

# PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## *MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION*

4 December, 2001

### *Federation Cooperation with Magen David Adom in Israel*

*This Programme Update is intended for reporting on Annual Appeals.*

*Appeal No. 01.64/2001*

*Programme Update No. 1; Period covered: January - 30 October, 2001*

#### *“At a Glance”*

*Summary/Update: Magen David Adom (MDA) in Israel was established in 1930 as a humanitarian organization with the purpose of becoming the Red Cross Society for Israel. The constraint of not being able to use either the red cross or the red crescent as an emblem has meant that it has not been able to meet the criteria for Movement membership. The work achieved in 2000 towards a Third Protocol to the Geneva Conventions has allowed the Federation to work with the MDA on the same basis as with others moving towards membership. In December 2000 the Federation posted a representative to the MDA who was mandated to deal not only with the legal aspects of the membership preparations, but to introduce MDA into all aspects of the Movement and its operational humanitarian work. The representative is also working to build connections between the MDA and other National Societies. The Federation’s representative undertakes activities in close cooperation with the ICRC which is the lead agency for the Movement in Israel.*

### *The context*

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is actively involved in the search for ways to bring Magen David Adom in Israel (MDA) into the Movement, a process strongly supported by the Federation. The initiatives of the Movement’s Standing Commission in year 2000 resulted in the preparation of a draft additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions regarding the adoption of a new Emblem. In the summer of that year all parties concerned, including MDA, were prepared to reach agreement. The intifada in September 2000 led to the postponement of the Diplomatic Conference which was expected to adopt the new protocol, but the draft text circulated on 12 October 2000 allowed the Federation to put its relationship with MDA into a new perspective.

MDA was founded in 1930 in accordance with the principles and ideals of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It is responsible for the pre-hospital emergency care throughout the country, and manages the central blood bank and blood collection services. MDA is a private institution and operates independently of the Government with

an annual turnover of US\$ 75 million, mainly from the reimbursement of services rendered to hospitals, health insurance, private and public institutions. It is a national humanitarian organization with 1,200 professionals and over 6,000 volunteers in 52 branches.

Israel's demand to maintain the use of the Red Star of David as their protective and indicative emblem has presented an obstacle to formal membership, and general contacts with the Federation and specific contacts with other national societies since the establishment of MDA have been minimal. An unfortunate result of this was that there was little substantive communications between MDA and the Federation. MDA was not involved in the development of tools such as Strategy 2010. Policy-wise this widened the gap further between the Federation, its members and MDA.

On its behalf, the ICRC is the lead agency for the Movement in Israel and has been continuously present in the country since 1967. The ICRC's direct interlocutors are the Government and the Israeli Defense Forces and its contacts with MDA have also been limited.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

The decision to assign a Federation Representative to MDA was taken in the context of the work on the draft Third Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and recognition of the need to work closer with MDA as it moved towards membership in the Movement. It was also quickly apparent that MDA's move towards membership would involve attention to programmes beyond those which have been the main traditional activities of the MDA. This would involve building linkages between MDA and other Societies, institutions beyond the Movement, as well as with the Federation.

In October 2000 the Diplomatic Conference which was to have negotiated and adopted the proposed Third Protocol was postponed. This was a serious setback, but it was hoped at the time that the meeting would be able to be held in early 2001. The ICRC and Federation continued to hold consultations with government representatives on the draft text. These consultations found that the principle difficulties were with the timing of consideration of the draft, rather than the substance of its proposals.

In view of these developments the Federation decided to post a representative in Israel. This step, designed to advance cooperation opportunities and prepare for membership, was taken in close cooperation with ICRC. The MDA also fully agreed with the following specific tasks of the Representative:

- to inform and guide the MDA, in close cooperation with the ICRC, on all issues involved in the membership of the Movement, including statutory aspects of the membership and Emblem issues.
- to introduce MDA into the policies and work of the International Federation, to assist them in defining their role and activities as a Society in formation.
- to promote international recognition of MDA as a humanitarian organisation and as a partner in the Movement family, to strengthen cooperation in the region, and to establish regular international contacts.
- to facilitate MDA's participation in Movement various activities.
- to assist as necessary with the discussion of ways to build cooperation with other National Societies, including with respect to the existing "Friends of MDA" organisations.

The Federation's Governing Board held extensive discussions on the matter at its meetings in November 2000 and May 2001. In both cases the Board agreed that the draft text represented a sound basis for negotiation between governments, and expressed hope that the Protocol would be adopted as soon as circumstances allow.

The Council of Delegates of the Movement adopted a resolution on 14 November 2001 affirming the position taken by the Federation governing board and inviting the Federation and the ICRC to take all possible initiatives with a view to pursuing cooperation -- in particular operationally.

## ***Latest events***

Although the events since 29 September 2000 have been accompanied by a sharp rise in tension in the region, the Federation has sought to stress the importance of increased humanitarian activity and cooperation.

Following the Board meeting in May the Secretary General of the Federation visited MDA. Extensive discussions were held with the President of MDA as well as with representatives of the Israeli Government on the draft protocol and membership questions. The Federation's Secretary General stressed the mutual advantages of a closer working relationship and described the tangible benefits available to both MDA and the Federation from an enhanced operational relationship. This process resulted in:

- participation of MDA in the blood donor recruitment conference in South Africa.
- attendance by MDA experts at the ICRC meeting of legal advisers in Switzerland.
- participation of the MDA representatives in the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) training in Germany.
- establishment of a Society of Friends of MDA in Israel for the purposes of raising funds.
- consultations on the establishment of the tracing section in MDA.
- discussions on introducing the basic knowledge of the International Humanitarian Law and Red Cross and Red Crescent principles to the training curriculum for paramedical staff and MDA workers.

A number of other National Societies have recognised the value of such links, and there have been some significant high-level visits to MDA in Israel as well as visits to other Societies by MDA's leaders.

Notwithstanding the hostilities, practical cooperation between the MDA and the Palestine Red Crescent Society has also continued. This has been actively supported by the ICRC and the Federation, and there have also been some operational links established between MDA and other neighboring Societies.

## ***Outstanding needs***

In spite of the fact that the importance of a permanent liaison between the International Federation and MDA has been recognised by the majority of those concerned, the Federation's office in Tel-Aviv has not received the minimum level of financial support needed. By the end of October the total operational deficit amounted to CHF 80,000 (the total financial requirement to cover a full 12 months of needs in the field are approximately CHF 90,000).

The Netherlands Red Cross has indicated the intention to provide a one-year coverage of the Federation's representative salary costs. The problem of coverage of field expenses has not been resolved, however, in spite of the continuous efforts of the Federation's Secretariat. The full sum required to maintain operations in 2002 is CHF 160,000.

The MDA is a relatively well developed Society, and the purpose of the Federation's presence in the country and the activities of the Federation's representative therefore differ from the traditional capacity building programmes. The Federation and the MDA propose collaborating together in directing the national society's programmes into areas relevant to Strategy 2010. It also needs to develop capacity to work as a National Society with respect to vulnerable people in Israel, and to fit more closely into programming relevant to the entire region. This requires a better link to the policies and partners of the Federations by opening doors, creating awareness, and building bridges.

## ***Conclusion***

The efforts to recognize and facilitate the MDA's membership within the Movement continues despite the difficult political context. The close links between all partners have enabled a confidence building process to take place, and the continued support of all members is needed.

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*All International Federation operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.*

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