THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the largest humanitarian network in the world. Its mission is to alleviate human suffering, protect life and health, and uphold human dignity, especially during armed conflicts and other emergencies. It is present in every country and supported by millions of volunteers.

It is not a single organization. It is composed of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the 193 individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Each has its own legal identity and role, but they are all united by seven Fundamental Principles.

The ICRC’s exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the Movement’s international relief activities during armed conflicts. Established in 1863, it is at the origin of the Movement.

The International Federation inspires, facilitates and promotes all humanitarian activities carried out by its member National Societies in behalf of those who are most vulnerable. It directs and coordinates its members’ actions to assist the victims of natural and technological disasters, refugees and those affected by health emergencies. It was founded in 1919.

National Societies act as auxiliaries to their national authorities in the humanitarian field. They provide a broad range of services including disaster relief, and health and social programmes. In wartime they may assist the civilian population and support the medical services of the armed forces.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
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The Fundamental Principles of the Movement express its ethos and are at the core of its approach to helping people in need during armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies. These principles unite the components of the Movement – the ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation – and enable them to provide effective, unbiased assistance to people in need. They are mandatory rules of conduct that the Movement’s components are required to follow at all times, and States must respect this necessity.

The Fundamental Principles are key to the Movement’s identity. Adherence to these principles ensures the humanitarian nature of the Movement’s work and brings congruency to the broad range of activities it undertakes around the world. The principles provide a common bond for the National Societies, which vary greatly in structure, culture and membership.

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Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, voluntary service, unity and universality: these seven Fundamental Principles sum up the Movement’s ethic and are at the core of its approach to helping people in need during armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies.

These principles underpin the identity of the Movement. They ensure that it is neutral, impartial, voluntary, independent, unity and universal. They define the Movement’s work and set rules for its members, and States, to respect in order to ensure the humanitarian nature of the Movement’s work.

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UNIVERSITY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to victims of war, to the wounded and sick in armed conflicts, endures – in its international and national capacities – to prevent and alleviate suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for every human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

HUMANITY

The Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and give priority in the most urgent cases of distress.

The principle of humanity embodies three related concepts:

- **Impartiality:** Members of the Movement help people regardless of their religious beliefs, the colour of their skin, their political convictions, where they come from, or whether they are rich or poor.
- **Proportionality:** Whether treating the wounded or distributing food, members of the Movement must ensure that those in greatest need receive assistance first.
- **Impartiality:** Decisions must be made on a “needs only” basis and must not be influenced by personal considerations or feelings.

PRINCIPLES

This principle, which underpins all the other principles, encompasses several ideas:

- **Impartiality:** The Movement must not take sides or be regarded as doing so, either in its support or in its actions, at any time or in any place. This enables its components to reach people who need help in crises. It also minimises discrimination and treats all parties in armed conflict or other situations of violence equally.
- **Impartiality:** The Movement must not be influenced by personal considerations, the onset of armed conflict or during other situations of violence.

The movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries of the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must maintain their autonomy so that they may be at all times in act to be in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

It is only by being truly independent that the Movement can respect the principles of impartiality and neutrality and undertake life-saving activities, from first aid to the provision of food and shelter.

SOCIETIES

The principle of impartiality embodies three related concepts:

- **Non-discrimination:** Members of the Movement help people regardless of their religious beliefs, the colour of their skin, their political convictions, where they come from, or whether they are rich or poor.
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