



## INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

### FIGHTING TWO BATTLES AT THE SAME TIME: RESPONDING TO COVID-19 IN CONFLICT ZONES\*

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**Fabrizio Carboni**, Regional Director for the Near and Middle East, ICRC:

The **pandemic in the Middle East** is just an additional element, an additional layer of misery. In the region, you have **overcrowded places, weak health facilities** and dangerous environment. You can imagine adding the **COVID19 crisis** on top of that.

In Syria, in the largest governorate (Homs, 8m people) there is **not a single general hospital left**. In Syria, most of the **trained medical staff have left** and **medical infrastructures are destroyed**.

For the first time, **humanitarian actors are also the victims of the crisis**. Usually, Geneva is the safe place. This changed. **Geneva and Europe were in lockdown before Yemen, Iraq or Syria**.

The other thing that caught us was the **restriction of movement**. Colleagues are **stuck in dangerous places** and don't have the possibility to go back home.

About logistics: you need goods to act as a humanitarian actor. The challenge is "how do you adjust your operations" "what are the new things you need to do?". The other challenge is that the new supply we need to adjust operations is not available on the market. We are also in competition with states for supply and states are ready to pay 4 to 5 times the price to get the supply.

Major challenge for us: **manage the staff**. There is **fear among the humanitarian staff**. Most of the staff is stuck on the ground, not knowing when they could go back home to their families.

Major source of stress is the **funding**. ICRC still do not know if funds from major donors will still be available

Our normal activities such as food or cash distributions **must continue**, but in parallel, you need to **adjust your actions regarding COVID crisis**, integrate social distancing for example, which is very hard.

Overall, it is a very **challenging environment**, which is constantly changing. We are **improvising** and it is very difficult to project ourselves in 2-3 weeks. This **crisis is probably of the most challenging moment in my career**, maybe because there is **no safe space anymore**.

**Antonio Coco**, School of Law at University of Essex, Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict:

**Concept of due diligence in international law:** standard of conduct states have to adopt. There is a **multitude of obligations**, typically requiring States to prevent harm risk. These obligations (obligation to monitor disease and health emergency situations, obligations to build emergency response, capacity and preparedness) arise when the states have **knowledge of the risk**.

There are more expectations from states with more resources "**great power implies great responsibility**"

In a conflict area, risks are increased. **Compliance is affected by several factors:** degree of control over territory and population ; availability of resources, expertise and channels of communications.

What are the international obligations in the COVID19 crisis?

- The "**no-harm**" principle: prevent transboundary harm
- Positive obligations under **IHRL**: protect right to life and right to health
- **International Health Regulations**
- **International Disaster law**: adopt measures to reduce the risk of disasters
- **International Humanitarian Law**: ensuring humanitarian relief, maintain health system