

# INTERNATIONAL REVIEW of the Red Cross

## Call for Papers: Revisiting the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Proposals Due: 22 May 2023

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has long relied on a foundational set of principles, the so-called “Fundamental Principles”, as pivotal tools that help to guide its humanitarian work around the world. The number and names of the principles have evolved over the course of the 160 years since the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross. They took on their modern form – as the seven Fundamental Principles – when they were formally codified in 1965, through their unanimous adoption at the 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.<sup>1</sup>

These seven Fundamental Principles are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality.

The principles both drive and enable the Movement’s work. Humanity is the driving force behind and foundation of that work, speaking to the Movement’s core values and mission. Impartiality is, in turn, the most prioritized method of achieving those values and mission in practice. Together, they demand that the Movement provides assistance, prevents and alleviates human suffering, protects life and health, and ensures respect for the human being – all based on the urgency of the need and without making distinctions as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions.

The principles also serve to enable that work. Neutrality and independence help the Movement avoid bias or finding itself beholden to particular sources of power or influence – and avoid the perception of such undue bias or influence. Unity, voluntary service and universality provide the organizational foundations for the Movement to achieve its mission. Together, these five principles help the Movement build trust and confidence and gain safe access to those most in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

*Given the pivotal role of frontline humanitarian workers in engaging with and applying the Fundamental Principles in their day-to-day work, the Review encourages those working at the frontline of the humanitarian sector (whether at headquarter or field level) to submit proposals on the practice of grappling with the principles in your work. In that vein, we welcome proposals that discuss the dual role of the principles: as overarching values, on one hand, and as operational tools and facilitators of humanitarian work, on the other.*

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<sup>1</sup> “The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Ethics and Tools for Humanitarian Action”, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0513-fundamental-principles-red-cross-and-red-crescent>.

## **The Application of the Principles in the Humanitarian Sector**

The seven Fundamental Principles as such apply only to the work of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – that is, to 192 National Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

That said, their efficacy in driving and enabling humanitarian work has encouraged many other entities to commit to some or all of the principles.<sup>2</sup> Notably, the first four Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – are referred to as the “Humanitarian Principles”, which guide, among others, all UN humanitarian assistance programs.<sup>3</sup> Many other organizations have committed to act in accordance with the Humanitarian Principles, or with whichever of those principles they find compatible with their own work.

That said, organizations that treat the Humanitarian or Fundamental Principles as guiding tools in their work may define, interpret and apply them differently, despite using the same terminology. It is clear that the Humanitarian Principles, and the Fundamental Principles more broadly, serve as inspiration and motivation for much of the humanitarian sector.

*With this in mind, the Review is eager to hear about a variety of stakeholders’ experiences interpreting and applying the Humanitarian or Fundamental Principles or similar values – and likewise with experiences choosing not to engage with the principles in humanitarian work.*

## **Challenges and opportunities**

Despite the widely accepted value of the Fundamental and Humanitarian Principles as moral and practical drivers of work in the humanitarian sector, tensions nonetheless arise where the principles find themselves in friction with other motives and imperatives. Meanwhile, the conduct and nature of armed conflict have, in many ways, seismically shifted since the principles were first conceived and later codified. Increasingly, we see armed conflicts of a non-international nature. Technological developments have pushed means and methods of war into uncharted territory. The global public has access to information (and misinformation) at previously unparalleled levels. As the world has shifted, the Movement and the humanitarian sector more broadly have shifted in kind. Though navigating competing ethical demands has long been part and parcel to humanitarian action, many of these demands are compounded by changing warfare and a changing humanitarian sector. Many of these areas of friction boil down to a single broad question:

How can the humanitarian sector square the Humanitarian Principles with sometimes-competing demands of modern humanitarian work?

For example, recent years have seen increasing calls for better localizing and decolonizing humanitarian work – that is, ensuring that, in humanitarian programming, decision-making authority and implementation falls at least in part in the hands of local actors and outside the hands of traditionally powerful states and entities. In kind, the Movement has long recognized an inherent tension between neutrality and independence, on one hand, and a reliance on local actors who

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some of the Fundamental Principles have been drivers of various kinds of humanitarian work since before they existed as the Fundamental Principles. These principles as values thus have a life of their own, apart from their place among the Fundamental Principles.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) codified the first three; UN General Assembly Resolution 58/114 (2004) added independence.

cannot reasonably be asked or expected to shed their own loyalties and biases, on the other hand.<sup>4</sup> Can and should this tension be resolved?

Relatedly, humanity, impartiality and neutrality demand that humanitarian work be carried out without discrimination and without allegiance. That said, the reality is that discrimination – on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and other factors – remains a reality in too many parts of the world. On its own, this poses a real challenge for humanitarians. How does maintaining the sector’s impartiality and neutrality affect humanitarians’ ability to treat a diverse staff of humanitarians’ and diverse world of people in need of assistance equitably? How can the sector navigate apparent tensions between its driving purpose and foundational principles, on the one hand, with the limitations of national- and local-level legal regimes, on the other hand?

Perhaps more than ever before, the modern world is rife with mis- and dis-information. As unreliable information runs riot, especially online, the humanitarian sector faces a dual challenge. First, it must grapple with the challenge of identifying reliable versus unreliable information as it plans its own programming, activities and crisis response. Second, it must come to careful decisions on if and how to respond to mis- and dis-information about humanitarian work itself. How can the humanitarian sector protect its actual and perceived neutrality and impartiality?

Challenges with mis- and dis-information also link to questions of public perception. The principle of independence requires that actors committed to it operate autonomously. Most often, this autonomy is thought of in relation to governments, militaries and other parties to armed conflicts, and other traditional sources of power. That said, autonomy must not be limited to those sources of influence. Rather, public opinion can serve as a significant source of pressure, particularly in a world in which the opportunity to have a voice and be heard online and in public fora is increasing. Vibrant public discourse is pivotal to shining a light on humanitarian harms and challenges. And yet a rich public discourse does not necessarily imply that the public would make its own choices or demands in line with the Fundamental or Humanitarian Principles. Thus, the humanitarian sector must be cautious to treat that discourse as informative, but not authoritative. How can the sector strike the right balance, listening and responding to an active public while maintaining its own independence?

*The discussion of challenges and opportunities presented here is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is intended to lay out some primary contemporary pressure points faced in interpreting and applying the Fundamental and Humanitarian Principles. The Review welcomes proposals that address these and other areas and encourages authors to engage in critical analysis and potential ways forward.*

### **Call for proposals**

As the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fundamental Principles approaches, the International Review of the Red Cross invites proposals regarding those principles – how to understand them anno 2023, how they are applied in practice, how modern developments (in armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and society writ large) pose new challenges and opportunities for the principles and their effectiveness.

Given the breadth of existing literature on the topic, we particularly value proposals with a forward-looking perspective that offer recommendations to improve current legal and humanitarian

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<sup>4</sup> “The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Ethics and Tools for Humanitarian Action”, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, June 2020, <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0513-fundamental-principles-red-cross-and-red-crescent>.

problems, as well as papers that present innovative and creative arguments that may have an impact on future legal and policy debates.

### **Submitting your proposal**

We invite anyone interested to submit by 22 May 2023 an abstract of maximum 500 words, as well as a CV or bio of maximum 300 words. Note that, if you are invited to submit a paper based on your proposal, the target length for a completed traditional article should be between 8,000 and 10,000 words (including footnotes), though we are open to proposals for other formats (opinion notes, etc.). Our selection process will prioritize innovative proposals that have clear potential to contribute to and advance legal and policy debates in this space in the years ahead.

In the abstract, please include:

- (i) title;
- (ii) main arguments you intend to develop; and
- (iii) an explanation as to how your topic innovatively adds to the existing literature and fits within the Review's editorial line (for further reference, please consult our [Guidelines for Authors](#)).

Please send these materials in a single Word document to [review@icrc.org](mailto:review@icrc.org). Note that, in line with our ongoing commitment to provide space for a diverse array of voices in this field, we encourage submissions by established and emerging voices alike.

You will be notified as to the status of your proposal by 22 June 2023. If you are invited to submit a full-length article, a draft of your completed article will be due no later than 15 September 2023.

Please note that submissions to this edition will be reviewed by a jury, the membership of which will be announced in the coming weeks.