



150 years of humanitarian action
**Council of Delegates of the International
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**
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Council of Delegates 2013

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

Chair: Dr Al-Hadid, Jordan National Red Crescent Society

Rapporteur: Ethel Kaimila, Malawi Red Cross Society

(A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The workshop contributions, from the panelists and the participants alike, demonstrated clearly the degree to which the Fundamental Principles are considered valuable and relevant by all components of the Movement. There was a discussion of how the Fundamental Principles were also strongly embedded in the personal values that motivate our work in the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Best practices and reflections were shared on how the Fundamental Principles contribute to the Red Cross/Red Crescent identity, and also how they enable us to bring assistance and protection to the victims and most vulnerable, with a particular focus on the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. Challenges that are faced with the application of the Fundamental Principles were also discussed, in particular with unity and independence.

It was recognized that 2015 will mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles, and that this anniversary should be marked. There was considerable support voiced for training and educating young people, volunteers, staff and leaders in the Fundamental Principles – both their substance and their application – and for including training on the Fundamental Principles in all Red Cross/Red Crescent training. It was proposed, and accepted, that a joint work programme be set up on the contextual application of Fundamental Principles. Such an initiative would complement existing and on-going capacity-building efforts. Ahead of the 2015 International Conference, this would take the form of a series of regional workshops on dilemmas faced in the field and on how the Fundamental Principles provide guidance and a solution to those dilemmas. Further consideration should be given to the way in which governments would be involved in this process. The concluding statement was that the Fundamental Principles define our identity and safeguard our work, and that by binding us together they make us stronger as a Movement.

(B) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- *Speakers*

The speakers shared their thoughts on the importance and relevance of the Fundamental

Principles in their work.

Mr Matthias Schmale from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies gave a summary of findings from a consultation process conducted over the past months in which the International Federation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and individuals from 115 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies shared their opinions on the contemporary relevance and importance of the Fundamental Principles.

Ms Berna Beyrouthy of the Lebanese Red Cross eloquently described the situation in Lebanon and the context in which Lebanese Red Cross volunteers operate. She described how challenging – and yet essential – adherence to the Fundamental Principles was in a sectarian environment. She described the Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality as a ray of light in what can be an ugly, dark world.

President Diallo of the Senegalese Red Cross Society described a recent dilemma faced by the Movement, which challenged the principle of unity. In being asked to consider the presence of two National Societies on the island of Cyprus, the Movement was forced to weigh the principle of unity against its ability to be present and able to provide assistance to the entire population of Cyprus. In the end he described how a compromise had been found that enables the Movement to meet its humanitarian mission.

Dr Kalbanau of the Red Cross Society of Belarus identified the Fundamental Principles as the foundation of our Movement. He noted their uniqueness and their importance. He went on to describe some of the complications that can arise in their application, particularly when National Societies are faced with delicate political or religious situations. He mentioned in particular the principle of unity as challenging for National Societies.

Ms Amal Emam of the Egyptian Red Crescent Society described the importance of the Fundamental Principles in the response to the civil unrest that followed the Arab Spring in Egypt. She made an emotional plea for support for skills-based training for young people and volunteers, along with the “7 4 7” (7 skills for 7 fundamental principles) approach, starting from today, so that we can continue “walking the talk,” and underlined the relevance of the Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) initiative in this regard.

Mr Philip Spoerri from the ICRC complimented the panellists and laid out a proposed way forward for a joint initiative that would lead to a major celebration at the 2015 International Conference. He noted the importance of the contextual application of the Fundamental Principles. The proposal would consist of regional workshops and other innovative ways of engaging with the topic. He said that the nature of State involvement would be carefully considered.

- Other participants

There was a high level of participation, with 19 participants making statements.

The representative of the Samoa Red Cross Society reflected on the importance of commitment to the Fundamental Principles, and of the power that components of the Movement have in changing attitudes.

The representative of the Nigerian Red Cross Society noted the challenges facing National Societies, particularly with regard to the application of the principle of independence. He also noted the importance of support for National Societies to enable them to better apply their principles.

The representative from the Palestine Red Crescent Society contributed some comments on the background paper to the workshop, and emphasized the importance of the Fundamental Principles in how we act and in how we are perceived.

The Australian Red Cross representative complimented the panellists and stressed the potential role for governments in the approaching anniversary of the Fundamental Principles in 2015. He asked how we should engage constructively with governments on the topic of Fundamental Principles. The Australian Red Cross welcomed phase two of the proposed initiative and registered its interest in taking part in the accompanying advisory group.

The German Red Cross representative offered an example of the application of the Fundamental Principles from the perspective of a National Society not operating in either a conflict or disaster-prone context. She noted that a major challenge was distinguishing the National Society from other civil society actors.

The representative from the Philippine Red Cross noted the difficulty for National Societies to adhere to the principle of independence. He also noted some difficulties currently being faced in the humanitarian operation underway in the Philippines. The Chair recalled that governments have commitments under international disaster response law with regard to disaster logistics.

The representative from the Ghana Red Cross Society commented on the value of impartiality and how it is universally reassuring that an impartial humanitarian actor is present in every country, should there be a need for assistance. He also drew attention to the fact that Movement relations transcend politics, as exemplified by the good relations within the Movement between the Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom in Israel.

The representative from the Brazilian Red Cross shared an example of good practice. He talked about their first-aid programme in primary schools and the contextual approach adopted to better explain the Fundamental Principles to this audience.

The representative from the Red Cross Society of the Democratic Republic of the Congo noted the challenge of applying the principle of Unity in the Belgian context. He also reaffirmed the crucial role of volunteers in the Movement.

The representative from Magen David Adom in Israel described the application of impartiality and neutrality in Israel, and confirmed that there were good relations within the Movement between National Societies whose States' political relations were traditionally tense. She wondered how we might transfer this good working relationship from within the Movement to our respective States and civil societies.

The representative from the Ethiopian Red Cross Society emphasized the role of the Fundamental Principles and of the use of new technologies in Movement communications. He affirmed that only through practical action would we ensure the relevance of the Fundamental Principles into the future.

The representative from the Swedish Red Cross described the promotion of a principle-based approach in Sweden.

The representative from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society noted the importance of a

Movement-wide approach and a general understanding of that approach in gaining access to people in need.

The ICRC representative noted that, although the principles were formally adopted in 1965, their origins could be traced back to the founding of the ICRC and of the Movement. He clarified that States are bound to respect National Societies' adherence to the Fundamental Principles. He pledged ICRC support for National Societies' efforts to apply the Fundamental Principles.

The representative from the Italian Red Cross highlighted the importance of a clear and proper understanding of the Fundamental Principles. In terms of challenges, he noted that advocacy and neutrality were not impossible to reconcile; that in fact the principle of neutrality enables the Movement to advocate against suffering and violence. He voiced his conviction that the seven Fundamental Principles should not be changed.

The representative from the Netherlands Red Cross highlighted the issue of dissemination and awareness-raising amongst immigrant communities and the potentially important role of this in limiting the influence of extremism. He recognized a key role for Movement actors in this type of activity.

The representative of the Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan noted the importance of applying the Fundamental Principles in a conflict context, both as a means of operating, and as a means of protection for their staff and volunteers. She went on to highlight the importance of public and State awareness of this, so that such protection would not be abused or misused.

The representative from the Russian Red Cross Society recognized the importance of peacetime dissemination as a means of limiting problems that may occur in times of crisis. He noted that the Fundamental Principles were what separated the components of the Movement from other civil society organizations. He described the Fundamental Principles as all being of equal importance. In particular he commented on the importance of independence and impartiality.

The representative from the Thai Red Cross Society registered the organization's support for celebrating the anniversary of the Fundamental Principles in 2015.

(C) CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chair concluded that the Fundamental Principles define our identity and have served us well over the past 48 years. He noted that the Fundamental Principles are embedded in our personal values and present in different cultures, beliefs and upbringings. He commented on the power of the Fundamental Principles in safeguarding Movement actors in the course of their work. The Fundamental Principles as shared by the youth panelists are at the forefront of our daily work, particularly in armed conflict. He noted that there are challenges with the application of the Fundamental Principles, particularly independence, neutrality and unity, but nonetheless noted the strength with which they imbue the Movement when we act together.

The Chair confirmed support for the proposed initiative going forward, and closed by saying that the participants would be reunited in 2015 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles.