Actions must match the words

PETER MAURER

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« The social consequences can also be dramatic »

The ICRC is a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organisation. It works to provide protection and assistance to victims of armed conflict and other violence.

Working on the front lines, the ICRC continues to receive harrowing accounts of the devastating effects of sexual violence. From the physical impact, which can be life-threatening, to the heavy burden on the mental health of individuals who bear the invisible scars of trauma. The social consequences can also be dramatic. When shame and stigma force survivors to isolate themselves for fear of rejection and reprisals, there is a twin impact.

The ICRC's response places survivors at the centre of considerations, at the intersection of three complementary and mutually reinforcing approaches.

- **An integrated and multidisciplinary operational methodology** seeks to address the diverse needs of survivors, while promoting respect for international law with the precise aim of preventing sexual violence.

- A **legal approach** is informed by the ICRC's operational proximity to survivors, perpetrators, parties to conflict and authorities. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is more relevant than ever: it prohibits sexual violence in all its forms in armed conflicts. The ICRC is committed to interpreting IHL to reflect the variety of experiences of those affected, but also to its application at the national level.

- Finally, **the ICRC's humanitarian diplomacy** aims to strengthen operational humanitarian action, as well as the development and implementation of the law, through involvement in diplomatic platforms.

While 2019 has been a year of remarkable mobilisation in the fight against sexual violence, our joint efforts remain more necessary than ever. Sexual violence is strictly prohibited and preventable. Action must accompany words.

Peter Maurer and Bernadette Sayo, survivor from Central African Republic during the Stand Speak Rise Up! forum in 2019