

EDITORIAL

Multiple humanitarian actors with different objectives, principles and *modi operandi* intervene in situations of armed conflict and internal violence in order to alleviate the plight of the victims of those situations: governmental and non-governmental organizations, international organizations, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, private companies and even the armed forces. Additionally, each operational context has its own distinctive characteristics relating to existing military, political and socioeconomic factors and religious and cultural conditions.

No humanitarian organization can meet all needs in emergency situations. The diversity of humanitarian actors is therefore an asset to the humanitarian community. Such a diversity of actors and approaches can help to alleviate suffering if these actors manage to act in a complementary fashion, on the basis of their respective operational abilities and the relevance of their activities with regard to the situation on the ground. In order to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action, there is a need to build and nurture an effective partnership between these diverse actors to make sure that all the needs of the affected population are met.

The ICRC has to adapt to these realities and to the people it is helping. It also has to reaffirm its own identity as a strictly humanitarian organization acting impartially and without discrimination. The organization's neutral and independent approach facilitates its access to persons in need. The ICRC therefore takes part in co-ordination and co-operation efforts with other humanitarian organizations in a reality-based and results-oriented manner. During the last century, and especially in recent decades, it has developed an expertise and experience in its areas of competence. Its special nature is the result of its legal basis, its universally recognized mandate, the fundamental principles which inform its work and, in particular, its operational activities in the field. Through an extensive field presence and the fact that it is frequently present on the ground well before conflict breaks out, the ICRC can, with the co-operation of the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, work directly with the affected populations in the midst of conflict.

This specific identity and approach enable the ICRC to offer an added value to humanitarian action. It strives to work with other humanitarian organizations, both at headquarters level and in the field, and takes part in both institutional and operational humanitarian co-ordination with the declared aim of improving, directly or indirectly, the fate of persons affected by armed conflict and

other situations of violence. The organization has also to adapt to new forms of co-ordination emerging from the current UN humanitarian reform process. Indeed, in the absence of a mechanism of humanitarian co-ordination, the ICRC has to acquaint itself with other organizations and to forge links and exchange information with them.

Not all organizations follow the same principles and extol a neutral and independent approach to humanitarian action. But a partnership based on equality, transparency and complementarity may help to optimize the benefits of humanitarian action for the people it aims to protect and assist.

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