



ICRC

Resilience, Conflict and Humanitarian Diplomacy

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Thank you for inviting the ICRC to join you to discuss the challenge of resilience in South East Asia.

It is a great pleasure to be in Singapore while it holds the ASEAN Presidency. If ever there was a resilient country, it is Singapore – a society that has thrived and adapted throughout its history to go from strength to strength. And our great Singapore Red Cross Society has played an important role in this resilient history.

ASEAN is a great achievement too, and it is a pleasure to address you after the Deputy Secretary General who has spoken so clearly about effective ways to drive resilience across the region.

Resilience is made by governments and their people working together. ASEAN is truly pioneering in its commitment to “regional resilience” for its 650 million people. The Charter is full of purpose and principles, which either aspire to resilience or make it easier to achieve.

ASEAN’s commitment to lasting peace, security, stability and the peaceful settlement of disputes is fundamental to resilience. As the ICRC knows too well – conflict and violence destroy resilience. Prosperous economies, strong government services and people’s livelihoods that have taken decades to build up can be destroyed in weeks by armed conflict and violence.

ASEAN’s deep commitment to sovereignty, peace, consensus and a nuclear-free region is the political foundation of resilience across your region. These fundamental commitments by ASEAN leaders and their people mean resilience is possible and can be evolved and strengthened over time.

ASEAN’s commitment to focus on mutual interests and to prioritize collective responsibility enables joined-up planning and the development of resilience at regional level not just country level. This is essential in disaster risk reduction because natural hazards have no borders.

Collective responsibility is also essential in conflict prevention and humanitarian action in man-made disasters because conflict is contagious and violence can spread across borders. It too needs to be managed as a regional challenge.

My contribution this morning is to do two things:

First, I want to share some of what the ICRC has learnt about resilience from our work with Government authorities, National Societies and people affected by recent conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, and also in Afghanistan.

Secondly, I want to reflect briefly on the way in which good humanitarian diplomacy by States can support the resilience of fellow governments and their peoples when they are affected by conflict and violence.

Diplomacy sometimes gets a bad name as just talk. But as governments and people in ASEAN have consistently shown - it is better to talk with one another in search of consensus than to seek enmity and division, and so destroy what you have.

ICRC Learning on Resilience

So what have we in the ICRC learnt about resilience?

I hesitate to talk about resilience in front of National Societies and the Federation in South East Asia because you are the real Movement experts in this area, not the ICRC. But, you have invited me, so I will try to say something useful and I hope you will be patient with me!

What we have learnt is best described by sharing our understanding of **the main sources of resilience**, and then what constitutes **good resilience programming**.

The Sources of Resilience

The ICRC's experience in the Middle East, Africa and all across the world, suggests that there are **three main sources of resilience**, which are critical to people's survival and recovery.

Personal resilience - the resilience of people's personal inner world. This is their emotional infrastructure, which gives them the determination and individual agency they need to survive.

Systems resilience - the physical infrastructure of basic services, connectivity and social and economic systems which they need to survive.

Values resilience – the resilience of the principles of humanity and peace, and respect for these in law and morality, which ensures people's protection and creates the values of harmony and human generosity that people need to survive.

Let me explore these three aspects of resilience a little.

Personal resilience is something each one of us carries within us. Our personal resilience often surprises us in adversity by its power and persistence. Looking back after periods of crisis we are often amazed by ourselves and say "I don't know how I did it".

This inner resilience is made of the fundamental human virtues, which are well known to all the world's great religions, its philosophies and to modern psychology. This personal strength is made of determination, courage, the deep desire to protect loved ones, an innate ingenuity and adaptability, patience, a belief in something better than today, and a firm hope that it will eventually appear for our children, if not for us.

These core human strengths create our personal emotional infrastructure which, if it can endure, gives us the will and vision to survive, adapt and make a better life.

This inner resilience is really our insistence on a life with dignity. Human beings are hard wired to resist indignity and to live a noble human life.

Secondly, is the importance of **systems resilience** in every person's life.

We are social beings and we live in and by community. It is our social networks – of families, friends, work, trade, basic services and good new people who come into our lives – as unexpected helpers or new employers - which make up the social and economic systems we need to survive.

The resilience of these systems is profoundly important to people's individual resilience. People depend on these systems as much as they depend on themselves. People cannot survive well without jobs or income, without shelter systems, food systems, water systems, health systems, protection systems, education systems, digital phone systems and humanitarian systems of all kinds.

People also need a bit of luck to survive. When resilient people look back at their survival, they will also speak of systems of luck and chance that helped them through - near misses and the timely kindness of strangers.

So, if we are to survive well, we need an effective physical, social and economic infrastructure around us as much as we need a working emotional infrastructure within us, plus a bit of good fortune.

Thirdly, there is **values resilience**.

This is the strength and continuity of basic values and laws which mean that a society affected by armed conflict continues to value humanity and solidarity. The determination to care about stability and peace, and to actively respect, protect and assist fellow human beings suffering from the humanitarian consequences of disaster and violence must be resilient too. Sustaining these values is an essential part of resilience and a major priority for our Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

People's individual survival, and the protection of their means of survival, requires a fundamental contract of humanity to remain in place during disasters and conflict, to recognize people's right to life with dignity and ensure their access to basic services.

In armed conflict, these basic norms and rules are set out in IHL – a set of laws firmly recognized in the ASEAN Charter. All States and non-State armed groups have obligations to respect the rules of war and to do all in their power to ensure the protection and assistance of the civilian population and other protected persons like the wounded and detainees.

If respect for the rules of war is not resilient in an armed conflict, then the conditions of people enduring the conflict will be truly terrible and their individual resilience and the resilience of the systems on which they depend will be put alarmingly at risk.

These norms and values of humanity need also to extend beyond State responsibility into the private realm of personal responsibility.

Across the world, we have often seen these norms in action as one family offers shelter to another, as vulnerable people share together what they have, and as many thousands of people work to keep basic services functioning, or volunteer in local associations of various kinds to help one another.

Humanity is often resilient in communities at the same time as inhumanity dominates so much of the the conduct of hostilities. People care for on another and continue to do so.

Programming for Resilience

If these are the three main sources of people's resilience that we have seen, then how does the ICRC and our Movement encourage and support them every day?

Programming for personal resilience

Even people who are personally resilient get badly hurt. They can be wounded, detained, tortured, separated from their families, become the victims of sexual violence or deeply saddened by loss.

A great part of the work of the ICRC and National Societies is a highly individualized caseload of people in need of particular protection and assistance needs at a certain point in their lives. People within this caseload often still have enormous inner resilience but face a major challenge to adapt to dramatically new circumstances – as someone who is now disabled, traumatized, impoverished or alone.

Our Movement's health and social programmes support them as they learn to survive in a new situation – healing the wounded, comforting the sad, trying to improve the conditions of detention or helping people to live in freedom again after detention.

This support often involves intimate psycho-social care and a financial safety net of some kind which ensures a person has an income and is connected into wider systems of health, work and welfare.

These safety nets often involve cash transfers – a humanitarian approach that was pioneered and scaled up in South East Asia after the Tsunami. And we find that cash can increase people's resilience.

Putting cash in people's hands at the right time can often give them autonomy and choice, and increase their personal agency. Cash can boost a person's independence of action and put them in charge of their survival.

Programming for systems resilience

A big part of the ICRC's work is to maintain resilient systems of power supply, water treatment and distribution, health services and digital connectivity.

In most parts of the world today, this is sophisticated and interconnected **urban** infrastructure, which is vulnerable to damage from explosive weapons and the cumulative impact of falling staff levels, reduced supply lines and continuous degradation.

The ICRC – working with local authorities and National Societies in line with IHL – is always determined to ensure the resilience of these systems of basic services without which even the most resilient person would struggle to survive and protect her family.

This kind of systems support means working across the so-called humanitarian-development nexus because the continuity of development infrastructure is essential to meeting the long-term humanitarian needs of people affected by protracted conflict.

Supporting the resilience of health facilities has been a particular challenge in conflicts where they have so routinely and tragically been attacked.

Not all systems are formal systems. One mark of resilience is people's ingenuity and their ability to adapt and innovate new coping systems when old systems are being destroyed, breaking down or beyond their reach.

The ICRC has also supported "systems ingenuity" in basic services and community-based protection, when communities organize themselves to advocate for their protection or run early warning systems and contingency plans to protect themselves – similar to community-based disaster risk reduction.

In protracted conflicts, it is essential that local actors are empowered to achieve humanitarian goals. Local systems are resilient systems.

The ICRC is deeply committed to the principle of partnership in humanitarian action. We agree with the much quoted mantra on localization: "as local as possible and as international as necessary".

This commitment to local-international partnership drives our collaboration with local authorities, municipalities, national ministries, National Societies and a variety of local community associations.

Resilience is best made together and the ICRC is always focused on finding the best form of complementary humanitarian partnerships that most creatively link local capacity and international capacity together. And when we fail, we need to be advised, otherwise our own resilience is at risk in a given situation.

Partnership is one of three major “shifts” in our next four-year institutional strategy. We must learn to become a better partner. You need to teach us how!

Programming for values resilience

Finally, at every moment and in every country suffering from conflict or disaster, the National Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC work tirelessly to ensure the resilience of humanitarian norms and rules in the hearts, minds and policies of the relevant authorities and citizens.

The principle of humanity and the rules of war are embodied in the emblems worn on the bodies of all our millions of volunteers – here across South East Asia and around the world – and proved in the humanitarian action they deliver every day.

Our Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is just one of many humanitarian movements. Countless organizations large and small are keeping the principle of humanity alive and resilient across ASEAN countries today.

This values resilience – the resilience of humanity and humanitarian law in action – is essential to people’s own resilience. And it is impressive across South East Asia today – in your great National Societies, in many government departments and in a rich civil society. All these different organizations have an admirable track record of resilience, determination and sacrifice in disaster work and in response to man-made crises.

Humanitarian Diplomacy and Resilience

Finally, I want to talk a bit about humanitarian diplomacy and resilience. Humanitarian diplomacy is that particular form of diplomacy that seeks to broaden political support for humanitarian law and humanitarian action, and for the ability of our great Movement to do its job on the ground.

It involves talking and listening to governments, ensuring that their various negotiations sustain humanitarian norms and exploring practical solutions with them to pressing humanitarian problems. Humanitarian action has often been stereotyped as short-term and superficial aid to communities in urgent need. But all of us in this room know that it is more than this.

The world of disaster risk reduction has very effectively pushed the principle of resilience to the top of the global policy agenda on disasters. You all know it is not enough to help people for a day. People’s resilience must be our common challenge.

We must all continue to argue the case of resilience in humanitarian action, and the ICRC is now catching up and joining you and the Federation in this important diplomatic task. Protracted conflicts that last for years and the particular challenge of urban resilience has made us see the light more clearly.

As a Movement we must now take every diplomatic opportunity to persuade government authorities, policy-makers, financing agencies and development banks of the importance of resilience, and how it needs multiyear investment and planning.

Resilience is a job for us all

I hope I have set the scene a little in general terms, and shared the ICRC's understanding that resilience is about governments and their people working together to build personal resilience, systems resilience and values resilience. I look forward to learning much more about these three dimensions of resilience in today's important panel. Thank you.

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