

**CD 97/7.1/1**  
**Original: English**

**COUNCIL OF DELEGATES**  
**Seville, 26 - 27 November 1997**

# **COMMUNICATIONS POLICY OF THE MOVEMENT**

**(Item 7.1 of the provisional agenda)**

Document established by the  
Communications Forum of the International  
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Geneva, September 1997**

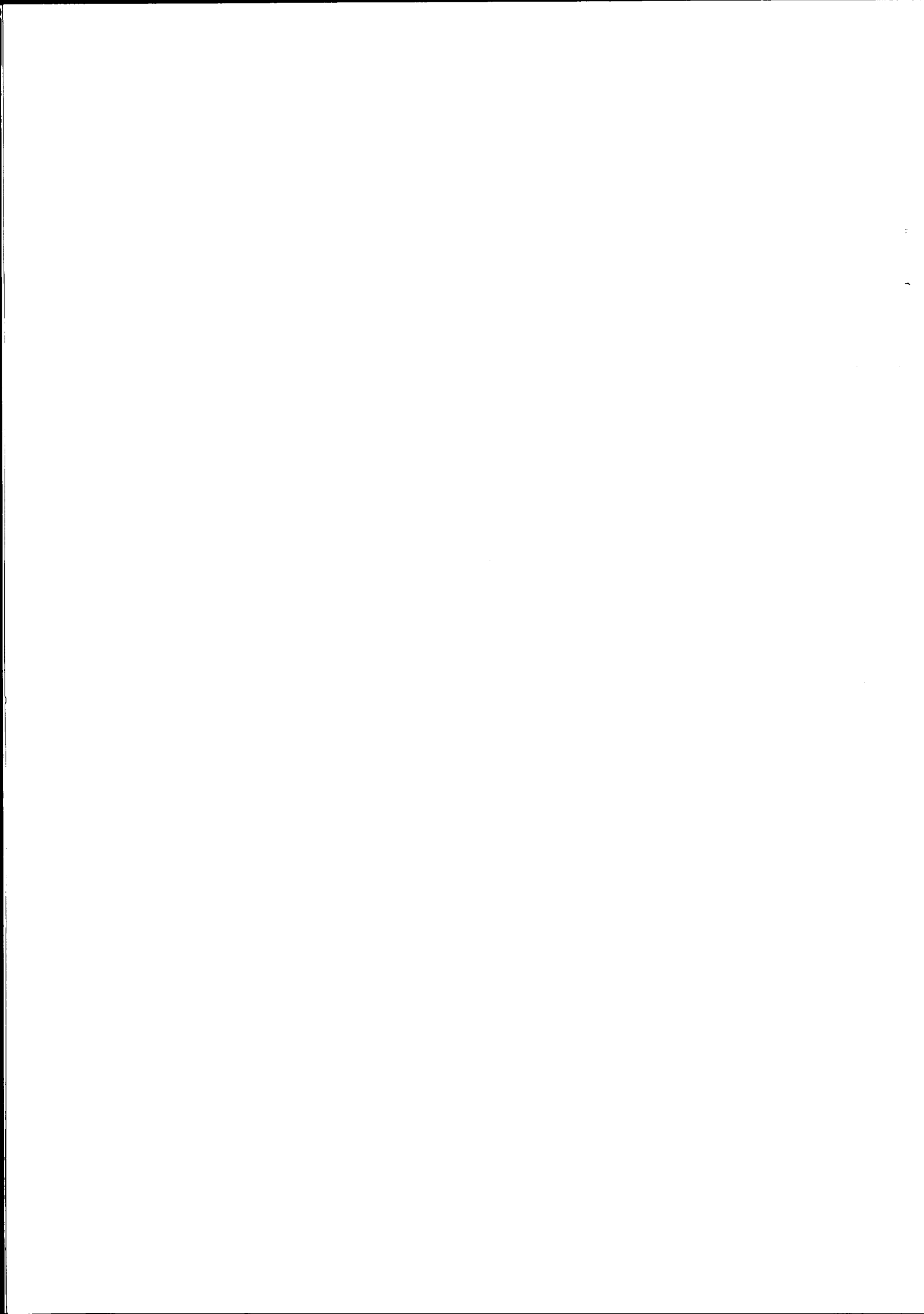
**CD 97/7.1/1**  
**Original: English**  
**August 1997**

## **Information work plan for the Movement**

Report of the Communications Forum of the Movement to the  
Council of Delegates meeting in Seville, Spain, 26-27 November 1997

### **Contents**

- 1) Background
  - 2) Objectives and challenges
  - 3) Key messages
  - 4) Global methods
    - The World Wide Web
    - Global campaigns
    - Television initiatives
  - 5) Support for local and national communication
    - Informing each other
    - Media training
    - Video spots
  - 6) Conclusions
- Annex : Preliminary draft resolution before the Council of Delegates



## 1) Background

At the Council of Delegates meeting in December 1995, it was agreed that the ICRC and the Federation should convene a representative forum of key communicators from all regions within the Movement to produce a set of coherent communications project plans to run from 1996 to the millennium and beyond. The Communications Forum of the Movement has now met twice with National Society representatives from, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Columbia, Hong Kong, Lebanon, South Africa, Uganda and the United States. The Malaysian Red Crescent, also a forum member, was unable to attend the meetings. The forum also included a representative of the communications department and a field information delegate from both the ICRC and the International Federation.

At its first meeting held in the United States, the forum, under the chairmanship of Tuur Hoste (Belgian Red Cross) and the vice chairmanship of John Gray (British Red Cross), studied a range of source documents as a fundamental first step in defining a long-term communications strategy for the Movement. These included:-

- Resolutions of the Council of Delegates (1989 and 1995)
- The information policy of the Movement (1989)
- The Federation's *Annual Reports*
- The ICRC's *Annual Reports*
- The Principles of the Movement
- The *World Disasters Report*
- National Society documentation

The forum concluded that it should work on a range of practical projects, not global policy. Such a policy would require a central body with enough authority and financial resources to implement and control it. The present structure of the Movement does not have such a body. Policy within the Movement is determined by individual National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC. This restricts effective communications, but the forum recognized this reality and decided to concentrate instead on practical means of increasing global coordination and cooperation rather than on definitions of global policy.

At the conclusion of the first meeting, each forum member was asked to prepare work on specific issues for discussion and debate at the second meeting in South Africa.

At the South Africa meeting, a volunteer consultant from Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency helped address matters of significance that the Movement would face at the end of this century and in the early years of the next. In that context the forum reviewed the work done by its individual members and decided on the projects it would recommend to the Council of Delegates. It also decided that work should start on some of them where existing resources permitted.

The forum believes that **partnership** is the key to the development and growth of Red Cross/Red Crescent effectiveness in communications in the future, through

such bodies as the forum itself, and regional groups of key communicators from National Societies.

## **2) Objectives and challenges**

There emerged a clear consensus among the forum's members that, in the increasingly competitive voluntary sector, the Red Cross/Red Crescent had to develop a pro-active strategy in communications to:-

- maximize opportunities to promote its work and services
- clearly position the Red Cross/Red Crescent, as the world's primary emergency and humanitarian service,
- differentiate the Red Cross & Red Crescent from the identities and visions of other aid agencies
  - actively encourage its volunteers, donors and staff to work together as partners in relieving and improving the situation of the most vulnerable people both internationally and through national programmes,
  - re-establish knowledge and respect for the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and everything they stand for.

The forum accepted that there were certain challenges which had to be faced and formulated its proposals to meet them, believing that their realization would contribute to the achievement of the above objectives. The challenges it identified were:

- two symbols
- bureaucracy
- lack of coordination
- insufficient importance given to long-term communications needs in policy-making bodies
- insufficient resources
- insufficient research
- lack of corporate approach
- increasing competition in the humanitarian market

The members of the forum recognized the importance of taking the lead, under the mandate given by the Council of Delegates in 1995, and worked together as a team in developing the following proposals.

## **3) Key messages**

The forum believes that it is vital that a set of key messages is agreed and owned by all Red Cross/Red Crescent communicators. These key messages should underpin all activities and be readily applicable to all situations in which the National Societies and the Geneva institutions are called to act or comment upon.

They should:-

- ◆ enhance the uniqueness of the Red Cross/Red Crescent as a whole and of its individual National Societies,
- ◆ deepen understanding of the principles of neutrality and impartiality of each National Society within their own states, and the universality of the Movement,
- ◆ raise awareness of the work of each National Society as part of an international humanitarian movement,
- ◆ create a common understanding among the membership of the National Societies of their roles within their own states and internationally,
- ◆ deepen respect for the Movement's emblem within National Societies and internationally,
- ◆ provide a common and consistent communications tool for all National Societies readily applicable and accessible to all,
- ◆ enable the Red Cross/Red Crescent to secure financial support from government, corporations and individuals.

The forum developed the following key messages for communicators:

- 1. We are the world's first humanitarian force.**
- 2. Globally and locally, we are committed to serve the community.**
- 3. Our emblem stands for quality services which are voluntary, impartial and neutral.**
- 4. The most vulnerable are our first priority.**
- 5. Our volunteers are trained, skilled and committed to save and improve life wherever they are needed.**
- 6. We respond quickly to emergency, and help people help themselves.**
- 7. We attract support from people in every walk of life and are accountable to them.**
- 8. People can count on us to get things done.**
- 9. We have a proven record of delivering effective help and care.**
- 10. We are ready to take on the challenges of the new millennium.**

The forum agreed to produce a poster of these ten key messages for use by information and communications departments throughout the Movement.

#### **4) Global methods**

##### **The World Wide Web**

While the ICRC, the International Federation and an increasing number of National Societies are running Internet web services with varying degrees of success, the forum notes that no systematic way of presenting the Red Cross/Red Crescent on the World Wide Web (WWW) has yet been developed.

The forum identified three opportunities the WWW, as an international communications tool, could provide for a global movement like the Red Cross/Red Crescent.

1.- **A unified message** : A Movement entry page on the Web could provide the ideal opportunity to convey a single, clear and coherent set of messages from the Movement to the international community : its unifying principles, its values, organization, objectives and activities, as well as its worldwide reach and concern for those in need. The emergence of the WWW has effectively made information discrepancies extremely visible and has increased the importance of harmonizing global, and to some extent local, messages. In addition to a Movement entry page the forum recommends a common site. As a first step an electronic version of the *Red Cross/Red Crescent* magazine could be carried.

2.- **A single voice** : To convey this message efficiently, all individual Red Cross and Red Crescent sites should at least point to the single RC/RC site from their home pages.

3.- **A unifying tool** : The development and support of one message across an international communications tool could act as a unifying factor for members of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, reinforcing the sense of belonging to a worldwide organization.

It has to be noted however that a successful Red Cross/Red Crescent Web site can only be set up if the following points are addressed:

**Resources** - a Movement Web site project would call for both financial and personal investment on a long term basis.

**Coordination** - the initial creation, and subsequent updating and maintenance of a Movement Web site, requires time and coordinated effort to ensure its success. The extent of the project and responsibilities would need to be clearly defined from the very beginning.

**Content and message** - the Movement has produced a number of communication products whose content has often taken time and negotiation to finalize in order to

be acceptable to the different components. The same would apply to any Movement Web site. The elaboration of content guidelines would therefore be a prerequisite.

### The Web site proposal

It is the view of the forum that the option of an unified presentation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent on the WWW should be pursued. It would consist of a site that combines activities, names and address lists and a calendar of activities of all RC/RC societies, the ICRC and the Federation. One possible model, conceptualized by a Geneva developer, has been studied by the forum. Discussions between the forum and a Red Cross/Red Crescent information systems group in Washington in May 1997 confirmed its feasibility.

A particular feature of this type of site is that it can be updated on-line by any Society that has access to a computer linked to the Internet. Updating can also be done by sending input by e-mail (or by any other means) to the site administrator. This provides an attractive opportunity for National Societies without their own Web access: they can be present on the Web at minimal cost.

As with all Web pages, the information can consist of text, pictures, sound files, video clips and, of course, links to national Web sites. While well resourced Societies could display relatively little content and provide a link to their own site, less developed societies could simply present their information on the global site, eliminating the need for their own site. Once such a Society designs its own site, a link from the global site can be created with minimal effort. This approach guarantees a relatively similar and balanced appearance of developed and developing societies on the Web.

Another feature of such a site is the possibility of two different types of access: one for the public and another for members. By entering a password any part of the Movement can be given access to, or can provide, additional non-public information. This could include texts to be shared as drafts with other National Societies, provisional dates for meetings on which a final decision has yet to be taken or, in the address section, private addresses and phone numbers of key staff not meant to be available publicly.

In addition, the site would contain powerful communication tools such as the possibility to send e-mail to one, several, or all members easily. Another forum project, the introduction of a Movement-wide alert system (see below), could also be handled easily by this application.

The ICRC presented this proposal on behalf of the forum, which believes it should be developed further by the Federation with ongoing financial and technical support from the ICRC and National Societies.

Discussion with Red Cross/Red Crescent information systems services and comparison of various Red Cross websites has made the members of the forum aware of the importance of well written and up-to-date content. The majority of Red Cross websites have become useful electronic libraries for reference texts and are



certainly well appreciated as such by scholars and individuals with in depth interest in Red Cross/Red Crescent matters. Only a few offer news and daily updates. On the other hand, many internet users 'browse' through the pages of the Web rather casually and read the pages that arouse their interest. As Red Cross/Red Crescent websites cater to the specialist most of the time, they tend to have less on offer for the media.

In order to rise the knowledge of Red Cross/Red Crescent matters and the profile of the Movement, a future Movement website should therefore include appealing and up-to-date content for a wider audience.

### **A global campaign from 1998 onwards**

The Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems are universally known. However, understanding of their meaning varies country by country. During the last five years, the British Red Cross has pursued an ambitious programme, linked to World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, of marketing very simple Red Cross pins which are distributed throughout the United Kingdom in return for a small donation. In 1995 nearly US\$4 million was raised and over five million Red Cross pins were distributed. To help raise profile, VIPs and celebrities were asked to wear the pins on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, including the queen, the British prime minister, members of parliament, and television presenters and personalities.

During a typical year, a variety of promotional techniques are used to raise funds and communicate the meaning of the Red Cross emblem, and the work of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, in the UK. But awareness reaches its peak in the run-up to, during, and in the immediate aftermath of World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day.

The forum recommends that National Societies organize similar campaigns worldwide using the same Red Cross or Red Crescent pin. The aim would be to raise the visibility and profile of the Red Cross and Red Crescent simultaneously throughout the world.

The forum calls on the Council of Delegates to support the global pin campaign by calling on National Societies to pilot this project in 1998 and 1999. The Federation and the ICRC, supported by the British Red Cross, would assist a number of National Societies with limited resources, to join the pilot, and the forum would facilitate other bilateral arrangements to assist other Societies to join. The forum believes that by the year 2000, 50 per cent of National Societies should be part of the global pin campaign. Ideally nearly all National Societies would be marketing these pins in their countries early in the new millennium.

The forum would also attempt to secure sponsorship to help finance a global Red Cross and Red Crescent pin campaign. The campaign would complement the Movement's millennium plans.

The cost of producing the pins is very small, barely three US cents each. The vision is to see all types of people from all walks of life - children, students, people in the workplace and particularly those who fulfil a 'customer service' such as airline cabin crews, bus drivers, people serving in shops and markets, policemen and women,

receptionists - **all wearing Red Cross or Red Crescent pins on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day.**

The Movement must promote its work on World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day. Other organizations, some of them competitors, are successfully promoting their own special days. The Council of Delegates proposal in 1995 that all Societies should encourage diary producers to include the day on calendars and in diaries, is still important.

The pin campaign could differ from country to country. Some National Societies may want to use it for fund-raising, others for awareness and some may only want to ask their volunteers and staff to proudly wear the pin.

The Communications Forum of the Movement is ready to develop a plan to work with up to 15 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for the start of a global pin campaign for 1998. If this pilot is successful, it would be hoped to expand as outlined above.

The forum believes this is a simple and effective way to raise Red Cross and Red Crescent profile, and provide a vehicle for future campaigns each year, which all Societies could participate in.

### **Global television initiatives**

It was recognized that the Movement should try to establish good working relations with one or more global television networks to get its message across. Such messages would focus on the impact of conflict and disaster on peoples lives and the work of the Movement to bring hope and help. Several networks were approached and encouraging high level contacts were established. This led to formal proposals to a key international television outlet. In order to be sensitive to the needs of television, the proposals concentrate on raising awareness of key issues of concern to the Movement as a whole rather than promoting the Movement as such.

As much as possible, any project will have a grassroots focus, involving National Societies as well as ICRC and Federation delegations. Public service announcements (PSAs) and on-site reporting will be key elements in this initiative. Funding support for the PSAs will be required and the cooperation of all elements of the Movement will be necessary in order to achieve maximum visibility and support for its humanitarian work.

In order not to disrupt ongoing discussions, it would be premature to name potential partners at this stage in the process.

## 5) Support for local and national communication

### Informing each other - media alert

Communicators in one part of the Movement are often unaware of what is going on in another part, even when it may be of direct relevance to them. The problem stems from the highly decentralized nature of the Movement, with its 171 autonomous National Societies, and two Geneva institutions each with over 60 delegations scattered across the world.

There are many examples of information officers being contacted by their own media about an event or problem concerning the Red Cross or Red Crescent in another part of the world and being in the difficult situation of hearing about it for the first time. While the logistics of the Movement make it inevitable that this will continue to some extent, those responsible for information should be able to improve on the present situation so that damage to our credibility is reduced.

### Objective

The aim is to create a basic alert system to ensure that all those communicators in the Movement who might be affected by events or actions elsewhere would be informed in advance. The principle should be that everyone knows, at best in advance, at worst simultaneously with the media, but never after the event.

The forum does not believe that one part of the Movement should respond to events on behalf of another. The aim is that any information officer in any component of the Movement should be in a position to refer an enquiry directly to the RC/RC source of the story, or, if necessary, have time to formulate a position for his or her organization should it be an issue of local concern.

The forum identified three basic requirements for an alert system. Firstly a directory of all information staff. Secondly basic criteria for issuing an alert and thirdly a simple system to communicate alerts.

### 1. The directory

Following the first meeting of the Communications Forum in Washington DC, the Federation secretariat was given the task of creating a Movement-wide information officer directory. Requests for information were sent to all National Societies, followed by several reminders to those which did not reply to the initial request. Some 40 Societies still have not replied, but the directory has now been produced in provisional form. With over 260 entries is 86% complete. Many of those Societies which have not replied do not have information staff and the forum will have to consult them to identify to whom alerts should be addressed.

The directory was presented in hard copy to members of the forum in Cape Town. It will also feature on the FedWeb, the Federation's intranet. Because the directory contains private 'phone numbers it will not be put on the public web site.

## 2. The issues

The forum identified the following criteria for deciding what issues merit a media alert being issued:

- ◆ Any press statement by a National Society, delegation or institution on international issues which might be picked up by press agencies
- ◆ Any press statement by a National Society on domestic issues which might have international ramifications (e.g. blood policy, humanitarian standards)
- ◆ Reports in national media critical of the international Red Cross/Red Crescent
- ◆ Critical reports of any Red Cross/Red Crescent national programmes funded from outside
- ◆ Sensitive political or integrity issues affecting the Red Cross/Red Crescent

The amount of detail in the alert should depend on the issue, but any public statement should be provided in full, along with the name of the person dealing with it.

Difficulties will arise on sensitive political matters or when the personal behaviour of Red Cross personnel is in question. Most National Societies would prefer not to broadcast the fact that they have such difficulties. A "no details alert" might be a possible solution, simply indicating that there could be press inquiries about a Society and providing a contact name in the Society. Should any press interest appear elsewhere, it can simply be referred with no comment.

## 3. The alert system

The forum agreed that e-mail should be the basic means for sending alerts. Although e-mail does not extend to all the Movement, it is expanding fast, and early in the new millennium should be within reach of all Societies. It already covers some 180 of the almost 300 points (National Societies and delegations) which would be involved in alerts. As an interim measure it is proposed that regional delegations should be the focal point for alerts where there is a gap in the e-mail network.

### Media training

At the first meeting of the forum it was agreed that one step towards increasing the Movement's communications capacity, and by extension its cohesion vis-à-vis external target groups, would be to assist National

Societies in developing their skills in communications. This, it was felt, would have the primary effect of helping individual Societies raise their profile in their own national constituencies, mainly but not exclusively through the media. An important secondary effect would be to enhance, through increased professionalism in communications, the image of the Movement by setting certain standards in communications on which the media, donors and others could depend.

The ICRC carried out a pilot project on behalf of the forum through its regional delegation for eastern Africa, and involved the National Societies of Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. An experienced British journalist and media consultant was made available by the British Red Cross.

Two-day workshops were held for each Society, in their respective capital cities, with between 12 and 20 senior headquarters staff and field personnel taking part. These were preceded by a workshop for the secretaries-general of the Societies concerned, in order to brief them on the project and ensure their support. The feedback was positive: it was felt that the training - which during the pilot project was necessarily summary - responded to a real need and desire on the part of the Societies to improve their capacity in this field.

The Forum believes that the opportunities offered by access to both traditional as well as new media make it important for the Movement to facilitate full use of the media by all National Societies. It would be a strengthening factor for the Movement as a whole and help bridge the gap between Geneva and the participating National Societies, on the one hand, and the operating National Societies on the other, in effectively presenting the Red Cross/Red Crescent to the world.

It is therefore proposed that:

- ◆ the results of the pilot project be made known to other National Societies, and their views solicited on the feasibility/ desirability of extending the project;
- ◆ a plan of action be drawn up, involving the International Federation, the ICRC and a number of National Societies, with a view to continuing the project in other countries over a period of up to five years;
- ◆ that prior pledges of core funding be sought from the ICRC, the Federation and National Societies, before launching the programme, but that external resources, both human and financial, also be sought to carry the project forward;
- ◆ that the operating National Societies provide an increasing part of the human resources needed (i.e. trainers) from within their ranks.

### **Video spots**

The forum noted the fact that a variety of useful centrally-produced audiovisual material, usually produced by the ICRC or the Federation is available. But it also noted that, as a rule, this material describes the international activities of one or other of the two Geneva institutions. There is no simple, short audiovisual material illustrating in general terms the role and action of the Red Cross/Red Crescent without explaining the complicated structure of the Movement and the specific roles of its various parts.

At the request of the forum, the ICRC produced a video clip presenting the Red Cross/Red Crescent entirely through images of situations in which it acts and of the assistance it provides. The clip was demonstrated at the Cape Town meeting of the

forum. It starts with computer-generated images of an unidentified and unidentifiable disaster. It then uses photos to show how the Red Cross/Red Crescent helps in crises.

The forum welcomed this specific contribution and believes that, as far as it is aware, the clip represents the first audiovisual product made strictly for the Movement rather than with a view to enhancing the image of one or other of its components. The forum underlines the need for other audiovisual material of this kind and appeals to participating National Societies, as well as to the Federation, to follow the ICRC's lead.

## 6) Conclusions

The main recommendations of the forum are:

- ◆ the promotion of key messages for use by communicators throughout the RedCross/Red Crescent.
- ◆ the development of a coherent Red Cross/Red Crescent presence on the World Wide Web.
- ◆ a global Red Cross/Red Crescent pin campaign each year to raise profile and provide a vehicle for Red Cross/Red Crescent messages.
- ◆ an approach to global television outlets to promote Red Cross/Red Crescent work
- ◆ the development of internal communications between all those involved in information and media work.
- ◆ a media training initiative to strengthen local and global impact on the media.
- ◆ the production and promotion of video spots to raise the profile of the global Red Cross/Red Crescent.

The Communications Forum of the Movement believes these proposals should gain the support of the Council of Delegate because:

- ◆ they are limited but important in scope and **can be achieved**
- ◆ they **include essential elements**: the promotion of the emblem, projection of the Movement's reputation, the use of the RedCross/RedCrescent network and the assertion of Movement values
- ◆ they **face up to competition** in the communications market
- ◆ they provide the complex organization of the Red Cross/Red Crescent with real opportunities to present a **coherent external image**.

And above all:

- ◆ they represent a practical approach which will **bring results**.

Annex  
CD 97/PDR 7.1  
Original: English  
August 1997

PRELIMINARY DRAFT RESOLUTION  
COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY OF THE MOVEMENT

The Council of Delegates:

*recalling* resolution 6 adopted by the Council in 1995,

1. *welcomes* the report of the Communications Forum of the Movement set up as a result of that resolution,
2. *congratulates* the Federation secretariat, the ICRC and the National Societies involved, on their work,
3. *adopts and calls for the implementation of* the report of the Forum as the current communications policy for the Movement and in particular:
  - (a) *calls on* all National Societies to introduce the Red Cross/Red Crescent pin project for the 8 May each year, using a common cross and crescent modelled on the British Red Cross campaign, in order to raise the profile of the Red Cross/Red Crescent worldwide, and provide a practical vehicle for future global campaigns including the Movement 's activities for the millennium,
  - (b) *supports* the production of a directory of information staff within the Movement and the introduction of an alert system to promote communication between information departments of the Movement, and to improve their handling of media issues,
  - (c) *endorses* the Movement web site project managed from the Federation secretariat and *urges* National Societies and the ICRC to support the project with both material for the site and financial support for the necessary resources, and link it with their own sites,
  - (d) *commends* the pilot media training project funded by the British Red Cross and run by the ICRC on behalf of the Forum and *calls for* its introduction as part of the capacity building programme of the Federation. It further *calls on* the ICRC, the International Federation and the National Societies to fund the media training project in the future,

(e) *welcomes* the production of the promotional television spot produced by the ICRC for National Societies on behalf of the Forum and *calls on* all parts of the Movement to promote its screening,

(f) *supports* contacts with leading international television companies aimed at producing coverage of Red Cross/Red Crescent values and actions on behalf of the victims of conflict and disaster, and the most vulnerable, and *commends* the support of the American Red Cross in furthering the project,

(g) *endorses* the Forum's list of key messages and requests the information and communications departments within the Movement to promote their use,

4. *recognizes* with thanks the financial contributions in the form of membership of the Communications Forum of the Movement of the National Societies of Australia, Belgium, China (the former Hong Kong branch of the BRCS), Colombia, Lebanon, Malaysia, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States,
5. *expresses* particular gratitude for the financial contribution to the Forum's running costs by the National Societies of Italy and Norway,
6. *also recognizes* the financial and administrative support of the ICRC, the Federation secretariat, the American Red Cross, the Belgian Red Cross, the British Red Cross and the South African Red Cross,
7. *agrees* that the Communications Forum of the Movement should continue its work, to implement the projects already identified, consider further Movement communications projects, and to report back on progress to the 1999 Council of Delegates,
8. *calls on* National Societies to support the work of the Forum through financial contributions to its running costs in 1998 and 1999.