

PROTECT. PROMOTE. RECOGNIZE.

Volunteering in emergencies

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P.O. Box 372
CH-1211 Geneva 19
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 22 730 4222
Telefax: +41 22 733 0395
E-mail: secretariat@ifrc.org
Web site: <http://www.ifrc.org>

CALL TO ACTION

1. PROMOTE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL VOLUNTEERS

Public authorities must work with volunteer-based organizations to protect, promote and recognize volunteers, especially in emergencies.

Understand the economic and social value volunteers bring to communities

- Develop credible data to encourage new policies for volunteers.
- Invest time and resources into volunteer development at all levels.

Promote volunteering and recognize volunteers

- Create incentives for volunteers and encourage employers to take volunteer experience into consideration.
- Support volunteer organizations in recruitment.

Strengthen the legal protection of volunteers

- Review existing laws and address gaps in legislation.
- Ensure that volunteers' rights and responsibilities are clear.
- Implement existing laws.

2. IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS OF VOLUNTEERS ACTING IN EMERGENCIES

Volunteers make it possible for humanitarian aid to reach the most vulnerable and they must be protected. Authorities must emphasize this message during peacetime and in conflict.

Integrate volunteer capacity into domestic emergency response plans

- Recognize the role volunteers play in extending the reach of government.
- Improve disaster planning between government and humanitarian actors.
- Make sure that volunteers are insured while responding to disasters.

Ensure that volunteers have safe access to all vulnerable groups

- Respect and recognize all volunteers as impartial humanitarian actors.
- Respect the red cross and red crescent emblems as symbols of neutrality and protection, as defined by the Geneva Conventions.

Include psychosocial support for volunteers in all response management plans

- Consider volunteers' psychosocial needs when they face traumatic situations.
- Offer psychosocial support before, during and after disaster response.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly 1 billion people around the world choose to be volunteers. More than 13 million of these join the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, delivering services to vulnerable people with no expectation of financial or material gain. When an emergency strikes, they perform first aid, rescue people from collapsed buildings, drive ambulances, brave flood waters, deliver letters to prisoners, conduct vaccination campaigns and provide comfort to those in need. Volunteers boost community resilience and extend the reach of governments.

The nature of emergency response work means that some volunteers risk their lives. In 2011 alone, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers around the world sustained injuries or died in service. In February, a post-flood relief distribution in Pakistan turned violent when men armed with AK-47 rifles threatened Pakistan Red Crescent Society staff and volunteers distributing food parcels. In April, Saleh al-Awami, a young paramedic, was killed by shrapnel inside a clearly marked Libyan Red Crescent ambulance that was hit by a missile. In July, 32-year-old Han Sun Il, a farmer and Red Cross volunteer in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, jumped into swirling flood water to rescue two children trapped in their home. He got them to safety, but was then swept away. Two months later, a Sudanese Red Crescent volunteer administering first aid to casualties in South Kordofan was caught in crossfire and died. These are just a few of the many reported incidents involving Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers. We call on governments to work with us to recognize and protect volunteers, particularly in times of emergency or disaster, when many volunteers risk their own lives to save others.

In order to design and support policies that promote volunteering, governments need to measure and disseminate the economic value they bring to communities. Tools now exist to calculate this information. In March 2011, the International Labour Organization (ILO) issued the *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*. When the IFRC used the ILO's methodology, it found that active volunteers for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement contributed close to 6 billion US dollars worth of services worldwide in 2009 – or close to 90 US cents for every person on earth. The manual's researchers estimate the total economic value of the world's volunteer workforce at nearly

1.4 trillion US dollars, or more than 2 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).

It is more difficult to measure the social value of volunteers, but governments should be aware that people working side by side and delivering services to the vulnerable create a sense of community empowerment and solidarity that money cannot buy. As a recent Red Cross pilot project in Burundi shows, volunteerism can help a post-conflict, ethnically fractured society rebuild and recover. In 2010, Burundi Red Cross volunteers built 8,115 houses for refugees returning from Rwanda and Tanzania – people they considered to be in particular need. With no external funding, they built the homes with materials available in their community. It is just one example of the widespread and ongoing collaboration between Hutus and Tutsis since the ethnic violence of the 1990s. One volunteer said: "Now we're working together to help vulnerable people, and, knowing each other, we will not return to civil war."



Burundi Red Cross volunteers carry out door-to-door visits to check that mosquito nets are being used properly. Photo: Bob van Mol/IFRC.

Under the Geneva Conventions, governments recognize Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies as "auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field". Volunteers are crucial to this auxiliary status, and must be accounted for in all disaster contingency planning. Prior to an emergency, there should be coordinated

strategies and regular dialogue among all levels of government, the local Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society, and other disaster-related and volunteering organizations. These partners should build relationships in advance, so that trust is established and any gaps or overlaps can be addressed. Volunteers must have proper equipment, clothing and training in order to do their jobs safely and effectively.

One example of excellent preparation and cooperation was the earthquake response in Christchurch, New Zealand, where partners included the New Zealand Red Cross, the Ministry of Civil Defence, the police, the Lions Clubs and others. It was chaotic, like all disasters, but, in the words of one Red Cross volunteer, it was “organized chaos” – and it worked.

Even when a response is well managed, emergencies are traumatic experiences. Being a volunteer does not make a person immune. First responders may also be victims, suffering the loss of loved ones or property, or witnessing heart-wrenching situations. Governments and volunteer organizations are beginning to understand the value of psychosocial services and counselling for beneficiaries; they must also extend these services to volunteers themselves and include them in all management plans.

“We must remember, volunteering is a choice one makes in sacrifice of doing something else,” states Dr Mukesh Kapila, Under Secretary General at the IFRC. Volunteers give their time and talent, expecting little in return. They must be encouraged and promoted, or this goodwill could disappear. Recognition does not have to be monetary – it can be a gesture, a speech at a public gathering, free public transport, new uniforms or scholarships to public universities. “If we are working for humanity, the authorities should protect us socially and economically if they can,” says one Red Crescent volunteer in Pakistan. “We are not a liability. We are assets of a society, because we are giving our best for them.”

Recognizing volunteers also helps to ensure they have safe access to vulnerable groups. Governments should ensure that the military, the police and the public realize the function and value of volunteers and protect them at all times, both during times of peace and conflict. Awareness campaigns and the dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement help build a culture of respect. In times of conflict, no party should ever target the Red Cross

or Red Crescent – or indeed any other humanitarian organization – nor misuse the emblems, equipment or volunteers for their own means.

Governments should continue to strengthen the legal protection of volunteers. In 2009, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme reported that, since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, more than 70 national laws or policies that encourage or regulate volunteering have been adopted. Despite this increased awareness, legal gaps remain and, overall, there is an ad hoc approach to volunteering law, especially in emergencies. Issues that require serious consideration include labour law, taxation, liability and training. Of course, passing a law doesn’t mean anything if authorities do not fully enforce it. Implementation strategies should be taken into consideration when laws are being drafted.

Another important issue, and one that affects a large majority of volunteers around the world, is a lack of insurance. Solutions to this problem exist, such as the IFRC-backed scheme that costs National Societies just 1 Swiss franc per person, but without government support, these might still be beyond the reach of some volunteer organizations. It is a tragedy when a volunteer is killed or injured; the suffering is even greater when a volunteer cannot afford medical care, or a victim’s family receives no compensation for his or her death.

As long as there are disasters, there will always be volunteers who face danger in order to help others. They are a precious resource. We must all work together to protect, promote and recognize each and every one of them.

VOLUNTEERING IN EMERGENCIES

ADVOCACY REPORT

In February 2011, after exceptionally heavy monsoon rains caused some of the worst flooding in Pakistan's history, three Pakistan Red Crescent staff and 23 volunteers were conducting a routine food distribution in a village in Sindh province. Moments after their five trucks pulled up to the awaiting beneficiaries, about half a dozen men armed with AK-47 rifles appeared out of nowhere. Nervous and agitated, the men demanded that the trucks be handed over, sticking a rifle barrel into the team leader's stomach. They fired shots at some volunteers, narrowly missing the ear of a 19-year-old man. They then stole a truck and drove away, forcing another volunteer, who was still on top, to jump off the fast-moving vehicle.

The team proceeded with the distribution but, soon afterwards, another armed band arrived. Angry and fearing that they would receive nothing, the villagers surged forward, looting the contents of the other four trucks. The whole incident lasted three hours.

From delivering food to providing first aid, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies play a key role at community level. Without their 13.1 million volunteers – an average of 20 for every paid member of staff – they simply wouldn't exist. But volunteers around the world face risks every day, especially during disasters and emergencies.

According to the IFRC's definition, a volunteer is someone who works for a more humane and peaceful world by delivering services directly to vulnerable people and seeking to prevent and reduce vulnerability and exclusion. Volunteering is carried out by people acting of their own free will – not through any external social, economic or political pressure – with no desire for material or financial gain.

Worldwide, two out of every 1,000 people volunteer for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Twenty-six percent of these volunteers act in disasters; from 2004 to 2010 they reached more than 300 million people. The range of activities they perform is vast, as are the risks they face. Detailed statistics on deaths and injuries are scarce, since each country is responsible for its own volunteers, and they cannot always report everything that happens in the field. Reporting systems are often hampered by limited technology

or capacity. What is certain is that in 186 countries, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are consistently at the front line of emergencies, from tsunamis to civil wars to pandemics.



Following the devastating earthquake on 28 February 2010, Chilean Red Cross volunteers carried out emergency response activities such as search and rescue, evacuating patients, removing debris and recovering bodies. Photo: Chilean Red Cross.

And being at the front line is not without risk. Volunteer ambulance drivers rescuing injured people during conflicts in Syria and Libya have been gunned down. Volunteers have drowned while attempting to save flood victims in the Philippines and in North Korea. In 2010, Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano erupted, killing dozens of people, including an Indonesian Red Cross Society volunteer who died trying to evacuate civilians. During a drug cartel gunfight in Tampico, Mexico, a stray bullet killed a 20-year-old female volunteer outside a medical clinic. Volunteers responding to the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York combed through the ruins of the World Trade Center looking for bodies, and later developed cancer from the smoke and dust. In Afghanistan, Red Crescent volunteers frequently travel through dangerous areas delivering letters from families of government soldiers or from Taliban fighters in prison. Then there are the everyday risks:

car accidents, hold-ups, hostage takings, even threats from members of the community who believe that volunteers have special privileges.

Name any major crisis in any country and you can be sure that Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteers were there. With increasing global pressures such as climate change, overpopulation and urban violence, our need for volunteers will only grow stronger. Civil societies, governments and corporate partners must work together to protect and encourage volunteerism. Volunteers are a precious resource.

UNDERSTAND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE THAT VOLUNTEERS BRING TO COMMUNITIES

Until recently, there was no systematic way of measuring the value of volunteers. As a result, economists tended to ignore their contribution to gross domestic product (GDP). If governments collect credible data, it will lead to the development of policies that recognize the significant contribution made by volunteers, often at great personal sacrifice.

In March 2011, the International Labour Organization (ILO) issued the *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, the first rigorous method for producing global estimates using existing data sources. The researchers' own statistics are startling: for 2005, they estimate the total economic value of the world's volunteer workforce at nearly 1.4 trillion US dollars. In a recent article they state: "Nearly 1 billion people throughout the world volunteer their time through public, nonprofit, or for-profit organizations, or directly for friends or neighbours, in a typical year, making 'Volunteerland,' if it were a country, the second most populous country in the world" – and the seventh largest economy.

One of the researchers, Wojciech Sokolowski, says that on average, every dollar's worth of contributions to volunteer organizations translates into two dollars of volunteer work. Although they are, by definition, unpaid, volunteers do cost money – in terms of management, coordination, training, clothing, equipment, insurance and psychosocial support. However, the figures prove they are well worth the investment.

Nevertheless, Sokolowski points out that the data remains limited. He and his colleagues have not

been able to extend their research to specific fields, such as volunteering in emergencies. Overall, the researchers estimate that volunteer positions equal around 20 million full-time jobs. Sokolowski notes: "If I said that I knew of an industry that could add 20 million jobs to the economy, everybody would be jumping and saying, 'What is it?'"

Now that the manual exists, the ILO's next challenge is convincing countries to use it. "I hope that the IFRC will weigh in to aid our effort to persuade national statistical agencies to start measuring volunteering on a regular basis," says Sokolowski. Already, the IFRC has used the ILO's methodology to measure the economic contribution of Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers as part of its year-long effort to protect, promote and recognize the value of all volunteers and volunteering. According to the IFRC's 2011 report, *The value of volunteers*, active volunteers for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement contributed close to 6 billion US dollars worth of services worldwide in 2009 – or close to 90 US cents for every person on earth.

During disaster relief efforts, governments have witnessed first-hand this added value. In Indonesia, Dr Emil Agustiono, Deputy Minister Coordinator for People's Welfare, estimates that volunteers represented more than half of the tsunami relief and recovery effort, at a fraction of the cost. "We learned lessons in Aceh," he says. "Government can't do it alone."

As he notes, volunteers extend the reach of government during disasters, providing services they would not be able to otherwise afford, such as round-the-clock early warning systems. In Bangladesh, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, cyclones are extremely deadly. To better prepare for these storms, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society Cyclone Preparedness Programme trained 49,000 volunteers in high-risk areas. The volunteers receive weather bulletins from the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, use megaphones and hand-held sirens to relay cyclone warnings to 10 million people, help evacuate them to shelters, and provide first aid. In recent years, volunteers were able to alert residents to the approach of two destructive cyclones: Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Aila in 2009. As a result of these early warning systems, Cyclone Sidr caused 2,300 deaths and Cyclone Aila claimed 190 lives – remarkably low when compared with over 500,000 deaths in 1970 and 138,000 in 1991.



Volunteers from the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society are providing communities with tools for improving their living environments, offering a step-by-step method for building safer housing. Photo: Agostino Pacciani/IFRC.

Volunteers also play a crucial role in preventing emergencies, particularly outbreaks of disease. Mongolia is a vast, sparsely populated country where 2.7 million people occupy 1.5 million square kilometres of land, and where some 38 per cent of the population is nomadic. It lies on a major migratory route for wild birds, which makes it vulnerable during outbreaks of avian influenza. In 2006, the Mongolian Red Cross Society developed an avian influenza programme, using its network of local volunteers to cover nearly all the country's territory. Within two years, 800 trained volunteers raised the awareness of more than 350,000 people, and in 2008 there wasn't a single human case of H5N1 in Mongolia.

During health emergencies and vaccination campaigns, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers penetrate deep into communities, from tiny hilltop hamlets to remote tribes that only locals know about. Pablo Medina, the IFRC's global operations coordinator, explains: "Most of my career has been

in the field, and the volunteers are the people who make it happen. We, as foreigners, we don't know the community, we don't know the language. The volunteers have the trust of the community. We pride ourselves on going the last mile, getting right into the community to provide goods and services, and that's the value that volunteers have, being that last mile."

In addition to economics, there is also the social value that volunteering brings to communities. Although attempts to measure this value have proved difficult, it is clear that volunteers help build social solidarity and integration, bringing people together at times of difficulty and giving them a role in their own recovery.

The civil war of the 1990s left deep scars on the social fabric of Burundi. Recovery has been made more difficult by the fact that the people of this chronically poor country endure ongoing ethnic tensions, inadequate healthcare, frequent disasters

and food insecurity. Following the war, many communities developed a dependence on external aid, and many saw the Burundi Red Cross as just one more NGO providing hand-outs. Moreover, the Burundi Red Cross was weak, almost to the point of being non-existent.

In 2007, a pilot project set out to rebuild the National Society from the bottom up, starting with units of around 50 volunteers in two communities. They performed simple services, such as digging fields and building houses. The groups brought together Hutus and Tutsis, men and women, the young and the old. As the people became used to working side by side, they developed a sense of social cohesion. Later that year, the pilot project was extended across the country.

In 2008, volunteers from Burundi's Makamba province took charge when famine struck a neighbouring province. Volunteers went from door to door and collected 300 tonnes of food in three days. Other provinces followed suit. This show of solidarity demonstrated the extent to which Red Cross volunteers helped communities rediscover a spirit of mutual help and community ownership – traditional values that had been destroyed during the war. Today, there are some 300,000 volunteers in Burundi Red Cross – most of them vulnerable people themselves – who identify and deliver services to other people who are even more vulnerable. It has become a vast, self-sustaining community network.

INTEGRATE VOLUNTEER CAPACITY INTO DOMESTIC EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS

Under the Geneva Conventions, governments recognize Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies as “auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.” Volunteers are crucial to this auxiliary status, and governments should integrate volunteer capacity into all domestic emergency response plans. There must be an ongoing dialogue between government and humanitarian actors about disaster planning.

Stefan Agerhem, International Advisor for Volunteering and Organizational Development at the Swedish Red Cross, explains, “waiting for a disaster to strike before governments and volunteer organisations talk is simply too late. There is so much potential to be had when we work

together, we must seize opportunities to grow our relationship well beyond the immediacy of disaster.”

When governments and response organizations work together before emergencies strike, experience shows that disaster response can be more efficient and far-reaching. Take the example of Christchurch, New Zealand, where Red Cross volunteers were on the ground just hours after a 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck on 22 February 2011. Hayley Presling, a young mother of two with a job in a real estate agency, had been a Red Cross volunteer for barely a year – ever since the formation of the Porirua Red Cross response team, of which she is the leader. Just days after the earthquake hit Christchurch, she and her team flew to the scene of the disaster.

With joint funding from the New Zealand Red Cross and the local government, the team had been training every two weeks throughout the year. And now, in a real crisis, they found they had the skills and equipment they needed to respond. “We’d done a radio and communications course, which was brilliant,” says Presling. “Many on our team had no familiarity with Christchurch, so they had to rely on using maps and TomTom GPS units. We used radios to contact our base, to let them know our movements around the city. We used first aid quite a lot; there were still cases of minor injuries. We had also done a ground-based rescue course. Our team didn’t actually go through buildings digging people out, but those skills are good to have if you found yourself in the city and there was another earthquake.”



Hayley Presling, a New Zealand Red Cross volunteer, discusses how best to support those living near the epicentre of the Christchurch earthquake. Photo: Phil Reid/Dominion Post.

Fourteen Red Cross emergency response teams and other organizations worked out of the Emergency Operations Centre, where the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management oversaw the entire operation. Volunteers from the Red Cross restoring family links programme collaborated with the police, city councils, civil defence and other agencies to track and register more than 50,000 displaced people, and to assist in finding more than 1,000 missing people. A specially-trained Red Cross team supported search and rescue teams, checking buildings for people who might be trapped.

Lions Clubs International had previously signed a partnership agreement with the IFRC, and in Christchurch, volunteers from the Red Cross and the Lions Clubs went from door to door, inspecting tens of thousands of residential properties and checking people's well-being. "The Red Cross has been great in providing the necessary training to prepare our volunteers to assist in emergencies," says Katerina Barcal, programme development manager at Lions Clubs International.

Presling recalls the experience as "organized chaos, simply because of the number of people coming and going all the time." Indeed, emergencies are chaotic, and it is almost impossible to predict how they will unfold. Effective disaster response doesn't begin the moment the ground starts to shake or when an epidemic claims its first victims; it requires strong partnerships between government and response organizations. It is a cyclical process that starts with significant preparation before, strong management during, and actions for recovery and sustainability after the event.

Organizations must maintain a volunteer database and volunteers must be adequately trained. "There is a basic minimum, especially on the front line," says Catherine Martin, a former Philippines Red Cross director, who is now working with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). "For search and rescue, if it's a collapsed structure, you have to go into that building, and you're in the same danger as first responders. When you're picking up the wounded in a battlefield, even if you're wearing a Red Cross vest, a bullet doesn't say 'This is the Red Cross'." She also recalls a rescue attempt by poorly trained volunteers (not from the Red Cross) during a severe flood in the Philippines. If they had received the correct training, they would have known not to use a rubber boat in raging flood water. However, they went out in such a boat, it overturned and no one survived.



A Cambodian Red Cross Society disaster response team visits the flooded commune of Cork Trabek in Kampong Thom province in 2011. Photo: Cambodian Red Cross Society.

Volunteers must have the proper equipment, whether protective clothing or communications tools. The South Pacific country of Vanuatu is subject to a barrage of natural disasters, from volcanic eruptions to earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and cyclones. A population of some 200,000 relies on approximately 450 Vanuatu Red Cross volunteers to warn and evacuate them, distribute food and administer first aid. However, due to a lack of financial resources, the National Society is woefully underequipped, relying on old two-way radios to communicate during disasters. In the past couple of years, two volunteers have died in separate incidents whilst evacuating families from the danger zone of erupting volcanoes. When their radios failed, they didn't hear the order to return and both were killed by falling rocks. Working with governments to ensure that first responders are properly equipped is critical in order to ensure the safety and security of all volunteers.

The capability of first responders can make the difference between lives saved and lives lost. "When a disaster happens, the first response is going to be through local people," says Pablo Medina. Local populations can enhance their capacity to respond by studying general first-aid training and basic disaster response skills in advance. In 1985, the Los Angeles Fire Department created the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). The programme trains civilians in disaster preparedness and response, working at the local level so they can meet their immediate needs during an emergency.



An American Red Cross volunteer surveys the destruction caused by the Harris fire, which affected approximately 75,000 acres in south-eastern San Diego County. Photo: Talia Frenkel/American Red Cross.

whilst waiting for responders. Since the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) made the programme nationally available in 1993, CERT has conducted training in 28 states and in Puerto Rico. In several emergencies, CERT volunteer teams have partnered with local Red Cross branches, often arriving before the Red Cross and helping to share the workload.

INCLUDE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS IN ALL RESPONSE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Even when volunteers are not risking their lives during an emergency, they work long hours under stressful conditions. Many may themselves become

the victims of a disaster, facing the death of family members or the loss of property. Others may be emotionally affected by what they see, making them vulnerable to depression or exhaustion.

Some volunteers will need psychosocial support. Disasters are traumatic experiences and responders are just as vulnerable as others in the community. “We must always remember that we are working with volunteers who are themselves survivors, people who are working on an empty stomach, sleeping in the rain and often mourning the loss of a family member or friend, just like our beneficiaries,” explains Danish Red Cross psychosocial delegate Zara Sejberg.

Authorities and civil society organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of



A psychosocial support project in Sindh province, run by the Danish Red Cross and the Pakistan Red Crescent Society, helps children recover from the trauma of the floods. Photo: Olivier Matthys/IFRC.

counselling services for staff and volunteers. The Danish Red Cross has been particularly involved in psychosocial activities and hosts the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support. A Danish delegate who works in Pakistan, Ea Suzanne Akasha, was in Sindh province on the day the food distribution turned into a nightmare. Afterwards, most volunteers had difficulty sleeping and were worried about going back to the field. Some decided to stop volunteering altogether.

Akasha conducted sessions with the volunteers, establishing a common understanding of the order of events, talking about their thoughts, feelings and reactions. The young man who had been fired at found sympathy and support from his peers. “They



Danish Red Cross psychosocial support delegate Ea Suzanne Akasha in Sindh province, Pakistan, 2011. Photo: Olivier Matthys/IFRC.

realized – much to their surprise – that they had acted very competently during the attack,” relates Akasha. “They were reassured that their reactions were normal in these abnormal circumstances. The group felt much relieved that someone sat with them and listened to their gruesome tales with empathy.”

In post-earthquake Haiti, psychosocial delegate Jérôme Grimaud notes that Haitian National Red Cross Society volunteers found a way of coping with their own loss and grief by helping others. One of these, a 33-year-old nursery school teacher named Erline François, recalls: “My house collapsed during the earthquake. The night after, I found myself naked in the streets. I did not know what to do and where to go. After a few days, I approached the psychosocial team of the Red Cross to become a volunteer. At the end of the first day of the training, I already felt better. The trainer listened to me and I learned that I could also listen to others. Before that, I was wondering what I could do, how to restart something in my life. After the training, I regained hope.”



Erline François, and another psychosocial support volunteer from the Haiti Red Cross, work with children affected by the earthquake in January 2010. Photo: Haitian National Red Cross Society.

PROMOTE VOLUNTEERING AND RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERS

There are always people who are willing to help out in the middle of a crisis. The trick is to encourage them to continue volunteering long afterwards, giving them fulfilling projects between disasters, so that organizations don’t have to start again and train a new group of volunteers when the next disaster strikes. Many of the difficulties in retaining volunteers stem from a lack of resources to reward their efforts or maintain their attention in

meaningful activity. It is crucial that volunteers feel needed and valued by the communities they serve.

Syed Mehmood Hussain Shah Kazmi is a 19-year-old volunteer from Kashmir, Pakistan, who became a Red Crescent volunteer when his village was destroyed by the earthquake in 2005. Tears come to his eyes when he describes running home from school that day. "On my way, I saw dead bodies. Girls, boys, elders, everyone was crying. I was running to my home, not sure what happened. Someone said, 'It's a massive earthquake, it's Judgement Day.' The bridge was swaying. A neighbour said, 'Your house is demolished.' I crossed the bridge and reached home, and I saw everything finished. Our house. Our cousins dead."

He helped to dig survivors out of the rubble with his bare hands, applying the most basic first aid and using pieces of clothing to dress their wounds. His parents and sisters had been injured but survived. At night everyone slept together in a tent, together with the dead body of his 13-year-old cousin, as no one had a spade to bury her. The next day, the Turkish Red Crescent Society arrived with first aid and relief. "I thought, why are they helping? They are not blood relations." Moved by what he saw, he volunteered soon afterwards for the Pakistan Red Crescent Society.

He is honoured to serve, though he says he would like the experience to offer him something concrete in return. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society does not provide him with insurance, and there is no certainty his training will help him find a job. "Volunteers are unpaid," he says, "not because they are worthless, because they are priceless. We do expect that we must be safe. We want social benefits. We have to work for our families as well as humanity. If we are working for humanity, the authorities should protect us socially and economically if they can. We are not a liability. We are assets of a society, because we are giving our best for them."

Whether or not volunteers should be paid is a matter for debate (see Box 1). But other incentives can promote the value of volunteering: free passes for public transport, discounts at public universities or quantifying a volunteer's experience when they apply for a public post. The European Commission recently released its first policy paper on volunteering. One of its recommendations is to validate voluntary work experience and skills by including them in a future European Skills Passport.

In many African countries, people have a strong tradition of informal volunteering. According to Henry Nkhoma, a director in Zambia's Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, the government realizes it has a role to play in supporting and regulating that goodwill. "Every year, we have International Volunteer Day. Ministers give speeches and the message they deliver is that government supports these activities. What we have not seen is an initiative to come up with policies to take care of the welfare of volunteers generally. We are working on that. The will to volunteer is very much there; what it lacks is coordination."

Governments may look for inspiration to Colombia, where volunteers enjoy a solid support system. One volunteer, Victor Manuel Letelier Paredes, has a family and a full-time job as a school librarian and yet, for the last nine years, he has volunteered an average of 16 hours a week for the Colombian Red Cross Society. He speaks of his commitment with a great deal of pride: "We don't want money," he says. "We just need tools to work. The organization gives us uniforms, helmets, jackets and, in return, we give it our work and knowledge. It's a good balance." Like every volunteer member of a relief agency that is part of the national disaster prevention system, he is covered by an accident insurance policy paid for by the state. And when he recently decided to study for a postgraduate degree in Peace and International Humanitarian Law, a Red Cross scholarship paid for half of his tuition fees.

"We must remember, volunteering is a choice one makes in sacrifice of doing something else," states Dr Mukesh Kapila, Under Secretary General at the IFRC. "If we do not recognize the significant value this choice brings to community, if we don't study the social drivers that lead one to make such commitments, then we are not taking their decision seriously enough and people will cease to make such sacrifices."

ENSURE THAT VOLUNTEERS HAVE SAFE ACCESS TO ALL VULNERABLE GROUPS

Volunteers must be allowed to assist those in need without fear for their own safety. Governments must promote full protection of volunteers in the field. And even if a country's government is falling, its people should know and respect the red cross and red crescent emblems, so that volunteers can work without fear of aggression.

Nonetheless, attacks on volunteer ambulances have taken place in countries from Syria to Honduras. During the 2011 anti-Gaddafi uprising in Libya, security forces sometimes used ambulances to hide in when approaching the front line, then jumped out firing. Partly as a result, the vehicles became targets. Even medics wearing Red Crescent vests were shot at when they went to pick up bodies.

On 7 April 2011, Mohamed Mustafa Almisrati, a Libyan Red Crescent first aider, was travelling in a clearly marked Red Crescent ambulance with a driver, two doctors and a nurse. They had just taken wounded people from the front line to Ajdabiya Hospital and were attempting to return to the front line. Conditions were dangerous – NATO forces had mistakenly fired on the opposition's tanks, Colonel Gaddafi's forces were launching missile attacks, panicked civilians and insurgents were fleeing the town – so their supervisor instructed them to return to base. They drove slowly so they could collect any casualties along the way.

Suddenly, a missile hit the back of the ambulance, scattering shrapnel everywhere. Almisrati leapt out when he heard the blast, fearing the vehicle would explode. When he looked around for the others, he couldn't see one of the doctors, a man named Saleh al-Awami, so he ran back to the ambulance calling for him. "I opened the door," he says. "I saw him lying down near the door. I lifted his head with froth coming out of his mouth and shrapnel on his chest with his shirt covered in blood. I burst into tears and couldn't control myself." Al-Awami died on the way to the hospital. The young paramedic had been volunteering at the hospital since the start of the uprising and had asked to join the ambulance and go to the front line.



Saleh al-Awami, a young paramedic who volunteered with the Libyan Red Crescent, was killed during the 2011 uprising in Libya. Photo: Libyan Red Crescent.



Mohamed Mustafa Almisrati during Saleh al-Awami's funeral. Almisrati is the Libyan Red Crescent first aider who was with al-Awami when he died. Photo: Libyan Red Crescent.

Other healthcare volunteers have also found themselves in situations of danger, notably during vaccination campaigns. Afghanistan is one of the last polio-endemic countries in the world, but vaccinators have been threatened, or even killed, while trying to access Taliban-dominated parts of the country. In 2007, at the request of the World Health Organization (WHO), ICRC took advantage of its neutrality to contact the Taliban leadership and ask for its support during vaccination campaigns. In return, Mullah Mohammad Omar issued a letter that vaccinators can carry, instructing people to cooperate and provide them with safe passage.

These intrepid volunteers visit households, administering two drops of oral polio vaccine to each child. They stain the children's fingers with permanent ink to indicate they have received the vaccine, and they put chalk marks on the doors of their homes. More than 12,000 Afghan Red Crescent Society volunteers joined the campaign in March 2011 alongside other local volunteers trained by UNICEF, WHO and the Afghan government. Together, they have vaccinated some 10 million Afghan children against the crippling disease since the beginning of 2011. "We aim at decreasing the polio threat to zero level, but we have not yet succeeded and there is a long way to go," says Fatima Gailani, President of the Afghan Red Crescent Society. However, there have already been signs of success. According to UNICEF, Afghanistan reported 25 cases of polio in 2010, while neighbouring Pakistan and Tajikistan reported 144 and 458 cases respectively.

There should be a general understanding that volunteers are to be protected at all times.



Afghan Red Crescent Society volunteers carry out polio vaccinations during a national immunization campaign. Photo: IFRC.

Awareness campaigns and the dissemination of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in schools, military and police compounds help build a culture of recognition and respect for volunteers. It goes without saying that in times of conflict, no party should ever target the Red Cross or Red Crescent – or indeed any other humanitarian organization – nor misuse the emblems, equipment or volunteers for their own means.

Authorities must emphasize this message both in periods of peace and in conflict. Moises Inguane of the Mozambique Red Cross Society has observed that the emblem might actually be more widely recognized during conflict, when ICRC is present. “We moved from a period of war, when the Red Cross was mostly respected and the presence of the ICRC was higher. We came to a transition to peace, and in the country we had demobilization of the armed forces and recruitment of new armed forces. So those who are new, maybe they don’t know international humanitarian law as well as those in the past.”

Volunteers are always vulnerable, not just during conflict. This was illustrated on the evening of 26 January 2010, when two Kenyan volunteers responded to a traffic accident on the Bungoma–Webuye highway. They rushed to the scene and provided first aid to an injured truck driver. Suddenly, they heard gunshots. They raised their hands and shouted that they were from the Kenya Red Cross Society. Despite the fact that they were wearing jackets bearing the

red cross emblem, the person firing, a policeman, claims he mistook them for thieves. When a second Red Cross team arrived at the scene, they found that one of the volunteers, Michael Wafula Sululu, had been shot and was writhing in pain. He died in hospital shortly afterwards.

An example of effective awareness-raising that has produced noteworthy results is Colombia. The Colombian Red Cross Society has strived for decades to educate the government and people about its principles, with seminars for government, the army, police and rebel fighters. According to Oscar Zuluaga, a senior adviser at the IFRC on volunteering development, “In 50 years of conflict in Colombia, only one volunteer was killed and it was an accident. This is a question of dissemination of the fundamental principles, of the respect of the emblem, of the Geneva Conventions, of international humanitarian law, of the activities of the Red Cross.”

Colombian volunteer Victor Manuel Letelier Paredes recalls one incident when he was driving an ambulance for the Red Cross: “Something happened between the police and the people; they were throwing rocks. A rock came towards us, and both sides said, ‘Excuse me, that’s not for you.’”

STRENGTHEN THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF VOLUNTEERS

The laws and policies affecting volunteers are different in almost every country, and even in different regions of the same country. Governments can and must do more to explore the legal mechanisms that protect volunteers in emergencies.

In recent years, the legal situation of volunteers around the globe has come under increasing scrutiny, with new reports released by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the IFRC. In 2009 UNV published its report *Laws and Policies Affecting Volunteerism Since 2001*, drafted by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law. It found that, since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, more than 70 national laws or policies that encourage or regulate volunteering have been adopted (now more than 80), whereas only a few countries had addressed the issue in a comprehensive way before. Many of these came about following national crises or disasters, such as the 2008 earthquake in China, which led to the drafting of the country’s Volunteer Service Law.

UNV has also issued a guidance note to help governments draft and implement laws relating to volunteerism. Its four main recommendations are: determine specific goals and challenges; embrace a participatory approach to analysis, drafting and implementation; draft laws or policies to achieve those goals; and ensure that they are effectively and sustainably implemented. The report holds up New Zealand and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as examples of countries that drafted strong legislation by integrating all four measures into their processes.

Comparative legal research on the legal environment relating to volunteering in emergencies is limited,

although the IFRC has recently released a report on the legal framework applicable to volunteering in emergencies, which is based on desk research and country studies. The report says countries fall into roughly four categories. In some instances, legislation is clear with regard to the definition of a volunteer and volunteers' activities. In other jurisdictions, there is an absence of clear definitions or scope of volunteering activities, which creates grey areas in the law. In yet other cases, there are barriers or legal provisions in various sectors – for example, labour laws or tax laws – that may prohibit or restrict volunteering. Still others have laws on disaster management or emergency response that make particular reference to volunteers. Generally,



Red Cross Volunteers walk through a camp for displaced people in Duékoué, western Côte d'Ivoire, where thousands of people fled after violence broke out following the December 2010 elections. Photo: Moustapha Diallo/IFRC.

there are clear gaps in the law and governments have taken a piecemeal and ad hoc approach.

Laws and policies can remove barriers to volunteering and, at the same time, create a more protective environment. And yet every country has different needs, so there is no universal solution. There may be significant variations in the country-level context, which results in different approaches. “People talk about a ‘model law’ on volunteering,” says IFRC lawyer Priya Pillai. “We don’t necessarily need one law on volunteering or one law on disasters that refers to volunteering. We must look at how well each country’s existing legislation protects and enables volunteers. In some cases, legal provisions are sufficient. Other countries need new laws.”

Certain legal concerns can have a direct impact on volunteering in emergencies and labour laws need to be taken into consideration. For example, volunteers should be offered time off work to train for and respond to emergencies. Similarly, they should not lose any entitlement to unemployment benefits as a result of their volunteering activities, and any small payments to reimburse them for basic living expenses should not be taxed.

Moreover, it is important to limit the liability of volunteers when they are acting in good faith. Although there are few examples of volunteers being successfully sued after an emergency, it is a potential risk and court trials can be gruelling affairs. Tragedy struck Linton, Australia, in 1998, when five volunteer firefighters responding to a bush fire were killed after the wind unexpectedly changed direction. Their colleagues later had to stand witness in one of the longest coronial inquests in the history of the State of Victoria. The National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management noted: “The decisions of volunteers as well as career staff are placed under intense scrutiny during such inquiries. This has led to some volunteers opting out of command positions in volunteer brigades.”

In the United States, the Federal Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 says that a volunteer performing services for a non-profit organization or governmental entity will not be held liable for harm caused to a person due to an act of omission (based on certain conditions and with exceptions such as gross negligence). The act came about because some members of Congress felt a risk of liability could stifle volunteerism. Legal scholars

disagree on this point. However, in their 2009 report entitled *Letting Good Deeds Go Unpunished: Volunteer Immunity Laws and Tort Deterrence*, Jill Horwitz and Joseph Mead from the University of Michigan Law School write: “People who live in jurisdictions without immunity are less likely than others to volunteer, suggesting that individuals do indeed react to tort risk – or the perception of that risk – through activity avoidance.” At the same time, a delicate balance exists between protecting volunteers and giving them *carte blanche*. “While you want to enable volunteers,” notes Priya Pillai, “you also need to protect persons who receive assistance from volunteers.”

It is a positive development that countries are drafting laws to protect volunteers, but if they are to be effective, they must also be implemented. Catherine Shea of the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law says: “We identified a number of instances where countries were good at implementation. They took it into account right from the outset, when they were developing their strategy for a law policy, and developed plans and strategies during the participatory process so they were able to carry forward their initiative after the law was passed.”

But the UNV report she co-authored also gives the example of Bolivia, where national volunteer legislation came about after a volunteer fire and rescue worker named Daniel Manrique was shot



A flood survivor in Odisha gives a warm welcome to an Indian Red Cross volunteer.
Photo: Indian Red Cross Society.

in the face during the 2002–2003 protests. With no insurance and no health cover, Manrique was only able to receive the multiple operations he needed thanks to the generosity of French volunteer firefighters. This incident provoked a public reaction and, in 2005, Bolivia passed an ambitious law giving volunteers rights such as short-term medical coverage, material support and academic credit. Soon afterwards, however, elections brought in a new government, which dissolved the ministry that backed the legislation.

A country's culture may also prove more powerful than its laws. When a magnitude-8.9 earthquake, a seven-metre-high tsunami and a nuclear accident all struck Japan in quick succession, 70,000 Japanese Red Cross Society volunteers rushed to the aid of victims. Despite this influx of assistance from an extremely large and well-organized Red Cross society, there still weren't enough volunteers for a catastrophe on this scale. Part of the reason is that most Japanese workers get two weeks' holiday a year. The law allows volunteers to take additional leave for disaster response, but few people dare. Hiroaki Sakamoto was among them. A quiet, 49-year-old high school teacher, he used one week of his holiday to help coordinate the relief effort. Other volunteers worked on a rota basis over four-day periods so as not to be away from their workplace for too long. "The law is well done in Japan, but management is not so good," says Sakamoto. "The local government says you can take time off to volunteer, but it is hard. You wouldn't lose your job, but it would affect your situation."

Implementation should be factored into a law or policy at the outset. As the UNV report states: "Once laws or policies have been enacted, government officials and other stakeholders should work together to develop an operational plan for effective implementation that provides clear and detailed activities, goals, responsibilities, and deadlines. Doing so will ensure that individuals and organizations take responsibility for their roles in the implementation process, and will help to ensure that laws and policies are more than just words on paper."



Hiroaki Sakamoto is a high-school teacher who volunteered with the Japanese Red Cross Society after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Photo: Japanese Red Cross Society.

PROVIDE INSURANCE TO ALL VOLUNTEERS

Most volunteers around the world are uninsured. Governments and volunteer organizations have to work together to guarantee that volunteers have insurance, especially when they respond to disasters. "Insurance for volunteers is a collective responsibility," says Dr Mukesh Kapila. "Government must work with volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross Red Crescent to make sure those who put self-interest aside to save lives will be protected if they suffer injury as a consequence. Volunteering should not be 'at your own risk'." The IFRC encourages National Societies to insure their volunteers through the IFRC-backed scheme that costs just 1 Swiss franc per person.

According to Mozambique's new legislation on volunteering, whenever a volunteer carries out activities that put his or her safety at risk, the organization must provide insurance. In reality though, Moises Inguane says it is too expensive to insure each and every one of the Mozambique Red Cross Society's 6,600 volunteers by name. Since many of them are on standby in case of an emergency, he suggests a system by which they could pay a smaller lump sum that would cover volunteers interchangeably and would only take effect when an accident occurs.

In the United States, health insurance is a major issue for volunteers. Many of the volunteers and first responders who helped out at Ground Zero following the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York have developed cancer or respiratory diseases as a result. Those who lacked medical insurance had to wait nine years, with no guarantee of assistance, until the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act came into force, helping them cover their medical bills and other losses.

CONCLUSION: PROTECT, PROMOTE AND RECOGNIZE VOLUNTEERS

In early 2009, Red Cross volunteers in Quinga, Mozambique, responded to a severe cholera outbreak by delivering chlorine to people's homes and showing them how to disinfect the water. When some villagers became sick, they blamed the volunteers. Some people confused the words for chlorine (*cloro*) and cholera. On

22 February, they attacked the volunteers; they tied them up, beat them almost unconscious and destroyed their homes. The volunteers fled for their lives.

Because they lived in the same communities as their attackers, they could not go back home. Over the next two months, the Mozambique Red Cross Society and the local government worked to educate the population about the role of the volunteers, until it was deemed safe enough for them to return. Incredibly, on their return they continued serving as volunteers. Ask why and the answer is simple: "I want to improve the health in my community," says Antonio Gabriel, who was set on fire during that awful day in February 2009.

As long as there are disasters, there will be millions of people just like Antonio Gabriel, willing to face danger for the sake of their communities. Volunteers who risk their lives to help save others deserve our shared commitment to protect, promote and recognize each and every one of them.



A volunteer with the Mozambique Red Cross Society explains about cholera prevention in 2010. Photo: Mozambique Red Cross Society.

Box 1

To pay or not to pay

When aid money flows into a country following a disaster, the local residents may find themselves better off than they were before the event. Kathy, a volunteer hygiene promoter for the Haitian National Red Cross Society, takes home 11 US dollars a day. She says it “is not a lot of money, but then again it is a lot. It represents a lot because that’s what helps you send the kids to school, pay rent and do other things.”

As Kathy’s example suggests, notions of what constitutes volunteering change in the weeks and months after a disaster. Immediately following an emergency, many people help out as much as possible without any thought of personal gain. Once the initial crisis is over, volunteers begin to think again about their own families and jobs. In many cases, humanitarian organizations find themselves staffed with people working full time and receiving a significant amount of money each day, and yet describe them as volunteers.

Does this make a difference? Yes, suggests Dr Masooda Bano, a research fellow at the University of Oxford. She has studied the negative impact of foreign aid on the capacity of voluntary organizations to mobilize communities and argues that giving volunteers too much money erodes the voluntary spirit that donors often hope to encourage with their aid. “If you give a lot of financial incentive – extrinsic motivation – then often you crowd out the intrinsic motivation, the compunction to do it for yourself: religious reasons, inner satisfaction and so forth. If you’re paying money, it no longer becomes a volunteer activity. The psyche changes.”

The issue of paying volunteers goes beyond just community perception. It also raises ethical and

legal issues. In the short term, such situations often mean that ‘volunteers’ do not receive the benefits of employment, including minimum wages and pensions, thereby posing moral and sometimes practical legal issues for the organizations for which they work. Nor does the state receive the income it usually would from employment.

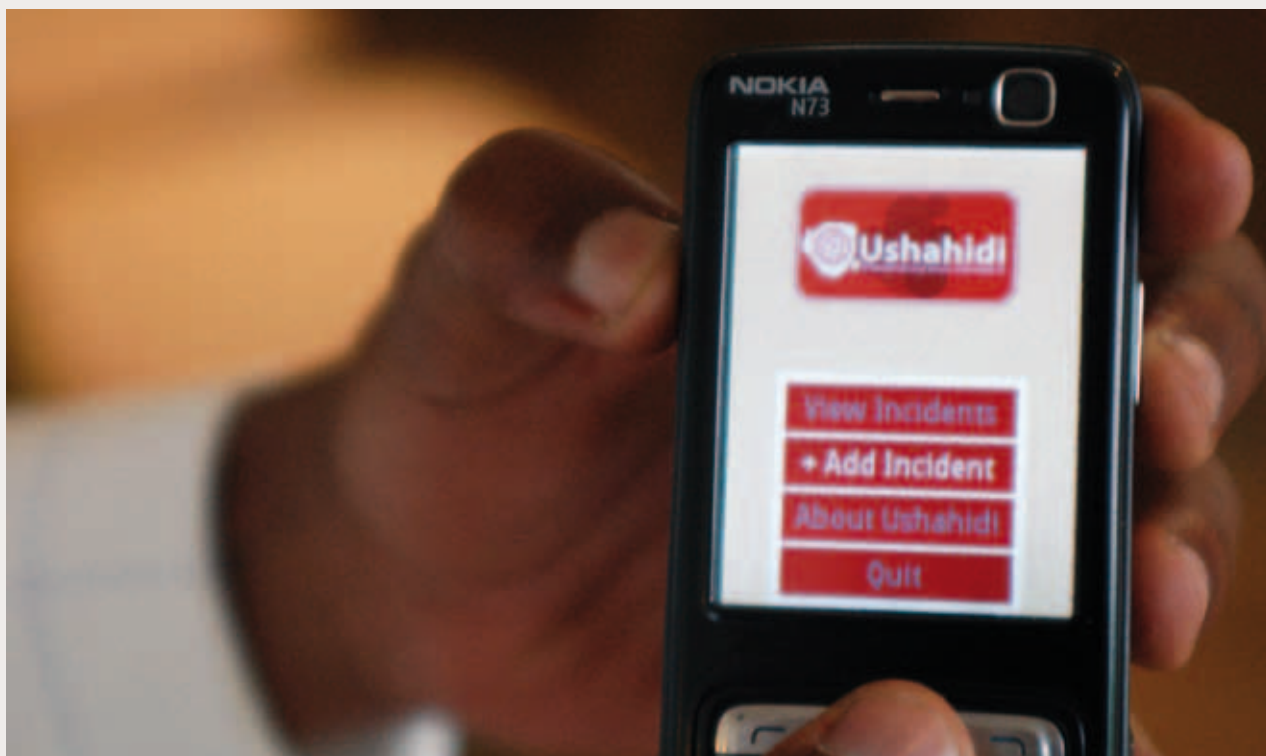
In the longer term, there is evidence that such practices may lead to volunteering being associated with poorly paid labour. When the money runs out (as it invariably does), communities are less well equipped – and often less willing – to deal with issues through community volunteering: community resilience has effectively decreased.

Yet this is not simply an effort by international agencies to avoid employment costs. Very often, national employment laws do not allow them to employ people legally, and using the word ‘volunteer’ is a simple way of avoiding legal complications in what is effectively an employment relationship.

Understanding the complex nature of the debate, the Red Cross Red Crescent remains committed to a community-based approach towards volunteering. “We believe that a focus on payment creates negative value propositions associated with volunteering that undermine the very spirit of voluntary service,” explains Dr Mukesh Kapila, Under Secretary General at the IFRC. “We will continue to work with governments and other volunteer-involving organizations to advocate for a clearer definition of volunteering, and ensure that paid workers remain separate from that definition.”

Box 2

Keyboard volunteerism



One of the smart phone applications created for Ushahidi, a non-profit technology company that develops open source software. Photo: Ushahidi.

Increasingly, new technologies mean that even volunteers who are far from a disaster can make a difference through their time and skills. On 19 January 2010, a one-sentence plea appeared online: “Orphanage Foyer de Sion in Haiti running out of water.” Online saviours saw a postal address accompanying the statement and a map of Port-au-Prince with a red dot indicating exactly where the children were located.

The ‘Crisis Map of Haiti’ was created by Ushahidi, a non-profit technology company that develops open source software for interactive mapping, information collection and visualization. The website went live just hours after the earthquake, with witnesses on the ground sending urgent messages through a variety of communications methods, including radio, SMS, Twitter and e-mail. Trained volunteers in cities from Boston to London receive the information and map it online, almost in real time.

Ushahidi (the Swahili word for testimony) was the brainchild of bloggers and programmers living in Kenya, who launched the first site in reaction to the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. People dialled a mobile phone number to report peace efforts or incidents of violence, which were then aggregated on a Google Maps mash-up that was available to view online.

Since then, Ushahidi’s platform has served to map clashes and natural disasters in India, South Africa, Libya and beyond. In October 2009, one of Ushahidi’s founders helped to create the International Network of Crisis Mappers, a global hub bringing technology and crisis mapping to humanitarian disaster response.

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 amongst 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 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 world-wide.

