Social media
Guidelines for IFRC staff

International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

INTRODUCTION

Communities have the power to make the world a better place. We know this, because we see it happen every day through the work of the volunteers in our 190 National Societies.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) embraces the fact that today's communities exist not only in the physical world, but also online. The IFRC leadership recognizes the wide reach that communication in online communities can have – both positively and negatively. It encourages all staff members to use social media responsibily to communicate about topics within their areas of expertise – as long as it doesn't interfere with their primary duties or the secuirty of personnel or IT systems.

While communication on behalf of the organization is the primary responsibility of the communications department, the senior management team recognizes that other staff members can also further the organization's goals by using social networks.

These guidelines are designed to provide helpful, practical advice and also to protect the IFRC, secretariat staff and Red Cross Red Crescent staff worldwide.

If you have any questions, please contact the IFRC Cross Media Campaigning Team in Geneva.

Who these guidelines are for

These guidelines are for all IFRC employees, volunteers and delegates who use any social media tools or online communication media, either professionally or personally, including but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube or blogs (both if you have your own blog or are posting comments on another individual's blog).

If you would like to know more about social media in general, please take a look at the social media toolkit on FedNet. This document contains helpful information on tools that exist and how to use them effectively.

Defining social media

Social media tools (or social media network sites) allow users to share information, photos, links and interact with one another. Social media differs from traditional forms of communications because it provides more opportunities for two-way conversation with the public and new ways for the public to contact our organization.

Why "personal" and "private" are not the same

While communication through social media is primarily a personal matter, this is not the same as it being private. In a lot of cases, written conversations inside these networks can be found through search engines such as Google. Even in cases where only your contacts can see what you write, there is a possibility that one of them will forward what you say and make it visible to a wider audience. As a result, personal conversation within social networks should be considered public rather than private. Keep this in mind whenever posting or having conversations on social media.

BEST PRACTICES

The reality of social media is that the lines between professional and personal are easily blurred whenever you reference your work with the Red Cross on your private social media channels. Regardless of whether your comments are negative or positive – or whether they are intended as private or public – they could be construed as the opinion of the IFRC.

These guidelines consist of two parts: first, best practice and recommendations by the communications department. This is followed by a summary of the rules and obligations that are already in place and how they apply to staff use of social media.

1. Be a good ambassador

While it is everyone's personal decision whether to use social media networks and tools or not, you should always be aware that your behaviour and opinions reflect on the organization. Whether you identify yourself as being associated with the IFRC or not, your online posts may be interpreted as the official voice of the IFRC. This means one must be careful to uphold the Fundamental Principle of Neutrality of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (see section 3).

2. Use a disclaimer

Whether you mention your Red Cross affiliation on your social media accounts or not, we encourage you to add a disclaimer in your biography (or in the case of a blog, on each page) to make clear that the views you express are yours alone. This is particularly important if you identify yourself as a Red Cross employee or discuss your work on your account. Be aware that this disclaimer doesn't free you from the obligations you have under the Code of Conduct or the Fundamental Principles.

> **Example:** "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent positions, strategies or opinions of my employer."

We advise against using photos for your profile picture where you stand in front of one of the emblems (or a photo of one of the emblems itself) since this might give the web site or blog an official appearance.)

3. Get advice

If your unit, programme or department wants to use social media to promote IFRC activities, please contact the IFRC Cross Media Campaigning Team in Geneva, which has the lead on social media activities for the secretariat and can ensure consistency and help with best practice.

3. Be passionate

Passion is contagious. Share the passion you feel for your work and talk about the successes you have been part of.

5. Think of the news, your mother and your boss

Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on the news, being asked about by your mother or having to justify to your boss.

6. Add value

The IFRC believes that the sharing of information and experiences benefits the whole humanitarian community and ultimately the beneficiaries we serve. Feel free to share and discuss your experiences, for example, in vaccination campaigns, field communication, the building of transitional shelters, etc. If IFRC staff are perceived to be knowledgeable and helpful, this will reflect positively on you and on the organization.

Refrain from mentioning internal and/or confidential information. If you are unsure, consult the owner of the information you want to share and, when in doubt, don't share. Avoid also commenting on the work of colleagues in this or other organizations that is outside your field of expertise.

7. Feel free to correct others, but stick to the facts

The IFRC and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are complicated organizations, and we work in complicated legal and operational contexts. People frequently misunderstand or choose to misunderstand us. If you come across a misrepresentation of the Movement, feel free to identify yourself and organizational affiliation and correct their mistake, but do so with respect and with facts.

If you don't feel comfortable doing it yourself, please contact the IFRC Cross Media Campaigning Team in Geneva.

In most cases people won't mind being corrected and they will frequently even distribute the correction themselves. However, if you get the feeling that someone deliberately misinterprets everything you say, just ignore them.

> **Example:** An early 2009 a newspaper reported incorrectly that a National Society would abolish the cross completely and replace it with the crystal. A number of bloggers then spread this information through Twitter and other channels. The media unit replied with a short message along these lines: "That is not correct. The red crystal is an additional emblem and will not replace the cross or the crescent. States and National Societies that currently use and want to keep using the red cross or the red crescent will continue to do so. Please find more information on our web site: http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/themovement/emblems/"

8. Be aware of the tone of your posts

When posting about your Red Cross work on social media, be aware of the tone you are conveying and how it may be perceived. Keep in mind that the people we're helping are often in very difficult situations, and be mindful of that. Avoid posting "selfies" with beneficiaries or other delegates when on a disaster or emergency deployment, as these can appear insensitive. While on mission, avoid giving the impression of humanitarian tourism by skipping posts or photos that depict you as flying in and out of exciting places, relaxing by the pool or partying while on mission.

This also applies to the tone of your posts about those you are helping. Avoid pity, exploitation and depictions of otherness – all images of people should represent them as dignified, empowered and equal partners.

Example: You've just arrived in Alphaland with your team to assist with recovery after an earthquake. Instead of posting "Just landed in Alphaland!!!", consider instead "The Red Cross team has arrived in Alphaland to provide assistance to those affected by last week's devastating earthquake."

9. Be the first to admit a mistake

If you have made a mistake, be upfront about it: admit and correct the mistake. If you correct an earlier post, do so visibly, by using the strikethrough function and adding a paragraph that explains the update at the end or by including your original post in your corrected post.

Example: "Update, 5 July 2009: My team delivered 500 tons of widgets to Alphaville - not 5,000 tons as I wrote previously."

10. Use your best judgement

It is best practice to not publish anything that you are unsure of. Try to identify what concerns you before proceeding. If it is related to the Movement, ask your supervisor for a second opinion. Keep in mind that the content you publish is ultimately your responsibility.

11. Protect your own privacy

A lot of web sites allow you some form of control over who can see your material. Adjust these features to your comfort level. It's important to review your privacy settings regularly; social media sites often make changes and information that was once private can become public.

Please note that controlling your privacy settings on social media accounts does not necessarily mean your communications will be private (see section 1).

Example: On Facebook you can control your privacy settings under "Privacy Settings". We recommend that you set most of these settings to "Friends" or use the "Custom" option for even greater control.

12. Keep security in mind

Be particularly careful with what you are discussing online if you are in an operational context. Please make sure that you have read and follow your delegation's security requirements. Never talk about routes or times of planned convoys or distribution of goods. If in doubt, talk to the security unit or a security delegate.

Never post personal details such as the home addresses of yourself or colleagues. Bear in mind that personal details – these include names and pictures – of local staff members can be very security sensitive in many operational areas. If in doubt, don't take the picture or film. When posting photos to social media, don't enable geo-tagging as your location may be included in your post. To guard against burglaries, do not post information on when you are travelling or away from your duty post.

13. Be polite

You will likely encounter various points-of-view in the social realm, especially pertaining to sensitive topics. Be considerate and find ways to

respectfully disagree, if needed. (Refer to the Code of Conduct.) Remember that you are representing the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement even when discussing unrelated matters.

Many social networking sites also have their own rules of use and etiquette, so please familiarize yourself with them.

14. Spread the word and connect with your colleagues.

Engage with IFRC (and other NS) content on social media by liking, sharing and re-tweeting. Connect with your colleagues through social networks, and share their success stories as well as your own. To help you get started, we have included links to the IFRC's most active social media profiles in the appendix.

EXISTING RULES & OBLIGATIONS

1. Observe neutrality

While all the Fundamental Principles are important, the Fundamental Principle of Neutrality is especially relevant to social media. The Code of Conduct for IFRC staff (Rule 14) requires you to: "not publicly express any opinions on events connected with political affairs or engage in political activities that could reflect adversely on the impartiality, neutrality or independence of the Federation, e.g., public support of a political party."

This does not mean you cannot "follow" or "be friends" with political leaders or organizations to stay abreast to what is happening in the community. However, it does mean that you should avoid political commentary, criticizing or endorsing governments, political parties and figures, religious figures or private sector organizations. Think about the potential impact of your social media posts on volunteers and staff in the field; check for anything that could affect humanitarian access or indirectly put Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff at risk.

In the context of social media, it is important to remember that the Code of Conduct applies not only when you represent the IFRC or during working hours but around the clock – even when you are on leave. Please keep in mind that the Code of Conduct also applies to "all accompanying family members covered under the Federation's legal status" and that it is your responsibility to ensure that they are following it.

In addition to the Code of Conduct for IFRC staff, the Fundament al Principles, the rules laid out in the Handbook for Delegates, and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief apply as well.

> **Example:** Following the elections in Alphaland, the opposition claims that the results were rigged and starts a campaign on Facebook and Twitter. They ask users to modify their profile photo and to post messages in support of reelections. As an IFRC staff member, you cannot take part in these or other related activities since this would be a violation of the principle of neutrality and the Code of Conduct.

2. Don't use the emblem or the IFRC logo

You cannot use the emblems or the IFRC logotype as any part of your blog or social media profile. If you have any questions on this matter, please refer to the emblem guidelines on FedNet.

3. Stay focused on your job

While the IFRC leadership encourages the use of social media for business purposes and recognizes that these can be a valuable resource, make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job responsibilities.

4. Keep your manager in the loop

Inform your manager of your work-related social media activities to ensure they are aware of and comfortable with the information you are sharing. Refer to the IFRC Code of Conduct (Rule 25) for questions concerning content rights.

If you are on mission and interested in posting about your activities on social media, touch base with the communications lead (if there is one) or your head of operation to ensure you have the appropriate guidelines for your mission.

5. Observe IT security rules

Don't download or install software that you find through social networks on your work computer. Please re-read the Acceptable Use Policy for Information and Communications Technology if you are not familiar with it and pay special attention to the parts about unacceptable use and personal use.

6. Respect privacy

Respect people's right to privacy and don't take photos/videos or share information about them without their permission. Keep in mind that many people who have just been through a traumatic event are under shock and might say "yes" to something they might later regret. Even if you take photos or videos for personal use only, make sure that you respect the dignity of the people portrayed (See also: Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief).

If you post about a beneficiary, whether in text or a photo, only include their first name (if you have their permission to do so) and avoid sharing any other personal information about them. If you post a photo or video, be sure to review it before you post it to ensure it doesn't give away any personal information. It would be easy to post a photo of a beneficiary in a clinic without realizing their name and medical chart are visible. Use careful judgement before posting images of children as they are unable to give informed consent; get the permission of a parent or guardian before posting.

If in doubt, don't post a photo or video. It is your job to protect vulnerable people, not to exploit them. Focus on positive images. Don't post anything about minors that could lead to anyone identifying them or where they live. (See also: IFRC Code of Conduct, rule 22.)

7. Be careful when quoting the number of casualties

The Red Cross Red Crescent does not count dead or wounded. This information always comes from the authorities. If you are writing about casualties, clearly reference the source, e.g., the police or the ministry of health. Numbers are very attractive for the media and if you don't reference the numbers correctly, a personal blog post could quickly turn into a headline that reads "Red Cross says 10,000 dead in Alphaland".

WAYS TO CONNECT

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