

Officials in Geneva contend that they had been proceeding quietly, on a diplomatic track, to include Israel since 1995. Yet just two months after the Americans began withholding their dues, there was progress. An international working group decided the world needed a neutral emblem to stand alongside the cross or crescent. Switzerland was laying the groundwork for a diplomatic conference when the latest wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence broke out in September 2000, stalling things.

After Sept. 11 this year, a high-ranking official from Geneva flew to the United States to try to persuade the American Red Cross to resume dues payments before the federation's fall assembly. The American policy was counterproductive, causing unhealthy tensions within the international movement, he said. The board member from Louisiana was persuaded to reconsider, and so were others. They didn't like the idea that Healy was forcing the American Red Cross to take a strong political stance, because one of its credos was neutrality.

In an Oct. 3 closed-door meeting, the executive committee voted 9 to 1 to second the Louisiana board member's motion to stop withholding dues. The vote was tentative, pending future discussions. But Healy found out about the vote as the board members emerged from their session, considered it decisive and exploded.

"I said, 'This is not the time to do this,' she told me. 'I said, 'You can't overturn this principle in a secret proposal in a secret session. Deserting Israel right now—what's the signal that you're sending?' They got mad at me. Later, they said I was insubordinate. It was all downhill from there."

At about that time, Terry J. Sicilia, a chapter director in Denver, wrote a letter to a senior vice president at headquarters to express his disappointment in Healy's leadership since Sept. 11. He asked, "Do you really feel the need to raise more money and blood?" He was concerned in part that the Sept. 11 fund-raising drive would make it more difficult for local chapters to raise money for their own needs.

Sicilia's letter was leaked to the Chronicle of Philanthropy Web site, which is checked daily by those in the charity world. It opened up the internal drama of the Red Cross to the public eye, and it helped create a drumbeat against Healy.

Healy, however, was getting mixed signals from within the Red Cross. In mid-October, she received a huge bouquet of flowers from the Watergate Florist with a card that read, "Thank you for being a truly great boss." It was signed by 11 senior Red Cross executives,

including Decker, "and our 1.6 million colleagues." She placed the card on her mantel—and later gave it to me, saying, "I don't want this anymore." Shortly after getting the flowers, Healy received a standing ovation from Red Cross executives who traveled to Washington to attend a weapons-of-mass-destruction-preparedness seminar. "I could have gotten a sunburn from all that warmth," she said.

Nonetheless, after the firing of the DOC women, the creation of the Liberty Fund by fiat and the blowup over the Israel issue, Healy's departure was becoming inevitable. "Bernadine brought discipline, authority and accountability to the American Red Cross," McLaughlin said. "But every time she took a strong position, a little more of her capital with the board was spent. At a certain point, you can't recoup."

On Tuesday, Oct. 23, the governors met to vote on whether they had confidence in Healy's leadership. Some sat in the board room in D.C.; others were piped in by speakerphone. In the end, six members voted for Healy, three abstained and about 27 voted against her, according to McLaughlin. By that count, 14 of the board members did not participate in the vote. Gloria White, a retired vice chancellor at Washington University, was one of very few board members who spoke on the record about the decision. She gave me a succinct statement about Healy: "She was one of the finest leaders the Red Cross has ever had." Then she said: "It will have to rest there. There's nothing to be served by going beyond that. They have made their decisions."

McLaughlin said that he recommended that Healy's departure be put off for six months, but that he did not prevail. Three days later, McLaughlin and Healy appeared together publicly to announce her resignation. Healy told me that McLaughlin wanted her to say that she was exhausted; as someone who prides herself on her stamina, she bristled at the very notion. So instead, she and McLaughlin gave *no* reason for her departure. Reporters were puzzled; they pushed Healy to explain why she was "abandoning" the Red Cross. Healy, growing teary-eyed, said that she had no choice; she was forced out. McLaughlin, sticking to the original script in which they were going to keep this fact hidden for the sake of her dignity, then denied this. It was, she said later, the "press conference from hell."

A few days later, she wrote a letter to the board: "Maybe you wanted more of a Mary Poppins and less of a Jack Welch."

Shortly after Healy's resignation, hundreds of Red Cross executives from around the country gathered in an all-white ballroom on E Street NW in Washington for

another "W.M.D.," or weapons-of-mass-destruction workshop. This time, Healy was not invited. But her face stared up from the cover of *The Humanitarian* magazine at every place setting. "If they were trying to disappear her, they should have lost the magazine," one woman in a red jacket whispered. Her colleague pointed to a faux balcony hanging over the ballroom, saying that he kept expecting Healy to appear. "Don't cry for me, disaster relief workers," someone joked.

The workshop did not impart a tremendous amount of new information. But it did serve unofficially as a kind of pep rally for those who felt, in a nondenominational way, that they had been doing God's work since Sept. 11 and did not deserve to have their good intentions maligned. The public questioning of the Red Cross had intensified in the wake of Healy's departure, and while some in the room resented her for that, most resented the "negativity of the media" instead.

Barry White from South Carolina passed around a cartoon from *The Oregonian* that elicited groans and "darns!" The cartoon showed the Statue of Liberty lying on a cot waiting for blood as Dracula, on the next bed, sucked from the donations. The blood bag was labeled "Sept. 11th Aid," and the vampire wore the Red Cross logo on his chest.

There was an air of defiance—and denial—in the ballroom that day as national officials set out to pump up spirits. Some sounded almost like preachers. "Since Sept. 11, the network has been working in miraculous ways," an executive vice president told the crowd. He intoned a sacred tenet: "As we all know, we're the first on the scene and the last to leave." A Philadelphia chapter executive told a story about a volunteer who "forever changed" the life of a little boy, as "Red Cross volunteers do again and again and again."

Only at the end of the day did some rise to interrupt the cheerleading, like a New Jersey executive who began by suggesting that his colleagues realize the Red Cross is not "omnipotent." At this point, I was hustled out of the room by a senior public-relations executive (who later left the Red Cross) so that the assembled could have a "free and open discussion."

It had taken me weeks to penetrate the Red Cross, which seemed excessively skittish of observation, much less of scrutiny. Eventually, McLaughlin intervened and got me into the ballroom that day and later inside the Red Cross's new, post-Sept. 11 call-in center outside Washington. In its nervousness about media scrutiny of its troubles, the Red Cross had been hiding its assets too—people like Cyndi Sadler, a volunteer from Louisiana who was, weirdly, sitting in a converted Levitz furniture

store in suburban Virginia fielding calls from World Trade Center widows.

As I approached, Sadler was signing off a call to New Jersey. "I couldn't get you off my mind all weekend," she said into the phone. "It just breaks my heart for y'all." Hanging up, Sadler shook her frosted blond mane. "She ended with 'God bless you,'" Sadler said. "Now that's some progress."

"This case I'm working?" she continued, taking a swig of Diet Dr Pepper. "The woman called Saturday irate, and I mean, iiiii-rate. She was going to call the press. She had lost her sister in the World Trade Center, and she'd been trying to get benefits for her nephew. But somehow her paperwork got lost. Just plain fell through the cracks. So I let her vent; I took her lashes. And before long, she was eating out of my hands."

Sadler has a big heart and an easy laugh, and she was like many of the Red Cross volunteers I met: earnest and industrious and Middle American. The kind of person who will follow you into the ladies' room to continue a conversation and talk right through the stall door. "I think it's awesome that we live in a country like this, with a Red Cross to reach out," she said. It was hard not to be touched by her and by the massive display of volunteerism that she is part of, the people who didn't know much of anything about Healy or McLaughlin or the F.D.A. or the Liberty Fund. They just knew about giving three weeks of their time when disaster struck and about how it made them feel queasy when the goodness of an institution like the Red Cross was questioned.

I talked to Sadler the day after a grueling hearing in November, during which congressmen suggested to Healy that the Red Cross was punch-drunk with donations and pig-headedly ignoring its donors' desires for all their money to go directly to the victims. Representative Peter Deutsch, Democrat of Florida, told Healy, "I don't think anybody who wrote a check for the Red Cross expected it would be used for frozen blood."

At that point, the Red Cross was already doing a pretty good job of getting money directly to the victims' families—it had handed out emergency cash grants averaging \$14,500 to 2,700 families—but it was making mistakes, and the mistakes were highlighted during the hearing. Russa Steiner of New Hope, Pa., the widow of a World Trade Center victim, had received only \$1,244 for incidentals until her name was put on the witness list for the hearing. That listing prompted the Red Cross to discover that Steiner had "fallen through the cracks." Luis Garcia, manager of the gift program, told me later that Steiner's application had been approved but that a