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**32nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT**

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**The Fundamental Principles in action:  
A unique ethical, operational and institutional framework**

**Background report**

**Document prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

Geneva, October 2015

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the lead-up to the 50th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles, adopted at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna in 1965, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement committed to do more than merely celebrate the importance of these Principles. It undertook to use the occasion to reflect critically on the contemporary challenges in today's humanitarian contexts and the role these Principles play in providing essential and effective humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

An extensive consultation, followed by a series of regional workshops within the Movement, on the Fundamental Principles confirmed their continued operational and institutional relevance. Details of the results of this process are set out in this report.

The role of States in ensuring respect for the Fundamental Principles is acknowledged as an essential consideration in strengthening the implementation of the Principles.

The conclusions show that the answers do not lie in producing more guidance or amending what already exists. Rather there is an overall feeling that continued good practice relies upon deepening the **dialogue with States**, investing more in **contextualized and practical training** on the Principles (including for external audiences) and encouraging the **sharing of good practices and peer-to-peer exchange**. Specific recommendations include the following:

- a. **A sound legal and statutory basis is key:** In order to maintain National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' operational independence and their ability to respect the Fundamental Principles, their auxiliary relationship must be clearly defined in domestic legislation.
- b. **Lay the groundwork in peacetime for respect in the event of political polarization, violence or armed conflict** so as to be able to negotiate the best humanitarian outcomes at the height of tensions.
- c. **Consistent and constant dialogue** and communication on the Fundamental Principles with public authorities and the public at large has to be developed and nurtured.
- d. **Independent and thorough assessments** are crucially important to maintaining some autonomy from public authorities or external partners, and ensure that this partnership is carried out in accordance with the Principles of humanity and impartiality.
- e. **Leveraging the complementary role and comparative advantages of the different Movement components** in order to apply the Fundamental Principles: National Societies bring added value to implementing impartial humanitarian action due to their local presence and volunteer base, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can mitigate risks to perceived neutrality and independence linked to the auxiliary role in certain circumstances.
- f. **Ongoing training and reflection on the application of the Principles is imperative** for all staff, volunteers and leadership of National Societies.
- g. **Adapting to context:** Applying the Fundamental Principles is not a straightforward recipe or a "one-size-fits-all" approach. While guidance and policy documents rooted in the Principles at Movement level are useful and necessary, National Societies must continually adapt the Principles to the local context and realities.

The Principles have served the Movement well as a framework for action since its inception. The focus of our attention should lie in redoubling our efforts to implement, discuss and adapt. Achieving this routine yet ambitious task requires support from States and all the components of the Movement. The 32nd International Conference's thematic plenary commission on the Fundamental Principles will provide the opportunity to discuss how this can be done.

## **1. Introduction**

In 2015, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the seven Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality, which were adopted at the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross in Vienna in 1965.<sup>1</sup> To mark this important anniversary, “Power of humanity: the Fundamental Principles in action” serves as the overarching theme of the 32nd International Conference, with the aim of highlighting their continued operational relevance for the Movement as a whole and renewing the commitment by States and Movement components to respecting these Principles, for the benefit of the people we serve.

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Movement in recent years to strengthen application of the Fundamental Principles and puts forward a number of considerations for continuing and redoubling the commitment to these Principles, to be discussed in the thematic plenary commission on “Fundamental Principles in action” at the 32nd International Conference.

## **2. Historical overview of the Fundamental Principles**

Although formalized in their current form in 1965, the Fundamental Principles were not created overnight; they are the crystallization of more than a century of operational experience and normative developments within the Movement. Already in 1859, on the battlefield of Solferino, the concepts of voluntary service and of non-discrimination – the latter being an essential element of the Principle of impartiality – were at the very heart of Henry Dunant’s impetus to come to the succour of wounded soldiers, underpinned by the need to respond to suffering with compassion, the basis for the Principle of humanity. Confronted with the complex operational realities of responding to crises in the following decades, it became obvious to the Movement that being seen as neutral and independent of any political, religious or economic agendas was necessary to be able to deliver impartial humanitarian aid in even the most adverse and polarized circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

This emerging practice was consecrated by States when in 1949 they recognized that “an impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict.”<sup>3</sup> Testimony to the fact that the principles were already established practice before their formal adoption, the 1949 Geneva Conventions further stated that “recognized National (...) Societies shall be able to pursue their activities in accordance with Red Cross principles, as defined by the International Red Cross Conferences.”<sup>4</sup> This commitment by States to respect the ability of Movement components to comply with the Fundamental Principles was later reaffirmed through the adoption of Resolution 8 at the 20th International Conference in 1965, of the 1977 Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions<sup>5</sup> and of the Statutes of the Movement at the 25th International Conference in 1986.<sup>6</sup>

Since their adoption, the Fundamental Principles – which were added to the Preamble of the Statutes of the Movement in 1986 – have continuously guided the action of the Movement.

<sup>1</sup> The definitions of the seven Fundamental Principles are annexed to this report.

<sup>2</sup> In 1921, four principles were for the first time put in writing and incorporated in the Statutes of the International Committee of the Red Cross: impartiality; political, religious and economic independence; universality of the Movement; and equality of its members.

<sup>3</sup> Article 3 common to the four 1949 Geneva Conventions.

<sup>4</sup> Article 63(a) of the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, Article 81(2) of Additional Protocol I states that “The Parties to the conflict shall grant to their respective Red Cross (Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) organizations the facilities necessary for carrying out their humanitarian activities in favour of the victims of the conflict, in accordance with the provisions of the Conventions and this Protocol and the fundamental principles of the Red Cross as formulated by the International Conferences of the Red Cross.”

<sup>6</sup> Article 2(4) of the Statutes states that “The States shall at all times respect the adherence by all components of the Movement to the Fundamental Principles.”

They have underpinned the progressive development of its normative framework and been regularly enshrined in resolutions and other policy or guidance documents that give direct practical expression to the Principles.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the Movement, the Fundamental Principles have also deeply influenced the broader international humanitarian community, which has widely adopted the first four Principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence as the principles guiding humanitarian action.<sup>8</sup>

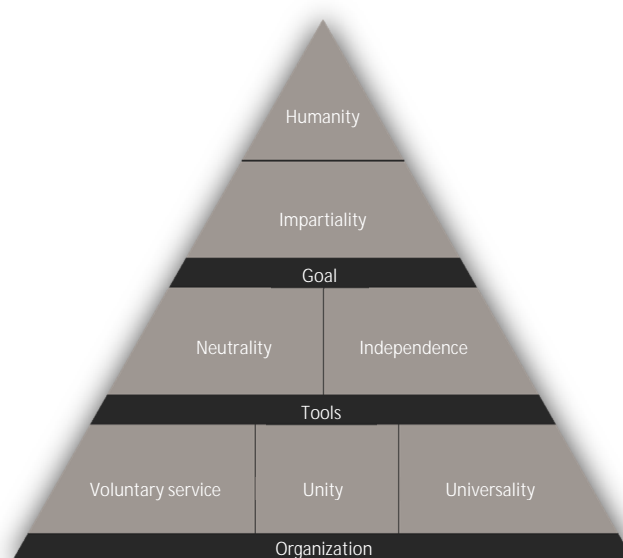
As the world is confronted today with an increasingly complex humanitarian operating environment, and in the context of the ongoing World Humanitarian Summit consultation initiated by the UN Secretary-General, a consideration of the interpretation and implementation of these principles by humanitarian organizations is welcome as a means to more effectively protect and assist people affected by and vulnerable to crises.

For the Movement, the Principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, accompanied by specific definitions, provide both the ethical compass guiding the Movement's action and the operational tools to safely deliver aid in all contexts. For the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in particular, these Principles are of paramount importance to accomplishing its specific mandate in armed conflicts and situations of internal disturbances and tensions.

The Principles of voluntary service, unity and universality lay the foundations that ensure that the Movement is organized in such a way that it can consistently take impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian action. They do this by envisaging a National Society in each country with a diverse volunteer base in place and that operates throughout the territory. In addition, these Principles ensure that National Societies are supported and complemented by other components of the Movement, including the ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation), to serve effectively the humanitarian needs of all those in need.

Thus, in this ethical, operational and institutional framework provided by the Fundamental Principles, no Principle should be considered in isolation from the others: they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (see Fig. 1).

Today the Fundamental Principles remain instrumental to enabling the Movement to gain the acceptance and access necessary to work directly with affected people. This proximity is a driver of accountability, effectiveness and relevance to people in need. In addition, these Principles are a vital element of the collective identity of all



**Fig. 1. The Fundamental Principles pyramid:** Based on the commentary of Jean Pictet, this representation is one way to visualize the relationship between the Principles.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Resolution 9 of the 1995 Council of Delegates, which reiterates that the Movement does not use armed protection, guided by “the fundamental need for all actions of the Movement to reflect a spirit of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.” See also the “Minimum Elements” for external partnerships, annexed to Resolution 10 of the 2003 Council of Delegates, which asserts that “any such agreement [with external partners] reflects coherence with Movement Fundamental Principles.” These are but two examples of such policy and guidance documents.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 adopted the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and independence was officially recognized in 2003 in UNGA Resolution 58/114.

Movement components across the world, “the cement which holds the stones together to make of them a solid and well-built edifice.”<sup>9</sup>

### **3. The Movement-wide initiative on the Fundamental Principles**

In 2013, and in view of the approaching 50th anniversary, the ICRC, the International Federation and the British Red Cross embarked on a Movement-wide initiative entitled “Reaffirming the Fundamental Principles.” The initiative seeks to celebrate the importance and relevance of the Fundamental Principles, while reflecting critically on their application by the Movement in today’s humanitarian contexts.

Following the presentation of the results of the first phase – a consultation of 115 National Societies – at the workshop on Fundamental Principles at the 2013 Council of Delegates,<sup>10</sup> the meeting called for the joint initiative to continue and embark on the second phase. This involved conducting a series of regional workshops aiming to identify the contemporary challenges and dilemmas facing National Societies in the implementation of the Fundamental Principles and to collect good practices and constructive approaches that participants have used to overcome them.<sup>11</sup>

Thus seven regional workshops were held between March 2014 and July 2015, bringing together a total of 127 National Societies.<sup>12</sup> Finally, on the initiative of the Austrian Red Cross and with the support of the ICRC and the International Federation, 52 National Societies gathered in Vienna on 7 and 8 October 2015 to celebrate the 50th anniversary and further reflect on the responsibilities of the Movement’s leadership in strengthening the Principles.

Regional workshops	Number of National Societies	Number of National Society representatives
Middle East & North Africa	10	14
Africa	39	50
Asia-Pacific	17	22
Europe	33	50
Latin America	28	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>167</b>

In parallel, a number of initiatives related to the Fundamental Principles were carried out throughout the Movement, such as an internal ICRC study on its application of the Principles, the global impact study on the International Federation’s ABC (Agents of Behavioural Change) initiative and the British Red Cross’s “Principles in Action” project.

Reaching beyond the Movement, a global opinion poll was carried out in early 2015 on the Principles of impartiality and neutrality.<sup>13</sup> Of the 13,000 people interviewed in 13 countries

<sup>9</sup> Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary*, Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of the main conclusions of these consultations, see the document “Outline of workshop 1,” available at: [www.standcom.ch/download/cod2013/wo/CD13\\_WS1\\_FP\\_outline\\_30Sept\\_clean\\_EN.pdf](http://www.standcom.ch/download/cod2013/wo/CD13_WS1_FP_outline_30Sept_clean_EN.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> For a summary of the recommendations of the workshop see the document “Report of the workshop,” available at: [www.standcom.ch/download/cod2013/cod2013-ws/cod13-ws1-summary-fp-eng.pdf](http://www.standcom.ch/download/cod2013/cod2013-ws/cod13-ws1-summary-fp-eng.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The workshops were held in the Middle East and North Africa (Beirut), Africa (Nairobi and Dakar), Asia-Pacific (Kuala Lumpur), Europe (Ashgabat and Budapest) and the Americas (Bogotá).

<sup>13</sup> This global opinion poll was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of the ICRC in the first quarter of 2015. It was conducted in 13 countries with a representative sample of 1,000 adults in each country: Brazil, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Palestine, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

worldwide, more than 80% agreed that the primary focus of humanitarian organizations should be to assist regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religious beliefs and political opinions – thereby confirming the relevance of impartiality – and 71% considered neutrality as a positive attribute for humanitarian organizations.

This report aims to highlight the main findings of the Movement-wide initiative in order to provide a sound basis for discussions during the plenary commission on Fundamental Principles.

#### **4. Findings of the Movement-wide initiative**

The **universal relevance and ongoing significance of the Principles** was recognized in both the consultations and the workshops.

The themes of the regional workshops were chosen based on the findings of the consultations organized within the Movement in 2013 in the run-up to the Council of Delegates in Sydney: 1) National Societies' unique **auxiliary role** and the challenges it poses to the application of the Principles; 2) **partnerships**, both within and outside the Movement (coordination), and tensions with the Principles; 3) the relationship between **neutrality, access and public advocacy**; and 4) the **role and responsibilities of the leadership** in the application of the Principles.

#### **4.1. Main challenges to the application of the Fundamental Principles**

##### **The auxiliary role and the Fundamental Principles**

*“Our auxiliary is a perpetual negotiation with authorities.” (Participant, Africa)*

Unsurprisingly, and in line with debates at previous International Conferences, discussions focused on the tension that the Principle of independence inherently creates between the role of a National Society as auxiliary to the government in the humanitarian field and the requirement for autonomy, and on how to balance this in practice.<sup>14</sup>

Participants acknowledged that the proximity with their governments – an asset that must be nurtured, as it puts National Societies in a privileged position to respond effectively to needs – must constantly be balanced with the need to maintain the autonomy to act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles at all times, being mindful of the consequence this may have on the impartiality of the action and the perceived neutrality of National Societies.

This tension proves most complicated in politically polarized situations, especially in armed conflict and internal strife. Electoral periods were identified as times that can be particularly challenging in that respect. National Societies need to make a particular effort to not be dragged into political controversies and to maintain an appropriate distance from political parties.

Humanitarian needs arising from specific phenomena, such as migration or widespread urban or criminal violence, also raise particular challenges for National Societies as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field given the degree of political sensitivity associated with these phenomena. In Latin America, and especially Central America, urban and gang

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<sup>14</sup> This tension has long been recognized and discussed in International Conferences and resulted, *inter alia*, in the development of the concept of a “balanced relationship” between National Societies and their public authorities, as in Resolution 2 of the 30th International Conference in 2007. See also footnote 21 below.

violence are raising particularly thorny challenges, given that humanitarian needs are real, but National Societies have to cope with the criminal nature of the violence.

The issue of the independence (or lack thereof) of National Societies working internationally (also known as “participating National Societies”) from their governments’ foreign policy also came up repeatedly. This raises particular challenges when participating National Societies operate in third countries where their government is a belligerent or a close support to a party to the armed conflict.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the issue of “nomination” by the authorities of serving or former politicians to senior positions in a National Society sparked heated discussions. The challenges in that respect are twofold. First, there is the question of whether a current politician can hold a leadership position in a National Society, to which most participants replied in the negative. However, the links of senior National Society governance members with politics are not always obvious and straightforward and the issue remains a constant challenge for many National Societies to navigate to ensure they are perceived by the public to be neutral and impartial. The second concern is linked to possible government interference with the appointment of senior management staff or members of governing bodies. While the presence of public officials in the governance of National Societies is a regular occurrence and may contribute positively to maintaining a close working relationship with the authorities, this should not interfere with the National Societies’ ability to take their decisions autonomously.<sup>16</sup>

#### External partnerships and the Fundamental Principles

*“We have to always be considering the optics, the perception of our relationships to the public as well as our actions.” (Participant, Americas)*

A lot of the challenges discussed with regard to the auxiliary role resonate on the topic of external partnerships. While it is agreed that external partnerships are positive and indeed necessary, as they enable a greater coverage of needs and diversification of sources of funding, and may therefore strengthen the impartiality of the response, they can also raise problems of perception and dependence.

Partnerships with United Nations agencies were an issue raised by a number of participants throughout the workshops. Particularly as regards managing the situation where a peacekeeping force engaged in fighting with either of the parties is deployed or where – owing to a Security Council decision or the organization’s engagement in development work alongside the government – the UN is perceived as supporting the government. In such situations, close association with the UN risks impacting the perceived neutrality of the Movement’s components and/or their decision-making autonomy, affecting their ability to uphold the Principle of impartiality. Similarly, partnerships with non-governmental organizations that are particularly vocal and active in public advocacy, whether on humanitarian access, violations of international humanitarian law or human rights issues, can present challenges in terms of the real or perceived neutrality of a National Society.

The increasing role of the armed forces in relief activities, particularly during the emergency phases of natural disasters, was flagged as an ongoing challenge by a number of participants. Participants acknowledged the likely superior logistical capacity of the military response, which can result in faster and larger amounts of much-needed aid being received by affected people

<sup>15</sup> This was also analysed in detail in a study carried out by the ICRC for the 2005 Council of Delegates: “National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field – Study on situations of armed conflict.” Geneva, October 2005.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, the International Federation’s *Guidance for National Society Statutes* recommends that public officials present in any decision-making body of a National Society should not constitute either a controlling majority or minority (see section VII – Election, rotation and profiles).

in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. However, participants were also mindful of the need to have a clear relationship and understanding of roles and ways of working in order to ensure that no confusion is created in the minds of the local population which could have consequences for the National Society being seen as impartial, neutral and independent of government.

Finally, some participants acknowledged that, in addition to perception or independence issues, these partnerships can directly impact the Principle of impartiality. This is the case where partnerships are directed toward some particular communities, such as displaced people for instance, thereby impacting the ability of the National Society to address more urgent needs (e.g. within host communities). This can also be the case where partnerships are so demanding that they divert substantial human resources, affecting the ability of the National Society to conduct other activities.

### Movement coordination and the Fundamental Principles

*“By strengthening Movement coordination, we strengthen our position vis-à-vis external partners.” (Participant, Africa)*

The relationship between Movement coordination and the Fundamental Principles was discussed at length from different perspectives. From the perspective of the National Society in the affected country, unilateral action by other National Societies in their country not only contravenes the rules of the Movement,<sup>17</sup> but also jeopardizes the Principles of unity and universality, which is the ability of a National Society to cover its entire territory and to present the Movement as acting as one. Such lack of coordination can in turn affect the ability to deliver impartial humanitarian aid, as uncoordinated action might result in areas where humanitarian needs might be the greatest not being covered.

From the perspective of participating National Societies, the relative weakness of some National Societies in the affected country, either in terms of capacity or perceived neutrality and independence, was put forward to justify in some cases some degree of unilateral action. In both cases, discussions came down to the importance of solidarity within the Movement, encapsulated in the Principle of universality, which calls for Movement components to support one another through coordinated action. This includes supporting sister National Societies to strengthen their capacity, whether financial, technical or logistical, and also very importantly to strengthen their ability to abide by the Principles of neutrality and independence.

### Balancing neutrality, access and advocacy

*“Neutrality must never be mistaken for indifference.” (Participant, Europe)*

The tensions that may arise between the Principles of impartiality and neutrality triggered in-depth exchanges. Participants acknowledged that strict application of the Principle of impartiality may sometimes impact the perception of the neutrality of the Movement. This is the case when, in situations of inter-ethnic tensions or sectarian conflict, aid to a particularly needy community may trigger resentment from less needy communities that perceive the aid as partisan and biased. The need to build and maintain the confidence of all, as a key element of neutrality, was seen as a vital factor in decision-making.

The tension between public advocacy or positioning and respect for the Principles, with the potential impact this can have on access, also led to rich discussions. While this tension

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<sup>17</sup> Resolution 11 of the 10th International Conference in 1921 states that National Societies operating in another country should first seek the consent of that country's National Society, and Article 3.3 of the Statutes of the Movement states that assistance “shall be given through the National Societies concerned.”



between speaking out and avoiding engaging in controversy is an age-old dilemma, advances in new information technologies, in particular social media, has intensified this challenge. In all workshops, the use of social media by staff and volunteers and the resulting tension between respect for their freedom of speech and a certain duty of discretion linked to the Principle of neutrality sparked lively discussions.

### Principled humanitarian leadership

*“As a humanitarian leader, I have to be able to assert these Principles and be able to take the heat when they are challenged.” (Participant, Asia-Pacific)*

The key role of the leadership in ensuring that National Societies abide by the Principles was noted in all workshops. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure that National Societies are well equipped to respect the Principles at an institutional and operational level (e.g. by using the Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification or the Safer Access Framework<sup>18</sup>) and to embody principled leadership through their behaviour and decision-making (e.g. through the 7 4 7 Framework and Agents of Behavioural Change (ABC)<sup>19</sup>). The operational relevance and institutional effectiveness of the Fundamental Principles also depend on the integrity of National Societies' leaders and people, of which acting in full accordance with the Fundamental Principles constitutes a key ingredient. It was noted in some workshops that the governing bodies of National Societies have particular responsibilities, as the guardians of the Principles, to counterbalance the daily constraints and often conflicting priorities that the management has to face, which might result at times in compromising on the Principles.

With regard to leadership, the challenges of developing, motivating and retaining a strong volunteer force, driven by the spirit of voluntary service, was mentioned in several workshops, in particular in Africa and the Americas. Participants described how the consequences of poor decisions can have a dire impact in terms of volunteers' safety and security and access to vulnerable people. In increasingly complex environments, volunteers serve at high risk, and it is imperative that they are supported and that the Fundamental Principles are understood, internalized and reflected in their actions.

## **4.2. Good practices and main recommendations**

It is not the objective of this report to exhaustively list the many concrete examples of good practices, shared in the workshops, that were developed to overcome some of these challenges. Readers can refer for that purpose to the reports of the workshops.<sup>20</sup> A common thread underpinning all of the recommendations and indeed workshop discussions is the shared understanding that building trust and acceptance is essential in order to create an environment in which the Principles will be respected. It must be built at both an individual and institutional level – with communities, affected people and authorities alike – and is made possible through consistent application of the Principles. A number of recurrent recommendations came out of the discussions and deserve to be mentioned.

### **a. A sound legal and statutory basis is key**

<sup>18</sup> The Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC), developed by the International Federation, and the Safer Access Framework (SAF), developed by the ICRC, were mentioned throughout the different regional workshops as good examples of tools that enable the “operationalization” of the Fundamental Principles. More information on these tools is available at: [www.ifrc.org/Global/rw/annual-report-2013/contents/capacity-building](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/rw/annual-report-2013/contents/capacity-building) and [www.icrc.org/saferaccess](http://www.icrc.org/saferaccess)

<sup>19</sup> The 7 4 7 Framework was designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the Fundamental Principles and link humanitarian values and principles. It provides the framework on which the International Federation's ABC programme is based. Available at: [www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201506/747leaflet-EN-FINAL.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201506/747leaflet-EN-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> The reports of the different workshops can be found on the website of the 32nd International Conference: <http://rcrcconference.org/fundamental-principles/>

In order to maintain the National Society's operational independence and its ability to respect the Fundamental Principles, their auxiliary relationship must be clearly defined in domestic legislation, in a National Society's Statutes or Constitution, and in the formal agreements concluded between the National Society and public authorities. These instruments should notably define the roles entrusted to the National Society as part of its auxiliary function, provide for the adequate 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 conformity with the Fundamental Principles.

**b. Lay the groundwork in peacetime for respect in the event of political polarization, violence or armed conflict**

Participants acknowledged that the most acute consequences for the application of the Principles tend to occur in times of armed conflict or heightened political polarization. Being able to resist authorities' requests in conflict requires a solid, Principles-based dialogue to be established in peacetime. National Societies must also engage with all political parties, opinion leaders and civil society groups to explain their work and the importance of the Principles, which can be useful during electoral periods.

Finally, one workshop participant also stressed how important it was, in a context of interethnic conflict, to have a balanced representation among staff and volunteers, guided by the Principle of unity. However, such a configuration – which enables the National Society to maintain a relative degree of neutrality and independence necessary for impartial humanitarian action – must be developed during peacetime, as it is generally too late when an armed conflict erupts.

**c. Consistent and constant dialogue**

Echoing the previous recommendation, the importance of proactively engaging in constant and consistent dialogue and communication on the Fundamental Principles with public authorities and the public at large was regularly emphasized.

As far as the auxiliary role is concerned, achieving a “balanced relationship”<sup>21</sup> with the authorities requires such constant and sustained dialogue, rooted in domestic and international law and in the Statutes of the Movement and decisions of the International Conferences. Indeed, it was widely agreed that the knowledge and awareness of political leaders and civil servants has to be developed and nurtured. This includes engaging with them at technical or working level, as well as with parliamentarians and other political parties, which can prevent difficulties in the event of a change of government.

Dialogue and communication on the Principles is also important with opinion and religious leaders, the media, academics and students, the diverse volunteer base, advocacy groups and the public at large.

**d. Independent and thorough assessments**

The importance of conducting thorough assessments was mentioned recurrently during the workshops. First, risk assessments should be routinely carried out before engaging in new activities, such as partnerships with external actors or public advocacy campaigns, in order to balance the opportunities and risks that this creates in light of the Fundamental Principles.

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of “balanced relationship” was first developed in a 2003 study on “National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field,” commissioned by the International Federation as a follow up to the 27th International Conference (Geneva, 1999). Since then, it has been referred to in a number of Council of Delegates and International Conference resolutions, including Resolution 2 of the 30th International Conference (Geneva, 2007) on the “Specific nature of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in action and partnerships and the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.”

Secondly, developing and nurturing the ability to carry out independent and comprehensive assessments of needs is also crucial to maintaining some autonomy from public authorities or external partners, and ensuring that such partnerships are carried out in accordance with the Principles of humanity and impartiality. In turn, maintaining this autonomy reinforces the credibility of National Societies vis-à-vis the authorities and other partners, and vis-à-vis the communities themselves, thereby strengthening the perception of independence and neutrality.

**e. Leveraging the complementary role and comparative advantages of the different Movement components**

The Principle of universality, and its inherent idea of solidarity within the Movement, is instrumental to leveraging the complementarity and comparative advantages of the different Movement components in order to apply the Fundamental Principles. National Societies bring added value to implementing impartial, needs-based humanitarian action due to their local presence and volunteer base, while the ICRC and the International Federation can mitigate risks to perceived neutrality and independence linked to the auxiliary role in certain circumstances, notably in armed conflict. For instance, in some contexts, the ICRC's relationship with national armed forces enables the National Society to maintain a certain distance from those authorities and avert the risk of being too closely associated with them.

Workshop participants repeatedly stressed that any initiatives to build the capacity of National Societies should incorporate and uphold the Fundamental Principles, as prescribed by the Principle of universality, while respecting the role of the National Society.

**f. Ongoing training and reflection on the application of the Principles is imperative**

Training National Society staff, volunteers and certainly leaders on the Fundamental Principles is at once obvious and of paramount importance. Workshop participants, most of whom were National Society leaders, acknowledged that awareness of the Principles among the leadership should be bolstered given the key role that leaders play in enabling Principles-based humanitarian action.

**g. Adapting to context**

Applying the Fundamental Principles is not a straightforward recipe or a “one-size-fits-all” approach. While guidance and policy documents rooted in the Principles at Movement level are useful and necessary, National Societies must continually adapt the Principles to the local context and realities. For instance, the potential impact of engaging in public advocacy on migrants' rights on the ability of a National Society to maintain the confidence of all and to pursue its activities very much depends on the sensitivity of the issue in a given context and the openness of the authorities and the public in that regard. This contextualization of the Fundamental Principles, including in training resources or communications, requires substantial efforts by the National Societies themselves, since they know their context and audience best. They can, however, benefit from the support of the ICRC, the International Federation or other National Societies in that respect.

### **4.3. Main conclusions of regional workshops**

In conclusion, the series of workshops clearly demonstrated that the application of the Fundamental Principles is a daily reality in the Movement. As such, there is no need to “reaffirm the Principles” as such, as Movement components live and breathe them on a daily basis. This is not to say that efforts should not continue. On the contrary, all Movement components are

confronted with daily challenges, which is inherent to the very nature of the Principles, and there is always room for improvement.

Rather than additional guidance – there was an overall feeling that the Movement is well equipped in that respect – this entails deepening the sensitization of and **dialogue with States**, investing more in **contextualized and practical training** on the Principles (including for external audiences) and, last but not least, encouraging the **sharing of good practices and peer-to-peer exchange**. Indeed, the opportunity offered by this series of workshops to collectively reflect, discuss and exchange among peers on the application of the Fundamental Principles was unanimously acclaimed.

## **5. Highlights from the Vienna celebration of the Fundamental Principles**

The general conclusions from the regional workshops on Fundamental Principles were presented to more than 100 leaders from 52 National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of their adoption, which took place in Vienna on 7 and 8 October 2015.

When the participants considered the seven recommendations emerging from the regional workshops (described in section 4.2. above), they proposed a number of concrete measures that can be taken to strengthen respect for the principles under each recommendation (a non-exhaustive list of which is annexed to the present report).

Generally, it was stressed that dialogue and communication between all Movement components is critical to ensure that approaches are tailored to the context in all situations. More specifically, the various measures proposed fall under three broad categories, confirming the main conclusions of the Movement-wide initiative:

- **A continuing emphasis on education on Fundamental Principles and the values underlying humanitarian action:** commonly referred to as “humanitarian education,” i.e. raising the awareness and understanding of a wide public audience of the Fundamental Principles was seen as crucial to promote greater respect of humanitarian action and actors.
- **Ramping up internal training and peer-to-peer exchange on the application of the Principles:** the Movement’s leadership has a key role to play in ensuring greater respect and good practical application of the Principles. The knowledge and understanding of Movement leaders should not be taken for granted and participants should be encouraged to promote greater awareness within the Movement.
- **Investing in communication and dialogue with public authorities:** Consistent and constant dialogue with public authorities on Fundamental Principles and the specificities of National Societies’ auxiliary role should be reinforced.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations (the way forward)**

The seven Fundamental Principles have provided an essential ethical, operational and institutional framework for the Movement since their adoption 50 years ago, and their continued relevance has been reaffirmed unequivocally throughout the multiple consultations and discussions held in recent years.

The focus of the Movement’s attention should now lie in redoubling its efforts to implement, contextualize and apply these Principles in light of changing environments and evolving contexts, to ensure that those in need may continue to receive assistance and protection in a manner that is reliable and consistent, based on humanitarian concern alone.

However, the Movement cannot do this alone; Movement components need the renewed commitment of States to support them in ensuring respect for the Principles. In this regard, the thematic plenary commission will provide a golden opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the components of the Movement and States and consider actions that can be taken to promote better respect and understanding.

The 32nd International Conference provides an opportunity to make concrete pledges to reinforce education, training, sharing of good practice, and dialogue on the Fundamental Principles. In particular, it is hoped that States and their National Societies commit, including through joint pledges, to an in-depth dialogue on measures to be taken to promote greater respect of the Fundamental Principles by the Movement and States alike, for the benefit of the people we serve.

## **ANNEX 1**

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

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **VOLUNTARY SERVICE**

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

#### **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.

#### **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.

## ANNEX 2

### CONCRETE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN RESPECT FOR THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES – VIENNA, 7-8 OCTOBER 2015

*What follows is a non-exhaustive and indicative list of measures proposed by participants at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Fundamental Principles in Vienna in October 2015, building on the seven recommendations that emerged from the regional workshops on Fundamental Principles.*

#### 1. **A sound legal and statutory basis is key**

- National Societies can give effect to and strengthen their legal and statutory bases through ongoing and consistent dialogue with public authorities, including with the aim of reviewing or further defining their legal status in domestic law in line with the Fundamental Principles.
- Peer-to-peer exchange and support among National Societies to strengthen their legal and statutory bases should be encouraged, including through regional networks of legal advisers.
- National Societies could benefit from increased support from Geneva-based institutions to strengthen their legal and statutory bases.

#### 2. **Lay the groundwork, in peacetime, for respect in the event of political polarization, violence or armed conflict**

- In peacetime, National Societies can engage in partnerships with their public authorities for integrating the Principles into public education programmes.
- National Societies should develop a more systematic dialogue, including on the Fundamental Principles, with the public authorities at all levels (e.g. at the local, regional and national levels; at all levels of government; with parliamentarians, etc.). This could be done by developing policy and guidance for all staff.
- National Societies should develop clear contingency plans for events or crises that could threaten their ability to apply the Principles (e.g. for electoral periods), and have well trained intervention teams.

#### 3. **Consistent and constant dialogue**

- The creation of “Friends of the Red Cross/Red Crescent” groups should be promoted among parliamentarians, and specifically targeted communication material, such as regular newsletters, should be developed.
- Humanitarian education in schools should be developed by integrating humanitarian action and principles into civic education curricula.
- Online platforms should be developed within the Movement to share good practices, experiences and ideas.

#### 4. **Independent and thorough assessments**

- Movement components should jointly design or further develop tools based on the Fundamental Principles to conduct needs and/or risk assessments, including in view of assessing the potential impact of new partnerships or advocacy initiatives on the respect of the Principles.
- Movement components should further bolster communication with affected communities with the aim of ensuring that communities' voices are firmly included and reflected in needs assessments.

**5. Leveraging the complementary role and comparative advantages of the different Movement components**

- Global strategic plans of the Movement should be better informed by plans of action developed at local level by National Societies, within the framework provided by the Fundamental Principles.
- Communication and dialogue among Movement components must be continuously improved in order to promote greater respect for the different and complementary roles of the different components and ensure that an adapted, context-tailored approach is taken in all situations.

**6. Ongoing training and reflection on the application of the Principles is imperative**

- Movement Induction Courses (MIC) for leadership should be organized more frequently at the international and regional levels, as well as online, and should be aimed at National Societies' presidents, secretary generals, board members and all senior management. MICs should have a strong focus on the practical application of the Fundamental Principles.
- The Fundamental Principles should be fully integrated into phase 2 (peer-to-peer review) of the Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process, including in relation to training and coaching.
- Opportunities offered by social media to create friendlier and more easily updatable training modules on the application of Fundamental Principles should be taken fully into account.

**7. Adapting to context**

- Sharing of experiences on challenges and good practices in the application of the Principles at various levels should be increased. This can be done, for instance, by creating platforms for discussion in existing regional meetings, such as a systematic two-hour sessions focusing on the Principles.
- More simulation/scenario-based exercises should be developed that are easily adaptable to different local contexts, with different modules adapted to different target groups (including leadership).