



Workshop: Upholding independence, neutrality and impartiality in the face of State responses to contemporary global challenges

(Workshop 3)

Outline

Key highlights

This workshop will discuss how the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) can uphold a principled humanitarian approach in the face of State responses to contemporary global challenges.

The discussion will focus on the implications of restrictive policies adopted by States with the rationale of “fighting terrorism” and “ensuring security” and the risk of humanitarian actors being influenced by or co-opted in the implementation of these policies. As a result, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) face increasing challenges in upholding their independence and acting at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement. While the debate is relevant for many fields of action, the focus will be on:

- how restrictive migration policies may affect the ability of National Societies to work in full independence;
- how States’ endeavours to counter or prevent violent extremism may impact National Societies’ ability to uphold the Fundamental Principles; and
- how the Movement can contribute positively to promoting non-discrimination and acceptance in an era of rising xenophobia and discrimination towards certain religious or ethnic groups.

Background information

Armed conflict, other situations of violence and human rights violations, combined with economic hardship, continue to drive a significant number of people to flee or leave their homes and seek a safer and better life in more peaceful and economically stable countries. At the same time, the changing nature of warfare and the perceived threat of groups designated as “terrorist” has led States to develop a number of measures and approaches to prevent and counter terrorism and what is now commonly called “violent extremism”.

These security responses and the conflation sometimes made between migrants (and other minority groups) and the perpetrators of “violent extremism” may itself feed growing nationalism and intolerance among the public. The link made between migration and terrorism is dangerous and misleading and has contributed to the adoption of strict asylum and immigration procedures, some of which do not comply with international law, and restrictions or changes to public financing.

In this context of often restrictive policies at national, regional and international levels, combined with the scale of the humanitarian needs and the restrictions sometimes imposed on funding allocation, humanitarian actors are at greater risk of being influenced by or co-opted in the implementation of these policies. As a result, National Societies, as auxiliaries to their authorities in the humanitarian field, face increasing challenges in upholding their

independence and acting at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

Rationale for the debate

It is proposed that the debate focuses on the following prominent areas, which raise particular dilemmas and challenges for National Societies:

1) State policies and public opinion on migration, and the creation of a restrictive environment for addressing migrants' needs

Increased migration flows within and between all the continents have led, in some circumstances, to amplified political pressure to “manage population movements” more strictly. National Societies in countries of destination for migrants are often experiencing greater pressure from the authorities to support the implementation of **restrictive asylum or migration policies**, or to provide confidential information on beneficiaries, while also striving to meet the humanitarian needs of all migrants and to ensure that States comply with international law. Similarly, National Societies in countries of origin and transit are at risk of being instrumentalized as a result of restrictive migration policies and their influence on inter-governmental relations.

In a number of countries, the frequently negative narrative around migration in the media has also been seen to significantly influence **public opinion**, and both feeds and is fed by rising nationalistic and populist sentiments. Such a climate may also render impartial action by the National Society difficult if it is criticized by the public or penalized by the State for helping certain marginalized groups. Some Movement components have also experienced issues with some of their own staff and volunteers holding negative opinions towards migrants.

2) State and international policies aimed at "Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism", and the broader reaction of public opinion to the phenomenon of "terrorism"

The new, global State-led approach entitled “**Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)**”, aiming to address the root causes of “violent extremism” as part of a broader counter-terrorism agenda, has also led to increased pressure on National Societies. This approach promotes efforts to fight “violent extremism” at grass-roots level through a broad range of mostly non-coercive activities. Strategies that are similar to development, violence prevention, social inclusion and peacebuilding work are promoted – but with political objectives in mind and labelled as initiatives to combat “violent extremism”.

These activities may overlap with or be similar to National Societies' purely humanitarian activities related to social inclusion, promoting peaceful and tolerant societies, inter-community dialogue, and reducing poverty and inequality.

National Societies may therefore face some difficulties in navigating the potential political dynamics and associations that could arise from such activities – especially in relation to accepting funding from sources that have the stated aim of preventing or countering violent extremism.

3) Combatting xenophobia and discrimination towards certain religious or ethnic groups

Finally, among the worst examples of State and public opinion on migration and “violent extremism” are **xenophobic beliefs and discrimination**. It is therefore timely to discuss, in the second part of this workshop (and building on discussions at previous Council of Delegates and International Conferences), how Movement actors can counter this discourse by promoting non-discrimination and respect for diversity and rejecting false beliefs about the link

between migration and “violent extremism”, while at the same time engaging with communities’ concerns around these issues.

Objectives of the workshop

The objectives of the workshop are threefold:

1. To identify and generate debate around the challenges of upholding the Fundamental Principles in this context.
2. To share and discuss tools, approaches and mitigating measures that have already been developed or could usefully be developed by Movement components in this field.
3. To highlight and further promote the positive contribution of the Movement to promoting non-discrimination as part of a culture of non-violence and peace, and to discuss what more can be done in this domain.

Guiding questions

With the overall objective of ensuring that the Movement's components are able to uphold the Fundamental Principles in an increasingly politicized and polarized humanitarian environment, the following questions will guide the debate:

- What concrete challenges have the Movement's components faced in seeking to apply the Fundamental Principles in the context of the above-mentioned State policies, and what solutions have been identified?
- Are National Societies experiencing a lack of respect for their independence, in particular in light of their role as auxiliary to the government? If so, what form does that take?
- How do the Fundamental Principles, related statutory resolutions and decisions, and other tools developed within the Movement help National Societies to navigate these issues?
- What else do Movement components need to navigate these issues and to boost their promotion of a culture of non-violence and peace?

References

The IFRC policy on migration:

http://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Migration-Policy_EN.pdf

The IFRC Global Strategy on Migration (publication forthcoming in September 2017)

Draft zero resolution, "Movement call for action on the humanitarian needs of vulnerable migrants", submitted to the 2017 Council of Delegates: http://rcrcconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CoD17_07_Migration-resolution-draft-0-final-EN.pdf

The ICRC's *Background note and guidance for National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism"*:

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/guidance-note-national-societies-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-approach>

The background report to Commission A of the 32nd International Conference, entitled *The Fundamental Principles in action: A unique ethical, operational and institutional framework*, and *Report on the work of Commission A: The Fundamental Principles in action*, both reports available at: <http://rcrcconference.org/international-conference/documents/>

The concept paper for the 2009 Council of Delegates workshop on promotion of non-discrimination and respect for diversity, which includes references to all relevant statutory decisions and other documents going back to 1991:

https://fednet.ifrc.org/PageFiles/92946/CNVP/CoD_non-disc%20and%20div_WS-concept%20paper_FINAL.pdf

And the final report of that workshop:

<https://fednet.ifrc.org/PageFiles/92946/CNVP/COD2009NDRFDworkshopreportfinal.pdf>

The 2009 IFRC advocacy paper on promoting a culture of non-violence and peace:

https://fednet.ifrc.org/FedNet/Resources_and_Services/Principles%20and%20Values/IFRCpositionpaper%20Promotion%20of%20culture%20of%20peace-EN-LR.pdf