

THIRD PANAFRICAN CONFERENCE OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

(Mbabane, Swaziland, 28 September - 2 October 1992)

The Third Panafrikan Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was held in Mbabane, the capital of Swaziland, from 28 September to 2 October 1992. Jointly organized by the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Conference was attended by 130 delegates from African National Societies and donor National Societies in Europe, Asia and the Americas. The ICRC, invited as an observer, was represented by Mr. Claudio Caratsch, Vice-President; he led the delegation, which consisted of Mr. Jacques Forster, member of the Executive Board, Mr. Olivier Dürr, Head of the Division for Principles and Relations with the Movement, Mr. Edmond Corthésy, Deputy Delegate General for Africa, Mr. Henry Fournier, Regional Delegate to Harare, and Mr. Hassan Ba, from the Cooperation and Dissemination Division.

The Conference was convened to examine humanitarian requirements in Africa and draw up an agenda for African National Societies for the '90s, in the context of the Federation's Strategic Work Plan.

The opening ceremony was chaired by His Majesty King Mswati III, Patron of the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross. In his address he paid fervent tribute to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in their work to help the victims of natural and man-made disasters. Mr. Mario Villarroel Lander, President of the Federation, and Mr. Claudio Caratsch also gave keynote speeches.

The delegates then split up into three commissions dealing with development, relief and health. A working group was set up on international humanitarian law.

In concluding its work, the Conference mapped out an "African response" to the Federation's strategic goal for the 1990s and set a three-year time frame for its achievement. The response is essentially geared to identification of the most vulnerable groups of the population and their needs. To this end, the participants at the Conference undertook to step up their planning and activities in the fields of relief, development and health. The response will also rely heavily on increased self-sufficiency of National Societies, regional cooperation and the reinforcement of the Federation's delegations for its success.

Among the tasks set African Societies for the next three years are:

- the establishment of a national disaster preparedness plan and the upgrading of the training of relief personnel;
- the implementation of a comprehensive primary health care programme in at least one vulnerable community;
- the incorporation of AIDS-control activities into primary health care programmes;
- the upgrading of first-aid training;
- the preparation of national development plans and their accompanying framework for development cooperation; and the increased involvement of the most vulnerable groups — especially women and youth — in strengthening operational capacities.

The Conference noted that assistance to the victims of conflicts in Africa was often seriously impeded and called on National Societies to use their influence with governments to promote respect for international humanitarian law, whether by urging them to accede to the Additional Protocols or by highlighting the need to apply and ensure application of that law.

Concerned at the repeated violations of human rights in Somalia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Conference likewise called upon the international community and parties concerned to take measures to stop these violations, to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and to assist the victims.

The delegates lastly set up a Committee, to be chaired by the President of the Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross, Mr. M. T. Mthethwa, to monitor the follow-up to the Conference's decisions. The next Conference, in four years' time, will be hosted by the Uganda Red Cross.

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Following the Panafrican Conference, the Executive Council of the Federation met on 5 and 6 October under the chairmanship of Mr. Mario Villarreal Lander. In one of its key decisions, *Mr. George Weber*, Secretary General of the Canadian Red Cross, was selected as Acting Secretary General of the Federation. His name will accordingly be put forward by the Executive Council to the General Assembly when it appoints a Secretary General in October 1993. Until Mr. Weber takes up his post on 1 January 1993, Mr. Stephen Davey will continue to serve as Secretary General in charge.