

Council of Delegates 2017

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

Waking the Red Giant Movement Communications: Alignment and Strategic Importance

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(A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, information and communication have become cornerstones of any humanitarian activity. There is no doubt that the Movement needs to be well-positioned at all times, particularly in crises, in order to mobilize support and maintain its position as a leading humanitarian actor at local and global levels. Achieving this requires an understanding of the fast-changing media and communications landscape, greater investment in communications and a leadership-driven approach that elevates strategic communications as an organizational priority.

For the first time, a workshop organized by the ICRC and the IFRC dedicated to strategic communications was convened at the Council of Delegates, bringing together 180 senior leadership figures from across the Movement to identify challenges and find solutions to the collective communications challenges faced by Movement partners. The workshop built on recommendations made by Movement communicators at the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Communication Forums of 2014 and 2017, which were convened by the IFRC and the ICRC.

(B) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The opening session comprised a joint presentation by Elhadj As Sy, Secretary General of the IFRC, and Yves Daccord, Director-General of the ICRC. They reinforced the importance for the Movement of engaging in strategic communications and its central role in giving a platform and voice to vulnerable communities and building trust and confidence in the Red Cross Red Crescent amongst different stakeholders.
- The workshop included a panel discussion with three panellists and a moderator. The panellists included Mr Riyaad Minty, Head of Digital Strategy at Turkish Radio and Television World (TRT World), Ms Judy Slatyer, CEO of the Australian Red Cross, and Mr Ben Lock, Head of International Affairs at Edelman London. The panel was moderated by Ms Charlotte Lindsey, ICRC Director of Communication and Information Management. Topics covered during the panel discussion included: digital disruption; the changing media landscape; the rising influence of social media and associated impacts on the communications approaches of humanitarian actors; factors driving diminishing levels of public trust in governments, the media and NGOs; and the value of developing strategic and integrated communications for the Movement. Ben Lock highlighted how communications in the past decade have evolved from traditional media relations approaches that relied on the widespread distribution of largely self-

promotional press releases. Now, communications approaches require more sophisticated audience segmentation and targeted messages that engage new audiences who do not necessarily hold the same beliefs. Humanitarian organizations should be more transparent and agile when responding to reputational crises and criticism. Unless they respond in a timely fashion, their image will suffer. Riyaad Minty highlighted the importance of good story-telling as the cornerstone of good communications. He emphasized the importance of going beyond statistics and factual information to give a human face to global events by telling the personal stories of people affected by conflict and disasters.

- In the second segment of the workshop, participants were engaged in a group work session, facilitated by Ms Jemilah Mahmood, IFRC Under Secretary General for Partnerships, which was designed to identify some commonly agreed strategic communications priorities across the Movement.

(C) KEY POINTS RAISED ON GUIDING QUESTIONS

During the group work, participants were tasked with identifying two key challenges in delivering effective public communications and two priority actions that could serve to overcome these challenges. The following challenges and solutions were identified.

Challenges:

- Constraints caused by a lack of financial, human and technical resources
- The failure to strategically prioritize.
- A lack of communications skills and ability to craft impactful key messages and engage with the media
- Poor communications coordination among Movement partners at different levels in operational contexts
- Low levels of trust in and acceptance of humanitarian organizations in some communities
- Poor internal communications within components of the Movement and also across the Movement
- The lack of a database or 'hub' to share communications tools, products and knowledge
- A lack of good story-telling that communicates the Red Cross Red Crescent mission in a positive way
- Low levels of social media engagement and a lack of policies regarding the use of social media

Solutions:

- Place more priority on communications training and investment in volunteers
- Understand and invest in strategic communications and be insight-driven, more targeted, agile and fast
- Be close to communities and have a clear and effective communication plan
- Develop the right messages to convey and define a clear position on key issues
- Scale up engagement and education in social media across the Movement
- Integrate young people with new ideas and technical skills into communications

- Invest in communication resources, capacity and knowledge transfer
- Understand community needs and focus on good story-telling through different mediums and platforms
- Work more effectively with the media, build media networks and educate them on the Red Cross Red Crescent

(D) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop was designed to encourage Movement partners to invest in strategic communications in their respective settings. The main message emerging from the presentations made by the IFRC/ICRC leadership, the panel discussion and the group work was that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement must prioritize communications in budget processes, elevate the organizational importance of strategic communications in order to build trust, maintain its credibility and relevance and ensure sustained support for activities serving the most vulnerable. It also highlighted the necessity to invest in training and the development of communications skills amongst staff, particularly in the area of digital communications, the capacity development of staff and the development of tools and approaches to achieve better alignment among Movement partners. The priority actions identified will help to guide Movement partners in investing in communications as a core strategic priority in the coming years.