



Power of humanity

Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross
and Red Crescent Movement

22-23 June 2022, Geneva

SUMMARY REPORT ON WORKSHOP

What will it take to build an International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement free from racism, xenophobia and discrimination?

Date and time: Thursday, 31 March 2022 09:00–10:30 (CET): English, Arabic, Russian

17:00–18:30 (CET): English, French, Spanish

Chair/facilitator/moderator: David Loquercio, Annika Norlin, Amjad Saleem, Gurvinder Singh

Speakers/panelists/presenters: Michele Hunt

Executive summary

Racism, xenophobia and discrimination are not new issues or conversations within the Movement. Efforts have been made in the past, such as various townhalls, and solutions proposed, but none appear to have been followed through with action. This workshop provides a moment to take stock and to identify and propose actions to address the interpersonal, cultural and systemic barriers that limit our recognition and our responses and efforts to render the Movement free from racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

General observations and key highlights

The aim of the workshop was to understand the barriers that exist within the Movement, which include individual, cultural, contextual and systemic barriers. Keynote speaker Michele Hunt noted: “The deep divides based on race, gender, religion, political views or just being different are all rooted in prejudice, discrimination and exclusion, a worldview that embraces supremacy and subordination rather than understanding that we are all inextricably connected and interdependent.” She concluded by saying that: “Now, more than ever, the world needs a Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that recognizes that diversity and inclusion is a gift, that we (as a Movement) are uniquely positioned to tap into the minds, hearts and imagination of everyone [in our communities] to live up to our vision of what an inclusive Movement would look like, one where No One’s Left Behind, No One’s Left Out and No One Feels Unsafe.”

Throughout the workshop, it was recognized that policies alone will not remove people’s biases and prejudice. A participant from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), sharing her personal experience, noted that fear of retaliation, a lack of safe spaces and failure to validate different experiences prevent brave and honest conversations. It was warned that we must ensure our efforts do not veer towards ‘performativism’ – celebrating actions which are, in reality, too little too late. A call was made to be “less patient” and for everyone in the Movement, not just marginalized and invisible groups or people

of colour (POC), to lead the emotional and educational work on racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

It is also important to note that several National Societies have already started to address some of these topics in different ways and take targeted action to address racism and discrimination. This includes undertaking surveys, monitoring diversity, equity and inclusion metrics, rolling out training and diversifying volunteer recruitment. Participants were invited to express their interest in being part of this work moving forward.

Key points raised

The following barriers to discussing these issues were cited:

1. Fear of retaliation, lack of safe spaces and insufficient validation of different experiences.
2. Weak accountability mechanism for staff, volunteers and communities to raise grievances.
3. Internalized and interpersonal racism, discrimination and xenophobia.
4. Not living up to our mandate and Fundamental Principles.
5. Institutional barriers (at branch/National Society/delegation/cluster/field office level).
6. Structural and Movement-wide barriers (at the institutional and staff level).
7. Leadership that is not reflective of the communities we serve.
8. Lack of sustained, informed action based on evidence.

There needs to be action at all levels – including but not limited to policies – to create a safe space for brave conversations on sensitive issues. This includes addressing individual awareness through education and understanding people’s lived experiences. Ensuring a deeper understanding of how to apply, interpret and live up to the Fundamental Principles was also put forward as a starting premise for the conversations that are needed, and mention was made of their use in the past to limit such conversations. It was observed that our mandate and Principles do not make us immune to racism, xenophobia and discrimination, nor do they prevent us from furthering a paternalistic and neo-colonial approach to aid.

There was also a call to look at our internal power structures from branch representation to funding relationships and engagement with members. Structural challenges, such as the treatment of national staff and compensation of national and international staff, were mentioned.

Lastly, special mention was made of the role of leadership in modelling the principles of diversity and representation and going beyond rhetoric.

Conclusions and recommendations

Participants suggested a more deliberate and intentional approach as a Movement. At the systemic and organizational level, the key recommendations are as follows:

- Develop training and guidance
- Formulate a core group to continue discussions and development of this topic
- Define our approach to racism, xenophobia and discrimination, grounded in visibility, accountability and learning
- Build protected and celebrated spaces for dialogue, learning and sharing resources
- Design a system free from racism, discrimination and xenophobia that is human-centred and action-driven

- Examine power within our institutions and Movement
- Live by our Fundamental Principles and core policies
- Have committed, diverse and accountable leadership
- Demonstrate our commitment and action to communities to address racism, discrimination and xenophobia

Resources to share

British Red Cross Report: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/international/humanitarian-policy>

Movement Podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/icrc-global/podcast-it-matters-who-is-around-the-table>

Blog Post: <https://rcrcconference.org/blog/what-will-it-take-to-build-an-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-free-from-racism-xenophobia-and-discrimination/>