

# Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross

## **Introduction**

Will the Red Cross survive? Should it survive? Has it really a mission in the world of today? In the world of the 1980s and thereafter? What is that mission? How can Red Cross gear up for it?

These questions have been the subject of thoughtful discussion among Red Cross people for some years. In 1972, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the League of Red Cross Societies, in co-operation with the National Societies, decided to take a hard look at the future in the form of a comprehensive examination of the role of the Red Cross.

The sponsoring bodies established a Joint Committee for the Re-appraisal of the Role of the Red Cross. Funds to finance the Re-appraisal were sought from non-Red Cross sources and in February 1973 a Study Director was appointed to undertake the work.

## **Scope and Approach**

The scope of the Re-appraisal is wide indeed, as can be seen from the terms of reference for the Study Director:

“ While carrying out his task the Study Director shall especially:

- pay attention to the present image, status, tasks and co-operation of all Red Cross bodies (ICRC, League, National Societies) and to the division of work between these and the public authorities and other voluntary agencies;
- find out if the role of the Red Cross in the community of today, internationally and nationally, is what it reasonably and appropriately ought to be and could be;

- make clear the future role of the Red Cross at middle range and long range as far as its image, status and tasks are concerned. ”

The terms of reference are so broad, and the activities of Red Cross so diverse, that a first difficulty was to decide where the Re-appraisal should begin. Equally difficult was the question of where it should stop.

It seemed obvious that no study could hope to tackle and to solve all the problems of Red Cross in either their national form, as found in 121 countries, or in their international expressions. Also, while the focus of the Re-appraisal is on the future, there are obvious limits to predicting the nature of the world or the course of events “ at middle range and long range ”.

Thus it was decided that certain problems should not be tackled: the technical content of health and welfare programmes, for example, or questions concerning the programmes or practices of a particular National Society. Rather, the conclusion was that the thrust of the Re-appraisal should be directed at those questions which affect all components of Red Cross at both the national and international level.

Even within these limits, it seemed unrealistic to believe that answers to all present and future problems could be found. Rather, the Re-appraisal should try to establish a firm sense of direction, together with the policies, structures, practices and attitudes which will give Red Cross the capacity and adaptability required to anticipate and solve its own problems.

The Re-appraisal is therefore seen as the initiation of a process of evaluation which will continue long after the formal studies are completed. Given this view, it becomes clear that it cannot be done wholly from “ outside ”—the basic conclusions must come largely from the Red Cross itself. And if the conclusions are to be acted upon, it seems that the more people who can be involved in the process the better the results will be.

In summary, the Re-appraisal has been defined not as a research exercise but as a vehicle for change.

## Content and Method

The content of the Re-appraisal and the methods to be followed have been set out in a detailed plan of action, a summarized version of which was submitted to the International Conference of the Red Cross at Teheran. Briefly, the content might be described under three phases:

1. *Present Role and Capacity*—the relevance, effectiveness and importance of Red Cross at national and international level.
2. *Options for Change*—how can Red Cross improve its effectiveness and relevance?
3. *Future Role and Changes Required*—the future role which Red Cross could or should play at national and international level.

Under the first phase—Role and Capacity—answers will be sought for such questions as the following: What is the essence of Red Cross? Is the whole idea of Red Cross still valid? Are the principles in harmony with the times? Are those principles capable of interpretation and application? Are Red Cross activities meeting the real needs of today? Are those activities well carried out? What are the resources of Red Cross?

Several studies are planned to shed some light on these questions. A separate study will, for example, be done on each of the separate components of Red Cross—the International Committee, the League and the National Societies. Other studies, directed to such Red Cross functions as Protection, Assistance, and Community Services, will complement and cross-check the material produced from the institutional studies.

Under the second phase, Options for Change, studies have been designed to consider alternative ways in which Red Cross can increase and strengthen its capacity. These studies will help to determine whether the answer lies in different structures, a different kind of leadership or membership, better financing, more (or less) government support, more (or less) professionalism, more (or less) reliance on voluntary service, etc. Special studies will examine whether changes are desirable in the basic philosophy of Red Cross, in Red Cross principles and values and in Red Cross priorities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In all, eighteen separate studies are planned. Details can be found in Document P.6 of the 1973 International Conference of the Red Cross.

The final phase, Future Role and Changes Required, can be detailed only when the first two sets of studies are completed. This is the point at which direct Red Cross involvement is crucial and where, it is hoped, the Re-appraisal can depart in method from the more traditional pattern of research followed by a formal report.

In general, the method will be to expose the results of the various studies to the widest possible discussion and debate. For example, certain of the functional studies lend themselves admirably to the technique of review by a panel of Red Cross experts and informed outsiders. Studies of a more general nature might better be considered by more diverse groups—National Societies, governing bodies, or regional symposia.

A special project is already under way inviting written submissions from all National Societies, as well as from governments, international organizations and individuals, expressing their views on the Red Cross and its future.

This particular project illustrates rather well the spirit of the Re-appraisal's approach and method. At Teheran, the Study Director acquainted all conference participants with the project. In urging National Societies to respond, he expressed the hope that their response would be the product not of one person but of the whole Society. "It is," he said "an opportunity to evaluate your own Society and to think through your views on the future of Red Cross. Ideally, it should be done in a manner which permits as many people as possible to participate."

It also provides governments and international organizations with an opportunity to review their relationship with Red Cross in both its national and its international aspects—a review of their expectations, how well those expectations are met and what role, in their view, Red Cross should play in the future.

### **Progress to Date**

In drawing up the plan of action for the Re-appraisal, it was necessary to schedule the work in a way which permitted certain studies to feed others at an appropriate time. The schedule called for certain studies to begin in the autumn of 1973, with others staged over the next six months. All studies are scheduled for completion

by the autumn of 1974, at which time the analysis and testing of conclusions—the final phase—will commence.

So far, the planned schedule has been honoured. The largest study, and one of the most basic, is the review, or “ Profile ” study, of National Societies. This is a comprehensive study of the present role, capacity and potential of a representative cross-section of National Societies. The study, involving about 30 Societies, will be conducted on the basis of visits by small teams using a standardized method of enquiry and working in close co-operation with a local counterpart.

The teams have now been recruited and trained and have worked out their own enquiry format. Three National Societies have been visited to test the format and the techniques and to identify gaps in the training of the teams. Arrangements to visit the remaining Societies have now been made and all field work for this study will be completed by June 1974.

Suitable consultants have also been found for most of the other major studies and they will begin on schedule. In the selection of both the teams and the consultants it has been possible to achieve a sensible balance between Red Cross and non-Red Cross people. The Red Cross staff have been drawn from the League, National Societies and the International Committee.

The enthusiasm with which the Re-appraisal has been received within Red Cross circles and outside has been extremely encouraging. Excellent co-operation has been achieved with the International Committee and the League Secretariat. U.N. agencies, international non-governmental organizations and academic bodies have shown great interest and have offered assistance and advice. At Teheran, almost all National Societies demonstrated a strong interest in and enthusiasm for the Re-appraisal and for the general approach that is being followed. If that interest and enthusiasm can be maintained and built upon, the Re-appraisal can be a powerful and practical instrument for guiding the Red Cross into the future.

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