



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Red Cross Update

By Alison Schumer

Introduction

This update will serve to help get you up to speed on all of the topics that will be debated around HMCE 2009 that will be most relevant to Red Cross delegates. This document should work as a starting point for delegates to, coupled with the briefings, gain an understanding of the issues that they will want to engage with at HMCE 2009.

Senate I

Human Trafficking

The Red Cross has tackled human trafficking in numerous international locations such as Myanmar and Cambodia. International Red Cross societies address the needs and vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking with priorities for prevention, protection, and **rehabilitation** into society. The Red Cross believes that it is important to learn from the experience and examples of good practice developed by various Red Cross groups in Europe and other parts of the world. Exchange of information and experience will help to identify gaps, analyze existing capacities and, consequently, to highlight key issues within anti-trafficking activities that can be tackled in the future.

Rehabilitation—to restore or bring to a condition of health or useful and constructive

Group of Eight

Foreign Aid to the Developing World

The Red Cross as an international aid organization is focused more on short-term disaster relief than on long-term, sustainable economic growth. However, it should be noted that much of foreign aid comes through organizations like the Red Cross during times of disaster as well as during times of peace, and that these expenditures are often used in the calculation of total foreign aid among countries.

In addition, the Red Cross has significant initiatives in the areas of maternal health and infant mortality. Improvement of both of these metrics is typically considered a vital milestone for developing countries in preparation for long-term growth and would be a great target for increased foreign aid. In this respect, the Red Cross does serve as a delivery agent for some aid programs and for the broader developmental agenda.

Group of Fifteen

Developing Nations and Climate Change

The Red Cross is particularly concerned with helping people recover from serious disasters. In the United States, for example, the American Red Cross was extremely active in New Orleans, Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The Red Cross is similarly involved in disaster situations around the world ranging from the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake to Cyclone Nargis, which affected Myanmar in 2008. Some argue that global warming may cause extreme weather events that cause widespread damage such as powerful hurricanes, heavy rains, and droughts. The Red Cross would support measures that help prevent these disasters, though it is questionable how much of the burden they would place upon developing nations.

Food Insecurity in the Developing World

One of the major functions of the Red Cross is to provide necessary support in times of large-scale emergencies. The Red Cross believes that food prices could very well lead to a humanitarian crisis, and that something must be done to **avert** such a situation. Today's high food prices are an excellent example of a crisis waiting to happen, and the Red Cross is alarmed at the scale of the food shortages that could potentially be seen in the near future. The Red Cross is lobbying hard for immediate remedial measures to combat high food prices and avert a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

Avert—to see coming and ward off.

World Health Organization

Genetically Modified Organisms

The Red Cross has not taken a strong position on the debate regarding GMOs. However, the organization understands the role food plays in good health, and should certain GMOs be declared safe, the Red Cross would likely use them in their relief efforts. In the past, the Red Cross has supported what were, at the time, regarded to be controversial scientific advances, such as vaccination. The possibility of plants with increased nutritional content, livestock (particularly cows) able to produce medicine in milk, and crops with medicinal or pharmaceutical properties would be highly useful to the organization's international relief efforts.

Neglected Diseases

The issue regarding water and sanitation is very serious in the eyes of the Red Cross. The organization has even recently begun training a large number of water supply specialists to protect, improve, and

repair existing water sources. These health professionals are trained in implementing water treatment methods ranging from chlorine tablets to solar disinfection to sand and ceramic filtration. Over the past decade, the Red Cross has realized that its immediate relief efforts alone are far more effective when combined with efforts to better long-term sanitation. Removing **stagnant** water and waste eliminates breeding grounds for the bacteria, worms, and mosquitoes that spread infectious diseases, and leaves communities safe from future outbreaks or crises.

Stagnant—*not flowing in a stream or current.*

United Nations Security Council

Crisis in Darfur

The Red Cross has a significant presence in Sudan of almost 1,600 personnel working to provide emergency aid to victims of the crisis. The Red Cross has worked in partnership with the Sudanese Red Crescent organization and is one of the NGOs with the most access to the rural villages of Darfur. The organization works to provide food, clean water, sanitation, and household materials to some of the most desperate villages of Darfur. The organization would greatly welcome any increase in security so that their workers would be better able to safely reach all areas that need aid.

Red Cross in the News

Gaza Conflict

This fall the ceasefire between Israelis and Palestinians ended once again, leading to an all out conflict in the Gaza region, with Israeli troops occupying portions of Gaza. The Red Cross, the UN, and a number of other groups publicly disagreed with Israel's handling of the Gaza occupation, claiming that much needed relief could not enter Gaza because of Israeli roadblocks. The Red Cross released a statement that said, "The Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded," and reported finding **emaciated** children. As an NGO, the Red Cross is supposed to remain **neutral** on political issues, and it would seem that they only weighed in on the humanitarian aspects of this conflict. The Israeli army responded that they had only heard of the Red Cross's finding through the news and that the Red Cross never actually brought the situation to the attention of the Israelis. Israeli forces also argued that the roadblocks were necessary to keep Palestinian arms and fighters from entering Gaza.

Emaciated—*extremely thin and undernourished.*

Neutral—*not taking one side or another.*

Abduction in the Philippines

On January 15, 2009 three Red Cross workers were abducted in the Philippines. The group responsible for the kidnappings is called Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic extremist group. The workers were sent to the southern part of the islands to inspect a jailhouse and report back to the Filipino government on how to improve its prisons. The workers were warned about the poor security situation in the region, yet refused armed escort. Even though the Red Cross is a neutral organization, this does not leave them unsusceptible to violence, especially to terrorist groups who view them as competition for the hearts and minds of the populace or as tools of the West. While the aid workers are expected to be released soon, a deal has not yet reached.

Guantanamo Bay

Since the first military detainees from Afghanistan arrived in 2002, **Guantanamo Bay** has been a center of controversy. Over this time the Red Cross has visited the detainment center 32 times, reporting it has seen use of torture such as sleep deprivation and water boarding. The Bush administration's policies regarding detainees were a magnet for criticism, though the strongest criticism was international, and American opinions on closing the base are split down the middle. President Obama made the shutdown of the facility one of his key campaign promises, and on January 22, 2009 Obama signed an **executive order** that stated the U.S will close Guantanamo within a year, will inform the Red Cross of all detainees held in detainment centers, and will give the Red Cross timely access to them. The Bush administration, while keeping Guantanamo open to the Red Cross, refused to grant the Red Cross private interviews with detainees, citing national security concerns. In response to the executive order the Red Cross released a statement that said, "There is no contradiction between state security and the protection of the rights and liberties of individuals and the fact that President Obama decided to act so rapidly and decisively is significant and important."

Guantanamo Bay—a US military base in Cuba where detainees from the War on Terror have been held since 2002.

Executive order—directives from the President that in many cases have the force of law.

Bibliography

Bronner, Ethan. "The U.N and Red Cross Add to Outcry on Gaza War." *The New York Times*. 8 January 2009 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/09/world/middleeast/09mideast.html>>

Conde, Carlos. "Three Red Cross Workers Abducted in the Philippines." *The New York Times*. 15 January 2009 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/16/world/asia/16manila.html?>>

The International Committee of the Red Cross <www.icrc.org>