

COLLECTION CICR

C1.1973/1046

SC/4/1

LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES

XXIInd International Conference of the Red Cross

Teheran, 8th - 15th November 1973

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Commission on Community Services

Item 4 of the Agenda

REPORT OF THE AD HOC WORKING PARTY

on

Red Cross and Protection of the Human Environment

(Geneva, 13th - 15th March 1973)

On the recommendation of the Health and Social Service Advisory Committee, the Executive Committee, at its 89th Session in Geneva 1972, decided to establish "an ad hoc working party composed of a small number of specially qualified representatives of National Societies to study and determine the possible forms of Red Cross action for the protection of the environment, with a view to presenting a report to the Board of Governors and the International Conference, in Teheran". (Res. No. 14).

A working party, composed of representatives from the National Societies of the following 8 countries held a meeting in Geneva from 13th - 15th March 1973. Participants were as follows :

National Societies' representatives :

Australia	- Mr. A. Werner	National Director, Red Cross Youth, Australian Red Cross Society
Czechoslovakia	- Professor Z. Krejci	Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Palacky, Czechoslovakia
Finland	- Mrs. A. Valle	Social Service Secretary, Finnish Red Cross
"	- Dr. H. Vertio	Finnish Red Cross, National Environment Programme
France	- Mr. R. Angebaut	Vice-President, French Red Cross
Hungary	- Mr. R. Sztuchlik	Department of External Affairs, Hungarian Red Cross
India	- Shri S. Ranganathan	Chairman, Managing Body, Indian Red Cross Society
Poland	- Dr. Irena Domanska	Chairman, League Health and Social Service Advisory Committee, Vice-President, Polish Red Cross
Tunisia	- Dr. T. Cheniti	Joint Treasurer, Tunisian Red Crescent

Participants also included Mr. Wayne Kines, Director of Information and special representative of Mr. Maurice Strong, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, and Dr. Gary Herbertson on special mission for UNEP, as well as Mr. Henrik Beer, League Secretary General and several of his associates from the League Secretariat.

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The working party elected its Chairman in the person of Mr. R. Angebaud, France, and Mr. R. Sztuchlik, Hungary, was elected Rapporteur, Mr. Angebaud having had to leave unexpectedly on the second day of the meeting, for family reasons, Shri S. Ranganathan very kindly and ably took the chair on the last day.

The opening address was given by Mr. H. Beer, who underlined the importance of Red Cross involvement in environment protection and improvement and gave a short survey of pertinent activities of the League Secretariat. In this field he welcomed the presence at the meeting of representatives of the UNEP, stressing the value to the League of continued cooperation with the latter and with other interested international organisations.

Mr. Wayne Kines greeted the meeting on behalf of the UNEP and expressed the interest of the organisation in further cooperation with the League in projects and studies concerned with human environment.

Prior to the meeting, Mr. R. Sztuchlik had spent one month from 10 January to 8 February 1973, on loan from the Hungarian Red Cross, at the League Secretariat to prepare a preliminary report on the subject of "Red Cross for a better Human Environment". This report was used as a working document at the meeting. It was subsequently re-drafted in parts by Mr. Sztuchlik and sent to the members of the working party for their comments. Replies were received from some of the members, and their comments, together with most of the opinions expressed at the meeting, were woven into what has become a League Secretariat working paper which is to be distributed with the present report.

The following summarizes briefly the opinion of the working party on the role the Red Cross could play in environment protection and improvement.

It was emphasized that the Red Cross had always been active in this field in various ways. What it lacked, however, was a global approach which would enable the problems, so far dealt with as separate issues, to be seen as interdependent aspects of the quality of life, hence as components of the environment problem.

It was stated that the main motives for Red Cross involvement in environmental improvement lay in its basic principles of humanity, universality, impartiality - in its respect for the human being.

The following guidelines were suggested to govern Red Cross action in this field :

1. The activities of the Red Cross must be in line with its basic principles and objectives.
2. The Red Cross should not assume the responsibilities of public authorities; it should act as an auxiliary; its activities must be subsidiary to government action.

3. The Red Cross should concentrate chiefly on pilot projects to provide for yet uncovered needs.
4. Red Cross activities should be integrated as much as possible into a national plan of action for environment protection and improvement and be determined according to the particular needs of each country.
5. The Red Cross should above all call for full participation of volunteers and use their capabilities to the utmost for the benefit of the community.
6. The Red Cross should give priority to prevention since the lack of relatively simple environmental measures - a typical symptom of environmental deterioration - leads to more costly and difficult corrective action.
7. National Societies should be entirely committed to environmental action. Youth participation should be encouraged at all levels since youth is genuinely and deeply concerned about environmental degradation. Its contribution should, however, always be seen as one component only of the whole Society's commitment.

The working party drew attention to the need for a certain adaptation of the services and structure of both National Societies and of the League to help National Societies in the development of their own programmes and in the utilization of all possible sources of information to promote their interest in environmental improvement, such as providing examples of existing programmes, practical suggestions for further actions and examples of action models.

To help National Societies in developing their own programmes, the working party suggested that a handbook on Red Cross involvement in environmental action could be prepared and distributed to National Societies to be used as resource material. This handbook, it was suggested, should be based on the working paper "Red cross for a Better Human Environment" which is being distributed with the present report.

Some participants supported the idea of a co-ordinated programme in the framework of a five-year plan of action to be initiated by the League. Others emphasized that if such action were considered feasible, it should concentrate on supplying information, focusing attention on certain selected areas of Worldwide significance, since priorities for action can only be decided upon at levels where the problems occur.

The working group agreed to continue giving every attention to the problem of environment as being of top priority for the Red Cross and to examine all possibilities for further action. In order to discuss the final presentation of the report to the Board of Governors and to the International Conference of the Red Cross, the working group agreed to hold a second meeting in Teheran, immediately before the session of the Board of Governors.

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