



*Many of the houses in the town of Gumri collapsed in the Armenian earthquake of 1988. The subsequent collapse of Armenia's economy, under the weight of the break up of the Soviet Union and the war with Azerbaijan, means that little reconstruction has taken place. The cranes stand idle and rusting and families find their lives changed for ever by the combined forces of war, economic decline and harsh climate. Armenia, 1993. Jan Berry/Magnum*

# Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief

## Purpose

This Code of Conduct seeks to guard our standards of behaviour.

It is not about operational details, such as how one should calculate food rations or set up a refugee camp. Rather, it seeks to maintain the high standards of independence, effectiveness and impact to which disaster response NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement aspires. It is a voluntary code, enforced by the will of organisation accepting it to maintain the standards laid down in the Code.

In the event of armed conflict, the present Code of Conduct will be interpreted and applied in conformity with international humanitarian law.

The Code of Conduct is presented first. Attached to it are three annexes, describing the working environment that we would like to see created by host governments, donor governments and intergovernmental organisations in order to facilitate the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

## Definitions

**NGOs:** NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) refers here to organisations, both national and international, which are constituted separate from the government of the country in which they are founded.

**NGHAs:** For the purposes of this text, the term Non Governmental Humanitarian Agencies (NGHAs) has been coined to encompass the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement - The International Committee of the Red Cross, The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its member National Societies - and the NGOs as defined above. This Code refers specifically to those NGHAs who are involved

in disaster response.

**IGOs:** IGOs (Inter-Governmental Organisations) refers to organisations constituted by two or more governments. It thus includes all United Nations agencies and regional organisations.

**Disasters:** A disaster is a calamitous event resulting in loss of life, great human suffering and distress, and large scale material damage.

## The Code of Conduct

### 1 The humanitarian imperative comes first.

The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. Hence the need for unimpeded access to affected populations, is of fundamental importance in exercising that responsibility.

The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster.

When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such.

### 2 Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.

Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs.

Within the entirety of our programmes, we will reflect considerations of proportionality. Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate.

In implementing this approach, we recognise the crucial role played by women in disaster prone commu-

nities and will ensure that this role is supported, not diminished, by our aid programmes.

The implementation of such a universal, impartial and independent policy, can only be effective if we and our partners have access to the necessary resources to provide for such equitable relief, and have equal access to all disaster victims.

**3 Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.**

Humanitarian aid will be given according to the need of individuals, families and communities. Notwithstanding the right of NGHAs to espouse particular political or religious opinions, we affirm that assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of the recipients to those opinions.

We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.

**4 We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.**

NGHAs are agencies which act independently from governments. We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of any government, except in so far as it coincides with our own independent policy.

We will never knowingly - or through negligence - allow ourselves, or our employees, to be used to gather information of a political, military or economically sensitive nature for governments or other bodies that may serve purposes other than those which are strictly humanitarian, nor will we act as instruments of foreign policy of donor governments

We will use the assistance we receive to respond to needs and this assistance should not be driven by the need to dispose of donor commodity surpluses, nor by the political interest of any particular donor.

We value and promote the voluntary giving of labour and finances by concerned individuals to support our work and recognise the independence of action promoted by such voluntary motivation. In order to protect our in-

dependence we will seek to avoid dependence upon a single funding source.

**5 We shall respect culture and custom.**

We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.

**6 We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.**

All people and communities - even in disaster - possess capacities as well as vulnerabilities. Where possible, we will strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. Where possible, we will work through local NGHAs as partners in planning and implementation, and cooperate with local government structures where appropriate.

We will place a high priority on the proper coordination of our emergency responses. This is best done within the countries concerned by those most directly involved in the relief operations, and should include representatives of the relevant UN bodies.

**7 Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.**

Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.

**8 Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs.**

All relief actions affect the prospects for long-term development, either in a positive or a negative fashion. Recognising this, we will strive to implement relief programmes which actively reduce the beneficiaries' vulnerability to future disasters and help create sustainable lifestyles. We will pay particular attention to environmental concerns in the design and management of relief programmes. We will also endeavour to minimise the negative impact of hu-

manitarian assistance, seeking to avoid long-term beneficiary dependence upon external aid.

**9 We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.**

We often act as an institutional link in the partnership between those who wish to assist and those who need assistance during disasters. We therefore hold ourselves accountable to both constituencies.

All our dealings with donors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and transparency. We recognise the need to report on our activities, both from a financial perspective and the perspective of effectiveness.

We recognise the obligation to ensure appropriate monitoring of aid distributions and to carry out regular assessments of the impact of disaster assistance.

We will also seek to report, in an open fashion, upon the impact of our work, and the factors limiting or enhancing that impact.

Our programmes will be based upon high standards of professionalism and expertise in order to minimise the wasting of valuable resources.

**10 In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.**

Respect for the disaster victim as an equal partner in action should never be lost. In our public information we shall portray an objective image of the disaster situation where the capacities and aspirations of disaster victims are highlighted, and not just their vulnerabilities and fears.

While we will cooperate with the media in order to enhance public response, we will not allow external or internal demands for publicity to take precedence over the principle of maximising overall relief assistance.

We will avoid competing with other disaster response agencies for media coverage in situations where such coverage may be to the detriment of the service provided to the beneficiaries or to the security of our staff or the beneficiaries.

## **The working environment**

Having agreed unilaterally to strive to abide by the Code laid out above, we present below some indicative guidelines which describe the working environment we would like to see created by donor governments, host governments and the inter-governmental organisations - principally the agencies of the United Nations - in order to facilitate the effective participation of NGHAs in disaster response. These guidelines are presented for guidance. They are not legally binding, nor do we expect governments and IGOs to indicate their acceptance of the guidelines through the signature of any document, although this may be a goal to work to in the future. They are presented in a spirit of openness and cooperation so that our partners will become aware of the ideal relationship we would seek with them.

## **Annex I Recommendations to the governments of disaster-affected countries**

**1 Governments should recognise and respect the independent, humanitarian and impartial actions of NGHAs.**

NGHAs are independent bodies. This independence and impartiality should be respected by host governments.

**2 Host governments should facilitate rapid access to disaster victims for NGHAs.**

If NGHAs are to act in full compliance with their humanitarian principles, they should be granted rapid and impartial access to disaster victims, for the purpose of delivering humanitarian assistance. It is the duty of the host government, as part of the exercising of sovereign responsibility, not to block such assistance, and to accept the impartial and apolitical action of NGHAs.

Host governments should facilitate the rapid entry of relief staff, particularly by waiving requirements for transit, entry and exit visas, or arranging that these are rapidly granted. Governments should grant overflight permission and landing rights for aircraft transporting international relief supplies and personnel, for the duration of the emergency relief phase.

### **3 Governments should facilitate the timely flow of relief goods and information during disasters.**

Relief supplies and equipment are brought into a country solely for the purpose of alleviating human suffering, not for commercial benefit or gain. Such supplies should normally be allowed free and unrestricted passage and should not be subject to requirements for consular certificates of origin or invoices, import and/or export licences or other restrictions, or to importation taxation, landing fees or port charges.

The temporary importation of necessary relief equipment, including vehicles, light aircraft and telecommunications equipment, should be facilitated by the receiving host government through the temporary waving of license or registration restrictions. Equally, governments should not restrict the re-exportation of relief equipment at the end of a relief operation.

To facilitate disaster communications, host governments are encouraged to designate certain radio frequencies, which relief organisations may use in-country and for international communications for the purpose of disaster communications, and to make such frequencies known to the disaster response community prior to the disaster. They should authorise relief personnel to utilise all means of communication required for their relief operations

### **4 Governments should seek to provide a coordinated disaster information and planning service.**

The overall planning and coordination of relief efforts is ultimately the responsibility of the host government. Planning and coordination can be greatly enhanced if NGHAs are provided with information on relief

needs and government systems for planning and implementing relief efforts as well as information on potential security risks they may encounter. Governments are urged to provide such information to NGHAs.

To facilitate effective coordination and the efficient utilisation of relief efforts, host governments are urged to designate, prior to disaster, a single point-of-contact for incoming NGHAs to liaise with the national authorities.

### **5 Disaster relief in the event of armed conflict.**

In the event of armed conflict, relief actions are governed by the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

## **Annex II Recommendations to donor governments**

### **1 Donor governments should recognise and respect the independent, humanitarian and impartial actions of NGHAs.**

NGHAs are independent bodies whose independence and impartiality should be respected by donor governments. Donor governments should not use NGHAs to further any political or ideological aim.

### **2 Donor governments should provide funding with a guarantee of operational independence.**

NGHAs accept funding and material assistance from donor governments in the same spirit as they render it to disaster victims; one of humanity and independence of action. The implementation of relief actions is ultimately the responsibility of the NGHAs and will be carried out according to the policies of that NGHAs.

### **3 Donor governments should use their good offices to assist NGHAs in obtaining access to disaster victims.**

Donor governments should recognise the importance of accepting a level of responsibility for the security and freedom of access of NGHAs staff to disaster sites. They should be prepared to exercise diplomacy with host governments on such issues if necessary.

## **Annex III**

### **Recommendations to intergovernmental organisations**

tion of effective disaster response, with their operational NGHAs partners.

**1 IGOs should recognise NGHAs, local and foreign, as valuable partners.**

NGHAs are willing to work with UN and other intergovernmental agencies to effect better disaster response. They do so in a spirit of partnership which respects the integrity and independence of all partners. Intergovernmental agencies must respect the independence and impartiality of the NGHAs. NGHAs should be consulted by UN agencies in the preparation of relief plans.

**2 IGOs should assist host governments in providing an overall coordinating framework for international and local disaster relief.**

NGHAs do not usually have the mandate to provide the overall coordinating framework for disasters which require an international response. This responsibility falls to the host government and the relevant United Nations authorities. They are urged to provide this service in a timely and effective manner to serve the affected state and the national and international disaster response community. In any case, NGHAs should make all efforts to ensure the effective coordination of their own services.

In the event of armed conflict, relief actions are governed by the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

**3 IGOs should extend security protection provided for UN organisations to NGHAs.**

Where security services are provided for intergovernmental organisations, this service should be extended to their operational NGHAs partners where it is so requested.

**4 IGOs should provide NGHAs with the same access to relevant information as is granted to UN organisations.**

IGOs are urged to share all information, pertinent to the implementa-

## Focus 2: Making the media work for the vulnerable

How can disaster-response agencies and the media together help improve the situation of the most vulnerable when much of the public throughout the industrialised world shares an image of developing countries that is incomplete and inaccurate?

In 1993 The Annenberg Washington Program held two roundtables with reporters, editors, producers and members of relief organisations to examine the impact of images of the developing world portrayed through the media and by relief organisations.

They sought to identify practical, specific strategies for both the media and relief organisations to improve the accuracy, timeliness, quality and cost-effectiveness of the information they disseminate about developing countries.

### Images and their causes

Peter Adamson, founder and author of UNICEF's annual State of the World's Children report and a roundtable participant, observed that western audiences dramatically over-estimate the problems and dependency of people in the developing world.

He said: "Whenever I give a talk in a school or college, usually with 16- or 17-year-olds, I end by distributing a questionnaire to both students and tutors. I ask: 'What percentage of world's children do you think are starving, defined as "visibly malnourished?"' The answer is usually 50-75%. The real answer is 1-2%. I ask: 'What percentage of world's families are living in absolute poverty, so they cannot meet even their most basic needs?' The answer is usually in the region of 75%. The real answer is 20-25%. I ask: 'What percentage of the world's 6- to 12-year-olds start school?' The average answer is usually 10-20%. The real answer is almost 90%. I ask: 'Is the rate of population growth in the developing world increasing, decreasing, or staying about the same?'

Almost invariably, the answer is 'it is increasing'. The fact is it is decreasing in every region of the developing world including Africa. I ask: 'What percentage of the poor world's income comes from overseas aid of all kinds?' The average answer is almost 50%, with many thinking that the developing world is 70% dependent on aid from abroad. The truth is that aid amounts to about 1% of the incomes of the poor world."

Where does this mis-impression originate? Most of the developed world's information about the developing world comes from two sources: the news media and relief organisations. Despite considerable efforts to be accurate and timely, both the media and relief organisations unintentionally contribute to distorted images of the developing world because both focus on the unusual, the extraordinary, the dramatic. The public's perception of developing countries may be formed entirely of information about the exceptions, rather than the norms, of daily life.

### Meeting the challenge

The round tables suggested a number of strategies for how both media and relief organisations can increase the accuracy and completeness of the images they provide to the public, and compete more effectively for public attention and support. Many of these strategies are already being followed by leading news and relief organisations. Nine of the most important follow. They are not new; they are presented here as widely recognised, cost-effective techniques for maximising the capacities of both the media and relief organisations.

### Strategies for the media

1 Use news resources more effectively. Media face the challenge to identify resources that could be employed to provide early notification about developing stories,

background information, and timely, accurate reports about events in developing countries. Independent journalists or "stringers" could be used more widely. More cooperative ventures among news organisations could make maintaining bureaus in developing countries more economically feasible. Relief organisations often have the infrastructure within developing countries to help the media identify important issues or emerging trends, give logistical support in reporting those stories, provide background information and arrange for sources and spokespeople from within the relevant country or countries. Media should also be aware of, and sensitive to, competitive pressures or inadequate resources that might compromise accuracy or thoroughness in reporting.

2 Designate and train development journalists. Reporting on developing countries could be improved by increasing the number of reporters who cover the area and by designating "development correspondents", just as many media today designate reporters to cover politics, financial markets, and other specific "beats".

In addition, how can reporters and photographers who are rushed into a country to cover a story be better prepared for such assignments? What training and background information would help equip them? How can they have the greatest amount of time possible "on the scene" and how can that time best be used? What training or information would help editors and other "gate-keepers" within the media evaluate the significance of stories from developing countries and place those stories in a broader news context?

3 Cover efforts by indigenous organisations and individuals to prevent, anticipate, and respond to disasters. Reporting about relief efforts should seek to include, to an extent proportional to their

importance, relief efforts by indigent people or organisations or by other developing countries. Most disaster relief support comes from within the developing world. News reports that focus on the arrival of western government officials, relief workers, or shipments from the industrialised world, are likely to distort the response to disasters. "On the scene" interviews with western relief officials may similarly mislead the public. The media should seek to interview and quote officials from indigent governments and relief organisations where possible.

4 Provide professional training and review. Journalism reviews, graduate schools, professional societies, and media critics should play an important role in training journalists in international reporting, in evaluating reporting on developing countries, and in sensitising both the media and the public.

There are noteworthy examples of high quality reporting on development issues; these should be noted, rewarded, and used to help train other reporters, editors, photographers, and producers. Media institutions could help provide opportunities for skill-building, sponsor workshops, provide training for reporters assigned outside of their home country or region, and even participate in providing substantive briefings about specific countries and issues.

### **Strategies for aid agencies**

1 Articulate your communications strategy. Each relief organisation should publicly articulate its strategy for communicating with the media and the public. What are the purposes of those communications: to raise money, inform the public, change public opinion, motivate political action, promote the organisation? Conflicts among those goals should be explicitly acknowledged. Communications strategies, like all activities of relief organisations, should be evaluated regularly to determine their effectiveness, their relationship to

the organisation's goals, and their impact. Relief organisations should also regularly evaluate their communications strategies for their impact on public understanding and for their ethical and professional appropriateness.

2 Train organisation personnel to work with media. Relief organisations should provide training, particularly for personnel in the field, to work with media to improve the timeliness, quality, and accuracy of reporting about developing countries. Because relief organisations have expertise in development, monitor issues affecting developing countries and disaster relief full-time, and have resources within developing countries, they are well-placed to help media identify and report important stories accurately and sensitively, evaluate the quality of news reports, and seek to correct inaccurate stories or supplement incomplete ones. Information provided to the media should be accurate, concise and clear, and presented in the manner and format requested by the individual reporter or organisation. Relief organisations should recognise that the media have limited resources, and should avoid overstating the scope of disasters.

3 Evaluate media content. Relief organisations should evaluate media coverage for accuracy, quality, completeness, timeliness, and professionalism. Excellent media coverage should be recognised and used to help improve other reporting. Inaccuracies or misperceptions should be corrected through direct contact with the media and reporters involved, letters to the editor, guest columns, counter-information, and other means available to relief organisations.

4 Create alternative programming. Relief organisations should work to facilitate documentaries and other programming providing a more complete image of developing countries. In particular, organisations should work cooperatively with programme producers in de-

veloping countries and with the media to create and disseminate programming, such as the *Developing Stories* series produced for the One World Group of Broadcasters and broadcast in 18 countries in the developed world in 1992. New programming outlets, such as cable and satellite television, offer considerable potential for airing such programming.

5 Evaluate relief organisation communications. Many relief organisations - individually and cooperatively - have adopted standards for their communications with the public. All communications activities should be evaluated according to articulated standards. For example, InterAction - a membership association of US relief organisations - requires its members to "respect the dignity, values, history, religion, and culture of the people served by the programs. They shall neither minimise nor overstate the human and material needs of those whom it assists." Save the Children (UK) has also adopted standards for communicating with the public: "The images and text used in all communications must be accurate and should avoid stereotypes and clichés ... attempts should be made where possible to identify and quote people being photographed or interviewed. If they wish to remain anonymous, their request should be honoured. Wherever possible, the views and experiences of the people involved should be communicated."

*This is an edited version of "Media, Disaster Relief and Images of the Developing World: Strategies For Rapid, Accurate and Effective Coverage of of Complex Stories From Around The Globe", prepared by Fred H. Cate, Associate Professor of Law at the Indiana University School of Law - Bloomington, and an Annenberg Senior Fellow. The Annenberg Washington Program plans to publish a more detailed report examining the images of the developing world and their causes during 1994.*