

Welcoming address

By N. W. Buckley

Chairman, Australian Red Cross Society

As Chairman of the Australian Red Cross Society, I extend a very warm welcome to our friends who have come from so wide a range of differing cultures, languages and religious beliefs and who have come together to consider the important issue of the "Protection of the Human Being in Armed Conflicts". This subject is of vital concern to the Red Cross world. It is the unique qualities of the Red Cross movement which make it possible for nominees of Governments and of academic institutions to meet to discuss this matter of world-wide concern, motivated by a common desire to know more about the implications of this body of international law. I thank you all for coming and I am sure that in the course of the next week we will be able to learn much from each other.

The Australian Red Cross Society is proud to be associated, in sponsoring this significant gathering, with the Henry Dunant Institute and our own Australian National University. The Australian Red Cross, as the organising arm for the Seminar, has received a tremendous amount of co-operation from many different sources for which it is most grateful.

From the initiation of the project, we have received solid support from the Australian Government. I take this opportunity of thanking the Honourable Senator Neil Brown, QC, Deputy Attorney-General and Federal Minister for Communications, who has generously come along to open this Seminar this morning and will also host a reception for participants on Friday evening on behalf of the Australian Government. The Government has also made a sizeable financial contribution towards the cost of mounting the Seminar.

The two Geneva-based bodies which are represented here today — the Henry Dunant Institute and the International Committee of the Red Cross (which is both the originator and custodian of the Geneva Conventions) have given us strong financial as well as moral support in organising the Seminar. We are pleased to welcome Mr Rudi Jaekli, a member of the Executive of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as the Committee's official representative. He is accompanied by Dr Hans Peter Gasser and Mr Jean-Jacques Surbeck. The Institute is presently represented by its Director, Mr Jacques Meurant, and at the final dinner on Saturday evening we will also welcome the President of the Institute, Mr Enrique de la Mata, of Spain, who is also the current President of the League of Red Cross Societies.

It is, I think, significant that the Australian National University is the third part of the sponsoring triumvirate, and I thank Professor Karmel for his hospitality and support, and Professor Greig for his constant interest and considerable input to the programme.

I would also like to say a special word of thanks to Professor Louis Waller. As

the Chairman of the Society's National Committee on the Dissemination of International Humanitarian Law, he has been the moving force behind the planning for this Seminar. In the five years of that Committee's existence, Professor Waller has made the Australian Red Cross Society very conscious of its responsibilities in making this area of the law better known, both in the Australian community and in our region of the world. This Seminar, with its challenging programme, is a tribute to the knowledge and imagination with which Professor Waller has led his Committee, and on the Society's behalf I would like to pay tribute to him for his work.

I believe that everyone here today is convinced of the importance of observance of the Geneva Conventions. But observance is only possible *after* acquisition of knowledge of the requirements of these Conventions. Governments of countries which are parties to the Conventions have a significant obligation to disseminate this knowledge within their own communities. And National Red Cross Societies are committed to assist their governments in this work of disseminating knowledge of International Humanitarian Law.

I am pleased to say that, in Australia, this commitment by our Red Cross Society is fully appreciated by the Australian Government which has appointed a Joint Committee to oversee this work, comprised of representatives of those Government Departments concerned with the implications and application of the Geneva Conventions Act, and of the Australian Red Cross Society. The Committee reports annually to the Attorney-General of the Commonwealth and to myself as Chairman of the Australian Red Cross Society, and this report is tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament and thus becomes a document available to the public.

In preparing for this Seminar, Professor Waller has been greatly assisted with the organisational details by Miss Noreen Minogue, Deputy Secretary General of the Australian Red Cross Society, and by the Red Cross staff helping her.

And of course there would not be this Seminar if it were not for all the thought and effort put into the papers and comments to be presented over the coming week. The speakers and commentators will give you much food for thought in the coming days. Though I am unable to be with you during all these days, I shall read the reports with great interest. I am confident that the gathering of talent and interest which we have assembled here in Canberra will make a noteworthy contribution not only to the growth of awareness of International Humanitarian Law as it stands, but also to the clarification of many of the areas of uncertainty which, unhappily, still exist.

Again I bid you all welcome, and as Chairman of the Australian Red Cross Society, I hope that your days with us in Canberra will be both enjoyable and fruitful.