

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
3 – 5 JULY 2012 - International Conference Center Geneva**

BACKGROUND PAPER

SIDE MEETING

The impact of protection standards and principles in humanitarian response

Wednesday 4 July 2012, 08h00 – 09h00 – Room 3

Humanitarian practitioners have a number of protection standards and principles available to them. Three of them are presented and discussed: the **ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work** (2009), the **Sphere Protection Principles** (2011), and the **Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Response** (forthcoming, 2012). The objective is to explore how these different sets of standards relate to each other and how they are effectively being used during humanitarian response – in particular by humanitarian workers not specialized in protection.

Background:

The need to develop protection standards is a consequence of increasingly complex contexts and – accordingly – more complex humanitarian response environments. As of the 1990s it was widely recognized that protection work needed to be better coordinated among the growing number of humanitarian and human rights actors.

Consequently, a global discussion among UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement started regarding the roles and responsibilities of humanitarian agencies in the protection of people affected by disasters and conflicts. They sought a definition of protection and attempted to develop professional protection standards, which do exist today. A better understanding of agencies' roles and responsibilities in protection has been part of the professionalization process in the humanitarian sector.

It is understood today that humanitarian agencies – irrespective of them having a protection mandate or not – must be aware of protection challenges and respond to them coherently and in a concerted manner, so as to avoid potential additional harm done to the populations they assist.

The Protection Standards and Principles:

The three sets of protection standards presented here each cover specific aspects of protection and are complementary to each other. They were developed in broadly consultative processes, and draw on each other where possible.

a) ICRC Professional Standards for Protection Work (2009):

Ensuring that people at risk in armed conflict and situations of violence are protected is a major challenge for both humanitarians and human rights advocates. A growing number of actors are involved in this effort, providing services in highly complex and sensitive contexts with different approaches and objectives. To ensure that protection work meets commonly agreed minimum professional standards, the International Committee of the Red Cross undertook a lengthy consultation with professionals from humanitarian and human rights organizations in order to

establish a common set of baseline requirements for safe and effective protection work. Following these consultations, it published the *Professional Standards for Protection Work* in 2009.

Professional Standards for Protection Work is a publication designed for all humanitarian and human rights actors engaged in protection work for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. It defines the main principles that are central to protection work, including humanity and impartiality. It highlights how to interact with the range of international and national actors responsible for ensuring the protection of communities. It establishes standards and guidelines for convincing authorities to assume their responsibilities as defined by international law and domestic legislation. The publication also addresses the importance of managing sensitive protection information as well as the need for ensuring that an organization's protection objectives are in line with their capacity to deliver.

Currently an advisory group composed of different UN agencies, NGOs and the ICRC is working on an update of the publication.

b) The Sphere Protection Principles (2011)

The Sphere Protection Principles are based on the idea that humanitarian assistance and protection are intertwined. Humanitarian workers cannot work towards upholding the dignity of the affected population without understanding and protecting their rights.

The four Protection Principles reflect the dual character of the protection concept: Principles 1 and 2 (do-no-harm and access to impartial assistance) address broad aspects of protection which will apply to all humanitarian agencies and activities. Principles 3 and 4 (protect from physical harm and assist with rights claims) address more specific protection activities while remaining broadly relevant.

The Sphere Protection Principles highlight general protection concerns and complement professional protection standards such as those developed by ICRC, and standards for specific areas of protection, such as child protection, gender-based violence or mine action.

c) Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Response (forthcoming 2012):

The Child Protection in Emergencies sector has considerably evolved over the past decades, including increased coordination and more harmonized understanding. In 2010 the global, inter-agency Child Protection Working Group (CPWG, within the Global Protection Cluster) agreed to define Child Protection in Emergencies as “the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children in emergencies”. With this evolution the group identified the need for minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian response.

The process started in November 2009 and the standards will be launched by the end of this year. The aim is to ensure humanitarian staff, organizations', governments' and donors' awareness and subsequent action on what are the minimum prevention and response measures and structures that needs to be in place to protect children, including strengthening their protective environments, in humanitarian settings.

The Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Responses are structured like the Sphere standards. The handbook includes principles and approaches, child protection standards, and standards on child protection within other sectors.