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“Issues Facing the International Community from the
Perspective of ICRC”

In this presentation I would like to begin with a description of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), after which I will speak about the transformation of today's conflicts, the diversity of humanitarian actors, and the dangers arising from the political use of humanitarian assistance. Finally, I will touch on security as well as on relations between Japan and the ICRC.

Introduction to the ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross is the world's oldest international organization engaged in humanitarian assistance, and it provides relief and assistance to the victims of conflict in troubled areas on the principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality in accordance with the Geneva Convention. It currently has a budget of approximately ¥100 billion, offices in about 80 countries worldwide, and staff of 13,000 including three full-time international professionals from Japan. Its activities include protection activities seeking to ensure that the parties to conflicts abide by international humanitarian law, relief efforts for the victims of conflict, and prevention work aimed at disseminating the concepts of international humanitarian law among armed personnel in peacetime.

Transformation of today's conflicts

Today's conflicts involve a greater diversity of parties and, under such circumstances, it is more necessary than ever to gain an accurate understanding of who is engaged in a conflict, in what way and for what purpose. Determining how best to ensure that humanitarian law is observed under complex conditions and how to engage in dialogue and negotiations with various parties to the conflict are major issues.

In other instances, conflict is not confined to a single country but may take an international dimension should neighboring countries intervene (also called, "internationalization of internal conflicts"). Understanding the nature of the conflict is important in determining what legal norms to apply.

Diversification of humanitarian actors

Diversification is a characteristic not only of the parties to conflicts but also of the NGOs engaged in assistance and relief. There were said to be a considerable number of NGO

staff ranging from 3,000 to 10,000, operating in Haiti even prior to the earthquake. Coordinating the activities of these assorted NGOs is a major issue to be addressed.

Dangers of the political use of humanitarian assistance

There are those who view NGOs as force multipliers and advocate their incorporation in ways to bolster the power of military forces. However, there are concerns about blurring the line between NGOs engaged in humanitarian assistance and the military. NGOs are supposed to be independent and impartial and such conflation would put NGOs at greater risk of attacks and access to victims may be undermined.

We must also be cautious about utilizing military logistics for post-disaster assistance. Places hit by natural disasters may also be ridden by armed conflict, as it was the case in Sumatra hit by the Tsunami in 2004. The military may regard itself as neutral, but it might well be perceived as party to the conflict by the local population.

Humanitarian Dialogue and Security

The International Committee of the Red Cross relies on the principles of neutrality and impartiality to gain credibility in the eyes of all parties to the conflict. It explains to all parties and at all levels the mandate and activities of the ICRC. It then attempts to persuade parties to change their behavior in line with humanitarian law or to mobilize other actors who have an influence over actors violating humanitarian law. Finally although extremely rare and as a last resort, the ICRC openly denounces the party in hope of an improvement of its behavior and ultimately the condition of the victims.

There has been an apparent long-term uptrend in harm inflicted on personnel of international organizations and NGOs engaged in humanitarian assistance. Also the ICRC has not been spared whose personnel were killed or kidnapped on various occasions. Protecting staff from such dangers is crucial, and the key lies in ensuring local acceptance.

ICRC in Japan

During First and Second World War ICRC was engaged in a variety of humanitarian assistance activities in Japan such as visiting prisoners or providing medical assistance to the victims of Hiroshima. Last year the ICRC TOK office re-opened after 60 years and the role of the office is now a different one. It is engaged in activities designed to support humanitarian assistance actors in Japan and improve their efficiency, encourage greater support from Japan for the ICRC, to raise its Japanese staff, and to analyze the geostrategic environment from the Japanese point of view.