

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LEAGUE OF RED CROSS SOCIETIES

During the first fortnight of April 1919, at Cannes (France), was held a conference which had been convened by the National Red Cross Societies of the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan. It was attended by outstanding members of the medical profession, experts in hygiene and assistance and several leaders of the Red Cross. The instigator was Henry P. Davison, who was Chairman of the American Red Cross War Council during the First World War.¹

The Conference concluded with an appeal for constructive work as can be seen from the following extract :

“ We have carefully considered the general purpose of the Committee of Red Cross Societies, whereby it is proposed to utilize a central organization which shall stimulate and co-ordinate the voluntary efforts of the peoples of the world through their respective Red Cross Societies ; which shall assist in promoting the development of sound measures for public health and sanitation, the welfare of children and mothers, the education and training of nurses, the control of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, malaria, and other infectious and preventable diseases ; and which shall endeavor to spread the light of science and the warmth of human sympathy into every corner of the world and shall invoke on behalf of the broadest humanity not alone the results of science but the daily efforts of men and women of every country, every religion, and every race.

“ We believe that the plans now being developed should at the earliest practicable moment be put into effect and placed at the disposal of the world. In no way can this be done so effectively as through the agency

¹ *Plate.* — Participants in the Cannes Conference.

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of the Red Cross, hitherto largely representing a movement for ameliorating the conditions of war but now surrounded by a new sentiment and the wide support and confidence of the peoples of the world equipping it to promote effective measures for human betterment under conditions of peace.

"We are confident that this movement, assured as it is at the outset of the moral support of civilization, has in it great possibilities of adding immeasurably to the happiness and welfare of mankind".

Following the Cannes Conference and based on its conclusions, National Societies set up in Paris, on 5 May 1919, a "League of Red Cross Societies" which, for Henry P. Davison who was its Chairman, appeared as an instrument for the continuation and co-ordination of the immense efforts exerted, during four years of war, by the Red Cross Societies with the support of millions of voluntary workers in many countries.

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So, this year, the League is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. The official ceremony at its Geneva headquarters on 24 April 1969 was the beginning of the commemorative events which will culminate in September at Istanbul with the XXIst International Conference¹. The ceremony, with music, began at 10.30 a.m. when the Chairman of the League Board of Governors, Mr. José Barroso, welcomed all present, which included, apart from representatives of the Swiss Federal and Genevese authorities, leaders and delegates of many National Societies of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun from all continents, and of other international organizations as well as several heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Geneva. He greeted particularly the official delegations of the five founder Societies and the ICRC represented by its new president, Mr. Marcel A. Naville, and its honorary Vice-President, Mr. Jacques Chenevière, a member of the ICRC since 1919.

The grandson and great-grandson of Henry P. Davison had come from the USA to attend the ceremony, the festive air of which was heightened by the flowers which the city of Cannes had offered to the five hundred people present.

¹ Plate. — Addresses delivered by Mr. Barroso and Mr. Naville.

Mr. Barroso paid tribute to " these men who were our predecessors, who had faith, and who enabled us to make our federation what it is today ".

After drawing a parallel between the past and the present, he then gave the floor to speakers who had the pleasant task of conveying congratulations and good wishes to the institution of fifty years standing. We cannot quote them in full, but give extracts below. The full text of Mr. Marcel A. Naville's address is given, from which readers will perceive the warmth of the tribute from the sister institution which is at one with the League and rejoices in this jubilee anniversary so worthily celebrated.

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Mr. José Barroso, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies: . . . It is our responsibility to make a maximum contribution to building a strong and active Red Cross Society in each country, for this is the best guarantee that the fight against suffering will be carried on. We should not lose sight of the fact that a large number of countries have only recently gained their independence and that we have the moral obligation to help the young Societies of these new nations to become the equals of their elder sister Societies. We have the duty to leave to those coming after us well organised Societies in all countries of the world.

But we have another more important duty, namely to promote peace. If the work of the League, and specially that of the ICRC, has already made a considerable contribution in this respect, ever more must be done in the years to come. We are witnessing a marked increase of internal disturbances, agitation and revolt. The Red Cross also has a role to play in these circumstances where it must work with its most strict neutrality, but without allowing any impediment to its efforts. We can be proud of what some Societies have achieved in the past. But in this new phase, the Red Cross should be ever better understood and helped so that nothing can jeopardize its work of giving relief without discrimination While there is still time, let us reflect and make a solemn promise to fight not only for peace but against war. Let us remember the unforgettable words spoken by the founder of the Red Cross on the battlefield of Solferino and fight with all our strength so that those coming after us, those who will celebrate the first century of the

League's existence, will be able to do so with faith, joy and the feeling and profound conviction that truly "All are brothers".

Mr. Willy Spühler, Federal Counsellor, Head of the Federal Political Department: The anniversary celebrated today by the League of Red Cross Societies and which affords me this welcome opportunity of bringing you the good wishes of the Federal Council, marks a further milestone in the history of the world movement born more than a century ago of the thinking of Henry Dunant. This anniversary, which brings to mind the hopes arising on the morrow of the First World War also reminds us more specifically of the great desire felt at that time by the national Red Cross Societies: that of having the possibility to work in a peaceful world.

... If, on the one hand, your organisation's transfer to Switzerland took place under difficult circumstances: the unleashing of a new and tragic conflict and the giving up of a vast programme for further development; on the other hand it allowed the consolidation of the very essential unity of the Red Cross. On the occasion of the Centenary which was celebrated in 1963 the Swiss authorities had attached great importance to the furthering of a project intended to underline this unity by offering the Red Cross a meeting place where each of its institutions and each of its members could feel at home and quite close to the very sources of the Red Cross. I am referring to the Henry Dunant Institute, placed under the overall auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies, and the Swiss Red Cross. Today this Institute is self-sustaining and active in that spirit of mutual respect, of rendering services to one's neighbours, and of universal friendship which gives its full meaning to the Red Cross. But it has not yet found a definitive seat. The Federal Authorities hope that, thanks also to the generosity and understanding of the Genevese authorities, a satisfactory solution to this question will soon be found, and will gladden all those who love the Red Cross. We know that, today, millions of people of all the continents belong to the latter category and that youth, which is our hope for the future, is widely represented in that total. It is here, in this bright building in which we are gathered and which for ten years already has been sheltering the General Secretariat of the League that, from all over the world, the news flows together which gives the measure of the growth of your Federation and of the Societies, the humanitarian activities of which are so fruitful...



Cannes, April 1919: Participants in the International Medical Conference as a result of which the League of Red Cross Societies was created (*facing front in centre: Henry P. Davison*).



Mr. J. Barroso, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League...

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Photos Jean Zbinden

.. and Mr. M. A. Naville, President of the ICRC, delivering their addresses.



Mr. V. W. Guiccardi, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Organization: After expressing his own good wishes to the League, Mr. Guiccardi conveyed a message from U. Thant, U.N. Secretary-General, which concluded as follows:

... As a non-governmental organization, the League of Red Cross Societies is in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and with many United Nations Specialized Agencies. The close working relationship between the two institutions makes it possible for effective action to be taken at a moment's notice to provide emergency relief in time of natural disaster...

... The United Nations and the Red Cross have worked together on many joint programmes. Since 1966, for example, the League has helped to re-settle refugees in the Central African Republic in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner and some of the Specialized Agencies. Last year, it provided emergency relief for the victims of a severe cyclone in Burma in collaboration with the World Food Programme, the FAO, WHO and UNICEF, and later assisted the WHO in combating the threat of an epidemic.

In addition to such emergency measures, and there have been many, the League has shared the work of the United Nations in the developing countries, in the promotion of human rights, in the education of youth in co-operation with UNESCO, and in innumerable other activities.

This co-operation is based on common goals and aspirations — to promote world peace and international understanding, and to alleviate human suffering. May the next 50 years bring even closer co-operation and progress towards the fulfilment of these goals.

Mrs. Lise Girardin, Mayor of the City of Geneva: ... Henry Davison well understood the necessity of increasing the power of intervention and effectiveness of National Societies by co-ordinating their action.

If the League today commemorates the 50th anniversary of its foundation and if the Town of Cannes can congratulate itself on being its birthplace, Geneva has pleasure in celebrating the 30th anniversary of the League's installation within its walls and of conveying to it, with sincere gratitude for its past activities, best wishes for the future. The Cantonal and Municipal Authorities extend their thanks for having been associated with this twofold anniversary.

For over a half a century we have grown accustomed to seeing National Societies intervene whenever and wherever there was relief to be given, a service to be rendered following a natural disaster or a conflict; Samaritan instruction to be imparted, nursing to be done, refugees to be sheltered and pilgrims to be comforted; the spontaneous generosity of youth to be encouraged and directed.

And because it has become a habit it is perhaps less easy to note the daily devotion, the persevering goodwill, the courage, the constant attention to others which are all at the basis of the effectiveness of the action of the League.

It is a good thing that occasions such as this enable the public and also the private authorities to evoke the dozens of actions conducted in aid of some hundred countries which under the sign of the red cross on a white ground, have mitigated physical suffering or moral distress and given to the whole world remedies, comfort, support, and hope.

It is therefore appropriate to say to the League quite simply: Thank you.

Mr Henrik Beer, Secretary General of the League of Red Cross Societies: . . . The history of the League does not at all follow the traces of a normal development. It starts with a great "heroic" period. The League of Nations asked it to cope with a calamity which seemed more terrible than war itself: the ravages caused by hunger and misery in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In response to the League's appeal, medical commissions journeyed through the countries to lay the foundations of a public health programme.

Within the Secretariat, Bureaux were set up to fight against epidemics, give popular instruction in hygiene, nursing and relief. The Junior Red Cross was also launched.

In co-operation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, also associated with the League's foundation, actions were undertaken following earthquakes and famine.

When the first years of this rapid development were over it was realised that it would unfortunately not be possible to continue at this speed. Davison had died already in 1922, and the financial needs showed that it was dangerous to depend in the main on a single Society. That is why this first phase was followed by a period of consolidation.

The problem of the risk of internal conflicts within the International Red Cross was to be solved at the International Conference held in 1928 when, thanks in particular to the efforts of the unforgettable Professor Max Huber, the present structure of the International Red Cross, consisting of the International Committee of the Red Cross the League and National Societies, was officially laid down. The organic Principles which still govern our activities were also defined.

Then came the Second World War, which the League faced with some sixty members. Naturally the conflict changed the character of the work. Geneva again became its general headquarters after Paris. In 1940 the Joint Relief Commission was set up with the ICRC to ensure the distribution and transport of some 165,000 tons of goods valued at more than 300 million francs. During this period National Societies again made magnificent efforts on behalf of the war victims. The value of the funds they donated reached the figure of one thousand million Swiss francs.

1945—end of the war. It was again necessary for the League to strengthen the bonds between Societies. An important Conference at Oxford in 1946 launched modern activities such as the extension of mutual assistance, the humanisation of war, the relations between the League and the United Nations as well as between Societies and Governments. New services were created, in close liaison with the WHO, for the rehabilitation of invalids, and the mobilisation of the general public in the fight against tuberculosis—all this directed at other parts of the world than Europe. A new period started for the League. It was not as dramatic as the first, but more firmly based on National Societies...

...Relief activities remain of daily concern. Statistics show that in the last ten years an international appeal was launched by the League every three weeks.

There is also a category of disasters, which has political causes. Here also the League is called upon to intervene. Refugee movements have resulted in large-scale operations where the League has played a role in liaison with the ICRC, but also in a spirit of excellent co-operation as the operational partner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

These actions involve a new orientation in and a new definition of our work of emergency relief.

It should not be forgotten that the Red Cross is also being renewed in developed countries. The activities involved cover a

wide range of fields such as blood transfusion, first aid, Health in the Home courses, health education and ever increasing specialisation in welfare service for the elderly, the handicapped and the isolated in densely populated urban areas—and a constant adaptation to modern life. Here the League serves as a liaison and information agency.

With regard to the future, it is no longer possible to make a division in Red Cross prospects, between the ICRC, National Societies and the League. The International Red Cross is indivisible. It might be believed that the present time with its conflicts, brutality and disrespect for humanitarian values would be an unfavourable period for an unarmed organisation based only on humanity. However, it is just such conditions which require the Red Cross to make a special effort, often doomed to failure, but which must be repeated again until at last success is obtained. More than ever the difficult, chaotic and varying conditions of our world call for the co-operation of an organisation such as the Red Cross at the side of the United Nations. In this respect the Red Cross will in the future have still greater responsibility than in the past. It is preparing for this. We are awaiting with the keenest interest the XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross in Istanbul, in which all Governments parties to the Geneva Conventions will participate alongside Red Cross organisations.

But in the medical and social fields modern means of communication have in recent years also brought to light the reality of often terrible and difficult problems. From this it has emerged that there is a need for duly trained leaders who, though integrated within a national system, would retain complete freedom of action. The revolution in social and economic life involves consequences which should not only be followed but moulded in a humanitarian spirit. This is an enormous challenge for the Red Cross. Young National Societies in particular here have a very wide field of action . . .

The Red Cross has the obligation to keep young in spirit. Fifty per cent of the population of the world is under 21. It is among the elite of this youth that we want to find the leaders of the Red Cross of tomorrow and with them new solutions to the problems of our world. It is under the sign of the need for renewal that we have launched the theme of this year's World Red Cross Day: "In a changing world, Red Cross stands for tomorrow". Let us hope that these words do not merely remain a slogan but become a living reality.

Dr. M. G. Candau, Director General, World Health Organization:

...I am well aware that the public is impressed above all by the role played by the League of Red Cross Societies in catastrophes, for the response of the League to hundreds of appeals has in some cases been on a scale which will long remain in human memory. However, apart from this, the League has complied from the outset, in a perhaps less dramatic way, with the wishes of its founders by taking an effective part in positive health work. In the very same spirit as that which was to be summed up in the integral definition of health given by the WHO Constitution — health regarded as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing — the League has carried on unremitting medico-social activities. In every country the Red Cross is endeavouring to show what should be done to promote the maintenance and development of health and it fills the gaps existing in national health services by placing qualified volunteers at their disposal. Often the League and the national societies have acted as pioneers initiating pilot activities subsequently taken over by government or private bodies: I need mention only, by way of example, the part played by the Red Cross Societies in the creation of blood banks.

In all these activities, the League of Red Cross Societies and the World Health Organization, whose nearness also facilitates the necessary contacts, are co-operating so closely and so constantly that this silent collaboration is sometimes little known. The Jubilee of the League gives me a welcome opportunity of stressing the cordial and effective nature of that collaboration and at the same time of expressing my earnest wish that the part played by the League will continue to grow both in scope and in strength.

Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: ...It has often been said that there is nothing new under the sun. To judge by the afflictions and the suffering which the League even today still endeavours to mitigate, one must admit that the circumstances and the reasons which led to the creation of this humanitarian institution, whose influence extends today throughout the entire world, do not, unfortunately, prove an exception to this rule.

One of these, as we all know, is the existence of hundreds of thousands of uprooted human beings who are refugees. As a by-product of the afflictions and wars which unfortunately continue to break out in numerous parts of the world, the refugees are there as

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the symbols of a period of history fertile in changes. Some of these, to be sure, open into new and promising horizons, but others are accompanied by suffering which is, as it were, the ransom which humanity must pay for its slow march towards progress.

The close co-operation which exists today between the League and the High Commissioner's Office, both of which are oriented towards purely humanitarian goals, dates from the foundation of our Office...

... This constant and faithful co-operation which occupies such an important place in the humanitarian activities of my Office, is not, I would like to emphasize, solely due to the fact that the League in itself has 111 members. The numerous national societies are for us often irreplaceable partners on the spot and to them, as to the League itself, we express our keen and deep gratitude.

In a world where so many traditional concepts and values have been suddenly put into question one must, I believe, pay tribute to the League for having constantly maintained, without faltering, the ideals which 50 years ago inspired its creation and which are expressed in the motto "Per humanitatem ad pacem". It is because the League has preserved its vocation and has never waived from its purely humanitarian mission; it is because it has as its ultimate objective peace among men, that the League of Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies could, and can today, often under the most difficult circumstances, pursue its work so usefully. And it is the reason also why we in the High Commissioner's Office feel such a close kinship with it, and why I today address to it my warmest and most sincere anniversary wishes.

Mr. André Vouillon, Mayor of Cannes: ... What do we find at the origin of this powerful organisation of today? The emotions of pity and indignation, which from time to time move almost everybody and which more often than not give place to a comfortable return to indifference.

It however happens that one day a man who is more deeply and tragically affected by the spectacle of suffering than the others ceases to accept it passively. This is what Henri Dunant chose to do.

Awakening other consciences around him and approaching the cumbersome official organisations with a sufficiently tenacious conviction to be heard by them, he very quickly obtained — quicker even than he had dared to hope—the holding of the Geneva Conference which has remained famous in view of the importance and lasting character of the decisions taken.

For more than 100 years there have been ever more men and women in all latitudes prepared to pursue ever more effectively the work he started. The qualities and virtues underlying the choice of the task which they have decided to undertake always arouse respect and often admiration.

There is no doubt that they are guarantees for a continued certain progress towards ever happier tomorrows.

For my part, I express my sincere and warm gratitude to Mr. Barroso, Chairman of the League of Red Cross Societies, for his thoughtfulness and kindness in inviting me to take part in today's ceremony.

Thus for the second time a Mayor of Cannes will have been an attentive and enthusiastic witness of a memorable event in the splendid history of the Red Cross.

M. Marcel A. Naville, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross: The International Committee, the founder of the universal movement of the Red Cross throughout the world, today takes great pleasure in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the League. Founded by courageous and inspired men, who knew how to go in for "prospective" even before the science existed, the League of Red Cross Societies has affirmed its position in the course of this period as one of the most effective international relief organisations. This admirable result is due to the noble ideal and humanitarian feelings of its Governors, officers and staff. However, it is also in large part due to the personality of its Secretary General, Mr. Henrik Beer, who, always on duty, omnipresent, and well informed both on major world events and the smallest administrative details, gives a shining example of tireless, far-reaching activity which fills those who have the pleasure of coming into contact with him with admiration. Without doubt the man is in keeping with the Institution he directs: the League, through all the National Societies federated within it, is omnipresent, attentive to events, alive to the diversity of requests and needs and aware of the infinity of human suffering.

As is generally known, each National Society works primarily within the framework of its own country. From the outset it was certainly considered that, whilst maintaining their full independence and freedom to make decisions, National Societies should show their solidarity towards each other and, thus, through mutual assistance, contribute to development in general. This solidarity

did not, however, become effective until the foundation of the League facilitated and promoted its demonstration in a practical way. This mutual assistance has taken on considerable and ever growing importance. In recent years there have been many examples of the support given by sister Societies, as they are often called.

Solidarity does not stop there. The International Committee of the Red Cross, whose main mission is to intervene on behalf of victims of armed conflicts, has been able to cope with certain large-scale actions — during the last world war and in more recent circumstances — only by establishing close co-operation with the League. In 1951 an Agreement laid down the ways and means of this co-operation. In accord with National Societies, our two Institutions are now preparing for the signature of a new Agreement adapted to present circumstances which, by respecting the structure and spheres of competence of each of the two parties, confirms and consolidates the fundamental unity of the Red Cross movement in the world.

The world needs this unity. Faced with the inflamed nature of contemporary political problems, the intervention of supra-national organisations or mediating nations is not always possible and does not necessarily tend to be of direct benefit to conflict victims.

Non-governmental institutions should therefore be ready, when necessary, to take the initiative of relief actions by accepting in advance the responsibilities and obligations which such tasks involve.

The fury of armed confrontation, the irreconcilable attitude of adversaries, the ravages caused by violence and repression, the blood which flows and the misery which gains ground no longer permit the Red Cross to confine itself to its traditional activities.

We must realize that the world requires of us a new type of commitment. Our basic principles remain: for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the neutrality of its actions (and here it must be understood that the ICRC does not select the victims it assists on the basis of a certain order of preference); for the League, the universality of its influence and the solidarity of its members. However, these principles should today have a wider field of application. Perhaps it will be necessary to overcome certain hesitations, force certain doors, give proof of an inventive spirit and abandon certain aspects of conformity. I know that the League is prepared to make this effort. I hope it will succeed. If it does it will be assured of the gratitude of mankind.

Angela, Countess of Limerick, Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross: . . . Our goal in the League is clear. It is to create the maximum unity in the world through our policy of mutual aid in times of disaster or conflict, respecting the sovereignty of each nation and accepting that each National Society has a different contribution to make. This, in itself, must help in bringing about a better understanding between the peoples of the world for the results of common action are, in themselves, a force for Peace. We must never harp on the differences which divide us, but concentrate, rather, on the fundamental purposes and the traditions which unite us.

Tradition is a good guide, but a bad master, and we must always bear in mind that the progress of today will become the tradition of tomorrow. So a great responsibility rests on us to adapt old Services to meet new needs.

It's a challenge — but as that great Red Cross leader Max Huber said, many years ago: “ If the Red Cross faltered before the abyss which yawns between what it would like to do and what it can do, it would already have capitulated on the Battlefield of Solferino ”.

The world today needs vision — a reminder that man can achieve great things if he sets his target high and has the courage and perseverance to stick to it despite the temptations of expediency.

And so, in this Jubilee Year, may we, in the League, concentrate on the fact that it is not in the past that the true benefits of the Red Cross lie, but in the possibilities it has created for the future, in the new avenues it is prepared to open up in the fulfilment of its threefold charter — the promotion of health, the prevention of disease and the relief of suffering throughout the world.

The Red Cross is an investment in the future — an investment in human lives, in health, and in happiness in which we may well feel proud to have a share.