

**Australian Red Cross submission into the Senate Standing  
Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010**

**Introduction**

Australian Red Cross would like to thank the Senate Standing Committee on

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the provisions of the Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010. The issues associated with the Inquiry are of particular importance to Australian Red Cross given the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's (the Movement) long history and mandate in providing humanitarian assistance in times of conflict and natural disaster. Australian Red Cross, as part of the Movement, has high level expertise in the implementation of humanitarian programs in disaster-struck regions and conflict zones and is keen to share its views with the Committee. In particular Australian Red Cross would like to confirm the different, but complementary, way of working between an independent and impartial humanitarian organisation and such a government initiative. Furthermore Australian Red Cross is keen to offer assistance where possible to the Australian Civilian Corps, especially in the area of pre-deployment training.

**Neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action**

Australian Red Cross welcomes further government commitment to responses to natural disasters and conflicts overseas but wishes to note the difference between such activities and the work of humanitarian organisations such as Australian Red Cross and the broad activities of the Movement.

Granted a legal mandate under international humanitarian law, the Movement has specific obligations to engage in humanitarian activities during times of armed conflict. These activities (such as International Committee of the Red Cross visiting individuals detained due to conflict

and National Societies such as Australian Red Cross working in favour of victims of conflict) must be undertaken in a particular way. The Movement is bound to work pursuant to seven fundamental principles, including the requirement that all its humanitarian activities be implemented in a neutral and impartial manner. The principle of neutrality requires the Movement not to engage in controversies which would limit its access to either warring side. During times of natural disaster, the mandate of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) also includes being bound by these principles in the development of programs and the delivery of humanitarian relief. Recent Guidelines relating to International Disaster Response Law confirm the critical role the Movement has to play with governments in this area, in particular as auxiliary to the humanitarian services of public authorities. The capacity for the Movement to harness its 95 million volunteers under these principles is another important factor.

It is important for the continuing ability of organisations such as Australian Red Cross, with its unique mandate and need to operate in conformity with its seven fundamental principles so as to benefit affected populations, to ensure that the mandates of all entities operating in the humanitarian sphere are clearly understood by beneficiaries, donors, partner organisations and other stakeholders. As such, it is imperative that any humanitarian action by government entities, such as the Australian Civilian Corps, is clearly identified as being such. This is particularly so as Australian Civilian Corps personnel may be deployed alongside Australian military and police, where present, or may work with foreign military, peacekeepers or police.

To this end, Australian Civilian Corps employees will benefit, in the same way that Australian Defence Force personnel and AusAID staff already do, from pre-deployment interaction and training by Australian Red Cross on the role and mandate of the Movement. Indeed, taking into account the expertise of the Movement, and the relationship of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies as auxiliary to the public authorities in 186 countries

worldwide, mutual understanding between the Australian Civilian Corps and the Movement on the role and mandate of each other will be invaluable for operational success.

### **Australian Red Cross experience in international deployments**

Australian Red Cross is aware that the Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010, in its proposed form, provides the legal framework for the effective and fair employment and management of the corps employees. Whilst not wishing to engage directly on matters relating to the constitution and management of the Australian Civilian Corps, Australian Red Cross notes the importance of this initiative having clearly defined processes, values and conditions of employment. In the experience of Australian Red Cross, the sending of humanitarian and development specialists internationally to provide technical assistance in times of crisis or need requires careful and specific management.

Since the formation of Australian Red Cross as a branch of the British Red Cross shortly after the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, Australian Red Cross has always had an interest beyond Australian shores. Prior to 1945 our work took the form of support to Australian and British soldiers and prisoners of war overseas. From the 1960s, an Asia-Pacific focus emerged, focusing on activities such as developing new National Red Cross Societies in the Asia-Pacific region. Major Australian Red Cross international projects and contributions at this time included the Kampong Speu hospital project in Cambodia, a major relief effort for Cambodian refugees on the Thai-Cambodia border in the early 1980s, a project to upgrade Blood Transfusion Services and community-based health care clinics in Nepal, the establishment of, and support to, the Papua New Guinea Red Cross upon independence in 1975, the Malaysian nursing scholarship, major African appeals, and Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Since the 1990s AusAID has provided financial support with an emphasis on emergency health and nursing and more recently funded expansion to disaster management on a global scale. The deployment of delegates on overseas humanitarian and emergency relief assignments continues to this day in partnership with

AusAID. Over a five year period, from 01 July 2005 to 30 June 2010, Australian Red Cross deployed and supported 575 personnel to work with the International Federation, International Committee of the Red Cross and bilateral programs.

Based on this extensive experience, Australia Red Cross has identified the following key learnings for deployees to be successful in complex environments, which may be of assistance to the management of corps employees:

- The need for a clear, articulated vision and strategy for deployment
- Strong relationships with partner organisations overseas
- Robust recruitment and selection processes which assess commitment, motivation and personal attributes including cross-cultural sensitivity, achievement focus, teamwork, adaptability, accountability, problem solving, self awareness and leadership
- Rigorous health assessment pre and post deployment as well as debriefings post deployment
- Code of conduct to manage behavioural expectations whilst on deployment
- Obligatory pre-departure briefing and preparation, including safety and security
- In-country support whilst on deployment, including access to psycho-social services
- A plan to retain high performing personnel for additional deployments
- Systems and communications support for rapid deployment, including rapid response alert tools
- A means to capture effectiveness/outcomes of deployments established at the onset of the program design
- Engagement of returned deployees to share learnings with prospective deployees.

In addition to offering pre-deployment training on our internationally recognised specialisation in international humanitarian law, and on the Red

Cross Movement, Australian Red Cross has developed expertise in health and psychosocial support for deployees and such modules could be tailored to the needs of the Australian Civilian Corps.

### **Shared expertise**

Australian Red Cross sees the great opportunity that the Australian Civilian Corps recruitment program will provide for the identification of new Australian talent in the humanitarian field. It is highly likely that candidates on the Australian Red Cross deployment register may be interested in also registering with the Australian Civilian Corps register. Certainly the experience of those who have deployed with the Movement, or with a non-government organisation, will be invaluable to the Australian Civilian Corps program.

Australian Red Cross, pursuant to our relationship of auxiliary to the Australian public authorities, would be pleased to maintain a relationship with the Australian Civilian Corps in relation to providing some personnel to Australian Civilian Corps for deployment, in circumstances where this can occur in conformity with our seven fundamental principles. However, we believe an approach which results in having largely the same people on a new Government register, as those who are on the register of Australian Red Cross, should be avoided. This would compromise the ability of Australian Red Cross to make its valuable contribution to the response of the Movement in times of emergency. A contribution that has for many years played an important role in emergency response - particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. It is also clear, in our experience, that aid workers with a good understanding and knowledge of the organisation they deploy with perform better in the field.

We also note the potential inequity for Australian Red Cross aid workers, as well as for aid workers from the non-government organisation sector in Australia, with regards the more generous remuneration terms for Australian Civilian Corps training and deployment.

## **Conclusion**

Located within AusAID, there are significant opportunities for the Australian Civilian Corps to greatly contribute to Australia's humanitarian responses and bilateral development efforts. In cooperation with other Australian government agencies, the Australian Civilian Corps has been identified as complementary to existing work in this field.

In short the Movement, as the largest humanitarian network in the world, has vast experience in working in situations proposed for the Australian Civilian Corps and would be willing to share expertise and experiences with this new initiative.

For the Movement, engagement with the Australian Civilian Corps is inevitable considering the type of activities both organisations will be involved in. Understanding the role and mandate of each other will be vital. This is particularly important since the Australian Civilian Corps will be involved in disaster response situations and low threshold instability. In addition to subject matter expertise, the Movement has well developed practices and procedures which circumscribe the way in which it can engage with military and other actors which are part of government policy.

Australian Red Cross is available and willing to attend the inquiry and speak to this submission, and to provide any additional evidence that may assist the  
Committee.

Australian Red Cross  
November 2011