



150 years of humanitarian action
**Council of Delegates of the International
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**
Sydney, Australia, November 2013



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CD/13/6.2
Original: English
For information

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES
**OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

Sydney, Australia
17-18 November 2013

Vision for a strengthened Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian response

**Document prepared by
the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red
Cross and Red Crescent Societies in consultation with National Societies**

Geneva, October 2013

Vision for a strengthened Red Cross Red Crescent humanitarian response

This paper outlines the vision of the senior management of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the Federation) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on how enhanced coordination and cooperation would help the Movement respond more effectively to the changing patterns of humanitarian needs worldwide and the shifting dynamics in humanitarian assistance.

The changing humanitarian landscape

We live in an era of incredible technological advances and major achievements in combating disease. There has been a revolution in our ability to communicate information instantly around the world and to find out about people's needs directly. And yet, we also live in an era of horrendous acts of violence, financial crises and growing uncertainty, with global and national governance mechanisms failing to adequately care for and protect people in need.

Demand for humanitarian action is unfortunately not likely to abate, owing to the increasing volume of assistance and protection needs generated by armed conflict and other situations of violence, the rising incidence and risk of disasters and crises linked to extreme climatic events and environmental threats, growing inequities in access to food and water, and economic and political instability.

As international power dynamics shift and States assert their sovereignty, the value of unconditional, independent humanitarian access is increasingly being challenged. The ethical foundations of humanitarian aid – the four commonly agreed principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – are being interpreted less rigorously and consistently by humanitarian actors and are being bluntly contested by some States (both donor and host). This can hamper the ability of humanitarian actors to operate, especially if they are perceived to be part of political or military agendas.

Challenges within the Movement

Informed by reviews conducted in July and August 2013 of Movement coordination in a number of major conflict- and disaster-related operations, as well as by a frank assessment of our recent performance, we realize that, while we do many things well, the Movement faces internal challenges that must be addressed if we are to extend the reach and impact of our humanitarian efforts.

In practice, our coordination processes are too often shaped by specific events and interests and influenced by personalities, resulting not only in tensions between the interests of individual components and the Movement as a whole, but also inconsistencies in our humanitarian action. The joined-up action advocated in existing coordination frameworks is not always put into practice and some of our recent operations have exposed a lack of commitment to meaningful coordinated action “on the ground.”

We acknowledge that in large-scale crises there have been some failures to maximize Movement synergies and capabilities. If the spirit, and to some extent the letter, of our instruments are to remain relevant, we should at least agree on a shared and consistent interpretation thereof and consider introducing additional procedures or mechanisms to enhance their practical application.

There are no clear mechanisms for agreeing on the role of lead agency or assigning shared leadership responsibilities, which at times results in misunderstandings and undermines trust

and accountability. The lead agency concept is too often interpreted with an exclusive rather than inclusive mind-set – it is seen in terms of command and control rather than a range of services and responsibilities that the lead agency should assume vis-à-vis all other Movement actors. In many contexts it is clear that there is no single component that can provide the full range of necessary services to other components of the Movement.

The growing fragmentation, deregulation and competition that characterize the wider humanitarian sector can also be felt within the Movement. In some contexts of conflict and internal strife, there are real or perceived questions about National Society neutrality and independence, which may result in restrictions on humanitarian access not only for that National Society but also for other Movement components. Tensions may arise between Movement actors over competing claims of national sovereignty and desires to express international solidarity, or over claims of prioritizing the principle of unity over that of humanity. Such tensions and competing interpretations can pose significant challenges to an effective and coordinated Movement response.

Mobilizing the necessary funds for our humanitarian work at all levels continues to be a challenge. At times, the failure to articulate a common view of our preparedness, response and longer-term work prevents us from increasing our collective share of available resources.

Finally, we recognize that there may be situations in which non-Movement partners are better placed to deliver goods and services. In such instances we should strive to complement rather than compete.

A vision for strengthened delivery of the Movement's humanitarian response

We have been at the forefront of organized international humanitarian action for 150 years and we have a duty to uphold and build upon that legacy for the sake of people in need. In order to achieve the transformational change necessary to do so, and to enhance and scale up our humanitarian response, we call upon all Movement components to redouble their efforts to:

- strive to work closely and directly with affected people (such proximity and access are the cornerstone of any Red Cross and Red Crescent action);
- empower people to take charge of the response to their urgent and longer-term development needs, and prioritize building their resilience and that of their organizations both before and during crises;
- adapt operational coordination frameworks to the capacity, positioning and ambitions of the host National Society;
- combine relief and recovery work with longer-term development as part of an enhanced multi-disciplinary approach to humanitarian assistance;
- invest in disaster and conflict preparedness and risk reduction;
- address issues of security, acceptance and the politicization of aid in a coherent and coordinated way across the Movement;
- develop and individually respect a framework of collective and mutual accountability;
- address issues of compliance and integrity;
- reaffirm leadership on humanitarian principles in order to foster understanding of the merits of principled humanitarian action;
- develop and enforce standardized agreements with key partners, first and foremost to protect the integrity and reputation of the Movement;

- innovate and make use of technology to improve our performance and explore new ways of providing assistance and protection.

In order to tackle the key internal and external challenges identified, we suggest focusing on the following four areas:

1. Strengthening leadership and coordination roles

Demonstrating an inclusive and responsible leadership mind-set requires the lead agency – whether the host National Society, the Federation or the ICRC – to perform a wider range of leadership services and functions for the benefit of all participating Movement actors. When the host National Society takes on the lead agency role, the ICRC and the Federation undertake to explicitly agree on the best way to support it in fulfilling all of the expected services and functions.

2. Scaling up the Movement's operational response

In the context of large-scale crises, we have to deliver humanitarian assistance more efficiently and effectively. While coordination is not an end in itself, it is essential to design and use mechanisms that enable all Movement actors to participate and that harness their complementary skills and expertise. Introducing security frameworks, conducting joint needs assessments and analyses, mapping all Red Cross Red Crescent activities, and developing common operational strategies are part of this process.

3. Promoting well-coordinated communications

In an increasingly competitive communications environment, in which we are subject to intense media scrutiny, we must deliver coherent and well-coordinated internal and external communications, and be consistent in our dealings with external actors.

4. Exploring new resource-mobilization approaches

Over the coming two years we want to test resource-mobilization frameworks that prioritize the “red channel” – seeking to mobilize and manage resources on a large scale directly through Red Cross Red Crescent channels rather than just through UN or other non-Movement channels. This will certainly have implications in terms of making better coordinated, and perhaps even consolidated, Movement appeals.

In conclusion, our vision is that, in a spirit of inclusiveness and cooperation, all the components of the Movement will do everything in their power in the coming years to forge a seamless connection between local, national, regional and international Red Cross Red Crescent action, thereby fulfilling our common mission “to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health, and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies, to work for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of health and social welfare, to encourage voluntary service and a constant readiness to give help by the members of the Movement, and a universal sense of solidarity towards all those in need of its protection and assistance” (Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement).

We invite National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to work with us to refine the vision outlined in this paper. Through our individual and collective efforts, we will strive to deliver more timely and effective results with and for people in need.