntary and professional helpers, and it is only the National Societies that have at their disposal large stocks of equipment and stores for relief work. They alone possess large financial resources, either because they have a large number of members who pay contributions regularly or because the nation habitually responds to appeals made to it by the Red Cross. Many Societies might be mentioned as examples in this connection. We are not called upon at present to make a comparative study of the resources of national Societies and the work which they have done. It may, however, be stated, in a general way, that a certain equilibrium does exist in this connection. The work of a National Society is carried out on national territory. It is determined by the whole social structure of the country and by the system it adopts for work of public utility. To the extent to which a country expects some specific work of the Red Cross, it will provide it with the necessary means both for its current work and for those exceptional cases in which national solidarity is expressed by sacrifices that are themselves no less exceptional.

The situation is quite different as regards the international work of the Red Cross. By its very nature, this work does not come within the province of any particular national Society; it is a matter that concerns the Red Cross as a whole. The field of action is the whole world. Furthermore, such work has to be undertaken just at the moment when organisation on a national basis is no longer adequate and when there is no appropriate organisation. This is especially true in cases in which the International Committee is called upon, before anyone else, to take the initiative, that is to say in times of wars and political and social upheavals. It
is this kind of Red Cross work which arouses the most widespread general interest because, emphasising, as it does, the frequently tragic character of human destiny, it is connected with events with regard to which the world is moved by feelings of passionate sympathy.

The Red Cross and, more particularly, the International Committee, as an organ of the international Red Cross, therefore receive appeals from all sides, from the Press and from humanitarian and philanthropic organisations. It is in such circumstances, however, that the popularity of the Red Cross, and the fact that it is more or less vaguely known to everyone in the world, constitute heavy burdens upon it. These burdens are all the greater because, in general, everyone is much more ready to suggest work for the international Red Cross to undertake than to provide it, or assist in providing it, with the necessary material means of action.

Most of this work, even if only one of the belligerents has recourse to the assistance of the international Red Cross, demands very considerable resources. War which, in the moral sphere, upsets all standards of value, also upsets economic conditions. In wartime nations throw their all into the scales because it is a matter of “to be or not to be”. It is, therefore, hardly possible that efforts made voluntarily should weigh heavily in the balance. Even though such efforts may be considerable, they are still but drops in the ocean compared with the distress caused by war. And they will all seem inadequate to those who view them critically.

For a neutral Society, the sending of one or more ambulances to the battlefield, more particularly when they have to be sent to distant countries, constitutes in itself a very considerable contribution by comparison with the work done in peace-time. And yet how small is this assistance in the light of all that requires to be done. Whether the question is one of sending consignments of medical supplies, provisions or clothing for prisoners or of meeting the similar needs of a population,
the sums required rapidly mount up to hundreds of thousands, or even to millions, of Swiss francs, even if only the most urgent needs are to be met effectively.

If the case is one of international relief work that can be based on a military medical service or on a powerful national Society, international action is fairly easy and the assistance, whether small or great, contributed from outside can be of immediate use.

If, however, the conditions presupposed in Article 11 of the Geneva Convention do not exist, it is necessary, in the first place, to make preparations for the work and this cannot be done without overcoming great difficulties. Furthermore, the assistance forthcoming from outside will, only too frequently, prove far from sufficient to meet the requirements of the situation.

At this point, I must stress the fact that the international work of the Red Cross is by no means confined within the limits of the Geneva Convention. Outside those limits, the International Committee — and that Committee alone — is often expected to take action: action in favour of prisoners, the exchange of prisoners, the provision of relief for political prisoners and for unfortunate persons of every kind, the transmission of news between the members of scattered families, the making of representations concerning violations of international law, etc., etc. For all action of this kind, the International Committee must establish relations of complete confidence with the authorities of the belligerent parties, must possess an organisation of its own on which all concerned can rely and must send delegates to the places concerned. This is bound to be costly even if the strictest economy is observed. Further, it must not be forgotten that, though such indispensable humanitarian work — being devoid of immediate value to the belligerents — may even, at the outset, seem to them to be open to question, or perhaps unfriendly in character, the chances of its being successfully carried out are all the greater if the Red Cross is,
at the same time, in a position to carry out definite and practical relief work on a very wide scale within the framework of the Geneva Convention.

***

What, then, are the means at the disposal of the Red Cross?

The fact is that the International Committee — to speak only of it — has scarcely the means necessary to the maintenance of its own existence and has almost exhausted its resources for dealing with cases of emergency, of limited magnitude, and also for the making of preparations for work on a large scale. Still less could it, by means of its own resources, undertake and carry out such work.

As the Red Cross is essentially a movement of voluntary collaboration based on the goodwill of the nation as a whole, it is but natural that it should first of all make preparations for what it will have to provide itself. It will then have an added claim for soliciting generous and loyal aid from others. Accordingly we think in the first place of the National Societies — those Societies which, taken as a whole, constitute the real body of the Red Cross.

In this connection, there are two courses which lie open for international action by the Red Cross:

The national Societies may either act on their own behalf or in collaboration with sister Societies, or they may place financial and material means at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee so that the latter may act on behalf of them all.

The choice between these two methods of action, or their combination, is always a question to be considered in the light of the special circumstances attending each case. The essential thing is that the help expected, and rightly expected, from the Red Cross should be really forthcoming.
A few recent examples may appropriately be mentioned at this point.

During the Chaco conflict, the International Red Cross Committee made no appeal to National Societies as a whole. Through the intermediary of the Chilian Red Cross, however, it requested the Societies of Latin America to grant their support to the Red Cross organisations of the two States at war. So far as we are aware, three of those Societies responded to this appeal. The general report of the International Red Cross Committee contains more detailed information on this matter.

In the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, the spontaneous aid of the National Societies and the appeal made by the International Red Cross Committee led neutral Red Cross organisations to make great efforts. Never before had so many neutral Societies sent complete ambulances to the scene of hostilities — and that in circumstances which exposed them to serious difficulties and dangers as a result of topographical, climatic and other conditions. Five European Societies and the Egyptian Red Crescent took part in this direct intervention which entailed heavy financial sacrifices. Several of these same Societies, moreover, also gave their financial support to the work carried out by the International Red Cross Committee itself.

Twenty-two other Societies responded to the appeal made by the International Red Cross Committee, either by sending grants of money or by aiding the Ethiopian Red Cross itself by despatching considerable consignments of medical supplies. Donations to the International Red Cross Committee amounted to a total of about 16,000 Swiss francs. Forty per cent. of this sum came from one Society. It is difficult to compute the value of the consignments of material. Let us estimate at some 200,000 francs the assistance in money and in kind furnished by these twenty-two Societies. As for the value of the assistance furnished by the six national Societies which sent ambulances to the scene, it would seem certain that this assistance represented a value of
more than two million francs. Thirty-two national Societies out of sixty did not take part — at all events, so far as we are aware — in relief action in Ethiopia. Collections from the public were made only in the countries which had equipped ambulances.

Of all the international work performed by the Red Cross since the Great War, the most important is certainly the work done for the relief of the victims of the civil war in Spain, due regard being had to the diversity and duration of the relief work and, in particular, to the large number of National Societies which took part in that work. The International Red Cross Committee appealed to National Societies by means of a series of circulars and letters. Only 36 Societies out of 60 contributed, by donations in money or in kind, to the work of the International Red Cross Committee in Spain. The majority of those Societies were associated with that work during the first year of the war only. Of the other 34 Societies, most of them made no reply to our appeals; a few negative replies reached us. The contributions from the 36 National Societies which forwarded donations made up 30% of the resources placed at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee for its work in Spain, and four of them alone supplied 80% of the total contributions in money received from the national Societies. So far as we are aware, the National Societies have not, directly and on their own behalf, sent large consignments, but it must, of course, be stated that one of them has done a great amount of relief work on its own territory, adjacent to that of Spain.

The figures we have given show that the financial support, large and generous as it is, of the National Societies, provides after all only a somewhat slender basis for any international action by the Red Cross, even when such action arouses keen and fairly widespread sympathy.

The action of the Red Cross in China furnishes still more ground for thought. Here, there are only two National Societies which have, by themselves, outside
the framework of the action undertaken by the International Red Cross Committee, done any relief work on a large scale. They have, partly indeed in connection with other organisations, collected donations which amount to more than twice the sums given for relief work in Spain. Only twelve of the other Societies have so far given an affirmative reply to the appeals made by the International Red Cross Committee. The Chinese Red Cross has, by itself, provided 80% of the financial means that have been placed at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee and that have enabled it to maintain a delegate in China for about six months. Thus a piece of work, the need for which no-one disputes, and for which considerable sums should be available, arouses, when all is said and done, only a somewhat slight degree of interest.

Here is another fact which is no less significant. Contributions for relief work in Ethiopia and Spain followed a curve which rose fairly rapidly at the beginning of each of the conflicts and then fell just as quickly. There is only one Society that has provided continuous support for our work in Spain and if the number of Societies which have been moved to render assistance in China is so small, this is doubtless due to the fact that the appeals for China followed too closely upon the appeals for Spain which had exhausted the available resources of the National Societies.

In connection with these last three efforts of the Red Cross, that is to say, in two years and a half, the National Societies have given or collected no less than some five million Swiss francs. We mention this with the greatest gratitude but, if we wish to see things as they are, we must not hide from ourselves the facts first, that the means provided made possible only very limited assistance which was very far from meeting all needs, even the most urgent; second, that it is impossible to count on any really continuous assistance and, third, that only a proportion of the national Societies are in a position —
or have any wish — to support such international work or carry it out themselves.

In these circumstances, it will easily be understood that, for international work by the Red Cross, the International Red Cross Committee is bound to seek other financial support. It is, moreover, quite fitting that work like that of the Red Cross should receive support from other quarters. In this connection, the only possible course — except in very special cases — is to interest the public in general, and the States that are parties to the Geneva Convention.

❖

So far as the public is concerned, it is, in accordance with tradition and in the very first place, for the National Societies to appeal to the nationals of their own countries. The International Red Cross Committee can scarcely do this itself. An institution that is not national would perhaps, moreover, not have any great chance of success if it launched an appeal to the population of any particular country in respect of some international action. Further, it is only very rarely that private individuals make any spontaneous donations to the International Committee for the purposes of international assistance. Some of these donations, however, — and sometimes very small ones — move us deeply through the spirit of sacrifice by which they are prompted. It is true that private collections for the purpose of providing funds for the work in Spain and in China have yielded very considerable sums. Thus, rather more than one-third of the financial resources placed at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee for Spain came from collections arranged by ad hoc organisations on behalf of the Red Cross in a few countries in Latin America. Similarly, committees known as "International Red Cross Committees" at Hankow and Shanghai have also met with remarkable success and have to that extent been able to relieve the Chinese Red Cross.
In seeking to determine, however, what international work the Red Cross must undertake and what it might undertake, it would be rash to count on resources of this kind. In one of the cases just mentioned, indeed, the ties existing between the Spanish populations of the old world and those of the new world certainly played an essential part. In the other case, a determining factor was constituted by the situation of foreign residents in China and their relations with economically powerful circles in Europe and in the United States.

The International Committee is, nevertheless, bound to consider the possibility of appealing direct to the public in general or to that of certain countries. Indeed, as has already been said, as soon as the distress resulting from wars or revolutions moves public opinion, the International Committee receives requests and suggestions of all kinds from the most varied quarters. The Press re-echoes these and people are very apt to criticise the Red Cross, or even to attack it, if it does not act or does not act quickly enough or effectively enough. Now, in the case of any action that might come within the domain of the Red Cross, public opinion cannot be a matter of indifference to us. If, for one reason or another, the national Societies do not mobilise the means required for international action, the International Committee is bound itself to appeal to those quarters which call for its intervention.

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that the promptitude and effectiveness of the action of the International Red Cross have considerable direct consequences so far as the National Societies are concerned. Through the interest it arouses and the space devoted to it in the Press — more readily than in the case of its normal peace-time activities — the international work of the Red Cross may be a valuable means of propaganda for national work. On the contrary, if public expectations are disappointed, the Red Cross institution in general is bound to suffer therefrom.
I should, at this point, like to refer to a somewhat special aspect of the problem. In many cases, appeals would meet with a wider response from the public if the Red Cross was able to accept donations intended exclusively for the benefit of one of the parties. Such a procedure would remain compatible with the principles of impartiality and neutrality observed by the Red Cross provided that there was a possibility of maintaining a certain equilibrium between donations earmarked for specific purposes. But the desire to make sure of the greatest possible resources must never lead the International Red Cross to yield to any temptation to abandon its attitude of neutrality. This impartial neutrality is essential not only because it alone makes it possible to act simultaneously in respect of both parties, but also because the fundamental rôle of the Red Cross is, in the presence of human suffering, to bring about the disappearance of any distinction between friends and enemies. Therein resides the greatest source of strength of the Red Cross and it is that which distinguishes it from many other philanthropic efforts.

* * *

There still remains to us — last but not least — the possibility of recourse to the Governments of the States that are parties to the Geneva Convention. If the Governments desire that the Red Cross — whether national or international — should be in a position to act, it is only natural that they should make themselves responsible for the expenditure. During the Great War the work of national Red Cross organisations, as also that of the International Committee, was greatly facilitated and supported by Governments. Apart from that period, however, the financing, by Governments, of the international work of the Red Cross has, hitherto, constituted an exception only. Last year, when the
resources available for relief work in Spain had fallen whilst, at the same time, needs were increasing, the International Red Cross Committee appealed, on April 27th, 1937, to all States signatories of the Geneva Convention, asking them to grant extraordinary assistance. The International Red Cross Committee felt that it was its duty at that time to neglect no effort in order to obviate the almost immediate cessation of this work. Important humanitarian interests would have suffered thereby — and so would the prestige of the International Red Cross.

Of 64 Governments, 31 have so far replied, and only 13 of them have given us any positive assistance. Thanks to the generous support of these Governments, it has been possible for us to proceed with only a rational and progressive reduction of our work in Spain by utilising in the most appropriate manner our own limited resources and also those with which one of the national Societies has continued to furnish us. The very composition — varied as it is — of the group of States which made donations proved that the appeal by the International Committee was justified and that were was no reason for any hesitation on our part on political grounds. The support given by these thirteen States is practically equal in amount to that furnished by the National Societies.

The reason why it is only in special situations that appeals have hitherto been made to Governments for funds for the international work of the Red Cross lies in the fact that it is desirable to find in the national Societies above all, and through their intermediary, the necessary means for furnishing visible proof of the solidarity of the Red Cross family. Since, however, the work to be done is constantly increasing both in the national and in the international field, the financial support of the Governments becomes a necessity — more particularly in cases in which the Societies cannot work individually and the International Red Cross
Committee is alone in a position to bring effective relief of all kinds to the victims of a conflict.

* * *

It is, indeed, an extremely thankless and even a really painful task to have to deplore the inadequacy of the support received when, at the same time, one is anxious to render thanks for so much assistance and generous comprehension. Nevertheless, we are compelled to bring to the notice of National Societies the fact that the means which are available, or which may be expected to be forthcoming, are insufficient by comparison with the duties that the Red Cross has taken upon itself and with the hopes reposed in the Red Cross not only by the general public but also by the Red Cross Societies themselves.

We are well aware of the fact that the economic depression has seriously affected the National Societies also. We realise that needs are increasing at the very moment when incomes are falling. In the case of many Societies, moreover, there are almost insurmountable obstacles standing in the way of the transmission of money to other countries. Nevertheless, how could one fail to remark that so many National Societies remain inert in face of the distress of other Societies on whose behalf common action is undertaken? There may be various causes for this phenomenon. It may be that there is a lack of material resources, which handicaps the development of national activity also, or it may be that the idea of the solidarity of the National Societies, which has been proclaimed by so many International Conferences and which the League of Red Cross Societies so brilliantly represents in its own sphere, has not yet cost its roots deeply enough in all directions. But if, by any chance, it is thought that it is the intervention of the International Red Cross Committee or its method of work that leads any National Society to abstain, we are prepared to listen to any criticism or suggestion. Let us
recall the fact, however, that no Society is compelled to have recourse to us as an intermediary. On the other hand, we hold ourselves at the service of national Societies whenever they do not feel called upon to undertake independent action.

***

Now I must stop. I have endeavoured to sketch a picture of the financial situation of the Red Cross in respect of its international work in time of war, and of the International Committee in particular. I am convinced that the facts mentioned will speak for themselves.

It is not my intention at present to put forward any proposals. The Conference will deal with this problem in its Committees. But, if the Red Cross wishes to answer the hopes of the nations and of the victims of wars and other conflicts, it will have to make an effort still greater, more general and more continuous than in the past. The effort of the National Societies themselves must be supplemented more than it has been hitherto by the support of the Governments as well as by that of the public that calls for the intervention of the Red Cross. As for the International Red Cross Committee, in particular, its regular and permanent work must rest on an adequate and stable financial basis and it must have at its disposal the funds that are necessary, in the first place for rapid and unforeseen action and then for the preparation of work on a wide scale to be carried out or supported by the National Societies and the Governments and, finally, for work in respect of which the National Societies could not be mobilised.

***

Before concluding, however, I wish to emphasise two points that are of fundamental importance: (1) the need for developing every national Society to its point of maximum efficiency and (2) the need for combining the extension of the activities of the Red Cross with its effort to obtain adequate material resources.

— 20 —
As to the first point, it is certain that it is not enough to be able, in a specific case and in present circumstances, to overcome the disproportion we have noted between the means at the disposal of the Red Cross and the assistance which the world expects from it. We must go to the root of the difficulties. The Red Cross will not flourish completely unless everywhere, in all countries, it succeeds in organising the maximum forces and in becoming the living expression of human solidarity. This is true of the work of the Red Cross in peace-time — to which the League of Red Cross Societies devotes all its efforts — as well as of its work in time of war. The capacity for action of all National Societies must, therefore, be increased to the greatest possible extent and this must be done by establishing an equilibrium between the needs created by the international work of the Red Cross and the means available for meeting those needs.

Only a strong Society, enrooted in the population of its own country can intervene, either directly by itself in a foreign country or by furnishing the International Committee with large resources for the purposes of common action. Such a Society can, moreover, with more chance of success than any other institution, launch an appeal to the public in favour of an action which does not concern its own country.

A strong Society will be less easily forced to appeal for assistance from other countries in times of war or disasters. A strong Society which has, nevertheless, to accept assistance from abroad will benefit all the more therefrom because such assistance will yield its effects within a framework that is already well organised.

If circumstances are such that a National Society is organised in an inadequate manner, that it has at its disposal only means that are entirely insufficient, the assistance of sister Societies will doubtless be absolutely necessary to it; but such assistance will always prove to be inadequate. Effort, time and money will then
have to be expended in order to create the conditions that are indispensable to the efficacity of the action undertaken. Now, although the International Red Cross can never repair the deficiencies of organisation of a National Society, it is frequently the International Red Cross that will be blamed for the shortcomings of that Society.

The second point that we mentioned relates to the need for the Red Cross to develop its resources side by side with the extension of its activities. This point is all the more important because the Red Cross world now shows a strong tendency to extend the principles of the Geneva Convention to the civilian populations that are victims of war. Sometimes, indeed, there is a desire to direct the activities of the Red Cross in time of war especially towards the relief of the civilian population instead of limiting it to its rôle of an auxiliary of the Army Medical Service, as was contemplated at the time of the foundation of the Red Cross and in the Geneva Convention. This extension of the programme, this emergence of a new rôle, is explained by the nature of modern warfare. It is obvious, however, that this new task is immense and still very vaguely defined and that it will probably be accompanied by great difficulties since it cannot everywhere be performed within the framework of a strongly constituted organisation such as the military Medical Service.

It is the duty of the National Societies to see whether they are equal to carrying out such a programme. We must, however, also consider how the solidarity of the National Societies one towards another can be shown in international action in this new and extended field. Will not the inadequacy of the means available make itself felt even more strongly in this connection?

Far be it from me to wish to dissuade from an extension of a branch of the work of the Red Cross which is in harmony with the spirit of the Red Cross, even though it goes beyond, and far beyond, the traditional limits
of its efforts. Let us always remember, however, that the continued existence of the Red Cross, both national and international, depends not on vast and numerous programmes of action, but on effective achievements. The great work accomplished by the National Societies is well known as are also the successes achieved by the League of Red Cross Societies in its own field of action. But such work demands incessant sacrifices of time, energy, health and even of life as well as of money and ever more money.

Before any decision to take up a piece of work, there must always be an assessment of the effort that will be required to carry it out. We are entirely sincere in the matter of our resolutions and our programme only when we realise clearly what we are undertaking to devote to them, even from the financial standpoint.

Only a sense of realities, associated with the willingness to make the personal sacrifices involved, can really give the Red Cross an impetus. Nothing could be more harmful than to deceive ourselves, and with ourselves the world, as to what we are prepared to do and to sacrifice for the accomplishment of what we proclaim to be our programme.

That is why I felt it was my duty to direct attention to the financial problem, which is important for every National Society and is especially serious and disquieting for the International Red Cross, more particularly at times when terrible and unforeseeable suffering occurs as the result of war and disasters.

* * *

After emphasising, on the one hand, the inadequacy of the means available, we are entitled, in conclusion, to emphasise no less the greatness and ever-growing importance of the Red Cross.

Wars between countries, and civil war also, are to-day even more terrible catastrophes than they were in the past. This is due not only to the dreadful power of modern
technical means but also, and above all, to the fact that the civilian population, women, children and old people, are much more exposed to the atrocious effects of these new instruments of warfare. Hence sufferings that are a thousand times worse and the unbridling of hatreds that are all the more frightful. It is at such a time that the Red Cross, before all else and perhaps alone, will, by visible acts of humanity, remind mankind of its real mission, both moral and material.

The universal Red Cross must therefore become powerful enough for its work to call forth the sentiment of human charity and human dignity and for it to maintain in the hearts and minds of men, through all conflicts and over and above all hatreds, a point of contact and of comprehension.

It is by comparison with the greatness and vital importance of this task of the Red Cross that the National Societies, the Governments and each human being individually must measure the effort necessary to its accomplishment.