



INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

“How to prevent COVID-19 from becoming a humanitarian disaster in the context of conflict situations, refugee and IDP populations?” by RightOn – 20 May 2020

Moderated by Dr Andrew Fagan (Human Rights Centre, University of Essex) and Dr Annyssa Bellal (Geneva Academy).

Dr Mohammed Al-Hadid - President of Jordan Red Crescent

In **Jordan**, strict **preventive measures** (lockdown, border controls, movement restrictions, closing of non-essential services, closing of schools) where **ultimately successful**.

Jordan **hosts** 1.3 million Syrian refugees, 2.2 million Palestinian refugees, 1 million migrant workers. Every fourth person is non-Jordanian. 120 000 people are living in refugee camps – outbreaks in the camps would be catastrophic. The camps are well-supplied with food and electricity. Government treats Jordanian citizens and refugees equally and puts people before the economy.

Main concerns of refugees: getting sick, shortage of food, debt payments, lack of jobs, family tensions, violence against their children. Most of the refugees do not have work permits. Most of the refugees also do not have internet connection at home, their children cannot access education online.

To help them overcome the crisis

1. We have a moral obligation towards refugees, they need urgent financial support.
2. We have to help them with getting work permits and, eventually, jobs. In **Jordan**, **three sectors** in which the refugees can receive a diploma in 1 year: agriculture, IT and health workers.
3. We have to ensure they have internet access at home, so that children are educated and are not easy target for extremists.
4. We need to encourage international community to do awareness programmes among refugees on how to protect themselves against Covid-19.

Ms Mariët Schuurman - Director Stability and Humanitarian Aid at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mental health crisis is a global crisis that particularly affects displaced people. **Netherlands** is a strong advocate for mental health support programmes in any kind of crises, including Covid-19.

All the funding should include mental health support programmes. Knowledge sharing, and support from local community activists is essential. Long-term **investing in the local capacity** should be the priority. **Stigma** around mental health **should be broken**.

Ms Cecilia Jimenez-Damary - UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) is a **broad group** that consists of women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and discriminated groups. The pandemic is not only a health crisis, but also a **human right crisis**.

The advice for everyone to stay at home is barely applicable for IDPs: they are not at home. **Development programmes should continue** wherever possible. We should ensure that the IDPs are **part of the solution**, and not part of the problem. We need to mitigate the pandemic, but we also need to have a human-rights based approach.

Special procedures have common principles – the principle of non-discrimination, participation, empowerment, and, of course, **accountability**. Particular attention should be paid to people in **vulnerable situations**. Need to address fake news, prejudices, discrimination, inequalities, violence. General call has been issued by Special Procedures to stress that everyone has **the right to life-saving interventions**. Special Procedures issued over 50 press statements on a wide range of topics, and a number of guidelines. They will continue to issue communications – some of them on situation of human rights violated because of the pandemic.



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Special Procedures have also been very active vis-à-vis **Human Rights Council**. Recently, they held a discussion with the Council, and urged all the states about the clear human rights based approach.

Dr Cédric Cotter - Researcher at the International Committee of the Red Cross

What we learned from the previous epidemics (e.g. “Black Death” plague, Spanish influenza), is that if the **measures are applied early**, they can **save a lot of lives**. During all the past epidemics, refugees, marginalized and poor people and certain religious communities (e.g. Jewish communities) were **stigmatized**. Authorities have the responsibility in stigmatizing certain groups. A notion of trust is very important. **Armed conflicts and pandemics** are different, we should **not use the same language** when we speak about them.

In the armed-conflict zones, **all the previous challenges** (gunfire, shelling, bombing, malnutrition, other epidemics and diseases (malaria, HIV...), no access to health care and sanitation, economic hardships) **continue with a new layer of Covid-19**.

Covid-19 exacerbates vulnerabilities in **detention facilities**. Safety and protection of **health workers** is essential.

For the ICRC to be able to **continue its protection and assistance programmes** in situations of armed conflicts (e.g. to provide support to health systems and to national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, to continue visits in places of detention, to continue dialogues with armed forces and armed groups), the organization needs to adapt normal operations with the current epidemics, and take new measures to **access population**, to form new partnerships, and to try to **overcome many restrictions on travels**, as well as problems with supply chain interruptions.

To be able to carry on its work, ICRC needs to go close to populations, while the big challenge is that some states’ measures remain very restrictive.

Dr Geoff Gilbert - Professor of International Human Rights & Humanitarian Law in the School of Law and Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex

Lawyers tend to put themselves in **silos** instead of working together.

Some things are on the background, that **should be on the foreground**: e.g. **Sustainable Development Goals** are not strictly law, but they protect rights implicitly. **Global Compact on Refugees** is not a legally binding document, but it sets two important objectives: to enhance **protection for refugees** and communities, and to ensure fair and more predictable **burden and responsibility sharing**.

In the meantime, access to education, access to employment, and access to housing remain as important as ever.