

CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONS

(13 November 2001)

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Chairpersons of the Commissions: Mr. Mustafa El Bashir, President,
Sudanese Red Crescent Society
Dr. Abel Pena y Lillo, President,
Bolivian Red Cross
Ms. Leonor Ines Luciano, Chairman,
Philippines Red Cross

Rapporteur: Mr. Wang Xiaohua, Director, Int. Relations
Chinese Red Cross

Keys points highlighted in the debates**1. General comments and clarifications**

A serious concern was expressed as to the extent of the problem of displacement. There was strong support for the background document as well as the draft resolution. Appreciation was voiced on the joint ICRC/International Federation effort, considered to be timely and important.

Participants spoke from rich experience, expressing concern about insufficient resources and long-term support, and the lack of coordination both within the Movement and with other actors. Many speakers emphasised the problems of the long-term displaced, referring to them as the "forgotten". Participants also spoke of the lack of sufficient action to address the root causes of displacement.

2. How to improve the coverage of needs of refugees and IDPs?

National Societies identified the importance of being the first to provide assistance to those in need, while at the same time recognising the imperative for a long-term commitment.

Many speakers referred to the need to address all categories of persons affected by displacement, including, but not limited to, persons unable to flee, local and host populations, returnees as well as migrants, regardless of their legal status. Mention was also made of urbanisation and the plight of those consigned to the slums and poverty belts of large cities.

At the same time, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of not focusing on a particular category of persons to the detriment of those more in need. The Movement's response must respect the principle of impartiality at all times.

It was also considered important to include beneficiaries and their representatives at all stages and all levels of intervention.

A number of speakers expressed the need to link the general work of protection and assistance with the fight against discrimination and xenophobia, as well as to integrate volunteers into all action on behalf of the displaced.

National Societies were seriously concerned at the lack of information - particularly as regards statistics and the legal bases underpinning their work - and the detrimental effect this has on not only facilitating access to the displaced, but also in raising funds.

A statement was made as to the absolute right to seek asylum, which led to a reflection on the need for clarification concerning the role of National Societies as regards the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Stress was laid on the need for careful analysis of situations and the danger of applying standard interventions regardless of the specific nature of the crisis, the vulnerabilities, and without consideration of the capacities of the National Societies involved. It was emphasised that the two Geneva-based institutions need to harmonise their methodologies, particularly regarding analysis and needs assessment. This was considered essential to ensure that the Movement operated in unison.

A number of speakers suggested the adaptation of existing planning and operational tools to meet the specific needs for intervention on behalf of those affected by displacement. Examples cited were: CAS/RAS, FACT, VCA, Sphere and Reach Out.

Participants severely criticised the international funding system for the problem of displacement and its tendency to prioritise easily accessible disasters which attract media attention during the emergency phase only and without any regard to long-term needs. According to a number of National Societies, the process of funding needs to be entirely re-visited, not only taking into account long term needs, but also the requirement for burden-sharing within the Movement. Particular concern was expressed about shrinking financial support to National Societies from both the International Federation and UNHCR. One speaker went so far as to say "you are deserting us".

Participants stated that in light of reducing resources and expanding needs, there had to be prioritisation as regards Movement intervention. National Societies themselves also recognised the need to better understand funding mechanisms and to raise resources locally.

National Societies called for enhanced resources within the Federation Secretariat to support them in their work on displacement.

3. Suggestions for improvement of communication and coordination within the Movement

Good communication and coordination were considered vital to achieve the most effective outcome for the beneficiaries.

In addition, there is a need to coordinate and communicate better on advocacy issues, including the requirement for a common platform and unified positions on issues relating to displacement. The capacity for advocacy must be improved, including through the publication of guidelines. It was pointed out that tools do exist which could facilitate access to the beneficiaries, and access by the beneficiaries to social systems and services. These tools need to be explained and made easily accessible to National Societies. They include Conference resolutions, particularly the International Conference plan of action - signed up to by States.

It was suggested that better use should be made of existing regional and international meetings and organisations as vectors for delivering the Movement's messages to Governments and to the media.

4. Identification of issues that should be raised with UNHCR to ensure that Movement identity and Principles are better presented in future partnerships

While the discussions focussed on relations with the UNHCR, it was underlined that the issues this raised are also applicable to cooperation with other external organisations, including the military.

The importance of ensuring respect for the principle of impartiality when acting as an implementing partner was repeatedly emphasised. It was pointed out that while the UNHCR mandate focuses on refugees, the Movement's mandate covers all vulnerable people.

There was a request for guidance on how to identify appropriate partners and how to formalise relationships in full respect of the Fundamental Principles. There were several requests for written guidelines concerning practical issues raised when working as UNHCR's implementing partner, such as the use of UN emblems, vehicles, and armed escorts.

The International Federation was urged to make representations to UNHCR that National Societies not be requested to participate in UNHCR's fund-raising efforts with the public at large. At the same time, the need for a more co-ordinated approach to fund-raising by the Movement and UNHCR was emphasised.

The participants welcomed the ICRC/International Federation initiative to launch a process of consultation with UNHCR with a view to clarifying the terms upon which the components of the Movement engage in co-operation with UNHCR. National Societies expressed the desire to be involved in and be kept informed on the progress of this initiative.

5. Comments on the draft resolution

A number of proposed amendments have been incorporated into the draft resolution.