



Restoring Family Links: Strengthening the Response of the Movement

Building on the Agenda for Humanitarian Action adopted by the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2003, the ICRC has launched a global initiative to strengthen the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Links Network over the coming decade. The purpose of the project is to build a dynamic network of tracing services that can respond quickly and efficiently to the needs of separated families.

*Interview with Renée Zellweger Monin
deputy head of the ICRC Central Tracing
Agency and Protection Division and chair
of the Project Advisory Group.*

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an RFL strategy is being
developed for the entire
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Why was this project initiated and why is it a priority?

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been responding to humanitarian needs for decades, in particular by restoring contact between separated relatives. In past years, conflicts, whether international or internal, natural disasters and migration have all produced their share of separated families. Following recent events such as the conflict in Darfur, the tsunami in Asia, Hurricane Katrina and the South Asia earthquake, hundreds of thousands of people have lost touch with their loved ones. For those concerned, the task of restoring family links (RFL) has proved essential.

Acting on the basis of its principles, the Movement, with its world-wide network of National Societies and its longstanding experience and expertise in this area, is particularly well placed to address the needs of people without news of family members. Building on various resolutions of the Movement and on the *Agenda for Humanitarian Action* adopted by the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2003, the ICRC decided to launch this project aimed at strengthening the existing family links network and improving service delivery across the world.



What are the goals of this project?

Acting through its family links network, the Movement must continue to address RFL needs in a wide range of situations, maintaining and increasing its capacity to assist people in accordance with the role assigned to it by States. With so many players involved, it is essential to think about how the network functions and how service delivery can be enhanced.

*«The RFL strategy for the
Movement will be presented
to the Council of Delegates
for adoption.»*

How will these goals be reached?

The aim of the project is to develop a 10-year RFL strategy for the Movement covering such areas as needs assessment, resources (human, technical, financial), communication, accessibility of the service and ownership of the service by individual National Societies and the Movement as a whole. This is the first time that an RFL strategy is being devised for the entire Movement and it is a fascinating endeavour. The ICRC is being assisted in this task by an Advisory Group comprising representatives from 19 National Societies and the International Federation. The group has

met three times since the launch of the project. Its task is to assist in drafting the strategy, in particular through working groups focusing on specific components of the strategy, and in planning and organizing four regional conferences that will take place at the end of 2006. The draft strategy will be discussed with National Society leaders during these conferences. After a broad consultation process within the Movement, the strategy will be presented to the Council of Delegates for adoption.

Regional RFL conferences

In cooperation with the host National Societies, the ICRC will hold four regional RFL conferences in November and December 2006 to discuss the draft *RFL Strategy for the Movement*. Leaders of all National Societies, the ICRC and the International Federation will be invited to attend the conferences so that they can agree on the future direction of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Links Network.

Locations and dates for the regional RFL conferences:

Nairobi: 1-3 November 2006

Kiev: 15-17 November 2006

Buenos Aires: 27-29 November 2006

Bangkok: 11-13 December 2006

Participants will discuss how the Movement can address the needs of those separated from their relatives, what role National Society tracing services can play in this regard and what capacities these tracing services need to develop. Each conference will endorse a «Regional Report and Recommendations» document providing a regional perspective on the strategic direction of the Movement in RFL over the next 10 years. The conference reports will be consolidated in the *RFL Strategy for the Movement* which will be presented to the Council of Delegates for adoption.

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RFL Strategy for the Movement

Migrants and their families are among those who suffer most from the disruption of family links, mainly because of the complexity and sensitivity of their status. The Movement must ensure that RFL activities for migrants and their families is based on a better understanding of their needs and on the synergy of the Movement's components. We need to offer the most vulnerable migrants an accessible and efficient service that respects their dignity and security in accordance with the Movement's Fundamental Principles.

Badreddine Bensaoud

*Secretary General
Moroccan Red Crescent
Chair of the Working Group on RFL in Migration Situations*

When a natural disaster strikes, countless people experience great psychological stress caused by the sudden loss of contact with a loved one. Last year the tsunami in Asia, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in South Asia and numerous other natural disasters showed once again the urgency of restoring family links.

The message I heard so often from worried family members during

my own experience in delivering RFL services was unambiguous and speaks for itself: «Please find my family.» The Movement needs to provide an efficient rapid-response mechanism in which preparedness and effective coordination play a key role.

Marjolein Bosch

*Head, Tracing Services and Missing Persons Helpline
The Netherlands Red Cross
Chair of the Working Group on RFL in Disasters*

Understanding the needs of beneficiary communities is essential to the success of humanitarian work. In order to develop an effective, relevant and responsive global RFL strategy, the Movement must seek to obtain a basic understanding of these needs. For this purpose, we have developed a tool for use by National Societies which we believe will encourage reflection and help identify key RFL needs.

Hang Vo

*National Manager, International Tracing, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Services
Australian Red Cross
Chair of the Working Group on Initial RFL Needs Survey*



The Advisory Group, Geneva, April 2006

It is important that the Movement inform the public about its tracing services – that it tell people where they can go for assistance, how they can reach out for help and what steps they can take to ease their anguish and suffering. The Movement's tracing activities impact directly on people's daily lives and we need to make them better known. Informing people about our services is also important for increasing support from within the Movement and from States and other key stakeholders. This support is essential if we are to improve our services and meet the needs of those without news from their loved ones.

Antonella Notari

*Spokesperson & Head, Media Relations
ICRC
Chair of the Working Group on Communication and Fundraising*

Global mapping – Humanitarian needs and Movement capacities

In developing an RFL strategy, the Movement must be guided by the humanitarian needs of those without news of family members and consider both the weaknesses that exist within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Links

Network and the challenges that need to be addressed. The global mapping exercise will gather key data in three areas: 1) the capacities of National Society tracing services, 2) existing and potential RFL needs in each country and 3) the ICRC's

capacity to play its role as coordinator and technical advisor for National Societies with regard to RFL activities. The mapping exercise is underway and the results will be presented to the regional RFL conferences.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



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