



# SAFER ACCESS IN ACTION

**CASE STUDY: LEBANON**

**PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK**

A joint publication of:



**ICRC**



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Cover photo: Lebanese Red Cross emergency medical services volunteers in action. Lebanese Red Cross

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### Acronyms

<b>EMS</b>	Emergency medical services (LRC department)
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IHL</b>	International humanitarian law
<b>LAF</b>	Lebanese Armed Forces
<b>LRC</b>	Lebanese Red Cross
<b>SAF</b>	Safer Access Framework

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Lebanese Red Cross

Lebanese Red Cross emergency medical services volunteers preparing for action.

## ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

This case study is a joint initiative of the British Red Cross, the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). All three organizations are members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a global humanitarian network that responds to armed conflicts and other emergencies. The case study is linked to two separate projects currently being carried out by the British Red Cross and the ICRC.

The British Red Cross project Principles in Action promotes the role of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in helping National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) to access and assist people in need. By documenting how the Fundamental Principles have been used by National Societies in a range of humanitarian contexts, including armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies, the aim of the project is to:

- ▶ share lessons learned within the Movement about how the Fundamental Principles have been applied in different situations;
- ▶ clarify the operational relevance of the Fundamental Principles in particular contexts;
- ▶ examine the importance of the Fundamental Principles in today's humanitarian situations;
- ▶ analyse the distinctive role of the Movement in different contexts.

In response to a request by National Societies to the ICRC at the 2009 Council of Delegates,<sup>1</sup> the ICRC initiated a project to develop the Safer Access Framework (SAF) as a practical resource intended to support National Societies in their efforts to prepare for and respond to armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.<sup>2</sup> The SAF highlights the interlinked actions that a National Society can take to increase its acceptance, security and access when working in areas affected by 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 proposed in the SAF are divided into eight "elements", each focusing on a key area (see Figure 1). It is also in relation to some of these elements that the LRC's humanitarian action is examined in this case study. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Every two years the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies meet in what is known as the Council of Delegates. This meeting provides a forum for the discussion of matters which concern the Movement as a whole, such as Movement strategy and global humanitarian issues.

<sup>2</sup> Armed conflict is a situation in which recourse is made to armed force between two or more States (international armed conflict) or to protracted armed violence between government authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State (non-international armed conflict). Whether or not a situation is classified as an armed conflict is important because if it is, and particularly if the ICRC informs the parties to the conflict of its classification, the application of international humanitarian law (IHL), which outlines the rights and obligations of the government authority and the armed groups, is triggered. The term "internal disturbances and tensions" refers to serious situations that fall short of the classification of armed conflict and to which IHL does not therefore apply. These situations may be of political, religious, racial, social, economic or other origin and include serious acts of violence affecting a large number of people. Such situations may be characterized by one or more of the following: the spontaneous generation of acts of revolt or struggles between groups or between them and the authority in power, the extensive involvement of police or armed forces to restore internal order, large-scale arrests, a large number of political prisoners, the probable occurrence of ill-treatment or of inhumane conditions of detention, the suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees and allegations of disappearances.

MAP 1: LEBANON AND THE LRC'S EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE STATIONS



**FIGURE 1: THE EIGHT ELEMENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK**

I		<b>Context and risk assessment</b>	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		<b>Legal and policy base</b>	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		<b>Acceptance of the organization</b>	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		<b>Acceptance of the individual</b>	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		<b>Identification</b>	National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.
VI		<b>Internal communication and coordination</b>	National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.
VII		<b>External communication and coordination</b>	National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.
VIII		<b>Operational security risk management</b>	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.

Given the link between the two projects and the LRC's extensive experience of applying the Fundamental Principles to increase acceptance, the British Red Cross and the ICRC have worked together to identify lessons to be learned from the LRC's approach. The aims of this case study are therefore:

- ▶ to examine the process and actions undertaken by the LRC's emergency medical services (EMS) to increase security and access in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions and, in particular, the relevance of the Fundamental Principles to its operations;
- ▶ to draw on the EMS' approach in order to increase knowledge and awareness of the relationship between the Fundamental Principles and access and security by promoting the case study within the Movement and among external actors.

The case study draws on a review of documents and a joint ICRC/British Red Cross mission to Lebanon in February 2012. The mission involved semi-structured interviews in Beirut, Qobeyat, Rmaich, Tripoli and Tyre. Interviews were conducted with the LRC leadership, volunteer EMS workers and their parents, the ICRC, representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, several partner National Societies and some external stakeholders. Time limitations meant that it was not possible to gather community and beneficiary views for this study.

# 1. THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICATION

The concept of neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action takes account of the fact that during armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, access to people and communities may become more restricted and the insecurity of those in need and of humanitarian personnel may increase. To provide assistance in such contexts, humanitarian agencies and their activities must be accepted and respected by State and non-State actors and by the local people.

The work of the Movement is underpinned by seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – which inspire and influence its activities. They are linked to international humanitarian law (IHL) and were agreed in 1965 as a framework for the action and organization of the Movement. As an operational tool to help to secure access and to enhance the effectiveness of assistance for the most vulnerable, they are particularly influential in terms of increasing access to those affected by armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are vitally important principles from an operational perspective.<sup>3</sup> Humanity, impartiality and independence are referred to in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, which has been adopted by more than 490 aid organizations. Despite the distinct operational relevance of the Fundamental Principles,<sup>4</sup> within and outside the Movement they are often perceived first and foremost as an expression of values and ideals. As such, their value as an operational and decision-making tool is often underestimated.



A Lebanese Red Cross volunteer collects data from an internally displaced person. Mount Lebanon district, near Beirut.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Pictet's *Commentary on the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* (1979), the first and most detailed analysis of the Fundamental Principles, sets out a hierarchy of principles in which humanity and impartiality "stand above all contingencies." Neutrality and independence are principles of utility and as such are viewed as essential to ensure that action is in accordance with humanity and impartiality: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/fundamental-principles-commentary-010179.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> A lengthy process of research on the characteristics of what had gone well in operations and activities predated the proclamation of the Fundamental Principles in 1965. Although the Movement now often treats the Fundamental Principles as revealed wisdom, they are, in reality, the distillation of practical operational experience over a very long period of time and are not *a priori* or normative in origin. See M. Webster and P. Walker, *One For All and All For One: Intra-Organizational Dynamics in Humanitarian Action*, Tufts University, Boston, 2009.

**FIGURE 2: 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.

Effective, relevant and community-based humanitarian services, provided in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and other relevant Movement policies, are paramount as a starting point for safer access and influence the level of acceptance and security afforded to the National Society – especially when access is restricted and controlled. When access is provided, the humanitarian activities – as well as relationships with community members – will influence perceptions, which will in turn have consequences for acceptance and security, and so on. Should misunderstandings arise, or if for some reason perceptions are not favourable and the degree of acceptance is insufficient to allow safe access, actions – such as those set out in the SAF – can be taken and, indeed, become highly relevant to operations.

This approach has long been adopted by the ICRC and by National Societies in a number of contexts. The approach recognizes that specific action must be taken to reduce risks and to increase access so as to ensure the provision of assistance and protection for those in need. In order to provide an effective response, it is important that at all times stakeholders perceive a Movement component to be a neutral, independent, impartial provider of relevant humanitarian services. When there is armed conflict or internal disturbances or tensions, the trust and respect that have previously been established with communities and armed actors will contribute to greater acceptance of the organization in question. This should result in enhanced security for staff and volunteers, enabling them to gain increased access to those in need.

The role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field means that the degree of independence that they enjoy may be less absolute than that of the ICRC, as reflected in the Fundamental Principle of independence. Although they have a role to play in supporting the humanitarian activities of their respective governments, their independence is maintained through the autonomy of their actions and decision-making processes.

## 2. OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

### 2.1 Lebanon: creation and political structure

Lebanon was created following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. It gained independence in 1943 as a parliamentary democracy based on confessionalism<sup>5</sup> and governed in accordance with the National Covenant. The covenant is an unwritten agreement for governance based on religious denominational or “confessional” lines with a standard composition including a Maronite Christian president, a Sunni Muslim prime minister and a Shia Muslim speaker of the Chamber of Deputies or National Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Lebanon has an estimated population of 4.1 million people with 18 officially recognized religious (confessional) communities. In purely ethnic terms, the country is largely homogenous: around 95 per cent of the population is Arab, 4 per cent is Armenian and the remaining 1 per cent consists of a variety of ethnic groups. The most relevant social divisions in Lebanon are confessional. The major confessional groups are Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslim, Maronite Christian, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Druze. A full national census has not been conducted since 1932, when a 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims was reported.<sup>7</sup> Today some believe that this has shifted to a roughly 6:4 ratio of Muslims to Christians. There are 394,532 Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) in Lebanon.

### 2.2 The Lebanese civil war: 1975 to 1990

A civil war between Lebanon’s confessional communities from 1975 to 1990 had a devastating humanitarian and economic impact on the country. Around 200,000 people died during the civil war and a further one million were wounded; there were billions of dollars’ worth of damage to the infrastructure and the economy.<sup>8</sup> One feature of the armed conflict was the involvement of neighbouring countries and international forces. In 1976, sanctioned by the Arab League, Syria entered Lebanon. This was a factor in Israel’s occupation of southern Lebanon for almost 20 years from 1982. The armed conflict consolidated the Shia militias in the south of the country and contributed to the rise of Hezbollah as an important military and political force in Lebanon. The protracted war led to the entry of a multinational UN peacekeeping force, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

After 15 years of intense fighting, the Taif Agreement was signed to bring an end to the conflict.<sup>9</sup> The agreement amended the National Covenant, giving it the form which is still in force today. Political reforms were enacted to give Muslims and Christians an equal share in the Lebanese government. The agreement also established that the dismantling of the confessional architecture of the Lebanese State was to be treated as a national priority; however, that system largely remains in force today. Militias were disbanded – with the exception of Hezbollah, which was rebranded as a national resistance force. The war finally ended in 1990 and Syria withdrew its forces in 2005.

<sup>5</sup> A system of government based on a mix of religion and politics, in which political and institutional power are distributed proportionately among religious communities.

<sup>6</sup> A.B. Prados, *Lebanon*, CRS Issue Brief for Congress IB89118, Congressional Research Service, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> J. Chamie, “Religious Groups in Lebanon: A Descriptive Investigation,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, April 1980, pp. 175–187.

<sup>8</sup> S. Eken *et al.*, *Economic Dislocation and Recovery in Lebanon*, Occasional Paper No. 120, IMF, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, footnote 6.

**MAP 2: DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN LEBANON**

Although international aid was provided during the Lebanese civil war, local welfare groups attached to particular confessional communities or armed actors dealt with most humanitarian needs in Lebanon. The war continues to have a number of consequences in Lebanon today and above all remains a backdrop to the ongoing tensions and the fragility of relations between Lebanon's different confessional communities.

### **2.3 Recent armed conflicts and internal disturbances and tensions**

The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 22 others in February 2005 triggered the Cedar Revolution, mass demonstrations in Beirut against the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Syria withdrew the remainder of its military forces in April 2005.

In 2006 Israel launched a major military operation inside Lebanon following operations by Hezbollah which resulted in the deaths of 10 Israeli soldiers and the wounding of 5 civilians. The fighting escalated into 33 days of armed conflict

and led to the death of around 1,200 Lebanese and 44 Israeli civilians, with many thousands injured and nearly a million displaced. Following a United Nations Security Council Resolution, fighting ceased and all Israeli troops withdrew by the end of the year.<sup>10</sup>

In 2007 the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) fought against an armed Sunni group, Fatah al-Islam, in the Nahr El-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. The LAF defeated Fatah al-Islam but the camp was destroyed and 30,000 Palestinian residents were displaced.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.4 Lebanon in 2012

Lebanon's political stability is commonly described as mirroring regional trends. Regional and internal developments exacerbate both Sunni/Shia and cross-sectarian pro-/anti-Syrian divides, putting stress on the security situation. Syria's complex relationship with Lebanon and the interconnections between Syrian and Lebanese societies and politics leave Lebanon vulnerable to a spillover of the current violence and instability in Syria. At the time of writing, the number of confrontations between pro- and anti-Syrian factions within Lebanon is rising, particularly since the influx of Syrian refugees into northern Lebanon and Tripoli.<sup>12</sup> Other issues also influence Lebanon's stability. One is the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague which is tasked with investigating and prosecuting those responsible for the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri.<sup>13</sup> In response to indictments, Hezbollah asserted that none of its members would be arrested by the government. The issue has already resulted in the fall of the government and the end of Saad Hariri's tenure as prime minister.



An EMS volunteer embarks on a mission in Tripoli.

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group, *Israel/Hizbollah/Lebanon: Avoiding Renewed Conflict*, Middle East Report No. 59, November 2006.

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, *Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma: The Struggle Over Nahr Al-Bared*, Middle East Report No. 117, March 2012.

<sup>12</sup> R.A. Hopkins, *Lebanon and the Uprising in Syria: Issue for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group, *Trial by Fire: The Politics of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon*, Middle East Report No. 100, December 2010.

## 3. THE LRC, THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICATION IN LEBANON

### 3.1 Effective, relevant humanitarian services

The LRC was established in 1945 and recognized by the State one year later as a public non-profit organization and an auxiliary to the medical services of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The confessional system of government in Lebanon affects the LRC in a number of ways, including its governance structure, which largely mirrors that of the Lebanese government. Top-level positions are traditionally filled by persons representing the three most prominent religious groups. The president and vice-president are nominated by the government.

The work of the LRC is largely health-related and includes the provision of emergency medical services, medical-social assistance, blood services, educational services and youth support. The LRC's medical-social department has 43 clinics supported by 200 volunteer doctors. Its 12 blood banks cover 50 per cent of the population's blood needs. Fourteen hundred youth volunteers provide general community and social support from 32 youth centres across the country.

The LRC's emergency medical services department carries out 200,000 medical missions every year, providing emergency support and ambulance care for medical emergencies as well as first aid at major public and sporting events. During armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, it crosses confessional lines to provide emergency medical evacuation and assistance for injured civilians and others who are not directly participating in hostilities.

The Lebanese Ministry of Health decided to invest in the LRC's EMS rather than its own ambulance service as it recognized the LRC provided the only EMS service capable of crossing all confessional lines freely and that the service was of high quality.

In 1990 the Lebanese Ministry of Health decided to invest in the LRC's EMS rather than in its own, limited, ambulance service. This was due to the quality and scope of the LRC's service and the costs associated with setting up a parallel State system. The government also recognized that the EMS was the only universal system operating in Lebanon and the only one that could cross confessional lines freely in order to provide services. There are a number of other ambulance service providers in Lebanon including the Ministry of Health, military actors, charitable organizations, confessional groups and the LAF. However, the LRC is the only public service which has the access and capacity that enable it to operate nationally and which enjoys a high degree of acceptance among Lebanon's 18 confessional groupings.

The LRC currently operates the only national emergency hotline, has a fleet of 270 ambulances which it is in the process of equipping to international standards, and is embarking on enhanced medical training of volunteers so that more advanced emergency support can be provided. With 45 ambulance stations across the country, supported by an estimated 2,700 first-aid volunteers and 270 ambulances, the service aims to respond to 80 per cent of emergency calls within nine minutes. The EMS faces significant challenges – not least in providing a national 24-hour emergency service run almost entirely by volunteers and on a low budget – but the professionalism of the highly motivated volunteers results in the provision of effective, reliable and relevant humanitarian emergency services for communities across Lebanon.



Marko Kokic/ICRC

Lebanese Red Cross first-aid volunteers in Beirut transport a young woman to hospital.

### 3.2 Application of the Fundamental Principles

The widespread acceptance of the LRC's EMS across different societal groups in Lebanon is at the heart of the department's success. This success is a result not simply of the quality of the EMS but also of its approach – which relies heavily on the application of the Fundamental Principles. Interviews with LRC staff and volunteers at every level from first-aid volunteers to the director of operations highlighted the central role played by the operational application of the Fundamental Principles in the success of the EMS in gaining and maintaining acceptance and access. Everyone interviewed for this study was able to supply specific practical examples of how they had personally used the Fundamental Principles or of how they had observed them being applied within the EMS. This is the result of a concerted strategy and approach by the LRC leadership which has been developed and applied systematically over decades.

The effective and relevant humanitarian service provided by the LRC's EMS is at the core of its approach. The EMS has the necessary infrastructure and capacity to mobilize quickly in response to armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, something which National Societies that do not provide emergency medical services on a day-to-day basis often find challenging. Years of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions between Lebanon and Israel and between different groups in Lebanon have meant that the LRC's assistance has been required by various communities and armed actors at different times. This has allowed the LRC and its volunteers to demonstrate the LRC's neutrality and impartiality clearly and consistently and thus to build trust and credibility with all. In the interviews, volunteers spoke of the LRC's ability to work across as

many as 50 different “borders” during the 15-year civil war, while government representatives highlighted the LRC’s ability to provide services in areas which are inaccessible to them. Although the LRC operates as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, its independence is valued and fiercely guarded, not only by the LRC, but by the government as well. Government representatives reported that from time to time the LRC turns down their requests because of a need to uphold its Fundamental Principles.

Although neutrality, impartiality and independence have been crucial to the wide acceptance and access of the LRC, voluntary service and unity are also of great importance, which highlights the mutually reinforcing interplay between all Fundamental Principles. The Fundamental Principles can also be seen to play a practical role in encouraging positive perceptions of the EMS across the country. These high levels of acceptance and perception are vital in providing a relevant, community-based humanitarian service for the people of Lebanon.

In a country where politics, business, personal relationships and even mobile phone ringtones are often determined on confessional grounds, EMS volunteers are representative of all confessional groups, their services thus being “open to all” – in line with the Fundamental Principle of unity. Although the EMS accepts volunteers without discrimination and actively seeks to be representative of the communities that it serves, it takes great care to select, train and manage its volunteers to ensure their adherence to the Fundamental Principles.

#### IN FOCUS: TURNING ADVERSITY INTO OPPORTUNITIES TO REINFORCE THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Adherence to the Fundamental Principles by staff and volunteers is evident at all levels of the EMS structure and is a result of the operational benefit of the Fundamental Principles, demonstrated over many years. In the interviews, the leaders of the LRC highlighted how important the commitment and profile of each volunteer was to the maintenance of the National Society’s hard-earned acceptance and the security of its personnel and how one wrong word or move could damage the reputation of the LRC in the region or even the country. As the EMS director said, “It takes years, and sometimes some very hard lessons, to build up our reputation and one wrong action or word could be enough to tear it down.” At the same time, these difficult situations provide opportunities to explain and further reinforce how the Red Cross works and the value of its commitment to applying the Fundamental Principles.

An example of using adversity to reinforce the Fundamental Principles is provided by the LRC’s commitment to ensuring that all volunteers can be deployed everywhere in Lebanon and can provide care for anyone regardless of the individual volunteer’s personal affiliation or background. Historically, the personal acceptance of individuals has been challenged by different actors, usually on the basis of religion but at times due to the profile of an individual volunteer. However, after years of these volunteers demonstrating their adherence to the Fundamental Principles, they appear to have contributed significantly to the LRC’s reputation of neutrality and impartiality. While some minor concessions were apparently made in the past as this reputation was being built up, this is no longer an important issue today as trust and confidence in the work of the LRC and its staff and volunteers has matured. Today the leadership does not tolerate differential treatment of volunteers and stresses that to relax the LRC’s standards would have serious consequences for the LRC’s ability to operate effectively throughout Lebanon..

## 4. PERCEPTION OF THE EMS

### 4.1 Reputation in Lebanon

The perception of an organization relates to its public identity and reputation, the level of awareness and appreciation of the organization, and the understanding and interpretation of its actions. Perceptions are closely linked to, and interdependent on, the National Society's use of the Fundamental Principles to guide thought processes, communication, decision-making and actions. They can develop on the basis of what people see: how well the organization performs its work, the composition and conduct of volunteer and staff teams, and how the organization identifies itself, for example by means of the red cross emblem and official uniform. Perceptions are also shaped by what people hear through direct contact with the organization, promotional activities relating to the humanitarian mission and the Fundamental Principles as well as dissemination of IHL and other communication activities. Perceptions may also be derived from association, assumptions and hearsay. They can be based on reality or on false assumptions. However, as positive perceptions are essential to ensuring access and security, action is required to address low or negative perceptions.

Perceptions can be based on reality or on false assumptions or misunderstandings. Whatever the case, if they are poor or negative, they must be rapidly addressed.

A study conducted in Lebanon in 2007 found that an extraordinary 100 per cent of respondents were aware of the LRC and its work. In terms of positive perceptions, the average score across different districts (and thus different groups) was 4.9 out of 5. Interviews with government officials and the media also suggested a clear understanding of the mission and principles of the EMS and recognition of the value of a neutral, independent and impartial organization providing emergency first aid.

“The fortune of the Red Cross is the confidence of the population; the LRC is protected by its activities and has paid a lot to gain this reputation.”

Lebanese government official

FIGURE 3: THE SAFER ACCESS CYCLE



Parents of volunteers spoke of their pride in their children, due in part to positive community views of volunteering to work with the Red Cross. One said, "People don't say that you are your father's son, they say that you are from the Red Cross." Nonetheless, some volunteers felt that the level of respect within the community was a barrier to recruitment and that their work needed to be demystified as a result: "The community says 'thank you,' they think of you as a hero, like Superman, and so others feel that they cannot join."

The EMS carries out some activities to influence people's perceptions, although its positive reputation is largely generated by its work on the ground. As well as explaining its work and the Fundamental Principles so as to gain acceptance from a wide range of different stakeholders, the EMS also conducts more formal dissemination sessions on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, IHL and the Fundamental Principles with civil society groups, universities and different community groups, especially during armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.

Some concerns have been expressed within the LRC that its governance structure and composition could give rise to negative perceptions of a lack of independence from government, despite the proven ability of the EMS leadership to take independent decisions and actions. The LRC's statutes are currently being revised to increase the emphasis on the independence and auxiliary role of the National Society. However, some argue that the fragmentation resulting from the confessional nature of the government in Lebanon safeguards the National Society from too much political influence being brought to bear on its operations. Others point to the benefits of having governance members associated with particular political parties as their collective involvement actually helps to ensure operational neutrality. There have been cases of senior politicians requesting specific support from the LRC. Because of the implications of such action for the LRC's real or perceived impartiality and neutrality, this support has not been provided but those incidents highlight the challenges inherent in maintaining its auxiliary role while ensuring both independence and the perception of it in this context.

## 4.2 The emblem

Across the world, acceptance of the work, mandate and identity of the Movement is linked to acceptance of its official emblems.<sup>14</sup> Respect for the emblems appears to be higher in contexts in which the National Society is known to provide relevant and effective humanitarian services in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. Lack of respect for the emblems should trigger action by the organization concerned to understand whether the case in question involves deliberate rejection of its work, mandate and/or identity or unintentional misuse of the emblem due to lack of knowledge. It will then be in a better position to address the problem.

It is a testament to the strong reputation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the LRC in particular that the red cross emblem is not only well known in Lebanon but that there is also limited opposition to

<sup>14</sup> The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols establish the red cross and other emblems as international symbols to protect sick and wounded victims of war and those authorized to care for them and/or to indicate that the person or object on which the emblem is displayed is connected with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. As such, the emblems are first and foremost symbols of neutral protection in wartime and for them to be effective, their use has been restricted. To ensure universal respect for the protective nature of the emblems, the Geneva Conventions oblige governments that are party to them to prohibit the unauthorized use of the emblem in both armed conflict and peacetime through the enactment of laws.



Lebanese Red Cross ambulance.

the use of the red cross rather than the red crescent emblem in a society which is thought by some to be almost 60 per cent Muslim. According to the EMS leadership, this is generally thought to be a result of the visibly impartial and neutral work of the EMS volunteers. The EMS leaders suggest that resistance to the emblem might be greater if the EMS and its work were not viewed in such a positive light. Although awareness of the importance of emblem protection within the EMS is high, there have been limited efforts to eliminate emblem misuse committed by organizations such as pharmacies and other ambulance services. If this problem is not addressed, the EMS runs the risk of experiencing operational constraints in the future.

### 4.3 Engagement with the media

The director of EMS operations appears regularly in the media to provide statements on the work of the service and on the humanitarian implications of different events. During armed conflict, the level of media engagement by the LRC is purposely very low, although its presence and actions are often reported in various media. The leadership is very conscious of the need to safeguard perceptions of neutrality and independence by maintaining a distance between EMS personnel and ambulances and the armed forces and/or civil defence during sensitive incidents. The National Society generally engages in little proactive communications activity – something bemoaned by many within the EMS who believe that the Red Cross brand is not being used to promote the LRC or to increase its funding base. Movement partners in Lebanon are currently working with the LRC to develop this area of its work.

## 5. ACCEPTANCE OF THE EMS

### 5.1 Acceptance by external stakeholders

The perception that different stakeholders have of an organization and its personnel has implications for the acceptance of the personnel and the work of that organization in a particular context. Acceptance strategies include understanding the context, cultivating contacts and relationships with multiple stakeholders (including those that may be hostile) and exerting a positive influence on their perceptions. Most humanitarian organizations today adopt a form of acceptance as a key element of their security strategy. There are different interpretations, however, with some agencies taking a passive approach based on the assumption that the provision of services will win the approval of the local population and that acceptance will follow.<sup>15</sup> Others, such as the ICRC and the LRC, believe that specific practical steps need to be taken to earn and increase their acceptance by stakeholders.

The SAF highlights the importance of an active approach involving actions and measures to gain and sustain acceptance of the National Society by all stakeholders, with the ultimate goal of assisting and protecting people and communities in need.

The SAF highlights the importance of an active approach in which deliberate actions are undertaken to gain and sustain acceptance from all stakeholders for the volunteers, members and staff of a National Society, as well as for the organization as a whole, the ultimate aim being to provide assistance and protection for those most in need. It highlights the importance of the provision of relevant community services based on the Fundamental Principles together with a thorough and ongoing understanding of the operational context and the risks posed – both of which lay an important foundation for action. It emphasizes the fact that the acceptance of the volunteers and staff of a National Society is enhanced when they are representative of the communities that they serve. They should also be recruited, trained and deployed on the basis of their ability to adhere to the Fundamental Principles and their capacity and skills to work in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. Organizational acceptance is further enhanced by relationships and dialogue with key stakeholders (beneficiaries, community leaders, government and armed actors) so that the presence and work of the National Society is known and understood and its role in providing neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian services is respected. There is much to be learned from the LRC's approach to achieving personal and organizational acceptance, which involves building on the elements described above and ensuring the provision of relevant, effective community-based humanitarian assistance in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

### 5.2 Acceptance of the individual within the EMS

The EMS places major emphasis on ensuring that its 2,700 volunteers are accepted and can be deployed everywhere in Lebanon, regardless of their personal affiliation or background. Differential treatment of volunteers either within the EMS or by beneficiaries or other external parties is not tolerated by the EMS. One important aspect of gaining acceptance has been ensuring representation from the 18 different confessional groups in Lebanon, while another focus has been on gender representation in Muslim areas to promote the acceptance of volunteers in socially conservative groups. Socio-economic representation has proved less possible owing to the need for volunteers to commit a significant amount of

<sup>15</sup> HPN, *Operational security management in violent environments*, Good Practice Review No. 8, Humanitarian Practice Network, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2010.

personal time as well as, on occasion, to contribute personal funds. The diverse composition is evident both at the national level and within the various districts; many stations (but not all) comprise volunteers from different religious groups. Volunteers of different confessions work throughout the country and stations often provide reinforcement for each other in times of crisis.

Every effort has been made to ensure broad representation, one of the major problems being to take care that this does not turn into representation of interests; strict neutrality is demanded and imposed by the LRC. During the recruitment process, prospective volunteers must sign a neutrality oath, and formal and informal checks with communities are often undertaken by the LRC to make sure that they are not affiliated to a political group. The neutral composition of the LRC is reinforced by a history of volunteering with the Red Cross as one way of avoiding conscription by militia forces during the civil war. This view of the LRC as a kind of sanctuary is still evident today in the face of confessional divisions within society and some continuing conscription; parents of volunteers drew particular attention to this aspect of volunteering, which they perceive as positive. The LRC's neutrality is a considerable draw for some young people who are uncomfortable with the system of confessionalism and limited meritocracy that persists in Lebanon today. The profile of neutral recruits and the LRC's efforts to safeguard its neutrality are mutually reinforcing; many volunteers emphasized the fact that they are perceived as different from their peers and that only certain people are suited to this work.

Volunteers' understanding of and adherence to the Fundamental Principles is reinforced by the mentoring and training given to each new recruit. New recruits are mentored by their station leaders and peers for up to a year before their first deployment. The LRC nonetheless readily admits that training is an area which it needs to improve and systematize. Informal and formal codes of behaviour are currently more important, however. No political and religious discussions are allowed at ambulance stations (at some, the news is turned off to discourage reactions) and joint celebrations of religious festivals are organized between stations to promote understanding and tolerance. The importance of understanding and applying the Fundamental Principles is reinforced through example and mentoring by the experienced leadership. They remind volunteers of the danger of one "rotten apple" ruining the National Society's reputation and set an example for more junior volunteers through their commitment to the Fundamental Principles. There is a strong hierarchical structure at the stations, where orders are expected to be followed fully. Contraventions are punished by shame and sanctions, with behaviour warnings displayed publicly at the stations. The perception of the neutrality of EMS staff and volunteers is reinforced by the use of nicknames.

Volunteers were able to point readily to examples of their neutrality and impartiality. One example occurred during violent clashes between the LAF and an armed Palestinian group in the Nahr El-Bared refugee camp in 2007.<sup>16</sup> Volunteers spoke of their work to provide both sides with medical services, even when siblings, spouses and friends were actively engaged in the fighting because of their membership in the LAF.

“The person is a person; we don't care who it is.”

The diverse composition of the LRC staff and volunteer base along with clear leadership intent to ensure each one adheres to the Fundamental Principles at all times contributes to their ability to cross all confessional lines and work throughout the country as needed.

Volunteer, Lebanese Red Cross

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, *Lebanon's Palestinian Dilemma: The Struggle Over Nahr al-Bared*, Middle East Report No. 117, 2012, available at [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org).



Gracia Abbard, a 24-year-old EMS volunteer in Qobeyat.

Another example was of an LRC head of district refusing a volunteer's plea to immediately rescue a relative from a building under attack on the grounds that the security situation did not allow the EMS to enter the affected area and that those who have a personal connection with volunteers cannot expect to be treated differently from any others. While the volunteer was affected badly by the subsequent death of his relative, the leadership took the time to review the incident with him to ensure that he understood the reasoning behind the instructions. The fact that the volunteer remains a volunteer today testifies to the leadership skills within the LRC, the commitment of volunteers and the understanding of, and respect for, the Fundamental Principles.

“When we come here, we are 17 or 18-year-old kids. We come with different mentalities and from different backgrounds. We are changed here in every way. When we are stamped with the Red Cross stamp, we become different. You are saving a life. You can't think of religion or politics. Working with people in pain changes you. It's humanity.”

Gracia Abbard, volunteer,  
Lebanese Red Cross

## IN FOCUS: VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN ACTION

Voluntary service is one of the seven Fundamental Principles. The experience in Lebanon demonstrates the importance of dedicated volunteers who are committed to the Fundamental Principles and the delivery of effective humanitarian service. The commitment of EMS volunteers to the work and approach of the Lebanese Red Cross is particularly noteworthy and inspiring. To ensure that the entirely voluntary national ambulance service operates effectively, each volunteer provides 12 hours of service one day a week and 36 hours one weekend a month. They must also have the physical and emotional stamina to work in stressful and tiring conditions and must be able to integrate into a team and follow orders. Team spirit is developed further by the need for each station to improvise in order to maintain services. Working on a shoe-string budget, volunteers spoke of recycling non-essential items, using substitutes where possible (for example, old ties as slings) and even paying out of their own pockets to ensure that the service continues. The strong team spirit contributes a sense of collective enterprise to all aspects of the volunteers' work, including the application of the Fundamental Principles, and a sense of responsibility for the EMS – particularly among older volunteers who have helped to build it up over many years.

Many of the 35 paid members of staff originated from the volunteer base; all of them, including the director of the EMS, continue to volunteer at the stations in their spare time. Despite the personal sacrifice, volunteers repeatedly spoke about receiving more from the Red Cross than they put in. They reported gaining leadership, social, negotiation and emergency management skills and becoming more tolerant and less sectarian in their thinking, both within and outside the EMS. There are downsides too: many spoke of systems not enabling them to take time off and of the stress and trauma associated with doing such psychologically demanding work within a National Society that is not in a position to offer formal support. This highlights the strain of running such a service on an almost entirely voluntary basis.



The value of teamwork: ICRC hygiene kits and blankets are loaded onto a Lebanese Red Cross minivan for distribution.

The National Society leadership has established strong relationships with many key stakeholders, highlighting the importance of investing in relationships and developing trust over time.

### 5.3 Acceptance of the organization and the EMS

Lebanon's history of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions has compelled the EMS leadership to develop and sustain systems and approaches that ensure its high degree of acceptance. During the Lebanese civil war it operated with the ICRC and, through many joint operations, learned how to position itself for greater acceptance. In the late 1980s the EMS had to deal with a series of security incidents against staff and assets, some of which resulted in a fleet of newly donated vehicles, clearly marked with the red cross emblem, being commandeered by armed actors. Local volunteers used their contacts and persuasiveness to highlight the benefits of medical evacuation services and to negotiate their return. This triggered concerted action by the LRC to widen its network of contacts, deepen its relations with stakeholders and communicate information about its work, and reinforced its ability to operate in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. Contacts developed at that time have been maintained, with the result that the leadership has established deep relationships with many of the key people in government and within the various confessional groups, highlighting the importance of investing in relationships and developing trust over time.

Relationships are very strong at the central level and are replicated at the district level and at individual stations, where the heads of stations emphasized how much of their time and attention was devoted to maintaining a strong network of local contacts. Relationships are built with political, military and community leaders during peacetime or before new operations and then drawn upon during armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions to secure safe passage. Casual and informal interactions with those in power are crucial to establishing trust and gaining acceptance. The depth and breadth of positive relationships are such that other Red Cross partners in Lebanon spoke of the credibility that they attained from being associated with the LRC.

The LRC's role in running the national ambulance service means that daily liaison with the authorities is often required, for instance to ensure coordinated planning for public events. Representatives of the LAF, the Civil Defence and the Ministry of Health all reported the importance of having an independent, neutral humanitarian actor that could provide services for people residing in all areas and communities. Given this high level of coordination and the need for trust, it is important for the LRC to retain autonomy over operational decision-making and to maintain an organizational distance from all stakeholders, both in reality and perception. Examples of this approach in action include challenging a government request to open a station in a particular location; safeguarding perceptions of neutrality by refusing to be on standby for the Civil Defence during demonstrations, preferring to be on call for specific emergencies through the national hotline; and transferring patients to treatment locations where it was believed that they would feel safe instead of following advice from the authorities to deliver them to an alternative location.

These relationships underpin the acceptance widely enjoyed by the EMS but it is the department's impartial and neutral humanitarian work on the ground which is of uppermost significance. The leadership indicated the importance of the LRC following through on its stated commitments so that confidence in its work is earned and maintained. The leaders stated that the history of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions in Lebanon is such that the LRC has proved itself to everyone over time, indicating for example how the 2006 armed conflict with Israel was important in further developing the LRC's acceptance by Hezbollah to ensure access to those in need. In one specific



The LRC collects the bodies of people killed during a bombing near Jouaiya, a village near Tyre.

incident, the passage of patients being transported by an LRC ambulance was obstructed and their lives and liberty were threatened by an armed actor.

Over several hours, the ambulance crew was able to persuade the group, by explaining matters and reasoning with its members, that they would not want their soldiers to be handed over should they face a similar incident in the future. This skill at advocacy and persuasion – combined with the well-coordinated steps taken by the director in approaching and negotiating the incident with his high-level contacts – ensured that the ambulance and all passengers continued their journey safely. Repeated attention was drawn to the need for consistency in messages and adherence to strict communication lines, together with having the strength and experience to take a principled stand in challenging circumstances. As a senior manager stated, “Each decision is crucial; it can have serious implications. There is so much pressure on leaders. Many conversations are tough. In a stressful situation, you must know that you are strong.”

## 5.4 Key points of EMS acceptance strategies

- ▶ There must be a deliberate strategy for gaining and maintaining access. Time and experience are important; acceptance cannot be achieved overnight and preparations must start during peacetime.
- ▶ Trust and credibility are essential. These will be established by the consistent provision of effective, relevant community-based services during peacetime as well as during armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. Organizations are judged by actions rather than by words, making it important for promises to be kept and effective delivery to be ensured.
- ▶ A large number of contacts at all levels and strong relationships with key stakeholders are essential. Systematic communication of the organization's work, objectives and principles must take place.
- ▶ The volunteer base should be representative of the people it serves and must adhere to the Fundamental Principles at all times, inside and outside work. Applying all the Fundamental Principles is important for the acceptance of the National Society.
- ▶ Challenges should be resolved by early and swift action and should be seen as an opportunity to reinforce the organization's principles. Strong, experienced leadership, consistency and good internal communication are all required.

## 6. SECURITY

Acceptance is the cornerstone of the EMS' security strategy, although some protective and deterrence measures are also employed.<sup>17</sup> The EMS leaders rely on their extensive network of contacts to establish consent and the necessary security assurances for sensitive missions. By taking the time to explain the nature of their intended work in the area and notifying stakeholders of their location in advance of the mission, they gain the support and trust of all parties and the community itself. Before commencing the response, sufficient time is allowed to elapse following contact with leaders to ensure that messages concerning the intended operation have been passed from the focal point to the various levels. In the event of the EMS not having prior contact with an active armed actor, assistance will be delayed until assurances are provided.

By taking the time to explain the nature of their intended work in the area and notifying stakeholders of their location in advance of the mission, EMS leaders gain the support and trust of all parties and the community itself and prevent sometimes fatal delays.

This elaborate and well-honed system has been built up over many years but cannot be relied on by the LRC in international armed conflicts. In instances such as the 2006 armed conflict with Israel, the LRC depends on coordination by the ICRC with the external armed actor, although coordination with Lebanese actors continues to be handled by the LRC. Where there is no direct contact, the LRC cannot make full use of its in-depth and nuanced understanding of the context or its relationship-building strategy with armed actors. It also means that, in certain instances, there have been delays in receiving clearance. In other cases, where clearance was apparently given, safe passage was in reality not guaranteed. There were a number of serious security incidents during the 2006 armed conflict, which underscores the limitations of over-reliance on acceptance strategies for security, particularly in the context of international armed conflicts, when relationships of trust cannot be built and acceptance cannot be affirmed directly by the LRC.

Some protective measures are also employed. Ballistic resistant vests and helmets are used, ambulances drive in convoy and/or undertake relays over risky or long missions, and different tactics – such as driving slowly or making prior arrangements with the authorities on ways of signalling their identity at checkpoints – are employed at critical times to reduce exposure to threats. A highly evolved system of code names has been developed to reduce further the vulnerability of personnel and patients. This masks the identity and religious background of individual volunteers but also includes code names for ambulance stations, political groups, hospitals and even routes. Infrequently, the EMS is also accompanied by LAF armed escorts in order to deter threats; it can apparently be difficult not to agree to offers of accompaniment when transporting LAF patients.

The EMS uses its thorough analysis of and information about the context to assess risk and adapt its approaches accordingly. For instance, heads of stations spoke of the importance of positioning local volunteers in the control room during sensitive missions as their knowledge of the local area equipped them to identify safer sites and routes for ambulances. The skills and experience of the leaders are important in these situations, as is the strong hierarchical approach; orders are expected to be followed exactly and fully when responding to critical incidents.

<sup>17</sup> Acceptance, deterrence and protection approaches to security are said to form a "security triangle." Often used in combination, they constitute a range of security options for agencies that extend from "soft" to "hard." Acceptance is an approach to security that attempts to negate a threat by building relationships with local communities and relevant stakeholders in the operational area and by obtaining their consent for the organization's presence and its work. Protection is an approach to security that emphasizes the use of protective procedures and devices to reduce vulnerability to existing threats. Deterrence is an approach that attempts to deter a threat by posing a counterthreat, in its most extreme form through the use of armed protection. See HPN, *Operational security management in violent environments*, Good Practice Review No. 8, Humanitarian Practice Network, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2010.



Helmets and flak jackets worn by Lebanese Red Cross first-aid volunteers.

Security management structures, systems and procedures are not fully integrated into the EMS or across the LRC. Rather, there is heavy reliance on the knowledge, experience and authority of the veteran EMS leadership and its network of contacts. This lack of formal integration adds to the high degree of stress on the leaders as responsibility for security rests solely on their shoulders. Some simulated training is provided but not for all; this is under review. There is a high degree of risk tolerance and the leadership readily admits that one of the challenges for the EMS is to hold back over-enthusiastic volunteers from entering high-risk environments. Reviews are mandatory after each response and although there is significant peer support and kinship between the volunteers, more formal psychological support is not available, despite the significant trauma that volunteers can witness and even experience first-hand. In a cash-strapped National Society, insurance is provided for actively responding staff and volunteers but life insurance is not available.

## 7. CONCLUSION: ACCESS BUT WITH LIMITS

The application of the Fundamental Principles has helped the EMS to gain and maintain a high degree of acceptance and access throughout Lebanon over the past 20 years. During the civil war, the EMS was able to work across as many as 50 different “borders.” Later, during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, the LRC was able to provide services across borders. During the 2006 armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, the LRC also provided services for both sides. At the time of writing, the LRC is providing emergency medical transport for wounded Syrian nationals who are fleeing across the Lebanon border.

It is clear that, in the context of Lebanon, the Fundamental Principles are more than an abstract code or ideological commitment. They serve as a framework for action and an operational tool to guide decision-making in very difficult circumstances. They are of particular relevance to a National Society which needs to balance its role as a formal auxiliary to the public authorities with the ability to provide, and to be trusted to provide, neutral and independent humanitarian assistance for all those who need it. One of the most important lessons from Lebanon is that this does not come about by accident or without considerable and consistent effort.

Although the LRC’s approach was underpinned by an operational imperative rather than by specific guidelines, it is striking to see the extent to which LRC practice reflects much of what is contained in the SAF, including a firm commitment to applying the Fundamental Principles. For instance, the EMS’ volunteer base is designed deliberately to be representative of all confessional groups in Lebanon and is selected on the basis of the volunteers’ ability and willingness to abide by the Fundamental Principles. It is clear that the EMS does not rely on neutrality, impartiality and independence alone; all seven Fundamental Principles are important. Volunteers and staff use the Fundamental Principles to gain acceptance for their work, and they can all point to examples of this leading to security and access. When challenges are faced, the leadership acts swiftly to overcome them, using the Fundamental Principles as a basis for decision-making and for negotiations with stakeholders. These approaches, combined with the extensive EMS experience and knowledge and the resultant relationships of trust, have been built up over many years. This study reinforces the relevance of the SAF, grounded in the application of the Fundamental Principles, as a sound foundation for preparedness, positioning and response during armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.

However, the application of the Fundamental Principles – and indeed, the SAF more generally – does not remove risk entirely. They are tools for increased access and security, which are nonetheless always contingent on the manner in which they are used as well as on the decisions and actions of armed actors. Assurances need to be tested over time. It is important that those on the front line understand both the benefits and the limits of applying the Fundamental Principles and the SAF. In some situations their application will be straightforward and in line with common sense. In others, they must be applied more as an art, with close attention being paid to shifts in the environment.

This was brought home in an incident near Qana in southern Lebanon during the 2006 armed conflict with Israel. Civilians were being transferred by two clearly marked, well-lit and security-cleared Red Cross ambulances with Red Cross flags on the sides and flashing blue strobe lights on the roofs. Despite

In Lebanon, the Fundamental Principles serve as a key operational tool and assist the National Society in balancing its role as a formal auxiliary to the public authorities with its ability to provide neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian assistance.



EMS ambulance damaged near Qana in 2006.

these markings, a missile struck the first ambulance and a further attack struck the second ambulance a few minutes later. Nine Red Cross volunteers and patients were injured.

Although the ICRC raised the issue with the relevant authorities and urged them to take the measures needed to avoid such incidents in the future, the incident severely damaged the affected volunteers' trust in the power and protection of the Fundamental Principles, the protective emblem and the ability of the Movement to secure safe access. For many, it highlighted how the

LRC can, over time, attain high levels of access and security in non-international armed conflicts, internal disturbances and tensions through extensive and deep contacts with all stakeholders which build high levels of trust. However, in international armed conflicts, where direct contact by the LRC with the authorities of the opposing side is most often not possible, relationships of trust are more difficult or even impossible to establish. If the National Societies of the parties to an international armed conflict have established good relations during peacetime and are allowed to maintain contact during violence, they may be able to provide yet another line of communication to their respective authorities, the purpose being to increase safe access to those in need. However, it remains to be seen whether the same level of confidence and trust can be achieved through third-party relationships.

Although the Lebanese Red Cross has achieved high levels of success in terms of acceptance and access for its emergency medical services – particularly in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions – it admits that this degree of acceptance is not as strong for some of its other non-emergency services. This divide between emergency and non-emergency programming in terms of the application of the Fundamental Principles is not unusual. It is not clear to what extent this is due to different LRC management structures, challenges associated with ensuring the application of the Fundamental Principles in longer-term programming, or greater acceptance by communities of emergency life-saving support than of less urgent assistance. Given the emphasis in the SAF on preparation during peacetime to make it possible to gain safe access during violence, it is important to understand how much of what can be learned from the application of the Fundamental Principles during emergencies is relevant to long-term programming. The work of the EMS is an excellent place to start this exploration.



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.

The British Red Cross is a volunteer-led humanitarian organization that helps people in crisis, wherever and whenever they are. We enable vulnerable people at home and overseas to prepare for and respond to emergencies in their own communities. When the crisis is over, we help people recover and move on with their lives.

The goal of the Lebanese Red Cross is to disseminate peace, serve society and alleviate human suffering with neutrality and without any racial, sexual, social, religious or political distinction.



ICRC