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OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

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Report on

THE RESTORING FAMILY LINKS STRATEGY (AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN) FOR THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT (2008-2018)

AND

DRAFT RESOLUTION

**Document prepared by the Central Tracing Agency
of the International Committee of the Red Cross**

Geneva, October 2007

Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008-2018)

Background Report

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this background report is twofold: to describe the evolution of the "*Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008-2018)*" - the *RFL Strategy* – and to present its structure and contents.

2. BACKGROUND

One of the many hardships imposed by armed conflicts and other situations of violence, natural and man-made disasters, and international migration, is the separation of families: because of this, countless numbers of people are left seeking news of family members. Respect for the unity of the family is an integral part of a broader respect for human dignity. Our individual well-being depends to a great extent on our ability to stay in touch with our loved ones. By restoring family links, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) provides support and comfort for hundreds of thousands of people every year.

In December 2004 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) launched a global initiative to strengthen the Movement's ability to restore family links by developing a strategy that would span the next decade. This initiative grew out of the commitments made by the ICRC at the International Conference of Governmental and Non-Governmental Experts on the Missing and their Families (2003) and the Agenda for Humanitarian Action of the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2003).

Today, the Family Links Network¹ faces significant challenges. There is, throughout the Network, insufficient understanding of the work of restoring family links and an inadequate sense of commitment and responsibility. When this is combined with scarcity of resources, the scale and complexity – ever increasing - of the situations requiring humanitarian action, and the growing number of other entities involved in this traditional field of Movement activity, a great effort is needed if the various components of the Movement are to meet existing needs in this area and retain their high profile in RFL.

3. RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

Restoring Family Links (RFL) is the general term given to a range of activities that aim to prevent the separation of families and the disappearance of family members, to restore and maintain contact among families and to clarify the fate of persons who have been reported missing.

¹ The Family Links Network consists of the ICRC (the Central Tracing Agency (CTA)) and tracing agencies in the delegations) and the tracing services of National Societies.

These activities are undertaken when people have been separated from their loved ones as a consequence of specific situations such as the following:

- Armed conflicts and other situations of violence;
- Natural and man-made disasters;
- Population movements, including international migration;
- Other situations requiring a humanitarian response in which the specific capacities and mandates of the components of the Movement and Red Cross / Red Crescent Fundamental Principles represent added value.

RFL activities are often related to the psychological, legal and material support to families and persons affected, resettlement or reintegration programmes and social welfare services. Other activities include the management of human remains and forensic identification.

4. THE ROLE OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE MOVEMENT

The RFL activities of the various components of the Movement, in particular the ICRC and the National Societies, have their basis in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, in the Movement's Statutes, and in the resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and those of the Council of Delegates. They are based also on the resolutions of the statutory meetings of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation), and on the policy framework of the ICRC, of individual National Societies and of the International Federation.

All the components of the Movement have a role in restoring family links. The ICRC (the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) and tracing agencies in the delegations) and the tracing services of National Societies together make up what is known as the Family Links Network.

As set out in the Movement's Statutes, National Societies have an important role in providing assistance for the victims of armed conflict and natural disasters and in other emergencies. In addition, as outlined in Resolution 16 of the 25th International Conference, they have an important role, as components of an international network, in tracing missing persons and reuniting families. They also contribute, as much as they can, to developing the abilities of other National Societies in this field.

In addition to its operational responsibilities as set out in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols and in the Statutes of the Movement, the ICRC, acting through the CTA, is both coordinator and technical adviser in RFL for National Societies and governments. Besides coordinating RFL activities and providing technical advice, the ICRC works towards strengthening the RFL capacity of its partners.

As a consequence of its leading role in the development of National Societies, the International Federation works to have RFL activities included in the various plans drawn up by National Societies for development, disaster preparedness and emergency response.

These complementary functions of its components, combined with the geographical scope of the Family Links Network, make the Movement uniquely qualified to be the leader in the field of RFL, because it acts at the international, national and local levels.

5. THE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION

The ICRC sought to develop a strategy that would be action-oriented, cross-sectoral and based on needs. Consultation within the Movement was essential as the *RFL Strategy* had to draw on the experiences and expertise of both the ICRC and National Societies in order to strengthen capacity in RFL.

Since the initiative was launched, all the components of the Movement have been consulted while developing the *RFL Strategy*. Under the leadership of the CTA, an advisory group composed of representatives of 19 National Societies² and the International Federation was assembled. It provided advice on the key issues facing the Family Links Network in order to orient the Strategy, and it participated in the development, organization and facilitation of Regional RFL Conferences.

The following steps have been instrumental in the development of the *RFL Strategy*:

- **five meetings of the advisory group;**
- assembling working groups to explore **key issues** in restoring family links. They concentrated on the following matters: **needs** assessments, RFL activities in connection with natural and man-made **disasters** and international **migration, communication** and **fundraising**;
- **a global mapping exercise** to orient the Strategy and to give its contents a concrete basis. This included the following: (i) assessing the capacity of National Society tracing services (ii) assessing the capacity of the CTA to act as coordinator and technical adviser in RFL, and (iii) carrying out an initial RFL needs survey;
- **four Regional RFL Conferences** in 2006 (Nairobi, Kiev, Buenos Aires and Bangkok) to discuss the draft *RFL Strategy* and to determine the direction to be taken by the Family Links Network in the future. The conferences were co-hosted by the ICRC with the National Societies of Kenya, Ukraine, Argentina and Thailand. The leaders of 139 National Societies and 50 ICRC delegations and representatives of the International Federation took part in the conferences and unanimously agreed on the importance of RFL in the humanitarian agenda of the Movement. Recommendations from each Conference were incorporated into the *RFL Strategy*;
- **final global consultation** process with all Movement components culminating in the current version of the *RFL Strategy*;
- **endorsement** of the *RFL Strategy* by the ICRC and the International Federation.

6. THE MOVEMENT'S VISION

Whenever people are separated from, or without news of, their loved ones as a result of armed conflict or other situations of violence, natural disaster or other situations requiring humanitarian response, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement responds efficiently and effectively by mobilizing its resources to restore family links.

The Movement's vision statement encapsulates the essence of RFL: alleviating the suffering of people who have no news of their families. Relationships with our families are an essential element of our human identities. Ignorance of their whereabouts creates immense suffering.

² The National Societies of the following countries are members of the advisory group: Argentina, Australia, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Germany, India, Kenya, Libya, Morocco, Norway, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Sweden, Thailand, the Netherlands, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States of America.

Every component of the Movement aspires to improve its performance in restoring family links so that those without news may be treated with the dignity, respect and compassion that underpin the Fundamental Principles.

The Movement's vision is intentionally ambitious. It aims to broaden our individual and collective approaches in the response to RFL needs and unambiguously defines the areas in which the Movement will assist those without news. The vision statement provides a guiding image of the way in which restoring family links contributes to humanitarian action.

7. IMPLEMENTING THE *RFL STRATEGY*

The ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation all have a responsibility to build, strengthen and maintain the Family Links Network. The effectiveness of this unique international network depends on the components' abilities to strengthen capacity, intensify cooperation and prioritize action. To tackle these issues, the Movement has to take a more global approach to building capacity throughout the Network by:

- increasing National Society participation;
- strengthening the operational efficiency of the ICRC and the nature of its partnerships with National Societies in operational contexts;
- promoting greater cooperation between the ICRC and the International Federation to support both the development of National Societies and their RFL activities.

To achieve its vision, the implementation plan for the Movement is structured around three strategic objectives based on the results of the global mapping exercise:

Strategic Objective 1

Improving restoring family links capacity and performance

Concerning: needs assessments, operational plans, training, information exchange, guidelines and tools, technology, resource mobilization

Strategic Objective 2

Enhancing coordination and intra-Movement cooperation

Concerning: rapid response capacity, coordination, closer ties among National Societies, interaction with authorities and with other organizations

Strategic Objective 3

Strengthening support for restoring family links

Concerning: ownership, organizational foundation, internal promotion, communication with external stakeholders

The strategic objectives cover performance management, coordination and cooperation, leadership and positioning in the field of RFL. They are all connected and measures taken in one area will have an effect on other areas.

The implementation plan outlines the **actions** to be taken to achieve each strategic objective and lists the **expected results**. It also proposes **implementation measures** and sets out **responsibilities and time frames** for each component of the Movement.

8. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

Responsibility for implementing the *RFL Strategy* is shared by all the components of the Movement. The National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation are individually responsible for incorporating the contents of the Strategy into their own strategies, plans and training programmes at the national, regional and international levels.

Each action defined in the Strategy is accompanied by expected results and implementation measures. It will be possible to achieve some of the expected results via the annual operational plans of the various components, while others can be achieved through the capacity-building programmes of the ICRC, the organizational development or disaster-management programmes of the International Federation, or through partnerships with National Societies working internationally.

As the Movement's RFL coordinator and technical adviser, the ICRC will supervise the *RFL Strategy's* implementation in cooperation with the other components. It will establish an implementation group, which will include National Societies and the International Federation, to provide guidance and support for the implementation process. The group will, as a priority, clarify what constitutes success in achieving the Movement's strategic objectives and in the individual actions undertaken by it; it will also devise guidelines to measure that success. Indicators will be developed at the global, regional and national levels to assess performance and progress in implementing the Strategy. Given the considerable differences in the criteria for success throughout the Network, a variety of targets and degrees of implementation should be expected.

At the 2011 and 2015 Council of Delegates, the ICRC will report on the progress that has been recorded. This will be based on the self-assessment of the Movement's components and might lead to the implementation plan being revised and adapted.

9. RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The resources needed to implement the Strategy go well beyond fundraising. Human resources, skills of various sorts, different kinds of knowledge, greater cooperation among and participation by all components of the Movement: all this is necessary to ensure successful implementation.

In order to bring about the allocation of the necessary resources for RFL, all those involved must demonstrate a real sense of commitment and responsibility. This is vital. RFL must be recognized as a core activity at all levels, first and foremost at the level of leadership. This should lead to RFL becoming fully incorporated into the structure of National Societies and, thus, into their fundraising plans. The ultimate objective is to make RFL activities self-sustaining.

Fundraising tools will be developed as an aspect of the implementation of the *RFL Strategy* and partnerships will be promoted between National Societies in order to support capacity development within the Network.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008-2018)

The Council of Delegates,

recalling with deep concern the suffering endured by those who have lost contact with, or have no news of, their loved ones as a consequence of armed conflict or other situations of violence, natural or man-made disasters or other circumstances requiring a humanitarian response,

recognizing that families provide the basis for all individuals to cope with the consequences of these tragic events, and *reiterating* the responsibilities of each component of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) in helping to restore or maintain contact between members of families separated in such circumstances,

recalling the role which the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) plays as a coordinator and technical adviser to National Societies and governments, as well as the importance for the Movement of relying on a sound international Red Cross and Red Crescent network in order to take effective action in Restoring Family Links (RFL) as recognized in Resolution 16 of the Twenty-fifth International Conference of the Red Cross,

recognizing and reaffirming the lead role of the ICRC in RFL within the Movement,

noting the need to strengthen the capacity of the Family Links Network to assist people who are without news of their families,

recalling further the Agenda for Humanitarian Action adopted by Resolution 1 of the Twenty-eighth International Conference, in particular its 'General Objective 1' on respecting and restoring the dignity of missing persons and of their families and "General Objective 3" on reducing the risk and impact of disasters,

expressing appreciation for the efforts and the commitment of the ICRC in developing the *Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2008-2018* (the *RFL Strategy*) as part of the implementation of the Agenda for Humanitarian Action,

noting with satisfaction the consultative process within the Movement that led to the successful development of the *RFL Strategy*, in particular the role played by the advisory group composed of 20 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation) and the ICRC and by the four Regional RFL Conferences attended by the leaders of National Societies in 2006,

1. *reaffirms* the commitment of the Movement to RFL and *reinforces* its commitment to stay the leader in this field;
2. *adopts* the *Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2008-2018*;
3. *commends* the commitment expressed so far by all components of the Movement to contribute to the implementation of the *RFL Strategy*;
4. *calls upon* all National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation to:
 - a) promote knowledge and understanding of this Strategy at all levels of their respective organizations,
 - b) implement the actions outlined in this Strategy as part of their organizational strategies and plans at national, regional and international levels,
 - c) allocate the necessary resources to carry them out;
5. *recommends that* the ICRC and the International Federation further enhance their cooperation to support National Societies in their efforts to implement the Strategy, *taking into* consideration the challenges that National Societies have identified and highlighted during the consultation process;
6. *encourages* partnerships amongst National Societies to support each other in building their capacity in RFL;
7. *requests* the ICRC to bring the *RFL Strategy* to the attention of the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent with a view in particular to encourage member States to better understand and support the RFL activities carried out by the Movement;
8. *welcomes* the ICRC's initiative to establish and chair an implementation group composed of National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC, to provide guidance and support in the implementation process as well as to develop the criteria for its success and indicators to measure that success;
9. *further requests* all components of the Movement to carry out the required self-assessments on the implementation of the Strategy and provide this information to the ICRC for monitoring and reporting purposes;
10. *invites* the ICRC to report to the 2011 and 2015 Council of Delegates on the results achieved by the implementation of the Strategy.