

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

ETHICS AND TOOLS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



ICRC



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HUMANITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

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IMPARTIALITY

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

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NEUTRALITY

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

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The Principle of

INDEPENDENCE

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

The Principle of

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

The Principle of

UNITY

There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

The Principle of

UNIVERSALITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

WHY DO WE NEED FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES?

Imagine you are a Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteer. Your country is going through a brutal civil war and your job is to treat anyone who is sick or wounded. But in order to get your patients to hospital, you have to navigate your ambulance through a series of government and opposition-run checkpoints. At the first checkpoint, a soldier demands to know who is in the ambulance. When he finds out your patient is a man from an opposition-controlled area, he refuses to let you through and accuses you of “helping the enemy.” What do you say? How do you convince him that your job is to help everyone affected by the war regardless of which side they’re on?

Now imagine that there’s been a catastrophic flood and you’re in charge of organizing teams to deliver food to survivors. Politicians and the media are pressuring your organization to get results, and fast. They are also making claims about who should receive aid first. How do you decide who to help first? What do you base your decision on? These difficult situations are commonplace for Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers around the world. Fortunately, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has developed solid tools to help.





The Fundamental Principles are an important tool for gaining access to people affected by conflict and disaster and ensuring everyone knows that our mission is solely humanitarian. (Pictured) An ICRC convoy going through a checkpoint to evacuate casualties from Dammaj, Yemen.

The seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – are the most important of these tools. They serve both as an inspiration – an ideal to strive for – and as practical steps to take to achieve that ideal in times of peace, armed conflict or natural disaster. They call on us to help those most in need first, regardless of their political affiliation, race or religion, and they make this possible by providing guidance on gaining the trust of people in all these circumstances.

When the principles are understood and followed, Movement volunteers and staff generally find that people let them carry out their work to help those in need, even during conflict. However, at times, they are held up at checkpoints, detained or even killed.

This is why it is imperative that people around the world understand the Fundamental Principles. People need to know that the humanitarian aid we provide does not have strings attached. For instance, an armed group must be able to trust that ICRC delegates want to enter territory under their control exclusively to help those in need and will not take sides. Likewise, people around the world who donate their time or money to a National Society need to know that their support is going to help only the most vulnerable.

The Fundamental Principles are also an expression of the values and ideals around which the Movement is united. Above all, the Principles are a call to action for Movement volunteers and staff, compelling us – as the Principle of humanity describes – to “prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found.”

A woman carrying food distributed by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society after monsoon floods.



National Societies must always abide by the Fundamental Principles. (Pictured) Mexican Red Cross volunteers helping a woman after a hurricane in 2013.

Why fundamental?

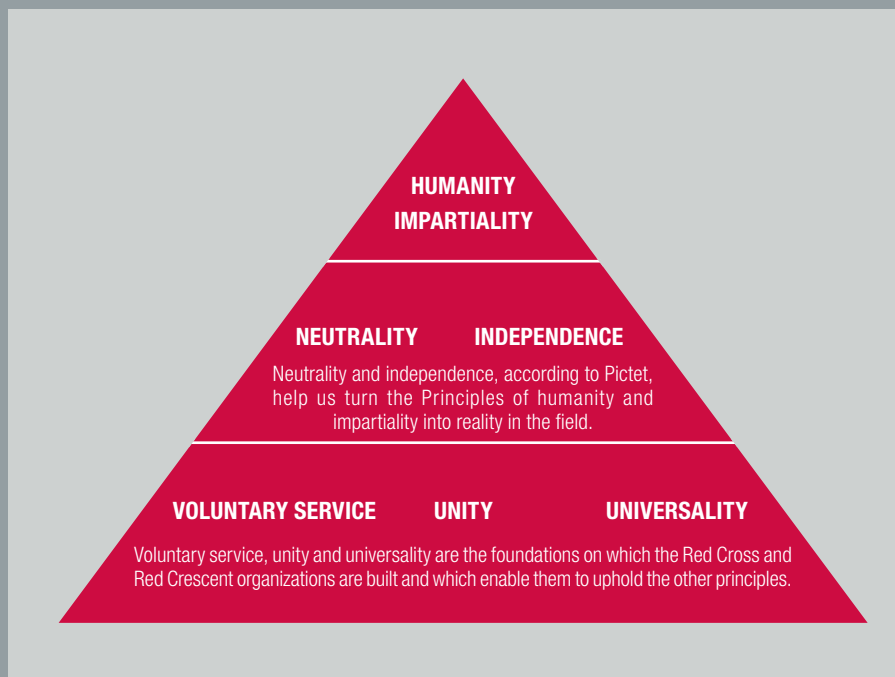
The Fundamental Principles explain why the Movement exists. Although the Principles express our vision, they are not dogma nor simply a set of lofty beliefs; in many ways they reflect the highest ideals of humankind – a reflection of our most humane aspirations. But they are also common-sense, down-to-earth standards that enable us to bring essential aid to people in their time of greatest need. They have proven their effectiveness again and again in crises around the world. They shape our day-to-day operational decisions in the field, as well as our long-term strategy. They influence the way we structure our organizations, work with others and communicate what we do. Taken together, they foster acceptance for our urgently needed humanitarian activities among those who might otherwise be reluctant or hostile.

The Fundamental Principles are the result of over a century of humanitarian experience, and are recognized in international humanitarian law. States that have signed the Geneva Conventions of 1949, for example, have officially agreed that National Societies “shall be able to pursue their activities in accordance with Red Cross principles.” The Additional Protocols to these Conventions, signed in 1977, further commit States to allow all the Movement components – National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation – to carry out their activities in accordance with these Principles, a commitment reiterated in the statutes of the Movement in 1986.

Nor are they relevant solely to the Movement. Because they have been effective over time, many organizations have since adopted some of them. In December 1991, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 46/182 which calls for all UN humanitarian assistance to be “provided in accordance with the

Principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.” Humanity, impartiality and independence are also embedded in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief, which has been adopted by over 500 NGOs. Although some organizations interpret and apply these principles differently, the Fundamental Principles have served as an inspiration not just for the Movement, but for the entire humanitarian sector.

PICTET'S PYRAMID



One of the key figures who helped craft the Fundamental Principles was Jean Pictet, whose 1979 commentaries on them are still used. Pictet suggested that the Fundamental Principles can be arranged in a pyramid. Humanity is at the top, as the over-arching and essential Principle, along with impartiality, which also influences all the other Principles.

THE BIRTH OF THE PRINCIPLES

In the winter of 1864, two representatives of the newly created International Committee for Relief to the Wounded (later the ICRC), Charles Van de Velde and Louis Appia, set out to discover how medical care was organized on both sides of the conflict between Danish and Austro-Prussian forces. The Committee had been established only one year earlier by five Swiss men, most notably the businessman Henry Dunant, who was deeply shocked by what he had seen during the Battle of Solferino in northern Italy in 1859 (see timeline).

The battlefield was a testing ground for a new idea – neutral medical care for all sides, provided by volunteers working alongside military forces. Freezing temperatures were not the only hardship they endured. The Danish authorities, press and military officials were openly sceptical of this “neutral” mission in a conflict in which they were up against a far

A TIMELINE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES



24 June 1859: The armies of France and Piedmont-Sardinia clash with Austrian forces near the village of Solferino, in northern Italy. Swiss businessman Henry Dunant witnesses the bloody aftermath and helps organize aid for wounded soldiers on all sides. He returns to Geneva deeply committed to improving the lot of people wounded in battle.

1862: Dunant publishes his book, *A Memory of Solferino*, and begins an intensive lobbying campaign to gain support for his idea of an international volunteer corps to assist wounded soldiers in war.



After the Battle of Solferino Henry Dunant and women from the town of Castiglione delle Stiviere came together to care for the wounded.

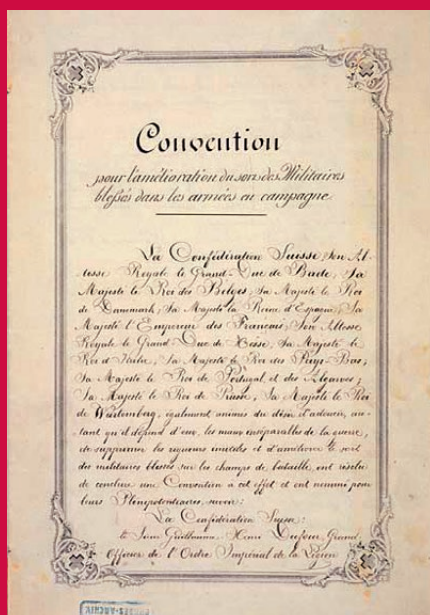


The red cross emblem was first used in 1864 in the war between Denmark and Austro-Prussian forces: two representatives from what is now the ICRC wore the cross on an armband while organizing medical care for wounded soldiers.

1863 1864 1865 1866 1867 1868 1869 1870

17 February 1863: Creation of the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, precursor to the ICRC and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The first National Red Cross Society is established in Württemberg, now part of Germany.

August 1864: The newly created Committee puts forward the first Geneva Convention, which is signed by 16 States. Officially named the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, the document's 10 articles lay the foundation for neutral and impartial humanitarian action and call on warring parties to respect medical personnel. "Wounded or sick combatants, to whatever nation they may belong, shall be collected and cared for," the Convention states.





International Federation

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement began in western Europe, but it quickly spread globally. In 1876, for example, the Ottoman Empire adopted the Red Crescent and today, Red Crescent National Societies help people in need around the world. (Pictured) A staff member of the Turkish Red Crescent brings food to people displaced by conflict in Syria.

superior fighting force. The Committee, the Danish press said, should be condemning the Austro-Prussian aggression, not sending offers of help to both sides.

Ultimately, the delegates were allowed to organize treatment for soldiers on both sides of the battle lines. Although the scale of the relief operation was dwarfed by the number of casualties, it nevertheless proved that aid could be delivered without discrimination even in war. This was unprecedented. But the delegates' efforts were limited by the warring

1875

1875: Movement founder Gustave Moynier speaks of four basic working principles which the Movement's Societies must observe: foresight, solidarity, centralization and mutuality (see story for full text).

1921: In the wake of the First World War, a first set of Fundamental Principles – impartiality, political, religious and economic independence, the universality of the Movement and the equality of its members – are incorporated into the statutes of the ICRC.

1939-1945: Second World War

This truly global conflict requires humanitarian assistance at an unprecedented scale.

The war causes the greatest loss of civilian life ever and poses the greatest threat to the humanitarian principles. There is genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany, abuse of prisoners in prisoner-of-war camps in Europe and the Pacific, mass aerial bombardment and the first use of nuclear weapons.

parties' lack of understanding. "Surely this illustrates," Van de Velde would later write in support of new rules, "why the resolution on the neutrality of volunteer aides must be put into effect."

Laying the foundations

Later in 1864, the Committee convened representatives from 16 countries who signed the first ever Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, which called on all signatory States to respect the neutrality of medical workers seeking to aid wounded soldiers.

This document gave birth to a succession of conventions that would culminate in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005. It also laid the foundation for a set of principles that would guide the Movement – which now has National Societies in more than 189 countries – for over 150 years.

In the early years of the Movement's existence, consensus on these principles was maintained by the sense of common endeavour. There were few efforts to build on these principles or set out specific humanitarian values in a written agreement.



A horizontal timeline on a red background showing the years 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950. Specific years are highlighted: 1921, 1939, 1945, and 1949.



A black and white photograph showing a group of people, including women and children, gathered around a wooden aid station or cart in a city with significant destruction and rubble in the background. A vertical text 'ICRC archives' is on the left side of the image.

1921

1939

1945

1949

1946: In the wake of the Second World War, the League of Red Cross Societies (now the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) affirms that the 1921 principles apply to National Societies worldwide.

1949: The experience of the Second World War brings about the Geneva Conventions of 1949. While earlier conventions only protected wounded soldiers and prisoners of war, these conventions stipulate for the first time that specific protections be provided for civilians in international conflicts.

However, in 1875, Movement founder Gustave Moynier spoke of four basic working principles which the Movement's National Societies must observe: "foresight, which means that preparations should be made in advance, in peacetime, to provide assistance should war break out; solidarity, whereby the Societies undertake to establish mutual ties and to help each other; centralization, which implies that there is only one Society in each country, but whose activities extend throughout the entire national territory; and mutuality, in the sense that care is given to all wounded and sick people irrespective of their nationality."

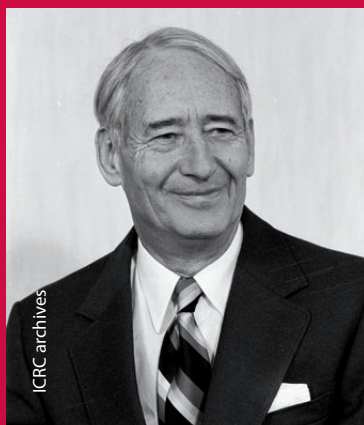
Not just abstract ideas

This early iteration of the Principles shows that they were intended not as abstract ideals or lofty concepts but rather as practical steps to gain the respect and trust of people during wars – when they are naturally at their most suspicious and communities can be torn apart. Although the Movement grew and changed rapidly in the ensuing decades, it did not codify or ratify the principles until 1921, when a first set of principles (see timeline) were formally put in writing and incorporated into the revised ICRC Statutes.

In the wake of the Second World War, the League of Red Cross Societies (now the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) affirmed that the 1921 principles applied to National Societies worldwide. But it wasn't until the 1950s that the Movement's principles were systematically analysed with the aim of crafting a definitive and universally adopted text. It began in 1955 after Jean Pictet, a former ICRC vice-president and a lawyer who had helped craft the Geneva Conventions, wrote a book on the principles. The ICRC

1950 1951 1952 1953 1954 **1955** 1956 1957

1955: Jean Pictet, a key author and architect of the ICRC's work on the 1949 Geneva Conventions, considers what values and principles define the Movement. Following the publication of his book *Red Cross Principles* in 1955, the ICRC and the International Federation set up a joint commission to draw up a definitive set of operating principles.





C. Hiest/International Federation/Belgian Red Cross

Today, Movement components carry out a wide range of activities, from helping communities to providing emergency aid. (Pictured) Hellenic Red Cross volunteers helping migrants get safely to shore, where they are given first aid, blankets, food and so on.

and the International Federation then set up a joint commission to put forward a set of guiding principles that would bind and unite the Movement. The seven Fundamental Principles as we know them today were unanimously adopted at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna, Austria in 1965.

Since then, the Fundamental Principles have been continually tested in a wide range of conflicts and disasters in every corner of the world. More than 50 years after they were adopted, they remain as effective as ever for ensuring that vulnerable people can receive the assistance and protection they need.





THE REALITIES OF WAR AND CRISIS

To understand why these Principles have been so critical to relief operations in times of war and major disasters, it is useful to understand the environment in which humanitarian action is carried out. In conflicts, emotions run extremely high: feelings of intense anger or hatred towards enemies can be widespread. In many cases, combatants see everyone as either “with us” or “against us.” Anyone offering to help both sides is viewed with suspicion or hostility.

In the wake of natural disasters or health emergencies, people in distress do not necessarily have full confidence in the motivations of humanitarian workers, many of whom are strangers in the communities they are trying to help. During the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014-2015, for example, National Society volunteers had to work hard to gain and maintain the trust of communities affected by the outbreak. Many people did not believe what

A Sierra Leone Red Cross volunteer talking about the dangers of Ebola after an outbreak. Building trust is vital in carrying out the sensitive tasks necessary for curbing the spread of the disease.

outside health workers were telling them about the disease. Fortunately, in countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, Red Cross volunteers had developed a reputation in previous crises for their neutral, independent humanitarian work. As a result, they were trusted to perform difficult and sensitive tasks, such as safe and dignified burials of Ebola victims.

In such cases, living by a clear, visible set of principles is essential to build trust, foster acceptance and ensure access to those who need it.

The rules of war

International humanitarian law does not guarantee humanitarian agencies unfettered access to war zones; rather, access entails negotiation between parties to the conflict and humanitarian agencies. Warring parties have the primary responsibility of ensuring that the basic needs of those under their control are met. But if they are unwilling or unable to do so, the law requires them to authorize and facilitate relief efforts that are humanitarian and impartial in character.

Conflict can have long-lasting effects on people and on the institutions that protect and care for them. (Pictured) A young boy from Gaza City standing amid the ruins of government buildings.





In today's conflicts, humanitarian workers often find themselves working among a wide range of weapon bearers, from large armies to small armed groups. Therefore, the ICRC continually explains to weapon bearers its impartial, neutral and independent approach to helping people in need.

NEW CHALLENGES

Putting humanitarian values into practice is not always easy. Ever since their inception, the Fundamental Principles have been repeatedly challenged. They have been put to the test in numerous conflicts, including two World Wars, a Cold War stand-off and a series of proxy wars between superpowers, as well as in a growing number of natural and man-made disasters.

Since the late twentieth century, conflicts have increasingly broken out within countries rather than across borders. These tend to be struggles between national armed forces and opposition groups, or between various rival groups.

There has also been a rise in identity-driven or intercommunal conflicts, which often result in widespread violence and large numbers of displaced people. The groups involved in the violence tend to be less structured than traditional military services or organized armed groups.

These trends have made the task of building trust and explaining and upholding our Principles all the more challenging. During the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the ICRC has interacted with as many as 40 different armed groups. In such situations, forging fruitful relationships takes time. But it is done bit by bit every day, by matching words with deeds.

Serious humanitarian consequences

The twenty-first century has been particularly difficult and challenging for humanitarian agencies. In the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, the global struggle between States and non-State armed actors (the “war on terror”) dramatically changed the way war is waged and humanitarian action can be carried out – often with grave consequences for civilians.

Against this backdrop, a new form of polarization or radicalization of ideologies has taken shape. As States have taken a hard line against what they consider to be terrorist groups, they have sometimes used measures that step beyond the bounds of accepted practice under international humanitarian law and human rights law. Meanwhile, radical non-State entities that oppose those States have resorted to non-conventional methods of warfare, including deliberate attacks against civilians and so-called soft targets, such as humanitarian organizations.

In this increasingly polarized environment, where people are seen as either friend or foe, the expectation that everyone will take sides grows. This makes it all the more difficult for organizations working on the basis of the Principles of independence and neutrality.

Another major challenge to humanitarian action has been the tendency among States since the 1980s to justify military operations on humanitarian grounds while also using humanitarian efforts as part and parcel of military and political strategy (i.e. “to win hearts and minds”).

Unfortunately, aid has become an integral part of counter-insurgency strategies, with some governments seeking to integrate humanitarian action into military campaigns, nation-building and efforts to stabilize fragile States. At the same time, some armed groups will use relief as a means to gain support among the local population.

This is not to say that warring parties should not seek to protect or help people living in areas under their control. On the contrary, military forces have legal obligations to do so during combat, including the evacuation of wounded civilians. But the problem lies in using humanitarian action more broadly to win hearts and minds, which can lead those engaged in the fighting and people in adversely affected communities to associate all humanitarians with a political or military agenda. When humanitarian action becomes part of a strategy to defeat an enemy, the risks for aid agencies in the field rise significantly.

NEUTRALITY IN A POLARIZED WORLD

Although our experience tells us that neutrality is an essential starting point, the idea has been challenged in recent years. Following the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, many humanitarian organizations working in Afghanistan rejected the Principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence in favour of more overt assistance for international efforts to rebuild democratic institutions.

In many cases, humanitarian organizations embraced their role as actors in a fight between “good” and “bad” sides, according to Fiona Terry in her 2011 article for the International Review of the Red Cross.

A new philosophy was developing among many humanitarian organizations in which aid to people in areas controlled by terrorist groups, and any dialogue with those groups, was seen as helping the enemy. “A neutral approach was deemed ‘impossible’, ‘old fashioned’ and even morally contestable in these new conflicts, and the integrated political – military – ‘humanitarian’ approach to state-building was embraced as the way of the future,” wrote Terry.

To further blur the lines, military personnel sometimes used humanitarian activities as a cover for military operations, wearing civilian clothing and driving white cars to disguise themselves as aid workers. In other cases, pamphlets were dropped over southern Afghanistan telling residents they should inform on the armed groups if they wished to continue receiving “humanitarian” aid.

This led in large parts of Afghanistan to an outright rejection of outside humanitarian aid. According to Terry, the result was that “just when humanitarian needs [were] greatest, aid organizations [had] the least capacity to respond.”

Through dialogue and repeatedly demonstrating its neutrality, the ICRC was able to slowly rebuild trust and expand into areas of the country that had been cut off from aid workers. Similarly, the Afghan Red Crescent has continued to carry out a wide range of health-care activities – from polio-vaccination campaigns to mobile health clinics – in most areas of the country thanks to its reputation for neutrality and impartiality among a wide range of armed groups.

A growing humanitarian sector

The number of organizations providing humanitarian assistance has grown massively in recent years. This expansion has many positive consequences. In some places, it means greater diversity and more people in need being helped.

But the proliferation of agencies with widely different interpretations of humanitarian principles and their uneven application has led to confusion about what humanitarianism is. In some places, this trend has led to an outright rejection of humanitarian aid, which in turn exacerbates people's suffering.

Some organizations, for example, operate not on the basis of impartiality but solidarity with one particular political, religious or ethnic group. While this is not entirely new, it has become increasingly common as more relief agencies are created with very specific targets.

Awareness of the principles underpinning humanitarian work has expanded as the United Nations and a large number of organizations have adopted humanitarian principles inspired by the Fundamental Principles. But it has also added to the confusion over what those principles mean and how they are to be applied.

In some places, the United Nations is or is perceived to be a party to certain conflicts because UN peace-keeping troops are deployed, a Security Council resolution has authorized the use of force by one or more member States or because the UN is working directly in support of governments to which there is armed opposition. In such situations, the neutrality and independence of UN humanitarian agencies is frequently called into question, and how the UN are seen in a conflict can have knock-on effects for other humanitarian organizations.



The United Nations is a major provider of humanitarian assistance, but it sometimes pursues particular political goals in situations of conflict. For this reason, the Movement must, even while working with the UN, keep a certain distance from its operations. (Pictured) Training exercise for UN peacekeeping forces.

J. Fontana/ICRC



After an earthquake struck Nepal in 2015, National Society volunteers and staff were ready to deliver emergency relief quickly in remote areas, emphasising the importance of the Principles of voluntary service and unity. Meanwhile, a sense of global solidarity embodied in the Principle of universality inspired the worldwide Movement to swing into action.

Putting principles into action

These trends make it ever more critical that the Movement not only asserts but demonstrates what neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action looks like and what it can achieve.

Even in extremely polarized circumstances, the ICRC and National Societies have been some of the few – and in some cases the only – humanitarian organizations able to reach people in dire straits on both sides of the front line.

Even in countries that are not at war, the Principles help National Societies provide aid and support to the most vulnerable, often in trying circumstances. Where there is a high degree of organized violence – involving armed gangs in cities, for example – relief and medical workers who adhere to the Fundamental Principles can earn the trust of all those involved in or affected by the violence. The Mexican Red Cross is a case in point. It is able to offer a wide range of services in areas affected by high rates of violence in part because of its reputation for impartiality and independence. This hasn't happened by chance: according to research carried out for the Safer Access Framework (see box below), the Mexican Red Cross went to great effort to show how these Principles apply in its ambulance and emergency-response services.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Public communication on the Principles often features in the Movement's activities. A typical food distribution operation at a camp for displaced people, for example, might start with a brief explanation of the Principles so that people know these deliveries are intended for those worst off and will be given out according to who is in greatest need.

In both war and peacetime, the ICRC and National Societies run sessions with armed groups and armed forces on the importance of international humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles.

The Movement is also engaged in near constant training, discussion and analysis on the subject of the Fundamental Principles and how they are applied in the field. Movement workers must follow strict codes of conduct based on them.

In addition, the ICRC, with the support of many National Societies, has developed the Safer Access Framework, which draws on the Movement's extensive experience and good practice to help National Societies meet the challenges of operating in sensitive and dangerous situations while minimizing risk and gaining the trust of those who control access to people in need.

The International Federation and National Societies have also come up with a number of tools aimed at helping National Societies and individual volunteers in high-stress environments improve their ability to behave ethically, compassionately and in accordance with the Principles.



Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers engage in training for ABC (Agents of Behavioural Change), an initiative of the International Federation and National Societies that helps people develop the skills and qualities – empathy, critical thinking, ability to put aside biases, and non-violent communication – needed to put the Fundamental Principles into action.



HUMANITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.





The Principle of humanity inspires not only concrete action, such as life-saving emergency medical care, but also small gestures of compassion, as shown by this French Red Cross first responder.

HUMANITY

The overarching Principle that motivates the Movement's work is that of humanity, a natural impulse to help our fellow human beings that exists in all cultures.

The Principle is the articulation of common human values: compassion, empathy, mutual aid, a desire to reach out to others to alleviate their suffering and protect them from further harm. These notions form the basis of bodies of law, ethics and customs in nearly all cultures.

The Principle stands in stark contrast to the inhumanity all too often witnessed in the world when the virtues of mercy, compassion and love are overthrown by the vices of anger, hatred, greed, revenge and the thirst for power.

A call to action

The wording of the Principle of humanity – to prevent, to alleviate, to protect, to ensure respect – is a call to action.

Around the world, the Principle inspires volunteers to learn first aid, join emergency brigades, educate people about deadly diseases, give blood or visit elderly people. It compels doctors to give up their time and risk their lives to treat people in difficult and dangerous locations. It moves people to donate their time and money to help strangers far away.

Many of the basic concepts intrinsic to the Principle of humanity are enshrined in international law, mainly as a means to protect people from abuse. Indeed, the rules of war that nearly all countries have agreed to uphold are contained in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

It's easy to be pessimistic about such protections – or even the Principle of humanity itself – in an era when images of violence and cruelty are so pervasive. But there are numerous examples in which international humanitarian law and the Fundamental Principles have enabled brave and compassionate people to help, protect and save the lives of extremely vulnerable people.



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a man is reunited with his nine-year-old niece after the girl was separated from her family by the conflict there.

Being close to those in need

The most significant humanitarian aid boils down to small acts between two human beings. Although interactions between aid workers and those they are helping may be brief and repetitive, they must never lose sight of the other person's dignity; they must be able to listen, empathize and understand. That is why Movement volunteers and staff get close to those they are trying to help. Talking to people, shaking their hands, listening to their stories: this is not only the best way we can help people affected by armed conflict, it is how we honour people's dignity when they are at their lowest.

However, this is not to say that humanitarian organizations should reject new technology and tools that allow them to communicate from a distance. Mobile phone networks, social media and the internet are all offering humanitarians important new ways to respond to the challenges of natural disasters and conflict. For instance, posts on social media from mobile phones have helped to identify where needs were greatest and saved lives. In some places, it has meant that atrocities could be reported and investigated.

But the increasing availability of technology could be a cause for concern. Is there a danger that humanitarian agencies could come to rely on digital communications and automation? Would access to technology lead some to think that humanitarians no longer needed direct access to those they are trying to help? These are questions that should be considered in relation to our Principles as technology develops.



Palestinian Red Crescent volunteers and the ICRC helping an elderly man get to a hospital.



ICRC employees speaking with female detainees at the central prison in Marcala, Honduras.

Protection

Being close to people in need is a necessary condition for another idea inherent in the Principle of humanity: protection. As a result of armed conflict, widespread violence and natural disasters, people can be left extremely vulnerable. They may have been forced from their homes and be living in makeshift camps where the usual community relationships – police, neighbours, family – have broken down. In such situations, the Movement acts to make their living conditions safer.

In peacetime, protection of life and health may involve preventing sickness, disasters and accidents or reducing the effects of chronic poverty or crime. For instance, a National Society first-aider will treat injured or wounded people or help prevent disease by bringing important hygiene information.

Humanitarian organizations cannot and should not try to do the job of the police or army, which are obliged in war to protect civilian populations. In armed conflict, the ICRC has a mandate to seek to prevent violations of international humanitarian law. It does this by raising awareness of States' and armed groups' obligations to preserve an individual's safety, physical integrity and dignity, and providing training on humanitarian law. The ICRC and National Societies campaign for governments to implement new domestic laws that enforce international humanitarian standards and enable aid workers to help and protect vulnerable groups. In addition, the ICRC also plays a special role in ensuring people who have been detained in armed conflict are treated properly under humanitarian law.

Prevention and alleviation of suffering

Protection goes hand-in-hand with prevention and alleviation of suffering. In conflicts or natural disasters, people are often deprived of the items most essential to their well-being and sense of human dignity: shelter, clean water, food, a livelihood. For many, their greatest loss is that of loved ones.

That is why the Movement provides food, water and shelter; helps people regain their economic independence and find new livelihoods; strives to improve health-care provision (including war surgery and medical care for detainees); and helps people to find missing loved ones, or at least what happened to them.

In today's protracted conflicts and cyclical crises, however, it is important not just to meet immediate needs, but to think about what comes next. How will the actions we undertake today lead to a better future for those we help? Are we helping to lay the groundwork for their full recovery so that people and communities can once again be self-reliant, or are we making people dependent on aid and leaving them even more vulnerable to the next crisis?

A young boy planting a tree with help from an Ethiopian Red Cross volunteer, part of a programme to encourage voluntarism and mitigate the effects of climate change.



B. Gezahegn/Ethiopian Red Cross Society



B. H. Mohamed/International Federation

After a drought, the Mauritanian Red Crescent Society and the International Federation didn't just give out emergency food aid. They also helped communities in Mauritania to prepare for food shortages by providing farming tools and drought-resistant seed and helping women to set up cooperatives for selling produce.

Building self-sufficiency and resilience

These are critical questions for humanitarians today. For this reason, the Movement seeks to help people live healthy, normal, productive and independent lives. A central tenet of the Principle of humanity is “to ensure respect for the human being.” This means providing help in a way that does nothing to disempower people and honours their inherent dignity. It means leaving people stronger, safer and better able to withstand future shocks.

For many years, the Movement has developed programmes that help people create or re-establish livelihoods through the use of small grants, microcredit and training programmes. In other cases, it may provide seed and tools to farmers, provide livestock vaccinations or take other steps that allow local people to feed themselves and buy or exchange goods more freely.

Similarly, the Movement works to help communities become more resilient to extreme events. In addition to working at the national and local level to better prepare people for natural or man-made disasters, National Societies and the International Federation are engaged in the discussion on what effect climate change is having on communities that are already vulnerable to storms, droughts and other climate-related crises.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

FACES OF HUMANITY

When the Ebola crisis hit Sierra Leone in 2014, health workers at the Kenema Treatment Centre spent their days hidden behind goggles and surgical masks. Even so they embodied the Fundamental Principle of humanity in the face of a terrible outbreak that claimed over 5,000 lives.

Their protective suits, which covered them from head to toe, allowed people such as 28-year-old community health nurse Brima Momodu Jr to provide care safely and give patients the best chance at survival. Despite the barriers this protective clothing put between him and his patients, he did whatever he could to ease their suffering. It was an extremely risky, difficult, stressful and emotionally draining assignment.

"I fed my patients to give them energy," he says. "I had to give them baths in bed so they could feel refreshed and healthier."

Edward Sannoh, a 24-year-old from Kenema, performed another critical task for halting the spread of Ebola – providing dignified burials for those who had died. As a member of a safe-and-dignified-burials team, he collected the bodies of those who had died in the treatment centre and prepared them to be taken to the morgue.

Over the course of the outbreak, more than 5,000 volunteers like Mr Momodu and Mr Sannoh were trained to perform numerous tasks, ranging from community health outreach on how to avoid contamination and track down people who may have been in contact with a sick person to burying the dead in a safe and dignified manner. In addition, several hundred people from around the world volunteered and – after getting critical training from the International Federation – spent months caring for the sick, helping to trace cases of infection and performing many other crucial tasks in the countries affected by Ebola.

"I am a Red Cross volunteer. I do this because I care about the Principle of humanity," says Sannoh. "I want to save the lives of our brothers and sisters."

National Society volunteers in West African countries affected by the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak embodied the Principle of humanity even while working in extremely difficult circumstances – often covered from head to foot to protect themselves from infection. (Pictured) A volunteer from the Liberia National Red Cross Society.







IMPARTIALITY

The Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.





Volunteers from the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society providing first aid to protesters and members of security forces injured during political violence.

Bangladesh Red Crescent

IMPARTIALITY

A few years ago, a young volunteer for a National Red Crescent Society in South-East Asia was leading a team of volunteers to a village that had been ravaged by floods.

As the volunteers arrived with 25 trucks full of food parcels, people gathered around the convoy to receive desperately needed supplies. But as the team was unloading, a man approached and introduced himself as a local leader. He said he knew who needed help the most and he wanted to take over distributing the food.

To many, it might seem perfectly logical to accept this kind of offer. After all, this man probably did know his community better than the visiting volunteers. However, the Red Crescent volunteers knew from experience and training that accepting his offer would compromise the Principle of impartiality, which requires that aid go to those most in need regardless of ethnic, political or cultural affiliations. How could they be sure that he was assessing people's needs objectively and wouldn't distribute food according to personal connections or political considerations? They had to decline his offer.

This example illustrates the importance of impartiality as both a practical and a moral necessity – what good would humanitarian assistance be if it did not go to those who needed it most? It also shows how seriously this Principle is

taken at all levels of the Movement. It is a way to reassure beneficiaries, donors and everyone involved in or affected by crises that aid is given purely on humanitarian grounds.

However, adhering to Principles often comes at a cost. It takes time to conduct objective assessments: time to speak and listen to people, understand their needs and track exactly what has been given to whom. That can be frustrating, and in some cases people object. But, for the most part, people respect this approach. It is, after all, based on fairness. Even when people do not receive aid on a given day, they understand that when they need it most, the humanitarian who stick to their Principles will be there to help them.

Non-discrimination: the essence of our work

Non-discrimination is an integral part of the Principle of humanity, which fully recognizes every individual as human, and is inherent in the Principle of impartiality. It has been embodied in the Geneva Conventions from the outset: under the 1864 Geneva Convention, wounded or sick combatants were to be collected and cared for, whatever their nationality. The 1949 Geneva Conventions expanded the requirement of non-discrimination to include “any adverse distinction founded on sex, race, nationality, religion, political opinions or any other similar criteria.”

This means that in times of armed conflict or internal disturbance, friend and foe have the same right to assistance. A hospital could not refuse to admit one side’s wounded so as to have more room for the other side’s wounded. Likewise, in a country torn apart by internal fighting, a National Society could not give food to the victims of only one group and make no attempt to bring relief to the others.

By the same token, the organizations that make up the Movement must not discriminate in terms of who can become members, volunteers or staff. National Societies must be open to everyone in their respective countries and permit all social, political and religious



The Principle of impartiality requires us to help the wounded based strictly on who is most in need. This includes combatants who are no longer able to fight. For the ICRC, it can also mean training all parties to a conflict in basic first aid. (Pictured) Training for staff from the Afghan National Directorate of Security.

J. Barry/ICRC

groups to be represented (see Unity, page 70). This helps ensure that the Societies' activities respect diversity and focus on one shared humanity, rather than being affected by partisan considerations.

The ICRC also has the task of helping ensure that people detained in connection with a conflict or internal disturbance do not face discrimination. When ICRC delegates visit a detention centre, they urge the detaining authorities to give the same humane treatment to all detainees, and they verify that no detainees are put at a disadvantage because of their nationality or political convictions. However, not all distinctions constitute discrimination: requesting extra blankets for those less able to withstand the cold because of their age or health is a distinction based on objective need. It represents the second facet of impartiality: proportionality.

Help in proportion to suffering

Non-discrimination does not mean identical treatment. Rather, impartial treatment takes into account how much individuals are suffering and how urgent their needs are. Thus, aid is distributed first to those who need it most urgently.

International humanitarian law also stipulates that preferential treatment must be given to certain particularly vulnerable categories of people, such as children and the elderly. Sick and wounded people must be given equal care and protection, and only reasons related to medical urgency may influence the order in which care is provided.

In practice, it is not easy to provide relief in proportion to need. In many cases, media and donor attention given to dramatic, large-scale disasters far outweighs the support for smaller, “forgotten” disasters, which together take just as many lives and cause just as much damage and suffering. Similarly, problems that build up slowly – desertification, drought, urban violence and rising water levels – garner relatively little media attention and a far smaller share of the funding. The Movement has developed funding mechanisms to counteract these tendencies, but it remains a challenge.

Distributing shelter kits following an earthquake in Nepal, after an objective assessment by the Nepal Red Cross Society to ensure impartial provision of aid.





Sometimes being impartial means looking further into community dynamics in order to best understand how to help those in need and ensure that they have a say in determining what kind of help they receive. (Pictured) An International Federation delegate talking to women from households hosting people displaced by fighting in northern Mali.

Impartiality: Avoiding personal bias

Impartiality also requires us to put aside our personal biases and affiliations. If, in the course of his or her duties, a National Society volunteer or staff member were to give a friend better treatment than that given to others, it would contravene the Principle of impartiality.

Impartiality therefore means that an effort must be made to overcome all prejudices, reject the influence of personal factors – conscious or unconscious – and make decisions on the basis of facts alone, in order to act without bias or prejudice.

In one sense, impartiality implies assessing needs objectively and dispassionately. Thus, while it is natural and human for National Society volunteers to side emotionally with one of the parties to the conflict, they are nevertheless expected to disregard their feelings when giving aid – by relieving the suffering of all affected people – and when distributing relief supplies – by making no distinction between the parties to the conflict.

A professional requirement

The Principle of impartiality is therefore something that people have to work on. However, staff and volunteers for the Movement and other humanitarian agencies are not left to their own devices to develop these skills. A set of systems, methods, codes and professional standards has been developed to ensure the best possible compliance with the Principle. ICRC staff undergo rigorous training to ensure they have the personal and professional attributes needed to act impartially in extremely stressful situations. Similarly, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff – with support from the ICRC and the International Federation – are trained to follow codes of conduct specific to the Movement and understand the Movement's interpretation of the Principles. In addition, a curriculum has been developed by the International Federation and National Societies that helps people develop skills and qualities – empathy, critical thinking, ability to put aside biases, and non-violent communication – needed to put the Fundamental Principles into action in their daily work and lives.



IMPARTIALITY IN A DIVIDED COUNTRY

In a country deeply divided along political and sectarian lines, the Lebanese Red Cross is one of the few organizations to be respected and trusted by all sides. Much of that respect has been earned through the work of its emergency medical services, the main provider of ambulance transport and pre-hospital care in the country.

The Lebanese Red Cross has a good reputation because of the day-in, day-out dedication of paramedic volunteers like 27-year-old Berna Beyrouthy. She understands the daily challenge of delivering neutral and impartial assistance in a country that is feeling the strain from the war just over the border in Syria.

In the first five years of the Syrian conflict, more than 1.1 million refugees entered Lebanon in urgent need of medical assistance, shelter and basic supplies. "Initially, we were treating people with minor injuries such as cuts and shrapnel wounds. As the fighting intensified, we began receiving people with life-threatening gunshot wounds to their chests and heads. With our long experience of war, our teams are technically very skilled in essential actions such as triage, first aid and medical evacuation."

But the challenges have not just been medical. "The Syrian crisis has presented us with a new challenge and is testing our courage and even our ability to uphold the Fundamental Principles, perhaps like no other time in our history," she says.

"How do you remain strong when your ambulance is pulled over and your patient dragged into the road by an angry local? And how do you continue to volunteer and help others when your own family and neighbours bitterly accuse you of 'helping the enemy'?"

"These are the kinds of challenges we face daily. It's a fundamental test of character, staying above the fray rather than expressing or defending your own opinions," she says, adding that for the Lebanese Red Cross and its volunteers, the ability to work impartially is deeply connected to neutrality.

Applying the Principle of unity (see page 70) is also essential to operating impartially in such a diverse and divided land. The Principle of unity requires that there be only one National Society in each country, representing all people. "Our National Society reflects the diverse mix of political and religious groups that make up our country. We have never allowed the divisions in our society to drive a wedge between us as humanitarians," she says.

Lebanese Red Cross Society volunteers carrying a war-wounded Syrian from the border community of Wadi Khaled to a hospital in Tripoli in 2013.



NEUTRALITY

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.





Syrian Arab Red Crescent and ICRC staff members crossing front lines in Syria to organize much-needed water-supply and health services. Leaders of armed groups ordered the more than 50 snipers in the area to hold their fire and allow the neutral humanitarian mission to continue.

NEUTRALITY

Neutrality is perhaps one of the most misunderstood, and also one of the most essential, of the Fundamental Principles.

Neutrality is often mistakenly taken to mean passivity or indifference. But not taking sides in a conflict does not mean being indifferent. Neutrality in fact enables the Movement to put the Principles of humanity and impartiality into action.

Why is this so? First and foremost, it is a key reason why people on all sides of a conflict feel they can trust the Movement. The Principle opens doors. It is often neutrality that enables ICRC delegates to visit prisoners, allows relief convoys displaying one of the Movement's emblems to enter conflict zones and helps ensure that National Society volunteers are not attacked.

Volunteers resist enormous pressure on them to take sides, despite the perils of taking such a position. In countries where an internal conflict is taking place, armed forces sometimes do not understand why the National Society does not condemn the activities of armed groups that they regard as criminals, much less why it wants to provide medical care to those no longer able to fight. And armed groups can be critical of what they see as the National Society's connections with the authorities. Sadly, sometimes volunteers are attacked, injured and even killed while trying to help people in need despite wearing the protective red cross or red crescent emblem.

Volunteers in the Syrian Arab Red Crescent offer an impressive example of the Principles of neutrality and impartiality in a country divided along partisan lines. "Their mission (...) is to aid those in need, no matter what their political affiliation," wrote the *New York Times* in June 2013. "In Syria's polarized conflict, that amounts to a radical stance."

Admittedly, it is not always easy to apply the Principle of neutrality, not least because everyone has personal convictions. When tension mounts and passions are aroused, every member of the Red Cross or Red Crescent is expected to exercise self-control and refrain from expressing personal opinions while carrying out their duties. But volunteers are not asked to *be* neutral – everyone is entitled to an opinion – simply to *behave* neutrally.

For the ICRC, neutrality enables it to establish and maintain dialogue with all parties to a conflict with the aim of ensuring humanitarian access to people affected by the fighting. The ICRC is always willing to talk to any party that has power over a civilian population. This does not constitute a pronouncement on their legitimacy, nor does it grant them any particular status.

A sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of conflict – how communities, armed forces and armed groups behave – is essential. Neutrality entails not acting in a way that could facilitate the conduct of hostilities by any of the parties involved.

Neutrality enables the ICRC to reach out to all parties to a conflict. (Pictured) An ICRC delegate speaks to members of an armed opposition group in Colombia about international humanitarian law.



Neutrality also means never getting involved in controversy, so as not to lose the confidence of any part of the population. If a National Society branch, for example, expressed sympathy for a particular political figure or cause, many people might stop supporting or working for the National Society. If a clinic run by a National Society displayed religious symbols in a country affected by violent sectarianism, many patients would no longer want, or perhaps dare, to go there for treatment.

National Societies, therefore, are aware that statements or actions that contravene the Principle of neutrality may be detrimental to the Movement's activities elsewhere in the world. Even in peacetime, National Societies must always observe the Principle of neutrality. One reason is that should conflict break out in their country, the National Society will enjoy the confidence of all and be able to assist people on all sides.

But neutrality does not mean the Movement will stay silent on issues of grave humanitarian concern. Since its earliest days, the Movement has actively sought to prevent the cruelty and abuse that can arise in armed conflict. Communications are sent to all those taking part in the hostilities, reminding them of their obligations under humanitarian law.

The Movement may advocate bans on specific military weapons, such as nuclear weapons or landmines which, by their very nature, contravene humanitarian law. The Movement's support for the adoption of the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, for example, was not shared by leaders of every country, and nuclear weapons are still seen by many people as acceptable. But because these weapons cannot realistically be used in a way that would discriminate between combatants and non-combatants – thus violating an important rule of humanitarian law – the Movement is able to take a public stand against them.



International Federation and Palestine Red Crescent Society

Upholding the Principle of neutrality does not mean being silent on issues of pressing concern. (Pictured) Press conference in which members of the Movement call on all sides to uphold international humanitarian law and provide greater support for people affected by violence.

The ICRC approach to speaking out

The ICRC routinely makes public statements demanding that all sides to a conflict refrain from any action that would violate humanitarian law.

What the ICRC generally does not do is denounce one side publicly. Instead, it makes direct, bilateral representations to parties on how they are conducting hostilities. If the ICRC has collected information that one or more parties to a conflict are violating international humanitarian law – e.g. carrying out forced disappearances, abusing prisoners, waging war in a manner that indiscriminately harms civilians – it will inform them confidentially in reports and face-to-face meetings that such behaviour is illegal and must be stopped.



I. Malla/Syrian Arab Red Crescent

During conflicts, the ICRC often publicly appeals to all sides to uphold international humanitarian law.

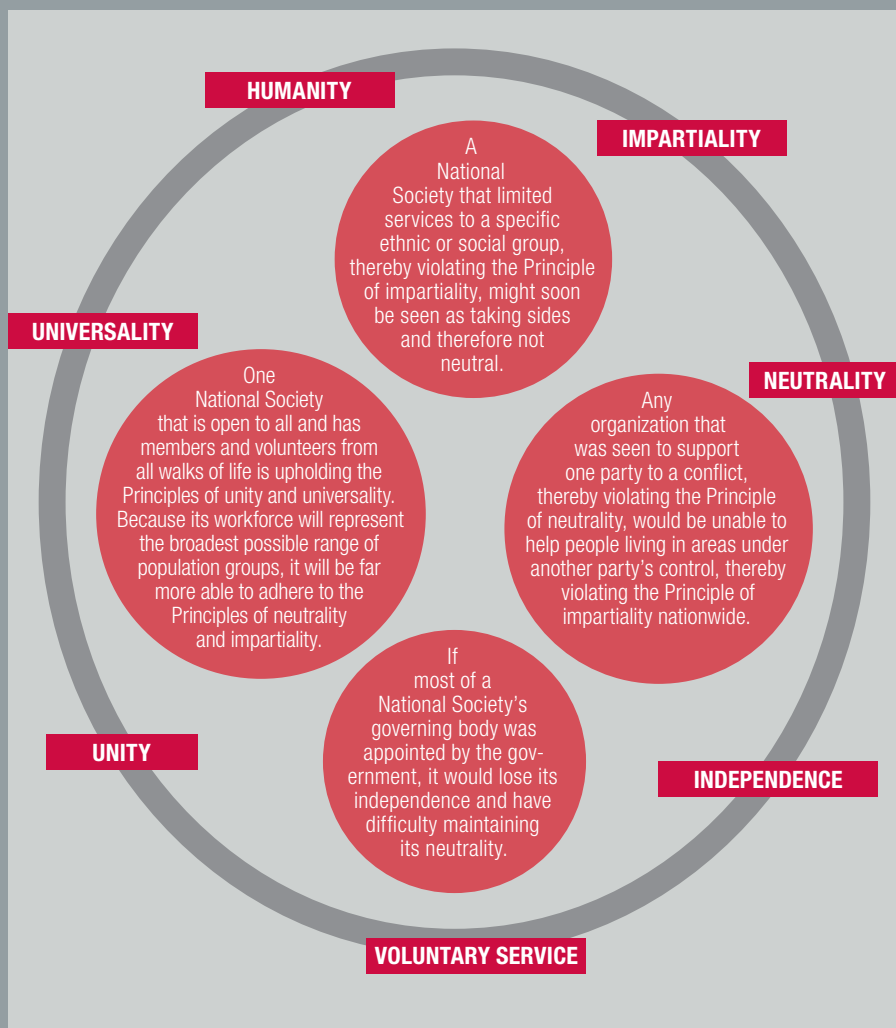
Only when the ICRC observes grave and repeated breaches of humanitarian law – and after confidential representations have been made in vain – does it make its concerns public.

But this is the exception rather than the rule. The reason for this is simple. Because the ICRC's goal is to protect vulnerable people, it wants to ensure continued access to those who are detained or who are suffering from other abuses. In addition, the ICRC wants to ensure that its reports are not used as, or seen as, tools for political propaganda, which would thereby undermine its neutrality and credibility.

In addition, the ICRC, along with its partners in the Movement, is engaged in efforts to expand the scope of the protective rules contained in humanitarian law to promote greater respect for life and human dignity.

INTERCONNECTED PRINCIPLES:

How is the Principle of neutrality connected to other Fundamental Principles?



During times of peace, the Movement advocates improvements in regulatory systems that have an impact on disaster preparedness and response. Similarly, members of the Movement may advocate more humane policies toward refugees and migrants, or take a stand on important health and safety issues. In doing so, they must get involved in the political processes to some degree while steering clear of taking sides in political debates that lie beyond the bounds of humanitarian concern.

Costs of neutrality

But there is a cost to neutrality. To ensure that humanitarian aid is not used to support a group's political agenda or that the Movement is not regarded as a part of any military campaign, Movement members cannot always accept services offered to them even though these services might provide immediate benefits. This is because governments, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups may not be neutral in a particular conflict or may not apply the Fundamental Principles in a manner consistent with the Movement's approach.

For example, to maintain a necessary distance from UN peacekeeping forces' political support for a particular government, the Movement has to arrange its own transport for people and goods. But this is difficult in countries where UN planes are often the only ones readily available. In the same vein, the Movement must pay attention to, and sometimes enter into long negotiations about, the logos that can be printed on aid it hands out or transports. All this drives up the financial cost of operations. However, although it is hard to quantify, the Principle of neutrality has proven to be our most reliable and effective tool in gaining access to areas where many international organizations cannot go.

Humanitarian action: A force for peace?

People also ask us why we, as a humanitarian Movement, are not more engaged in peace-making activities. One reason is our neutrality. In conflict situations, the Movement does not contribute to peace processes directly. Nor does it take sides in political debates revolving around whether or not a certain war is "just" or "unjust." Doing so would compromise our political neutrality and therefore our ability to help people adversely affected by conflict. The decision to go to war or not is often extremely politicized. It is therefore up to others to convince warring parties to start negotiations for peace. That said, the overall work of the Movement, which is based on feelings of solidarity and unity, can aim to foster a spirit of peace and bring about reconciliation among adversaries. This is expressed in the Principle of humanity which says the Movement "promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples."



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

BRINGING CARE TO ALL IN SOMALIA

For more than two decades, Keysaney hospital in Mogadishu has provided impartial medical care. This is in large part thanks to the Somali Red Crescent's reputation for neutrality during the bloody civil war, according to a 2013 study by the British Red Cross.

In 1991, Mogadishu was divided. Wounded civilians and combatants in north Mogadishu were cut off from hospital services in the south of the city. The Somali Red Crescent and the ICRC decided to turn an old prison in north-eastern Mogadishu into a hospital. After opening its doors in 1992, the hospital was soon treating more than 100 new patients a day.

As control of the area changed hands repeatedly during the 2000s, it was vital for the hospital staff to gain the trust of all sides if they were to remain safe and able to treat everyone. It was thanks to its neutrality that Keysaney hospital was able to remain open and operational, irrespective of which group was in control of the area.

Since it was founded, the hospital has treated over 200,000 people, including more than 30,000 with weapon-related wounds. "It's only because we are strictly neutral, and recognized as such, that we can carry out our work in such a difficult environment," says the hospital's director.

"It's only because we are strictly neutral, and recognized as such, that we can carry out our work in such a difficult environment."

Director, Keysaney hospital in Mogadishu, Somalia

The Principle of Neutrality is one reason medical personnel at this hospital in Mogadishu can offer basic health services to everyone, including those wounded in fighting.



A hand is visible at the top of the page, reaching out over a green and white checkered surface. The background of the page is a solid red color.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

NEUTRALITY AND COMMUNITY

The Fundamental Principles are not only relevant in times of crisis and conflict. For many National Societies, they are essential in maintaining the public's trust and building strong relationships with local communities.

Australian Red Cross, for example, found that the Principles played a vital role in strengthening its humanitarian activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. . The Principles of neutrality and impartiality resonate particularly strongly with volunteers and staff in these communities, according to an Australian Red Cross study.

A case in point is Woorabinda, where Red Cross volunteers and staff offer a wide range of services to improve community health, disaster preparedness and social inclusion. This community of around 1,000 people was established in 1927 when people from numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups were forcibly placed there by the Australian government.

This history, along with other policies and attitudes, have had a damaging and lasting impact on the social, economic, cultural and spiritual lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Principles help people to understand that the Red Cross will help anyone in need, regardless of their religious or cultural background or even their family connections. "By being neutral and independent we can explain to communities that we are here not to take sides with anybody," said one person interviewed in the study. That understanding leads to greater acceptance and mutual respect, which in turn fosters deeper community engagement in the National Society and its services.

Working with people from such a diverse range of backgrounds has highlighted the need to explain things in ways that make sense in each cultural context. Local volunteers and staff sometimes explain the Principles through paintings that employ imagery drawn from Aboriginal culture and "yarning" – the local term for story-telling.

Taleesha Sweeney, a Red Cross volunteer from Woorabinda who helped paint a mural of the Fundamental Principles on the outside of the local Red Cross branch's headquarters says that such activities are helping to change attitudes about the National Society's services.



"When there have been issues between members of the community, young people have commented 'you can't take sides because you work at the Red Cross,' which shows an amazing growth in the understanding of the role of Red Cross in community," she says, adding that the Principles also make everyone feel welcome at the Red Cross branch and give them a sense of belonging. "It's about creating a safe space for people to come," she adds. "It's about bringing everyone together in that safe space where we're non-judgemental and we can sit down and have a yarn about anything."

An Australian Red Cross volunteer from the Tiwi Islands gives physical expression to the Principle of universality.



INDEPENDENCE

The Movement is independent. National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.





National Societies serve as auxiliaries to their governments in the humanitarian field, but they are independent organizations that make their own decisions about when and where help is needed. (Pictured) A volunteer talking to a woman waiting outside an overnight shelter for undocumented migrants, established by the Norwegian Red Cross and a local partner to respond to desperate needs.

INDEPENDENCE

When the ICRC and the first National Societies were founded more than 150 years ago, their founders recognized how important it was to be independent.

National Societies would have to be in a position to make their own decisions to give assistance based purely on need and not be subordinate to political, military or other powers.

Independence is as relevant today. National Societies, like the ICRC and the International Federation, must be able to make their own decisions. They must not give in to political pressure or let themselves be swayed by public opinion that can be influenced by a fickle media.

In its broadest sense, independence means that Movement members must resist interference – whether political, ideological or economic – that would stop them from acting in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality.

Autonomy of action

No National Society may, for example, accept financial contributions that are given to help people only on the basis of political, ethnic or religious criteria and to the exclusion of those whose needs might be greater. Similarly, in order to merit the trust of all and to enjoy the credibility essential to carrying out their mission, Movement members must on no account appear to be instruments of government policy.

Likewise, a National Society that decided to carry out relief operations because of public pressure and not its own criteria might end up providing aid that was inappropriate or even harmful. That could in turn lead to public criticism and a loss of the public's trust.



H. R. Diaz/International Federation

The Principle of Independence is important because it allows National Societies to do work that might be controversial or culturally sensitive. (Pictured) A Colombian Red Cross employee in Cali shares information about sexually transmitted diseases and other health issues to sex workers and other vulnerable people.

Many National Societies around the world work with governments to improve the laws and regulations that govern delivery of humanitarian aid after disasters. For example, laws on importing goods can impede emergency relief if no exceptions are made during emergencies. (Pictured) Cook Islands Red Cross Society personnel talking to government officials and civil society representatives on how to improve domestic laws regulating disaster response.



B. Matsha-Carpentier/International Federation

The auxiliary role: Maintaining a healthy balance

It is also critical that public authorities understand and respect National Societies' autonomy and distinct legal status under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the statutes of the Movement and resolutions adopted by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

These bestow on National Societies the role of “auxiliaries” to public authorities in the humanitarian field. The auxiliary role of National Societies has its origins in the earliest days of the Red Cross, when volunteer medical workers were first recognized as auxiliaries to military medical services. Over time, this concept has changed and come to cover a wide range of humanitarian activities that support public authorities both in peacetime and in crisis.

This does not mean that National Societies are subordinate to their governments, but rather that they may be entrusted with complementing government activities or public services that the government is not able to provide.

In order to maintain the National Society's operational independence however, the auxiliary relationship must be clearly defined in domestic law, the National Society's statutes or constitution and the formal agreements between the National Society and the government. These laws and agreements should define the roles entrusted to the National Society, provide for the necessary resourcing of such roles by the government and confirm the ability and prerogative of the National Society to deliver its humanitarian services at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

Because of their auxiliary status, National Societies have a duty to consider seriously any request by the government to carry out humanitarian activities. And the government may take full advantage of National Society services to complement public social services and emergency-preparedness and response systems.

But governments must not ask National Societies to perform activities that conflict with the Fundamental Principles or with the Statutes of the Movement. States, as parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Members of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, are committed to respecting the ability of National Societies to abide by the Fundamental Principles at all times and not to interfere in a National Society's autonomy of action and decision-making.

At times, this means that National Societies, the ICRC or the International Federation might need to say no to certain proposals, if they do not accord with the Fundamental Principles.

At the same time, a National Society may decide on the basis of the Principle of impartiality to undertake social welfare activities to help especially vulnerable groups (refugees, released prisoners, drug addicts, etc.), even if the State has not requested that it take action.

Challenges to autonomy

But remaining independent is not always easy. For example, in some cases the State is represented in the National Society's governing body. This can be useful for coordination with the public authorities (e.g. the ministries of health, education or defence), but this should happen only if the members' freely elected representatives always form the majority in the Society's governing body. This rule should be clearly set out in the National Society's statutes.

It will safeguard its independence still further by recruiting volunteer workers from all social, cultural and economic sectors of the population, and by giving them the opportunity to take part in important decisions and to be elected to leading positions.

The Peruvian Red Cross, supported by the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund, giving out blankets during extremely cold weather in the Andes. The Fund was set up to enable National Societies to respond quickly to crises especially those that do not get widespread international attention.



Other pressures

Where funding comes from can influence whether humanitarian action is or is seen to be independent. The more diverse the sources of funding, the more autonomous humanitarian organizations will be.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, many people in higher-income countries began to call into question their nations' overseas aid budgets. As a result, many donor countries have demanded more accountability from humanitarian organizations. At the same time, there has been less willingness to support organizations' "core budgets" and instead the focus has shifted to funding specific projects or areas of interest. As humanitarian agencies have proliferated in recent years, donors have had more choice in where they send their money.

All this has led to many positive developments. Greater demand for accountability has forced humanitarian organizations to demonstrate more effectively how aid money is spent and the concrete benefits from that funding – essential actions to maintain public trust and ensure that aid is helping those who need it the most.

However, the trend poses a challenge to the independence of humanitarian organizations if they increasingly accept money to fund specific projects only. This may erode their ability to make their own decisions about who in their communities needs the most help, thereby also undermining the Principle of impartiality. Although such funding may in the short term enable National Societies to make a difference at the community level and, for some of them, to have greater financial autonomy from their governments, when the project-specific funding dries up, that autonomy could be seriously weakened.

In response, the Movement continually seeks to help National Societies find and develop relationships with a wider range of donors close to home, which in turn leaves them less dependent on any single source of funding. Similarly, National Societies with diverse activities (including those that generate income) may be less susceptible to financial pressures that could compromise financial independence. And maintaining credibility in the eyes of the general public means that if its independence is threatened, the National Society can count on public support.

Finally, there is a close link between organizational development and respect for the Fundamental Principles: a National Society whose administrative and financial structure is inadequate is less well-equipped to uphold its independence vis-à-vis the authorities than if its structure is sound and can rally the support of well-trained and motivated volunteers.

Cooperation vs independence

Independence is of critical importance when working in partnership with government agencies, international funding consortiums, other humanitarian organizations and local community groups. This is particularly true when responding to large-scale disasters in which coordination and cooperation are essential to make the biggest impact with limited time and resources.

While the Movement endeavours to work with others who help those suffering from conflict or natural disaster, it often asserts its independence when other economic, political or even military agendas come into play.

The Principle of independence does not mean we cannot work with other organizations that are trying to help vulnerable people; as long as it does not impact our ability to apply the Principles.





This is particularly important when working in areas of conflict or serious violence. To be effective, humanitarian action needs to be distinct, and seen as distinct, from political and military interests. The reason for working independently is straightforward: in any conflict, parties will tend to reject humanitarian organizations they suspect of having ulterior motives.

Integrated approaches combining political, military, reconstruction and humanitarian elements, as advocated by a number of States, conflict with the Principle of independence.



Armed forces and civil defence organizations often play a key role in responding to natural disasters. Movement components may work with them, provided this has no negative impact on how the whole Movement is perceived and that there is no real or perceived breach of the Principles of independence and neutrality. (Pictured) French military personnel delivering relief goods in Vanuatu.

This is not because the Movement shies away from talking with the military: for example, the ICRC wants and mostly manages to have an active dialogue with the military and other armed groups. However, the Movement's stance is that humanitarian activities should not be designed as part of "hearts and minds" military campaigns, nor should they be used to promote or accompany regime change. Blurring the line between humanitarian and political or military activities may ultimately prevent humanitarian protection and assistance from being provided in a non-discriminatory manner for all victims of a conflict.



VOLUNTARY SERVICE

The Movement is based on voluntary service and is not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.





An Indian Red Cross Society volunteer speaking to a man with tuberculosis, as part of a programme to help patients keep up with their treatment.

VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Every day, all around the world, people give their time and energy to help others for free. They visit elderly people in nursing homes, help people give blood and bring warm blankets to victims of house fires. In emergencies, volunteers provide first aid and sometimes perform acts of tremendous bravery. They devote days, weeks and sometimes even years to building shelters and protecting communities from infectious diseases.

There are an estimated 17 million volunteers in the Movement. One recent study by the International Federation placed the economic value of their services at over 6 billion US dollars a year. But volunteering is not about money.

Voluntary service is a core Principle of the Movement. Our work must be driven by individual devotion and commitment to humanitarian goals rather than a desire for financial gain, prestige, social standing or personal advancement. This applies as much to paid as unpaid work: although Movement staff receive a salary, they are driven by the same disinterested desire to help people in need.

This spirit of selfless voluntarism helps reinforce the Movement's adherence to other Principles. When individuals are not looking for personal gain and organizations are not driven by profit, people can trust that our actions are taken without regard to financial pressures. Volunteering can also play a role in promoting social cohesion and community health in ways that are extremely valuable but difficult to quantify.

The origin of voluntary service

It was on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859 that Henry Dunant, struck by the insufficiency of medical services and the number of soldiers who died for lack of care, conceived of forming "relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers."

Although the first Red Cross volunteers worked on or close to the battlefields, they now perform a host of medical and social welfare tasks in everyday life and after natural disasters.



Because they themselves often come from the countries and communities affected by crisis, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are often the first on the scene when people are in need. (Pictured) Members of the Ukraine Red Cross Society care for someone injured during civil unrest.



This Chilean Red Cross Society volunteer searching for survivors after an earthquake exemplifies the spirit of voluntarism.

Still relevant?

Is voluntarism still a relevant model for addressing the consequences of conflict and natural disaster, not to mention myriad social, economic and health-related issues that affect modern society? We think so. While it cannot, and should not, be seen as the main remedy for these issues, it can make a significant impact. First, in many countries, governments simply lack the resources, the infrastructure or political will to respond to many of these issues. And even in countries in which the health and well-being of the public are largely or entirely provided for by the State, or in countries whose National Societies have large numbers of well-trained and competent salaried staff, there are gaps in services that must be filled.

However competent and devoted health workers may be, there is always suffering that only volunteers familiar with local conditions can detect. While voluntary service is not intended to replace paid labour or government services, in many places a considerable number of people would not be helped if all the work done by volunteers had to be paid for.

In addition, the very fact that Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are not public employees working under orders is likely to gain the confidence of the men and women they seek to help.

A strong foundation

One of the strengths of the Movement lies in its vast network of volunteers who are anchored in their local communities yet independent of local authorities or political concerns. Their knowledge of the local context and acceptance within their community gives them a crucial role as first responders and facilitators in the event of a crisis. And without the support of volunteers from all political, religious and social backgrounds, the National Society could not gain the confidence of all parties, which is indispensable for getting access to all victims in armed conflicts.

Having a vibrant network of volunteers also helps to keep National Societies in touch with the concerns and aspirations of all segments of society: the young, the elderly, the rich and the poor.

Volunteering among young people is a source of hope for a more peaceful and cohesive society as it rallies people of diverse affiliations and backgrounds behind a common cause. In areas affected by violence, poverty and poor health care, local volunteers can make a positive contribution to the community.

Finally, in many countries, volunteer programmes serve as *de facto* job training, providing education and a platform for promoting social cohesion in countries with very few such opportunities.



The Principle of voluntary service inspires people to engage in daily work over the long-term to improve the health and well-being of local communities, both in times of calm and crisis. (Pictured) Red Cross volunteers and local villagers in a quarantined settlement in Guinea help clean up the village's port area as part of a campaign to improve hygiene and reduce the incidence of infectious diseases.

T. Trenchard/International Federation



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

‘ONCE A VOLUNTEER, ALWAYS A VOLUNTEER.’

Narayan Kumar Shrestha is known as the ‘Ambulance Uncle’ – a testimony to his emergency humanitarian work in Nepal. During the 2015 earthquakes, he rescued over 100 people, many of whom he carried on his back. He also gave psycho-social support to people traumatized by the earthquake.

“Voluntarism is the foundation of the Movement, and my work is another brick that helps build the castle. It is the spirit of voluntarism that people associate with the Red Cross... I feel rewarded when people say that the psycho-social support helped them rebuild their confidence and get their lives back to normal.”



• A nurse trainee in Bangui, Central African Republic, Edwige Marina is the lead psycho-social support volunteer for the Central African Red Cross Society. She knows how families suffer because of conflict. Her younger brother was killed and her family displaced after her home was looted and destroyed. Once, after a displacement camp where she was working was attacked, she almost gave up humanitarian work.

“I looked at the people around me and felt compassion. Having been displaced twice, they needed me more than ever before. From then on, I have never looked back. I think that volunteering is a calling, and once a volunteer, always a volunteer.”

• Although Ala Sahim was a paid field officer with an ICRC mobile surgical team in Aden during the Yemen conflict in 2014, his dedication exemplifies the volunteer spirit. He worked at the Al-Gomhariah hospital round the clock to keep it running despite the fighting and bombardments happening all around.

“I couldn’t reach my home due to roadblocks, and I was afraid that if I left, I might not be able to return to the hospital where I was needed. To be in charge of the hospital and its emergency-response programme amid heavy fighting was a big challenge. I am very proud of our achievements. We were able to treat 800 war-wounded people *in one month*.”

Voluntarism gives people hope and a sense of purpose. (Pictured) Kiribati Red Cross Society volunteers celebrating with their instructor after finishing their first-aid training.



UNITY

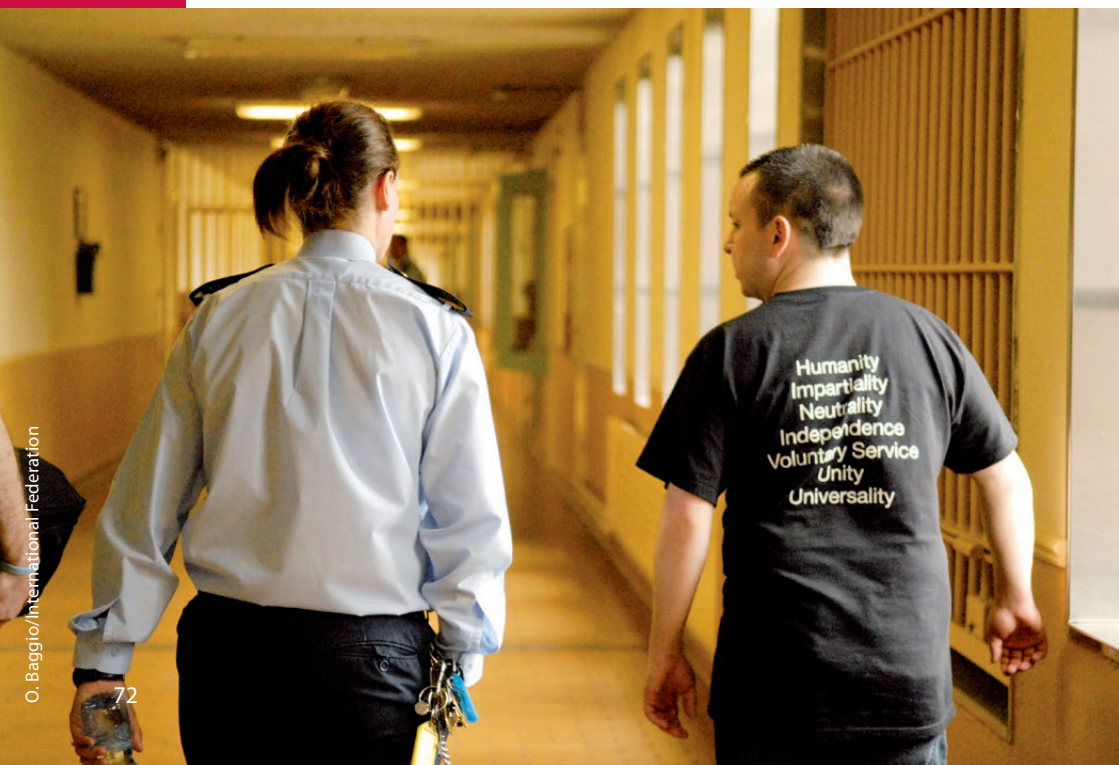
There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.



UNITY

The Principle of unity might appear rather mundane but there is more to it than first meets the eye. The Principle is essential to ensuring that the Fundamental Principles of neutrality, impartiality, universality and independence can be upheld. The requirement that there be only one National Society that covers all the territory of a given State means that it must maintain branches in all parts of the country. The requirement that it be open to all means that its workforce should represent all the groups that make up the population. These factors greatly increase the likelihood that the National Society will be able to remain neutral in national disputes and controversies, and that it will be able to bring effective and impartial assistance to all parts of the country when needed.

The Principle of unity means that the Movement is open to all. For instance, inmates in several Irish prisons have joined the Irish Red Cross. The Fundamental Principles are at the core of their work enabling fellow detainees' to fully access health services and to prevent violence.



Being the sole National Society in the country

For this reason, the government decree or law recognizing a National Society usually states that it is the only National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society that can carry out its activities on the national territory.

Apart from the risk of confusion in the public's mind if there were several associations carrying out the same tasks, there is also the risk that they would come to represent different communities within the country, undermining their ability to remain impartial, neutral and independent.

Non-discrimination in the recruitment of members

The strength of a National Society comes from embracing diversity and a broad-based membership. It is therefore essential that it be open to all and that this be reflected in its governing body. This appears in the Movement's Statutes, which require a National Society to "recruit its voluntary members and its staff without consideration of race, sex, class, religion or political opinions."

A National Society must recruit its members from all the ethnic and social groups in the country if it is to enjoy universal confidence, without which it would be impossible for it to fulfil its mission effectively. The conduct of its activities must not remain the preserve of the most privileged classes. It must be open to both rural and urban communities. By enjoying the full support of people from all walks of life, the National Society will acquire both the means and the necessary authority to resist outside pressure that might otherwise undermine its autonomy or its impartial humanitarian mandate.

Non-discrimination in recruitment becomes especially important in countries where communities oppose one another on political, racial or religious grounds. The National Society must not allow itself to acquire any political or ideological hue, and its publicity and recruitment drives for volunteers must be inclusive.



The Principle of unity requires a National Society to work throughout the country. (Pictured) Volunteers from the Red Cross of Montenegro taking help to people in remote areas in freezing temperatures during a particularly severe cold snap.

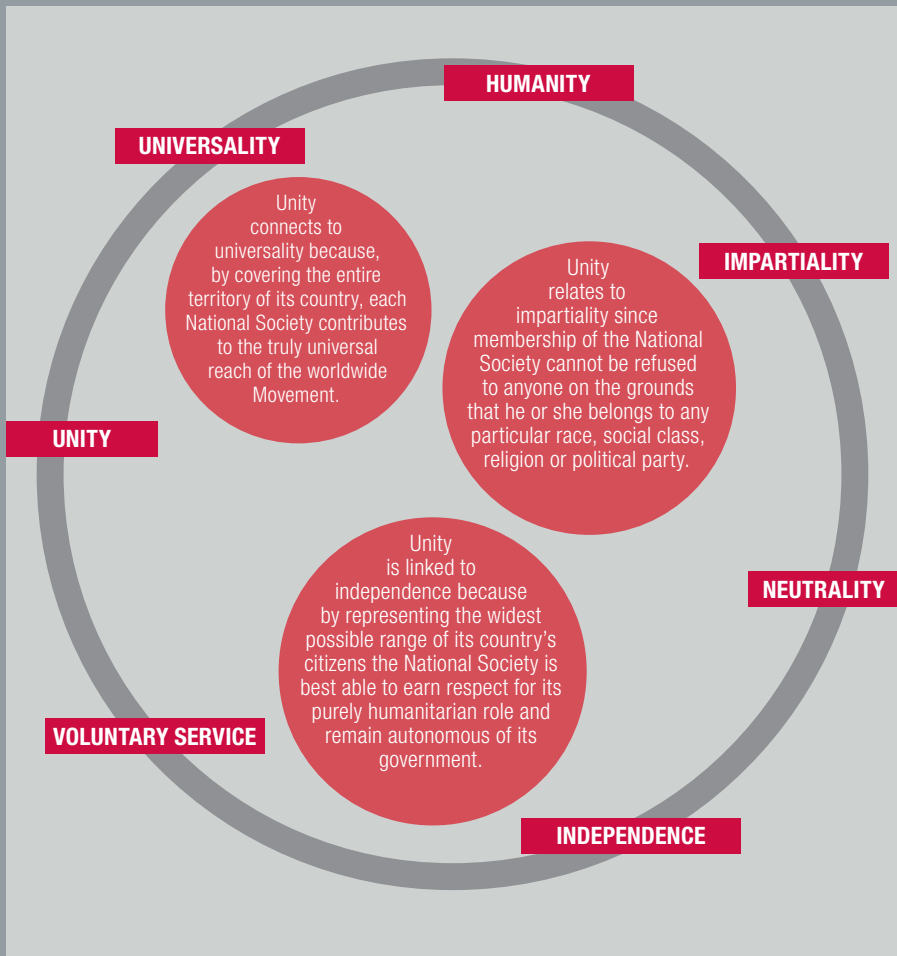
Covering the whole territory

The requirement that the National Society cover the entire territory of its home country serves to ensure that certain regions will not be neglected in favour of others – a violation of the Principle of impartiality.

This might prove difficult in some internal conflicts, where a large part of the national territory may be inaccessible to the National Society. While such circumstances might in some cases affect whether the Movement can grant official recognition to a National Society, it should not prevent the Movement from establishing practical working relations with the organization concerned and helping it in its humanitarian work.

INTERCONNECTED PRINCIPLES:

How is the Principle of Unity linked to other Fundamental Principles?



The Fundamental Principles are closely linked, with each Principle dependent on others in order to be fully realized.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

UNITY: A FOUNDATION FOR INDEPENDENCE

Shortly after South Sudan became independent, a devastating conflict broke out. With tensions running so high, it was a real challenge to provide humanitarian assistance to the millions of civilians caught between the warring factions.

Yet the South Sudan Red Cross was able to press on, in part thanks to a law passed by the South Sudan government recognizing it as an independent, impartial and neutral humanitarian agency. The government accepted that the National Society would operate in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and that it was autonomous in deciding how to run its operations. Being recognized as independent was a critical tool in assisting people in all parts of the country.



J. Cernius/IFRC

"When government or armed groups tried to interfere with aid operations, staff and volunteers were able to point out that the law was signed by all members of the parliament, representing all regions of the country and all ethnic groups," said Mr Lobor, the secretary-general of the South Sudan Red Cross. "This doesn't mean that things always go smoothly for volunteers working in areas of extreme violence and tension. But it gives them a strong basis for making their case."

Many National Societies might have been torn apart as a result of the conflict. But this did not happen in South Sudan. The members, staff and volunteers were united in providing urgently needed help.

"Our governing board and the board of our branches must include representatives of the different ethnic groups," said Mr Lobor. "When people see that they are represented – that everyone is represented – it creates a sense of belonging. They feel it is their National Society."

This sense of unity helps the National Society function as a cohesive whole and makes it possible to deliver impartial humanitarian assistance to those most in need, whatever their ethnic group.

South Sudan Red Cross volunteers taking part in first-aid training.







UNIVERSALITY

The Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



The universality of the Movement is on display every year when volunteers from around the world meet in Solferino, Italy. The Battle of Solferino inspired the Movement's creation over 150 years ago.

UNIVERSALITY

With this final Principle, we come back to the first. The call to alleviate human suffering “wherever it may be found” requires a worldwide response. We cannot claim to be truly dedicated to reducing human suffering if we ignore certain parts of our world or sections of society.

Our humanitarian commitment must rise above the barriers of politics, race and religion. Global solidarity is inherent in the Principle of humanity and expressed through the Principle of Universality. That is why, in the Movement, each National Society is duty bound to support its sister Societies and to come to their aid when needed.

The universality of the Movement is most clearly visible through our National Societies, which exist in almost every country in the world. While a few countries do not yet have a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society – or have Societies that have not yet been recognized as full members of the Movement – there were National Societies in 189 countries as of 2015. Although the Principle of universality does not explicitly mention the International Federation or the ICRC, the two organizations embody the universality of the Movement. The Federation does so by facilitating and encouraging cooperation between the National Societies and by coordinating international relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters. The ICRC does so by working in any country where armed conflict and serious violence has broken out and requires a humanitarian response.



S. Ryan/International Federation

The International Federation, National Societies and the ICRC work together in crises, each making a contribution according to their individual mandates. (Pictured) An International Federation delegate talks to a man displaced by the fighting in Ukraine.

Movement solidarity is particularly evident after sudden large-scale disasters or in times of war when we mobilize support for people and National Societies in the countries affected. But global solidarity is not limited to times of crisis. In times of peace, the Movement also works to develop and strengthen National Societies, particularly younger ones or those in low-income countries with fewer resources. It is then up to the more affluent or experienced Societies to give them support in a spirit of mutual respect and equality.

The Principle of universality requires the entire Movement to work together to help the most vulnerable people. (Pictured) ICRC and Philippine Red Cross personnel assessing the impact of conflict between armed rebels and government troops in Zamboanga.





The Movement aims to alleviate human suffering “wherever it may be found.” National Societies, present almost everywhere in the world and acting in solidarity with each other, reflect the universality of the Movement.

Equal status

Equality, mutual respect and a sense of shared responsibility are essential to truly universal humanitarian action. These values are, after all, what allow our extremely diverse international network to function effectively in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality and unity – often under intense pressure.

For the Movement, diversity is essential to its identity and its mission. This diversity stems from both the cultural origins of its components worldwide – the National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC – and how responsibilities are shared among their different mandates.

To guarantee equality, the Movement is guided by internal rules to give components a say in key decisions affecting the course of its humanitarian activities. For instance, each National Society has one vote at the Federation’s General Assembly, the Movement’s Council of Delegates and the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

This universality is also reflected in humanitarian principles and laws that come from outside the Movement, but can trace their origins to Movement initiatives (as described in the introduction on page 80).

The international legal protections afforded to people caught up in conflict are one example. International humanitarian law and especially the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 – signed by practically all States – transcend national particularities and ideological differences. For this reason it is indispensable that National Societies and the ICRC, to which humanitarian law explicitly entrusts certain responsibilities, should help States to

spread knowledge of, and bolster compliance with, these important universal instruments that protect the victims of war.

Challenges for universality

The Principle of universality also poses challenges for the Movement. For example, to join or remain in the Movement, all National Societies must adhere to the Fundamental Principles. But should the Movement allow a little wiggle room so as to remain as international and open as possible? Or should National Societies be excluded if they do not perfectly adhere to the Principles, even if that might jeopardize the Movement's ability to take action in some countries? The Movement must weigh each individual situation up carefully to find the right course of action.

While a certain degree of flexibility, patience and mutual understanding are the price to be paid for maintaining the Movement's universality, some compromises are unacceptable: any National Society that persistently violated the Principle of humanity, or whose activities were deliberately biased, would by its own actions be cutting itself off from the Movement.

The Principle of universality requires that National Societies offer their solidarity and support in a way that does not undermine other components of the Movement – particularly National Societies in countries in crisis. However well intentioned, a National Society that intervenes unilaterally on the territory of another without consent may cause confusion, and undermine the unity, universality and independence of that country's National Society.

Just as the failings or omissions of one component of the Movement may affect the whole "family," the successes of each component, and the credibility and power of the international network, can lift us all. The unparalleled universality of this network is a precious resource for all humanity that must be protected and cherished by upholding all seven of our Fundamental Principles.

Almost every country is represented at the Movement's international conferences and its council of delegates.



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

SUWARTI'S STORY: UNIVERSALITY AT WORK

Surrounded by a seemingly post-apocalyptic landscape, Suwarti sat and stared, dumbfounded. "It's shocking. I'm speechless," she told a journalist. The frames of shattered buildings around her punctuated a flattened landscape of rubble, twisted metal, overturned cars and landlocked boats.

Dressed in her Japanese Red Cross uniform, the young nurse had travelled to north-eastern Japan with five colleagues to help people who survived the magnitude 9.0 earthquake that sent a towering tsunami crashing into communities along the Tohoku coastline in 2011.

The destruction brought back memories for Suwarti of her experiences in Indonesia, where she came from. She arrived in Banda Aceh with a relief team after the tsunami of 26 December 2004 had wiped out the town.

Seven years on, and now part of a nursing exchange programme with the Japanese Red Cross, Suwarti was once again helping tsunami victims. Her determination to help was boosted by her experiences in Banda Aceh. "When my country was in need, lots of different countries and organizations helped us, including the Japanese Red Cross," she said.

"Disaster can strike at any time and affect anyone, so as a member of the Red Cross, I strongly feel it's my duty to help anyone affected by disaster – no matter what their ethnicity, religion or nationality."

Suwarti, an Indonesian nurse and volunteer, working at a Japanese Red Cross hospital in Tokyo.





INTERLINKING PRINCIPLES

There may be nothing more challenging for humanitarian action than civil war. Civil wars heighten feelings of hatred; they split societies apart and pit neighbour against neighbour. As attacks increase, members of some groups flee for safety, and once diverse neighbourhoods lose their multicultural mix.

Volunteers who work in such circumstances must often defend their neutrality, impartiality and independence in the face of people who want to know why volunteers “are helping the enemy.”

It’s a delicate balance to strike. During the prolonged conflict in the country, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) has stayed close to communities through its local branches but has also managed to maintain its relationship with the government in order to be granted access and get through checkpoints. The National Society has been accused by turns of aiding the rebels and of being too close to the government.

“We face huge risks, but we are committed to neutrality,” says SARC volunteer Zaki Malla Aref. He explains that most local charities in the area help one side or the other, so people are not used to the idea of neutral and independent humanitarian assistance. “When a group asks us, ‘Who are you?’, it can be a problem. We have to tell them we are the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and we are not with this group or the other.”

A peacetime National Society

Before the first shots were fired during street protests in 2011, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was a fairly typical National Society that had a close relationship with its government. Volunteers had had some preparation however. Drought, and an influx of refugees from Iraq, gave the volunteer corps experience in emergency work. Training from other National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation helped lay the groundwork for a neutral and impartial response when civil war broke out.

**Volunteers must abide by the Fundamental Principles.
(Pictured) Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers providing
humanitarian aid during the conflict there.**



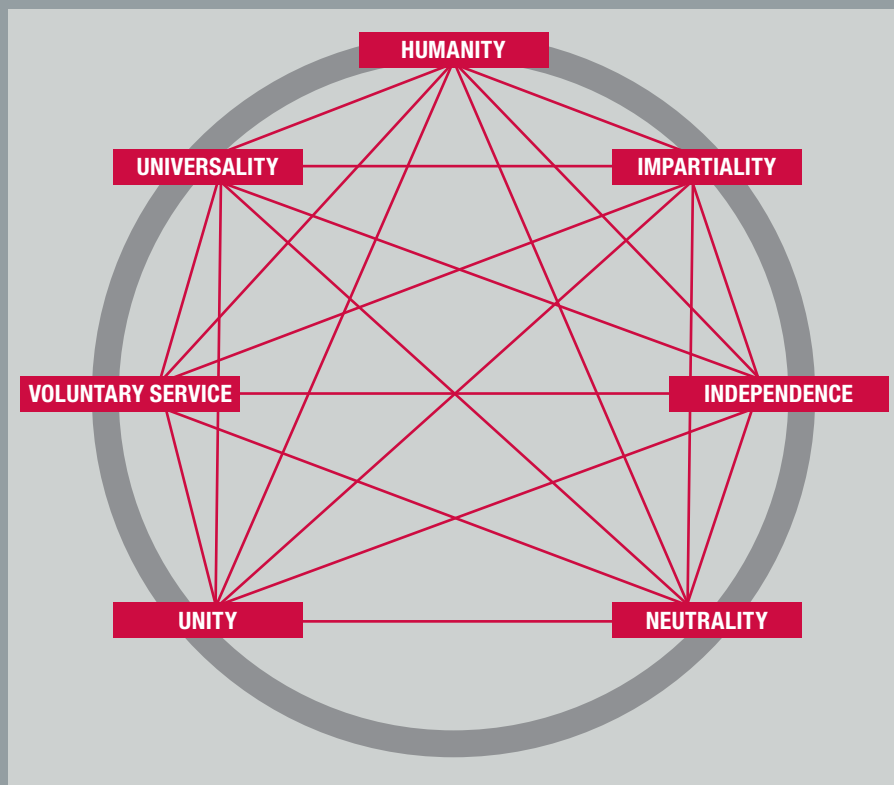
Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers build trust among communities and political factions by abiding by the Principles of neutrality and independence. They can therefore provide important health services, such as polio vaccinations (pictured).

When it did, the SARC asserted its independence. In order to act in accordance with the Principle of humanity, it sought to be impartial and bring help where it was needed most, whether that was in areas controlled by the government or by opposition groups. One thing that helped was that SARC branches around the country represented a wide range of the communities affected by the fighting, so the Principles of unity, universality and voluntary service enabled the SARC to operate effectively.

No amount of preparation or adherence to the Fundamental Principles is a perfect shield during wartime. Despite the SARC's principled response to the conflict, many of its volunteers have been killed, injured, abducted or detained. Still, its preparation, training, experience and support have made the Syrian Arab Red Crescent the main provider of humanitarian aid in Syria.

INTERCONNECTED PRINCIPLES:

In what ways do the Fundamental Principles rely on each other?



To act on the Principle of humanity entails upholding all the principles. But the ability to be impartial – that is to help those most in need, whoever and wherever they are – is essential. To put impartiality into action, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent needed to show that it was neutral in the conflict even though it worked with the government. It also needed the voluntary service of people at the branch level to put humanity into action. Having branches in all parts of the deeply divided country and being open to all Syrians – as required by the Principle of unity – enabled the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to assert its operational independence from any one party to the conflict, which in turn allowed the volunteers to work impartially and neutrally on all sides of the battle lines. And because the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is connected to a worldwide network, it could show that it was connected to universal humanitarian goals and ideals, not to any local political agenda. In this sense, unity and universality created the necessary pre-conditions for impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action that can be trusted by all sides in the conflict.



Guided by our principles, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement tries to go the extra mile to reach people in need. (Pictured) A member of the Palestine Red Crescent Society emergency team brings first aid, blankets and other assistance during a snow storm in Gaza and the West Bank.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

These reports, articles and internet links form the basis of the texts in this document and are excellent sources for those who wish to know more about the Fundamental Principles in action.

(1) The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Commentary by Jean Pictet, ICRC lawyer and contributor to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/40669/Pictet%20Commentary.pdf

(2) "Principles guiding humanitarian action," International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 97, No. 897-898, 2015.

www.icrc.org/en/international-review

- (3) The website dedicated to the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:
www.fundamentalprinciples.today
- (4) Fiona Terry. "The International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan: reasserting the neutrality of humanitarian action," International Review of the Red Cross, No. 881.
www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/review-2011/irrc-881-terry.htm
- (5) The British Red Cross, the ICRC and the Lebanese Red Cross. "Principles in action in Lebanon." 20-12-2012 Publication Ref. 4128
www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p4128.h
- (6) Sorcha O'Callaghan and Jane Backhurst, British Red Cross. "Principles in action in Somalia." Produced in cooperation with the Somali Red Crescent as part of the Principles in Action project. For more information, please contact HP@redcross.org.uk or visit www.redcross.org.uk
- (7) Pierre Krähenbühl. "The ICRC's approach to contemporary security challenges: A future for independent and neutral humanitarian action" 30-09-2004 Article, International Review of the Red Cross, No. 855.
www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/66cm82.htm
- (8) Safer Access Framework. The Safer Access Framework provides a practical means to record and address the barriers, risks and challenges facing National Societies in carrying out their humanitarian work, based on the situation, recent experience and possible future scenarios.
www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/cooperating-national-societies/safer-access-all-national-societies
- (9) International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Promoting Principles and Values
www.ifrc.org/principles
www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201506/747leaflet-EN-FINAL.pdf
- (10) Red Cross Red Crescent magazine.
www.redcross.int

MISSION STATEMENTS

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. With our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we are in every community reaching 160.7 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes, as well as 110 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



ICRC



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies