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Facilitating the Participation of Small States and Small National Societies in the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The participation of small states in international arenas is a widely researched topic that has gained prominence ever since the World Wars and the following proliferation of the number of states in the international system. Much attention has been paid to the change that the post-World War multilateral system brought to international relations and the role that small states have adopted in it. Through these changes small states have increasingly been recognised as actors in their own right, as distinctive agents, more than as dependent subjects defined in relation to the Great Powers.

Yet small states face diverse challenges in participating in international arenas due to their smallness. These challenges are generally seen as caused by a lack of resources and limited capacities that are often characteristic to small states. These limitations tend to render the participation of small states less effective and decrease their influence in international relations.

Besides small states, the multilateral system is also increasingly marked by the significance of a variety of non-state civil society actors that participate in international arenas in various roles. More often than not states taking part in international arenas are accompanied by civil society representatives seeking to bring in voices of the people. Yet the small state literature remains overly state-centric and academic literature has continued to focus exclusively on states rather than states together with civil society actors. This is the theoretical framework that this study falls into.

The particular setting this study focuses on is the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, a conference that takes place every four years and meets for the 32nd time in December 2015 in Geneva. The conference is unique in its composition in that it brings together states parties to the Geneva Conventions and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for debates and decisions on humanitarian issues. The role of the National Societies at the conference is quite unlike any other civil society actors as their presence is built into the conference design itself. No research has been published on the participation of small states and small National Societies in intergovernmental conferences, which makes this project first of its kind.

The driving idea behind this research is that smallness is a qualitative state of being which influences all the aspects and functions of the subject, potentially causing limitations to the extent and effect to which small actors can prepare and participate in international settings. By asking what exactly these challenges are and how they could be responded to, the research seeks to identify ways in which the participation of small actors could better be facilitated.

Based on a desk-study and on a set of interviews with representatives of small states and small National Societies, the study identifies key challenges that small actors face when participating in international arenas in general, and the RC/RC Conference in particular. Through an analysis of these challenges, a set of recommendations are proposed for small states, for small National Societies and for conference organisers in order to better facilitate their participation in international conferences.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	6
The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent	8
Methodology	10
Literature Review	13
Defining Smallness	13
Participation and Influence	17
Small Actors in International Arenas	20
Analysis	23
Small States	24
Perception of Smallness.....	24
Challenges	25
Significance of the RC/RC Conference	29
Preparation and Participation in the Conference	30
Suggestions for Conference Organisation.....	35
National Societies	37
Perception of Smallness.....	37
Significance of the RC/RC Conference	37
Challenges	38
Preparation and Participation in the Conference	39
Suggestions for Conference Organisation.....	40
Conclusion	42
Recommendations	45
For Small States	45
For National Societies	45
For Conference Organisers	46
Bibliography	47
Annex	49
List of interviewees	49
Interview Questions:	49

“If Lilliputians can tie up Gulliver, or make him do their fighting for them, they must be studied as carefully as the giant.” Robert Keohane

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito.” African proverb

INTRODUCTION

As a centre of global governance, hundreds of international organisations and deliberative bodies are based in Geneva and countless decisions and negotiations are made here. For the diplomat, Geneva is a “traffic jam of meetings.”¹ These meetings bring together states of all sizes, social structures, degrees of economic power, and geopolitical positioning. Taking population size alone as one of many possible indicators, one can find Nauru with a population of just 10,000, and at the same time, China, which represents nearly 19% of the total world population with a population of more than 1.3 billion.² And just as states are heterogeneous entities, so too are the intergovernmental forums where they come together. These forums deal with issues ranging from trade to climate to human rights, and are managed through a variety of different membership criteria, voting structures, and governance structures.

¹ In the words of one of the diplomatic staff interviewed

² Government of China census. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/statisticaldata/censusdata/>

The Conference of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC/RC) is particularly unique as an international forum. It brings together representatives of states with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. These National Societies together make up an essential part of the RC/RC movement. In some sense, the National Societies bear a close resemblance to civil society organisations (CSO), particularly in the domestic setting where they often support or even fill in for the government in providing aid and assistance to populations in situations of disaster or war. Furthermore, they can sometimes serve as a check to national governments in ensuring respect for international humanitarian law.

However, in the setting of the International RC/RC conference, the National Societies are quite unlike other examples of CSO in international fora in that they are not only guaranteed a participatory role in the conference, but also their presence is built into the conference design itself. This clearly sets the RC/RC conference apart from other international fora where states are the dominant players, and CSOs, if they are allowed in at all, clearly play a more marginal role. The role of CSOs in international fora is a subject that has been studied widely, however mostly separately from small states and mainly in relation to more traditional conference settings, where the dynamic is quite different from that of the RC/RC conference.

The Standing Commission of the Red Cross / Red Crescent, the body responsible for the conference, has therefore commissioned this study to examine the role of small states and their corresponding National Societies in the conference. Aware that small actors are often at a disadvantage in international conferences, the Commission is willing to identify ways to better facilitate their participation.

The aim of this study is to identify recommendations relevant to the unique setting of the International Conference of the RC/RC, but also to try to extrapolate a larger set of findings about the role of small actors in international fora more generally. This study asks:

- What specific challenges and issues do small states and national societies face when participating in the RC/RC conference and in other large-scale multilateral settings?
- What kinds of opportunities are available to small states in these settings, and in particular what is the degree to which there could be strategic advantage to their smallness?
- What are the best practices already in place facilitating small actors' participation in large-scale international conferences?
- How can conference organisers better facilitate the participation of small actors?
How can the small actors themselves participate more effectively?

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

The study is undertaken in advance of the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent, taking place 8-10 of December 2015. The conference brings together states party to the Geneva Conventions and National RC/RC Societies to discuss and make decisions about humanitarian issues. Taking place every four years, the Conference is the “supreme deliberative body” for the RC/RC movement.³ As a space where National RC/RC Societies come together with representatives of their states, the Conference is also a forum for “humanitarian diplomacy,” defined as the responsibility of all members of the RC/RC movement to work to persuade their governments to respect humanitarian principles.⁴

The Conference is organised under the auspices of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent which is the trustee of the International Conference between two Conferences. The Standing Commission is responsible for setting the agenda and programme

³ General Guidelines, 2012 pp. 6.

⁴ Humanitarian Diplomacy Policy, [accessed June 2015]

for the meeting as well as for approving all official documents that are circulated to members of the Conference. The Commission is composed of five elected members from among National Societies as well as two from each, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Those two institutions, together with the Secretariat of the Standing Commission and the Commissioner for the Conference, constitute the Joint Organising Committee which is responsible for all practical arrangements.

The main substantive outcomes of the Conference are in the form of resolutions which are generally adopted by consensus, or in the rare case where a consensus cannot be reached, by vote. The other outcomes include voluntary “pledges” adopted by states or RC/RC components, as well as reports and background documents. The Conference typically has two plenary sessions and a number of parallel “commissions”. In addition, workshops and side events provide alternate avenues to advance discussions about humanitarian issues, and an additional space for states and components of the RC/RC movement to interact.

The preparation for the conference begins immediately after the previous conference that comes four years before, and includes consulting with participants about any issues they may have had with the recently passed conference. A briefing of permanent missions was held in May 2014 and a briefing of legal advisors from National Societies was held the same month, both in Geneva. Additional briefings of National Societies were held at the regional level in the following months and a draft agenda was circulated to National Societies and States in December 2014, one year before the conference. A series of Group of Ambassador meetings were then held in 2015 (in January, June, and September) providing an opportunity for all

permanent missions to influence the preparation for the conference. Draft resolutions were circulated to participants in June and a pledge database was launched the same month.

METHODOLOGY

The primary means through which the research questions were assessed was through a series of interviews with representatives of diplomatic missions of states and RC/RC National Societies that would participate at the conference. The research questions driving this project are based on the experiences of small states and small National Societies. As these experiences are not published anywhere, this research was necessarily dependent on interviews as its primary source of information.

Desk research comprised another significant portion of the research. The rich literature on small states was explored to situate the chosen sample within a larger scholarly discourse about what constitutes a small state and the implications of such smallness. Academic literature on small actors in international fora was also turned to, as well as the ways in which participation, and particularly the form of more engaged participation that this study is interested in, can be understood. Finally, available resources of the ICRC, IFRC, and the Standing Commission were studied in order to better understand the conference context and to design the interview questions and approach.

The initial aim was to conduct 20 interviews, and if possible, for these to consist of ten states and ten corresponding National Societies. However, arranging appointments with representatives of National Societies and in particular with the permanent missions of small states proved to be difficult. An initial level of bureaucratic barriers were encountered with

the permanent missions, as email requests were often lost and representatives requested a new email to be sent before considering the request. These led to the ultimate barrier of permanent missions being too occupied to spare time for an interview.

The small sample size serves both as a key limitation to the research. At the same time, it serves as a finding in and of itself, as it demonstrates the extent of the resource barriers faced by many missions of small states. In the end, the data included in this report is based on five interviews with small states and seven interviews with National Societies. On the small state side, the findings were complemented with meeting notes shared by the Office of the Swiss Commissioner to the Conference. The Commissioner's Office conducted their own outreach to permanent missions in Geneva to make sure that the missions were aware of the conference and its preparations. Only three pairs of a corresponding state and National Society were arranged, unfortunately limiting the insight into how these actors work together and differences in how they understand their involvement in the conference.

The sample was composed of states that met at least two of the three criteria suggested by the Standing Commission:

1. Population size of less than one million,
2. Landmass of less than 10,000 square kilometres, or
3. GDP of less than five billion USD.

The list was then adjusted to achieve improved regional representation. As there is no single common definition of what makes a state small and given that the criteria outlined above are relatively comprehensive and broadly take into account the complexities associated with

categorizing small states, the definition was found to offer to be useful for the purposes of this study.

After identifying a sample of small countries, a set of interviews were conducted to understand the qualitative aspects of smallness and their implications to participation. The interviews with Permanent Missions in Geneva were conducted in person, and in one instance via email by the lead researchers. The interviews with representatives of National Societies were conducted via skype, phone, and email by partners at the Standing Commission. All interviews were semi-structured and based on five lead questions. The lead questions were followed by more targeted questions regarding specific conference mechanisms and preparation processes to get as full a picture as possible of their preparation and participation.

The five lead questions were as follows:

- 1. Do you consider your state to be a small state and what are the implications of this?*
- 2. What is at stake for your state/NS at the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent?*
- 3. How does your mission/NS prepare for the 32nd Conference?*
- 4. Can you describe how you anticipate your participation in the actual conference?*
- 5. What changes or mechanisms would you like to see put in place in order to better facilitate your participation in international conferences?*

The interviews were analysed along the lines of these five lead questions, which were identified as the most important to generate recommendations and best practices. Analysis was conducted by going through interview notes and categorising comments by interviewees as related to these five areas. The comments were then interpreted in relation to each other and to the background research into the conference and the academic literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING SMALLNESS

During the past century, an extensive body of scholarly literature has emerged on small states in international relations. The first wave of analysis took place in the early 20th century at the beginning of decolonization and the consequent proliferation of the number of small states in the international system. The analysis began within political science and island studies⁵, looking at the newly independent states and their strategies in the international system, most often in relation to “the Great Powers”.⁶

Despite the relatively long history of small state analysis, a common definition of “a small state” is yet to emerge. This implies challenges in identifying the group of states that any endeavours on the topic of small states has to take into consideration. To date, the most commonly applied single criterion in identifying small states is population size.⁷ This stems from a stream of economic literature that has identified a correlation between population and other measures of economic size, such as total GDP and total land area.⁸ Therefore, according to this argument, it is enough to define the size of a country exclusively according to its

⁵ Cooper, Andrew F. and Shaw, Timothy M. “The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience”. Palgrave Macmillan. London. 2009. pp. 13

⁶ More about the emergence of small states in the international system and in relation to the Great Powers, see e.g. Rappard, William E. “Small States in the League of Nations”. *Political Science Quarterly*, 1 December 1934, Vol.49(4). pp. 544-575

⁷ Crowards, Tom. “Defining the Category of ‘Small’ States”. *Journal of International Development*. 14. 2002. pp. 143.

⁸ Charles, Mary Eugenia. “A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability”, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997. pp. 8

population size. Other scholars, however, have challenged this notion and found that when several quantitative indicators are taken into account, the group of states that are categorised as small changes. Crowards, for instance, found that when the size of population, land area and total income are taken into account as three independent indicators and used together to identify small states, the group of small states changes in comparison to using population size as a single indicator.⁹

Besides the lack of consensus on which indicators should be used to identify small states, a further open question on where to draw the line between a small and a non-small state exists. In terms of population size, a common cut-off point has been around 1 million people or less. However, due to global population growth, a new watershed has often been set at 1.5 million. Depending on where the limit is drawn, the number of small states ranges from around a quarter to half of all the sovereign states in the international system.¹⁰

Yet, it has been argued by Amstrup and others, that even if a solid cut-off point was determined, quantitative indicators such as those listed above are not sufficient in defining what makes a state small. Rather, smallness should be seen as a qualitative state of being that strongly impacts all the functions of the state, including its foreign relations. This has led Amstrup to argue that research has overly emphasized quantitative over qualitative indicators that, in fact, are the key to identifying and understanding small states.¹¹

An example of an author who prioritized qualitative characteristics of small states would be Robert Keohane. In his work in 1969, he looks at states in international relations and seeks to

⁹ Crowards, 2002. pp. 171

¹⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997

¹¹ See e.g. Amstrup, Niels. "The Perennial Problem of Small States: A Survey of Research Efforts." *Cooperation and Conflict*. 11 (2). 1976.163-182. Amstrup argues that the key to defining small states are their *actions* and *behaviour* at the international stage.

define their size based on the *self-perception* and consequent *behaviour* of states and their leaders:

“A Great Power is a state whose leaders consider that it can, alone, exercise a large, perhaps decisive, impact on the international system; a secondary power is a state whose leaders consider that it can exercise some impact, although never in itself decisive, on that system; a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be able to have a systematic impact in a small group or through an international institution; **a small power is a state whose leaders consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system.**”
(*emphasis added*)¹²

The definition presented here is in essence a qualitative one: to Keohane, smallness is a self-perception of certain type of weakness and dependency that makes a state behave in a certain way. However, identifying such a group for the purpose of research and policy-making, for instance, is more challenging and takes more time with these parameters than with more clear-cut quantitative indicators.

Looking at the everyday policy discourse, there seems to be a tendency to normalize large and marginalize small states. It is quite common to perceive bigger states as “the norm” and smaller states as the exception. Yet, in fact, many of the states that often are considered small, when examined closely, are in fact of “average” size.¹³ It further seems that this tendency has

¹² Keohane, Robert O. “Review: Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics”. *International Organization*, Spring, 1969, Vol. 23, No. 23. pp. 291-310

¹³ Baldacchino gives a critical review of the discourse around the size of a state and shows, for instance, that Finland, a country commonly regarded as small, actually had the average size population of 5.3 million (in 2007). Baldacchino, Godfrey. “Thucydides or Kissinger? A Critical Review of Smaller State Diplomacy”. 2009. pp. 23

been present since the emergence of small states, as they became to be defined from the very beginning as states that were not “the Great Powers”.¹⁴

Regardless of the exact definition, it is evident that small states are largely heterogeneous. The adjectives often used in the literature that describe small states are, on the one hand, vulnerable, isolated, weak, dependent, suboptimal, fragile, limited and insular, and on the other, smart, strategic, privileged, ingenious, prosperous, resilient, open, innovative, resourceful and creative. Evidently, not all the adjectives describe all the small states and at all times, but rather describe characteristics and circumstances that vary from one state and one moment to another. One of the difficulties in grasping this heterogeneity is that negative features are often given excessive attention at the expense of positive ones¹⁵, to the extent that adjectives such as “vulnerable” and “weak” threaten to replace “small”¹⁶. Furthermore, as the lack of homogeneity causes diversity in interests and preferences, in turn creating a variety of policies and strategies, it is a genuine challenge to look at small states as a group in their own right.¹⁷

Now that the main trends in the literature on small states have been reviewed, it is time to say a few words on how the term “small state” will be defined in this paper. The purpose of the study is to better understand the realities of participation of small actors in intergovernmental settings, and where possible, improve the current state of affairs.¹⁸ This requires a solid understanding of the qualitative aspects of smallness and its consequences. These aspects

¹⁴ Rappard (1934) writes that at the time of the early independence, a small state was generally defined as a state that was not a Great Power, that is, a state that was militarily weak (563) and not a member of the Security Council (pp. 544).

¹⁵ Cooper and Shaw, 2009. pp. 2

¹⁶ See e.g. Baldacchino, 2009. pp. 26 and Amstrup, 1976. pp. 163-182

¹⁷ About the heterogeneity of the small states’ policies, see e.g. Rappard, 1934. pp. 570-571

¹⁸ The term “small actors” is used here to include small National Societies as well as small states.

were addressed through interviews with the representatives of small states and small national societies. In addition, a set of quantitative indicators were used to identify the sample for interviews.

As a last note before moving forward to defining and discussing participation, it must be stated that despite the increasing importance of civil societies and the private sector, the literature on small state participation remains overly state-centric and pays little attention to participation in conjunction with non-state actors. This research project aims to address this notable gap in the literature on the participation of small states together with non-state actors in general, and National Societies in particular.

PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE

Central to the research questions put forth in this study is the concept of participation. The questions posed in this research seek to understand how small actors participate in international fora and specifically in the RC/RC Conference, including how that participation differs from the participation of other, larger actors; and to identify recommendations to enhance participation.

In order to fully explore what is meant by “participation” in this context, we must turn to a different set of literature in the fields of political science and international relations. Though these concepts are dealt with loosely in some of the literature on small states delineated above, we can find them explored most thoroughly in studies of non-state actors and their efforts to shape international policy making processes.

Jonas Talberg leads the “Transaccess Project” based in Stockholm, which examines the formal access of transnational non-state actors to international organisations.¹⁹ Talberg identifies a “continuum of access”, in which the lowest level is defined by access to information sharing mechanisms through which non-state actors are able to influence policy-making by providing relevant data and analysis to decision-makers. The second level of access refers to a more active consultation process with decision-makers that suggests a form of information sharing and analysis that entails more room for discussion. The third level involves actual collaboration and a more equal relationship between the policy makers and the non-state actors in the formation of an approach to policies than the relationship that arises from consultation alone. Finally, the highest level of access on Talberg’s continuum is characterized by formal representation, in which non-state actors are fully involved and granted a seat at the table.

Although certainly useful in certain contexts, Talberg’s analysis fails to take into account the nuances that are encompassed in formal representation, including possible variation in the capacities of representatives to fully engage with the contents of the conference. His analysis is focused very much on the conference setting itself and does not fully consider all the elements in the preparation and lead-up to the conference that we argue are central to understanding participation. This paper demonstrates that the spectrum of participation extends beyond a seat at the table, and seeks to understand what we might call “meaningful participation” which entails the ability of conference participants to fully engage with the content of the conference and to influence the outcomes.

¹⁹ Talberg, Jonas “Explaining Transnational Access to International Institutions”. Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco. March 26-29, 2008.

In his 1975 book, *The Descriptive Analysis of Power*, political scientist Jack H. Negal defines influence as “a causal relation between the preferences of an actor regarding outcome and the outcome itself.”²⁰ Although, measuring the influence of conference participants falls outside of the scope of this research, it is nevertheless useful to turn to some of methods of measuring this “causal relation”, in order to contextualize our definition of participation. These are perceived influence, process tracing, and preference attainment.²¹

The “Perceived influence” method is typically used when conducting surveys and is based on the perception of the actor/s attempting to influence the policy making process, the perceptions of the policy-maker being influenced, and/or the perceptions of outside experts or observers. A key limitation of this approach is that as since is necessarily based on perception it remains very difficult to measure. Perhaps a more scientific approach, “process tracing” seeks to isolate the different stages of the policy-making process and to assess causality at each stage. There is also an issue of objectivity here, which comes into play when identifying these different stages of the policy-making process and the key events that distinguish them. Moreover, each case assessed through the “process tracing” method is unique, making it difficult or impossible to employ this method for any kind of comparative analysis.²²

The “preference attainment” method compares the preference of the actor attempting to influence the policy-making process to the final outcome as a measure of influence. However, it is highly problematic to infer causality from the end result. If an outcome corresponds to the preference of a given actor or set of actors, this does not necessarily establish a causal relationship. Therefore, other methods must typically be employed in order

²⁰ Negal, 1975, pp. 561.

²¹ Cannon, (*unpublished draft*), 2015.

²² Collier, 2011.

to establish that connection. Since the raw data of this project is composed of qualitative interviews, to the extent that the measurement of influence is incorporated into our analysis, it is along the lines of the “perceived influence” method.

Finally, it should be noted that this research considers the ability of small states and small National Societies to actively and meaningfully participate in the conference, which includes the ability to influence the outcomes of the conference, but also includes “softer” forms of participation that may not be reflected in outcomes, including the ability to contribute to the discourse around the issues at hand and to help shape the form and the nature of the discussion. For this reason, the perception of the stakeholders is given the greatest weight in our analysis.

Since the small states and small National Societies examined in this study all have equal representation in the Conference, the levels of participation that go beyond a simple “seat at the table” are those that are of the greatest interest to us.

SMALL ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL ARENAS

Thus far no research has been conducted on the participation of small states together with their National Societies in international arenas. Yet the participation of small states has been studied almost as long as there has been literature on small states. Therefore this section will focus exclusively on the participation of small states, but the findings will be applied to the setting of the conference of the RC/RC in the analysis section.

As early as in the 1930s, Rappard studied what he called the “small states”, that was, states other than the Great Powers, and their foreign relations. He found that the newly developed multilateral system had greatly benefitted the emerging small states by providing an

international forum where they could participate together with, and independently from, the Great Powers unlike ever before. Even though the structure of the multilateral setting, primarily through the establishment of the Security Council, resulted in enforcing the power imbalance of the international system, yet according to Rappard, the militarily weak small states had all to gain from becoming a recognised member of the system that was aiming to establish law and order in the world.²³

Similarly, Keohane found in the 1960's that the reinforcement of the multilateral setting and the establishment of the United Nations granted small states an increased significance in international politics. With the one-country one-vote system, small states, at least in theory, stood on equal ground with the Great Powers in most of the UN organs. This, according to Keohane, had a major impact on the small states' international status as they became recognised actors in their own right and now had the opportunity to seek to push their own agendas in the multilateral settings.²⁴ Therefore it was no longer enough to look only at the Great Powers in order to understand the international system, but the small powers were to be studied carefully as well.²⁵

A further interesting aspect that the small state literature has explored is the strategies that small states have adopted in seeking leverage in international arenas. Already in the 1930's, Rappard wrote about the then newly emerging trend of small states making use of their smallness and the impartiality often attached to it. Ways to benefit from this impartial status were, among others, hosting international conferences and acting as a mediator and

²³ Rappard, 1934. pp. 544-563

²⁴ Keohane, 1969. pp. 291-310

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 310

conciliator in various international settings.²⁶ These activities have brought visibility and prestige to many of the smaller states since the establishment of the multilateral system and continue to be topical for many even today.

Another important strategy at the disposal of small states has been the formation of alliances. It is again Keohane who has conducted ground-breaking research in this field, being one of the first scholars to actively engage with the alliance formation of small states. He found that small states had generally benefitted from creating alliances. For instance, the emergence of the Non-Aligned movement in the 1950's provided a classic example of an alliance that served as a powerful avenue for creating a common agenda between the non-Great Powers in the Cold War climate, and consequently helped the smaller actors to gain some leverage in their international relations.²⁷

Keohane suggested that, in general, small states seemed to benefit more from alliances formed with other small states due to the tendency of alliances with bigger powers to make small states susceptible to coercion and negative influence.²⁸ Yet Keohane did not take a position on the issue of heterogeneity of small states and the subsequent difficulty to accommodate their various foreign policy objectives. This is a continuing challenge both for the small states, and for the small state literature where avenues for further research exist.²⁹

Looking at the more recent literature on small states, there seems to be a strong trend to pay much attention to the active agency of small states in the international system. This trend

²⁶ See e.g. Rappard, 1934. pp. 564-568

²⁷ Keohane, 1969. pp. 300-301

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See e.g. a relatively recent study of Prasad on the variety of small states and their foreign policies. Prasad, Naren. "Small but Smart: Small States in the Global System." 2009. pp. 41-64.

could be named a quest for “the power of the powerlessness”³⁰. In a recent book edited by Cooper and Shaw, two political scientists from the US and from Trinidad and Tobago dedicated to the study of small states in international relations, contributed strongly to the elaboration of small states’ agency. The book features a collection of articles on the diplomacies of small states and provides for an informative general outlook on the current understanding of small state diplomacy as well as a set of individual case studies for a more in-depth look.³¹

Cooper and Shaw argue that small states are increasingly both willing and able to act as creative agents in their own right. Consequently, they argue, small states are taking advantage of various strategies through which they have successfully gained leverage.³² The strategies, as identified by the authors, include first, acting through international associations such as the Commonwealth, second, participating and pursuing agendas in multilateral arenas, and third, using varied forms of alliance building and networking. The key to the small states’ agency is their innovative approach and creativity that the authors see as compensating for their structural deficiencies.³³

ANALYSIS

Turning back to the International Conference of the RC/RC, the participation of small states and small National Societies is now given a closer look. The interviews with the state mission

³⁰ Baldacchino, 2009. pp. 22

³¹ Cooper and Shaw, 2009.

³² Ibid. pp. 1-18

³³ Ibid. pp. 2. More about the innovativeness and creativity of small states see e.g. Baldacchino, 2009 and Prasad, 2009. Also, see Nilas Tarp and Bach Hansen, 2013, for smart strategies of small states.

and National Society representatives were analysed from five angles. First, the perception of smallness was addressed in order to flesh out the qualitative aspects of smallness and build on the quantitative definition that informed our sample selection. The second section provides an account of challenges related to the participation of small actors. The third section addresses the perceived significance of the International Conference of the RC/RC. The fourth section addresses the actors' preparation and participation at the conference in more detail. Finally, the fifth section considers comments made by the interviewees regarding the organisation of the conference, and in particular, suggestions for conference organisers. For the sake of clarity, the interviews with small states and small National Societies are analysed separately.

SMALL STATES

PERCEPTION OF SMALLNESS

Having determined the sample of small states based on quantitative indicators, the interviewees were given the option to comment on whether they themselves perceived their states to be small. It was found that all of the interviewees considered their states small. This self-identification was based both on quantitative and qualitative aspects. The most common quantitative aspects raised were population size and land area,³⁴ whereas the most common qualitative aspect was belonging to a group of small states.³⁵ Yet in the discussion that followed, these aspects were used interchangeably, both with each other and with other related characteristics, such as the lack of capacity and resources, geographic remoteness and etc. This reflects the complexity of defining a small state and the variety of features that are attached.

³⁴ Two out of five interviewees mentioned both.

³⁵ Three out of five interviewees mentioned this when defining the smallness of their state.

The state representatives elaborated on what being small means much more than their National Society counterparts. One reason for this could be that unlike a “small National Society”, a “small state” is a readily established concept and it has already made its way into international relations and scholarly discourse. Moreover, the notion of a small state has become institutionalised in the form of various organisations and structures that advocate for the agenda of small states, provide assistance and support their initiatives.³⁶ Therefore, and in the hopes of receiving support and assistance, it is often of actual and strategic benefit for states to be categorised as small. Consequently, it is also not problematic for the states to be elaborate and explicit regarding any challenges that they face as small states.³⁷

CHALLENGES

When asked to further elaborate on the implications and consequences of smallness, both challenges and strengths were mentioned. All in all, more disadvantages than advantages to being small were raised. The most commonly identified challenge, mentioned by each of the interviewees, was limited human resources both at the states’ permanent missions and in the capitals. Of the states missions interviewed, three had a staff of three people, and one was staffed by only one person. Limited human resources restrict the ability of the missions to meaningfully prepare and take part in the various diplomatic events taking place in Geneva, and subsequently have a limiting impact on the overall representation of the small states.

“There are more disadvantages than advantages to being small”

³⁶ These can be *ad hoc* institutional arrangements that are tied to specific conferences, for instance in the form of financial support; they can be more long-term routines of an international organisation to support the participation of small states in its activities or in their international relations in general; or they can be permanent institutional arrangements the primary purpose of which is to support the general international performance of small states (such as the Commonwealth Secretariat)

³⁷ Baldacchino, 2009. pp. 25, notes that the act of defining oneself as small is sometimes “used to lobby international support for special economic privileges”.

All of the interviewees expressed that because of limited human resources, they had to prioritise tasks with particular care and to be highly selective in the commitments that the missions undertake. Prioritising tasks is a common practice among state missions regardless of size, but here the extent to which prioritisation and selection of tasks is done is of crucial importance. One of the interviewees said that they were often obliged to be selective to the extent that they had to neglect some or many of the issue areas that in fact were within the state's interests.

In many instances, the lack of adequate human resources caused a sense of being constantly overwhelmed by work. In practice, this showed in various forms. One of the interviewees, a sole representative of the mission, said that a significant part of email and other information was systematically unaddressed because of lack of capacity. This translated into a tendency for relevant diplomatic staff to be unaware of many of the events and processes taking place in Geneva, which subsequently contributed to the mission's challenges to meaningfully prepare and take part in such events. The same interviewee had also not heard of the International Conference of the RC/RC by the time of the interview. Another member of a mission composed of three staff members, mentioned their difficulty in responding to unexpected tasks. This shows, on the one hand, that although routine tasks were largely under control, on the other hand, the unexpected tasks that are a usual part of any diplomatic undertaking were difficult to attend to. Lastly, a third interviewee said that the combination of a high volume of work and limited human resources created a sense of constantly having to be at several places at the same time.

*"Geneva is a nightmare
for small countries"*

Another important set of challenges attributed to being small was the financial and technical constraints. These were mentioned by three out of five interviewees. The financial and technical constraints link to the limited human resources in a variety of ways. One, mentioned by two interviewees, was the capital's reluctance to send additional staff members needed in the missions due to budget constraints. Another aspect mentioned was the capital's inability to generate enough expertise to train qualified representatives. Third, noted by one interviewee, a small state's budget limitations are partly due to the narrow tax base as a result of their small populations. Taking all these aspects into account, there seems to be a close and mutually reinforcing connection between the limited human, financial and technical resources. Responding to these constraints requires taking into account the interconnectedness of the aspects.

Other perceived implications of the financial and technical constraints mentioned were the struggle to pay membership fees to international organisations and the difficulties in covering the costs of attending international conferences around the world. The latter was exacerbated when the country's location was remote from many of the international "hot spots", such as Geneva or New York. For countries located far away from these areas, the travel expenses were increased and subsequently it was more difficult for the states to send staff members and experts to conferences. These circumstances particularly apply to many of the small island states that struggle with both their remote location as well as with infrastructure deficiencies.

Lastly, one interviewee noted that the lack of financial means tends to create a need for external financial support. Relying on external support generally increases the need for

information-sharing and communicating with the donors. This, in turn, adds to the workload of the missions and takes time away from other engagements.

Despite the long list of challenges related to smallness, a corresponding set of mechanisms to cope with these challenges and some inherent advantages were also raised. The most commonly expressed merit of smallness was the degree of perceived impartiality that often comes along being small. Being perceived as “small and neutral” was said to help the resolutions proposed by small states be received more openly and with less suspicion than those proposed by bigger and more influential states. One of the interviewees framed this phenomenon in terms of small states not having “the political baggage” of the big players. These are the kinds of assets that the small states could and should enhance and develop further.

In a more specific sense, one small state representative found that the state’s foreign service benefitted from having exceptionally close relations to the country’s civil society, including its National Society. This was found to be largely due to the fact that the country was so small, as smallness was perceived to be a factor that allowed the state’s political representation to be intimately familiar with the various issues of its people, humanitarian or other. In general, civil society organisations have a wealth of knowledge and experience on various issues that are of primary importance to local communities, and National Societies possess invaluable perspective on humanitarian issues specifically. In order to benefit from their knowledge, close relations between the state and the civil society should be actively enhanced and made use of, both in general terms and also in relation to the International Conference of the RC/RC.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RC/RC CONFERENCE

Discussing the importance of the RC/RC conference to small states, it was found that two out of five states considered the conference to be very important, one considered it as important but was formerly unaware of its existence, one considered it as relatively important, whereas one found the conference to be relatively unimportant. The conference was perceived as an important agenda-setting forum where a lot of issues of primary importance to the state would be addressed. The states that perceived the conference in a such way consequently put more effort into taking part in the preparatory process. In turn, one interviewee stated that the conference was not of primary importance to their state, and correspondingly, their state did not put as much effort into the preparatory process.

For two states, particular agenda items were of interest. The items were gender and sexual violence, volunteers and the safety of the humanitarian staff, and detention in non-international armed conflicts. Generally most emphasis is put on the agenda items that fall within the primary interests of the state. However, it seemed that there was also some room for maneuver as the diplomats could pay particular attention to the agenda items that were of personal interest to them. The extent to which diplomats could rely on their own consideration seemed to depend on the established procedures of a given state, and to some effect on the initiatives that a diplomat was willing to take. However, especially where the connections to a mission's capital were more loose due to limited resources or issues with communication, the margin of discretion of the state representatives may be exceptionally wide.

Also of interest to the states was getting to know the overall procedures of the conference, through taking part in the formal and informal preparatory meetings and planning to attend

the conference itself. This approach was adopted by states that either had not participated in the International Conference of the RC/RC before, and therefore simply wanted to know what the conference was about, or by states that had not been actively preparing for the conference. Similarly, one interviewee stated that the primary interest for their state in attending the conference was to learn more about the overall work of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

One state was prepared to put effort into networking at the conference, as well as to showcase the state's best practices in the realm of humanitarian law. The state in question had been strongly involved in the preparatory process and had put a lot of time and effort into the preparations. It seemed that because of this, it was feasible for the state to make an ambitious and yet realistic plan for its participation at the conference itself. The plan included introducing a junior staff member to the conference and negotiation procedures, taking part in the side events, and observing the way in which the state's long preparation process would bear fruit at the conference itself.

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE

The means of preparing for the conference varied strongly according to the level of importance attached to the conference and the resources that the state missions had at their disposal. One of the interviewees whose state had not been too involved in the preparations, explicitly stated that this was the normal pattern that dictates states' preparation for conferences, as states are not able to take active part in every conference.

The formal aspect of the preparatory process included thematic and procedural meetings, as well as preceding conferences leading up to the main conference in Geneva. Two out of five interviewees reported that they attended the formal meetings and two had participated in the

preceding conferences. One interviewee also explicitly said that their mission had participated in the Group of Ambassadors, a group designated by the Standing Commission of the RC/RC, where the participating missions had the chance to influence the preparatory process to the conference.

The formal meetings were considered an important part of the overall preparation to the conference. However, the interviewees said very little about the actual content of the meetings. In addition, some confusion exists regarding the various humanitarian events organised around the world by different organisations and subsequently some of them were treated without distinction. In particular, the misunderstanding became explicit in the correspondence between the Commissioner's office and the small states, where the World Humanitarian Summit organised by the United Nations to take place in Istanbul in early 2016 was frequently conflated with the RC/RC conference. Since it was a mission that had been more intensely involved in the preparation process that committed this misunderstanding, there is reason to presume that the preparatory processes to conferences discussing similar issues might to some extent get mixed elsewhere as well.

In a sense, where preparations are treated interchangeably, an additional challenge is posed to the analysis. It is more difficult to conclude how much of the preparation efforts were in fact meant to prepare the mission for the RC/RC conference, and which were for some other purpose. Yet, this misunderstanding can be telling of the actual nature of the preparatory processes. It can well be that some of the informal negotiations are done in the realms of other related conferences. The diplomats attending the conferences are largely the same and also often know each other personally. As the most important negotiations in general take place in informal meetings and outside of the actual conference settings, attending other

related conferences and their associated negotiations could, in a sense, be validly seen as a part of the preparatory process for another conference.

The lack of knowledge and resources were factors that decreased the level of participation in the formal preparatory process. One of the interviewees stated that the possibility of participating in the formulation of agenda items had been offered, but due to their lack of capacity they did not take part in the effort. In another case, the information had not reached the mission and therefore they had not been able to take part in the preparations. The lack of knowledge was most likely caused by the antecedent lack of resources that impedes the processing of information flows.

In addition to formal meetings, informal meetings and briefings arranged by the conference organisers were deemed important as well. In particular, the informal meetings were seen as a key channel for establishing relations with the organisers and for familiarising with the overall process. Here the most active role was played by the conference organisers who reached out to the participants and sought to support the missions in their preparations.

Preparations varied also in terms of the time scale. Naturally, the missions that had the most active role in the preparatory process started their preparations at a very early stage, soon after the previous RC/RC conference in 2011. The states that were not planning to play a very active role consequently started their preparations later. To one mission, the main way to prepare was to explore the conference website, which shows a much lower level of engagement with the process.

It seemed that none of the state missions cooperated closely with their respective National Societies in preparation for the conference. A couple of the interviewees were not sure if such

cooperation took place, but stated that in any case it would happen between the capital and the National Society. One of the interviewees perceived such cooperation to be very important and happened to have close relations to their country's National Society. However, by the time of the interview, such cooperation had not yet materialized and the mission did not have a plan on how to initiate cooperation. Another interviewee said that copies of their correspondence with the capital were sent to their National Society by the capital's initiative. There is most definitely room for further exploring cooperation possibilities between the small states and their National Societies.

Due to the issues of limited resources, remoteness, difficulties in communication and etc. it seems understandable that the state missions abroad and their respective National Societies do not spend much resources in trying to coordinate among themselves. However, as was done by at least one of the states, the capital has a crucial role in coordinating correspondence and harmonizing the approach, as well as the agenda of the state and its respective National Society. The conference is a unique opportunity for states and their National Societies to get together and discuss the pressing humanitarian issues and concerns. The National Societies have a wealth of knowledge and experience in these contexts, which is precisely the kind of human capacity that the interviewees said their missions were lacking. The states, on the other hand, arguably have a much stronger influence on other states, since states in general take the words of other states more seriously than of any other actors.

Similar to preparations, the meanings attached to the actual participation at the conference varied from one state to another. It was most common to approach the conference as a learning experience, to understand the process and to get an overall view of conference practices. As mentioned above, one mission was also planning to send a junior diplomat to

learn about the conference and its mechanisms. Other ideas relating to participation included networking, advocating the state's activities, learning from the practices of other countries and observing how contributions the state had made in the preparatory phase would come to benefit the state.

The fact that none of the interviewees expressed a firm intention to participate in cooperation with other small states was notable. Many of the interviewees referred to some of the general issues relating to groupings and alliances, namely to questions of whether enough of a common ground for cooperation exists, the need to make compromises and sometimes to diverge from the state's interests, as well as the overall difficulty of accommodating the diverse interests of small states. One of the interviewees was explicitly of the opinion that for small states in general there are not enough of common denominators to work as an alliance.

However, two of the interviewees found that overall it is beneficial for small states to work together as groups. Such cooperation was seen to help to have their voice heard and to bring negotiating power to small states. The group of the small island states, in particular, was found to be largely functional. Nevertheless, the two missions who elaborated on this, had not yet looked into the possibilities of cooperating with other states in the framework of the conference of the RC/RC, but said that they might explore the option. The lack of cooperation seems to be partly due to the general lack of resources of the small states, but also partly due to a level of skepticism towards the value of cooperation. There is certainly potential for further research on the pros and cons of cooperation through small states' alliances in specific intergovernmental settings. In addition, the role of organisations such as the Commonwealth Secretariat in coordinating the participation of small states could be further studied.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONFERENCE ORGANISATION

The interviewees were asked to suggest any improvements in the conference organisation that they would like to see taking place to better facilitate their participation. Much of the recommendations that were presented had to do with communication and information sharing. One broad and important issue raised was the need to systematize communication by creating consistent communication procedures. It would be helpful for the missions that struggle with the tremendous information flow to be aware of a consistent communication pattern and to know the channels through which the relevant information is shared, and through which it can be found. It seems that many international conferences have room for improvement in this aspect. Hopes were also raised regarding the possibility of harmonizing the ways of communication among different conference organisers. However, as such a level of coordination would be extremely difficult to achieve, a good first step would be to harmonize the communications of one conference organiser.

More specific practical suggestions relating to information sharing were raised as well. Publishing reports of expert meetings was a practice that was perceived to be highly beneficial to small states that do not have the resources to attend many of the meetings in person. By way of reporting, the state missions can be kept up to date on the developments within the meetings. Other suggestions included maintaining informative conference websites with real-time updates during conferences, as well as webcasting open meetings. These sorts of practices assist small states to prepare for conferences, as they do not need to expend too many resources. In addition, they allow for greater flexibility to take part in meetings that are of most importance to the state while staying adequately informed of the content of other meetings of secondary importance. Lastly, an SMS service to send updates on the conference proceedings, such as delays in programme and etc. was also deemed to be useful.

Organising pre-conference workshops was found useful to help new attendees familiarize themselves with both the conference procedures and the subject matter. This was expressed by one of the interviewees, whose mission had been actively meeting with the conference organisers in the preparation process. Yet, these workshops should be organised in a flexible manner so as to not further increase the workload of small states. The number of conferences and events is too big for small states as it is, and therefore piling on additional engagements would do little to improve the situation. However, when organised well, such workshops could potentially also be hubs for effective information sharing and flexible cooperation among small states. Through such workshops, small states' diplomats could potentially combine some of their efforts without necessarily building a lasting alliance that requires a lot of maintenance.

Last but certainly not least, providing financial support was mentioned by three interviewees. This is needed in particular to cover the costs of travel and accommodation of any additional staff sent from the capitals. Based on the interview findings, the main reason for not receiving additional staff and experts from the capitals is budget constraints, and yet additional human resources are what the missions need the most.

Also, linking back to the issues of information sharing, a very important related element is the availability of information regarding scholarship possibilities. As small missions struggle with

navigating the information stream, it is of crucial importance to make the information regarding scholarship possibilities transparent and easily accessible to them. A consistent way of sharing information is again of use here.

“We will welcome any decision to put in place a mechanism that highlights the interest of small states during the deliberation

NATIONAL SOCIETIES

PERCEPTION OF SMALLNESS

All of the representatives of National Societies interviewed considered their National Societies to be small. Unlike states, however, National Societies were more likely to describe their “smallness” in terms of its effects, including instability, vulnerability, and a greater focus on domestic challenges, rather than international challenges. Some National Societies did define their smallness in terms of quantitative indicators such as GDP, population size, and geographic area. One interviewee mentioned that even though they came from a country whose GDP was representative of a middle-income country, this did not line up with the actual resource challenges they faced. All in all, however, National Societies were less likely to refer to quantitative indicators in their self-identification as small. This could relate to for instance the fact that the concept of a small national society does not exist and it has not been analytically problematized or institutionalized in practice.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RC/RC CONFERENCE

National Societies were more likely than states to focus on content in mentioning what was at stake for them in the conference. This is likely because, as part of the RC/RC movement, their daily work is more closely intertwined with the subject matter of the conference. Among the issues that were identified as being important were the environment and other long-term “emerging” issues, protection of volunteers, the “Healthcare in Danger” agenda item, and migration. Interestingly the National Society that mentioned migration did so in contrast with the focus of their corresponding government, which was on migration management as opposed to migrants as a vulnerable group. This reflects a crucial difference in the positioning of National Societies to their corresponding states, with states being more likely

to have a greater commitment to the principle of state sovereignty and to view the issues through that lens.

Like their small state counterparts, several National Societies also mentioned the conference as an opportunity for learning, training, networking, and having their voices heard on an international stage. The RC/RC conference represents a unique opportunity for the National Societies to take part in international negotiations where their presence is built into the conference design itself. Not only do they have the chance to participate next to their respective states, but also to discuss with representatives of other states and National Societies about issues that comprise the essence of their work.

CHALLENGES

The National Societies identified a number of key obstacles that hinder their participation in the conference and their ability to influence the discussion and larger decision-making process. The most commonly mentioned hurdles were the constraints of having a small budget and limited human capacity, particularly in relation to areas of expertise, limiting their ability to engage meaningfully with all the issues-areas raised in the conference. Another important aspect that arose from the interviews was the idea that the participation of small National Societies in the conference is perceived as “insignificant” when compared with other actors. This seemed to be especially true for National Societies of states that are not currently engaged in armed conflict. One interviewee mentioned armed conflict as an area that gets a high level of attention in the conference at the expense of other “emerging issues” such as migration and climate change. The effects of this perception of insignificance are further compounded by a corresponding self-perception,

“Our complexities remain unseen”

which can deter small National Societies from engaging with the conference to the full extent possible because they do not feel that any contributions they would make would carry significant weight.

Interviewees also mentioned that small National Societies are likely to have limited interaction with other components of the RC/RC movement. Where National Societies participate in regional groups, one interviewee mentioned that being clustered in this way could actually minimize the opportunities for advancing their own interests if there is a gap between their objectives and the priorities identified on a regional level. Issues important to bigger countries and their corresponding National Societies “crowd out” the issues of interest to small countries.

In the case of some small island states in particular, geographic isolation was also identified as a challenge to coordination with other states and/or regional mechanisms. The National Societies of small island states identified similar issues related to geographic isolation as those mentioned by small states.

PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE

“I simply don’t have the capacity to prepare much at all” As a result of the obstacles outlined above, the majority of the interviewees mentioned that they were unable to engage with the issues fully and practice a minimum level of preparation in the conference. Many had not begun the preparation process at the time of the interview. One interviewee mentioned that their preparations were typically done at the last minute. More than one interviewee noted their participation through the election of new members of the Standing Committee, perhaps because it is perceived as an easier way to participate in conference mechanisms when

compared to engagement in substance of the conference, which is perceived as requiring a high level of background knowledge and/or technical expertise. However, another National Society noted that putting up candidates would require too much follow up than they have the capacity for. One National Society noted that they undergo a review of what was done at the last conference as a key part of their preparation.

Three interviewees described specific techniques that they employ to cope with the limited financial and human resources at their disposal. One National Society mentioned that they derived benefits from being part of a regional group and being able to tap into those resources. Another National Society noted that although their National Society independently lacked the funds to attend the conference, they had appealed to larger National Societies for support. A third mentioned that they had an officer who liaises with their country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in advance of the conference in order to develop a common understanding of the format of the conference, procedures, and agenda items, and to share resources.

Other “best practices” for small National Societies were mostly raised in the context of recommendations to the conference organizers,

“Link with larger groups and draw on those resources”

however many could be implemented by the National Societies directly. These include the establishment of a horizontal coordination structure with “like” National Societies, and the establishment of a joint national committee between the government and the National Society that would allow both entities to coordinate their efforts in preparing for the conference.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONFERENCE ORGANISATION

The most commonly raised recommendation was for the development of a forum for small National Societies, where issues of common interest could be identified and then presented

and discussed at the conference. The potential criteria for inclusion in this forum is undefined, but one interviewee mentioned a forum of small island states similar to the Small Island Developing States group of governments.

The documentation associated with the conference was also widely identified as an area of possible improvement. Conference materials could be made more “user friendly” by being shorter and written in a less convoluted style that would be more easily digestible to most readers. There are some discrepancies to be found here however, as one interviewee recommended that conference organizers limit the paperwork sent to National Societies, while another interviewee reported a shortage of information during the lead up to the conference. These differences demonstrate the inherent challenges in communicating information to a wide variety of stakeholders with different needs and preferences in receiving information. Therefore, although suggestions for improving information sharing are made in this report, it is clear that it is nearly impossible to fully satisfy all parties.

“Help to explain our role to the government and get more government respect”

In addition, it was recommended that there be a smaller number of agenda items so that conference participants would have fewer issues to familiarize themselves with. Also in reference to agenda items, one interviewee mentioned that topics could be better adapted to the concerns of National Societies, rather than governments and international institutions.

A third set of recommendations to conference organizers dealt with guidance on how to be more effective in preparation for and participation in the conference, in particular in relation to tools that facilitate cooperation with governments. The suggestion arose from one interview that this could come in the form of visits in the months leading up to the conference

by regional delegations, with the aim to go through proposed topics and provide advice in helping National Societies to develop inputs. Another interviewee proposed the idea of short videos that would be produced at the global or regional level and could be used by National Societies to generate interest and support for the conference from their governments and other partners.

Finally, four interviewees mentioned funding mechanisms to bring staff to the conference. An alternative suggestion was establishing mechanisms of remote participation in order to allow for the involvement of technical teams to provide needed expertise. Similar suggestions were raised in the interviews with small state missions.

CONCLUSION

As the founder and keeper of modern humanitarian principles, the RC/RC movement is also the largest humanitarian network in the world, made up of state signatories to the Geneva Conventions and various components of the movement, with National Societies being key among them. The International Conference of the RC/RC brings together representatives of these entities every four years with the aim to re-engage, update, and renew the principles governing humanitarian response and the role of states and other actors in situations of natural disaster and armed conflict.

As such, the RC/RC conference is a unique forum that seeks to establish common ground among a diverse set of stakeholders. Connected to this aim, the conference organisers endeavour to amplify the voices of all actors, and with the commissioning of this study, turn a

particular spotlight on the participation of small states and their corresponding National Societies.

Indeed, the interviews conducted revealed a number of particular challenges faced by small states and National Societies. Among the challenges were lack of human resources, financial and technical constraints, and difficulties in effectively influencing international decision-making. Many of the challenges were mutually reinforcing and therefore they need to be assessed in relation to each other. These challenges, together with a set of best practices to respond to them, are further addressed in the recommendations at the end of this report.

The normative assumptions adopted in this research project, namely that small states are inherently at a disadvantage and that improved participation for small states is valuable by definition, are worth acknowledging. Although the findings of this research seem to support this assumption, a separate study could challenge this further, for instance by looking more closely at small states in relation to their larger counterparts and by engaging with the strategies for measuring influence identified in the literature review.

Another possible area for further inquiry is related to the value of alliances on which our findings are inconclusive. In addition, the design of mechanisms between governments and their corresponding National Societies is another interesting area of research that could warrant further investigation. It seems that greater coordination between states and their National Societies could carry many benefits for both, and therefore it might be worth exploring possible avenues for supporting such coordination on national and international level.

Ultimately a number of key recommendations were identified. These are directed to small states and National Societies attending the conference, as well as for conference organisers. The recommendations for small states and National Societies are based on a combination of best practices identified by the interviewees, as well as on suggestions on ways to capitalise on possible strategic advantages possessed by small states and small National Societies. The recommendations to conference organisers are based on comments from interviewees regarding hurdles posed by elements of the conference organisation, as well as things that worked particularly well in both previous RC/RC conferences and in other conferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR SMALL STATES

- **Making use of the perceived neutrality, impartiality and other advantages of smallness**
 - E.g. through actively proposing resolutions in order to forward the state's interests while simultaneously initiating dialogue and mediating between the bigger states
- **Investigating avenues for small state cooperation**
 - E.g. through *ad hoc* groupings and associations of small states
 - Such cooperation can bring power to the voice of small states, as well as to decrease the amount of efforts spent, subsequently releasing the state's capacity to forward their agenda
- **Coordinating with the country's National Society to benefit from the wealth of expertise on humanitarian issues that they possess**
 - This can respond to the lack of human capacity of the state missions and improve the quality of their participation

FOR NATIONAL SOCIETIES

- **Beginning preparation for the conference at an earlier stage**
 - This can allow National Societies to be more strategic, actually minimising the amount of resources used
 - By participating in preparatory meetings, National Societies who feel that the issues relevant to them are under-represented can advocate for agenda items that are of importance of them
- **Coordinating with other components of the movement**
 - Including the Standing Commission and other National Societies that may be able to support smaller National Societies
- **Liaising with state agencies to share resources**
 - Generates benefits for both parties as it permits states to tap into a greater knowledge of the issues that can typically be found among components of the RC/RC, and provides National Societies with new avenues to advance humanitarian advocacy and the possibility of tapping into alternative funding streams

FOR CONFERENCE ORGANISERS

- **Support states and National Societies in their efforts to implement the best practices outlined above**
- **Offering information services to conference participants with limited resources**
 - Such as publishing reports of expert meetings, maintaining informative and up-to-date conference websites, webcasting open meetings, and providing an SMS service to send updates on the conference proceedings
- **Systematizing information sharing to conference participants**
 - In order to help small actors to organise their preparation and enhance their ability to integrate new information and respond
 - Including ensuring awareness of scholarship opportunities for potential beneficiaries
- **Organising pre-conference workshops for new conference participants**
 - To allow for familiarizing with the procedures and the subject matter, as well as for networking and potential coordination among states and National Societies

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ANNEX

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Permanent Missions

Permanent Mission of the Union of the Comoros to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Fiji to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Seychelles to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva

National Societies

Bahrain Red Crescent Society
Cyprus Red Cross Society
Maldives Red Cross Society
Malta Red Cross Society
Seychelles Red Cross Society
Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society
Vanuatu Red Cross Society

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Do you consider your state to be a small state and what does this mean to you?
 - a. Challenges and benefits?
 - b. Participation in small state organizations/ fora?
2. What is at stake for you in the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent?
 - a. What are your main objectives and expectations?
 - b. Which agenda items are of particular importance for you?
 - c. What do you anticipate to be the main take-away of the conference for your state/NS?
3. Can you describe your preparation for the 32nd Conference?
 - a. When did you start preparing/ what is your preparation timeline?
 - b. What resources are you committing to the preparation for this conference?
 - c. Have you coordinated with your own NS/State in preparation for the conference or do you anticipate doing so?/ Are you aware if your State has coordinated with your NS in preparation for the conference or if they anticipate doing so?
 - d. Have you submitted any pledges? If so were they collective with your state/NS or with other states/NS? Did you lobby other actors who did not sign on?
 - e. Did you propose any agenda items? Are there any issues that did not make it onto the agenda that you wish were being discussed?

- f. Did you respond to the questionnaire from the 31st conference? If so, do you see your responses from that questionnaire reflected in the 32nd conference's agenda?
- g. Did you propose any workshops or side events? If so, how was the proposal received?
- h. Is your state participating in the Group of Ambassadors? If no, what has prevented you from participating? If yes, can you describe this participation to us? (States Only)
- i. Will you take part in the Council of Delegates on December 7th? Did you take part in the Council of Delegates in 2013? (National Societies Only)
- j. Have you attended the meetings of the International Federation Governing Board? (Board Members Only)
- k. Will you attend the briefing with legal advisors in September?
4. Can you describe how you anticipate your participation in the actual conference?
 - a. Commissions?
 - b. Workshops?
 - c. Drafting Committee?
 - d. Interaction with corresponding State/NS?
 - e. Possibility to make interventions and comments?
 - f. Possibility to take part in all the events that are most important to your state/NS?
5. What are the major obstacles you face as a small state/NS when it comes to your preparation and participation in the conference?
 - a. Have you received all the information you have needed to prepare for the conference? Has there been any important information that has not reached you or reached you too late?
 - b. Have you experienced problems cooperating with the other participants, (regional fora, other small states, etc.)?
 - c. Have you received adequate support from the conference organizers?
6. As far as you know from your own experience or the experience of your predecessors, what has been your state's/NS's experience with past RC/RC conferences?
 - a. Have there been any obstacles to your participation?
 - b. As a representative of a small state/NS, has your voice been heard when making comments or interventions?
 - c. Has there been cooperation or coordination with other small states/ small NS during the conference? Has it been functional?
 - d. Do you find that you have received additional benefits from participating in the conference? Is participating in the Conference useful to you? For instance, have you had the chance to expand your networks there?
 - e. Have there been any changes (positive or negative) in the set-up from previous conferences that impact your participation this year?
7. If you compare your participation for this conference to other inter-governmental conferences, what do you see are the similarities and differences in your delegation's ability to participate and to influence?
8. Do you have any suggested changes that could be made and that would help improve your participation and the participation of small states/NS more generally?
9. Do you find that the categorization of "small state" has value? In the context of the 32nd international conference or in other international conferences/fora?
10. Is there anything you would still like to add? Do you feel like we have covered all the important aspects?