

XXIst INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS

Istanbul, 1969

GENERAL COMMISSIONItem 5 of the AgendaTHE RED CROSS VOLUNTEER - YOUTH AND ADULT - IN THE CHANGING COMMUNITYIntroduction

"Red Cross volunteer" - "Changing Community": how can these two concepts be linked so that the term Red Cross volunteer projects the image of a dynamic person, able to participate in and adapt to the changes occurring in the community? How can National Societies' services keep pace with these changes and provide a needed complement to government programmes, locally and nationally? How can governments aid their respective National Societies in these efforts?

These are the concepts which this document attempts to clarify, in the hope that the discussion on this subject will result in the expression of some broad principles for the future development of Red Cross volunteer service.

The Changing Community: Respective Responsibilities of National Societies and Governments

Change is a characteristic of all communities today, regardless of their size, location, composition, or socio-economic structures. Throughout the world, communities are undergoing changes which stem from a number of factors, some of which are universal while others, presently found in certain areas, may belong to the future of others. Among these factors, the following may be mentioned as directly affecting the lives of community members: increased and shifting populations, changes in living, working and leisure time patterns, changes in disease patterns and methods of treatment.

These changes often result from attempts to improve living standards, but in some cases they give rise to new problems which must in turn be solved. Their solution is the main responsibility of governments, but it also requires the understanding, support and active participation of all community members. In addition, the extent of these problems is often so great that governments must limit their efforts, at least in the beginning, to meeting the needs of the majority. Voluntary agencies, such as the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies*, can complement these efforts by offering

* hereafter referred to as National Societies.

smaller, in some cases more individualised services, until governments are in a position to provide them.

Because of the variety and number of its services and volunteers, the National Society may hold a key position in the community in awakening public understanding to the implications of change, and in obtaining its support and participation for the improvement of health, welfare and education programmes.

Today, more than ever before, it would seem that partnership between public and private agencies, as well as support from an interested, informed and committed public, have become a challenge for the community.

The Nature of Red Cross Service

The principles which underlie Red Cross service can be stated as follows. This service

- is open to all, regardless of race, religion, political opinion, social status, sex or age
- complements the work of government and other organisations, and does not overlap or compete with it
- is planned, and is directed at meeting unmet needs
- is often pioneering in nature
- is comprehensive, in that there are no limits to the areas in which it can be provided
- is provided so long as there is a need for it, or until another agency assumes responsibility for it.

The Volunteer

Who is he?

In the spirit of the founder of the Red Cross, the word "volunteer" means "one who enters into or offers himself for any service of his own free will".* In the present document, it applies to those whose services are unpaid, or if paid, only to cover basic expenses.

The volunteer

- comes from all age groups, including children, young people and the elderly
- with a variety of background, interest and skills
- is a catalyst, capable of influencing his family, friends and others for the improvement of community living standards
- is above all a person whose belief in humanitarian principles motivates him to apply them in service for others.

* LORCS Executive Committee Meeting, May 1950

How does he serve?

- on a part or full-time basis
- by offering training, service, advice, financial support as well as leadership for determining new needs and their solutions in his community
- in close cooperation with professional staff

Where does he serve?

- where the need lies
- in his own community, in other regions of his country or in other countries
- in training or direct service programmes in the fields of health, welfare and education
- on boards and committees

Children and Youth as Volunteers

At the same time that Red Cross service is a real help to the community, it is also a means of stimulating a sense of social responsibility in both youth and adults. An increasing number of volunteer services is provided by children and young people. This is an asset, in that young people bring to this service enthusiasm, openness to change, innovative ideas and dynamism. Encouraging them to volunteer their services for those in need enables them to practice the ideals and principles they learn in their home and school lives. They gain, thus, sound learning experiences for their role as active, participating citizens in their communities.

In offering opportunities for youth and adults to serve, their National Society can ensure a continuity of programme and a comprehensive approach to community involvement.

Organisation of Volunteer Services

To involve youth and adults in volunteer service requires sound organisation. Among the components of this organisation which have direct bearing on the volunteer are recruitment, selection, training and supervision.

Recruitment and Selection

A prerequisite to recruiting and selecting volunteers is a clear definition of the task to be performed, and the skills, knowledge and aptitudes needed to perform it.

Various methods are used to recruit volunteers - radio, press, television and other media, personal contact, contacts with groups and agencies, etc.

Selecting the volunteer for his job will be easy if the latter has been well defined in advance and if criteria have been set up for determining whether or not the potential volunteer meets the qualifications for the job.

As far as possible, the potential volunteer should be given the job for which he applies, or if this is impossible, should be helped to find one for which he is suited.

Training and Supervision

It is the responsibility of each National Society to see that volunteers are enabled to work effectively. Different methods may be used - orientation, technical training, in-service training. In all cases, training should be continued through supervision. Not only does supervision help a volunteer to develop his skills, but it is also a means of ensuring that a National Society's standards of service are maintained.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, the International Conference of the Red Cross might wish to consider specifically:

1. the respective responsibilities of Governments and National Societies in general development efforts in the health, welfare and educational fields
2. ways in which Red Cross volunteers can be a factor in meeting needs in the changing community
 - by awakening community interest in the problems arising from change
 - by encouraging community participation in finding solutions to these problems
 - by providing services as they are needed
3. broad principles related to recruitment, selection, training and supervision of volunteers.