

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC is the only international organization with a credible history of Relevant Information in the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief arena. For many decades it was the only international organization with a global presence—the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (co-sponsor of ReliefWeb) are relative new-comers and have not yet institutionalized their Relevant Information practices.

Dr. Peter Fuchs, (then) Director General of the ICRC, has spoken publicly about the path-finding efforts of the ICRC in developing information collection, sharing and analysis protocols that are effective in times of conflict and also designed to protect the humanitarian assistance personnel.¹

- 1) Relevant Information challenges in a threatening environment are completely different from Relevant Information circumstances in a normal peaceful environment.
- 2) Relevant Information approach has to be rigorous and *transparent* (i.e. clearly overt and non-threatening), to be thoroughly prepared *before* the outbreak of conflict and be conducted in a coherent, predictable manner.
- 3) “Neutral and impartial” is vital to success. What really counts, however, is the *perception* of neutrality and impartiality.
- 4) The ICRC network for gathering information is unique. Sixty delegations cover the planet. In most conflict areas (30 as of 1994) the ICRC has an operational delegation and additional sub-delegations. They communicate by radio, mail, telephone, fax and email. In 1993 the ICRC staff of 7,000 produced more than one million written communications associated with operational humanitarian assistance, not to mention the millions of oral communications.
- 5) ICRC needs its own worldwide information gathering system because information supporting policy and operational decisions must be as complete as possible and of a high standard of credibility. For this reason the ICRC cannot rely completely on public sources of information, especially since the media does not cover most of the 30+ conflicts where the ICRC is rendering assistance. Since critical information about casualties, morale and equipment are of military and political importance, the ICRC often has to work very hard to gain access to the victims and to remain with them as long as needed.
- 6) ICRC has found that only a network of human representatives, on the ground, can adequately meet its needs for early warning, accurate assessment including cross-community insights, local liaison with leaders responsible for protecting ICRC representatives and providing

access to victims) and general safety. *There is no substitute for first-hand information.*

- 7) The fundamental principles for ICRC Relevant Information practices are summed up in two phrases: bottom-up information process based on direct observations in the field; and extreme—even obsessive—attention to neutrality, impartiality and independence from any other international or national organizations engaged in the conflict.

ⁱ The text of his address to OSS '94, "Handling Information in Humanitarian Operations within Armed Conflicts" is available at <http://www.oss.net/Proceedings/ossaaa/aaa4/aaa4ae.htm>:

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