



ICRC

FAMILY LINKS NETWORK

Project Bulletin

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Family links help us cope in difficult times

What makes us who we are? Where do we find the support we need in times of trouble? Our relationships — with family and friends — play an essential role in defining our identities and provide us with a sense of security and stability. If they break down, important elements of our identity are lost and so is our primary source of support. The Restoring Family Links (RFL) Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement puts these ties back at the heart of the Movement's activities.



Jaime Razuri/ICRC

Our relationships with our loved ones provide us with a sense of belonging and security. They remind us of where we come from and help us face the future. When, in extraordinary circumstances such as war or natural disasters, members of a family are separated from one another, this security is shaken. When they are deprived of contact with their families, individuals are less able to cope. This is apparent in situations of detention when contact with relatives is impossible. Breaking these ties undermines the confidence and ultimately the identities of individuals. It threatens the very basis of their existence. Many families of those detained live in uncertainty and worry about what has happened to their loved ones.

*We share love and affection
with those we know and
develop our ideas and
ambitions with their help.*

Receiving news from one's own family, being able to share one's feelings and thoughts with them and, ultimately, being reunited with them: the Family Links Network seeks to ensure that such basic rights are respected, regardless of the specific circumstances that might have brought about the separation. It is a challenging undertaking, but the RFL Strategy for the Movement shows how it can be carried out.

"In times of crisis, people turn to their families. They are the most important coping mechanism that most people have. By strengthening the global Family Links Network, the Movement can make a difference in people's lives."

Pierre Krähenbühl, Director of Operations, ICRC

Nairobi, Kiev, Buenos Aires and Bangkok: common challenges for the Network

The four regional RFL conferences that took place in Nairobi, Kiev, Buenos Aires and Bangkok at the end of 2006 were the highlight of the unique consultation process that was carried out in order to develop the content of the RFL Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. These conferences gave National Society, International Federation and ICRC representations in each region valuable opportunities to provide their perspectives on the challenges the Movement faces as it attempts to strengthen its response in the area of restoring family links. The participants came from 139 National Societies, 50 ICRC delegations and the International Federation, and National Societies were, for a large majority, represented at their very senior governance and management levels. They unanimously endorsed the RFL Strategy, creating the necessary momentum for its implementation. These are the recommendations that emerged from the conferences:

- Ensure increased ownership of RFL activities by all the components of the Movement
- Make valuable RFL-trained human resources available
- Mobilize the necessary resources for implementing the Strategy
- Monitor and incorporate new technological applications
- Create an RFL rapid-response mechanism and improve cooperation in emergencies
- Broaden the scope of RFL activities to include other groups, vulnerable migrants in particular
- Develop effective outreach programmes to inform those in need of RFL assistance
- Pay more attention to activities related to prevention
- Communicate and promote the RFL Strategy and RFL activities both within and outside the Movement



Regional RFL conference in Nairobi

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PUTTING THE STRATEGY INTO ACTION: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

OWNERSHIP – In ensuring the successful implementation of the RFL Strategy, ownership by all the members of the Network is a key element. In RFL, the first steps towards ownership are: the recognition by each member of its responsibilities in the area of RFL, the assessment of the RFL needs of each country, and the development of a strong organizational foundation for RFL activities within each National Society.

POLICY INTEGRATION – The Strategy incorporates RFL into the Movement's framework of plans and strategies, that is, into all existing Movement strategies and National Society strategic development plans and planning processes. This approach means, for instance, that RFL will be included in disaster preparedness and response planning. This is crucial to the success of the Strategy.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION – Implementing the Strategy requires the mobilization of financial and human resources, as well as expertise and knowledge. Each member of the RFL Network already has resources that it can share. The Strategy sets out plans for a contributions assessment in the early stages of the implementation process and it reaffirms the role of the Central Tracing Agency as coordinator of the Network, to ensure the optimal use of the available resources in responding to needs.

PARTNERSHIPS – No single member of the Family Links Network can respond to present and emerging needs by itself. Family links are disrupted for many different reasons and these disruptions occur in many different contexts, often with cross-border implications. This calls for joint action and a joint approach. Partnerships should be established at the international, regional and local levels in order to make the most of the resources that are available.



Towards implementation of the Strategy: Four National Societies take the initiative

At the initiative of the Thai Red Cross Society, the National Societies of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam have begun a pilot project in their region to familiarize themselves with the Strategy and to discuss its implementation within a regional perspective. The Thai Red Cross Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) co-hosted the first meeting of the group in Bangkok from 28 to 29 May 2007. Dr. Werasit Sittitrai, Director of the Strategy and Planning Bureau of the Thai Red Cross, commented "The aims of this 10-year strategy are to increase ownership, to build on partnerships amongst components of the Movement and to adapt our responses to specific needs in every region and to the situation in each country. We have started to discuss the measures to be taken in our region and we will continue to work towards these aims."



After its adoption by the Council of Delegates, the RFL Strategy will be presented during the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. This will be an excellent opportunity to promote the Strategy and to ask participants to express their commitment, for example by taking "pledges." A workshop on the implementation of the Strategy and possible partnerships will be organized for the occasion.

Latest developments and next steps

Advisory Group

In February 2007, the members of the Advisory Group met in Geneva to discuss how the implementation of the Strategy would be phased. They will hold their last meeting from 20 to 21 November 2007, before another group is set up to monitor the implementation of the Strategy.

Building our disaster-response capacity

Several measures described in the Strategy are already being implemented, as is the case with the RFL rapid-response mechanism (Strategic Objective 2, Action 1 of the RFL Strategy). In May 2007, the ICRC, the German Red Cross and the British Red Cross started working on the development of this mechanism. The process includes the production of a field manual and the creation of a pool of specialists, of different backgrounds and nationalities, who can be deployed rapidly during natural or man-made disasters.

Adoption of the RFL Strategy

The draft RFL Strategy document is going through a final round of consultations with all the components of the Movement. The International Federation has fully endorsed its contents and the document has been approved by the ICRC's Directorate and Assembly Council. The launch of the Strategy will start with its adoption by the Council of Delegates, which will take place on 23 and 24 November 2007.

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 war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It 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 International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



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