



Our world. Your move.

31st International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent
Geneva, 28 November–1 December – **For humanity**



31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Workshop: Best Practices in Strengthening Child Protection

Organized by

The Uganda Red Cross Society and the Norwegian Red Cross Youth

28 November 2011, 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.

CCV Room C, International Conference Centre, Geneva

Chair: Mr Michael Nataka, Secretary-General, Uganda Red Cross Society

Rapporteur: Mr Mads Espersen, President, Danish Red Cross Youth

Summary

The workshop, which was attended by approximately 45 participants, drew attention to the importance of protecting children and youth during armed conflict. They are a particularly vulnerable group and in need of more focused interest. The recruitment of children as soldiers and gang members is an issue that must be targeted. Preventive measures and measures for the social reintegration and early recovery of those affected have to be strengthened: this can be done through the provision of psychosocial support, instruction in life-planning skills, vocational training and similar initiatives. Neglecting these issues not only creates needless human suffering; it endangers the entire transition from war to peace. The Movement should increase cooperation on these issues both internally and externally.

Panel discussion

- The workshop began with a short film about northern Uganda, where the Uganda Red Cross Society in partnership with the Danish Red Cross Youth has developed a life-planning skills programme targeting youth affected by armed conflict: the ultimate aim is to restore the hopes of an entire generation.
- **Mr Michael Nataka, Secretary-General of the Uganda Red Cross Society**, opened the workshop by pointing out that children in affected by armed conflict have been a priority for the Movement since the adoption by the Council of Delegates in 1995 of the Plan of Action concerning children. The Plan of

Action, which was reaffirmed in 1999, focuses on preventing child recruitment and on the plight of children and youth who are victims of conflict. Since then, a number of National Societies (NS) have implemented projects in this area, but more vigorous efforts are urgently needed. The workshop sought to identify best practices and lessons learnt in working with children affected by armed conflict and violence. It also sought to gather ideas on sharing knowledge within the Movement to secure effective responses and to motivate NS to take action.

- **Ms Kristin Barstad, Child Protection Adviser at the ICRC**, explained that though children were protected under international humanitarian law and acknowledged to be a particularly vulnerable group, they are, far too often, victims of direct and serious violations. It was necessary, therefore, to pay unremitting attention to the issue of children affected by war; and stronger cooperation between the components of the Movement was essential, despite the differences in role and the differing areas of expertise. Steps have already been taken to increase such cooperation: Ms Barstad referred to the workshop on Children Affected by Armed Conflict and other Situations of Violence (CABAC) held in Geneva in March 2011, in which 19 NS, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), the ICRC and several external partners took part. At this workshop, four cross-cutting principles and priorities were identified: action must be holistic and multidisciplinary; action must be based on children's resilience; youth participation was particularly important; and local ownership was essential. The workshop recommended that regional networks be strengthened in order to secure the sharing of information and experience; it also suggested that funding should have a long-term focus. Furthermore, the Movement should build stronger networks with external partners
- **Dr Wael Qadan, Head of Planning and Development at the Palestine Red Crescent Society**, provided glimpses of children's lives in the occupied territories. Some children had lost friends and relatives, while the separation of the areas affected had had damaging consequences for the lives of others. Together with the Ministry of Education, the Palestine Red Crescent initiated a modified CABAC programme that included mental health, psychosocial support and other measures fitted to these particular circumstances. Through a holistic approach that entailed the provision of basic services and security, community and family support, focused non-specialized support and specialized services, the programme managed to increase tolerance and trust among the children in question.
- **Ms Norma Archila, Coordinator of Dissemination of Principles and Values at the Honduran Red Cross**, presented a programme focused on improving opportunities for teenagers and on fighting violence. The project was initiated in 2003 and targets 3,000 teenagers between 14 and 18 years of age. Through health activities, vocational training and other similar activities, the project has managed to prevent group violence and recruitment into gangs. Support for this is provided by a consortium of NS and the ICRC; the project has empowered other organizations as well. The process of identifying best practices is under way; important lessons learnt are that a long-term focus is needed and that activities must be community-based throughout the project – to secure the active participation of all partners, as some degree of initial resistance must be expected.

Highlights of the discussion

- **The Uganda Red Cross Society** in partnership with the **Danish Red Cross Youth** has implemented a Life-Planning Skills (LPS) programme at four branches in post-conflict northern Uganda. The programme includes LPS courses, livelihood training and local advocacy work. Based on its experiences, the Danish Red Cross Youth recommended increased experience sharing, through a yearly CABAC report, published by the ICRC, that would highlight Movement efforts; greater use of the International Federation's Psychosocial Reference Centre in programme development; and a stronger cooperation between the ICRC and NS working in children and youth camp settings to allow increased access and earlier implementation of psychosocial programmes. **The ICRC** restores family links, runs reintegration programmes and works with minors in detention: CABAC may be said to incorporate all these activities, and should be given weight accordingly. The increasing challenge of urban violence is a great concern, and the ICRC together with NS has initiated a number of programmes to deal with it. The ICRC encouraged NS and States to focus on vocational training and life-skills training and to sign the pledge put forward to the International Conference. The ICRC welcomed the suggestion to establish a CABAC learning platform, specifics of which will have to be discussed. The ICRC had decided to make psychosocial care an area of focus; it had recently initiated cooperation with the Psychosocial Reference Centre in Copenhagen.
- **The Cameroon Red Cross Society** was concerned that the current debate appeared to be concerned mainly with post-conflict suffering. It called for broader attention to be paid to children and youth affected by violence and for greater emphasis on proactive initiatives.
- **The Norwegian Red Cross Youth** highlighted the issue of child soldiers. It declared that NS should work to ensure that no one under the age of 18 would be recruited to participate in armed conflict; it also called on States to sign the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and to fix the minimum age of voluntary recruitment at 18. NS and States were urged to sign the pledge put forward by the Norwegian Red Cross Youth.
- **The Turkish Red Crescent** together with the Ministry of Education trains teachers to instruct students in international humanitarian law. NS should work to convince their governments to ban recruitment of minors for participation in armed conflict and to prosecute violators. **The Myanmar Red Cross** supported this view.
- **The Honduran Red Cross** stressed the need for early action: children as young as six years of age were being recruited into violent gangs. The provision of psychosocial support was very important in preventing violence.
- **The Palestine Red Crescent Society** highlighted that taking responsibility and cooperating with external partners was crucial for success.