

“Education and protection as antidotes to violence”

Panel on SDG 16
International NGO Day

Showcasing contributions of best practices of NGOs and other stakeholders working in global partnerships in response to drivers of conflict to end extreme violence via early detection responses.

IFRC Contribution
Charlotte Tocchio, Humanitarian Education Coordinator
December 2016

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

We all know that violence is born out of fear, ignorance and mistrust, and is often linked to social determinants such as poverty, unemployment and access to small arms. We are also all aware of its consequences on health, lives and livelihoods, education, economic growth, community resilience and social development.

So when we sadly observe that an estimated 875 million firearms are in circulation and that our world still counts 758 million illiterates, 197 million unemployed and 702 million poor of which youth respectively represent 15%, 36% and over 50%, our prospects of achieving the SDGs, especially SDG 16, appear quite seriously at threat. Not to mention the patterns of increased inequalities and average length of displacement, nor the rising numbers of conflicts, natural disasters, epidemics and other crises exacerbating vulnerabilities.

In such a global context where a culture of anger, intolerance and division seem to prevail, social, community and family support systems are more than ever under pressure. The lack of opportunities and the limited actual or perceived alternatives to protect and provide for families, often lead to forced choices that fuel the cycle of poverty and migration, and greatly heighten the risk of child labor, early and forced marriage, neglect, physical, psychological and sexual violence and exploitation, recruitment into fighting, and other life-threatening activities.

This is especially true for the 80 million children, adolescents and young adults affected by emergencies and protracted crisis, and even more for the 37 million that are out-of-school, as well as for those that have a disability, are forcibly displaced, orphaned, unaccompanied, separated from their families, or living on the streets, in conflict or in fragile situations.

This surge in violence and vulnerability is predictable and hence preventable. The attitudes and behaviours that are born today will drive the choices that are taken in the future. Our young people are our future so in the same way that, in the aftermath of an emergency, we ensure safe water and sanitation, provide emergency health services, and establish shelters for displaced people, we must also do all we can to protect the most vulnerable from violence and provide them with enabling, safe environments to access opportunities, achieve their full potential and continue building up their future.

Our Movement, made up of the ICRC, the IFRC and 190 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has, since its creation on the battlefields of Solferino more than 150 years ago, sought to promote solidarity, prevent and reduce human suffering, protect life and health, and uphold human dignity, with the ultimate goal of “contributing to the maintenance and promotion of peace in the world”, as worded in our Constitution.

We are convinced of the power of education, volunteering and youth engagement as antidotes to bring about the change of mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that is required for a world culture of inclusion and peace to exist and blossom.

For us, education is about enabling individuals to interpret situations from a humanitarian perspective, to develop the knowledge, values and skills that transform the way they think and relate to each other and empower them to take up an active role and responsibility as local and global citizens, helping and caring for themselves and others. It is about strengthening their physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and social capacities to protect them against both immediate dangers and future threats, and support their long-term recovery process, thereby building resilience, inclusion and peace at family, community and society levels.

In emergencies, education is a key protective factor and a life-saving intervention. It provides individuals with vital information including self-protection, landmine awareness, basic health and other survival skills necessary in handling the specific context. It contributes to reducing the risks of violence, provides a return to a sense of normalcy and instils hope for the future, thereby mitigating the psychosocial impact of crisis.

To protect from violence and enhance the psychosocial wellbeing of children affected by emergencies and crisis situations, we design and operate safe spaces where integrated programming including play, recreation, education, health and psychosocial support can be delivered and/or information about services and supports provided. These child-friendly spaces are often implemented in partnership with other stakeholders, including governments, UN agencies and NGOs such as Save the Children and International Social Services. National Societies also improve access to education, including through cash transfers, the provision of school materials or the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructures. Other activities include restoring family links,

and disseminating international humanitarian law as a measure to protect health and education facilities from attacks.

In Yemen, for example, the Red Crescent Society is working with teachers, parents and students to establish child friendly spaces in schools so that students have a place to be physically safe and to learn to cope with the psychological burdens of the fear and anxiety caused by the 2 year conflict. As a result, and despite initial reluctance, the number of returnees to schools is increasing, and more children are engaging with the programme.

After the South Kordofan violence, the Sudanese Red Crescent provided a safe space for children to come to address the trauma they had witnessed through recreation, education and awareness activities. It also worked on identifying and responding to cases of separated and unaccompanied minors, to help reunite them with their families or to find alternative care solutions where reunification was not possible.

In Europe, the Armenian Red Cross Society runs a programme aimed at promoting the integration and resilience of 580 Syrian-Armenian children (aged 7-14) in 25 schools in Yerevan. Its volunteers provide psychosocial support, recreational and cultural activities, thematic workshops and sessions around life skills and violence prevention, mitigation and response, as well as homework assistance, paying special attention to 80 refugee children living in dormitories.

In Central America, the Honduran Red Cross implements since 2003 a project to reduce the incidence of violence and exclusion among youth and

their families by offering psychosocial support, vocational trainings and alternative education to those interested in starting or completing their basic education from the first to the ninth grade - thereby creating or facilitating opportunities for their individual development, and ultimately that of their communities.

While action in emergencies is critical, experience has taught us that work done before an emergency is equally important. Protection and education should be an integral part of preparedness efforts and contingency planning. This includes working through schools and communities to reach children, parents, teachers and first responders to identify risks, plan for them and practice action.

An example of our work in this field is our contribution to the operationalization of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework and the worldwide initiative for safe schools launched in Sendai. Putting the children's rights to survival, protection, education and participation at its core, this aims at protecting learners and education workers from death, injury, and harm in schools; planning for educational continuity in the face of all expected hazards and threats; safeguarding education sector investments; and strengthening risk reduction and resilience through education.

Another example is our flagship initiative on the promotion of social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace called Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (or YABC). Through peer education and experiential, affective learning, YABC gets youth to undertake a personal transformation process, develop (self-)awareness and an understanding of societal issues

as well as learn and practise important skills to interact constructively and live peacefully with others. Created in 2008, it counts today with 2,100 trained peer educators from 127 National Societies directly reaching out over 250,000 people who report having brought positive changes in their lives as a result.

Khaled, an 18-year-old refugee and volunteer with the Palestine Red Crescent shares *“As a youth, I can have an influence on other young people. If we can reduce the percentage of people who resort to violence, even by a few percentage points, it will be a start that we can build on to make people safer in our community.”* Khaled’s example also highlights how volunteering can create social connection, skills enhancement opportunities and personal fulfilment through contributing to the well-being of others as well as one’s own development.

As auxiliaries of public authorities, our National Societies have a long history of working with governments to support education, as illustrated by our 70 nursing schools around the world, and the over 15 million participants in our first aid trainings each year who then contribute more than 3 million volunteer hours, often in the most difficult contexts, in places like Syria and Yemen, and in the long-term recovery of disasters in places like Nepal. We also have several successful examples of collaboration with UNICEF, the World Education Forum, the Special Olympics, to name a few.

Yet, tragically, violence is not prevented on the scale that is required, and the most vulnerable are living with the consequences, many of which remain unseen and unheard, such as along the migration routes to Europe where

our global efforts to protect them or provide them with targeted services are inadequate, even non-existent at times.

This is why, we are committed to scale up our investments in safe spaces, psychosocial care for girls, boys and families and improve access to education, along with efforts to increase and maintain family unity, and support young people to take a leadership role in finding and implementing solutions.

We are determined to improve our practice around the collection of age and gender disaggregated data to bring violence into the light, to contribute to building a more robust and effective referral and support system for victims and survivors, as well as to provide better training for our frontline responders to identify at-risk populations as early as possible.

At the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, our National Societies with States from 190 countries adopted a resolution on preventing sexual and gender-based violence. We invite you to visit our IFRC website to learn more about how this could support our collective work to address this critical issue of protection.

All around the world, there is a collective responsibility to improve, much of which lies with States. However, humanitarian organizations can do much more. Platforms like today, inspire and aspire us in this direction, so be assured that on our side, we are more than ever committed to develop and strengthen partnerships with all to increase the effectiveness and impact of our joint efforts to break the spiral of violence. We look forward to working with you.