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Building the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to address harmful information in humanitarian settings

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The spread of harmful information has become a critical challenge for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement). Harmful information, encompassing misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, hate speech, and content that violates international humanitarian or human rights law, undermines public understanding of humanitarian principles, erodes trust in the Movement, jeopardizes the Movement's acceptance and ability to carry out its principled humanitarian work, and puts its staff and volunteers and vulnerable populations at increased risk.

In armed conflicts, disasters, or other crises or emergencies, harmful information exacerbates suffering by disrupting access to life-saving assistance, fostering discrimination and violence, and undermining trust in humanitarian organizations. The rapid expansion of digital connectivity, social media and generative artificial intelligence has amplified the scale and reach of harmful information and the speed of its spread, heightening its potential to disrupt the Movement's operations, lower its operational capacity and damage its reputation. Harmful narratives have led to harassment of staff and volunteers, doxing, funding challenges, and diminished humanitarian acceptance by States and other stakeholders.

This resolution focuses on enhancing the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to detect, assess and respond to harmful information in humanitarian settings. It aims to build the Movement's collective capacity to respond effectively and in alignment with its Fundamental Principles.

The Movement has already taken steps to address this challenge. It has laid the groundwork for a more cohesive approach and set out practical pathways for action through iterative statutory resolutions, resources developed by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) and reports such as *Addressing Harmful Information in Conflict Settings* by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the *World Disasters Report 2026* by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which draws on case studies from more than 30 Movement partners. However, existing efforts remain fragmented, and there is an urgent need for a Movement-wide effort to ensure responses are consistent, coordinated and contextually appropriate.

In 2026, the Movement launched the Movement Hub on Harmful Information (MHHI), hosted by the Swiss Red Cross. This hub, supported by National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC, aims to enhance the Movement's capacity to address harmful information through four workstreams: crisis management, capacity development, thematic alignment and external engagement.

This resolution builds on the Movement's unique role as a trusted provider of neutral and impartial humanitarian information. It calls for co-owned, localized and culturally sensitive responses, supported by global coordination and informed by evidence-based approaches.

By addressing harmful information as a collective priority, the Movement seeks to preserve trust in its Fundamental Principles and ensure the continuity of its life-saving humanitarian

work. This resolution aligns with previous commitments, including those on principled humanitarian action, community engagement and safeguarding humanitarian data, and proposes prioritizing harmful information as a key agenda item for the 35th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference).

1) INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the spread of harmful information has emerged as a critical challenge, undermining trust in and acceptance of Movement. Harmful information is an umbrella term referring to any instance in which the spread of information, online or offline, has the potential to cause harm. It includes misinformation,[1] disinformation,[2] malinformation[3] and hate speech.[4] It also encompasses the spread of information that violates international humanitarian law (IHL) or international human rights law. Harmful information undermines people's understanding of humanitarian principles and States', donors' and communities' respect for them. This may, in turn, erode trust in and acceptance of principled humanitarian action. Criticism of the Movement's positions or activities, including genuine feedback from communities that opposes the role of the Movement, should not be classed as harmful information. Criticism could be instrumentalized by malicious actors or for reasons of political interest, but the Movement should preserve the space for genuine community feedback.

People depend on access to reliable and timely information, whether in armed conflict, other situations of violence, disasters, or other crises or emergencies. In many settings, the impact of harmful information is felt first by individuals who are already suffering the effects of these crises or emergencies. The spread of harmful information can result in them having more difficulty gaining access to assistance, being more exposed to discrimination or violence, or trusting less in the Movement and others providing humanitarian services. Harmful information has the potential to disrupt humanitarian operations and jeopardize the safety and well-being of Movement staff and volunteers and people's access to its services. The Movement, through its components operating globally, is therefore increasingly confronted with the spread of harmful information in armed conflict or other situations of violence, or disaster and other crisis and emergency settings, online and offline.

That said, the spread of harmful information during crises is not new. History has shown how false or inflammatory narratives have been used to manipulate public opinion, escalate tensions, foster exclusion or discrimination and even incite violence. In armed conflicts, harmful information has fuelled divisions and contributed to suffering and decreased access to services. In disasters, crises and emergencies more broadly, harmful information has hindered the delivery of life-saving aid, delayed emergency responses and undermined trust in humanitarian actors.

The rapid expansion of digital connectivity; the widespread use of mobile phones, social media and messaging apps; and the rise of generative artificial intelligence have amplified the scale and impact of harmful information and the speed of its spread.[5] Today harmful information can reach millions in seconds, sowing confusion, fear and mistrust. When the information environment is complex, as in crises and emergencies, the spread of harmful information diminishes people's situational awareness and impacts those in situations of vulnerability. It also exposes humanitarian organizations, including the Movement, to significant reputational risks by undermining the perception of their neutrality and hindering their ability to carry out

[1] False information spread by individuals who believe the information to be true
[2] False information disseminated intentionally for specific gain, including economic gain
[3] True information spread with malicious intent to cause various effects, including harm
[4] There is no international legal definition of hate speech. The most internationally used definition is the OHCHR's working definition: "All forms of expression (text, images, audio, video) that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred or violence based on intolerance, usually against identity traits – gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.)." See OHCHR, Hate speech and incitement to hatred or violence.
[5] Resolution 2 of the 34th International Conference, preambular paragraph 19: "*recognizing* that the specificities of the ICT environment raise questions on how principles and rules of IHL apply to ICT activities in situations of armed conflict and that States have expressed a diversity of views on such questions, emphasizing the need for continued discussions."

their work effectively. There have been numerous instances worldwide where such narratives have resulted in intimidation and harassment of Movement staff and volunteers, doxing of staff members, withholding of funding, reduced acceptance by States and other stakeholders of the Fundamental Principles, and the spread of information encouraging potentially harmful acts against humanitarian operations.

This resolution specifically addresses the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to detect, assess and respond to the spread of harmful information in humanitarian settings. It does not seek to address all dimensions of harmful information globally, nor does it seek to establish legal obligations or adjudicate on violations of international law. We recall that in situations of armed conflict, IHL regulates conduct involving the dissemination and spread of information, and all Movement components are called upon, in accordance with their respective mandates, to strengthen understanding of the application of relevant IHL rules to the spread of harmful information and to promote respect for those rules and, where appropriate, integrate relevant IHL considerations into their analysis and response to harmful information in armed conflict.

The scope of this resolution is however focused on building the Movement's collective capacity to coordinate and harmonize its response, and on equipping its components, particularly National Societies, with the tools, frameworks and shared approaches needed to act effectively and in line with the Fundamental Principles.

2) BACKGROUND

In an era where access to timely, accurate and reliable information can mean the difference between life and death, the Movement must act decisively. Owing to its exposure to and experience of the impact of harmful information, the Movement is uniquely positioned to take a collective, coordinated approach to addressing harmful information. A Movement-wide approach is therefore essential to building strategic and operational preparedness to address this growing threat, protect and uphold principled humanitarian action and ensure that the Movement continues to serve as a trusted pillar in an increasingly complex information landscape.

Specifically, there have been iterative statutory resolutions and discussions, and reports have been shared by the ICRC and the IFRC, such as the ICRC's framework *Addressing Harmful Information in Conflict Settings* and the IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2026*. Several National Societies have also contributed valuable resources, including the early action plans by the Costa Rica Red Cross, the volunteer guide from the Slovak Red Cross, lessons learned from the Spanish Red Cross, front-line messaging templates from the Canadian Red Cross and social care guidelines from the American Red Cross. Approaches to coping with the impact of harmful information have so far remained fragmented, with limited use of collective intelligence and a lack of systematic sharing of tools, resources and practices across the Movement. Momentum has therefore been building toward a more coherent and cohesive Movement-wide approach, which is reflected in this Council of Delegates resolution.

On the margins of the statutory meetings of October 2024, 20 secretaries-general, the IFRC, and the ICRC confirmed the need for urgent, collective action, recognizing the Movement's unique role as a trusted provider of neutral and impartial humanitarian information.

Against this backdrop, the Movement Hub on Harmful Information (MHHI) was launched in 2026. Through collaboration across National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC, this collective effort seeks to equip Movement partners to provide timely, life-saving information or services while safeguarding trust in their communication and minimizing humanitarian consequences. By enhancing the Movement's capacity to detect, assess and respond to harmful information through coordinated and contextually appropriate approaches, the MHHI aims to tap into the Movement's potential to lead the response to this sector-wide challenge.

The IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2026* sets out evidence-based pathways for action, based on case studies from over 30 Movement partners, including National Societies, along with hundreds of community insights. National-Society-led pilots will test and adapt these approaches, which emphasize co-owned, localized and culturally appropriate responses supported by global coordination.

Previous resolutions relevant to this topic include:

- Resolution 5 of the 2024 Council of Delegates: "Call for respect and support for principled humanitarian action"
- Resolution 2 of the 34th International Conference: "Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict"
- Resolution 1 of the 2019 Council of Delegates: "Movement-wide commitments for community engagement and accountability"
- Resolution 12 of the 2022 Council of Delegates: "Safeguarding humanitarian data".

Statutory documents relevant to this topic include:

- 32nd International Conference background report, *The Fundamental Principles in Action: A Unique Ethical, Operational and Institutional Framework*
- Council of Delegates 2017 report on the workshop, "Upholding independence, neutrality and impartiality in the face of State responses to contemporary global challenges".

Other research documents include:

- B. Ulbricht and J. Rizk, "How harmful information on social media impacts people affected by armed conflict: A typology of harms", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 106, No. 926, August 2024, pp. 823–862.
- Typology of harm, Table 1.1 in IFRC, *World Disasters Report 2026*, Geneva, 2026.

3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

Several in-depth assessments and interviews were conducted in 2024 and 2025 for the MHHI and the *World Disasters Report*. They consistently demonstrated that, while Movement components face similar challenges across contexts and situations, the lack of a centralized and coordinated approach was a critical gap.

This gap spans crisis management, capacity development, available response actions, early warning and detection mechanisms, linkages with other Movement initiatives, including the Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC), the Safer Access Framework, MHPSS mechanisms, community engagement and accountability (CEA) approaches and accountability to affected people (AAP) approaches, as well as research and external engagement with stakeholders outside the Movement.

A) WORLD DISASTERS REPORT 2026

The IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2026* examines how the spread of harmful information is reshaping the environment in which principled humanitarian action takes place. The report grounds its analysis in the lived experience of those most affected, drawing on case studies from more than 30 Movement partners, including National Societies across all regions, alongside hundreds of community insights gathered from people who are themselves navigating crises and emergencies.

Building on this evidence base, the report sets out practical, implementable pathways for action that place communities and volunteers at the centre, as trust brokers and front-line responders, and that emphasize co-owned, localized and culturally appropriate approaches supported by Movement-wide coordination. It also transcends the humanitarian sector, engaging States, technology companies, media actors, researchers and other external stakeholders whose decisions shape the information environment in which crises unfold.

Together, the report's findings reinforce the call of this resolution: to equip the Movement to detect, assess and respond to harmful information in a coherent, principled and coordinated manner.

B) MOVEMENT HUB ON HARMFUL INFORMATION

In 2024, the ICRC launched a consultation process to develop a shared understanding of the challenges posed by harmful information and to shape a collective plan of action. Interviews with Movement partners[6] highlighted that harmful information affects the vast majority of them. Survey responses further pointed to an increasingly hostile information environment across diverse contexts – armed conflict, disaster, and other crises and emergencies, targeting National Societies, the communities they serve, or both. Further, the ICRC organized a workshop on the sidelines of the 34th International Conference that reinforced the need for a collective approach to addressing the impact of harmful information.

Subsequently, in early 2025, the Movement Initiative on Harmful Information was started by the ICRC and the IFRC and is now hosted by the Swiss Red Cross as the Movement Hub on Harmful Information (MHHI).

The overarching objective of the MHHI is to support the Movement in addressing the impact of harmful information on humanitarian action and to leverage its unique strengths, values and global network to safeguard the space for principled humanitarian action. The MHHI is structured around four interconnected workstreams:

1) crisis management
2) capacity development
3) thematic alignment
4) external engagement.

This resolution outlines a set of measures to strengthen the Movement's preparedness and its capacity to address harmful information. Within agreed workstreams, with the active engagement of Movement components and in line with existing frameworks, approaches and mechanisms, the MHHI will support activities such as developing training programmes and contingency planning exercises; developing early warning responses and processes; fostering collaboration with academic and research institutions; and facilitating information-sharing across the Movement.

For more information, please visit www.mhhi.org.

4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Multi-source funding has been secured for the MHHI to advance its workstreams and equip the Movement with tools and coordination mechanisms to address harmful information. Active participation from National Societies is crucial for a coherent response. Further activities will depend on the availability of resources.

[6] The ICRC, the IFRC and the National Societies of Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, Iceland, Kenya, Malawi, Norway, Qatar, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and Zimbabwe.

Effective implementation of the resolution requires ongoing investment in local and organizational expertise and collaboration with external stakeholders. Expertise, frameworks and research from all Movement components, including the ICRC and the IFRC, are vital for success.

5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The aim is to ensure this resolution is implemented through existing workstreams and processes of the Movement and through the workstreams of the MHHI. To that end, Movement components should integrate this resolution into their strategic and annual plans, with the aim of reporting on the progress made on this resolution as part of their standard annual reporting processes. The hub will report on its own workstream activities in parallel and leading up to 35th International Conference.

6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The resolution aims to address harmful information in humanitarian settings by adopting a multidisciplinary, Movement-wide approach. It emphasizes the need for co-ownership by National Societies, leveraging existing frameworks, and fostering community-rooted, culturally sensitive responses. The resolution calls for enhancing risk awareness, capacity-building and resilience among staff and volunteers and embedding trust-building and community engagement into all efforts. It also seeks to strengthen internal collaboration and foster partnerships with external actors, such as academic institutions and technology companies, to deepen understanding and mitigate risks. The resolution also calls on the Movement to explore the development of a shared framework that sets out common principles, commitments and methods for Movement responses addressing harmful information. The establishment of the MHHI is central to coordinating these efforts, ensuring operational continuity and preserving the space for principled humanitarian action.

This resolution will seek to preserve a neutral humanitarian space by addressing the impact of harmful information, which has the potential to undermine trust, social cohesion and humanitarian access. By enhancing the capacity of staff and volunteers as trusted intermediaries and equipping them with tools, training and support, this resolution seeks to strengthen their strategic and operational capabilities to address the harmful information impacting the Movement and communities affected by armed conflict, disaster, or other crises or emergencies.

It seeks to prioritize community engagement, ensuring that responses are localized, culturally appropriate and focused on building trust. Additionally, by fostering collaboration within the Movement and with external stakeholders, this resolution seeks to ensure that timely, reliable and life-saving information reaches affected populations, ultimately reducing harm and enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian action.