

in time of conflict. The Geneva Conventions are the international treaties sponsored by the Red Cross which set forth rules for the treatment of wounded combatants, prisoners of war and enemy civilians. The body of international law known as the Geneva Conventions provides the foundation of the International Red Cross and is responsible for the participation of governments in the Conference of the otherwise voluntary and non-official humanitarian movement. The League of Red Cross Societies is a federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which seeks to promote Red Cross activities in peacetime by developing public health and welfare programmes in the international and national field. Another agency of the International Red Cross which in theory is not represented at international conferences was active behind the scenes in New Delhi. This was the Standing Commission, which represents the authority of the Conference between its meetings and has the responsibility of organizing the international assemblages.

Commissions Active

The dates of the Conference were October 28, 1957 to November 7, 1957 inclusive. The Conference was preceded by meetings of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies and other Red Cross agencies which began October 24. Plenary sessions of the Conference were held on October 28, October 29 (a special plenary session), November 5, November 6 and November 7. The main work of the Conference was done on October 29, 30, 31, November 1 and November 2 at meetings of three Commissions which were established at the opening plenary sessions—the Humanitarian Law Commission, the Medical-Social Commission and the General Commission. The interest of government delegations was concentrated on proceedings in the Humanitarian Law Commission, which dealt with controversial issues involving ideological differences. The technical aspects of Red Cross were dealt with in the other two Commissions. Proceedings in both the Medical-Social and General Commissions were harmonious and productive. The day-to-day achievements and problems of the International Red Cross passed in review in the two Commissions and with minor exceptions recommendations concerning future activities were adopted unanimously. Among the Red Cross activities discussed in the two Commissions were first aid nursing, transfusion services, international relief arrangements, financing, education and public information, and relationships between National Red Cross Societies and their respective governments.

The Conference had been scheduled originally for the early months of 1957. Its postponement was caused by the difficulties that arose in the Middle East in connection with the Suez Canal. A number of aspects of the Conference gave it special interest for both the Canadian Red Cross Society and the Canadian Government. The Canadian Red Cross Society, which traditionally displays a keen interest in international aspects of the Red Cross, had been host to the XVIIIth Conference held in Toronto in 1952.* Much of the work done at the 1952 Conference was expected to (and ultimately did) bear fruit at the XIXth Conference. Moreover the theme of the Conference, the protection of civilian populations in wartime; the locale in a commonwealth country; and the particularly friendly relationships established through the year between Red Cross workers in India and Canada, all combined to accentuate the interest of both Canadian delegations.

*Vide: External Affairs Vol. 4, No. 9, September 1952, Pages 298 - 303.