

CANADIAN RED CROSS

OUR SELECTED EXPERIENCE

PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK

Our context

Founded in 1909, the Canadian Red Cross works to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people in Canada and around the world. We provide a wide range of humanitarian services for millions of people in Canada through health care programmes, injury prevention programmes (such as water safety and first aid), and violence and abuse prevention initiatives. In addition, we help communities prepare for disasters of all types and respond to needs arising from natural catastrophes. The Canadian Red Cross also

operates worldwide, assisting the world's most vulnerable populations, including those affected by armed conflict or devastated by a disaster.

The Idle No More (INM) movement originated in Saskatchewan in 2012 as a protest against Bill C-45. It is a peaceful grassroots movement that is working towards social, political and economic change. The movement's goal was to use education to build consciousness and awareness among all Canadians regarding the resurgence of indigenous sovereignty and environmental protection. The INM movement grew rapidly



Normand Blouin/KlixPix/Canadian Red Cross

Today, the Canadian Red Cross builds relationships and has relevant programming in many First Nations communities throughout Canada. Here, a Red Cross volunteer helps a Kashechewan First Nation elder, Rebecca Friday, involved in a spring flood evacuation.

across the country and a wide variety of support events were staged, from teach-ins to round dances.

Coincidentally, in December 2012, Chief Theresa Spence from Attawapiskat First Nation went on a hunger strike in protest against Canadian government policies. Together, INM and Chief Spence's protest made headlines across the country and in social media.

Different indigenous groups in Canada supported these events, and in some cases tensions escalated around blockades or caused disruptions on the railways.

How our neutrality and impartiality were tested

The Canadian Red Cross mostly deals with domestic disaster response. Our experience with domestic situations of internal disturbances or tensions is limited to a handful of events which occurred over 20 years ago.

Given the mounting tensions, we activated our National Disaster Coordination Team to increase our monitoring activities across the country and we reviewed our response procedures. For many Canadian Red Cross staff and volunteers, the issues highlighted by the INM movement were personally relevant and compelling. As a result, we also initiated a series of internal communications to our staff and volunteer base.

What we did

The focus of the internal communications to Canadian Red Cross staff and volunteers revolved around our role as a neutral and

impartial humanitarian organization, the role that neutrality plays in creating acceptance of both our responders and the organization as a whole, and the need to refrain from engaging in politically sensitive debates through social media or community actions. The messages reinforced the need to focus on our ability to fulfil our mandate with those who could be affected by these or similar situations.

In addition to the broadcast messages to Canadian Red Cross personnel, a "Question and Answers" document and a YouTube video focusing on neutrality were developed and an email account to handle additional questions was established. Further guidance was provided on an individual basis in response to questions raised by both staff and volunteers.

What we learned

Lessons learned from this exercise included:

- ▶ Reinforcement of the Code of Conduct and the Fundamental Principles must be done on an ongoing and systematic basis with both staff and volunteers.
- ▶ Mechanisms must be provided for personnel to ask questions, voice concerns and obtain guidance on communications and expectations.
- ▶ Clear and concise messaging about expectations is required.
- ▶ Social media can provide a quick and easy means to reach the target audience.
- ▶ Personnel are dedicated to the mission of the Canadian Red Cross and may need support in understanding the differences between response in disasters and response in situations of violence.

