

Recommendations for improving the security of humanitarian workers

The meeting of heads of delegation and regional delegates held in Glion from 19 to 22 January 1997 was a milestone in the recent history of the ICRC. Its aim was to mobilize senior operational staff around security issues in situations where humanitarian operations are undertaken. The recent tragic events affecting the ICRC (the assassination of ten staff members in Burundi, Chechnya and Cambodia) and the murder of three members of *Médecins du monde* as well as four United Nations human rights monitors in Rwanda, have highlighted the need to reassess security and humanitarian action on behalf of conflict victims.

Those who attended the meeting unanimously acknowledged that the ICRC's mission — to bring protection and assistance to conflict victims — must be pursued, but they also recognized that, with regard to the security conditions under which this mission is being carried out in some parts of the world, certain limits had been reached and, in some cases, exceeded.

The participants began by drawing up a list of external factors which pose a security risk for humanitarian action as a whole and for the ICRC in particular. These were:

- the emergence of new protagonists and armed groups and the difficulty of grasping the complexity of the situation in conflicts marked by general anarchy;
- humanitarian action is sometimes identified with Western values or even a specific ideology and is being increasingly manipulated (displacement of civilian populations), resisted (ethnic conflicts), or simply disregarded by the belligerents;
- the increase in crime and banditry, sometimes fostered by the material wealth which the humanitarian organizations display;

- the perception of humanitarian aid is blurred by competition among its providers, the intervention of peace-keeping forces, the dual political and humanitarian agendas of States funding assistance, and excessive media exposure, which leads to indifference, confusion about specific roles, and challenging of the independence and neutrality of humanitarian action;
- the red cross emblem, perceived as a Western, Christian symbol, which means that the ICRC may become a target both because of its presence and activities, and because of the emblem's symbolic dimension;
- the confusion about specific mandates and the diversity of operational approaches among the different components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement also represent a risk factor.

At the internal level, too, a thorough appraisal was made. The matters addressed were as diverse as the coherence of the ICRC's message, the image it projects, the management of human resources, the capacity to assess situations and foresee developments, the training of its staff, the degree to which the available resources match the objectives pursued, and the practical application of security measures.

The participants in the Glion meeting drew up a number of recommendations regarding both the development of practical and technical security measures and the adaptation of the ICRC's operational methods to new contexts. Some of the recommendations can be put into practice quite quickly, while others require more in-depth analysis and consultations in the months to come. The proposals put forward may be classified as follows:

Operational policy

- To extend the ICRC's capacity for action through local partners, through improved working methods, and by diversifying networks of contacts so as to increase the acceptability of humanitarian activities.
- It is essential that the operational delegations enhance their capacity for political, social and economic analysis so as to adapt the intervention criteria to the new types of armed conflict. Assessments of needs must be improved and impact studies must be carried out regularly.
- To work for more concerted action on the part of humanitarian agencies in order to combat the adverse effects of competition among them, while safeguarding the specific nature of the ICRC's mission.

- To secure clarification of the respective mandates of the different components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, reaffirming the specific competence of the ICRC to take action on behalf of all victims of war.

Practical security measures

- The ICRC must take a firm stance with the competent authorities when security incidents occur and insist that such incidents be clarified on both internal and external levels; when ICRC delegates are the target of criminal acts, the matter must be referred to the competent courts.
- In situations where the ICRC becomes a target, its heads of delegation are empowered to decide, on the basis of an assessment of the risks involved, whether an operation can be continued or should be suspended, or whether certain regions should no longer be covered.
- Where it is necessary, especially to shield themselves from criminal activity, delegations may resort to the use of armed guards to protect staff in their places of residence and work, giving preference to officially recognized local security firms. Armed escorts may not be used, however, to protect humanitarian activities carried out by the delegation.
- A number of delegates should receive special training in security matters and be placed, on a temporary or a permanent basis, at the disposal of delegations needing such expertise.
- The security and stress-management unit at ICRC headquarters will be strengthened so that it can provide better support, listen more attentively to individual concerns and ensure a more efficient exchange of information between headquarters and the field.

Human resources

- A multicultural approach must be developed with regard to recruitment, training and assignment of field staff.
- The skills of local employees and of the staff of National Societies with which the ICRC cooperates must be enhanced.
- The training and integration of delegates and local staff must be strengthened through improved integration courses and working sessions, the establishment of regional training centres, in-service training in the field, better management of contracts and assignments and

upgrading of the role of field coordinators and heads of sub-delegations.

- Heads of operational delegations must be relieved of day-to-day management tasks in order to have more time at their disposal for strategic work and be better able to listen and analyse. The tasks involved in running a delegation should be redefined and reallocated among its top management.

Image and communication

- Delegations must be free to use the ICRC logo in a flexible manner and in accordance with the circumstances (acceptability of the institution and security conditions).
- The ongoing study on a new emblem, universally recognized as neutral, should be continued.
- The ICRC must devise messages and a communication policy that will not be perceived as moralizing.

In the weeks following the Glion meeting, the Department of Operations and the Executive Board of the ICRC set about implementing some of these recommendations, particularly with respect to strengthening practical security measures and arrangements. A meeting with the main participating National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, devoted for the most part to security issues, took place in mid-March, and a wider effort to mobilize the main humanitarian organizations and the international community is being planned. Other recommendations will be examined and debated in various forums of the Movement, and in a wide-ranging prospective study currently being carried out within the ICRC. It is evident that the tragic events of 1996 and the ensuing Glion meeting have set in motion a process which will have a profound effect on the nature and *modus operandi* of the ICRC in the twenty-first century.

Frank Schmidt
ICRC Department of Operations