



SAFER ACCESS IN ACTION

CASE STUDY: AFGHANISTAN

PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK



ICRC



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross
19, avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 733 20 57
Email: shop@icrc.org www.icrc.org
© ICRC, October 2013

Cover photo: Afghan Red Crescent Society food distribution in Kunduz province. A. Sweeting/British Red Cross/ICRC

SAFER ACCESS IN ACTION

CASE STUDY: AFGHANISTAN

ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This case study summarizes some of the issues affecting safe access by the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) to people and communities affected by armed conflict or internal disturbances or tensions. It also includes the strategies that the organization is adopting to enable its volunteers and staff to safely provide humanitarian services in an active conflict environment. The case study is the outcome of a peer learning process that shed light on several aspects of the Safer Access Framework (SAF), particularly context and risk assessment, acceptance of the organization and acceptance of the individual.

With the goal of fostering a learning exchange between National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a representative of the Canadian Red Cross and of the Nepal Red Cross Society led a process supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the ARCS in September 2011 to gather data for this study. The process included a desk review of a number of background documents, interviews and focus group sessions involving representatives from ARCS headquarters, as well as from several regional and branch offices, the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Swedish Red Cross. The data was compiled and categorized and this case study developed.

An essential component of the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack, case studies such as this one give current examples of good practice by National Societies.

This case study was produced with the assistance of:



Acronyms

ARCS	Afghan Red Crescent Society
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
SAF	Safer Access Framework

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT	5
Country background	5
Afghan Red Crescent Society	6
Humanitarian action by the National Society	7
The Safer Access Framework	8
ISSUES AFFECTING SAFE ACCESS AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED	9
Issue 1: Context and risk assessment	9
Issue 2: Acceptance of the organization	10
Issue 3: Acceptance of the individual	14
WORKING TOGETHER AS A MOVEMENT	18

FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Afghanistan	5
Figure 2: The eight elements of the Safer Access Framework	8
Figure 3: The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent	18

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Country background

Afghanistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is a landlocked country divided administratively into 34 provinces. It has a population of approximately 30 million.¹

Over the past three decades and more, Afghanistan has faced many challenges caused by armed conflict or internal disturbances or tensions, including those resulting from foreign occupation, military presence and political instability.

“We had an invasion of a superpower, we had a civil war, and then another, a religious war, an ethnic war, a language war, and also a war of the regional powers. So it is extraordinarily important that people who benefit from the Red Crescent should be protected from all that is going on, and that we preserve the nature of a National Society, the very reason why we exist.”

Fatima Gailani, President,
Afghan Red Crescent Society

¹ Although population estimates differ slightly, several sources converge around 30 million. The United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, recorded 28,398,000 in 2010.
http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm

FIGURE 1: MAP OF AFGHANISTAN





ARCS emergency mobile unit and volunteers responding to needs at the Cheshma-e-Shafa camp for internally displaced persons.

The country is also prone to a high frequency of natural disasters, including floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides and avalanches, which often result in widespread casualties, loss of life and damage to the infrastructure. In many instances, the disasters occur in regions already affected by violence, further complicating the humanitarian response.

The history of conflict in Afghanistan has also engendered mistrust between some ethnic groups and communities. Some people can be mistrustful of anyone who is not known to the local community. This can be a significant factor affecting safe access to communities for all organizations.

Afghan Red Crescent Society

The ARCS has been operating in an environment affected by armed conflict, internal disturbances and tensions and natural disasters since its inception. It is organized into 34 branches and has 7 regional coordination offices, mirroring the structure of the country. Services provided include first aid, health care, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response, the management of human remains, mine risk awareness, restoring family links, food-for-work programmes, the promotion of humanitarian values, youth education and Marastoon (social welfare) programmes.

The ARCS takes great pride in its over 15,000 trained volunteer service providers. Volunteers are not remunerated for their work and are seen as playing a key role in gaining acceptance for the organization at the community level and as the driving force behind the provision of services and programmes.

The ARCS features in the Afghanistan constitution as an auxiliary to the national government; a number of non-voting government ministerial representatives are present on its Governing Board and in its General Assembly. Its statutes state that during natural and man-made disasters, it has an auxiliary role to the government in the humanitarian field and maintains its independence at all times when

dealing with the governmental organizations concerned. The ARCS conducted a General Assembly in October 2012, even though insecurity in many remote regions impeded the holding of preliminary local and provincial assemblies.

To fulfil its auxiliary role, the ARCS establishes and maintains contact with government representatives at the local, regional and national levels. Meetings serve to disseminate information about the ARCS mandate, the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the procedures and other policies that govern the work of the ARCS.

Humanitarian action by the National Society

The Afghan Red Crescent Society's adoption of a conflict preparedness and response strategy has been identified as an imperative means of increasing the Movement's safe access to as many conflict-affected people as possible. The ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and National Society partners rely on the extensive network of ARCS volunteers who are active in all provinces. The ARCS approach to increasing safe access to people and communities has evolved gradually and in an ad hoc manner over time in response to the circumstances and challenges encountered by volunteers and staff. The ARCS is aware that a more comprehensive, systematic and planned approach to increasing its acceptance, security and access – one that strengthens the links between its headquarters and the regional coordination offices and branches – is required. Its leadership has identified a clear vision for its way forward, with priorities based on a pragmatic assessment of its internal and external environment.

The ARCS health programme provides support for the government's basic health policy and meets the needs of the population by running 47 primary health care clinics, health posts, a district hospital in Kabul, 10 emergency units, HIV prevention programmes in four major cities (serving 131 high schools) and several community-based first-aid programmes. Most recently, the ARCS launched a comprehensive community health centre initiative in support of the government's strategy to reach those in need.



An ARCS team visits Hazar Naw village to carry out a needs assessment.








Both the ARCS position of neutrality towards armed actors and its demonstrated impartiality in providing services have been crucial in reinforcing safe access to people and communities affected by conflict. Furthermore, through the provision of relevant humanitarian community services, such as the exchange of human remains between parties to the conflict or the provision of health care for all those affected during cholera outbreaks, the ARCS has boosted confidence in its commitment to applying the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and has gained greater levels of acceptance within the communities that it serves.

The Safer Access Framework

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) highlights the interlinked actions and measures that a National Society can take to increase its acceptance, security and access when working in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. Neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and strict observance of the Fundamental Principles form the basis of the SAF.

The actions and measures are divided into eight "elements", each focusing on a key area (see Figure 2). It is in relation to some of these elements that the ARCS' humanitarian action is examined in this case study.


FIGURE 2: THE EIGHT ELEMENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

I		Context and risk assessment	National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.
II		Legal and policy base	National Societies have sound legal and statutory instruments and develop policies that provide a basis from which to carry out their humanitarian mandate and roles in conformity with Movement policies, international humanitarian law and domestic legislation.
III		Acceptance of the organization	National Societies have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.
IV		Acceptance of the individual	Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.
V		Identification	National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.
VI		Internal communication and coordination	National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.
VII		External communication and coordination	National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.
VIII		Operational security risk management	National Societies assume responsibility and accountability for the safety and security of staff and volunteers by developing and implementing an operational security risk management system and structure.

ISSUES AFFECTING SAFE ACCESS AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Issue 1 Context and risk assessment

Safer Access Framework element I

I		Context and risk assessment National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.
---	---	--

The sub-contexts within which the ARCS headquarters and branches are called to operate are constantly changing. Command and control of armed groups is often decentralized, new armed factions or splinter groups are formed, with their new leadership unaware of the independent, neutral and impartial humanitarian role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Banditry is often a threat, and the risks associated with the prevalence of natural disasters are compounded when they occur in a region already affected by conflict or violence.

The development of community-based volunteers who are able to provide up-to-date, critical information on the local context has proved instrumental in helping the ARCS to ensure that ARCS and Movement stakeholders are aware of the changes in their working context and of the possible need to revise their risk assessments and their operational plans. An increasing number of security incidents, including the death of personnel and other challenges which often hinder or even block operations, have underscored the importance of continual context analysis, with input from all ARCS levels, as a means of providing meaningful guidance for their operations.

Strategies adopted

Volunteer roles in context and risk assessment

ARCS headquarters has identified that context and risk assessment is best managed at the level of the branches. However, the branches need support and training before they can assume this critical responsibility. Additionally, it is necessary to include information from regional or headquarters level in their analyses.

Heads of branches maintain regular contact with their community-based volunteers in order to assess contextual details such as active conflict information and/or patterns of violence, armed groups present in the area, risks and community needs. The information collected in this way feeds into the ARCS assessment process, supports the development of relevant response strategies and provides input into the wider Movement's contextual analysis.



During a mission to Samangan province, the ARCS sets up a mobile health unit to provide services for the community.



An ARCS survey in Shiraz.

Issue 2 Acceptance of the organization

Safer Access Framework element III

III



Acceptance of the organization

National Societies have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.

ARCS staff and volunteers expressed a strong confidence in the organization's solid reputation and felt that the credibility of the ARCS had been built on its neutral and impartial provision of relevant services.

Many of the ARCS staff and volunteers interviewed in the course of this study expressed strong confidence in the organization's good reputation among the people of Afghanistan. They reported that it is perceived as one of the most credible charitable institutions in Afghanistan and that it has reasonably good access to most areas of the country. Areas do exist, however, in which the ARCS does not have the necessary level of acceptance required to gain access to the communities.

Those interviewed felt that the credibility of the ARCS had been built on its neutral and impartial provision of relevant services. First aid and the management of human remains are often the first services of interest to a community.

“The ARCS is one of the few organizations that work universally in Afghanistan. It is widely accepted by the people throughout the country because we have kept our neutrality and impartiality. The people allow us to go to the most remote areas, which the government and other organizations have difficulty in accessing.”

Naim Dindar, Secretary General,
Afghan Red Crescent Society

The ARCS has independent legal status. Nonetheless, its structural organization is established in the country's constitution and several members of its Governing Assembly and Governing Board have historically been non-voting ministerial representatives. The ARCS is seeking to bring about change in this area by the end of 2012. Mrs Gailani, the ARCS President, states, “I will be at peace when I see that the ARCS has an elected president, elected governance, and an elected person who will look into our budget.” To date, the participation of government representatives

in the ARCS governance function has led to some people perceiving the ARCS as being very close to the government. This perception is reinforced when government representatives are invited to participate in highly visible ARCS events such as the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May). To counter this view, the ARCS gives key speeches about the role and principles of the National Society as a means of clarifying its mandate and raising awareness about its activities. In Afghanistan's volatile environment, the independence of the ARCS and its personnel is often challenged by both internal and external stakeholders, and consistent actions and communication are therefore crucial to ensure that its autonomy is understood.

The ARCS must undertake and maintain regular contact with government representatives at the local, regional and national levels, while simultaneously trying to maintain and reinforce its independence. In the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Plan, the ARCS is a member of the national and provincial disaster management committees with clear roles and responsibilities. Generally speaking, being an important member of this coordinating mechanism is a strong point in favour of the ARCS, enhancing its ability to carry out its role. However, its membership is not without challenges. For instance, the committees are chaired by the governors of the provinces and comprise representatives of many other humanitarian agencies including, in some areas, United Nations agencies, which not all stakeholders view as neutral and impartial within the Afghan context. ARCS personnel often travel and work as a team with the members of these committees, including representatives of the Afghan government and United Nations agencies, in order to conduct joint assessments.

The ARCS President chairs the disaster response committee at ARCS headquarters and, together with her management team, provides guidance and support for the provincial teams in navigating the challenges that can arise. In some locations, some of those interviewed nonetheless still felt that this close operational liaison affects the image of the ARCS as a neutral and independent organization.

The particular challenge of balancing external relationships in terms of their impact on the perception of the National Society as neutral and impartial was not included in the ARCS strategies that have been adopted but might be an area on which the ARCS could usefully work in the future.



Women and children attend a session alerting them to the dangers of mines.



ARCS President Fatima Gailani gives an interview on International Women's Day.

Strategies adopted

Maintaining a balanced relationship with the government

There is some recognition within the organization that the existing context is highly complex and that the ARCS increasingly needs to be seen as relevant, accepted and independent while carrying out its humanitarian work as an auxiliary to the government in order to maintain safe access to communities.

“Independence is essential. If we are not independent we are no different from any other charitable organization or from the government itself. The reason why the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was created was to have that very special independent and unique way of working. In Afghanistan, if we compromise our independence, we are finished. When I look at some countries and see that they have a National Society without preserving its identity and independence, I always think that they would be better off not having one. That is very important.”

Fatima Gailani, President,
Afghan Red Crescent Society

The ARCS leadership fully recognizes the need and the importance of ensuring that the organization is perceived as – and is capable of – acting independently. To achieve this goal, the ARCS governing bodies and management have identified the following actions as steps needed to strengthen the independence of the ARCS vis-à-vis all levels of government and to provide a foundation for increasing access to beneficiaries and enhancing safety and security for ARCS personnel.²

² Much of this work was carried out over a six-month period in 2011-12 with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC.

Achieved

- ▶ Obtain a presidential decree (2005) declaring the ARCS as a neutral and independent humanitarian organization;
- ▶ Develop a membership programme to ensure that the ARCS is open to all and representative of the communities that it serves;
- ▶ Develop and implement a new strategic plan that sets a clear direction and focuses on the provision of relevant services for the most vulnerable in accordance with the Fundamental Principles;
- ▶ Develop human resources policies to ensure transparency in recruitment and performance management processes and develop a volunteering policy to provide better support for the role of volunteers within the organization.

In progress

- ▶ Draft a new emblem law to ensure recognition and protection of the red cross and red crescent emblems and consequently to protect and strengthen the identity of the ARCS and other Movement components operating within Afghanistan;
- ▶ Implement the newly developed human resources policies;
- ▶ Develop procurement regulations to ensure independent purchasing practices;
- ▶ Draft revised statutes to further strengthen the independence of the ARCS and to guide the future development of the organization.

The ARCS representatives interviewed generally considered their relationship with government representatives as an opportunity to further disseminate key messages about who they are and how they operate in accordance with the Fundamental Principles as well as to learn more about the external environment in which they operate.

Taking up that point, Mrs Gailani observed, “Whether we like it or not, in Afghanistan, as in any other country, we exist with the permission of our government so it is very important to explain to them that you can help them better if they respect your ways of working ... your laws, your legal base, your everything. In my everyday work I soon realized one thing – that sometimes when there is a problem, whether it is with the government, the people who need you or the anti-government movement, it is mostly because of lack of knowledge about the way you work. We have to find more and more successful ways of how to maintain our diplomacy, how to go to people, how to talk to them, how to convince them, how to open their eyes so they can see that we can solve the problems with conversation and with understanding.”

To further emphasize the importance of this point, Mrs Gailani very wisely commented, “I believe that the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement needs to have a conversation with the whole world.”

Those interviewed also referred to the challenges that they face in maintaining the balance in these relationships. “The capacity to maintain a balanced relationship with the government would promote our independent image as well as increase cooperation for ARCS operations,” said the head of the Kapisa branch. “Independence does not mean boycotting relationships with the government authority.”

Issue 3 Acceptance of the individual

Safer Access Framework element IV

IV



Acceptance of the individual

Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.

The ARCS is no different from other Movement components in terms of experiencing challenges regarding the safety and access of their staff and volunteers in armed conflict or in internal disturbances and tensions.

“It is impossible to protect your volunteers 100%. However, if I see our volunteers targeted, this is a problem, something is wrong. Either we have not made our neutrality very clear or the situation is so bad that no one cares about our neutrality. Then we need to take steps. In my experience in Afghanistan, the problems nearly always stem from a lack of information about our neutrality. I have had endless discussions with the government to assure them that we are not on someone else’s side. We are just neutral. We have to stay in the middle otherwise there is no reason for us to exist.”

Fatima Gailani, President,
Afghan Red Crescent Society

As one of the only humanitarian organizations able to reach certain parts of the country, the ARCS finds itself subject to increased pressure. On occasion, the ARCS has not had enough local staff to respond to community needs in some regions. Given the context, which includes a diverse array of ethnic groups, volunteers from outside a specific community are not always welcome or allowed to provide services.



ARCS personnel talking to community members.

Strategies adopted

The summary given below is a compilation of good practice processes which, although they have not been adopted throughout the country, exist to varying degrees in some branches. Although these processes are applied only inconsistently and partially in some locations and may not be known to or recognized by ARCS headquarters, the case study team wanted to highlight these steps as good practice to be considered for wider application.

1. Community volunteer recruitment process

By supporting communities to recruit appropriately profiled volunteers and ensuring the thorough induction and guidance of those put forward by the community, the ARCS has created an extensive network of representatives and volunteers who are acceptable to people and communities to provide services for those in need.

As the first step in the volunteer management continuum, recruitment practices are critical to the success of any National Society. The following volunteer recruitment approaches are being utilized by some of the ARCS branches visited and are undertaken as a joint initiative with the communities they serve.

Community needs assessment: Prior to the recruitment of volunteers, a community needs assessment is completed and the ARCS establishes, in consultation with the community, what services are needed and what capacity the community and ARCS have to provide them.

Recruitment based on identified volunteer profiles: The head of the ARCS branch engages the local community leaders in the recruitment of appropriately profiled volunteers to support the provision of services. Community leaders identify potential volunteers from the community and present them to the ARCS. Potential volunteers must:

- ▶ be honest and have a high degree of personal acceptance from the community;
- ▶ know and agree to abide by the Fundamental Principles,³ ARCS policies and its code of conduct;
- ▶ be committed to humanitarian activities;
- ▶ have no associations with armed actors or criminal circles; and
- ▶ know the articles of the National Constitution that outline the mandate of the ARCS.

Face-to-face meetings prior to acceptance as ARCS volunteers: The next step in the recruitment process is a meeting between community leaders, potential volunteers and ARCS branch representatives. During this meeting, the ARCS provides information about the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ARCS mandate, role and services and the requirements of volunteering with the ARCS, including respect for and adherence to the Fundamental Principles and code of conduct. Through this discussion, potential volunteers and the ARCS branch representatives are able to assess the suitability and the capacity of each individual as an ARCS volunteer service provider for their community.

Diversity of the volunteer base: The ARCS has recognized the importance of diversity and representation in its volunteer base as a means of gaining greater access to those in need of services. This is seen as an important aspect of

The ARCS has created an extensive network of diverse community volunteers, seeking the involvement of the community in their selection and in the work they carry out.

³ Compliance with the Fundamental Principles is monitored by the head of branch on an ongoing basis.

projecting an image of impartiality and neutrality and of being representative of the communities served. Considerable effort has been made, for example, to recruit more female volunteers in several areas, including Kabul, Kapisa and Jalalabad. Female volunteers are involved in community-based first aid, community-based disaster preparedness and disaster management activities.

Through this community-centred recruitment approach, the ARCS ensures that its volunteers are both acceptable to the communities they will serve and able to support the ARCS mission in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

2. Protocols for the deployment of volunteers outside their home communities

The following summary highlights steps that occur to varying degrees in several branches but are not applied systematically and are not standard throughout the country. They nonetheless appeared to represent examples of good practice that could be built on, which is why the case study team has chosen to draw attention to them.

In some communities which display high levels of mistrust towards “outsiders” and when the scope of a response requires the ARCS to bring in trained volunteers from other communities, due care must be taken in advance of their arrival to ensure their acceptance.

Some branches have established a protocol for building trust, obtaining security guarantees and facilitating this type of volunteer deployment. Before the volunteers are deployed, the ARCS head of branch makes a presentation to the community leaders and elders to review the agreed needs assessment and to outline the rationale of bringing volunteers into the community. Once an understanding has been reached, the community leaders are given further details, such as the number of volunteers arriving, the specifications of the identification documents that they will be carrying and a description of all vehicle markings.

This sharing of information in advance of deployment builds confidence and trust in the ARCS and has facilitated access and led to greater acceptance of ARCS personnel in numerous communities.

3. Additional training for volunteers deployed outside their home communities

Some ARCS branches include additional briefing and training for volunteers who are working away from their home communities:

- ▶ Contextual briefing on the destination community, including identification of the community leaders, cultural norms and anticipated risks associated with the local context;
- ▶ Personal preparedness – the importance of appropriate body language, respect for the local culture and norms, pursuing a “do no harm” approach;
- ▶ Planning service provision – what services could be provided, how to ensure that the services are acceptable to the community and meet their needs;
- ▶ Communications – the importance of speaking to people clearly and respectfully.



In an ARCS dispensary, two nurses attend to a wounded patient.

Volunteers are at the heart of the humanitarian activities of the ARCS. Mrs Gailani spoke of how much she valued the volunteers, stating, "Above all, I am very proud of our volunteers. I am proud that through them we reach even the remotest community."

“It is really important for conversations to go on. We have to make it loud and clear at the level of leadership, with the volunteers, at every level, that we are independent, we are neutral, we are there to help people who need us and we are not going to take sides. As soon as we display any shortcomings, we put the lives of our volunteers in danger. And the lives of our volunteers are the most important thing. Without our volunteers, we are no different from other organizations.”

Fatima Gailani, President,
Afghan Red Crescent Society

WORKING TOGETHER AS A MOVEMENT

The ARCS emphasized that coordination between Movement components and the general cooperative approach to organizing Movement activities so as to ensure complementarity are fundamental to securing safer access for all Movement personnel. Movement coordination agreements have been developed to support this requirement.

Formal and informal coordination mechanisms are in place covering areas such as uniformity of messaging, coordination of both relief and development activities and the harmonization of joint ventures.

Working together as one body has been found to be essential to being identified as one Movement as well as to maintaining access, ensuring acceptance and upholding the reputation of the National Society.

FIGURE 3: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

HUMANITY	IMPARTIALITY	NEUTRALITY	INDEPENDENCE	VOLUNTARY SERVICE	UNITY	UNIVERSALITY
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.	It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.	In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.	The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.	There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout the territory.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



ICRC