

## Concept Note

### ***Humanitarian principles in a changing world: Still fit for purpose? A Dialogue Between States and Humanitarian Actors***

***Hosted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)***

Date: Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014, 17.30-19.30

Venue: Director General's Hall, International Committee of the Red Cross,  
19 Avenue de la Paix, Geneva

### **Context**

***The changing complexity of crises and increased risks for humanitarian actors have raised questions regarding the continued utility of the humanitarian principles for facilitating operations and building trust and acceptance with States and local communities.***

The core principles of *humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality* provide the foundation humanitarian action; but they are also practical operational enablers for the delivery of aid by humanitarian actors in complex operating environments. The principles are particularly relevant in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence, where typically, there can be pronounced political agendas, restricted access, and heightened mistrust and/or risk of violence towards humanitarian actors.

The challenges and operational dilemmas faced by humanitarian actors in responding to the needs of populations affected by crisis in a principled manner have come starkly to the fore most recently in contexts such as Syria, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Challenges include the proliferation of new actors, constraints on funding, inconsistent mandates, increased risk aversion, and pressure to conform to the political and security agendas of States or armed groups. Humanitarian actors are also confronted with re-occurring dilemmas such as balancing protection with delivery of assistance, including how to deal with some of the most abhorrent tactics used by some parties to conflict. How the humanitarian principles assist practitioners to deal with these challenges, whilst facilitating everyday operations is hotly debated, as is the very acceptance and perception of the principles across diverse contexts.

Different stakeholders have also questioned the consistency in application of the principles, their relevance, relationship to State sovereignty and their appearance as 'Western rhetoric.' Concerns regarding transparency and accountability in humanitarian action also exist, especially in respect of State's decisions concerning humanitarian interventions, financing and partnerships, in addition to balancing foreign policy interests.

Better understanding of the perceptions and concerns of States, and gaining support for facilitating principled humanitarian action, is one of the most critical factors in ensuring that humanitarian action is effective. Increased dialogue based on the priorities and practical

considerations of governments and humanitarians alike is a prerequisite for increasing understanding and strengthening the mutual commitment of all actors to alleviate suffering and strengthen the protection of civilians.

## Event

ICRC and NRC invite States and humanitarian actors to a high-level panel discussion to examine some of the current-day dilemmas in applying principled approaches to afford better assistance and protection to affected populations in crisis.

The dialogue builds upon NRC and ICRC's collaboration to promote dialogue on the principles and humanitarian action with States. In 2012, NRC organized two public events in Geneva and Brussels, hosted by the EU delegation, and ECHO/ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of ICRC's president and director general, on principles of humanitarian action (For further information, please see : [Brussels conference](#) and [Geneva roundtable](#)). NRC and ICRC have, since 2013, engaged diplomatic representatives from different permanent missions in Geneva in a dialogue on the relevance of the humanitarian principles in modern crises. ICRC has also been participating in NRC's engagement with NGOs in a dialogue on principled humanitarian action, in the lead up to a public event to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs (1994).

## Objective

This dialogue seeks to provide a forum for an open and constructive conversation between States and humanitarian actors in order to foster a stronger mutual understanding of the various concerns, priorities and challenges in current humanitarian situations. It is hoped that such an improved understanding may contribute to States and humanitarian actors jointly facilitating more effective principled humanitarian action, to alleviate the suffering and strengthen the protection of civilians.

## Format

There will be a high-level panel discussion between Ambassadors, the ICRC's Director General Mr. Yves Daccord and NRC's Secretary General Mr. Jan Egeland, followed by a facilitated Q & A discussion. The event will seek to bring together representatives from the various Permanent Missions, humanitarian and development organisations, NGO networks and academia.