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Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross
and Red Crescent Movement

Geneva, 26 November 2011 – For humanity



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COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

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Preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Background report

prepared for resolution 6 “Preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the International
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”

adopted at the Council of Delegates 26 November 2011

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and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with the
support of the Australian, British, Chinese, Colombian, French, and Serbian Red
Cross Societies and the Turkish Red Crescent, and in cooperation with
the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum**

Geneva, October 2011

BACKGROUND REPORT

Preserving the historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Introduction

The 150th anniversary of the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereafter the Movement) is a particularly appropriate time to reflect on the importance of the Movement's actions and of the contribution of its components to the world's history through many times of armed conflict and other situations of violence, disaster, and disease. It stands today as the largest and the longest-lived humanitarian movement in the world endowed with a distinctiveness which derives from its Fundamental Principles, its values and modes of operation. It has an undisputed place in history and stands as an example to governments, communities and all organisations with humanitarian objectives.

The Movement's components have accumulated a unique heritage; this must be preserved and promoted in order to inspire current and future generations. Understanding the origins and past experiences of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement should guide current and future actions, by enabling individuals to utilise this knowledge.

Prompted by its 20th anniversary in 2008, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (the Museum) in Geneva re-examined the meaning of its mission and the future of its cultural work.¹ Given its special role, it offered to strive to improve the way the Movement's historical and cultural heritage is preserved. The Museum wishes to raise awareness of its work and to make available its professional expertise. Finally, to optimize its relations with the Movement, the Museum has moved to develop partnerships with the Movement's different components, with each partner retaining its own independence.

This report presents a draft resolution on preserving the Movement's historical and cultural heritage. It draws on various consultations held following the contribution by the Museum Director at the Movement meetings in Seoul in 2005. It is also based on the request from the Standing Commission to develop further the draft resolution in consultation with the ICRC, the International Federation and National Societies, with a view to a decision by the Council of Delegates in 2011.

All Movement components are invited to work towards achieving these objectives and, to that end, to work with the Museum as a key contact and partner.

I – The Movement's historical and cultural heritage

What do we actually mean by “historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”?

We understand “historical and cultural heritage of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement” to be any object, document or image deemed worthy of preservation and passing on to future generations as a record of the Movement's work and its history. It also includes intangible heritage defined as the practices, representations, living

¹ *Avenir 2008. Stratégie générale pour les années 2008-2018*, report approved by the Museum's Governing Board on 24 April 2006, 90 pages.

expressions, knowledge and skills inherent in the modes of operation and humanitarian actions of the components of the Movement and of the persons and communities they assist.

Narrowly defined, Red Cross and Red Crescent heritage consists of artefacts and documents produced by a component of the Movement (e.g. promotional posters) or showing one of the Movement's components in action (e.g. photographs of field operations).

Defined more broadly, it includes material representations and symbols linked to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its components or to their humanitarian work (such as works of art inspired by the Red Cross / Red Crescent).

II – The Red Cross and Red Crescent at the heart of this challenge

The **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum** helps to preserve and promote the Movement's historical heritage. Since it opened in 1988 the Museum has assembled vast collections of posters, photographs and films, for the most part produced by National Societies and collected by the International Federation. It also maintains numerous historical documents, stamps, relief-and-assistance items, and a unique collection of handmade gifts received – during ICRC prison visits for example – from grateful beneficiaries.

The Museum promotes this heritage by way of exhibitions, publications and loans. A new permanent exhibition opening in 2013 will exhibit important items of Movement heritage while presenting the main challenges for humanitarian work in today's world.

In order to develop the collection and to preserve its international character, since 2005 the Museum has been working with a number of National Societies, selected to represent the Movement's diversity. This collaboration enhances the collections with objects, images and documents that bear witness to current humanitarian activities.

Since its creation in 1863, the **ICRC** has built up a considerable archive heritage. In its archiving policy, first adopted in 1990, it undertook to preserve its institutional memory in a sustainable way to support decision making and efficiency in its current operations and promote the history of humanitarian action. Its heritage consists of written records concerning ICRC activities and the people it has assisted. In addition to these documents, there are films, sound recordings, photographs and publications. The ICRC library holds books, publications, audio-visual materials and other productions, produced by itself and other components of the Movement.

Through its archives and also its activities in the realms of public communication and promotion of international humanitarian law and the Movement's fundamental principles, the ICRC strives to disseminate knowledge of its own history, identity and work, and of those of the Movement as a whole.

In 2007, the archives of the International Prisoners-of-War Agency (1914-1923)² entered UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. This represented the crowning achievement in the tireless efforts to save these archives from deterioration or destruction and to contribute to preserving the memory of the first World War. For the Movement, these archives also testify to the continuity of the Movement's humanitarian work in the fields of restoring family links, searching for missing persons, and protecting people affected by armed conflict and

² In October 1914, after the opening battles of the First World War in which many prisoners were taken, the ICRC opened the International Prisoners-of-War Agency in Geneva; during the conflict it listed almost two million POWs, visited many of them and enabled families to send relief parcels.

other situations of violence – a mandate and range of activities still carried out today around the world.

The **archive service of the International Federation** has since the creation of that organization in 1919, been collecting, organizing and protecting files and publications that contain information on its activities and those of its member National Societies. Thanks to these efforts, National Societies and the general public are able to access archived material and learn more about the International Federation's history, and International Federation staff use the historical information to inform current decision-making.

These archives cover principally: governance; organisational development and capacity-building; the work of volunteers; relief operations following natural disasters; refugee operations; disease and epidemics; public health, in particular nursing education, blood donations/transfusions and community health; youth; the contribution of these Red Cross and Red Crescent actions to peace, development and stability.

The International Federation's audiovisual archives have been deposited with the Museum, where they are used for museum activities.

National Societies, as key components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, have a vital role to play in safeguarding and promoting the Movement's heritage. An ever-growing number of these Societies are taking steps to preserve the traces of their past. Some have set up archiving services to maintain a record of their activities; others have protected their heritage by providing the means needed to reflect that past in museums. Others are striving – sometimes with limited resources – to make known the history of their Society and of the Movement as a whole.

Certain events in the past continue to shape the present and future humanitarian action of the Movement and of its various components. World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (8 May) commemorates the birth of Henry Dunant, the Movement's founder, and furnishes the National Societies with a valuable opportunity to promote their activities. Prominent among the many initiatives taken by the National Societies around the world is the Fiaccolata, held in Solferino in June of each year. It is an occasion for mobilizing members to mark the Battle of Solferino in 1859, the event that inspired Henry Dunant to carry out his visionary work.

III – Mobilising the Movement to make use of and to promote its historical and cultural heritage

In order to promote the historical and cultural heritage of the Movement's components and to stress the vital necessity of archives in supporting efficient action, decision-making and clarity in today's humanitarian activities undertaken by the components of the Movement, all opportunities to raise awareness and inspire current and future generations must be seized.

Several important anniversaries and commemorations arising over the next decade will offer such an opportunity, some of which are:

2011: International Year of Volunteers

2013: 150th anniversary of the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross

2014: 150th anniversary of the adoption of the original Geneva Convention and 100th anniversary of the creation of the International Prisoners-of-War Agency following the outbreak of the First World War.

2019: 100th anniversary of the founding of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and 70th anniversary of the adoption of the present Geneva Conventions.

A number of anniversaries of the establishment of National Societies or commemorations of national historical events in which National Societies played a significant humanitarian role will also be commemorated in the years to come.

With their own historical background in mind, all components of the Movement are encouraged to seize upon these occasions as opportunities to embrace their responsibility to preserve, promote and disseminate knowledge of the Movement's cultural and historical heritage. The occasion of these commemorations, which in many instances will be marked by or associate Governments, intergovernmental organisations, or other organisations which have been inspired by the Red Cross and Red Crescent, should also be drawn upon to position the Movement and its historical and cultural heritage.

To that end, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of Australia, Britain, China, Colombia, France, Serbia, and Turkey wish to submit the draft resolution for approval by the Council of Delegates.