

# International Red Cross Conference

By Paul Malone

*Member of the Canadian Government Delegation*

The closing moments of the XIXth Conference of the International Red Cross held recently in New Delhi, which were marked by withdrawals by delegations representing seventeen countries, understandably may have overshadowed in the public eye other events and proceedings at the Conference.

As a traditional symbol of the brotherhood of man, the International Red Cross depends on its universality for its effectiveness in relieving misery and suffering throughout the world. A sharp division on ideological lines at the quadrennial conference in New Delhi therefore suggested an alarming deterioration in the structural foundations of the world-wide humanitarian movement. A view of the Conference proceedings in retrospect, however, encourages a belief that developments during the Conference's final hour will not prove as serious for the Red Cross as appeared likely at the time and gives reason for the hope that the finalé will prove to have been an incident in an otherwise unusually harmonious Conference. This optimistic estimate in retrospect is supported by the fact that delegations at the Conference agreed unanimously to place at the end of the agenda the one item—the question of Chinese representation—which threatened to and ultimately did disrupt proceedings. A number of other contentious political issues were disposed of with compromise formulae which were accepted with unanimity or near unanimity. All the main business of the Conference, therefore, including that directly affecting the strengthening and expansion of the Red Cross movement on a world-wide basis, was completed before the widely-publicized walk-outs occurred. Less publicized than the walk-outs but probably more significant for the future was the introduction at the Conference of government and Red Cross Society delegations from fourteen nations (several of them recently formed in Africa and Asia) which had not been represented at previous Conferences.

## Most Representative Conference

The Red Cross Conference in New Delhi was the most representative international assemblage convened in Asia. Indeed, with its inclusion of delegations from the divided countries of the world—Germany, Korea and Vietnam—and with most countries of the world represented by both official and non-official delegations, it could perhaps lay claim to being the most representative international conference ever assembled. Eighty-three countries were represented by delegations from seventy-three International Red Cross Societies and seventy-two governments. Eighteen international organizations and sixteen Indian national organizations were represented by observers. Also present, as representatives of integral parts of the structure of the International Red Cross, were delegations from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies. The International Committee is the autonomous and neutral group composed of Swiss citizens who act as the custodians of the Geneva Conventions and the Red Cross Emblem and who function as a recognized neutral intermediary between belligerent powers