



ICRC

**TEN YEARS OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES
ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT**

Achievements and Future Challenges

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"Humanitarian Actors – Commitment to the protection of IDPs"

Address by Angelo Gnaedinger

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank you for inviting the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to participate in this conference to mark the 10th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

I am particularly pleased to be on this panel, which reviews our commitment to the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The ICRC is an organization mandated by international humanitarian law (IHL) to protect and assist those who, like IDPs, suffer the consequences of armed conflict and violence; it is therefore always in search of better means of tackling the needs of those – millions – who have been forced to flee their homes.

I shall make four points briefly and raise one question in conclusion:

- First, I would like to express the ICRC's conviction that the Guiding Principles are relevant and deserve our full support. They are relevant because, in several instances, they provide more specific guidance than IHL (which protects civilians, IDPs among them, during armed conflict). For example, there are no specific provisions in IHL requiring that displaced persons be allowed to return safely and with dignity. Also, the Guiding Principles deal with issues associated with forced displacement, regardless of the way a particular situation is classified under law. Thus, they are as pertinent during and after an armed conflict as they are in a situation of internal strife, a complex emergency, or a natural disaster. For this reason, the ICRC began, in 1998 already, to require its field staff to familiarize themselves with the Guiding Principles and to make appropriate use of them.

- Tens of millions of people throughout the world suffer the effects of internal displacement. It is one of the most serious humanitarian consequences of armed conflict and other situations of violence. This brings me to my second point: I would like to reiterate the ICRC's unwavering commitment to the protection of IDPs. The acronym 'IDP' gives the merest idea of the grim realities that confront us in many parts of the world today. In the past month of August alone, more than half a million people have been driven out of their homes as a result of three renewed conflicts: in Georgia, in areas on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and in the southern Philippines. During the recent weeks tens of thousands more have had to flee their homes in Sri Lanka – where the civil war reached new peaks - in Somalia, in eastern Congo, and in many other places where hostilities and attacks on civilians have continued unabated for years.

We are committed to reaching all these people in profound distress, who

are in urgent need of basic goods and services, and in need – most of all – of a sense of security and hope.

I would like to outline, very briefly, how we strive to give our commitment practical application. I cannot sufficiently stress the importance of having direct and timely access to displaced persons. We take our first, and essential, step in protecting IDPs when our people - delegates, local staff, and members of the local Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - reach the displaced and set about opening and sustaining a direct line of communication line with them. The next, crucial, step in our approach is to respond rapidly and effectively to the most urgent basic needs.

Our ongoing direct communication with displaced persons and our readiness to participate proactively in the appropriate relief effort are the basis for our representations to the public authorities and non-State actors who have effective control over IDPs. Thus involving ourselves we try hard to mobilize them and to make them fulfil their legal obligation to the civilian population. This approach, which includes the provision of relief, can be effective only if we manage to enter into a meaningful dialogue with all armed parties in a given situation; that is necessary in order to discuss our own security arrangements as much as the protection needs of the displaced population.

Thus, our mandate, which has its basis in IHL, our approach – which is based on the principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality –, our extended network with all actors in crisis areas throughout the world and our rapid-deployment procedures as much as our solid track record in protracted conflicts enable us to reach millions of IDPs. They allow us to provide them with food and essential household items, safe drinking water, and basic health care (through mobile clinics). They allow us to provide support for hospitals faced with an unexpected surge of patients with weapon-inflicted injuries, and to intervene with local authorities and armed groups.

- Thirdly, I should like to draw your attention, briefly, to the importance of preventing forced displacement. The ICRC has consistently stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to the humanitarian needs of the entire civilian population in any crisis or situation of conflict. In our view, it is of paramount importance that we reach out to everyone under pressure, and not only to those who have been forcibly displaced. So, we assist more than half a million people living in villages and among nomadic communities in Darfur. Our hope is that this will help those living in remote areas to recover some measure of self-sufficiency and resilience, ease tensions over scarce resources, and prevent these people from having to move to IDP camps. Our efforts to prevent displacement require us also to persuade those exercising control over contested territory to refrain from deliberate attacks against civilians or the intentional destruction of their livelihood. When these efforts are fruitless and flight unavoidable, we try to help people get out of harm's way. We did this recently in Georgia when a number of isolated and frightened elderly people found themselves trapped by the fighting in that country. Communities hosting IDPs also have a wide range of needs; the ICRC pays special attention to their situation, which is often as dire as that of the displaced.

- Finally, the last point I wanted to make and the question I wished to raise are related to the way we work together within the humanitarian community. The collaborative approach was developed to ensure effective system-wide involvement in the IDP issue. It called for flexible strategies for responding to situations of internal displacement; these strategies would take into account the mandates and comparative strengths and advantages of the actors and agencies in the field, as well as the different contexts in which internal displacement occurs. This collaborative approach respects the ICRC's identity as a specifically neutral and

independent actor while bringing us into a dynamic and complementary collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs through the humanitarian coordinator system. We have constructively engaged in this approach and are at ease with it. My question is this: is the collaborative approach still valid or has it been fully replaced by the UN cluster approach? I hope this panel will enable us to clarify this question.

Thank you

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