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**COUNCIL OF DELEGATES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT
MOVEMENT**

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**The restoring family links strategy and implementation plan for the
International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008-2018)**

From adoption to initial phase of implementation (2008-2009)
(item 17 of the Draft Provisional Annotated Agenda)



Report

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

Geneva, October 2009

"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." (RFL Strategy for the Movement)

Executive summary

The adoption of the RFL Strategy by the Council of Delegates in November 2007 set in motion an elaborate ten-year implementation plan, starting in 2008. The implementation plan specifies concrete measures to be taken by all components of the Movement.

The ambition is to improve the humanitarian services provided to people who have been separated from their family members or who have relatives who are unaccounted for.

This update summarises key actions undertaken by the components of the Movement in the initial phase of implementation, from 2008 to mid-2009. A more complete progress report on results achieved is scheduled for the Council of Delegates in 2011.

One of the objectives in the initial implementation phase is to improve the Movement's capacity to respond to **RFL needs in disasters**. To this end, the ICRC, with support from the British and German Red Cross Societies, is establishing a pool of RFL specialists for rapid deployment in disasters. The pool will consist of some 60 RFL specialists drawn from National Societies and the ICRC. The project is being developed in close coordination with the International Federation.

In 2009 and 2010, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency (CTA) is organising five training courses on RFL in disasters for the members of the RFL specialist pool. So far, two courses have been organized in Geneva and Bangkok for some 30 persons. The course is based on the recently produced "**RFL in Disasters Field Manual**". The final version of this manual will be published by the end of 2009.

Another important aspect of the RFL Strategy is the creation of the **Implementation Group**. The group met for the first time in April 2009 under the chair of the ICRC. A second meeting will take place from 25 to 28 November 2009 in Nairobi following the Council of Delegates.

The Implementation Group is composed of 18 National Societies with representatives from the leadership, disasters management and RFL sections. The ICRC and the International Federation are also represented in the group. The main task of the group is to guide and support the CTA and the Family Links Network on all matters pertaining to the promotion and implementation of the RFL Strategy.

The initial implementation phase of the RFL Strategy has already achieved increased **regional exchanges** among National Societies, particularly in Asia.

The CTA has also begun work on significant **technology projects**, including a data application for National Societies, development of the Family Links website, and the creation of an RFL web gate.

More work is required to **raise awareness** and pool information about the importance of RFL. Key RFL messages have been integrated into policy documents prepared by the

Movement, and a logo for the Family Links Network has been developed and made available to all National Societies. A series of publications in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish has been published, distributed and uploaded onto ICRC's websites.

1. Introduction

The overall aim of the RFL Strategy is to meet the needs of individuals and populations separated from, or without news of, their family members, in a variety of circumstances, by improving the performance of the Family Links Network.

This goal was formulated by the Movement in the following vision statement:¹

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

The Movement has made an important statement by adopting the ten-year Restoring Family Links Strategy.

First, it commits itself to responding more rapidly and more efficiently to the needs of separated families during emergencies and to extending its response for as long as required.

Second, it commits itself to developing its services based on a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the needs of people who have been separated from their family members or who have relatives who are unaccounted for.

Third, it commits itself to providing services not only to people affected by conflict, but also to people affected by other situations of internal violence; to refugees and asylum seekers; to migrants; to people affected by disasters; and particularly to vulnerable people, such as children and the elderly.

The Movement is in the unique position of having a worldwide network, the Family Links Network. However, the Movement needs to improve the capacity of individual National Societies and the ICRC to be able to identify and meet RFL needs everywhere in the world.

The implementation plan in the RFL Strategy outlines the actions to be taken to achieve the three strategic objectives that the Movement has identified. The following update on achievements is structured in accordance with those objectives.

¹ RFL Strategy for the RC/RC Movement and implementation plan (2008-2018) Chapter 1, Vision and Introduction

2. Main achievements and challenges

Strategic Objective 1

Improving Restoring Family Links performance and capacity

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

2.1 Needs assessment

A comprehensive needs assessment is essential for developing a response to separated families and is the first step in starting to implement the RFL Strategy.

A few National Societies and ICRC delegations have taken on the task of carrying out joint and comprehensive needs assessments, and a number of National Societies and ICRC delegations have explicitly stated their intention to carry out RFL needs assessments. Nevertheless, the Movement still has a lot to learn about this subject, including on when and how to exchange best practices.

To support the practice of **professional needs assessments**, the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) is developing guidelines for National Societies that will be finalized by the end of 2009. These guidelines will provide advice on how to make assessments in emergencies as well as in more stable environments, and will serve to re-adjust and develop services and capacities in line with actual needs. The guidelines will supplement the "RFL in Disasters Field Manual" (see below), which will be available to National Societies by the end of 2009.

Many National Societies work to assist vulnerable **migrants** in restoring family links, and new practices are being explored in areas where no such services exist. This is the case for example in Mali where the Mali Red Cross is assisting migrants in difficulties. A few National Societies, together with the CTA, have developed guidelines on RFL and migrants that will be included in a revised edition of the RFL guide for National Societies.

2.2 Regional exchanges

Restoring Family Links activities often require communications and operational exchanges between National Societies and ICRC delegations in different countries and on different continents. A common understanding on how to respond to RFL needs is important in order to provide coherent services to families that have been separated and find themselves in different countries. To this end, several National Societies have organized **regional meetings** where the RFL Strategy has been promoted and the needs of specific population groups have been discussed. Since 2008, such meetings have been held in Bamako, Beijing, Djakarta, Doha, Geneva, New Delhi and St Petersburg with the participation of more than 40 National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC.

Bilateral exchanges and internships between National Societies occur regularly and have been reinforced with the RFL Strategy. In addition, use of the ICRC's extranet for RFL practitioners has grown. The number of National Societies with access to the extranet has increased significantly since the Strategy was adopted, as has the quantity of information available on the extranet.

2.3 Technology

Since the RFL Strategy focuses on the need for the Family Links Network to be responsive and effective, modern technologies should be adapted and integrated into RFL activities. The CTA is working on various projects to be developed over the coming six years. These include

Developing an RFL data application that will help National Societies to improve their data management;

Improving the Family Links website (www.familylinks.org) so that it can be managed by National Societies; and

Developing an RFL web gate to integrate public information and reinforce the exchange of RFL information within the Family Links Network.

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

2.4 RFL in disasters

A key element of the RFL Strategy concerns rapid response in emergencies.² In order to strengthen the Movement's capacity to respond during emergencies, the ICRC is undertaking a project to establish a pool of RFL specialists who can be quickly deployed in a disaster, and to formulate a field manual for RFL practitioners. The project is being developed in close coordination with the International Federation and with support from the British Red Cross and the German Red Cross.

The pool of specialists will be composed of about 60 National Society and ICRC specialists with different fields of expertise, cultural backgrounds and linguistic skills. The pool members will attend a training course to ensure standard approaches, methodologies and techniques.

In March 2009, the ICRC invited staff of all National Societies and ICRC delegations to apply to participate in the pool. Some 130 applications were received from 38 National Societies and numerous ICRC delegations.

The first training course was held in Geneva in July; the second was held in Bangkok in October 2009. Similar courses will be organized in Nairobi in November 2009 and in Dakar and Panama during the first quarter of 2010.

A Memorandum of Understanding between the ICRC and the International Federation facilitates the deployment and coordination of pool members where the International Federation is the lead agency for the Movement response.

The "RFL in Disasters Field Manual", and its accompanying CD-ROM, were developed over the past two years and will become a reference for all RFL practitioners within the Movement

² Strategic Objective 2, Action 1: "Improve the Movement's rapid-response capacity for emergencies".

who need to prepare for and respond to disasters. A pilot edition has been tested and the final version will be published before the end of 2009.

In addition, the International Federation and the ICRC have updated the RFL module used in the RDRT/FACT training. RFL has also been integrated into the "Well-Prepared National Society" self-assessment tool and in the database "Disasters Management Information System" (DMIS), run by the International Federation.

2.5 Long-term capacity building

Capacity building is another cornerstone of the RFL Strategy and investing time and resources in building the RFL capacities of the National Societies and the ICRC is crucial to successful implementation. Capacity building will need to develop substantially over the next implementation phases.

Two examples of good practices in this field are:

In Indonesia, the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) and the Swedish Red Cross Society are involved in a five-year capacity building project in RFL. The project, which involves support to the internal structure and organization of the Society, training and human resources, will end in 2011.

In the Pacific Islands, 11 National Societies and the Australian Red Cross are engaged in a capacity building project that aims to raise the level of preparedness for RFL responses in natural disasters. The project focuses on developing adapted RFL tools, training modules and management support.

In consultation with the members of the Implementation Group (see below), the CTA is elaborating an overall framework for capacity building in RFL that will serve as a basis for practitioners involved in this field of work.

With the adoption of the RFL Strategy, National Societies are expected to play a greater role in RFL capacity building. This will require strategic partnerships between National Societies and the CTA to support long-term capacity development. It will also require active interest and motivation from the leadership in National Societies and in the ICRC.

Strategic Objective 3

Strengthening support for Restoring Family Links

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

2.6 Implementation Group

In accordance with Resolution 4 of the 2007 Council of Delegates, the ICRC created an RFL Strategy Implementation Group. Chaired by the ICRC, the group is composed of representatives from 18 National Societies, the Federation and ICRC's CTA.³

³ The Implementation Group includes representatives from National Societies in Australia, Cambodia, Canada, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, the

The group will provide guidance and support to the CTA and to the Family Links Network on all matters pertaining to the promotion and implementation of the RFL Strategy.

The group met for the first time in Geneva on 6-8 April 2009. During this meeting, it adopted its terms of reference, particularly its advisory and supporting role in implementing the RFL Strategy and its responsibility to raise awareness and promote RFL at local and regional levels. Priorities for action were set for 2009-2011, and priority areas for monitoring were discussed.

Members include leaders, managers and experts offering a wide range of perspectives on RFL issues. Representatives of the International Federation provide their unique expertise in the fields of disaster management and organizational development. Members are committed to be part of the Implementation Group for three years. After this period, the group membership will change.

2.7 Promotion and communication⁴

Key RFL messages were incorporated into several of the Movement's policy documents during 2008 and 2009. The importance of RFL has been highlighted in documents such as the Strategy 2020, Declaration of the Pan-African Conference, Principles and Rules in Disasters, as well as in the International Federation's policy on migration.

Raising awareness about RFL activities within the Movement is intended to increase both understanding and support. In 2009, ICRC published the "**Restoring Family Links Strategy including legal references**" in Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish. An accompanying leaflet, "**Restoring Family Links – Presenting the strategy for a worldwide network**", was also published.

The "**Family Links Newsletter**" was developed to raise awareness within the Movement about ongoing RFL activities. To date, two editions have been issued and distributed within the Movement.

An **RFL logo** was developed by the ICRC and selected in consultation with all National Societies. The logo is to be used on RFL promotional material, Red Cross Messages and other forms, together with one of the emblems. The logo was created in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, and is available on a CD-ROM that has been distributed to National Societies.

3. Conclusion

The present report only summarizes some key actions undertaken by the components of the Movement in the initial phase of implementation of the RFL Strategy. Of course, many more individual or collective actions are being done or planned within the Movement. All National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC will contribute their achievements and experience to the more comprehensive progress report that is scheduled for the next Council of Delegates in 2011.

Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

⁴ RFL publications are available on www.icrc.org and the corresponding ICRC websites in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish.

Nevertheless, much more can and should be done to fully achieve the ambitious vision and objectives as set by the Movement in its ten-year RFL Strategy. This Strategy is not only a matter for RFL experts, for their training or for developing new technical tools. It also involves strategic decisions and investments that are to be initiated and supported by the leaders of each component of the Movement. A more in-depth knowledge of the humanitarian needs of separated families and of the risks of separation should lead to operational and organizational decisions, including on strategies for strengthening capacity and partnerships. It is only through endeavours of all components of the Movement that we can create a stronger Family Links Network that is truly worldwide, shows solidarity and responds to the humanitarian needs of separated people rapidly and efficiently. A great challenge is still ahead of the Movement for the eight remaining years of the Strategy.