



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



Council of Delegates 2013

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

SAFER ACCESS AND THE PROTECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Co-hosted by the Colombian Red Cross, the ICRC and the International Federation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Having access to those we aim to serve is essential for the fulfilment of our humanitarian mission. We must uphold our Fundamental Principles, and especially the principles of neutrality and independence, if we are to secure this access while also protecting the lives of our staff and volunteers. National Societies should work in close collaboration with the ICRC, the International Federation secretariat and Movement partners to ensure that all actors are aware and well-informed of these principles.

We face a number of both new and persistent challenges in the countries where we are active, as a result of armed conflict and other situations of violence, including social unrest, gang violence and criminal activity. We must be prepared to protect the volunteers, staff and members of National Societies to ensure that they can safely reach those in need and respond to emerging challenges.

To achieve this we need to have a sound understanding of the current security situation in the country and be equipped to face future challenges. The Safer Access Framework can be very useful in this regard, providing a structure for operational security risk management. More importantly, there is a need for all National Societies to carry out a risk assessment and plan accordingly. It is fundamental that we disseminate policies and provide training if we are to continue to protect our staff and volunteers.

Movement coordination is essential for ensuring our safety. National Societies should continue to lead coordination processes and ensure that the Movement is visible and speaking with one voice in their respective countries. Participating National Societies and other Movement partners should not act in a way that puts our safety in jeopardy or undermines the National Societies' needs and development.

We should continue to focus on ensuring appropriate use of the emblems, for both indicative and protective purposes, as a means of guaranteeing our safety. National Societies, with the support of the ICRC and the International Federation secretariat, need to keep disseminating information about the appropriate use and protection of the emblems and to establish the necessary links with governments to advocate for emblem protection laws. The sharing of information between National Societies on this vital issue is essential and should be facilitated and encouraged.

Upholding our neutrality and independence in settings where our safety is at risk requires continuous efforts to disseminate the Fundamental Principles and communicate our work to others.

KEY POINTS RAISED:

- National Societies face a wide range of security challenges. However, the Safer Access Framework remains relevant in all contexts.
- Safety is not an end in itself but a necessary condition for us to reach those in need of our help.
- Risk analysis and identification are essential in all contexts. National Society staff and volunteers are not only exposed to risk when carrying out operations, but also within their offices, at headquarters and in local branches; that being the case, occupational health and safety should be included in Safer Access policies and strategies.
- National Societies must continue to hold dialogue with governments and other stakeholders as a means of disseminating information about our work and principles.
- Promotion of our neutrality and independence is crucial.
- It is necessary to make sure that our emblem is being used appropriately and this effort should be supported and protected by a legal framework. There was consensus on the importance of protecting the emblem and on the need to work with governments on this matter.
- Stronger Movement coordination is fundamental for our safety.
- The actions of some participating National Societies put us all at risk. We need to act as one Movement, with a unified voice and a single approach.
- There continues to be a lack of information and dissemination efforts. All Movement components must do more to rectify this issue internally, between each other and with external stakeholders.
- Each National Society's experience is important and needs to be shared. The ICRC and the International Federation secretariat should facilitate this exchange of experiences.
- It is important to ensure that volunteers are covered by insurance (only 20% are currently insured). Some National Societies have taken steps in this direction, but more must still be done.
- We need to gain a better understanding of how all actors work in the countries of participating National Societies, to include them in our dissemination efforts and other services, and raise awareness among delegates **about the principles of Safer Access** before their deployment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- While there is great diversity in National Society experiences and needs, the Safer Access Framework is relevant for all.
- There is a need for all National Societies to complete security risk assessments and to devise a road map for action, encompassing systems, processes, policies and resources.
- Stronger action on emblem protection laws is needed in many countries. This should be supported by the ICRC, the International Federation and National Societies with relevant experience, to ensure respect for the emblem.

- Consideration should be given to the wider legal framework defining National Society roles in each country and clarification sought from the government.
- To maintain our independence and neutrality, there is strong need for all National Societies to engage in dialogue with all stakeholders, including the government.
- Stronger coordination between all Movement components in a given country is necessary; the host National Society should take leadership in coordination efforts and other components should respect their role.
- There is a need for all National Societies **to take steps to prepare for possible instability or risks.**
- Participants called on all National Societies to share their experiences with the ICRC and to learn from and support each other. The ICRC and the International Federation should create spaces and processes that allow National Societies to work on this together.
- We should invest in training for all (governance, staff and volunteers) and at all levels (strategic and operational, headquarter and branches).
- Dissemination **of Safer Access policies** is essential, both within the Movement and among external stakeholders.
- Further work is needed on the question of insurance. Insurance needs to be accessible, comprehensive and sufficient to cover all Red Cross and Red Crescent workers (volunteers and staff). We need to work on improving insurance coverage, raising awareness of it and clarifying any financial or documentary issues.