

Contribution to the Public Consultation on Evaluation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

Recommendations of National Red Cross Societies of EU Member States and the
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – 23 February 2017

1. Introduction

The Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC Secretariat) and National Red Cross Societies of EU Member States (EUNS), welcome the initiative of the European Commission to evaluate the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the opportunity to provide recommendations. The work of the UCPM is relevant to the official mandates of the National Societies and the International Federation and their activities.

Before presenting our remarks, it is important to recall the specific mandate and the unique nature of Red Cross Red Crescent (RC/RC) National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in relation to disasters preparedness and response both within and outside the European Union (EU).

The first part of this contribution describes the specific mandate of the IFRC and National Societies; the second illustrates our comments and recommendations.

2. The IFRC and Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies

The IFRC consists of 190 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies. These National Societies are *auxiliaries of the public authorities in the humanitarian field*. In accordance with this auxiliary role and with national and international laws, many National Societies have special status within the national legal system.

The range of activities undertaken by National Societies differs in each country and depends on the national context. Domestically, National Societies cooperate with public authorities in the prevention of disease, promotion of health and the mitigation of human suffering. All these activities are largely based on a nation-wide network of valuable volunteers and staff, who provide a wide variety of services, ranging from disaster relief and assistance for the victims of war, to first aid training and restoring family links.

Internationally, National Societies contribute to build the capacity of recipient National Societies. They also provide aid to victims of conflicts, natural and technological disasters, through the local National Society, the IFRC or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as appropriate.

Founded in 1919, the IFRC's vision is *"...to inspire, encourage, facilitate, and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by the member Societies with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering and thereby contributing to the maintenance and the promotion of peace in the world."*¹ As per IFRC's Constitution, the National Societies created the International Federation to,

¹ IFRC's Strategy 2020 <http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/strategy-2020/>

among other functions, “act as a permanent body of liaison, co-ordination and study among National Societies”, “assist National Societies in risk reduction, disaster preparedness in the organisation of their relief actions and the relief operations themselves” as well as “bring relief by all available means to all disaster-affected persons” and “organise, coordinate and direct international relief actions” in accordance with its Principles and Rules; If the IFRC receives a request for international assistance from a National Society it liaises with other National Societies for the mobilisation and deployment of global and regional disaster response mechanisms and surge capacity tools. Such tools can include Field Assessment and Coordination Teams (FACT), Emergency Response Units (ERU), and Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) and enable the IFRC to respond rapidly and effectively to emergencies.

IFRC and National Societies are governed by the Statutes of the Movement, other statutory documents, as well as the Fundamental Principles². Likewise, the States parties to the Geneva Conventions must ensure that these Principles and statutory rules are respected.³

The principle of independence, together with the principles of neutrality and impartiality, assure the non-political and non-discriminatory nature of the RC/RC services. This means that when National Societies are working with their public authorities in providing international humanitarian assistance RC/RC assets or resources may only be loaned or deployed to operations, provided such deployment would not weaken the IFRC’s capacity to respond. Furthermore, the emblems of the IFRC or National Society’s name or logo shall only be used in such international deployments if the National Society retains the full control over such assets and resources; and such use is agreed by the National Society in the disaster-affected country and the IFRC and it is not considered a risk to the perceived independence and neutrality of the RC/RC response, nor a potential threat to safety, security or access of any staff or volunteers.⁴

In line with the principle of unity, there can be only one National Society per country, which is mandated to undertake its humanitarian work throughout the national territory. Like the concept of sovereignty, a National Society cannot carry out any relief activities in another country without the prior approval of that National Society. In accordance with the Statutes of the Movement and the Constitution of the Federation, all RC/RC activities in the field of international disaster relief must be given through the IFRC, the ICRC, or the National Society in country.

3. Comments and recommendations

3.1 General observations

IFRC Secretariat and EUNS welcome the developments related to the UCPM and its activities which places a greater emphasis on disaster prevention and preparedness. The progress made with the establishment of the European Emergency Response Capacity and, particularly the European Medical Corps, based on the experience gained during the response to the Ebola crisis, is considered positively. The UCPM has certainly enhanced the coordination among EU Member States and encouraged their preparedness for disasters.

² The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement are: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality were adopted in the 20th International Conference, Vienna 1965

³ Statutes of the Movement, art. 2(4): The States shall at all times respect the adherence by all the components of the Movement to the Fundamental Principles.

⁴ Paragraph 6.2 of [Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance](#), 2013.

As a relatively new coordination system, the UCPM would benefit from supporting long term existing mechanisms such as UN OCHA's and the Red Cross' and building synergies with effective practices already in place. Particularly, in interventions outside the EU, it is fundamental to respect roles and mandates of different actors, as clearly indicated in the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*. Moreover, Civil Protection interventions outside the EU should be in line with the Oslo and MCDA guidelines⁵. These interventions should focus on areas where they can add most value, such as improving the operational environment for humanitarian action with the provision of highly specialised equipment (e.g. CBRN, restoration of infrastructure, restoration of power supply). IFRC and EUNS are particularly supportive of efforts made to ensure coordination and avoid duplication.

IFRC Secretariat and EUNS think that the EU Civil Protection Programme and related funding for training, exercises, preparedness and prevention activities within the EU and its neighboring countries have proven to be useful to foster resilience and coordination during emergencies.

3.2 Recommendations

1. IFRC Secretariat/EUNS consider that the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid* is and must remain a key document for the action of the EU in humanitarian Aid and its relations with UCPM and EU civil protection actors; its principles and values must remain fully respected.
2. IFRC Secretariat/EUNS view that due to their different nature, the two EU instruments respectively for civil protection and humanitarian aid must remain clearly separated and specialised in their respective areas. Additional synergies and practical ways of cooperation should be further explored.
3. Regarding the development of EU disaster response capacities, the UCPM should invest in very specialised assets and expertise NGOs/IOs do not necessarily have (this includes, but is not limited to, CBRNE, Forest fire, MEDEVAC etc.).
4. Mapping the strengths and capacities of the main Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid actors would help fostering collaboration and partnership. Most importantly, it would facilitate the identification of actual gaps in the respective systems. This would increase efficiency and eliminate risks of duplication.
5. IFRC Secretariat/EUNS recommend that the UCPM organises regular and genuine lessons learned meetings about the interventions of the UCPM in major emergencies with the participation of key humanitarian actors involved in the operation. This would allow the joint identification of best practices and improve future emergency responses.
6. In line with the localization agenda and the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, IFRC Secretariat/EUNS strongly recommend to prioritise the support and development of local mechanisms and capacities to respond to disasters. Local response mechanisms and volunteering schemes need to be further developed. In this respect, the EU should work with the RC/RC which has the advantage of being a large network able to tap on local knowledge and expertise and provide effective support.

⁵ Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo guidelines) and Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines)

7. Lastly, IFRC Secretariat/EUNS consider that additional efforts should focus on legal preparedness for international assistance in countries both inside and outside the EU. Many countries still lack comprehensive and effective procedures for receiving international assistance in case of a major emergency. [*Resolution 6 of the 32nd International Conference*](#) of the Red Cross and Red Crescent of 2015 acknowledges the progress made in strengthening legal frameworks for disaster response in the last few years, but also stress the need for more advocacy efforts to foster global change. The UCPM and the EU Member States could play a key role in that respect. IFRC Secretariat and EUNS have an extensive experience in this sector gained through the Disaster Law Programme. They have developed several tools to assist states in addressing these important aspects that, if not properly tackled, could compromise the efforts to build or enhance sophisticated international response mechanisms.