

## **SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL SOCIETY FIELD STAFF**

*The following document, which was drawn up by the ICRC Relief Division, was presented and discussed at the "Regional Disaster Preparedness Workshop" held in Maseru, Lesotho, from 16 to 21 May 1983. The International Review considers that it merits the attention of all National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.*

### **I. PREAMBLE**

Present-day warfare, which in many instances has become indiscriminate in the methods and means used (for example: indiscriminate bombing, mines, booby traps) increases the risks run by relief workers in carrying out their mission. The following recommendations, which correspond largely with the ICRC's internal safety instructions, are intended to draw the attention of National Society personnel to some simple, practical safety measures that can contribute to the reduction of risks connected with relief work in the field in times of conflict. The list is not exhaustive and may of course vary from instance to instance.

### **II. PERSONAL FACTORS**

In addition to the observance of practical measures, it is clear that the relief worker's safety depends also on his attitude when confronted with situations involving danger.

This attitude is primarily a part of his personality, but can also be related to a possible weakening of his stamina as a result of circumstances.

## 1. Personality

Maturity, self-control, the capacity to evaluate a situation in the heat of the moment, an ability to assess the danger, and determination are some of the qualities which are required of a good relief worker.

The recruitment process does not always allow for an in-depth evaluation of such qualities, and the relief worker himself must make, in all honesty, his own assessment in this respect.

There is no reason to be ashamed of giving up; on the contrary, the reasonableness of those who have done so, feeling that they did not have—or did not yet have—the qualities required, has always been appreciated. For lack of experience, however, the attitude one will have in the face of danger is not always known to the individual himself, and it may happen that, in the course of a mission, one may discover that one is absolutely not « made for the job ». Here again, *true courage lies in knowing when to give up.*

## 2. Weakening of endurance

Different factors can undermine the most secure personality. Among those that particularly come to mind are stress, fatigue—the medical and psychological syndrome of “war fatigue” (apathy, indifference to danger, automatic behaviour) is well known—the excessive consumption of alcohol or medicaments, strained relations within the team, a feeling of powerlessness vis-à-vis the enormity of the task. Relief workers should always be aware of this. *It is essential for them, in the long term, to keep in good physical condition, even at the expense, sometimes, of tasks which appear to be urgent.* It is clear that there are periods during which the workload is heavier than at others, and this must be taken into account, but it is absolutely essential to try to spare some time for relaxation, which will allow for the “recharging of batteries”.

## 3. Fear

Apart from what has been said above, *fear*, the natural reaction to danger, is a normal feeling which should be admitted, both in oneself and in others. It can even play a positive role of regulator, or protective mechanism (signalling “danger”). What should be avoided is the excess which leads either to panic or to temerity.

— *Panic* is the result of uncontrolled fear: it can be contagious and lead to mishap. It is therefore necessary *in all circumstances to endeavour to give at least an appearance of calm and confidence*, which,

by easing the tension, often makes it possible to overcome the most dangerous situations.

- *The majority of accidents, however, arise from the absence of fear, from recklessness.* In all circumstances, therefore, the relief worker should seek to control his impulses; not, for example, to leap unthinkingly to the rescue of victims falling near him, but to evaluate the situation calmly. *To be wounded himself is not the best way for a relief worker to assist a wounded individual.*

#### 4. Other factors

The relief worker should also be on his guard against such feelings as fatalism, a presentiment of death, or, at the other extreme, a sensation of euphoria, or a feeling of invulnerability. It is essential, in such cases, for him to express his feelings, to confide in his superiors or colleagues; there is no shame in this. *Thus, frank and open discussion must in all circumstances be the rule within a relief team.*

### III. INFORMATION

The first pillar of safety is information. Everything depends on its quality (abundance and reliability). It is therefore essential that it be gathered, synthesized and transmitted rapidly and completely at every level. Decisions concerning safety can only be taken on the basis of a very good knowledge of events. The relief worker will endeavour to keep his superiors and colleagues fully informed about the situation and the development to be expected in his area. Headquarters, through the team leader, will provide the relief worker with more general information concerning points relevant to safety. Furthermore, all authorities concerned should be fully informed of where, when and how the relief action takes place. In addition to this, dissemination of Red Cross and general humanitarian principles should be made at all levels and at all times.

### IV. ACTION PRINCIPLES

1. No action should be undertaken within a territory against the will of the authorities.
2. No action should be undertaken without taking every precaution to ensure the safety of the participants.

3. In principle, the Red Cross/Red Crescent will neither request nor accept a military escort.
4. In principle, all Red Cross/Red Crescent vehicles involved in the field should be clearly marked with the corresponding emblem. No armed persons, whether military or civilian, should be allowed to be aboard such vehicles.
5. In no case should Red Cross/Red Crescent personnel be armed.

#### **6. Assigning others to a dangerous mission**

- The danger to which any other person is exposed must not be greater than that to which it would be acceptable to submit oneself.
- The person who takes a risk must only do so in full knowledge of the facts.
- No pressure must be brought to bear on anyone to carry out a dangerous mission.

### **V. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

#### **1. Wearing of emblem**

In general, on mission, the relief worker will be identified, in the course of his work, by means of a distinctive emblem.

According to the circumstances, the emblem may be a badge, an armband, a tabard with emblem on back and front, a helmet with emblem on back and front, a flag—or a combination of any of these.

#### **2. Documents**

The relief worker should always be able to identify himself as a member of the National Society. In addition to this, he/she should be in possession of the necessary laissez-passer and other documents established and/or required by the authorities.

#### **3. Field missions**

- Before undertaking a difficult mission, the itinerary to be followed should be fixed and the details left in writing at the base; in case of repeated missions, a regular time-table is a safety factor.
- During a mission, the established itinerary should always be adhered to.

— At the end of each mission, the actual return should be made known to the base.

#### **4. Photographic equipment, recorders**

Use of these is not recommended, as it may jeopardize a relief worker's safety, a team's safety or even a whole relief operation.

#### **5. Activity at night**

Relief action should not take place in the field at night, except by special decision of those in charge.

#### **6. Evacuation plan**

An evacuation plan, both individual (in case of accident or illness) and collective (in case of military action) should be drawn up and made known to all personnel in every team where an emergency evacuation might be necessary.

#### **7. Other safety measures**

##### **Marking of vehicles**

As already stated above (4.4), in principle, all Red Cross/Red Crescent vehicles involved in the field should be clearly marked with the corresponding emblem.

With regard to the marking of vehicles, it must not be forgotten that the most important factor is its visibility; the protective sign of the red cross on a white ground must be as large as possible, visible from all directions (particularly from the back!) and illuminated if necessary.

##### **Additional recommendations regarding vehicles**

Two vehicles is the minimum requirement for any undertaking in danger zones.

The number of persons per convoy in danger zones shall, as a rule, be restricted to a strict minimum.

The vehicles shall always be parked in the direction of departure during missions in the field.

If the vehicles are equipped with radios, a liaison check shall be made at the time of each departure and each arrival; other checks shall be carried out en route whenever possible.

### **Recommendations related to the danger of mines**

Experience has clearly demonstrated that passive protection measures for vehicles (armour-plating) are *not advisable*. Relief workers should therefore not be assigned to missions into areas where any presence of mines is suspected.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS CONNECTED WITH THE LOCAL SITUATION**

It is essential for all relief workers to be well acquainted with the general situation so that all the laws in force in the country, whether written or unwritten, are respected. Special attention must be paid to the following:

### **1. Curfew**

It should be strictly observed and the instructions of the civil or military authorities followed.

### **2. Check-points and barriers**

As a general rule, stop at these points.

No objection should ever be raised to identity-checking or to control of vehicle or luggage, including brief-case.

### **3. Cease-fire and truce**

Orders and time-tables in force should be scrupulously respected.

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