



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

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Rethinking media approaches to humanitarian issues

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The IFRC and the Italian Red Cross express their deep concern about the upcoming broadcast of the reality show "Mission", due to air on the Italian national TV station Rai Uno in Autumn 2013. The stated aim of this programme is to document the experience of Italian celebrities living the life of humanitarian workers in refugee camps in different African countries.

Whilst we understand that the proposed purpose of this reality show is to highlight the plight of refugees and other displaced people, we at the Red Cross Red Crescent also believe that such TV programmes present a number of pitfalls. Our position is that a reality show - a format well known for sensationalizing issues rather than reflecting on their roots and their possible solutions - risks transforming humanitarian tragedies into fiction, pain into entertainment, human dignity into a game. Even if the intention behind the initiative is to create awareness, the risk that this turns into an opportunity to increase TV ratings at the expense of people's dignity is simply too, unacceptably high.

We also believe that having celebrities play the role of humanitarian workers might fail to give an accurate and fair view of humanitarian work as a highly professional activity that requires technical expertise and specific competences, by giving a simplistic view of it as something that can be carried out by anyone. A show in which participants are asked to cover the roles of aid workers could result in the reinforcement of old stereotypes and to widen the distance between the helper and the helped, showing the resourceful humanitarian worker who lends his helping hand on one side, and the vulnerable beneficiary who receives it on the other.

The Red Cross Red Crescent is committed to providing support to migrant people in countries of origin, transit and destination. While we address their humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities regardless of their legal status, we also aim to promote their social inclusion in host communities and their full development as individuals. We believe that the media has the power to facilitate this process by positively shaping the perceptions and ideas of the people it reaches out to.

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We also believe that with this power also comes a responsibility for the media to provide their audiences with high quality content and information that encourages critical thinking and a change in attitudes concerning current humanitarian issues, while avoiding sensationalism and misconceptions. An approach that does not accurately portray humanitarian issues in their complexity – like migration - is likely to perpetuate existing stereotypes and fail to trigger that change in mind-sets that can lead to a more inclusive and enabling environment for refugees and others who have fled their home countries.

We at the Red Cross Red Crescent therefore call upon all national and international media outlets to actively contribute to addressing the plight of vulnerable people - including migrants - by encouraging a deeper and more critical dialogue with regard to humanitarian issues. A dialogue that embraces phenomena in their complexity and goes beyond the emergency, the crisis, and the potential threats that humanitarian issues present to raise awareness of the opportunities and the benefits that they entail. A dialogue that preserves people's dignity without pity or commiseration. A dialogue that helps understand who people are, where they come from and which issues they face on a daily basis, rather than wishing to find stereotypes, judgements, tension and exclusion. A dialogue that rethinks its language and goes beyond the labels of *migrant, refugee, displaced, illegal* and gives each of them a voice as *people* who have dignity, skills, knowledge, experiences, dreams and expectations from the future. A dialogue that no longer portrays them as beneficiaries and passive recipients of humanitarian aid, but that looks to them as our *other selves, as partners* who have right to a dignified existence and can represent an invaluable contribution to their new hosting communities, wherever they are.

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