

## **The European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' focus on migration at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Heike Spieker  
*German Red Cross*

On 14 to 19 April 2002 the VI<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of the European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies took place in Berlin, Germany. Regional Conferences are statutory conferences according to the Statutes of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. They are intended to increase participation of member societies in the discussion of matters pertaining to Federation policies and their implementation. An analysis of typical regional problems may result in regional strategies providing appropriate answers to such problems<sup>1</sup>. Thus, cooperation of National Societies in the regions is strengthened and exchange of experience among the Societies themselves as well as with other international organizations is promoted.

The VI<sup>th</sup> European Conference was hosted and organized by the German Red Cross. Around 350 participants from 51 delegations of National Societies were present, along with the International Federation Secretariat as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, some non-European National Societies<sup>2</sup> and representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organizations<sup>3</sup> as observers. The European National Societies included Societies from Western, Central and Eastern Europe<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Article 24 of the Statutes of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

<sup>2</sup> American Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, The Canadian Red Cross Society, Egyptian Red Crescent Society, Japanese Red Cross Society, New Zealand Red Cross, and the Philippine National Red Cross.

<sup>3</sup> CARE Germany, Council of Europe, German Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Global Network of People living with HIV/AIDS, Human Rights Watch, Medicine Faculty of the Humboldt University at Berlin, Malteser Auslandsdienst, and World Health Organization.

<sup>4</sup> Albanian Red Cross, Andorra Red Cross, Armenian Red Cross Society, Austrian Red Cross, Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan, Belarusian Red Cross, Belgian Red Cross, The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgarian Red Cross, Croatian Red Cross, Czech Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, Estonian Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, French Red Cross, Red Cross Society of Georgia, German Red Cross, British Red Cross, Hellenic Red Cross, Hungarian Red Cross,

The 2002 Berlin Conference succeeded the preceding V<sup>th</sup> European Regional Conference 1997 in Copenhagen and forms the catalyst of a process starting in Copenhagen and reaching to the VII<sup>th</sup> Conference in 2006 probably in Moscow and beyond. The 1997 Copenhagen Conference, hosted by the five Nordic National Societies (Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross), was characterized by the slogan “Action and Advocacy”. The main lessons to be learned from the Copenhagen Conference were the essential importance, first, of a participatory approach in the implementation of a Regional Conference and, second, of an agreement on a comprehensive follow-up mechanism for conference decisions. In order to render the event of a Regional Conference a meaningful one and to pave the way for an effective and efficient implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration<sup>5</sup> in particular and the decisions of a Regional Conference in general, it proved to be essential that all participants commit themselves to a concrete follow-up, both in terms of substance and in terms of procedure. In parallel, to have ideally all participating National Societies and institutions actively involved in the planning, preparation and conduct of a Regional Conference had been identified as a crucial prerequisite for the success of a statutory conference, and the Copenhagen–Berlin process proved the importance of participation to be the key principle.

The 2002 Berlin Conference learned from both lessons and paid tribute to both the participatory approach and the crucial role of a follow-up mechanism. The Monitoring Committee of the Copenhagen Conference was converted into the Planning Committee for the Berlin Conference which, together with the Steering Committee, took all substantial decisions on content and framework of the conference. These international bodies decided that the Berlin Conference should concentrate on two main themes, one being “Health” and the other being “Migration”. The reason for choosing these themes was that both form a substantial part of the daily work of all National Societies involved. Irrespective of their different national contexts and envi-

Icelandic Red Cross, Irish Red Cross Society, Italian Red Cross, Kazakh Red Crescent and Red Cross Society, Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan, Latvian Red Cross, Liechtenstein Red Cross, Lithuanian Red Cross, Luxembourg Red Cross, The Red Cross of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta Red Cross Society, Red Cross Society of the Republic of Moldova, Red Cross of Monaco, The Netherlands Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Polish Red Cross, Portuguese Red Cross, Romanian Red Cross, The Russian Red Cross Society, Red Cross of the Republic of San Marino, Slovak Red Cross, Slovenian Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross, Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, Turkish Red Crescent Society, Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan, Ukrainian Red Cross Society, Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan, and Yugoslav Red Cross.

<sup>5</sup> Final Document of the V<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 17–20 March 1997.

ronments, structures and core competences, all participating National Societies are active in the health sector – being one of four core areas of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies<sup>6</sup> – and all participating National Societies face remarkable challenges with regard to the issue of migration. In implementing a participatory approach, the planning committee identified the two National Societies of Switzerland<sup>7</sup> and Russia as having a specific, yet comprehensive interest in migration-related questions and problems and assigned them as the lead chairs for the main theme “migration”. This comprehensive theme was sub-divided into four sub-themes, namely “Operational Guidance”, “Tracing and Family Reunification”, “Racism and Xenophobia Within an Integration and Repatriation Context” and “Migrant Health”.

Each one of the four sub-themes on migration was assigned to one Working Group, and eight different National Societies undertook to act as chairs of the working groups or co-chairs respectively. Through these functions as chairs and co-chairs the working group process was initiated, promoted and maintained. It had started roughly two years before the conference and culminated in “eight conferences within the conference”<sup>8</sup> in April 2002. Working group chairs and co-chairs were the “masters” of the sub-themes and were genuinely responsible for content and programme of the sub-themes to be elaborated. The German Red Cross on the contrary had the task to assure a sufficient consistency and substance of the sub-thematic programmes. This conference design rendered it possible to activate 48 out of 51 participating National Societies already one year before the conference and to make them actively involved in the elaboration in particular of the substance of the sub-themes.

The main theme “Migration” is of remarkable relevance in the present-day European context. Extent and complexity of migration put it beyond the capacity of a single organization or government to act. Due to this multi-faceted character of the problem a great variety of important actors is engaged in the field. Along with a whole range of non-governmental organizations it is especially the international organizations playing prominent roles in strategies to cope with the different aspects of migration – in particular the United Na-

<sup>6</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Strategy 2010, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> See the introductory presentation of the Swiss Red Cross at the VI<sup>th</sup> European Regional Conference by Hans-Beat Moser, published in this issue, pp. 23–29.

<sup>8</sup> Two out of five conference days were assigned to the eight independent working group programmes.

<sup>9</sup> For the four sub-themes on “migration” these were: Operational Guidance, Tracing and Family Reunification, Racism and Xenophobia within an Integration and Repatriation Context, as well as Migrant Health.

tions and their specialized agencies, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Organization for Migration. These actors pursue different approaches from their respective focal points, geographical coverage and variety of membership. However, from a more holistic perspective they come close to a comprehensive approach and have been invited to the Berlin Conference for this reason. The organizers of the conference owe the representatives of these organizations and institutions not only meaningful introductions to the specific angles and points of interests of their institutions, but a nearly comprehensive picture of the manifold facets and challenges – challenges for the various actors, including in particular the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

It is especially in the area of migration issues that National Societies from the different parts of Europe and Central Asia may be confronted with differing problems and challenges where they may fulfil differing functions within their domestic environments. International migration is neither a new phenomenon, nor is it in itself a crisis. Nevertheless, it currently occurs within a framework and under conditions which expose many international migrants to deception, exploitation, vulnerability, discrimination, and xenophobia, resulting from social and other conditions which cause migration, the manner in which migration flows are managed, and the situation of the migrant in the receiving country. In particular the problem of illegal migrants, i.e. migrants without a recognized status as, for example, refugees or asylum seekers, is not exclusively relevant for National Societies in Germany or in Western Europe in general, but is also relevant for National Societies in Central and Eastern European States affected by the channels of smuggling and trafficking migrants. The Red Cross and Red Crescent already assists and protects migrants, among them so-called illegal migrants of whom there are an estimated three million in Western Europe, and 20 to 40 million worldwide. From the supply of cheap labour to human trafficking, it is today a global business estimated to generate up to 7 billion Dollars annually – an industry with a higher turnover than the narcotics trade.

Due to a variety of reasons including a considerable lack of social and economic opportunities in the home country and the perception of opportunity in the receiving country, the trigger factors for contemporary mass influx of migrants are to a lower extent political repression or the effects of armed hostilities – reasons which would entail a more detailed protection under international law –, but more the economic situation in the countries of origin of migrants. Such migrants generally are not provided with a legally protected status, and because of their illegal status in a host country are widely deprived of possibilities to effectively claim and efficiently enforce their –

often basic – human, economic and social rights. Based on the seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in particular on the principle of humanity, it is the Red Cross' and Red Crescent's most genuine task to protect the most vulnerable and to alleviate their suffering.

Migrant needs have occupied National Societies for more than a decade. How they have responded has depended on resources and domestic situations but today, with migration becoming an increasingly critical issue, common strategies and policies are needed. It is in this sense that the VI<sup>th</sup> European Regional Conference reiterated the principle that assistance to and protection of especially illegal migrants are provided on the basis of need alone. It is explicitly not the aim and purpose of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to interfere with or to undermine a government's national legislation. The Red Cross and Red Crescent will assist migrants of whatever status within the existing legal systems – on the basis of their needs alone. Concerns and activities of National Societies and the International Federation are complementary to governmental measures – based on the principle of humanity and thus based on their actual mandate.

It is especially this context which renders the final documents of the 2002 Berlin Conference valuable. They do not – only – constitute the concluding documents of a Regional Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, but they demonstrate which questions and problems European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have to face, which ones are of particular relevance for their daily work and for their contribution to civil society, and, last but not least, which efforts they actively undertake in the area of migration<sup>10</sup>. The final documents consist of a framework resolution, the "Berlin Charter", two Plans of Action – one on "Health and Care in the Communities" and one on "Migration" – and a commitment on the follow-up both on the institutional implications of the Conference as well as in particular on the substance on the main theme "Migration".<sup>11</sup>

The Resolution of the VI<sup>th</sup> European Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference explicitly acknowledges the unique contribution of the working group process to the success of the conference. It further emphasizes the need for an effective implementation of commitments made, in particular the Plans of Action, and requests participants of the conference to present a report on such implementation to the following conference. The following Berlin Charter reiterates the crucial importance of an effective follow-up and participants of the conference pledge themselves to practical action with a view to developing and implementing their respective programmes according to the Plans of

<sup>10</sup> Commitments in the area of health are neglected in the present introduction.

<sup>11</sup> The Berlin Charter and the Plan of Action on migration are published in this issue, pp. 215–226.

Action of the conference, to working together and seeking partnerships with governments as well as with national and international organizations, civil society and the private sector. In order to ensure the basis for such effective follow-up participants commit themselves to intensify their own efforts to build and develop national and operational capacity. Existing capacities shall be fully utilized and National Societies' actions responsive and focused.

The centre piece of the Berlin Charter is the advocacy message, i.e. advocacy for the needs of those whom migration has placed in special jeopardy. Without interfering into any political discussion on domestic immigration policies one has to state that the migrant influx is increasing and that, irrespective of her legal status, the mere fact of migration renders any individual specifically vulnerable. In this situation every individual is entitled to enjoy basic human rights in accordance with international law. The Red Cross and Red Crescent is determined to advocate the granting of these basic human rights and to advocate the creation of efficient opportunities to implement such rights. The participants pledge themselves to use the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's unique relationship with governments and civil society to act on behalf of migrants, regardless of their legal status.

Both Plans of Action, on "Health and Care in the Communities" and on "Migration", give evidence of and constitute the basis for such advocacy. The Plan of Action on Migration addresses a range of vulnerabilities stemming from the movement of people across borders. Its focus is, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles, on the most vulnerable and those in the greatest and most urgent need of protection and assistance among those international migrants who cannot avail themselves, or for whatever reason choose not to, of the provisions of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. In order to enhance such protection and assistance the European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies pledge to take action internally and externally, through its service delivery and advocacy, to ameliorate the conditions faced by international migrants and those made vulnerable by migration at all stages of the migration process.

In the context of the sub-theme "Operational Guidance", the participants of the conference emphasized that extent and complexity of migration put it beyond the capacity of a single organization or government to handle. Therefore National Societies in countries of origin, transit and destination will improve their cooperation among themselves and with peer organizations. In order to improve especially the protection of illegal migrants, participants commit themselves to provide information, including legal advice and counselling, take action against all forms of exploitation and deception and develop innovative delivery mechanisms. They further committed themselves

to respond to humanitarian needs, to provide tracing services and to generally assist migrants in exercising their basic rights. Concluding commitments in terms of advocacy are quite detailed and extensive.

Concluding the sub-theme "Migrant Health", the participants of the conference proposed an overall strategy for health and migration. The third and last level of this suggested strategy addresses four areas: attention to primary health, attention to specific pre- and post-migration diseases and new pathologies such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV/Aids and leishmaniasis, reproductive health and gender issues as well as medical attention and inter-cultural competence.

In the context of the sub-theme "Racism and Xenophobia", the European Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies will take firm, persistent and direct action to combat racism and xenophobia by a whole range of measures. These include promoting tolerance and respect within the National Societies and other components of the movement, capturing, building and sharing expertise, knowledge and best practices on fighting racism, xenophobia and related discrimination, in particular by cooperation with international organisations, governments and NGOs, and advocating for and participating in the implementation and the safeguarding of national and international human rights and anti-racist legislation and policies.

The sub-theme "Tracing and Family Reunification" finally reiterated the approaches taken up to now and re-emphasised that European National Societies must respond to the psychological impact on people without news from their relatives and families. They will therefore give attention to psychological needs in their training programmes for tracing staff and volunteers, as well as in the design and delivery of services.

Finally, the follow-up process calls for facilitating a monitoring and reporting mechanism for the implementation of the decisions of the conference and to mobilize resources for the implementation of these decisions. Emphasis is laid on the importance of ensuring that the outcome of the conference is transmitted to relevant international forums where decisions of importance to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement are made, as well as to relevant partners among United Nations agencies, regional and sub-regional organizations, and others. Furthermore National Societies should be guided in bringing the outcome of the Conference to the notice of their respective governments.