

Message from M. Max Huber

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Annex II

MESSAGE FROM M. MAX HUBER

Honorary President
of the International Committee of the Red Cross
to the XVIIIth International Red Cross Conference¹

REFLECTIONS ON THE XVIIIth INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS CONFERENCE

The Conference has two main tasks before it. It has in the first place to revise the Statutes of the International Red Cross. It has also to consider the reports of the National Societies, and of the international organs of the Red Cross, on their activities.

Having myself had close knowledge of the great difficulties which were encountered at the time of the drafting of the first Statutes of the International Red Cross in 1928, I am of opinion that great prudence and care are essential in connection with any revision of these Statutes. The International Red Cross is based so very largely on a profound appreciation of different, and it may be divergent, interests. Such an organisation cannot do fruitful work except with the loyal and freely given assent of those who from day to day are engaged in the common effort. Without wishing to under estimate the importance of good organisation, I feel that this factor can never create or replace the spirit of free and frank co-operation.

An even more important task than the revision of the Statutes will be the consideration of what the national and international organisations of the Red Cross have accomplished or have attempted to accomplish, and of the objects they have attained or have failed to attain. Study of these efforts will be for each party a veritable examination of conscience, and will make it possible to bring to light the intangible principles which should guide us in our labours.

¹ See *Part III*, Chapter II, above, page 67.

This examination of conscience will be particularly necessary in view of the fact that we are living in a critical age, in which profound changes are taking place not only of a social, political or economic character, but also in ideological connections. There is a tendency today to call in question anything existent or traditional. It is perfectly natural that the Red Cross and the idea on which it is founded should also be affected by this tendency of the present age. It would be a great illusion to ignore it.

The difficulties encountered by the Diplomatic Conference of 1949 in its attempts to formulate, in a manner acceptable for all, the motive principles of the rules which it laid down show that the Red Cross world is not an ideological unit, and probably never has been. But on the other hand it is a pragmatistical unit. On the basis of different philosophical conceptions there is agreement as to what each is ready to do in connection with the Red Cross work, whether independently or by means of mutual or common effort. Of this the signature of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 is the proof.

Widely open as it is to all intellectual ideas, the Red Cross cannot however be satisfied with purely practical collaboration. If it is not to embark on divergent lines of development, and so become incapable of co-operating in time of war or other grave conflicts, it must profess certain common and immutable principles.

The first of these principles is its universality. The Red Cross must be opposed to any division of peoples into hostile groups or groups animated by mutual mistrust, and must itself remain faithful to its universal character.

Another principle which is perhaps even more closely bound up with the fundamental nature of the Red Cross is the principle of impartiality. Just as it accepts in its ranks any person desirous of doing service, so the Red Cross is always ready to assist within the limits of its mission any human being, whether friend or enemy, who is in need of assistance, without distinction of race, class, or political or religious opinion. In the last analysis the Red Cross knows Man only as Man—suffering, deserted or menaced Man.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, which cradled the Red Cross movement, will continue to proclaim and to champion without reservation or compromise of any kind the principles of universality and impartiality. It will do so without regard to the extent to which these principles may be called in question in a struggle of Powers or ideologies ; and it will do so, not only in words but in acts, for the Red Cross is above all a movement of action and not of mere rhetoric.

It counts for this purpose on the support of the States, which once again recognized its existence and the part it has to play when they signed the new Geneva Conventions. It counts also more especially

on the body of National Red Cross Societies, which in one way or another are in a position to assist it in its difficult and often ungrateful task.

The International Committee is ready to render account of its acts. It is ready to listen to any criticism which may be made on its activities. But its attitude would stiffen if its impartiality were questioned, particularly in Red Cross circles, for its very existence is bound up with its impartiality. It will remain firm at the post which history has entrusted to it. If it were to abandon that position as the result of disappointment, it would be disavowing the spirit of the Red Cross, so long as there is still a possibility of its acting in accordance with its conscience in favour of the victims of all conflicts.

The mission of the Red Cross is service and nothing less. Neither attacks nor thanks nor considerations of prestige can alter that in any way.

Max HUBER.