Listening to volunteer experiences
Users guide

This material is to be used for a discussion on the experiences of volunteers working in conflict and emergency situations. The quotes are drawn from a larger research material of the ViCE Initiative – for more detailed information and instructions, please visit www.rcrcvice.org

Print the material double sided (in colour). Cut the papers into postcards, this print set contains 10 different quotes with a total of 80 handouts.

This exercise can take between 30-60 minutes.

Divide the participants into smaller groups of 3-5 people and provide them with 1-3 quotes each.

Instruct them to read the quotes 2-3 times before discussing the questions in their groups

1. How does this quote make you feel?
2. What issues does this quote raise?
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Bring back the participants to a plenary discussion. If possible, bring out input from the participants with post-its that can be grouped to visualize different topics.

Good luck!
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HUB Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies
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“And we live in dangerous neighbourhoods, so there's always that fear of leaving the house and knowing that we might not be able to go back. The best case scenario, as my colleague said, is to be mugged, and the worst, well, to go back in a box. So there's always that fear and, the way things are going, the situation in the country, it's bad.” (Male volunteer)
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(Male volunteer)
Conflicts in this region were different from those in X-region as ours are conflicts between arm forces but those in X-region are based on ethnicity. As we have to pass through the mine fields, ours can be said more dangerous. In a training held at the capital, I had a chance to meet volunteers working in X-region and share experiences with them. We realized our projects are riskier as we had to work in battle fields.” (Male volunteer)

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“Once we are on a mission to give vaccinations in villages. They provide lunchboxes to everyone except us. We had not had any meals. We were very disappointed. I wondered why they didn’t give us any meals. So, we came back feeling sad. I also told my seniors about it. They asked us why we had not told them. But we had. We did not know why they discriminate us because we were in Red Cross Red Crescent uniforms. They gave the meals to others except us. We did the same work but we were treated differently.” (Female volunteer).

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“There were no lights at night and none on our boat. We reached near the general’s quarters. An order was given to shoot us. They were putting searchlights on us and because of the reflection tapes on my uniform, they saw us and stopped the order. That was the time I was saved from an unfortunate death. So what we need is transportation and communication. Since we don’t have any communication devices, our lives can be in danger. And since our boat does not have a light, our flag could not be seen. That was very dangerous. Even if we are in military occupied territory, if we are delayed while travelling, it is dangerous for us to sleep on the road. We have to work in dangerous conditions.” (Male volunteer)

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“My village is very remote; it is far from the railroad and the roads. You have to go there by foot. I have to leave behind my wife, who is 30 and my three children. The oldest is only 6 years old. They are 6 years old, 4 years old, and 7 months old. Because I am passionate about this work, they can’t prevent me.” (Male volunteer).

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“I also provide healthcare service for all the cattle and animals in town. Every day I go around the town to give injections to the animals. In the morning, I run a training course about raising piglets and pig castration. In the afternoon, I explain the soldiers everything about the Red Cross Red Crescent. I also give an explanation of ICRC and its current activities. I request them not to shoot cars with Red Cross Red Crescent flags but to take care of them.” (Male volunteer).

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“Well, one of the challenges is to have to leave our families at the time of an emergency, or a natural disaster, or floods which are so common at the port; that knowing that the area we live in gets flooded, knowing that where we are is a little safer that our neighbours or other people, nevertheless...the family and the Red Cross Red Crescent. So, this is very difficult you have to choose fast because it's a matter of deciding whom I'm going to leave waiting for me: my family or the Red Cross Red Crescent. So, it's difficult making a choice. That's why I have a brother and we split. One day he stays with the family and I go to the Red Cross Red Crescent, or one day he goes to the Red Cross Red Crescent and I stay with the family.” (Male volunteer)

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“Because suddenly when we help a lot of people, when there is a huge disaster, sometimes we forget our own volunteers that can be damaged. And they provide humanitarian aid to a family who has a need. But also to the internal, makes the need of the volunteer invisible, while is having the same needs at that moment that the beneficiary that is being given. So it is there that we have to visualize the needs of our volunteers, categorizing them. And to know in these countries logically, that sometimes, to the one we give has the same needs as the giver. And we must make a balance in the humanitarian aid.” (Volunteer President).

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“Despite that, despite being living with risk, in the middle of the risk, we have many volunteers that come from pretty dangerous areas, but by the fact of wearing the emblem they feel protected. But not only they feel protected but also they do not feel part of reality. Then, well that also applies to us the envoys, because I’ve felt it. Then, I come in my senses and say what is happening to me? I am also vulnerable. I can also be a victim; the fact of wearing an emblem is not, is not a bulletproof vest.” (Female volunteer)

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