

## RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES IN MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY

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Recognition of the need for new approaches to diplomacy is now widespread. The intergovernmental relationships that have governed diplomatic activity for centuries can no longer meet the needs of people. This is particularly so in the Internet era, as is recognised by the UN itself in the context of such events as the World Summit on Information Society. In addition, a number of events have forced a new realisation on governments and intergovernmental organisations of the fact that to accomplish their own economic and social goals they need to involve a much wider range of stakeholders.

Alongside these realisations, governments have recognised that military strength alone can no longer assure international peace and security, which can be threatened by situations of poverty, disease, and despair. This is of special significance in countries so destabilised by disease and poverty that their own capacity for country management is damaged.

Governments became more willing to discuss cases of internal difficulty or instability with the reshaping of world alliances and relationships at the end of the cold war. This must be seen, however, as an addition to the earlier and fundamentally important development of treaty systems that saw governments accepting internationally-monitored obligations towards their own citizens. The best examples of this at the global level are the human rights and environment treaties system. In the fields of economic and social development, however, few examples contain so many lessons for the future as the work on disaster preparedness and disaster response. Preparation for disaster and disaster response are very relevant today, but they also show how work at the national level on an issue with priority in international diplomacy can be affected by rooting the multistakeholder approach at all levels simultaneously.

### **Background**

In 1999, governments and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, meeting at their 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red

Crescent, adopted an international plan of action for the following four years. That plan included a commitment by states to establish national disaster preparedness plans that would include the representation of National Societies in appropriate national policy and co-ordination bodies (ICRC, 1999a). In the same plan of action, governments supported the need for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to initiate a study of the working relationships between states and National Societies. Hopefully, the working relationships would take account of changing needs in the humanitarian, health and social fields, the auxiliary role of National Societies and the evolving roles of the state, the private sector, and voluntary organisations in service provision (ICRC, 1999b).

The IFRC itself had become more deeply involved in the evolution of its own role in multistakeholder diplomacy about five years earlier. On 10 October 1994, after active discussion with many different governments, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 49/2 through which it accorded the IFRC observer status at sessions of the General Assembly. The resolution includes an important preambular paragraph, in which the multistakeholder approach is clearly resonant. It is worth quoting in full, for it shows how one of the foundations of modern multistakeholder diplomacy is set:

Recalling the special functions of the member societies of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which are recognized by their respective Governments as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field on the basis of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. (UN, 1994)

In other words, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are in many positions at the same time. They are independent, neutral, and impartial. They are also recognised by their governments and, in most cases, formed by parliamentary action of one kind or another. Their secondary role, once seen as auxiliary to their country's armed forces medical units, is now very much wider, although their work with the IFRC on issues relevant to the dissemination of International Humanitarian Law has lost none of its urgency or priority.

The decision in 1999 to study the evolution of this auxiliary role took place amidst awareness that National Societies and their International Federation had come to play a new and different role in national and global affairs. The study itself was brought to the 28<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross

and Red Crescent in 2003 (ICRC, 2003), and will continue. The definition of the role, as this Conference shows, is evolving against the backdrop of similar changes in thinking in the international community.

### **Current Developments in Multistakeholder Diplomacy**

Perhaps the best reflection of the way the International Federation's approaches sit alongside those of the other parts of the international community is the Federation's main strategy document, *Strategy 2010* (IFRC, 1999), also adopted in 1999. Its four core areas – the promotion of fundamental principles and humanitarian values, disaster response, disaster preparedness, and health and care in the community – are at the base of all the International Federation's multistakeholder diplomatic activity.

The UN response to the same developments, that is, to increasing multistakeholder diplomatic activity, came from member states in many ways, just after the adoption of the IFRC's *Strategy 2010* and the decisions of the 28<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The most important UN response, perhaps because of its relevance to the growth of respect for multistakeholder diplomacy, was the Millennium Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in September 2000. Through this, heads of state and governments provided the UN and its family organisations with a clear responsibility to address the vulnerability of people at the same time as they sought to address their traditional agendas.

The Millennium Declaration formed the basis of new but erratic approaches to best ways of bringing civil society into international negotiations. It was unevenly accepted at the national level and the experience of the IFRC shows that only a combination of government willingness and civil society capacity will ensure its wide acceptance. This is why capacity-building programs are such an important part of the IFRC agenda.

The UN itself recognised that it had a responsibility from the Millennium Declaration to provide inspiration and, perhaps, a lead to governments and other parts of the international community. The vital decision, taken in 2002, was the establishment by the Secretary-General of a Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations chaired by former President Fernando Enrique Cardoso of Brazil.

The Cardoso Report, launched in June 2004, will have its first full airing in the UN General Assembly later this year. It reaches many conclusions

important to any discussion on multistakeholder diplomacy. One is that the multilateral agenda has changed and will increasingly respond to global issues brought forward by civil society and what it describes as “a crescendo of public opinion.” Therefore, as the report says, multilateralism already includes ongoing processes of public debate, policy dialogue, and pioneering action to tackle emerging challenges.

These points are also picked up in the report of the UN’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. This report endorses the recommendations of the Cardoso Report on the establishment of a better mechanism to enable systematic engagement with civil society organisations. Nonetheless, the recommendations are not directed with sufficient precision to make a real difference to the way the UN will work.

### **The Place of the IFRC in Current Multilateral Diplomacy**

It is not the purpose of this paper to review the recommendations, but the IFRC’s position as an organisation with a world-wide, grass-roots base does give us an opportunity to comment.

I remember well the time when the IFRC obtained its observer status with the UN General Assembly. There was considerable debate at the time as to whether adopting the draft resolution proposed by Australia would introduce a plethora of unrepresentative and unaccountable non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the heights of international diplomacy and rule-making. In the end, the General Assembly adopted the proposal, after member states were satisfied that the auxiliary status of National Societies effectively distinguished them from NGOs. States also felt that the quadrennial International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent gave them a part in the evolution of the National Societies’ priorities and programs.

The answer to this so-called dilemma was provided by a number of governments deciding to embark on domestic processes of consultation with NGOs and coalitions. This led quickly to some making it a regular practice to include representatives of those coalitions in their governmental delegations to international conferences.

Since then, the idea has matured to the point that the first provisional list of participants in official delegations to the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan showed that no fewer than eleven governments included people from outside the government itself. Of these,

six included people from their national Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies. The eventual numbers will be larger; the point to emphasise is that governments are becoming increasingly ready to include stakeholders when they move into international diplomatic negotiation. This point is all the clearer from the simple statistics that the Kobe conference was attended by over 4000 delegates from 168 governments, 78 observer organisations and 161 NGOs, not to mention 562 accredited journalists.

With the same objective of inclusivity, some governments and international organisations facilitated the presence of multi-national expertise in the IFRC Delegation at the Kobe conference. They did so partly because they knew that the IFRC's status provided the persons with a platform from which their expert knowledge could be easily integrated into the conference processes. These governments were perceptive. Although they could not have known it when they composed their delegations, the handling this year by the UN of the Tsunami disaster has underlined the importance of the IFRC role. Our status has enabled the UN to bring our expertise to centre stage in debates and negotiations in Geneva, New York, and other centres.

Our status also made it possible for ASEAN to include the Secretary-General of the IFRC in its Ministerial Meeting on the Tsunami Disaster in Jakarta in January. It has made it easy, despite the restrictions imposed on wider civil society by outdated rules of procedure, to bring the voice of communities to the centre of discussions about how to meet their needs.

The IFRC will take its multistakeholder constituency from many other stages into international diplomacy in the next years. One of the most important is in debate surrounding the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration and its Development Goals. The purpose of referring to this again is to observe the multistakeholder dimension of the IFRC's consistent presentation to UN discussions.

### **The IFRC in the Future**

We believe that vulnerability is best assessed, and best addressed, in concert with the people who experience that vulnerability. We say that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are a realistic set of objectives, but that their achievement will, in most cases, depend on the willingness of governments to design and implement programs in consultation with the people directly affected. This means that government

at all levels – from local government to intergovernmental negotiation at the UN – must work with community representatives at each of those levels if development programs are to be successful in a MDG context. The MDGs present, hence, the greatest challenge to traditional ways of doing multilateral business.

The arrival of the MDGs on the scene in 2000 was followed by several other important and similar signs that new ways of doing business must be found. Some have already been mentioned: the Cardoso Panel of Eminent Persons and the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel (the reform panel). However, others are visible. One of the important tasks ahead is to bring their conclusions together and foster a coherent debate on them.

Apart from those already mentioned, those of greatest interest to the IFRC include:

- The work in progress on Good Humanitarian Donorship, which places substantial emphasis on accountability and, hence, on programming that takes account of the needs of the beneficiaries of assistance (CIDA, 2004). As it develops, it will bring other stakeholders and their interests to the centre of the international development debate. It will also permeate national level programming for the vulnerable, in both developing and developed countries.
- A review commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator of global response capacity. Although the review addresses needs in a disaster situation, it will include the work done at the national level to build community resilience and prepare for potential disasters. Any such work has implications for the stakeholder base to which governments and other institutions need to be accountable as they work towards their objectives.

The Non-Aligned Movement addressed similar themes at a ministerial meeting held in Durban in August 2004. The call put to the ministers in the opening address by the President of South Africa was for the Movement to rise to three challenges in 2005, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bandung Conference which created the Movement.

The third of those challenges is the most relevant in the context of multistakeholder diplomacy. President Mbeki saw it as the restructuring of the global exercise of power, and suggested that the Movement needed find a way to build a “democratic inclusive” answer for the affected people themselves (Mbeki, 2004). Some important steps in that direction by the bodies most

responsible for the global exercise of power include the way the UN Security Council has agreed that HIV/AIDS presents a threat to international peace and security. A long way remains before the Security Council's own procedures will permit the debates that this subject requires, but it is some comfort that the agenda item is alive.

It is also a comfort to us that the UN General Assembly has followed its own Special Session on HIV/AIDS (in 2001) with specialised high-level debates on the issues. The IFRC will utilise its observer status and take part; we will say, as we did in the first such high level debate (in 2003), that the debate would have been much more useful if the voices of civil society organisations, representing other stakeholders, could have been heard (IFRC, 2003).

We feel, as our President said to the special high level UN General Assembly debate on HIV/AIDS in 2003, a special sense of responsibility when we take part in debates that are closed to wider civil society because of old rules of procedure. We want to see much more inclusivity in the future, in the UN, and in all bodies that share objectives relating to peace, development, and the protection of human dignity.

### **The Objectives of the IFRC in the International Community**

The UN family's work on its procedures coincides with similar but essentially unrelated work in other institutions, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Although the world knows us as one of the foremost examples of multistakeholder diplomacy at work, we too recognise the need to tune ourselves better to the needs of the most vulnerable.

We have taken some important steps of our own. One, already mentioned, is the study of the auxiliary status of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Another, just as far-reaching, is the 2001 Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC, 2001). This strategy concerns the work of all components of the Movement – the ICRC, the IFRC, and each of the National Societies. One of its objectives relates to international diplomacy and relations with governments and other external actors, and makes it clear that we should see consistency in the humanitarian approach, as well as a thorough commitment to the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and to the integrity that must be present in our work at all times. This strategy is now under review. One of the issues that will be prominent is the way the Movement as a whole and in its individual parts relates to

the outside world – in other words, the way its own multistakeholder action reflects its multi-constituency nature.

Similarly, the IFRC is examining the way it fits into a future already very different from the time during which it was built. The IFRC's next General Assembly Session will be held in Seoul in late 2005, where one of its main agenda items will be a discussion of the kind of federation the IFRC will be if it is to represent the interests of its members in a changing external environment. To be fully effective, the work now being done needs to reach the people in whose name so much multistakeholder work is done.

Accordingly, it is the IFRC's hope that the World Summit on Information Society, when it concludes in Tunis at the end of 2005, will have identified the needs of the vulnerable as one of their priority areas for future work. For us, as we have said at several international conferences in recent years and emphasised recently, vulnerability exacerbated by remoteness is a particularly important challenge. It is, however, a challenge to address through effective communication and the use of the Internet and its panorama of opportunities.

The Summit, we believe, presents a considerable challenge for proponents of multistakeholder diplomacy. Many governments are still reluctant to accept that the Internet has changed forever the way they communicate with and listen to their constituents. The Summit, largely built around standard UN conference rules of procedure and incorporating a wide and inclusive process in preparatory stages, is unlikely to bring many of the beneficial concepts unveiled during those stages into its outcomes.

Nevertheless, the preparatory stages have opened a new window into the management of conference processes in the future. Their own public and its constituencies now demand of them what a few governments were doing in terms of public consultation 20 years ago. Our view of this, from the vantagepoint of our community-based organisation, is that at the top level of government it becomes easier to gain acceptance of the importance of this multistakeholder consultation. It is still difficult, however, in many countries to reach into the bureaucracy with fresh ideas and fresh ways of working. This is a significant challenge for us all.

Thus, what the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement sought 20 years ago in terms of respect for the views and needs of communities is now at the centre of the international development agenda, where it will stay. What is still missing is an international community that knows how to respond to the challenges this multistakeholder world presents. Some serious political



constraints limit the freedom of movement of international organisations, starting with the fact that almost all are membership organisations composed by governments.

This limitation is one of the reasons why the last 15 years has seen such a growth of alternative forums for the discussion of major world issues. One that deserves mention is the World Economic Forum, which meets every year in Davos (Switzerland) and has spawned related events on particular issues in other places. The IFRC is very grateful for the opportunity to provide its experience and insights to the World Economic Forum. We have found it invaluable for discussion of ideas and a very useful forum to reach another range of stakeholders who are often difficult to contact through regular channels. We place a high priority in reaching the private sector with our issues and have been consistently pleased with the reception our ideas have produced. Partnerships with the private sector are an essential part of the partnership agenda we must all develop in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The Cardoso Report tackles the broad question of the place of partnerships and the multistakeholder approach by observing that governments in the multilateral world for which the UN was designed came together to agree on and then implement policy. The Cardoso Report called the process “omnigovernmentalism.” Now, the report says, the world is multilateral and embraces many constituencies from many sides of debate in the process of decision-making.

The Cardoso Report says the UN should respond to this challenge by fostering multistakeholder partnerships, reaching to constituencies beyond member states. This, we say, is also a demand posed by the MDGs and, in particular, by Goal 8, built around the need for new partnerships for development. IFRC multistakeholder diplomacy has evolved in exactly this direction. Without these partnerships, and especially without partnerships linking the communities to governments, the MDGs will not be achieved. Without progress on those economic and social fronts against poverty, deprivation, and despair, the UN will not maintain the respect of the people of the world. Multistakeholder approaches, involving the people affected by the decisions of diplomacy, are the key to the next generation of governance for the world.

Debate on the Cardoso Report and the other important documents in the reform agenda will show us whether the world is ready to accept the changes to diplomatic patterns already in progress. The challenge for the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, as for all others committed to development, namely, the eradication of poverty and fostering peace, is to partner the same change process and to build the capacity of communities so they can play their part in the new stakeholder equations of the future.

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Part V

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MULTISTAKEHOLDER  
MODEL  
FOR CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION

