2015 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Title: “Principles in Action: How do Neutrality and Independence Contribute to Humanitarian Effectiveness?”

Sponsors and Organizers: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Time and Date: 17 June 2015, 17:15 – 18:30

Room: ICRC Humanitarium,
19 Avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

This side-event will be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, in keeping with this year’s theme: The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness.

The event is held also under the umbrella of the Research and Debate Cycle on Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action. The panel discussion will be livestreamed on the Cycle’s webpage.

Background and objectives

The seven Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, adopted in 1965, provide an ethical, operational and institutional framework guiding its work at all times, including situations of armed conflict and disaster. The application of the Principles, including neutrality and independence, are essential for the Movement to gain the acceptance of all, ensure access and work in proximity with affected communities, all of which are also prerequisites for humanitarian effectiveness. These principles later influenced the broader humanitarian community, which have largely adopted humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence as the principles guiding humanitarian action.

The United Nations system and its member states have endorsed the humanitarian principles through several policy statements and resolutions, including UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 1991. By way of example, elements of the ECOSOC Resolution on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations of 25 June 2014 make an explicit link between effectiveness, coordination and partnerships, and humanitarian principles: the Economic and Social Council “[r]ecognizes the benefits of the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, including by engaging and coordinating with relevant humanitarian actors”, while ensuring that “their collaborative efforts adhere to the [humanitarian] principles” (E/RES/2014/13, para. 19). In the same vein, the corresponding Report of the Secretary-General (E/2014/68) indicates that “the analysis of what is effective needs to extend beyond the international humanitarian system. It will need
to recognize the different perspectives and comparative advantages of the various actors” (para. 75).

This rationale raises a particular challenge for humanitarian actors since they are expected to strengthen partnerships at the global, regional, national and local levels with actors that are not necessarily bound by the humanitarian principles, while ensuring that they adhere to these principles themselves. In addition, within the international humanitarian community, not all organizations have the same interpretation and consistent application of the principles. While humanity and impartiality remain relatively consensual, neutrality and independence are subject to greater divergences in their interpretation and degrees of application.

As far as States are concerned, besides numerous commitments to humanitarian principles expressed through UN resolutions and other instruments, they have subscribed to the obligation to facilitate “relief actions which are humanitarian and impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction”, subject to their agreement and right of control.1

With these elements in mind, the objectives of this side-event are the following:

- Considering that the principles of humanity and impartiality provide the consensual bottom-line for humanitarian action in all circumstances, to engage in a focused discussion on how neutrality and independence effectively contribute to humanitarian effectiveness.

- To reflect on the relevance and implications of the principles of neutrality and independence against the wide range of concepts embedded in the term ‘humanitarian effectiveness’ (e.g. meeting the needs of affected populations, relevance, transparency, accountability, partnerships, value for money, good donor practices…).

- To hear the perspectives of actors coming from countries or regions directly affected by humanitarian crises, but playing different roles in humanitarian action: as an affected State, as a local responder (RCRC National Society), and as an inter-govermental body increasingly involved in humanitarian response (regional organization).

**Discussion points**

Against this backdrop, the side-event will focus on the following suggested questions:

- Are neutrality and independence guarantors of effectiveness for all actors, in all circumstances? Do all actors have the same interpretation of neutrality and independence?

- How might the approach to the application of the principles of neutrality and independence differ according to situations of conflict or disaster? Are there instances where the way neutrality and independence are interpreted and applied go against humanitarian effectiveness?

---

1 Article 70 (1) Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, confirmed in almost identical terms in Article 18 (2) Additional Protocol II and recognized in international customary law (Rule 55 of ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law study: https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule55).
• To what extent can actors that are neither neutral nor independent engage in neutral and independent humanitarian action?

**Intended outcome**

• *Expected outcome:* Participants have a refined and nuanced understanding of how neutrality and independence contribute to impartial and effective humanitarian action. While the importance of these principles for humanitarian action in general is well understood and strengthened for all participants, the limitations and boundaries of neutral and independent humanitarian action are also clarified.

• *Proceedings and recording:* A conference brief and an audiovisual recording will be published on the Research and Debate Cycle on Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action’s webpage, along with ECOSOC’s own channels and platforms.

**Format & choreography**

*Livestreamed panel discussion, introduced by the ICRC and facilitated by the International Federation.*

**Start time:** 17:15

**Welcome remarks** (5 min)

• *Jean-Christophe Sandoz,* Deputy Director of International Law and Policy, ICRC.

**Chair** (5 min)

• *Joelle Tanguy,* Under Secretary General, Humanitarian Values and Diplomacy, International Federation.

**Panel presentations** (total 15 min)

• *Member State* (5min). His Excellency Mr. Jorge Lomónaco, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations.

• *Red Cross Red Crescent National Society* (5min). Mr. Georges Kettaneh, Secretary General of the Lebanese Red Cross.

• *Regional Organization* (5 min). Dr. Daniel Eklu, Director for Humanitarian Affairs, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

**Debate** (30 min)

*The Moderator follows up with questions for the panelists to debate between themselves.*

**Q&A** (20 min)

*The panelists will answer questions raised by the audience, under the oversight of the moderator.*

**End time:** 18:30

*[Followed by a cocktail reception at the Ariana Museum]*
Background Material


Principles in Action in Lebanon, British Red Cross and ICRC

Principles in Action in Somalia, British Red Cross and Somali Red Crescent


The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief

Contact
For more information, please contact:

Jérémie Labbé
Head of Project "Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action"
Multilateral Organisations, Policy & Humanitarian Action Division
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
19, avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 730 2864 | M +41 79 218 7532
Email jlabbe@icrc.org

Rebecca Dodd
Senior Officer, Fundamental Principles
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Chemin des Crêts, 17. P. O. Box 303, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland
T +41 (0)22 730 46 32 | F +41 (0)22 733 0395 | M +41 78 774 90 24
Skype: Rebecca.dodd71 | Email rebecca.dodd@ifrc.org