



XXVI^e
Conférence
Internationale de la
Croix-Rouge et du
Croissant-Rouge

XXVIth
International
Conference of the
Red Cross and
Red Crescent

XXVI
Conferencia
Internacional de
la Cruz Roja y de la
Media Luna Roja

42

INAUGURAL CEREMONY

**Statement by Mr Mario Villarroel Lander
President of the International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

President of the Swiss Confederation,
President of the Canton and Republic of Geneva,
Chairman of the Standing Commission,
President of the International Committee of the Red Cross,
Government representatives,
Dear friends of the Red Cross and Red Crescent,

I should like to join the Chairman of the Standing Commission in expressing my thanks and gratitude to the Swiss Confederation and the State Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva for their invaluable help in bringing the 26th International Conference to fruition.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was founded over 132 years ago, and its worldwide membership now stands at 131 million volunteers. Its activities have made it possible to save lives and to alleviate suffering.

Humanity is becoming more and more frequently entangled in situations of violence; instead of holding out a helping hand, human beings seem to be intent upon killing and destroying.

As Shimon Peres, Nobel Peace Prize winner, said, "Words are not enough to praise the efforts made by the International Federation since 1919 to mitigate the suffering of innocent people, holding out a hand across borders and overcoming natural and man-made obstacles to bring assistance to the weak and to those in distress".

In order to carry out its mission as defined in its Statutes, the Movement draws inspiration from its Fundamental Principles, and there are numerous examples of its action and commitment to the cause of those who suffer.

I should like to draw the attention of the government representatives present here today to the fact that, in each and every country, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies represent a committed and disinterested force for the alleviation of social problems.

The future is not bright; if the number of victims of natural and man-made disasters continues to increase at the present rate, the figures will reach astronomical heights in the 21st century.

Our strength lies in the devotion and enthusiasm of our volunteers. They are an example for us all, and we are fully aware that all our work bears the stamp of the potential for peace and solidarity which they represent. We must do everything within our power to attract and train more of them for the successful performance of the tasks with which we entrust them.

Thanks to the selflessness and dedication of men and women of vision inspired and motivated by Henry Dunant, citizen of Switzerland and of the world, we are able today in Geneva to face the challenges of the future with fortitude and hope.

The obstacles to be overcome in order to reach the objectives we have set for ourselves cannot be overemphasized, neither is it possible to quantify all the efforts that will be required to fulfil the mission we have undertaken in order to live up to the ideas of Henry Dunant, which form the very foundation of our worldwide Movement.

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is one of the world's major events on the humanitarian front. It forges links between States and the components of the Movement, namely, the National Societies, 169 of which have been recognized to date, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Conference's composition makes it an admirable forum for a **political dialogue** where humanitarian matters of common interest are discussed.

Allow me to recall the words of another Nobel Peace Prize winner, Yasser Arafat: "The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, by virtue of its humanitarian work, which is free of all discrimination, cannot but help bring about lasting peace, and this is what it has been doing for the good of all humanity".

As the 20th century draws to a close, I urge the participants in the 26th International Conference to do everything within their power to see to it that the Fundamental Principles of

the Movement are reinforced and that respect for human dignity and humanitarian values is enhanced, in order to strengthen our capacity to assist vulnerable groups throughout the world.

On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and on the occasion of the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, I should like publicly to express my gratitude to the some 130 million volunteers who devote themselves so selflessly to the performance of the Movement's fundamental task, which is to prevent and alleviate human suffering in all circumstances and to protect human life and health in times of armed conflict and in other emergency situations.

May the results of this Conference be commensurate with the efforts deployed.

Thank you very much.