

## CHILEAN RED CROSS

### The challenge of renewal in a changing society

The Chilean Red Cross is an organization firmly established in Chilean society. It is a national symbol of very altruistic and completely voluntary humanitarian action. In the Latin American context, it is further distinguished by its strength, organization, and wide coverage.

Since the 1920s the Chilean Red Cross has focused its activities on health, and nursing and its various specialties have drawn the greatest effort. Social assistance is also one of its most important spheres of action. When required, it has also taken part in relief efforts as an auxiliary to the Chilean state and in particular its Armed Forces in emergency situations such as domestic disturbances and natural disasters. The National Society has carried out such activities through what today is one of its greatest strong points, the impressive geographic coverage it has created during 80 years of activity; it is one of the broadest in Latin America and extends throughout Chile in a network composed of 211 bodies and various operating units.

In recent years, however, the environment in which the National Society operates has undergone profound changes: in the political arena the country has recently begun a process of democratization; in the economic sphere, the policy of liberalization and adjustment adopted at the end of the 1980s has promoted the country's modernization and led to the renewal of economic growth. These phenomena have, however, had a strong social impact which shows itself in a higher degree of vulnerability in wide sections of the population, which are affected by high levels of unemployment and underemployment, declines in real wages, and an increase in poverty. Moreover, the redefinition of the state's role and the visible reduction of its activities in the social sphere have created greater demands for attention by the private sectors and nongovernmental

development organizations (NGDOs) while at the same time opening new areas and possibilities for action. Finally, one of the aspects which is perhaps most important is that as modernization has occurred, significant cultural changes and value shifts have taken place and new socio-cultural patterns of behavior have emerged in Chilean society.

The Chilean Red Cross has displayed great ability to conduct its work in changing situations. It has maintained close and flexible relations with various political regimes by carrying out its role as an auxiliary to the Chilean public authorities in the spheres of health, social welfare, and security (with the Armed Forces).

Nevertheless, the organization has met the changing times without introducing all necessary adjustments, both in its internal structure and in the services it provides. This raises questions, challenges, and above all the need to undertake modernization and readaptation of its role. Accordingly, some important aspects are:

In the first place, its organizational and operational structure has been limited, among other reasons, by its inability to adopt decentralized decision-making procedures and operational methods coherent with the new values and more attractive to new generations and social movements. Nor has it been able to introduce advanced technologies in the fields of administration and communication, and it is only now starting to direct its programs toward the newly vulnerable groups on the basis of greater community participation. This is a cause for concern when one considers the growing competition from other private organizations and public agencies which are also entering the social sphere and whose proliferation has been one of the most visible changes which occurred in Chile during the 1980s

Its financial situation has become more difficult during the past decade because of the fall in real income caused by inflation and restrictions on state spending on public health and social welfare, despite the fact that the state's grant to the Chilean Red Cross has increased. Further, the Chilean Red Cross has not been wont to seek funds from private sources of financing or abroad, except for emergency appeals

## Organization of the National Society

### *Organizational structure and geographic coverage*

The Chilean Red Cross is an organization with much centralization, which is exercised over an impressive network of local units subject to a uniform statutory structure which has changed little since the Red Cross's founding in 1903.

The principal governing organs are the central committee and executive board. There is a general assembly which meets every four years, but it is only consultative and investigative in nature. The central committee is the highest authority. It is composed of 38 members, including representatives of the regional committees (Valparaíso, Concepción, Temuco, and Puerto Montt), health representatives from the Army, Navy, and Air Force; representatives of the ministries (interior, health, education, foreign relations, and national defense); health representatives from the Directorate of Carabineros, representatives of professional societies (physicians, dentists, nurses, social work, and journalism); and representatives from the Corps of Carabineros.

The executive board, elected by the central committee, directs the organization from national headquarters. It consists of the president, two vice presidents, a secretary general, the inspector general, the legal adviser, and nine directors general of national services and departments. The board is responsible for the creation and operation of the regional committees and other local units, as well as approving any program or

initiative they undertake. Its powers are quite broad, which gives it a very important role in the National Society's operational leadership.

The organizational structure extends throughout the country, with a widespread presence through 211 branches. The headquarters of each includes a first-aid post or polyclinic, and these are housed in old or modern urban buildings from a remote and humble post in the northern deserts to the antarctic south.

This vast, complex, and solid national organization has gradually been regionalized, though there are certain operational limitations. Today there are four regional committees, in each of which an effort is made to coordinate and supervise the activities of a group of Red Cross units. These committees are Valparaíso (coordinating 26 units), Concepción (31), Temuco (25), and Puerto Montt (27). The remaining units, which are very close to or distant from the capital, are supervised from the central committee's headquarters.

There are differing perceptions and viewpoints regarding regionalization. The central committee and the executive board do not believe it timely or effective to establish more regional units because they absorb large resources from the central budget. Moreover, it is alleged, the distance between units in the northern and southern areas does not permit creating regional committees since their management would be impossible.

It is thought in some units, however, that this process should continue in order to facilitate decentralization of decision making.

### *Administration and planning*

Administration is concentrated at the national headquarters in Santiago where the highest central authorities combine administration with the technical direction of national programs. The presidency, the inspector general's office, and the directorates of nursing, finance and accounting, and public relations and information, followed by relief, missing persons, social affairs,

the Red Cross Youth, and the national blood bank directorate. There are several support committees for youth programs.

A small number of paid officials work under the direction of an administrator general in assisting all the executive board.

Administrative procedures and routines are characterized by their precision, order, and rigor, and so there is a high degree of efficiency. Nevertheless, methods of communication, data entry and storage, accounting, and administrative control are based on very simple, generally manual technologies (the extent of office automation is very limited), which makes them slower and more laborious than necessary. This is an area in which it is necessary to have more modern and efficient methods.

Given Chile's peculiar geography, the broad geographic coverage creates certain problems in communication, leadership, and administration. The central committee and executive board make inspection visits and communicate by means of circulars and correspondence. In addition, the executive board holds regional meetings every year with the regional committees and units reporting to the central committee. Still, the long distances and the lack of modern communications technology affect coordination and understanding between the national headquarters and field units.

Planning and evaluation are carried out for the short term—annually. There is no long-term planning in which strategic goals such as a development plan are established. Planning falls entirely to the directors, the inspector general (who makes constant visits to the field units), and the president, who on the basis of experiences and reports from the previous year set out and very closely oversee the activities that the departments and programs will execute during the following year.

### *Human resources*

All members are volunteers and have to fulfill high income and residence requirements. As members of youth groups they receive uniform

and solid indoctrination supplemented by painstaking training in nursing and first-aid methods and several medicosocial disciplines. Their service generally spans several decades and generations.

The trained volunteer corps is estimated at about 9,000 (90% women), who work a minimum of three hours weekly for the Chilean Red Cross and collaborate with a specialized medical staff numbering approximately 900 (physicians, dentists, midwives, graduate nurses, and social workers).

Despite these high figures, the volunteer corps has declined for several reasons. On one hand, admission, discipline, and sacrifice requirements are high (including the cost of a uniform); on the other, the unwillingness of clinics and hospitals to give practice to nursing students because of the state's ever-receding role in the health sphere, the need of Chilean women to find paid occupations, and family impoverishment. Moreover, there is a lack of interest among young men in the Chilean Red Cross, which they consider a predominantly female organization that does not meet their expectations. The National Society is worried about these problems and is trying to find solutions to them.

One of the factors may be competition from other volunteer organizations, which in recent years have appeared in great numbers. They offer both greater attractions and a greater variety of programs whose noncharitable nature makes them more stimulating to volunteers, especially young people; this constitutes a difficulty in renewing the Chilean Red Cross's volunteer corps.

Another significant problem in this area is the need to guarantee the quality and continuity of present middle-level leaders. Job turnover means that their experience is lost. A new regulation was recently approved which permits reelection in the field units; it may help strengthen the units by giving their leaders greater continuity.

Since the operation of the National Society relies almost entirely on volunteers, paid staff are few: 18 auxiliary officials and secretaries at the

national headquarters, of whom two are blood bank technicians.

### ***Finance and budgeting***

The Chilean Red Cross's total budget is CLP 53 million (about USD 152,000, USD 1 = CLP 350), which in the main comes from collections, a proportion regulated by decree-law of the Lottery and Charitable Raffle (CLP 15 million in 1990), and 12 variable contributions from a contingency fund of the Presidency of the Republic.

Sixty-two percent of all revenue is assigned to operating expenses and the remaining 38% to wages. According to internal assignment by levels or departments of the organization, about 62% goes to expenditures programmed annually by the central committee, of which the five directorates each receive a small amount for their operations (between CLP 100,000 and CLP 150,000); 15% is transmitted to the Federation as Chile's barem; 12% is allotted to the regional committees, and 10% goes to field units for local expenses.

The high proportion allotted to operating expenses compared to wages is noteworthy and a quite positive aspect of the organization's finances, if the National Society's characteristics are borne in mind.

The budget is drawn up on the basis of the estimated availability of funds each March and the needs the directors submit. Prepared as an expenditures plan, it is approved by the central committee. The office of the director general of finance and accounting is responsible for accepting or rejecting the budgets of field units. Since there is no development plan, the budget relates to the annual plan and does not cover medium- or long-term objectives.

All vouchering, accounts, and financial statements are executed using methods characterized by their precision and double control, from the field units and regional committees to the national headquarters. The central committee uses a separate accounting system which is checked

annually by the Ministry of Justice to revalidate the institution's legal status.

The field units have financial autonomy, depend on member dues, and seek self-financing means through donations, municipal grants, rental of parts of their buildings, and fund raising during the "Annual Red Cross Week."

Greater efforts must be made to increase financing capacity since present resources, which are tending to stagnate, are inadequate to maintain and develop the Red Cross's services, while funds such as those awarded by the Presidency are discretionary in nature, subject to variation, and therefore uncertain in their amount and continuity. Still, each annual budget has increased up to now.

### **The National Society's role and activities in the context of the country**

#### ***Principal activities***

According to its priorities, the areas in which this National Society provides services are:

#### ***Health services***

Instruction in nursing and provision of services in that field are the strongest and most extensive activity in the organization. The National Society's activities are in essence projected through this area, and it dominates the public's image of the Red Cross. The 211 Chilean Red Cross field units have polyclinics (the institution's true "basic cells") in which the teams of volunteer nurses who compose 80% of volunteers carry out their work by assisting in a multiplicity of activities which generally speaking are offered at no cost or in accordance with the socioeconomic capacity of the families. These services in particular cover the areas of preventive and curative medical and paramedical care and dentistry and comprehensive care of women (by agreement with APROFA), as well as a wide

range of household education, nutrition, prenatal and natal control, hygiene, and home accident prevention programs all aimed largely at women, children, the disabled, and the elderly.

The nursing centers or schools operate under the control of the director general of nursing and award several diplomas and degrees, depending on the number of years of study, in various specialties.

As an agency reporting to the central committee, the directorate of the national blood program basically promotes donations of blood nationally and the program's operation in all the Chilean Red Cross's units. The program's chief activities are campaigns through the press, radio, television, talks, and visits to public and private enterprises to increase voluntary donation; and a blood bank at the national headquarters to collect, process, and examine blood, through which more than 2,000 donations were obtained during 1990. Activities are also conducted to support dialysis centers, hemophiliacs, and persons with limited means; there are also teaching activities and collaboration in research related to blood. Two projects have been submitted to the Federation to strengthen the activities of the National Blood Program.

The Norwegian Red Cross finances an AIDS prevention program, which was organized in 1988 and covers the entire country. Instruction was given to 63,832 people up to the end of 1991.

### *Social assistance and welfare services*

These services, which in 1990 were provided in 1.3 million cases, are charitable in nature and provided through the social action department in the polyclinics. Activities are based on the free and periodic provision of food (especially milk in "milk bars" for children and adults), clothing, medicines, glasses, wheelchairs, etc., to the needy and disabled after determination of their socioeconomic condition. A program of recreation and care for the elderly operates through the popular "clubs for the elderly." Assistance is

also provided to university students from poor families (the University Dining Hall Program) and to prisoners.

The National Society is aware that, because of the social problems the country is experiencing, local social demands for services the Red Cross provides have increased in fields such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and child protection. Some need is also seen to begin providing new areas of action relating to community work and prevention of social vulnerability for the most marginalized.

### *Relief and emergency services*

These services are the responsibility of a national directorate at headquarters which in the frequent natural disasters operates in close collaboration with agencies such as the National Emergency Office (ONEME), in the Ministry of the Interior, and Civil Defense, a parallel organization in the Armed Forces, as well as other agencies. Good coordination exists with all of them and some "division of work" has been established in such situations. The relief directorate is represented in the local field units and a few start-up relief brigades.

### *Other activities*

Disseminating information about international humanitarian law has started to expand its radius of action with support from the public relations directorate. Some activities are specifically aimed at Chilean women and young people; examples are seminars and meetings dealing with recreation, drug abuse control, and AIDS prevention. These are conducted in liaison with activities conducted by other departments such as relief and social action. The National Society's data show that there are "Red Cross Youth Units" in around 2,500 educational establishments which consist of leaders, instructors, and 2,500 teachers, with an average of 64,000 youth members throughout Chile.

### *Relations with the Government*

The Chilean Red Cross's operation as an auxiliary to the public authorities is made concrete through close relations with the state's civil and military agencies. As noted above, the Presidency of the Republic uses its discretionary fund to provide it a varying grant each year.

Although no general agreements exist, there is positive cooperation with the Ministry of Health in various campaigns. The youth department has a special relationship with the Ministry of Education through its youth unit programs. The Red Cross's participation in emergency relief activities is coordinated through the Ministry of the Interior's ONEME, and there is also coordination with the civil defense agency and the different branches of the Armed Forces.

In mass events of various kinds or in civil disturbances, the Armed Forces assign intervention on behalf of affected or injured persons to Red Cross volunteers.

Public agencies often invite Chilean Red Cross representatives to management or working committee meetings. There are also significant links with municipalities based on the fact that the Red Cross's leaders usually belong to traditionally elite social groups, and their participation can be seen in religious, civil and military, and community aid ceremonies.

### *Relations with other organizations and agencies*

Generally speaking, relations with other NGOs are limited. Two important exceptions are an agreement for comprehensive women's care in polyclinics concluded with the Chilean Family Protection Association (APROFA) and collaboration with the National Front Against AIDS (FRENASIDA), a nongovernmental association.

Some organizations such as Teletón, Rotary clubs, and various sports clubs and private associations request relief assistance services or training in first aid, but this does not lead to contributions to or collaboration with the Chilean Red Cross.

There are a large number of volunteer organizations which carry out efforts parallel to those of the Red Cross and so compete with it. This is a challenge which the Chilean Red Cross must confront. In general, good contact is maintained with other NGOs, which could lead to better opportunities for cooperation in the future.

### **Role of external cooperation**

The Chilean Red Cross has few financial links with external sources. In addition to appeals, which are generally exceptional, there is in-kind cooperation (foodstuffs, cheese, vegetable oil, and medicines donated by the European Community), which is channeled through the Federation, and the Swedish Red Cross (used clothing) to meet the needs of its charitable and emergency programs, in this instance to offset gaps in warehoused goods.

A recent exception was the two annual payments of USD 41,570 to which the Norwegian Red Cross committed itself for 1990-1991 for the AIDS prevention program mentioned above. This program has enabled an innovative mechanism using prevention committees to be put in place through the four regional committees; these could be extended to other parts of Chile.

There are areas the National Society considers warrant priority in increased external cooperation: grants for training seminars and support for blood and international humanitarian law informational programs. Support is solicited in the field units in the management and entrepreneurial areas, decentralized administration, self-financing, and community action to enable them to innovate and diversify their programs.

### **The National Society's perception of its public image**

The National Society has a directorate general of public relations which conducts external informational work nationally. Since it has few financial and professional resources, it is still considered a new unit.

As for the means used by the National Society to project its image and publicize its activities, the work of the polyclinics and the institution's other public activities are usually used to bring it to the attention of small sectors of the public. A short newsletter is published fairly frequently for distribution among national leaders. The editors and owners of communications media currently provide very limited collaboration except in some provincial areas where the local radio and press collaborate more actively.

The impression exists that the organization's real image is better and more widespread among the poor, who receive its services directly, than among the middle and upper classes, who are better able to cooperate financially and as volunteers.

The interpretation made of the Principles of the Red Cross and the internal organizational culture which its leaders and volunteers share promotes a style of action which is circumspect, reticent, and based on freely performed humanitarian work in which it is not thought useful for the Chilean Red Cross to conduct campaigns to publicize its activities or raise funds. This could be an obstacle to establishing other publicity mechanisms which rely on broader use of the mass communication media or more modern publicity and marketing techniques, which are currently rejected because of their supposedly "commercial" nature.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

For almost a century this National Society has consolidated a strong organization focusing on health services, especially nursing. Other important activities it performs are social assistance and, to a lesser extent, relief efforts as auxiliary to the public authorities in emergency situations arising from domestic disturbances or natural disasters.

Among its strengths are one of the broadest geographic coverages in Latin America, which consists of a network of 211 field units, a strong and very dedicated volunteer corps, and great capacity to conduct its work under changing circumstances.

Chile has recently undergone profound political and economic changes which have favored the country's modernization and economic growth, but which at the same time have led to great vulnerability for large social sectors affected by poverty, unemployment, and falling wages. These phenomena, together with a reduction in the state's role in the social sphere, have created strong demands for attention by the private sectors and NGOs.

On the basis of this situation, the most important challenge facing the Chilean Red Cross in the immediate future is introducing necessary adjustments in both its internal structure and the services it provides in order to adapt itself to the

changes in its environment and the major challenges of this period.

This means modernizing and readjusting its role and operating systems, and to do this it is important to take into account certain factors which are now the main weaknesses to be overcome.

The institution's financial stability is precarious and shows a tendency toward stagnation, due basically to a fall in real income because of inflation.

Decision-making procedures within the National Society are fairly centralized, which limits the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizational and operational structure; advanced technologies for administration, communication, and coordination have not been introduced, though they can be very useful in assisting the process of modernization. New ideas have been implemented and there are agents of change in the National Society, but a diagnosis in depth of the changes which have occurred in its environment is required; such a diagnosis would enable readjusting the supply of services and the training of human resources to meet the demands of the most vulnerable in the different parts of the country. Although there is rigorous planning in the Chilean Red Cross, it is for the short term and there is still no national development plan which includes strategic goals.



### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Update and broaden programs and action strategies for dealing with the situation of the most vulnerable**
- 2. Modernize the organizational structure and establish a strategic planning system**
- 3. Strengthen, expand, and diversify sources of financial resources**
- 4. Broaden and renew voluntary human resources**
- 5. Expand external cooperation links**
- 6. Project a new image for fulfilling a new mission**

- 1. Update and broaden programs and action strategies for dealing with the situation of the most vulnerable**
  - 1.1 Analyze the supply of services provided by the National Society in light of demands from the most vulnerable and implement the adjustments needed to deal with them, and include greater community participation.
  - 1.2 Prioritize activities to respond to the poverty and social marginality of those most affected by poverty (children, young people, female heads of household, and the elderly) and the regions with the greatest deficits (Greater Santiago, Bio-Bio, Araucanía, and Los Lagos)
  - 1.3 Include a promotion strategy (community participation, mobilization of local resources, collaboration with other NGOs) in activities to overcome the charitable approach.
- 2. Modernize the organizational structure and establish a strategic planning system**
  - 2.1 Readjust the internal structure by promoting decentralized activities and greater participation in decision making
  - 2.2 Introduce more advanced technologies in the administration, information, and communication areas.
  - 2.3 Adopt more open operating methods in accordance with the new cultural values and changes and which are more attractive to the new generations and social groups
  - 2.4 Strengthen the specialized training of leadership cadres and human resources, especially in areas of activity closely related to relief work, social action, and community leadership.

- 2.5 Draw up and implement a National Development Plan with the broad participation of all sectors of the institution.
- 2.6 Include the special needs of the branches and volunteers in the plan.

**3. Strengthen, expand, and diversify sources of financial resources**

- 3.1 Establish a specific administrative unit with professional staff to raise financial resources.
- 3.2 Modernize fund-raising systems by adopting modern and competitive informational, marketing, and publicity methods.
- 3.3 Explore the new public policies, especially social investment funds, as a fund-raising alternative for programs aimed at vulnerable groups.
- 3.4 Formulate a fund-raising plan that identifies new types and channels of financing.
- 3.5 Establish interorganizational and cooperative ties with NGOs and the private sector which increase interaction and the possible financing of joint programs.

**4. Broaden and renew voluntary human resources**

- 4.1 Promote activities of interest to young people and men to attract human resources who will renew the volunteer corps
- 4.2 Diversify the volunteer corps so that it meets the needs of programs with a community and social action orientation.

**5. Expand external cooperation links**

- 5.1 Promote external cooperation technical exchanges in order to support the strategic, governing, and operational changes in the institution suggested above.
- 5.2 Explore the possibility of obtaining external cooperation to implement new areas of activity through establishment of a Reference Framework for Development Cooperation.

**6. Project a new image for fulfilling a new mission**

- 6.1 Apply public relations and information techniques which increase support of the institution by the state and Chilean society.
- 6.2 Strengthen the areas of public relations and information through modern research, design, and execution methods.

## SOURCES

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