

**8<sup>th</sup> European Regional Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference  
Vienna, 13-16 April, 2010**

**Opening Address**

**Dr Massimo Barra  
Chairman**

**Standing Commission of Red Cross and Red Crescent**

I thank the Austrian Red Cross and the organisers for the invitation and the opportunity to be with you at this European Regional Conference with representatives of National Societies from our wide and diverse region with its equally varying and unique identity and history. The proud history of Vienna and this historic city, combined with the excellent organisation by our Host Society, is a befitting setting for this important Conference.

At the last International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, where the Movement meets with its most important partners – the Governments – we achieved something historic: States accepted the role of National Societies as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

This is a forceful mechanism. The well-known history and proven track record of the Red Cross / Red Crescent has given us status and credibility, which in turn have given us access to inform and influence governments and their policies. We are present all over the globe, in every community; we are truly community based. We practise the principle ‘think globally – act locally’. Our network of millions of members and volunteers – the core in our Movement – help create awareness about the realities on the ground, where they work with people facing hardships and calamities affecting their every-day lives.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is respected world-wide; we enjoy an image of being ‘the common good’. Our volunteers, members and supporters are committed to humanitarian values and principles, from the smallest distant villages to the biggest cities and metropolis. Our greatest strength is, and will always be, that we are *present*; we are on the spot, all around the world, in every community, prepared and ready to act when something happens. That is a force our Governments cannot afford to neglect.

The chosen themes – *Ageing in Europe* and *Multicultural interaction in the face of increasing migration* are challenges in the wider spectrum of developing the European Civil Society and timely considering the vision and the objectives set in the newly adopted Federation’s Strategy 2020.

Europe is old. It is today the oldest world region. Not only is Europe old but its share of the global population is steadily declining – from some 25% at the beginning of the 20th century to an estimated 7% in 2050.

Demographic changes in combination with economic downturns and changing societal structures lead to significant in-country imbalances as the aged are being left alone in areas, which the young have deserted in search for better futures. Moreover, traditions and values, such as caring for the elderly as a family

responsibility, are breaking down. In an increasing vacuum of social services, the end-result can be depressing loneliness and an atmosphere of abandonment.

One aim in the new Strategy 2020 is promoting social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace – both relevant and important in view of the themes of this Conference.

Ageing is not a negative development!

While we must ensure that vulnerable older people get the services they need, let's not forget that they are an important resource in society, especially for the Red Cross and Red Crescent. We can only benefit from their valuable experiences and skills. Active ageing means inclusion of the elderly as equals, side by side with other volunteers for maximum benefits.

The same holds true for Migrants, who are another resource for the Red Cross/Red Crescent. Multicultural interaction by definition implies and expects respect for diversity. Inclusion of the elderly and of migrants means not only tolerating differences but accepting, respecting and celebrating those differences.

Participants at this Conference are decision makers, indirectly or directly. Speeches help analyse problems, solutions need concrete action. As with everything, change begins at home, in each National Society, in each local branch.

This conference can show Europe that the Red Cross/Red Crescent can and will open up for new members and volunteers and develop innovative ways and approaches to walk our talk in tune with our principles.

Thank you.