



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

Nairobi, Kenya  
23-25 November 2009

### **Workshop Report Non-Discrimination and Respect for Diversity**

#### **Workshop Officers**

Chair: Ahmed Hassan, President, Somali Red Cross  
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#### **Introduction**

The promotion of non-discrimination and respect for diversity is a vital issue for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as it concerns the implementation of our Red Cross Red Crescent Fundamental Principles. Furthermore, non-discrimination is a cornerstone of the Principle of impartiality.

This workshop built on previous resolutions adopted during the Council of Delegates in 2003 and 2005. It focused on the promotion of non-discrimination and diversity both **internally**, within our National Societies and the Movement, as well as **externally**, in the community and global society where we work. Steps taken to overcome challenges and key factors for success were highlighted.

In preparation of this workshop, 44 National Societies from all regions were invited by the IFRC and ICRC to share their concrete experience and lessons learned. A total of **24 case studies** were received, from the following 17 National Societies: Belarus, Botswana, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Great Britain including Cayman Islands branch, Canada, Ecuador, Kenya, Tanzania, Mongolia, Nepal, Netherlands, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain and Sweden. All of them will be given visibility in a follow-up publication to the Council of Delegates.

In each workshop, 3 National Societies joined the panel to present their case studies: Great Britain, Canada, Ecuador, Netherlands, Mongolia, Rwanda, South Africa, Spain and Sweden.

Over the day; over 60 National Societies, together with the IFRC and ICRC took the floor to share their experience, express their views, identify key factors of success and formulate recommendations.

Discrimination is a wide-raising and complex issue. Many grounds of discrimination were raised during the course of the day. Youth, gender, migrants, HIV/AIDS status and religion were frequently mentioned. Other mentioned were: physical and mental disability, elderly, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, street children, sex workers, drug users, prisoners.

National Societies recognised that tackling the issue of discrimination had produced a profound impact on their entire institution.

The open dialogue and vibrant exchange of experiences was highly appreciated by the workshop participants. It was hence strongly suggested to organise such an inter-active event in future statutory meetings.

Along the same vein, it was recommended to put the topic of “non-discrimination and respect for diversity” on the 31<sup>st</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and to lobby with governments to value the contribution of the RC/RC Movement towards shaping a more humane, equal and non-violent society.

### **Main conclusions and recommendations of the workshop**

- The entry point for all work on non-discrimination must be a firm willingness to critically look at oneself, and challenge our own attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. It does take courage to do so.
- Adequately addressing discrimination is a long-term process: it requires constant commitment from all levels of a National Society; management and governance, headquarters and branches.
- Non-discrimination and diversity need to be strategically mainstreamed across all RC/RC areas of work, rather than through a piecemeal, project approach. It needs to be integrated upfront into National Societies’ statutes, all policies, in particular human resources, and operational plans. Affirmative action and quota can constitute an initial temporary measure.
- In application of our Fundamental Principle of Unity, the composition of our National Societies must reflect the social set up of their country. Equally, it was stressed that boards should mirror the diversity of the volunteer basis.
- Diversifying the composition of our National Societies is often a pre-requisite to be trusted, and to be able to have access and provide services to marginalised groups.
- Our Fundamental Principles and underpinning humanitarian values need to be credibly translated into all communication and action, whether internally or externally.
- Formal, non-formal and informal education is key to start with. As such, an important role for our National Societies is to ensure that these relevant topics are integrated into the school curriculum.
- We need to act upon the dynamism, enthusiasm and expressed willingness of our RC/RC youth to take up a leadership role in their Societies and our Movement. The Youth Declaration, adopted in Solferino, needs to be implemented.
- Innovative and recently developed tools and initiatives, such as the IFRC’s self-reflection and learning online tool on non-discrimination and respect for diversity and the Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change initiative, shall be actively used by National Societies.
- Advancing non-discrimination and respect for diversity in the community, and speaking up on behalf of marginalised groups takes courage. Where prevented, National Societies need to defend their right to provide humanitarian services to marginalised groups, regardless of legal status or societal acceptance.
- Working on discrimination outside of the RC/RC Movement, is a two-way learning process. As much as our target population needs to know what the RC/RC stands for – our Fundamental Principles - , we need to understand their culture and life realities.
- Effectively reaching out and including marginalised groups, calls for face to face interaction with them. Promotion campaigns alone will not do the job. Means and indicators are needed to measure the impact of our action.
- Marginalised groups must have ownership and be empowered to finding and implementing solutions and must be made aware of their rights.

- Diversity is a gift, we should rejoice. As a universal network, the RC/RC is living manifestation of diversity, and through partnerships with sister National Societies, we can make it further blossom.
- Together with preventing human suffering and assisting or protecting the vulnerable, the RC/RC must take up an educational and shaping role in society and lead change of mindset, attitudes and behaviour.
- However, we will have no credibility, if we do not lead by example and walk our talk. Only by doing so, can we become agents of change in our local community and in the world?