

In Mexico

World Meeting on Voluntary Service

The First World Meeting of Red Cross Volunteers, organized by the Mexican Red Cross in collaboration with the League of Red Cross Societies and the Henry Dunant Institute, was held in Mexico from 7 to 12 March 1983. It was attended by representatives of thirty National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, of 16 provincial sections of the Mexican Red Cross, of the League (including Mr. Enrique de la Mata, President; Mr. Ricardo Bermudez, delegate general; Miss Monique Esnard, technical adviser, Social Welfare Service), of the ICRC (Mr. Rudolf Jäckli, member of the International Committee) and of the Henry Dunant Institute (Mr. J. Meurant, Director).

Many National Societies of the Americas were represented and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of faraway countries such as China, Ethiopia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, the Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, the Principality of Monaco, etc., also sent delegations.

The opening ceremony on 7 March took place in the presence of Doña Paloma Cordero de la Madrid, the wife of the President of the Republic of Mexico and Honorary President of the Mexican Red Cross. Speeches were delivered by Mr. José Barroso Chávez, President of the Mexican Red Cross and former Chairman of the League, Mr. Ricardo Bermudez, representing the League, and Mr. Jacques Meurant, Director of the Henry Dunant Institute.

A very broad subject had rightly been chosen for this first world meeting, namely an appraisal of voluntary service in the Red Cross. There were two subdivisions to the discussion: 1. To examine the situation of Red Cross voluntary service in the world; 2. To propose ways and means of fostering the motivation and participation of voluntary workers in the Red Cross and improving their efficiency.

A series of lectures were given on these subjects, all followed by discussions.

The first speaker was Mr. David Turner, Executive Secretary of the Centre of Voluntary Supporters of the Mexican Red Cross, who gave an account of the "Development of voluntary service in Mexico". Following this lecture, representatives of the National Societies of Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Spain, the United States, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Lebanon, Mexico and the Republic of Korea presented reports, written reviews or films on voluntary work in their respective countries.

The President of the League, Mr. E. de la Mata, then gave a talk entitled "Importance of voluntary service in the present-day world", and Mr. Jacques Meurant, Director of the Henry Dunant Institute, spoke more specifically about "Red Cross voluntary service in the world today".

The work of the meeting was concluded by two more technical and more practical accounts: Miss Monique Esnard (League) spoke about the "Role of the League in Red Cross voluntary service", and Dr. Mario Espinoza Vergara (Chile) analysed the "Theory and practice of voluntary service". Then Mr. Rudolf Jäckli (ICRC) gave a speech in which he recounted his experience with the Red Cross and its voluntary workers.

After all these various lectures, the participants, divided into working groups, examined several subjects relating to the various aspects of voluntary service and approved the conclusions reached by the meeting.

Respect for the fundamental principles of the Red Cross was reaffirmed in these conclusions, which likewise stressed the importance of motivation for voluntary workers, their training and the need for increased participation at every level of voluntary service.

All the participants thanked the Mexican Red Cross for organizing this world meeting on a difficult subject of paramount importance for the entire Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.