

IN THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT WORLD

Death of Mr. Henrik Beer

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is in mourning. Henrik Beer, former Secretary General of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, died in Geneva on 24 May at the age of seventy-one.

Of Swedish nationality, Henrik Beer was born in 1915 in Stockholm and went to university there. He came into contact with the Red Cross during the Second World War, when he was responsible for co-ordinating Swedish relief work for war victims. In 1947 he became Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross and in 1960 was elected Secretary General of the League of Red Cross Societies, a post which he held until he retired in 1981. In the same year he was appointed Honorary Secretary General and in 1982 he was made an honorary citizen of the Republic and Canton of Geneva.

After his retirement, Henrik Beer devoted himself to humanitarian and ecological issues. He was adviser to Dr. Mostofa K. Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, and to Mr. Maurice Strong, at that time Director of the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa.

In 1983 he became a member of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, which was established and jointly chaired by the Crown Prince of Jordan and Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, and participated actively in its work.

It is an understatement to say that Henrik Beer identified himself with the destiny of the League, for under his sure guidance the Federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies expanded in an unprecedented manner. The League's membership rose from 86 to 126 National Societies, and the number of adult and junior members throughout the world increased from 157 million to 230 million.

True to the Movement's principle of universality, he promoted mutual assistance by National Societies in aid for the victims of natural disasters and to help less developed Societies.

In brief, Henrik Beer imbued the work of the League with a universal dimension through his dynamic approach, his courage and influence, whilst being largely instrumental in making National Societies truly “Sister Societies”.

The ICRC always appreciated the relationship of confidence and trust which it enjoyed for more than twenty years with Henrik Beer and his secretariat. That active co-operation, enhanced by personal contacts, was particularly fruitful when drafting in the 1950s the new Statutes of the International Red Cross and the Agreements between the ICRC and the League and when undertaking large-scale relief work.

Those members and staff of the ICRC who knew Henrik Beer well will always remember him as a valued friend, with affection, esteem and gratitude for his great service to humanity.

Representatives of the international community in Geneva joined ICRC officials, the Genevese authorities and League staff, in St Peter’s Cathedral on 2 June, to pay a last homage to Henrik Beer. A gathering of over 200 heard tributes to his inspirational leadership and international repute in humanitarian services from Jean Pictet, on behalf of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, M’hamed Yssafi, UNDRRO Coordinator, on behalf of the international organisations, Börje Wallberg, President of the Swedish Red Cross, and Hans Høegh, League Secretary General.

