

PROGRAMME UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

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OPERATIONAL COOPERATION WITH MAGEN DAVID ADOM

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 180 countries. For more information: www.ifrc.org

IN BRIEF

Summary: The Federation's presence in Israel is temporary; the aim and role of the representative differs considerably from the traditional capacity building task, with a focus mainly directed to improving links by creating awareness and building bridges. Cooperation between the Federation and Magen David Adom (MDA) is also directed to the development of programs in areas relevant to Strategy 2010. MDA aims to work as a 'well functioning national society' and needs to develop capacity to deliver services to vulnerable people in addition to the existing first aid, ambulance and blood services. The establishment of a Federation Representation in Israel has clearly proved its value. The close contacts and direct communications between MDA and the Federation created understanding on both sides and helped to bring MDA and the Movement closer. The coming period places a high priority on the MDA's capabilities to transform itself into 'a well functioning National Society'. This will require a continued close link between the Federation Secretariat and MDA. In this respect the ICRC, being the lead agency in the area and valuing MDA's initiatives, has made funds available from its operational budget to contribute to the strengthening of the relation between MDA and the Movement. The ICRC has pledged financial contributions to MDA for the development of a tracing office, the development of tools for the dissemination of the principles and IHL within the MDA, and disaster preparedness activities. The ICRC employs two cooperation delegates for Israel and the Occupied Territories who work in close cooperation with the Federation Representative. The establishment of strong cooperation between MDA and other National Societies will require further support.

Context

The decision to open the Federation's Representation office in Tel Aviv was taken in the summer of 2000 within the context of the work on the Draft Third Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and the recognition of the need to work closer with Magen David Adom in Israel (MDA).

MDA was founded in 1930, and after the State of Israel was established in 1948 the Government of Israel ratified the Geneva Conventions. But it made a reservation concerning the use of the emblem and has used the red shield of David as its emblem ever since.

In 1996 the Movement's Standing Commission initiated steps to find a solution for all National Societies facing problems in using existing red cross or red crescent emblems. These initiatives resulted, after a lengthy and extensive consultation process, in a proposal for the adoption of an additional protective emblem, which can only be done through the adoption of a protocol to the Geneva Conventions by governments. The proposal also contained provisions concerning the circumstances in which the Societies of affected countries could use their own traditional emblems for indicative purposes. This appeared to be an acceptable compromise for all parties concerned. It would have enabled MDA to continue using the red shield of David domestically as its indicative emblem, and in case of international operations, MDA would have come within the established rules and regulations on the external use of the emblem (dating from 1921, which are still in force and applicable to all National Societies when operating outside their country). However, events in the Middle East in September 2000 interrupted this process and planning for the Diplomatic Conference, which was to decide on the adoption of the additional protocol in October 2000, had to be postponed.

The ICRC and Federation continued to hold consultations with government representatives on the draft text. These consultations concluded that the principle difficulties were with the timing of consideration of the draft, rather than with its substance. Following these developments the Federation took a decision, in close consultation with the ICRC, to open the office of its representative in Israel to assist the MDA in its preparations to join the Movement. The Federation Representative's tasks include liaison, creating a better understanding, enhanced cooperation and narrowing the gap between MDA and the Movement.

The Federation's Governing Board held extensive discussions on the matter and its meetings in November 2000 and May 2001. In both cases the Board agreed that, notwithstanding the political developments, the draft text for the protocol was a sound basis for negotiations between governments, and it remained hopeful that the Protocol could be adopted as soon as circumstances allow. The Council of Delegates of the Movement adopted a resolution on 14 November 2001 affirming the position taken by the Federation's Governing Board and inviting the Federation and ICRC to take all possible initiatives with a view to pursuing operational cooperation.

Recent events

The Movement's Standing Commission met in early February, 2002 and set up a working group to follow up on the decision taken by the Council of Delegates in November 2001. All National Societies have been asked to work with their governments in support of the adoption of the proposed third protocol. The Working Group itself had its first meeting on 9 April 2002, and its discussions were heavily concentrated on ways to strengthen the relation between the MDA and all parts of the Movement, using the same tools as apply for all other National Societies prior to their obtaining full membership of the Movement .

The Working Group consists of representatives from all geographic regions and its discussions were very productive. The working group was presented a report which outlined the current state of the operational cooperation initiatives involving MDA, the Federation and the ICRC. It decided to invite the MDA to the next meeting to express its views and expectations. With these steps the Movement developed a clear goal and strategy for the MDA, aiming to create the necessary understanding of humanitarian priorities at political levels, and the means to bring it to the knowledge of the Movement as a whole, through the Working Group. In addition, the terms of reference of the Working Group require that it should finish its work with presenting recommendations for the solution of this issue when the agenda for the next International Conference, due to convene in Geneva in December 2003, is finalized.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

The activities of the Federation's Representative in Tel Aviv focus on:

- **Institutional communications:** liaison between MDA and Geneva in furthering the emblem and membership issue; listening to and forwarding MDA's views and hopes to Geneva and informing MDA about the discussions in and outside the headquarters; information on existing policies of the Federation.
- **Tracing:** support the ICRC in assisting the MDA to develop its tracing services

- **Dissemination of IHL and the Red Cross and Red Crescent principles:** To work together with the ICRC in (a) building on the initiative of the American Red Cross to establish dissemination activities for volunteers and staff of the MDA, and (b) involving MDA in the ICRC's 'Exploring Humanitarian Law' project with the Ministry of Education.
- **International aid and Emergency Response Units:** To discuss working modalities of international aid and, together with the ICRC, further discussions with the IDF Home Front Command and MDA which revealed that the development of a Basic Health ERU would be beneficial for Israel for domestic and international use; to facilitate the establishment of an ERU which will emphasize MDA's role in Disaster Preparedness in Israel and enable it to participate easily in disaster response operations of the Federation and in ICRC operations. It will also introduce MDA in the day-to-day practice of international cooperation.
- **MDA delegates and staff-on-loan:** To stimulate qualified MDA professionals to attend basic training courses (BTC), ERU and/or FACT training courses in order to be qualified to fill ICRC or Federation delegate positions abroad. These training sessions will also increase the knowledge of MDA staff on the practicalities of working with the different components of the Movement; to inform MDA about the possibilities for MDA staff to fill in delegate and/or staff-on-loan positions.
- **Bilateral cooperation:** Strengthening the contacts between MDA and all other National Societies and, where possible, to develop bilateral cooperation for the exchange of knowledge, expertise and other points connected to the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and the Federation's Strategy 2010. This includes the maintenance of contacts and communication channels between MDA and the Palestine Red Crescent Society in recognition of the humanitarian needs of all the people in the region.
- **External relations and communications:** Participation of the MDA in working groups, committees and expert meetings of Federation and ICRC in the field of First Aid, Blood, volunteers, tracing, legal advisers, youth, and other areas; include the MDA in the external communication of the Movement: address, web site links, profile on the web site, articles in magazines, etc.
- **Vulnerability Capacity Assessment (VCA):** Introduction of VCA as a tool for expanding the MDA's activities at local and national level.
- **Strengthening the International Department:** Providing background information, developments, resources, and other inputs on all aspects of the Movement; support in preparation of meetings, contacts, correspondence, etc.

The most prominent results of these activities were the start of a fully equipped office for tracing and an office for the dissemination of International Humanitarian law which were publicly announced as additional services of MDA. In addition, MDA took an active part in the November 2001 meetings of the Federation General Assembly and the Movement's Council of Delegates.

Outstanding needs

The Federation's Representation was initially planned for a period of 6 to 12 months. Due to the continued instability and unrest in the region and the inability of governments to meet and adopt the proposed third additional protocol, the period has had to be extended. It is the Federation's intention to keep the office in place to help achieve the objective of extending operational cooperation as part of the process of helping MDA join the Movement as soon as possible.

The importance of a permanent liaison between the International Federation and MDA is now widely recognized, and in response to the Federation's special request for support the following national societies have provided financial or other support for the Federation's office in Tel Aviv, totaling CHF 307,870: American Red Cross, British Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross, ICRC, Netherlands Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Swedish Red Cross.

The MDA is a relatively well developed Society and has regularly expressed appreciation for the support received from the Federation, but it lacks the means to cover costs and expenditures related to maintaining a Federation representation office. Nevertheless, the MDA contributes by providing office facilities and some

other local support. In addition to this, further financial support will be necessary to cover the costs of the office in the period ahead, particularly as operational cooperation activities expand.

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

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