Behind the face
Fundamental Principles in action

Testimonies from employees and volunteers of the Burundi Red Cross in response to the crisis
June 2015
Introduction

It has been more than a month since pre-election violence started in Burundi, resulting in a number of casualties in the capital of Bujumbura. Since the first day of the demonstrations, the Burundi Red Cross, with support from Movement partners, has deployed three first aid mobile response teams and 9 advanced posts in Bujumbura, with more than 100 volunteers supporting the operation. They are offering onsite first aid treatment, evacuation of the injured to hospitals, and referrals of pregnant women. To date volunteers have evacuated and treated more than 500 people.

In a country with multiple chronic vulnerabilities, Burundi Red Cross has developed door-to-door access to every vulnerable person in the country through its network of sustainable community volunteer units, with more than 450,000 volunteers active across the country.
JEAN BAPTISTE NIYUNGEKO, 33, coordination of operations

I started as a volunteer in April 2002. In June 2013, I became a full-time employee of the Burundi Red Cross. I had nurtured the interest for working as a volunteer right from a tender age because of my desire to help others. For me, the humanitarian spirit of compassion and being of service to people affected by natural disasters or conflicts constitutes the essential values embodied by the Red Cross.

With regard to the crisis facing my country today, my role within the Red Cross family is to coordinate the rescue operations of the injured people, manage the first aid centres in Bujumbura, facilitate first-aid team awareness on the fundamental principles, so the principles of Neutrality, Independence and Impartiality, as well as the Code of Conduct, are adhered to.

It is important for me to contribute to the humanitarian response operation undertaken by the Burundi Red Cross because it is the very essence of our existence.

Furthermore, we need to save lives and educate young people from an early age to have compassion for those who suffer and who deserve our assistance.

In my day-to-day activities as a humanitarian worker, I get my inspiration from the basic principles of the Red Cross. The first four principles (Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence) are the ones I value most because they not only enable us to be accepted and to perform our work, but are also very sensitive and need to be safeguarded. This does not in any way mean that the other three principles (Universality, Unity and Voluntary Service) are not important; on the contrary they complement the other four.

I cannot easily single out a case of someone who I helped who has touched me the most because I have numerous examples. But probably a date that will forever remain engraved in my memory is 6 May 2015. On this date a 15 year old boy died in my arms after being shot in the spine. It was around 1:25 in the afternoon. He called for his mother, who arrived just a few minutes before he passed on.
EDDY-JUSTE BITAGOYE, 40, in charge of Restoration of Family Links Services

I started working for the Burundi Red Cross almost seven years ago after having worked on a voluntary basis for a number of years. I wanted to feel useful and to be of service to people who found themselves in more vulnerable situations than I.

I am in charge of the Restoration of Family Links Services. We help to reunite separated families after conflicts or other situations of violence. Currently, our volunteers are on stand-by in emergency support centres where people in need can come to seek help.

I am a member of the National Disaster Response Team but I am also one of the rescue workers who provides help to victims and injured people during the demonstrations. Moreover, I help people to search for their loved ones with whom they lost contact following any such event, making sure families stay informed of the whereabouts of their separated relatives.

For me, the Fundamental Principles act as a scorecard that gives us direction, thereby enabling us to be impartial in all that we do. The principles I value most are: Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence.
I formally joined the Red Cross on 1 October 2006 after working as a volunteer since 2004. In total, I have been with the Red Cross family for over ten years. My main motivation is the humanitarian spirit in me that wants to help alleviate the suffering of other people and save the lives of the most vulnerable.

I am a field emergency rescue worker. Currently, I coordinate rescue operations in the emergency centres set up in the south and north of the capital city, particularly in Nyakabiga Musaga, Ngagara, Kinama and Kanyosha neighbourhoods. Every day at noon, I give a progress report of the first-aid response operations made and the number of people referred to health facilities in each area of operation. I am in charge of the provision of first-aid services to the injured before they are referred to health centres for further treatment.

The Fundamental Principles act as my Bible in the relief operations. I obviously mostly value the first three principles of Humanity, Impartiality and Neutrality because, for me, easing people’s suffering and saving human life are the very goals of our emergency relief operations, which we undertake without any form of discrimination or partisanship.

I would like to share with you the story of a schoolboy in sixth grade who missed his National Certificate of Primary Education Examinations because of the head injuries he incurred during the violence. I found him in shock lying in a ditch where he was hiding. He was bleeding profusely. I managed to stop the bleeding and had him transferred to the Prince Regent Charles Hospital. When we met the following day at the hospital, the young boy expressed his gratitude, telling his mother and the medical staff that if I had not been there, he would be dead.
ADRIEN RUSHARIKA
50, rescue driver

I started working for the Red Cross in 1998, first of all for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies before joining the Burundi Red Cross in 2006.

I am a rescue driver in charge of transporting emergency volunteer rescuers to different emergency first aid centres and, where necessary, evacuating seriously wounded victims. Being also a rescuer, I help to take care of the wounded in the streets while also ensuring the safety of pre-positioned relief supplies in operating the vehicle.
LEILA NIYUKURI
27, volunteer rescue worker

I started working as a volunteer at the Burundi Red Cross in 2008. As a volunteer rescue worker, I put to use the knowledge I acquired during the first aid training courses I undertook, applying simple but necessary actions that help to rescue the wounded and where necessary, start the evacuation procedure to the various health care facilities.

What matters most to me is to contribute to the humanitarian response of the Red Cross and help vulnerable people in an impartial manner, without taking into consideration their social or political affiliation.

The Fundamental Principles inspire me in my volunteer work, giving me the desire to help the wounded without discrimination and most of all, in an impartial manner, so as to maintain the trust of all.

For me, the most important principles are Impartiality and Neutrality. Impartiality helps us to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress. And Neutrality allows us to keep the trust of everyone.

In the course of one of our rescue operations, I had to rescue a boy burned with gasoline. He was in a lot of pain, his body covered with serious burns and his skin badly damaged. Seeing this young man in such a state gave me more strength to always undertake rescue operations with more courage and composure, whatever the circumstances.
TOUSSAINT GEORGES NDIKUMANA,
39, stocks manager

I started working for the Red Cross in 2005, driven by my desire to work in the humanitarian field.

I am in charge of stocks at the Burundi Red Cross where we strive to ensure proper coordination of relief operations. We set up a central centre where all the necessary equipment; first aid kits, medical tools etc. are stored. With the support of Movement partners and external partners, we get the equipment required for operations which we then transport to the first-aid centres to help meet the needs of the wounded.

I think it is very important to come to the aid of the most vulnerable and suffering. This is the very cornerstone of our identity as the Red Cross family and our Fundamental Principles inspire us to work in this direction. For me, the principles of Humanity, Impartiality and Neutrality encompass the other four.

Two weeks ago, when we were returning from work at around 4:30 in the afternoon, on Rumonge Road, there was a motorcycle accident. Two people were lying on the ground, with serious head and leg injuries. We immediately stopped, and my colleagues and I began to administer first aid to the victims before transporting them to hospital. It was a powerful experience because it made me feel that I had the ability to rescue injured people in all circumstances.
The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity**
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace among all peoples.

**Impartiality**
It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality**
In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence**
The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service**
It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity**
There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality**
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.