

Notes from the 10th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

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Summary

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is the only event that brings together delegations both from all of the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions (the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the National Societies) and from States parties to the Geneva Conventions. At the same time it provides a non-political forum for dialogue on issues of common interest. In 1921 the 10th International Conference was held in Geneva. Relations amongst the Societies, international relief operations and the experiences gained during the war were the main topics held. Several reports and suggestions prepared by seven sub-committees were presented. The most important feature of the 10th Conference is that it gave a mandate to the National Societies and to the ICRC to assist victims of civil war and internal disturbances. A committee of four people had represented Turkey, and a member of the committee, Besim Omer Akalin had written down notes about the important points and framework of conference, and his expressions and thoughts. This study is aimed to present an important conference in the history of all Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions via the published notes of Besim Omer Akalin.

Keywords: Voluntary health agencies, Red Cross, war, congresses

A BRIEF HISTORY

The decisive clash of the war of Italian unification in 1859, the Solferino battle, and the suffering of the wounded left without care was the inspiration for the founding of the Red Cross. The period between 1863 and 1914 saw the vision of Henry Dunant become reality, through the increasingly operational role played by the Committee and through the creation of national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies [1]. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's mission is defined as "to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies, to work for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of health and social welfare"[2]. In other words, this implies mobilizing the resources of civil society to come to the assistance of victims of war and to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people worldwide. National Red

Cross and Red Crescent Societies must maintain close relations with their governments in order to ensure that their humanitarian services are accepted.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), on the other hand, was established as a separate organization in 1919. It is mainly working in disaster situations on international level with close cooperation with national societies.

10th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of the RED CROSS and RED CRESCENT

This mission that defined above explains the role of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It is the only event that brings together delegations both from all of the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions (the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the Nati-

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onal Societies) and from States parties to the Geneva Conventions. At the same time it provides a non-political forum for dialogue on issues of common interest [3].



Figure 1. Dr. Besim Ömer Paşa (Akalın)

In 1921 the 10th International Conference was held in Geneva. Although Red Cross societies had accomplished many missions and have been serving for over a half century, they had faced to a difficult task during the First World War, and had come together in Geneva in order to make negotiations about the umbrella organization which was gaining importance day by day. Representatives of various countries such as Turkey, Austria, Poland, Italy, Netherlands, China, Argentina, and Bulgaria had spoke out. A committee of four people which were determined by the executive board of the Turkish Red Crescent Society, namely Besim Ömer Paşa, Akil Muhtar, Ahmed İhsan Bey and Ziya Bey, had represented Turkey. A member of the committee, Besim Ömer Akalın, had written down notes about the important points and framework of Conference, and his expressions and thoughts. These notes that were written in Arabic script was published as a book [4]. This study is aimed to present an important conference in the history of all Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions via the published notes of Besim Ömer Akalın.

During the nine days of the Conference, member societies had found opportunities to communicate and know each other better. In general assembly meeting, seven committees have been established for negotiating reports that were sent by Red Cross and Red Crescent societies about various topics:

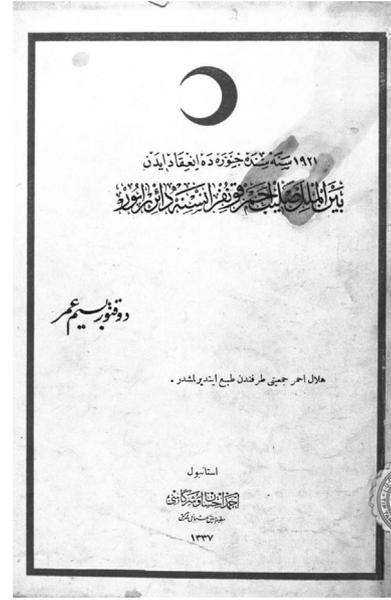


Figure 2. The book written by Besim Omer Pasa

1. Changing the Geneva Convention

The first commission was given an important task; changing the Geneva Convention dated 1914. It was stated that the article about the psinoners of war in the Convention was lacking, and that the report which was presented in the Assembly by International Committe of Red Cross was supportive enough for this fact. Commission members were Germany, Bulgaria, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Serbia, and Turkey.

2. Regulations about prisoners of war

The second commission had proposed an agreement, as an addition to the Lahey Agreement dated 1907, which was about the transfer of prisoners of war during the conflicts. The painful and harsh lessons learnt during the war time was showing the importance of the work of this commission. The proposition was negotiated at the General Assembly, but a consensus could not be achieved. Commission members were Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia, and Turkey.

3. Civil wars and Red Cross

The third commission had negotiated the issue about civil wars which was held and unagreed in the 9th Conference in Washington, 1912. This topic is very im-

portant regarding the measures which would be applied in a country by Red Cross. Commission members were Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia, and Turkey.

4. Red Cross's relationship with the national societies, charity foundations, and governments

The issues had been discussed in the fourth, fifth and sixth commission's sessions were the directions for the Red Cross societies rather than recommendations for governments.



Figure 3. Turkish section in the 10th International Conference.

The fourth commission had written down its work in the form of two separate reports. In the first report, to establish the Red Cross societies in every country as charity foundations with immunity was encouraged, and governments were called to help the desperate patients in need. The aim of the commission was to establish a purely humanitarian center for Red Cross by entirely positioning itself out of the political, economical and societal problems. The second report was about the relationships between the Red Cross societies. The most important issue in the report was the relationship between a society which would like to establish a branch in a different country and the national society of that country. Connectedly, as another feature of this report, the name of the Turkish Red

Crescent Society was mentioned for the first time in the Conference minutes. Commission members were Poland, Scandinavia, and Turkey.

5. International Committee of Red Cross

The fifth commission, which had included numerous presidents of the national societies, was in charge of consideration of the organization of the International Committee of Red Cross, and examination of the reports sent by various institutions to the Conference. In one of the reports, there was a proposal to change the organizational structure of International Committee of Red Cross. By taking into consideration of its working style that was conscientious, and independent from politics for nearly a half century, it was decided that the International Committee which was trusted by the 43 national societies with its compassionate and just approach should go on its activities with the current structure.

6. The missions of the organization

The essential need for training skilled caregivers had been discussed in the sixth commission. Also the need for medical supplies had become an issue. Commission members were Germany, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Italy, Denmark, and Sweden.

7. Violence of war

The report presented by the seventh commission is about the Lahey Agreement dated 1907. This commission had tried to humanize the form of conflicts by recommending regulations about the children, elders and patients in wars.

OTHER RESOLUTIONS of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY

After the reports written down by the commissions had been presented and negotiated by the Assembly, some of the delegates had commented on the various topics. The importance of the need for an international regulation about prisoners of war was especially emphasized by numerous delegates.

The General Assembly had encouraged the national societies for struggling with the public health problems and protecting the children.

One of the most important decision of this Conference was about the guidance of activities of Red Cross in peace time. It was stated that Red Cross had adopted the principle of serving humanity in every time and place, and that serving compassionately and without discrimination in every situation would be helpful to obtain the trust and sympathy of people. The Assembly had given a mandate to the national societies and to the International Committee to assist victims of civil war and internal disturbances [3].

The Assembly had recommended to governments for establishing a common regulation about prisoners of war (PoW) and refugees as soon as possible. The main principles were stated as below:

- The right to capture somebody as PoW is valid only in war time.
- Only the soldiers actively make war or the ones who will be recruited in the army in one year could be captured as PoW by considering the Geneva Convention dated 1916.
- To capture the civilians as hostages is forbidden.
- The state which capture PoW is responsible to protect them and their honour.
- The PoW benefits from that state's laws. He is responsible to comply legal regulations as well.
- The race, nationality and religion of PoW should not be the reason for discrimination.
- The captivity period cannot be longer than two years for healthy prisoners. After two years, the sending back process would begin starting from the oldest PoW.

Conclusion

In 1921, the 10th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent was held in Geneva. As a conclusion, it could be said that relations amongst the societies, international relief operations and the experiences gained during the war were the main topics held in the Conference. Several reports prepared by seven sub-committees were presented to the General Assembly. The most important feature of the 10th Conference is that it gave a mandate to the National Societies and to the ICRC to assist victims of civil war and internal disturbances. Also, a draft regulation about the prisoners of war has been issued.

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