

THE CODE OF  
CONDUCT FOR THE  
INTERNATIONAL RED  
CROSS AND RED  
CRESCENT  
MOVEMENT AND  
NON-GOVERNMENTAL  
ORGANISATION  
(NGOS) IN DISASTER  
RELIEF

Prepared jointly by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red  
Crescent Societies and the ICRC\*

## **Purpose:**

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This Code of Conduct seeks to guard our standards of behavior. It is not about operational details, such as how one should calculate food rations or set up a refugee camp. Rather, it seeks to maintain the high standards of independence, effectiveness and impact to which disaster response NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement aspires. It is a voluntary code, enforced by the will of the organization accepting it to maintain the standards laid down in the Code. In the event of armed conflict, the present Code of Conduct will be interpreted and applied in conformity with international humanitarian law.

*\*Sponsored by: Caritas Internationalis\*, Catholic Relief Services\*, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies\*, International Save the Children Alliance\*, Lutheran World Federation\*, Oxfam\*, The World Council of Churches\*, The International Committee of the Red Cross (\* members of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response)*

## **Definitions**

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**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** : NGOs refers here to organizations, both national and international, which are constituted separately from the government of the country in which they are founded.

**Non-Governmental Humanitarian Agencies (NGHAs)**: For the purposes of this text, the term NGHAs has been coined to encompass the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – The International Committee of the Red Cross, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its member National Societies – and the NGOs as defined above. This code refers specifically to those NGHAs who are involved in disaster response.

**Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs)**: refers to organizations constituted by two or more governments. It thus includes all United Nations Agencies and regional organizations.

**Disasters**: A disaster is a calamitous event resulting in loss of life, great human suffering and distress, and large-scale material damage.

## **1** *The humanitarian imperative comes first*

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The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognize our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. Hence the need for unimpeded access to affected populations is of fundamental importance in exercising that responsibility. The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such.

## **2** *Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone*

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Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs.

Within the entirety of our programmes, we will reflect considerations of proportionality. Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate.

In implementing this approach, we recognise the crucial role played by women in disaster-prone communities and will ensure that this role is supported, not diminished, by our aid programmes. The implementation of such a universal, impartial and independent policy, can only be effective if we and our partners have access to the necessary resources to provide for such equitable relief, and have equal access to all disaster victims.

## **3** *Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint*

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Humanitarian aid will be given according to the need of individuals, families and communities. Notwithstanding the right of NGHAs to espouse particular political or religious opinions, we affirm that assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of the recipients to those opinions.

We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.

## **4** *We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy*

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NGHAs are agencies which act independently from governments. We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of any government, except in so far as it coincides with our own independent policy.

We will never knowingly – or through negligence – allow ourselves, or our employees, to be used to gather information of a political, military or economically sensitive nature for governments or other bodies that may serve purposes other than those which are strictly humanitarian, nor will we act as instruments of foreign policy of donor governments.

We will use the assistance we receive to respond to needs and this assistance should not be driven by the need to dispose of donor commodity surpluses, nor by the political interest of any particular donor.

We value and promote the voluntary giving of labour and finances by concerned individuals to support our work and recognise the independence of action promoted by such voluntary motivation. In order to protect our independence we will seek to avoid dependence upon a single funding source.

## **5** *We shall respect culture and custom*

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We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.

## **6** *We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities*

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All people and communities – even in disaster – possess capacities as well as vulnerabilities. Where possible, we will strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. Where possible, we will work through local NGHAs as partners in planning and implementation, and cooperate with local government structures where appropriate.

We will place a high priority on the proper co-ordination of our emergency responses. This is best done within the countries concerned by those most directly involved in the relief operations, and should include representatives of the relevant UN bodies.

## **7** *Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid*

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Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.

## **8** *Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs*

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All relief actions affect the prospects for long-term development, either in a positive or a negative fashion. Recognising this, we will strive to implement relief programmes which actively reduce the beneficiaries' vulnerability to future disasters and help create sustainable lifestyles. We will pay particular attention to environmental concerns in the design and management of relief programmes. We will also endeavour to minimise the negative impact of humanitarian assistance, seeking to avoid long-term beneficiary dependence upon external aid.

## **9** *We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources*

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We often act as an institutional link in the partnership between those who wish to assist and those who need assistance during disasters. We therefore hold ourselves accountable to both constituencies. All our dealings with donors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and transparency. We recognise the need to report on our activities, both from a financial perspective and the perspective of effectiveness. We recognise the obligation to ensure appropriate monitoring of aid distributions and to carry out regular assessments of the impact of disaster assistance.

We will also seek to report, in an open fashion, upon the impact of our work, and the factors limiting or enhancing that impact. Our programmes will be based upon high standards of professionalism and expertise in order to minimise the wasting of valuable resources.

## **10** *In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects*

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Respect for the disaster victim as an equal partner in action should never be lost. In our public information we shall portray an objective image of the disaster situation where the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears.

While we will cooperate with the media in order to enhance public response, we will not allow external or internal demands for publicity to take precedence over the principle of maximising overall relief assistance. We will avoid competing with other disaster response agencies for media coverage in situations where such coverage may be to the detriment of the service provided to the beneficiaries or to the security of our staff or the beneficiaries.