

GUIDE TO THE AUXILIARY ROLE OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT NATIONAL SOCIETIES – AMERICAS

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Saving lives, changing minds.

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. Together with our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we reach 97 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes as well as 85 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to ‘saving lives and changing minds’.

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Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our communitybased expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

**Guide to the Auxiliary Role
of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies – Americas**

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GUIDE TO THE AUXILIARY ROLE
OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
NATIONAL SOCIETIES – **AMERICAS**



Foreword

The auxiliary role provides essential space for dialogue and mutually beneficial relations between National Societies and public authorities. This *Guide to the Auxiliary Role* is designed to help external actors, particularly public authorities, develop their understanding of the auxiliary role and strategies to enhance their partnerships with National Societies.

This document provides clear and simple information to showcase the auxiliary role as a tool to clarify roles and responsibilities in the humanitarian field within the framework of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. A strong auxiliary relationship between a Red Cross or Red Crescent Society and the public authorities can make humanitarian and development action more effective and efficient.

The *Guide* shows practical examples from this region of how the auxiliary role creates a space for dialogue and partnership. While there is no 'one fit' approach for a successful auxiliary relationship, there are countless opportunities for the auxiliary role to assist both governments and Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies

in achieving their humanitarian goals and activities. The auxiliary role is a reflection of the context in which it exists. There can be many viewpoints of what a successful auxiliary role should look like.

Therefore, the *Guide* is not meant to be prescriptive but to illustrate the breadth of what can come under the umbrella of the auxiliary role to assist states and National Societies in achieving their humanitarian and development goals. This *Guide* may be used also in conjunction with the previously published *Guide to Parliamentarians*, available on our public website at ifrc.org.

We hope that this document will serve to strengthen relations between National Societies and public authorities and will initiate many valuable exchanges between them.

Yours sincerely



Walter COTTE

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What is a Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society?

- Each National Society is an **independent, impartial and neutral** humanitarian organization with a special status and role among humanitarian agencies. National Societies are made up of volunteers and staff, who provide a wide variety of services, ranging from disaster relief, development activities and assistance for the victims of armed conflicts, to first-aid training and restoring family links. They are an important part of the domestic response to humanitarian challenges and can count upon the solidarity of the world's largest humanitarian network in situations where there are exceptional levels of need.
- National Societies form part of the **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**, which is made up of three components:
 - 189 National Societies
 - International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the Federation)
 - International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).
- National Societies are not non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as each one has a specific and distinctive partnership with its public authorities. At the same time, they are **not part of any government** and must be able to deliver their humanitarian services to vulnerable people at all times in conformity with the Fundamental Principles. The auxiliary role is the expression of this particular status and provides an opportunity for each National Society to work closely with its public authorities on humanitarian issues while maintaining its independence.
- National Societies' work is based upon the Movement's **Seven Fundamental Principles**. These principles and their definitions have been agreed upon by states at the International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent and under the **Geneva Conventions**. National Societies are required to abide by them at all times.
- According to the **Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**, to be recognized as part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a National Society must *be duly recognized by the legal government of its country, on the basis of the Geneva Conventions and of the national legislation, as a voluntary aid society, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.*

What is the auxiliary status and role?

- The **auxiliary status** is permanent and is part of the **legal foundation** of every National Society. Normally, it is included in the **domestic law** of the country and occurs once a National Society has been recognized by the legal government of its country, on the basis of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and of national legislation, as a voluntary aid society, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

The **auxiliary role** is the embodiment of a National Society's auxiliary status; it helps to **define the relationship** between a government and a National Society and provides opportunities for **regular contact** at all levels. The auxiliary role also refers to a set of **agreed responsibilities and activities** defined by a government and a National Society together.

- The 30th **International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent** (2007), described the auxiliary role as a relationship where:

“[P]ublic authorities and National Societies as auxiliaries enjoy a specific and distinctive partnership, entailing mutual responsibilities and benefits, based on international and national laws, in which the national public authorities

and the National Society agree on the areas in which the National Society supplements or substitutes public humanitarian services [...].”

- This means that National Societies have **unique legal status**: they are private organizations with certain recognized public functions. The auxiliary role can help National Societies to serve the most vulnerable and help public authorities to accomplish their humanitarian objectives.
- Because of their auxiliary status, National Societies have a duty to **consider seriously** any request from their public authorities to carry out humanitarian activities within their mandate. The public authorities should take full advantage of the services and activities of the National Society to complement public social services and disaster response mechanisms. Public authorities, recognizing the independence of National Societies, must refrain from requesting that National Societies perform activities which are **in conflict with the Fundamental Principles or the Statutes** of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. States, themselves, have affirmed the obligation of National Societies to abide by these principles.

- **Independence**, as defined under the Fundamental Principles, means that National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their public authorities and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must maintain their autonomy always so that they are able, at all times, to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement. This independence is a valuable tool for the National Society's work, allowing the National Society to gain the trust and confidence of, and access to, vulnerable communities. Fostering the independence of the National Society helps the public authorities to ensure that more-effective humanitarian assistance can be delivered to the most vulnerable.
- The auxiliary status is most valuable when its **contents are clearly defined**. Therefore, the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent has called upon National Societies and their respective public authorities at all levels to pursue and enhance balanced partnerships with clear and mutual responsibilities.

Where does the auxiliary role come from?

This role dates from the foundation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the 19th century. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were created to provide medical assistance to those wounded in battle, in support of their countries' military medical services. Today, National Societies are recognized as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field **in times of both war and peace**.

Subsequent resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which states help to develop, have described the auxiliary role of the National Society further, defined its characteristics and affirmed the role of the public authorities in supporting the National Society.

How can the auxiliary role help to reach humanitarian goals and obligations?

- In accordance with the **United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182**, each state has the responsibility to take care of those affected by natural disasters and other emergencies occurring in its territory by initiating, organizing, coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance.
- As auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, National Societies have the potential to be **valuable partners** to support the public authorities in meeting their humanitarian obligations and achieving their humanitarian and development goals. As National Societies respond to the needs of vulnerable populations domestically, and build community resilience through their staff and volunteer bases, their goals are similar to those found in national disaster or development plans. National Societies may be invaluable in the development of such plans, providing opportunities for coordination and mutual support.

- National Societies are able to complement state humanitarian activities. They have an important role in establishing community-based functions in core areas like health, disaster management, etc. These can be of invaluable support to public authorities during emergencies which surpass normal coping mechanisms and when working towards sustainable development. National Societies may have access to areas that are less accessible to others. They also have access to the global expertise of sister National Societies as well as the Federation and ICRC, which support them.

*The extent to which a National Society is able to support the humanitarian and development goals of the public authorities is highly dependent upon its **capacity** as an organization. Therefore, an important part of the auxiliary relationship is the role of the public authorities to **promote and support the capacity building** of their National Societies to be effective and strong humanitarian organizations.*

National Societies working with the public authorities

- National Societies engage in a wide variety of **humanitarian and development activities** and programmes depending upon the specific needs and context in their countries. As auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field, they may carry out some of these activities in agreement or coordination with their public authorities while maintaining their independence.
- National Society activities may cover a broad range of sectors such as disaster response and prevention, disaster risk reduction, health (including blood and ambulance services), food security, shelter, international humanitarian law (IHL) dissemination/promotion, support in the development of effective disaster law, tracing services and emblem protection, to name a few.
- Born from and firmly anchored in the communities which they serve, National Societies and their volunteers support communities to prepare for both unforeseen and predictable emergencies that threaten life and safety, as well as, often, serving as the last resort for persons living at the edges of society: the marginalized and isolated.

- Below are a few examples of how specific National Societies and their public authorities have agreed to work together, coordinate or support one another. Again, the most appropriate way for a National Society and the public authorities to engage is highly dependent upon the particular **national context**.





Costa Rica: Pre-hospital services



The Costa Rica Red Cross is enabled by the state to be the unique provider of pre-hospital services, which are integrated fully into the national emergency system. The provision of these services abides by standards and regulations established by the public authorities and is coordinated directly with governmental institutions in the interest of beneficiaries. The Red Cross is responsible for mass events, vigilance during holidays, international leaders' meetings like the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and response in airports.

Ecuador: Training



The Ecuadorian Red Cross Technological Institute is a leading institution in the training of technicians for medical emergencies and emergency management. As part of the Ecuadorian Red Cross, the institute is recognized by the Ecuadorian Government as an auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian sector. It promotes the initial training process and acts as permanent supporting organization in the community for risk reduction and prevention, responding to medical emergencies and providing pre-hospital care, risk and disaster management. Its mission also is to support and promote highly qualified personnel, to the principal public institutions of the Ecuadorian Government and the private sector.

Honduras: Friendly neighbourhoods



The Honduran Red Cross has been promoting the Friendly Neighbourhoods programme in the community of San José de la Vega; a park improvement committee has been created and its purpose is to rehabilitate public spaces and, in the future, to establish a board of trustees recognized by the municipality of the Central District. Among its achievements was

the creation of a work plan, which was ratified. This plan generated a series of actions that were conducted by the committee, such as visits to different state offices to present their proposals and requests for the support of park improvements. Dialogue was held with the municipal authorities on the coordination of activities.

Dominica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: Volcanic risk reduction



A regional pilot project was created to strengthen the existing volcanic risk management systems and meet those needs that are not currently covered, especially as they concern the links between the scientists and the authorities on one hand and the authorities and the population on the other hand. The project involved coordination and harmonization of approaches with the Red Cross National Societies and National Disaster Offices (NDOs) of each country, including strong mutual support in project planning and the implementation of activities. A key factor for

success was the creation of a volcanic risk Think Tank, which was set up successfully during the initial stages of the project and comprised a number of national and regional stakeholders. The group was able to identify the gaps in the volcano early-warning system in the region and the need for public-awareness materials. The Dominica Red Cross supported the development of pilot contingency plans for schools in coordination with the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which was implementing a disaster risk reduction project in schools in partnership with Ministry of Education.



Supporting National Societies

- As previously mentioned, the auxiliary role is not an automatic guarantee that a National Society will be able to support the humanitarian and development goals of the public authorities at all levels. To be efficient and successful, a National Society must have the **capacity to carry out programmes and activities**. The public authorities can play an important role in ensuring the development and maintenance of a strong, independent National Society, which can, in turn, be of great benefit to the public authorities themselves.
- There are many ways for the public authorities to support the National Society. For instance, investing in an **exchange of skills and knowledge-sharing** can be of great mutual benefit. The same is true for ensuring **co-ordination**, both in activities and in planning. Both the public authorities and the National Society will be able to gain further experience and expertise to the benefit of the most vulnerable.
- While the purpose of the auxiliary role is not principally one of fund-raising, **resources** do have important consequences on the ability of a National Society to conduct humanitarian activities and to support the public authorities in reaching their humanitarian goals and obligations. States have, through resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, confirmed their roles in supporting their National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, including through the provision of resources.
- There are numerous ways that public authorities can contribute to the success of their National Societies. To name only a few, they may:
 - **provide direct contributions**
 - annual direct contributions (for programmatic or core operating costs)
 - fees for service provision

- **provide indirect contributions**

- tax exemptions and fiscal concessions (including customs, gifts and legacies)
- fiscal incentives for donors
- in-kind contributions (office space, land, etc.)
- special benefits (i.e., preferable rates on telecommunications, taxes or fees levied for the National Societies, etc.)
- licences to run profit-making endeavours (charity shops, commercial first-aid courses, blood provision, etc.)

- **ensure an enabling environment**

- creation or adaptation of policies and laws to facilitate the humanitarian work of National Societies, such as in the field of volunteering
- help to ensure access to reach those who need help and to protect humanitarian space.

Developing humanitarian plans, policies and laws

- Each National Society can be a valuable resource not only during a time of disaster, but long before that. A number of National Societies are included in **national planning groups or committees** for disaster preparedness, risk reduction and management, as well as development. This can help to ensure that relevant humanitarian needs are addressed and that community-level needs of vulnerable populations are reflected in national planning mechanisms.
- Inclusion in committees/planning groups can be another way to ensure **regular and in-depth contact** between a National Society and relevant public authorities at the national or local level.
- As agreed by states at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, National Societies can support states with advice in the **assessment and strengthening of disaster-related laws, policies and regulations** also.

Keeping the auxiliary role healthy and up to date

- Not only is the auxiliary role a defining characteristic of National Societies, but also it requires dialogue about responsibilities and roles. As such, the public authorities and the National Society will want to ensure that the auxiliary role reflects and is adapted to the needs and priorities of each side. **Regular dialogue around humanitarian issues** is essential to ensure that the auxiliary role is serving its purpose and the needs of both the public authorities and the National Society in the best way.
- Periodically reviewing the state of the auxiliary role that the National Society has with regard to the public authorities can provide opportunities to ensure regular and appropriate points of contact, opportunities for increased partnership, and transparency and accountability.
- The public authorities can aid in identifying fora where the National Society could add value. Also, the National Society can invite the public authorities to be included in its board and strategy meetings.

- The public authorities and the National Society can **refer to the resolutions, and any joint pledges**, to which both have agreed during the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. These resolutions can be a useful entry point for discussions regarding how each can contribute to their implementation and how they relate to the humanitarian work already being undertaken by each, either jointly or individually.
- Just as the National Society can assist its public authorities in responding to humanitarian needs, the public authorities can help to ensure an **enabling environment** for the work of the National Society and support the building of its capacity. Also, they may voice support for the National Society as a preferred partner for domestic organizations and as a preferred operating partner for multilateral partners, etc., where appropriate.

In conclusion, a strong auxiliary role can benefit both public authorities and National Societies in their quest to support vulnerable communities both in times of crisis and in pursuing development goals. Public authorities are encouraged to work closely with their National Societies through continued dialogue, to ensure that the best possible humanitarian assistance may be provided to those most in need.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace among all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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