

## Preparatory Meeting for the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Summary report

27–28 June 2019

International Conference Centre of Geneva (CICG)

Rue de Varembé, 15 – 1211 Geneva, Switzerland

### INTRODUCTION

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An informal preparatory meeting for the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference) took place from 27 to 28 June 2019. The meeting, open to all members of the International Conference, was convened by the co-organizers, i.e. the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The organizers are grateful to all members present for their attendance and their constructive and thoughtful contributions during the discussions. The organizers wish to thank the Government of Switzerland for its generous support for this meeting and for the International Conference preparations in general.

The aim of this meeting was to provide an opportunity to exchange views on the International Conference's draft-zero resolutions, circulated on 7 June 2019, namely:

- Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies
- Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law
- Responding to shifting vulnerabilities and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: How National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies contribute
- Restoring family links while respecting the right to privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection
- Climate-smart disaster laws and policies that leave no one behind.

This meeting allowed members of the International Conference to come together and identify areas of broad agreement on the proposed resolutions and areas that required further attention. The meeting was co-chaired by Balthasar Staehelin, the ICRC's deputy director-general, and Julie Lyn Hall, the IFRC's chief of staff. The commissioner of the International Conference and the chair, vice-chair and one additional elected member of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Standing Commission) were also present.

This report strives to capture key elements of the discussions held during the preparatory meeting and does not include or refer to the written comments submitted by members before or after the meeting. It is issued under the authority of the two co-chairs of the meeting. They

announced during the meeting it would be drafted, and stressed that it should be considered a working tool and had no formal value.

## **SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**

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The meeting took place over one and half days and saw a fruitful exchange of views between the participants: representatives from 87 States, 92 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), the Standing Commission, the IFRC and the ICRC, and the commissioner of the International Conference. Following the opening remarks by the co-chairs, the chair of the Standing Commission announced that the Standing Commission had selected two people to nominate for key conference officer positions. If approved by the Council of Delegates on 8 December 2019, they would be nominated for election at the International Conference, as per the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Statutes). The proposed officers were: as chair of the International Conference, Ms Natia Loladze, president of the Georgia Red Cross Society, and as chair of the Drafting Committee, H.E. Ms Maria del Socorro Flores Liera, ambassador and permanent representative of Mexico.

A brief introduction and general update on the status of the preparations for the International Conference were provided by the International Conference's Joint Organizing Committee.

The co-chairs specified that while this was an informal meeting not provided for in the Statutes, exchanges were to be grounded in the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement). Speakers should not therefore engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

The meeting then focused on each of the proposed draft-zero resolutions in turn. To set the stage for an exchange of views, the co-chairs provided a brief introduction to each resolution and outlined its objectives and how previous comments from members had been worked into the draft zero.

## **SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS**

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This summary is a broad analysis by the co-chairs of the high-level issues identified for each resolution, including those issues requiring further consultations in the coming months. The aim is to facilitate the work of the Drafting Committee during the International Conference, and thus the adoption by consensus of the proposed resolutions.

### **RESOLUTION: Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies**

**Overall assessment:** The proposed draft resolution "Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies" was well-received by the members of the International Conference at the meeting, with broad overall support expressed for the draft zero. Many members emphasized the fundamental importance to health of mental health and psychosocial well-being, and said the time was right to take action and commitments in this area. The point was made that collective action on this issue is required to meet these often overlooked needs.

**Areas for possible further clarification:** In addition to the general support received, there were several proposals for clarification, which can be summarized as follows:

- More clearly specify the roles and responsibilities of the Movement components, and how those roles are complementary to that of States.
- Clarify the scope of the resolution in several areas, for example: whether it is referring to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) only during emergencies, or after them as well; whether MHPSS covers pre-existing mental health conditions; whether there are links to substance abuse; and whether there should be more explicit links to issues such as migration and climate change.
- Clarify or acknowledge different cultural contexts and ways of addressing MHPSS.
- Consider using more “inclusive” language and include people who may face increased or specific risks, including adolescents, indigenous people, people with pre-existing mental health issues and people who abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Clarify what the term “other emergencies” englobes or find alternative terminology.

**Areas for possible further development:** During the discussions, the members commented on how this resolution could be further strengthened and developed, building on the existing draft. These suggestions can be summarized as follows:

- Link the resolution to relevant frameworks and standards, for example from the World Health Organization.
- Some members suggested being clearer about expectations regarding relevant legal instruments and called for more accuracy as to the legal obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law on addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies.
- Further emphasize prevention, community-based MHPSS and resilience, and the inclusion of staff and volunteers.
- Consider how the resolution could take into account the factors that make certain groups of people (such as adolescents, migrants and people in detention) vulnerable and the specific risks these groups face, and better reflect the impact of population movements on mental health.
- More explicitly address issues relating to capacity-building, training and gaps in formal systems, and how these issues can be supported by the Movement.

Many members expressed their intention of submitting written comments by the 31 July deadline as well, which the co-chairs looked forward to receiving.

### **RESOLUTION: Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law**

**Overall assessment:** The proposed draft-zero resolution “Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law” was welcomed by those present, who reiterated that IHL is at the very core of the International Conference. The feedback received during the session demonstrated broad support for the proposed resolution, which was regarded as well-balanced and emphasizing key areas where domestic implementation of IHL could be strengthened. The members acknowledged the current context in which this resolution was being proposed and welcomed its pragmatic approach.

**Areas for possible further clarification:** In addition to the broad support expressed for this resolution, there were a number of specific comments and questions asking for further

clarification. The co-chairs noted the individual suggestions to make changes and clarifications and express nuances, and have summarized the overall feedback as follows:

- Clarify the role of National Societies, including in promoting IHL, and describe it in a way more closely aligned with the wording of the Statutes.
- Consider whether the resolution could encourage States to consider the relationship between national committees on IHL and National Societies.
- Better highlight the importance of cooperation and exchange between national committees on IHL, not just at the domestic level but also in terms of sharing good practice with other countries or regions.
- Clarify the wording on the ratification of IHL treaties and the manner in which IHL obligations are expressed.

**Areas for possible further development:** During the discussions, some suggestions were made on areas where the resolution could be further developed or strengthened, as follows:

- The protection of the emblem was mentioned by several members as an additional area for consideration in the resolution. How this could be captured without affecting the non-thematic approach of the resolution would need to be considered.
- Several members mentioned the need to engage with religious leaders and groups in the dissemination of IHL, and the need to include this in the proposed resolution.
- Some members suggested strengthening the reference to the International Fact-Finding Commission or reinforcing its role in this resolution.
- Consider the “digital dimension” of this work and reference it more explicitly.
- Be more explicit about the underlying principles of IHL, and potentially recall them in the text of the resolution.
- Given the importance of youth, consider this demographic when mentioning target populations.

Many members also expressed their intention of submitting written comments on the resolution by the 31 July deadline, which would be very welcome and useful in taking this resolution forward to the International Conference.

### **RESOLUTION: Responding to shifting vulnerabilities and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: How National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies contribute**

**Overall assessment:** The proposed resolution is linked to the International Conference’s theme of “shifting vulnerabilities”. Debates will be organized on this theme in areas such as the impact of climate change on humanitarian needs, gaps in access to primary-health-care services, the growing spectrum of pandemics and the needs of vulnerable migrants and displaced people. Rather than proposing new commitments in these areas, the resolution focuses on how National Societies can contribute to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), an overarching framework that expresses States’ joint goals and commitment to address the problems underlying each of them.

The organizers had been unable to share a set of “elements” for this resolution beforehand, as had been done for the other resolutions. This draft zero was therefore the members’ first opportunity to consider and give feedback on this proposed resolution. Many delegations welcomed the draft zero, expressing support for its intention, to clarify how National Societies contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and to encourage increased cooperation between National Societies and their authorities.

Several delegations recognized that the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to their public authorities for humanitarian action has expanded over time to include many peacetime activities, from resilience-building to public health, that go beyond “emergency response”. Several delegations appreciated the timeliness of this proposed resolution as a means to advance current global efforts on making humanitarian action more local. However, it was questioned whether a resolution was the right vehicle for building that cooperation or whether it might be premature at this stage.

**Areas for possible further clarification:**

- A number of delegations felt that the objectives of the resolution were not clear enough and that the text was too detailed and extensive. Several also called for greater attention to the humanitarian–development nexus, specifically in relation to the Movement’s work in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.
- A number of additional specific comments were put forward, in particular on the section of vulnerable groups and on better aligning language with that used in the SDGs.

**Areas for possible further development:**

- Several delegations proposed more clearly addressing implementation measures and actions and making the interplay between the different vulnerabilities touched upon in the resolution, such as climate and health, more explicit.

Overall, the discussion on this proposed resolution broadly recognized the value of National Societies’ work in support of development goals, including on the humanitarian–development nexus and across resilience issues, while also recognizing the value of dialogue on the evolving role of the National Societies in light of current and emerging factors creating vulnerability.

**RESOLUTION: Restoring family links while respecting the right to privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection**

**Overall assessment:** The draft-zero resolution “Restoring Family Links while respecting the right to privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection” received broad support from the members at the meeting, particularly given that it relates to a fundamental area of the Movement’s work. Several connections were made between this proposed resolution and the notion of trust in humanitarian action, which is one of the pillars of the International Conference. More specifically, it was emphasized just how critical the notion of trust is for the Movement’s Restoring Family Links (RFL) services and its processing of personal data. Those being assisted need to be aware of, and confident in, how their data are being used, trust that their data are being processed exclusively for humanitarian purposes, and consent to their personal data being transmitted by the components of the Movement for RFL.

It was clear from the feedback received that this is a timely and important subject for the International Conference to address, and that it is more important than ever to find good solutions and ensure that RFL services can adapt to the changing environment. Given the resolution’s focus on maintaining family links and determining what happened to family members who went missing, the proposed resolution was considered to be rooted in the history of the Movement and its Fundamental Principles. Several delegations also noted that it balances States’ responsibilities with the mandate and activities carried out by the components of the Movement, including National Societies’ auxiliary role in humanitarian work. Mention was also made of the connections with new technologies, and the need to strike

a careful balance between harnessing new technologies in this area of work, but also causing “no digital harm”.

**Areas for possible further clarification:** In addition to the positive feedback received, there were a number of requests for further clarification, particularly with regard to terminology, concepts and implementation. The key areas are as follows:

- It was stressed that National Societies will still have to comply with domestic and regional data protection legislation.
- It was suggested to take note of, or include, references to relevant frameworks and measures, including from the United Nations and with respect to human rights. Some delegations questioned the language and legal frameworks mentioned in this resolution, particularly those which were not supported by all members.
- Some delegations cautioned against using terminology and concepts that were not universally accepted, to ensure that consensus would be reached (e.g. the concepts of data protection and privacy).
- Further clarity was requested on the standards contained in the Movement’s RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection, and what the practical implications would be for States to “acknowledge” or “take note” of this document.
- A correction was needed to the Spanish translation of the resolution, in the part of operative paragraph 10 on “*recogniz[ing]* the Code of Conduct on Data Protection as a solid basis for the protection of personal data”.

**Areas for possible further development:** Some of the areas for further development on which members made constructive comments included:

- Further develop and clarify of operative paragraph 9, which for several delegations combined too many thoughts and concepts. The text should be redrafted to simplify the content and clarify the proposed commitments.
- Include the core principles of personal data protection in the resolution and address the issues of transparency, trust, consent, responsibility and accountability for data processing more concretely.

The co-chairs also noted the comments on specific wording and details, and will take them into account when preparing the official draft resolution. Many delegations expressed their intention of submitting written comments on the proposed resolution by the 31 July deadline, which the organizers looked forward to receiving.

## **RESOLUTION: Climate-smart disaster laws and policies that leave no one behind**

### **Overall assessment:**

The International Conference has been a key international forum for dialogue on disaster law since disaster law was conceived in 2003. With over 90 National Societies having provided technical assistance to their governments since then, the participants at the meeting appreciated having another useful tool for moving this agenda forward, namely, a checklist to support domestic policy makers in assessing their own domestic legislation and policies for disaster preparedness and response, using common gaps and global best practices as a comparison. This draft resolution proposes that States strengthen their legal frameworks on disaster risk management and adapting to climate change and incorporate them more fully

into their systems, along with greater consideration for protecting and including the most vulnerable groups.

There was broad support for the objectives and scope of this resolution. Many delegations noted that previous feedback had been reflected in the draft-zero text. Several delegations welcomed the connection between disaster risk management and climate change adaptation, and the integrated and holistic view of the two areas; some also requested that climate change adaptation be even more visible.

**Areas for possible further clarification:**

- The heart of the resolution is aiming to ensure that no one is left behind – this was highly valued, and also generated a number of comments regarding the different groups and needs to be reflected. Several delegations called for specific groups to be mentioned, such as girls and women, LGBT people, homeless people and people living with pre-existing medical conditions. Some other delegations appreciated the difficult balance between referencing specific groups and the risk of excluding others by doing so.
- There was, however, general support for recognizing the disproportionate impact of disasters and climate change on marginalized groups and in particular on people living with disabilities, and thus the obligation to address their specific needs.
- Several delegations sought clarification on terms, such as “climate-smart”, or sought to revise certain terms, e.g. using “hazard” and not just “natural hazard”.

**Areas for possible further development:**

- Several delegations wanted to give particular attention to youth, not only as being affected by disasters and climate change, but also as part of the future.
- Delegations taking the floor highlighted the role of the National Societies (and of local humanitarian organizations in general) in disaster prevention and proposed that this be made even clearer in the official draft.
- Several speakers proposed an explicit reference encouraging States to seek the advice and support of National Societies and the IFRC when using and considering using innovative ways of working in disaster risk management, such as cash-based programming and forecast-based financing.
- Additionally, delegations mentioned the importance of consulting people who might be most impacted by climate hazards and extreme weather events when revising and developing legislation on disaster-related risks.
- Several speakers emphasized the importance of managing disaster-related risks, with countries and National Societies more prone to disasters showing strong support for the resolution and work on introducing legislation to reduce disaster-related risks and adapt to climate change.

Many speakers mentioned the importance of implementing this resolution. Delegations showed interest in helping finalize the proposed checklist for disaster preparedness and response. The chair responded that the draft checklist was available on the International Conference website and everyone was welcome to contribute comments until 31 August. The final draft would be available online, together with the official documents, on 25 October and at the International Conference.

## **NEXT STEPS IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

The organizers encourage all members to continue their dialogue and engagement in the lead-up to the International Conference, with the aim of reaching consensus on the proposed resolutions during the International Conference.

Consultations will continue in the form of group-of-ambassador meetings (the next one is scheduled for 2 September at 15:00, at the IFRC in Geneva), permanent mission briefings, online webinars and meetings with National Societies in the remaining months leading up to the International Conference.

Input received during this meeting and the written comments received will both contribute to the development of the official draft resolutions, which will be proposed at the International Conference. The draft resolutions will be shared in the official mailing on 25 October 2019, as per the statutory deadline.