



150 years of humanitarian action
**Council of Delegates of the International
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Council of Delegates 2013

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

MOVEMENT RESPONSE TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ARMED CONFLICT AND DISASTER

Chair: Dr Helen Durham, Australian Red Cross

Rapporteur: Dr Fawzi Amin, Secretary General, Bahrain Red Crescent Society

Aide Rapporteurs: Siobhán Foran, Gender & Diversity, IFRC and Sophie Graven Minnig, Women and War, ICRC

SPEAKERS:

- Dr Michaële Amédée Gédéon, Former President, Haitian National Red Cross Society
- Dr Asha Mohamed, Deputy Secretary-General, Kenya Red Cross Society
- Mr Morris Gbessagee, Secretary-General, the Liberia National Red Cross Society
- Ms Eva Von Olreich, President, Swedish Red Cross
- Ms Charlotte Lindsey-Curtet, Director of Communication and Information Management, ICRC
- Ms Joelle Tanguy, Under-Secretary-General, Humanitarian Values and Diplomacy, IFRC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) often occurs when a pre-existing situation of vulnerability, risk, discrimination and violence is exacerbated by the conditions of conflict or disaster.
- The workshop considered SGBV in the context of conflict and disaster, and their aftermaths, but also as an issue that is normalized in communities and in society at large.
- SGBV affects everyone, from women and girls to men and boys. People already deemed vulnerable – older people, people with disabilities, people from minority groups, detainees, etc. – are at relatively higher risk than others of falling victim to the violence.
- The issue continues to be shrouded in silence and stigmatization.
- Despite considerable national and international efforts, legislation and investment, as well as Movement policies, the issue persists and is even growing in many situations.
- The fact that everyone has a role to play in tackling this cross-cutting issue presents a major challenge. Accordingly, there was a call to rethink our strategy and increase capacity and investment.
- It should be borne in mind that aid workers and Movement actors can themselves be victims, perpetrators or agents for change.

- The workshop concluded with three recommendations: to define common terminology around gender, gender-based violence and sexual violence across the Movement; to map activities currently being undertaken in this area across the Movement; and to include the issue of SGBV on the agenda of the 32nd International Conference, in 2015.

KEY POINTS RAISED:

- SGBV often occurs when a pre-existing situation of vulnerability, risk, discrimination and violence is exacerbated by the conditions of conflict or disaster.
- The workshop considered SGBV in the context of conflict and disaster, and their aftermath, but also as an issue that is normalized in communities and in society at large.
- SGBV affects everyone, from women and girls to men and boys. People already deemed vulnerable – older people, people with disabilities, people from minority groups, detainees, etc. – are at relatively higher risk than others of falling victim to the violence.
- The issue continues to be shrouded in silence and stigmatization.
- Despite considerable national and international efforts, legislation and investment, as well as Movement policies, the issue persists and is even growing in many situations.
- The fact that everyone has a role to play in tackling this cross-cutting issue presents a major challenge. Accordingly, there was a call to rethink our approach and increase capacity and investment.
- It should be borne in mind that aid workers and Movement actors can themselves be victims, perpetrators or agents for change.
- There is a need for more evidence-based data to enable us to understand the nature and extent of SGBV in pre-conflict and pre-disaster situations, in order to respond meaningfully to the issue.
- The ICRC, International Federation and a large number of National Societies are already working to prevent or respond to SGBV, and it is clear that lessons and good practices can be drawn from these. Participants called for National Society activities to be mapped in an effort to understand what is being done and where gaps may exist.
- A welcome development for the ICRC and for the International Federation, as well as the broader humanitarian community, is the recognition that we must assume and act on the assumption that violence will increase in emergencies and conflict. This issue was articulated in the joint communiqué that emerged from the UK Government-led Call to Action on protecting women and girls in emergencies (13 November 2013), which was signed by the International Federation. The ICRC has made a separate commitment that all its delegations will work with the assumption that sexual violence takes place, regardless of the extent of tangible evidence, and as such, develop humanitarian activities aimed at responding to the needs of victims of this violation.
- It is necessary to adopt a multifaceted approach to addressing SGBV, to support efforts made by governments and in the security sector, and to develop operational and advocacy programmes.
- Training and capacity-building is required for staff and volunteers at all levels.
- Many National Societies stressed the importance of considering the issue in context, taking into account such factors as poverty, a lack of education, social marginalization, and weak legal and policing systems. There was also agreement that messages should be adapted to the local language and culture through community-based systems.
 - Much reference was made to the Canadian Red Cross Society's and International Federation's work around "Predictable, Preventable: Best Practices for Addressing Interpersonal and Self-Directed Violence During and After Disasters."
 - There was encouragement for approaching SGBV from three angles: gender and diversity (including not only women and girls but also boys and men, older people and people with disabilities), prevention and disaster preparedness.
 - Many National Societies emphasized that boys and men can also be victims of SGBV, both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, men may feel shame, anger and distress if their female relatives or children are affected by SGBV. We therefore need to ensure that we provide men with the social and psychological

support they need, but also engage them as key agents in prevention and response efforts, as well as potential victims.

- A number of National Societies reiterated that rape and other forms of sexual violence are absolutely prohibited at all times under International Human Rights Law and in both international and non-international armed conflict under International Humanitarian Law . A number of National Societies mentioned how important it was for governments to take action to criminalize SGBV under domestic law and for the Movement to work with governments and law-enforcement agencies to ensure implementation. Not only does the legal framework require attention, but there is also a need to build a culture of equality and non-discrimination. Work on fostering an environment conducive for change must begin in peacetime.
- Much discussion was given to building on the Movement's internal culture of non-violence and non-harassment. Participants stressed the need to reinforce the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, including by establishing or strengthening Codes of Conduct and all associated mechanisms for addressing complaints, conducting investigations and providing redress. They also suggested creating environments that foster a culture of respect.
- There are gaps in the knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers with regard to recognizing signs of SGBV or knowing how to respond if victims disclose their experiences. This indicates the need for additional capacity-building in all sectors and at all levels.
- Enhanced coordination is required between Movement components and with external actors, such as governments, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.
- National Societies were reminded of the importance of signing relevant pledges (relating to international humanitarian law, gender and violence prevention).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To develop common Movement terminology and definitions around gender, gender-based violence and sexual violence.
- To map activities currently being implemented by Movement components in relation to SGBV. This would enable us to develop a clearer picture of existing programmes, good practices, potential gaps, and needs in terms of training and tools.
- To sustain interest and momentum in this critical area of work and to include it on the agenda of the 32nd International Conference, in 2015.