

# **Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Crystal: "Last Resort" for Humanity: @PKO Now! No.88**

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## **The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

The "Red Cross" and the "Red Crescent" have internationally been recognised as symbols of humanitarian action in times of conflict and disaster. There are 189 individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (NS) around the world.<sup>1</sup> Most Muslim countries adopt the crescent, as an alternative to the cross associated with Christianity, although neither of the two emblems originally has any religious meaning as such; the Red Cross is merely a colour reversal of the Swiss flag to show respect to Henry Dunant, the organisation's founder, and his country, and the Red Crescent is also a colour reversal of the Ottoman flag. Together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the three main components form the so-called "International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement", which is the world's largest humanitarian network made up of nearly 100 million volunteers, supporters and staff.<sup>2</sup> Each Movement partner has its own legal status, operational strategy and budget without any organisational hierarchy vis-à-vis others, whilst they are all united by seven common Fundamental Principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the third distinctive emblem of the "Red Crystal", which evokes no religious significance, was newly established by the adoption of the Third Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions (AP III) in 2005. Accordingly, the

Magen David Adom (MDA, “Red Shield or Red Star of David”) in Israel joined the Movement as a formal partner,<sup>4</sup> together with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) following a memorandum of understanding signed between the two NS.<sup>5</sup> The MDA is still allowed to use the Red Shield or Red Star of David for relief activities within its national territory, and now to use the traditional emblem by incorporating it within the frame of the Red Crystal when conducting such activities beyond its borders.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the creation of the Red Crystal has successfully enhanced not only mutual cooperation between the MDA and the PRCS working together in the field but also the spirit of humanitarianism amongst all other partners towards a more consolidated Movement as a whole.

### **The Seville Agreement**

The common mission of the Movement is to ‘alleviate human suffering, protect life and health, and uphold human dignity especially during armed conflicts and other emergencies’<sup>7</sup> In principle, the ICRC is mandated to provide protection and assistance to people affected by armed conflicts, whilst the same is true of the IFRC but for those suffering from natural and man-made disasters in peace time. Needless to say, each NS, as the backbone of the worldwide network of the Movement, is to conduct a wider range of activities, regardless of wartime or peacetime, for those in need within its own territory. At the operational level, however, it is not always clear which component(s) of the Movement should actually take action in some complicated situations requiring international relief operations, and how: issues of direction and coordination of such activities. The so-called “Seville Agreement”, adopted in 1997, endeavours to clarify the issues anticipated in various situations, including ‘armed conflict concomitant with natural or technological disasters’ and ‘unforeseen situations’, by referring to two new concepts of ‘lead role’ and ‘lead agency’.<sup>8</sup> The lead role concept aims to maximise the Movement's impact by strengthening functional cooperation between the three components (NS, IFRC, and ICRC) for their continuous and coherent action and by eliminating overlap and duplication of effort, taking limited human, material and financial resources available into consideration. Nevertheless, the Seville Agreement has only served as general guidelines; in practice, each Member partner is requested to promptly and efficiently respond to all types of humanitarian emergencies on a case-by-case basis.

On the other hand, the Seville Agreement only briefly touched upon the relationship with other humanitarian organisations outside the Movement such as the UN and NGOs.<sup>9</sup> It simply provides that Movement's international relief operations should be coordinated with those conducted by other organisations 'where this is in the interest of the victims and in accordance with the [seven common] Fundamental Principles'.<sup>10</sup> The Movement's activities are limited to purely humanitarian ones, which would eventually secure its access to all expected beneficiaries even in politically sensitive situations. For example, the ICRC, which regularly visits prisoners of war and security detainees in order to ensure with detaining authorities humane treatment for such people deprived of their liberty in connection with armed conflict, would neither share its detailed activity reports with other organisations nor make them public for this purpose. Instead, with very few exceptions, the ICRC discusses its observations and recommendations, through strictly confidential dialogues, only with the authorities concerned which bear primary responsibility for the humanitarian issues at stake. The trusting relationship built through such a principle of "confidentiality" allows the neutral organisation to remain continuously involved in humanitarian action even in times of conflict. Each Movement partner will continue staying with most vulnerable people on the front line of humanitarian crises as their "last resort".

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See the website of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), “International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”, <https://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/the-movement/> (consulted 19 May 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For the details, see ICRC, *The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement* (May 2014), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-4046.pdf> (consulted 19 May 2015). For the purpose of promoting such humanitarian values, the “World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day” is annually celebrated on 8 May, the birthday of Henry Dunant.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief explanation on the procedure to recognise and admit a new partner to the Movement, see IFRC, “Adopting the additional emblem”, <https://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/the-movement/emblems/adopting-the-additional-emblem/> (consulted 19 May 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom in Israel (28 November 2005), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/red-cross-crescent-movement/31st-international-conference/31-int-conference-mou-mds-prcs-en.pdf> (consulted 19 May 2015). Significantly, Paragraph 2 of the MoU provides as follows: ‘MDA and PRCS recognize that PRCS is the authorized national society in the Palestinian territory...’.

<sup>6</sup> Article 3 of the AP III. See also Commentary on the AP III (2007), <https://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Comment.xsp?viewComments=LookUpCOMART&articleUNID=872E9AD4A0B88563C125719A003E6291> (consulted 20 May 2015).

<sup>7</sup> ICRC, “The Movement” (24 August 2013), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/movement/overview-the-movement.htm> (consulted 21 May 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Agreement on the organization of the international activities of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement - The Seville Agreement (1997), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/other/57jp4y.htm> (consulted 21 May 2015). See also Supplementary measures to enhance the implementation of the Seville Agreement (2005), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/resolution/council-delegates-resolution-8-2005.htm> (consulted 22 May 2015); ICRC, “Reinforcing Red Cross / Red Crescent cooperation in emergencies: the Seville Agreement” (7 February 2003), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/5jjkwe.htm> (consulted 21 May 2015).

<sup>9</sup> See also *The Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Disaster Relief* (1995), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jmvv.htm> (consulted 22 May 2015); *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* (1995), <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/code-of-conduct-290296.htm> (consulted 22 May 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Article 6.1.1 e) and 6.2.2 c).