

**BACKGROUND NOTE AND GUIDANCE FOR NATIONAL RED CROSS  
AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES ON “PREVENTING AND  
COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM”**

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**ICRC**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Rationale

“Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism” (P/CVE) is a global State-led approach that is part of a broader counter-terrorism agenda. This “whole-of-society” approach aims, through a wide range of mostly non-coercive activities, to address the root causes that may ultimately result in “violent extremism” and acts of “terrorism”. Given the political and sometimes contested nature of the approach, and the fact that some components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have already been involved in activities related to P/CVE programmes, there is a need for the Movement to have clear guidance and a certain degree of alignment on the subject in accordance with its [Fundamental Principles](#).<sup>1</sup>

## Objectives

The purpose of this document is to promote a **common understanding** across the Movement of the P/CVE global political agenda and to offer some **practical guidance** to National Societies in particular on how to position themselves and address some of the dilemmas related to P/CVE.

This document does **not aim to influence P/CVE policies or to provide a definition** of “violent extremism” – which is not the role of the Movement. Terms such as “violent extremism”, “radicalization”, “extremist” or “terrorism” are used throughout the document to describe P/CVE theory, usually in inverted commas. Their use does not mean that the Movement endorses the terms or shares the proposed definitions, which are often contested.

Likewise, this document is **not a guide on how to develop P/CVE programmes**. Movement components are discouraged from getting directly involved in such programmes (owing to their political nature, their potential for generating protection-related concerns, and the perception risks attached), although it is recognized that some Movement components may be meaningfully involved in activities related to such programmes.

## Structure

**Part I provides background information** on: (1) the P/CVE agenda itself (what it is, where it comes from, who the main actors are); and (2) the links and tensions between P/CVE and the Movement’s mission (including the stance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on P/CVE).

**Part II provides practical guidance** and proposes: (3) advice on the Movement’s positioning and narrative in relation to P/CVE; and (4) a checklist of considerations to guide National Societies should they get involved in activities that are related to P/CVE or could be perceived as such.

**READERS INTERESTED EXCLUSIVELY IN THE PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ARE ENCOURAGED TO JUMP DIRECTLY TO PAGE 11 OR TO CLICK [HERE](#).**

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<sup>1</sup> This document was designed specifically for National Societies, but it provides background information and guidance that is relevant to all Movement components. It was drafted by the ICRC, in consultation with several National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The need for such guidance was expressed at the Annual Meeting of National Society Legal Advisors, Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland, 12–13 September 2016.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON P/CVE

The purpose of these guiding principles is to inform and guide the Movement components, particularly National Societies:

### Key messages

- The Movement has a **mandate to prevent and alleviate human suffering** wherever it may be found. It is primarily concerned about the **humanitarian impact** of armed conflict and violence, and not by political or ideological phenomena leading to violent action or “violent extremism”.
- The **Movement condemns acts of terrorism**, as well as any other acts of violence of such kind committed **against civilians**, whether they occur in peacetime or in armed conflict and irrespective of the perpetrators.
- The Movement recognizes that **some of its humanitarian activities may overlap with some P/CVE activities**, as they contribute to preventing and reducing the suffering caused by acts of violence, including acts of terrorism, but **its ultimate objectives are fundamentally different**.
- The Movement’s **indirect contribution remains guided by the Fundamental Principles**, in particular humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, which are essential to the Movement’s added value and to the implementation of its humanitarian mandate.
- The Movement also has a **responsibility to promote inclusive and peaceful societies**, informed by and in compliance with its Fundamental Principles.

### Key positioning elements

- National Societies, like any other Movement component, are encouraged to **avoid explicit and visible association with P/CVE programmes** owing to perception risks for themselves and for the Movement as a whole.
- Recognizing that some Movement activities may overlap with P/CVE programmes, **a clear understanding of the risks should be developed** during the planning of programmes and activities, informed by the Fundamental Principles and the specific national political context.
- **Maintaining a “balanced relationship” with the authorities** helps to preserve National Societies’ status as auxiliary to the authorities in the humanitarian field and facilitates the resolution of issues that may arise in relation to P/CVE programmes.

### Key considerations for National Societies when getting involved in activities that are P/CVE or could be perceived as such

- Do the proposed activities fall **within the scope of the National Society’s role and mandate**?
- Do the proposed activities **comply with the Fundamental Principles**?
- Is there a **risk of contributing to activities that are not humanitarian in nature** and that may have harmful effects on individuals’ physical or mental integrity?
- Is there any risk of the activities **being publicly associated with the P/CVE label**?
- **Is there a significant perception risk** for the National Society itself, or the Movement as a whole, considering both context-specific aspects and global dynamics?
- Are there **sufficient safeguards in place to maintain the trust** of all segments of society?

## PART I – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 1 Understanding P/CVE

#### 1.1 What is P/CVE?

PVE and CVE stand respectively for *Preventing* Violent Extremism and *Countering* Violent Extremism.

There is no internationally agreed definition of “violent extremism”. In P/CVE theory it is generally described as the way people come to embrace “radical” views and ideas that can lead to violent action, which may be inspired by or linked to groups and/or individuals described as “terrorists”. The dominant but contested theory of “violent extremism” focuses on social and political grievances (e.g. poverty, marginalization, lack of professional opportunities, political oppression and perceived injustices) that can be exploited to persuade individuals to support or commit to ideologically-motivated violence in order to further political goals.

While counter-terrorism generally refers to the coercive measures States use to tackle “terrorism”<sup>2</sup> (e.g. policing and judicial measures, blocking of financing, preventive detention, counter-insurgency campaigns and targeted air strikes), P/CVE is the use of non-coercive means to prevent or dissuade individuals or groups from adopting “extremist views” that might lead to acts of terrorism. P/CVE is thus intimately related to and part of States’ broader counter-terrorism agenda.

Owing to the lack of an agreed definition of “violent extremism” – and the broad and contested range of push and pull factors that P/CVE initiatives aim to address – a variety of concerns have been expressed about the impact of P/CVE programmes. These include the risk of stigmatizing some communities considered as vulnerable to “violent extremism” based on ethnicity, religion or race; the criminalization of individuals suspected of being “radicalized” in the absence of any unlawful acts; and the suppression of legitimate political opposition groups. The lack of a clear definition and the concerns voiced by some observers call for a cautious approach by the Movement, whose role is not to better define what is primarily a political concept.

#### 1.2 Where is the P/CVE approach coming from?

States’ understanding that “terrorism” must be fought through more than military or security means is not new. Non-coercive and preventive measures to address this phenomenon have been part of counter-insurgency strategies and counter-terrorism approaches for decades (e.g. the famous “winning hearts and minds” approaches).

The concept of P/CVE as it is now understood emerged more than ten years ago in the post-9/11 context out of concerns to address the root causes of “terrorism”. However, high-level and global interest in P/CVE has peaked in recent years because of the rise and spread of violent armed groups that claim to follow a particular “jihadist” ideology.<sup>3</sup> Increasing attacks in various countries – including by States’ own citizens in some cases – and the phenomenon of “foreign fighters” have made P/CVE a

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<sup>2</sup> The term “terrorism” does not have a comprehensive and universally accepted definition in international law and remains highly susceptible to subjective political interpretations that are problematic with regards to the Movement’s neutrality.

<sup>3</sup> There are many varying interpretations of the term “jihad” within Islamic academic and popular discourse. Literally meaning “effort”, “struggle” or “striving”, it has accrued both non-violent and violent interpretations, with varying classifications within these two broad categories. The non-violent interpretations focus on spiritual, social or economic struggles, often focused on personal striving for moral betterment. The violent interpretations tend to focus on self-defence, including armed resistance against attacks on the Muslim faith or community. The word “jihadist” is used here only to refer to the particular ideology that these armed groups claim to promote and defend.

security priority for States, as illustrated by the United States' White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February 2015.

In January 2016, the United Nations secretary-general (UNSG) unveiled a [Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#) and called upon all States to develop national plans on PVE. The plan aims to tackle PVE through a comprehensive, "all-of-UN" approach that requires all UN agencies, funds and programmes to contribute to preventing this phenomenon across all three pillars of the UN's mandate: peace and security, development and human rights.

There is currently no agreement or understanding at the global level on the drivers for "violent extremism" and the most effective means to address them – a point acknowledged in the UNSG's plan of action. Some States have even resisted this agenda, preferring a more traditional counter-terrorism approach. Nevertheless, due to the current political momentum, many countries are developing and implementing national plans based on their own assessment and understanding.

### 1.3 What are P/CVE programmes and who implements them?

P/CVE aims to tackle factors that both push and pull individuals to "violent extremism".<sup>4</sup> P/CVE strategies are primarily driven by State authorities and include a wide range of activities ultimately aimed at preventing acts of violence or the reoccurrence of such acts. Given the broad range of factors they aim to address, P/CVE approaches share some strategies similar to development, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts, such as: setting up social inclusion programmes; promoting a peaceful and tolerant society; engaging in cross-community dialogue; and reducing poverty and inequalities.

International organizations and various civil society actors are being asked to partner with State authorities in designing or implementing P/CVE plans of action, which usually have a "whole-of-society" approach that requires the involvement of all sectors and actors. These may include civil society organizations, the private sector, UN agencies, peacekeeping operations, development NGOs and humanitarian actors, depending on the environment and the activity.

P/CVE activities may include, among others:

- **Development programmes** for education, job creation and inclusion; community engagement activities, especially with young people, aimed at fostering social cohesion, promoting democratic culture and dialogue, and providing economic and livelihood opportunities; and strengthening the capacity of governments to deliver services and security, and to ensure the rule of law and respect for human rights.
- **Deradicalization programmes** targeting individuals or groups at risk or already involved in "radical" movements or organizations. These are typically carried out in prison environments, and may include scholars engaging in religious and ideological debate with detainees. Special deradicalization facilities may be built or detainees may be segregated within prisons, based on perceived "radicalization".
- **Training and/or revised responsibilities for police or armed forces.** In some parts of the world, national counter-terrorism forces or units are requesting specific training on the use of force and legal standards in strategies to reduce "violent extremism".
- **Countering "extremist" propaganda and voices on social media and in communities** by promoting "moderate" voices or the voices of victims of acts of terrorism.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the UNSG's plan of action (A/70/674), "two main categories of drivers can be distinguished: "push factors", or the conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges; and "pull factors", or the individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action" (para. 23).

- **Monitoring and intelligence-gathering** activities targeting communities considered vulnerable to “extremist” views. Community groups, police, peacekeeping operations and even teachers or health personnel may be involved.

#### 1.4 What is the role of the United Nations in P/CVE?

The United Nations has played a key role in generating the current political momentum around P/CVE and in putting it at the top of the global political and security agenda, notably through the UN secretary-general’s 2016 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (see [section 1.2](#)). However, although States “took note” of the agenda through various resolutions,<sup>5</sup> some governments remain sceptical and favour a more traditional counter-terrorism approach.

In line with the fourth pillar of the 2006 [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#), the UNSG’s plan of

##### UNDP’s involvement in PVE

The UN Development Programme is one of the UN entities most involved in PVE. In 2016 it developed a [global framework](#) on preventing violent extremism that frames most of its development activities in PVE terms. It identifies 11 “building blocks” of strategies to be pursued as part of addressing violent extremism, including: promoting a rule of law and human-rights-based approach to PVE; enhancing the fight against corruption; providing socio-economic alternatives to violence for groups at risk; and engaging youth in building social cohesion.

action emphasizes the *preventive* aspect. It focuses in particular on the contextual conditions leading to “violent extremism” that could be addressed through development programmes, promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and conflict prevention and resolution. The UNSG proposes a UN-wide strategy that requires the coordinated efforts of all UN entities.

The UN Development Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, UN Women and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations appear to be among the UN entities that are most involved in P/CVE. Not all UN agencies, funds and programmes are supportive of this approach, however, reportedly fearing that association with P/CVE “would imperil the impartiality needed to conduct business, whether in the humanitarian, political, or security space”.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rather than welcoming it, which usually indicates a stronger consensus. See in particular [UN General Assembly resolution 70/254](#), adopted on 12 February 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Boutellis and Naureen Chowdhury Fink, [Waging Peace: UN Peace Operations Confronting Terrorism and Violent Extremism](#), International Peace Institute, New York, October 2016, p. 12

## 2 P/CVE and the Movement: An overview of links and tensions

### 2.1 Why is P/CVE relevant to Movement components?

National Societies are voluntary aid societies, auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. They have a mandate to support and cooperate with their governments in mitigating human suffering and responding to the needs of the people of their respective countries, including in fields such as education, health and social welfare.<sup>7</sup> All the Movement components have a duty to promote and disseminate the principles and ideals of the Movement, including “tolerance, non-violence in the community and respect for cultural diversity”, as stipulated in the [2000–2003 Plan of Action](#) for the Movement.<sup>8</sup> “Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace” was also adopted as one of the three strategic aims of the [International Federation’s Strategy 2020](#). In pursuing these objectives, it is likely that some of the Movement’s activities will overlap with P/CVE programmes or elements thereof.

In the case of the ICRC, such overlaps stem from its internationally recognized mandate to work for the respect, understanding, dissemination and development of international humanitarian law (IHL),<sup>9</sup> whose purpose is to prevent and reduce human suffering caused by armed conflict. National Societies also have a recognized role in disseminating IHL and assisting their governments in this task.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, IHL clearly prohibits acts and measures of terrorism in situations of armed conflict, as well as any acts or threats of violence whose purpose is to spread terror in the civilian population, and the Movement components are committed to preventing and reducing such violations of IHL.

However, whilst there may be some commonality with P/CVE programmes in terms of concrete activities, the mission and actions of the Movement components are strictly humanitarian in nature and should always remain neutral. In contrast, some P/CVE initiatives have a clear political purpose, namely combating specific ideologies that involve the incitement to, and perpetration of, violence. P/CVE aims to do this by means of “deradicalization”, by identifying and neutralizing actual or potential “violent extremists”, and by countering and preventing the spread of these ideologies, including by promoting alternative doctrines and concepts.

Some of the P/CVE activities that have more coercive or policing aspects may also raise protection-related concerns, such as deradicalization programmes in detention that rely heavily on solitary confinement, or monitoring activities that can unintentionally stigmatize some communities.

Since some **overlaps exist** between P/CVE and the Movement’s work, but their **overall objectives are fundamentally different**, it is necessary to engage in a thorough reflection and achieve some clarity on the interaction between them.

### 2.2 What kind of Movement activities might be perceived as overlapping with P/CVE programmes?

A number of Movement activities may overlap with P/CVE-related policies and end up becoming associated with P/CVE programmes or being co-opted for political ends. The list below is illustrative and non-exhaustive, and compares some Movement activities with the type of P/CVE actions described in section B, “Taking action”, of the UN secretary-general’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

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<sup>7</sup> Statutes of the Movement, Article 3

<sup>8</sup> Annex 2 to Resolution 1 of the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 1999

<sup>9</sup> Statutes of the Movement, Article 5(2)

<sup>10</sup> Statutes of the Movement, Article 3(2)

- **Promotion of IHL or human rights standards** among armed and security forces, prison authorities and judicial authorities could be seen as contributing to “Strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law” as per the UNSG’s plan of action.
- **Educational activities**, including “humanitarian education”, vocational training, and activities aimed at protecting access to education in armed conflict and other situations of violence fall squarely within “Education, skills development and employment facilitation”.
- **Detention-related activities**, including with migrants, could become associated with or co-opted by the authorities’ “deradicalization” programmes in prisons, which come under “Strengthening good governance, human rights and rule of law”.
- **Promoting a culture of non-violence and peace**, in particular when targeting youth (e.g. through “Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change” programmes), could be perceived as contributing to “Dialogue and conflict prevention”, “Engaging communities” and “Empowering Youth”.
- **Social inclusion programmes** aimed at migrants or other marginalized communities – such as those offering access to employment, language training, education, housing or other services, and promoting cultural awareness and understanding – have significant overlaps with “Education, skills development and employment facilitation” and with aspects of “Dialogue and conflict prevention”.
- **Protection and assistance programmes for migrants** (e.g. running reception centres for asylum seekers or providing legal assistance and counselling) could be exploited by some authorities who tend to increasingly conflate migration with the perceived risk of “terrorism”, including concerns about the phenomenon of returning “foreign fighters”.
- **Programmes addressing the specific needs of women and girls** could be presented as relevant to promoting “Gender equality and empowering women”.
- **Dialogue on IHL and diverse traditional and religious normative frameworks**, including Islamic law, which is an area in which the ICRC has invested in various operational contexts in an effort to highlight the local relevance of IHL, could be confused with P/CVE actions aimed at promoting “Dialogue and conflict prevention”.

**Example of P/CVE-related activities by some National Societies**

The Movement’s involvement to date has been minimal. A few National Societies have set up P/CVE-related programmes or have been approached by the authorities to contribute to such programmes. One example involved vocational training to offer economic livelihood opportunities to marginalized youth, a group deemed at risk of radicalization. In another case, a National Society was approached by its government to put in place assistance services for parents of radicalized youths and to accept returning “foreign fighters” in existing rehabilitation facilities for war victims.

These are just some of the activities carried out by Movement components all over the world on a daily basis that could be perceived as overlapping with an overly broad conception of P/CVE activities.

### 2.3 What are the links and tensions between P/CVE and the Fundamental Principles?

According to Article 1 (2) of the Statutes of the Movement, “the components of the Movement (...) act at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles”. Given the politicized nature of P/CVE, the Fundamental Principles are especially important when it comes to considering how Movement components should interact with P/CVE and whether and how they should engage in related programmes. In this context, the most relevant Fundamental Principles are the first four:

**Humanity:** In preventing and alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found, protecting life and health and ensuring respect for the human being, the Movement is concerned first and foremost about the *impact* of external forces on people’s physical and moral integrity. It is therefore the impact of

“violent extremism” on people that is of primary concern for the Movement, rather than the ideological phenomenon itself, which remains an ill-defined political concept (see [section 1.1](#) above). Yet, the principle of humanity is also about “promot[ing] mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples”, which justifies some involvement in activities aimed at promoting a culture of non-violence and peace, as long as they are in accordance with the other principles and do not target a particular ideology or religion.

**Impartiality:** Guided by the principle of humanity, the activities of the Movement must be carried out without discrimination “as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions” and must be based on the urgency of needs only. Such needs can be found not only amongst victims of acts of terror but also amongst those who are influenced by so-called “violent extremist” movements or ideologies. However, carrying out programmes on the basis of the suspected vulnerability of a community to sympathize with such ideologies – which would inevitably be based on criteria such as race, religious belief, political opinions or even socio-economic factors – would contradict the principle of impartiality.

**Neutrality:** Association with P/CVE programmes, given their political nature, is likely to create perception risks linked to neutrality. In particular, if a Movement component is involved in an activity that could be perceived as taking a position against a specific armed group or violent movement, that group/movement could perceive the component to be “against them” and, as such, not neutral. This could, in turn, lead to security and access concerns for that Movement component and for the Movement as a whole.

**Independence:** Considering the political nature of P/CVE programmes, which are usually State-driven and/or supported by inter-governmental organizations, such as the UN, association with such programmes may raise questions about the Movement’s independence. As for National Societies, their auxiliary status to their governments is limited to the humanitarian field and, even when acting in that auxiliary capacity, they “must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.” All Movement components should maintain the same level of autonomy from inter-governmental organizations too.

#### 2.4 What is the ICRC’s stance on P/CVE?

The ICRC’s stance on P/CVE is informed by its specific and internationally recognized mandate to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to promote and strengthen international humanitarian law. It is based on **three main messages**:

- The ICRC acknowledges the security concerns of States regarding “violent extremism” but, as a neutral and independent humanitarian organization, it **does not comment on the merits** of P/CVE approaches.
- The ICRC recognizes that its **humanitarian action may partially overlap with P/CVE** to the extent that it contributes to preventing and alleviating the effects of violence. Indeed, compliance with IHL and the rule of law in general is essential in preventing downward spirals of retaliatory violence and extreme behaviour on all sides of any given confrontation.
- This indirect contribution depends on the **ICRC’s ability to remain impartial, neutral and independent** and, therefore, not to be directly associated with P/CVE efforts.

These three messages are best encapsulated in the excerpt of a speech by the ICRC president in the text box below:

**Excerpt of a [speech by ICRC President Peter Maurer](#) to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 27 October 2016:**

“[W]e aim to contribute to an environment that is favourable to respect for IHL and the rule of law, for the benefit of people affected by conflict and violence. Consequently, we engage with political authorities and weapon bearers – on a strictly humanitarian basis – to see that IHL is respected, and to gain access to victims of armed conflict, but not with the political objective of "deradicalization" or combating extremism.

We rely on principled humanitarian action to foster trust, consent and acceptance. But humanitarian action cannot be expected to prevent radicalization, although we recognize that our humanitarian activities may sometimes overlap with programmes aimed at countering or preventing violent extremism, as they contribute to preventing and reducing suffering caused by acts of violence, including acts of “extreme violence”. (...)

Overall, the success of our humanitarian work depends on our ability to remain impartial, neutral and independent and it is essential to ensure that P/CVE programmes do not create confusion on the very distinct role of principled humanitarian actors.”

When engaging in P/CVE-related debates, the ICRC’s stance is guided by three main priorities:

- Promoting and preserving the rule of law and the integrity of existing legal protection regimes, especially international humanitarian law.
- Ensuring the best possible protection for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. For instance, this prompted the ICRC to publish a position paper on [radicalization in detention](#), in which it proposes some important safeguards and cautions against the potentially harmful consequences of deradicalization programmes.
- Preserving the space for neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action, which might be compromised by potential overlaps and therefore confusion between P/CVE and the humanitarian mission.

## PART II – PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

### 3 Proposed Movement position and narrative on P/CVE

#### 3.1 What key messages on P/CVE are suggested for the Movement?

According to the Preamble to its Statutes, the Movement’s mission is “to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies.” **The Movement is therefore primarily concerned about the humanitarian impact** of armed conflict and violence. The concepts of P/CVE or deradicalization – which focus on the ideological and political phenomena leading to violent action – thus fall outside the scope of the Movement’s humanitarian mission.

The **Movement condemns acts of terrorism**, as well as any other acts of violence of such kind committed **against civilians**, whether they occur in peacetime or in armed conflict and irrespective of the perpetrators. In situations of armed conflict in particular, measures or acts of terrorism are expressly prohibited by international humanitarian law.<sup>11</sup>

The Movement recognizes that **some of its humanitarian activities may overlap with some P/CVE activities**, insofar as they contribute to preventing and reducing the suffering caused by acts of violence, including acts of terrorism. However, they should not be made part of, or subject to, a political strategy to combat “violent extremism”.

The Movement acknowledges the devastating effects of violence on individuals and communities, and on the principle of humanity itself, and has a **responsibility to promote a culture of non-violence and peace**. This work must be carried out **in accordance with the Fundamental Principles** of the Movement, in particular impartiality, neutrality and independence, which are essential to the Movement’s added value and to the implementation of its humanitarian mandate.

#### 3.2 What position could National Societies take in relation to P/CVE, given their specific auxiliary status?

According to the Statutes of the Movement, National Societies “carry out their humanitarian tasks in conformity with their own statutes and national legislation, in pursuance of the mission of the Movement, and in accordance with the Fundamental Principles”. They “support the public authorities in their humanitarian tasks, according to the needs of the people of their respective countries”.<sup>12</sup> As indicated in their mandate and by the principle of independence, their status of auxiliary to their government is limited to the humanitarian field and they “must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles”.

While National Societies have a role to play in preventing and alleviating human suffering, including that brought about by acts of terrorism, they need to be aware of the potential conflict between P/CVE activities and the Fundamental Principles, as indicated in [section 2.3](#) above. **The involvement of National Societies, like that of any other Movement component, in programmes that are explicitly labelled P/CVE is discouraged**, owing to their political nature, the potential protection-related concerns and the perception risks.

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<sup>11</sup> Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that “[c]ollective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited”, while Article 4(2)(d) of Additional Protocol II prohibits “acts of terrorism” against persons not or no longer taking part in hostilities.

<sup>12</sup> Statutes of the Movement, Article 3(1)

Recognizing, however, that some activities may overlap, a clear understanding of the risks should be developed during the planning of the National Society's programmes and activities, informed by the specific national political context as well as the transnational nature of the phenomenon that P/CVE aims to address in a globalized and interconnected world. The list of questions in [section 4](#) below is intended to help National Societies define the parameters of their involvement in activities that could be seen, explicitly or not, as P/CVE-related.

It is also helpful for National Societies to maintain good communication with their public authorities, as part of consolidating the "balanced relationship" advocated in [Resolution 2](#) of the 30th International Conference in 2007. This dialogue helps National Societies to preserve and develop their status as auxiliary to their public authorities in the humanitarian field and enhances understanding of their mandate and respect for the Fundamental Principles. If a National Society is presented with a request for information or services by the public authorities that may pose risks – such as sharing lists of names or engaging in deradicalization programmes – a well-established and cooperative relationship will facilitate the discussion and resolution of issues before the National Society takes any action (see also [section 4.6](#) below on legal constraints that National Societies may face in that regard).

Maintaining this balanced relationship may also enable National Societies to raise concerns related to State-led P/CVE programmes should such programmes result in the targeting of minority groups or discrimination, the lowering of accepted legal and protection standards, or the politicization of humanitarian aid.

### 3.3 What narrative can National Societies use to explain their position on P/CVE?

National Societies may find it difficult to explain to their public authorities and/or the public why they wish to maintain a certain distance from the P/CVE agenda. Indeed, it may be difficult to refrain from fully embracing an approach that aims to prevent and combat "violent extremist" ideologies, especially in countries that are particularly affected by such phenomena. On the other hand, a National Society cannot be associated with a discourse that may be perceived by some as stigmatizing entire communities, as that would be in clear contradiction of its neutrality.

It is therefore suggested that National Societies **develop a narrative and a public communication line** that explain, in a nuanced manner, both their position and their positive, yet indirect, contribution.

The **key messages** suggested in [section 3.1](#) above are designed to help with this by providing an overarching framework.

National Societies can then tailor their messaging, for example:

- by promoting first and foremost the activities they undertake in response to actual acts of terrorism (e.g. first aid, ambulance services or psychosocial support for victims of such acts), as well as those that promote mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity;
- for any activities that may overlap with P/CVE programmes, by basing the narrative as much as possible on concrete examples of activities that contribute to P/CVE indirectly, but whose success

is intrinsically linked to the fact that the activity is delivered in accordance with the Fundamental Principles (see example in text box);

- by emphasizing *the humanitarian impact* of the phenomenon, rather than the phenomenon itself, and by explaining this focus clearly and transparently to the authorities and beneficiaries in the course of the National Society's activities.

#### **Anchoring the values of tolerance and respect for diversity in the Fundamental Principles**

The British Red Cross is testing a new approach to develop the critical thinking skills of young people based on the Movement's Fundamental Principles. Anchoring such an educational approach in the universally recognized Principles can offer an effective way to promote the values of tolerance, respect for diversity and non-violence, while avoiding possible polarization and stigmatization. Once further developed, this initiative may be of interest to other National Societies.

### **3.4 How does the Movement indirectly contribute to P/CVE objectives?**

Many Movement activities may indirectly contribute to addressing some of the underlying factors that are considered to be conducive to "violent extremism". These activities include, for example, IHL dissemination, education (including humanitarian education on the Movement's principles and values), protection work for people affected by conflict or natural disaster, projects related to migration, economic livelihood opportunities and social inclusion programmes (see [section 2.2](#) above).

Part of the Movement's added value is its ability to maintain the trust and confidence of all segments of society, including individuals and (armed) groups who may have been designated as "extremists" or "terrorists". This requires that all Movement activities be anchored in the Fundamental Principles and, as such, remain separate from any political agenda.

The work of the Movement must remain primarily focused on preventing and addressing the *humanitarian consequences* of "violent extremism" – just like any other form of violence having a significant humanitarian impact – and must be conducted in a non-stigmatizing and non-polarizing manner, distinct from any potential ideological or religious controversies.

#### **Spotlight on social inclusion programmes**

Many National Societies run social inclusion programmes to promote equal access to resources, opportunities and rights for people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from full and meaningful participation in society. The target groups include migrants, ethnic minorities and socio-economic minorities who, in P/CVE theory, may be incorrectly associated with being at risk of "violent extremism". These programmes include: facilitating access to employment, training, education, housing and other services; promoting cultural awareness and understanding between different groups; and addressing negative perceptions of, and discrimination against, certain groups.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that, "by its humanitarian work and the dissemination of its ideals, the Movement promotes a lasting peace, which is not simply the absence of war, but is a dynamic process of cooperation among all States and peoples".<sup>13</sup> A lot of National Societies are involved, with the support of the International Federation, in activities aimed at promoting values of tolerance and respect for diversity. These include, for instance, "Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change" programmes and activities aimed at promoting social inclusion, non-violence and peace. In that respect, the Movement also provides a real alternative as part of efforts to create a world where differences between people create less division, discrimination, violence and inequality. It does so by remaining firmly anchored in its Fundamental Principles and steering clear of any polarizing political agendas.

<sup>13</sup> Preamble to the Statutes of the Movement

## 4 Checklist of considerations before engaging in P/CVE-related activities

As discussed in [section 3.1](#) above, the recommended Movement position is to **avoid any visible and explicit association with P/CVE programmes** owing to potential protection-related concerns and perception risks linked to a distinctly political agenda. That said, the Movement components have a legitimate and important role to play in preventing and alleviating the humanitarian impact of the phenomenon of “violent extremism”, although there is a risk that those activities may be perceived as contributing to P/CVE. National Societies in particular may be asked by their public authorities or by other partners (e.g. UN agencies) to contribute to P/CVE programmes or activities as a result of their auxiliary status and their local and national foothold.

If undertaking activities that may be understood, rightly or wrongly, to be associated with P/CVE programmes (hereafter “P/CVE-related activities”), it is suggested that National Societies emphasize that they are focused on the **humanitarian impact of the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself**.

The following list of questions is designed to help National Societies to define the parameters of their involvement and put in place any relevant safeguards, in line with the humanitarian mandate of the Movement and its Fundamental Principles.

### 4.1 Do the P/CVE-related activities being considered fall strictly within the mandate of the National Society?

As a starting point, any National Society considering getting involved in P/CVE-related activities should assess whether such activities would normally fall within their humanitarian mandate, as defined in Article 3 of the Statutes of the Movement, and if such activities would normally be deemed necessary to implement that mandate.

National Societies’ activities typically include:

- Natural disaster prevention, risk reduction and response.
- Health activities, including first aid, disease prevention, and blood and ambulance services.
- Assistance activities, such as food, shelter, water and sanitation, both in response to emergencies and as longer-term support for the most vulnerable segments of society.
- Poverty reduction, promotion of education and economic livelihood activities.
- Protection and assistance programmes for migrants.
- Social inclusion programmes.
- Tracing services.
- Dissemination and promotion of IHL and the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.

However, activities whose purpose is to promote alternative ideological or religious narratives, to identify and report individuals suspected of “radicalizing” or of sympathizing with a particular ideology, or to monitor and gather information on particular communities or groups, etc., would fall outside of the humanitarian mandate (see also [section 4.6](#) below on potential legal constraints in this regard).

### 4.2 Do the proposed P/CVE-related activities comply with the Fundamental Principles?

National Societies, like any other Movement component, should assess whether the proposed activities are in accordance with the Fundamental Principles (see also [section 2.3](#) above). They should consider the following factors:

- Are the proposed activities based exclusively on an independent assessment of needs and vulnerabilities?
- Is there a risk of discriminating against people based on race, religion, ideology, gender or nationality?
- Is there a risk that the National Society may become embroiled in a racial, ideological, religious or political controversy that could affect how it is perceived?
- Is there a perception risk for the broader Movement, beyond national borders, given the global nature of the concept of “violent extremism”?
- Will the National Society maintain its autonomy in carrying out the proposed activities (especially when in partnership with a government or another entity, such as a UN agency)? For example, this includes independence in terms of selecting beneficiaries and deciding to adjust, suspend or terminate its programmes.

### 4.3 Is there a risk of harm to individuals or groups if the National Society gets involved in the proposed activities?

An oft-heard criticism of P/CVE programmes is the risk of stigmatizing entire communities on the basis of a purported vulnerability to a “violent extremist” discourse or ideology. Using the Fundamental Principles to assess whether and how to get involved in a particular activity is a good way to mitigate

this risk and to ensure that any activity is driven by the principles of impartiality and neutrality.

#### Assessing the potential impact of activities

Recently, the Netherlands Red Cross explored the idea of giving IHL training to so-called “foreign fighters”, in a context of heated national debate about the phenomenon of “radicalization”. The IHL department thoroughly discussed whether such an initiative would be in **compliance with its Fundamental Principles**. Given the risk of stigmatizing a specific group, it was found to contradict the principles of **impartiality** and **neutrality**. The activity was not carried out.

Yet, realizing the role it could play in **promoting an inclusive and peaceful society** and in **contributing to respect for diversity** while promoting IHL, the Netherlands Red Cross reviewed the scope of its training programmes through the prism of the principle of impartiality, and added material on the historical roots of IHL. This enabled them to reach out to segments of society previously not well covered by its training programmes and to foster reflection and discussion, while avoiding stigmatizing any specific group.

There are, however, other potential negative and harmful consequences that should be considered when deciding whether and how to get involved in a particular activity. These include, for example, risks relating to disclosure of beneficiaries’ personal data, requirements to report certain individuals to the authorities, and using RFL or tracing activities in order to trace suspects and their families (see also [section 4.6](#) below). Such consequences should be the object of a risk analysis as part of the decision-making process.

### 4.4 What are the risks related to funding?

In recent years, a number of donors have started to mainstream P/CVE objectives and activities in their development policies and funding, a trend confirmed by the [decision of the OECD Development Assistance Committee](#) in February 2016 to expand the definition of Official Development Assistance to include certain costs related to P/CVE. For example, the European Commission outlined in 2015 its development approach in relation to the [Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism](#) (STRIVE) programme, and the US State Department and USAID published in May 2016 a [Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism](#). For the Movement, this means that some activities that used to be funded under development aid packages might now be relabelled as P/CVE.

National Societies should be aware of these developments and carefully assess the objectives associated with the funding being considered, the reporting requirements and potential conditions attached to the funding, and the visibility and communication requirements. National Societies are encouraged to carefully consider and examine the development funding policies of their domestic and international donors and to examine whether there is room to negotiate the conditions in order to avoid any explicit association with P/CVE funding. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s policy offers an interesting example in this respect, as it recognizes that “CVE activities may carry risks, including the possibility of stigmatization, alienation of target communities and *harm to partners* [emphasis added]”, and encourages its officers to “take these into account in how activities are labelled and acknowledged”.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.5 What are the risks and opportunities linked to a possible partnership on the proposed activities?

Partnering on P/CVE-related activities can present both risks and opportunities. National Societies should first assess whether any potential partnership is in line with Movement policies on external partnerships in general. In the case of possible operational partnerships with UN agencies, for instance, National Societies should consider the “[Minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners](#)”,<sup>15</sup> as well as the more recent “Checklist of considerations before entering into operational agreements with UN agencies and other humanitarian partners”,<sup>16</sup> which builds on the minimum elements and provides very practical guidance.

Two essential tenets of the minimum elements are that: (1) the partnership should not affect the ability to apply the Fundamental Principles, the Statutes and other important Movement policies (such as on the use of the emblem); and (2) the National Society should be able to display at all times its own individual identity and avoid displaying the identity of the partner, such as by using a double logo. The checklist of considerations provides more concrete guidance, such as how to conduct a risk/benefit analysis (including reputational risks), and a checklist of questions for assessing whether the terms and conditions of an agreement are acceptable. National Societies are encouraged to use such Movement guidance in relation to potential partners involved in P/CVE-related activities and to evaluate potential risks.

Conversely, partnerships might offer National Societies opportunities to dissociate themselves from activities that are explicitly branded P/CVE. Developing a partnership with a third party can be a way to shield the National Society from the P/CVE label by leaving any P/CVE-specific activities to the partner. In doing so, however, National Societies should be careful to develop a clear understanding on the distribution of tasks, on the use of logos and names, and on any other visibility requirements that could create any association with P/CVE.

#### 4.6 Are there specific legal provisions that oblige National Societies to be associated with P/CVE-related work?

National Societies may find themselves obliged to cooperate with the public authorities and/or to contribute to some P/CVE programmes owing to national legislation.

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<sup>14</sup> Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Development Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism*, February 2017: <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/development-approaches-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Annexed to Resolution 10 of the 2003 Council of Delegates

<sup>16</sup> Document drafted jointly by the ICRC and the International Federation and sent to all National Societies in November 2016. Available on [FedNet](#).

This may be the case when, for instance, a national strategy to prevent “violent extremism” compels all providers of public services – such as health, education, services for migrants or other social services

**Legal obligations attached to the UK’s P/CVE policy**

The UK’s Prevent policy has established a statutory duty for schools – along with prisons, local authorities and other public bodies – to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. According to [governmental guidance](#), teachers now have a responsibility to identify pupils who “may be at risk of radicalization” and to “take action when they observe behaviour of concern”.

– to proactively share information on any individual suspected of “radicalizing” (see text box). National Societies might also be obliged to comply with enquiries and/or injunctions from judicial authorities, law enforcement authorities or intelligence services.

Such legal obligations may be reasonable in specific circumstances. However, the risks should always be taken into account,

especially in terms of beneficiary protection, the perception of the Movement and implications for wider operations.

National Societies are therefore encouraged in all circumstances to fully analyse the legal risks and constraints. In exploring potential mitigation measures, consideration should be given to the following:

- Does the legislation establishing the National Society (i.e. the Red Cross/Red Crescent law or act) explicitly oblige the authorities to respect the National Society’s adherence to the Fundamental Principles at all times? Are there any separate cooperation agreements with the authorities on specific programmes or activities that contain such provisions?
- Does the National Society enjoy any immunities or privileges in domestic legislation that could protect it against legal obligations that are in contradiction with the Fundamental Principles?
- What is the national legislation on data protection? Does it provide for any exceptions and/or recognize the unique nature of humanitarian, social or charitable work?
- Are there specific professions that enjoy immunities or privileges in domestic legislation that would protect professional secrecy and confidentiality and could be relevant to the National Society (e.g. health professionals, education providers, or staff at migrant reception centres, as illustrated in the text box)? Are there any other professional standards or codes of ethics that might confer similar protection?
- Are there any previous or ongoing legal challenges relating to the legal obligations at stake (e.g. the obligation to provide individual data)? In the case of court injunctions, are there precedents that would allow the National Society to reasonably challenge the order?

**Duty of confidentiality in Belgium’s migrant reception centres**

In Belgium, according to the legislation of 12 January 2007 on the reception of asylum seekers, staff members of reception centres, including those from the Belgian Red Cross, are bound by professional secrecy and a duty of confidentiality. This applies to any information shared by asylum seekers with the staff members in the course of their work, except in specific cases provided by the law where there is an obligation to disclose the information.

A [code of ethics](#) addressed to staff members of reception centres was drawn up by the authorities in order to implement this obligation, after consultation with partners such as the Belgian Red Cross. According to this code of ethics, only personal data that is relevant for the work of the reception centre staff members can be registered and consulted. Personal data may not be communicated to third parties without the individual’s consent.

Ultimately, regardless of the availability of legal arguments, it may be most practical and productive to put forward non-legal reasons, such as the reputation and humanitarian mission of the National Society and its need to be able to have access to all sections of the population.

#### 4.7 What other mitigation measures can be taken if National Societies get involved in P/CVE-related activities with their public authorities and/or are legally bound to share information?

If a National Society gets involved in P/CVE-related activities with the authorities, it should enter into an agreement with the authorities stating that its sole purpose is to address the humanitarian impact of “violent extremism”, providing for respect for its humanitarian mission (including in terms of public communication) and allowing the National Society to end the activity if its integrity is undermined.

Such agreements should also comprehensively detail the National Society’s responsibilities regarding confidentiality and protection of personal data, and the legal limitations on such confidentiality.

The National Society should ensure that the beneficiaries of such programmes are provided with the information they need to give informed consent regarding their participation in the programme and/or the processing of personal data (including possible transfer of data to third parties, such as the authorities). This means providing clear and transparent information on the humanitarian purpose of the programme, the relationship with the authorities, and any legal obligations and/or limitations imposed on the National Society.

Staff and volunteers working on such programmes should be given the necessary instructions and training in that regard, including on the humanitarian mission of the National Society and the Movement’s Fundamental Principles.

## CONCLUSION

Owing to the political nature of the P/CVE approach, Movement components are discouraged from explicit association with P/CVE-related programmes. Nonetheless, owing to significant overlaps between some Movement activities and P/CVE programmes, it is acknowledged that some National Societies may be involved in activities that could be associated with P/CVE – or perceived as such.

It is hoped that this document will help National Societies to adopt a constructive approach to this ambiguity by promoting an understanding of P/CVE programmes and how they differ from the Movement’s mission, a nuanced appreciation of the Movement’s indirect contribution to P/CVE and the opportunities therein, and a lucid reflection on the safeguards required, guided by the Fundamental Principles.

If National Societies have questions or need additional guidance to address some of the dilemmas and challenges related to P/CVE programmes, they are encouraged to approach their local ICRC delegation or the Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division at ICRC headquarters in Geneva ([policy@icrc.org](mailto:policy@icrc.org)).