



# Social media

guidelines for IFRC staff

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# INTRODUCTION

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Communities have the power to make the world a better place. We know this, because we see it happen every day through the work of the volunteers in our 187 National Societies.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) embraces the fact that today's communities exist not only in the physical world, but also online. The IFRC leadership recognizes the wide reach that communication in online communities can have – both positively and negatively. It encourages all staff members to use new and social media responsibly to communicate about topics within their areas of expertise – as long as it doesn't interfere with their primary duties or the security of personnel or IT systems.

While communication on behalf of the organization is the primary responsibility of the communications department, the senior management team recognizes that other staff members can also further the organization's goals by using social networks.

These guidelines are designed to provide helpful, practical advice and also to protect the IFRC, secretariat staff and Red Cross Red Crescent staff worldwide.

If you have any questions, please contact the external communications unit in Geneva ([media.service@ifrc.org](mailto:media.service@ifrc.org)).

## Who these guidelines are for

If you are using social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr or YouTube, if you have your own blog or if you are posting comments on other people's blogs, then these guidelines are for you.

If you would like to know more about social media in general, please take a look at the social media toolkit on FedNet. This document contains helpful information on tools that exist and how to use them effectively.

## Why "personal" and "private" are not the same

While communication through social media is primarily a personal matter, this is not the same as it being private. In a lot of cases, written conversations inside these networks can be found through search engines such as Google. Even in cases where only your contacts can see what you write, there is a possibility that one of them will forward what you say and make it visible to a wider audience. As a result, personal conversation within social networks should be considered public rather than private.

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# BEST PRACTICE

These guidelines consist of two parts: first, best practice and recommendations by the communications department. This is followed by a summary of the rules and obligations that are already in place and how they apply to staff use of social media.

## Best practice

### 1. Be a good ambassador

While it is everyone's personal decision whether to use social media networks and tools or not, you should always be aware that your behaviour and opinions reflect on the organization.

### 2. Get advice

If your unit, programme or department wants to use social media to promote IFRC activities, please contact the external communications unit in Geneva ([media.service@ifrc.org](mailto:media.service@ifrc.org)), which has the lead on social media activities for the secretariat and can ensure consistency and help with best practice.


### 3. Be passionate

Passion is contagious. Share the passion you feel for your work and talk about the successes you have been part of.

### 4. Use a disclaimer

If you have a blog and talk about work-related issues, add a disclaimer to each page making clear that the views you express are yours alone. For personal blogs unrelated to work issues, you are still encouraged to include such a disclaimer given your affiliation with the organization. Be aware that this disclaimer doesn't free you from the obligations you have under the [Code of Conduct](#) or the [Fundamental Principles](#).

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 **Example: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent positions, strategies or opinions of my employer."**

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If you have an "about me" page, we advise against using photos where you stand in front of one of the emblems since this might give the web site or blog an official appearance.

### 5. Think of CNN, your mother and your boss

Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on CNN, being asked about by your mother or having to justify to your boss.

### 6. Add value

The IFRC believes that the sharing of information and experiences benefits the whole humanitarian community and ultimately the beneficia-

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# BEST PRACTICE

ries we serve. Feel free to share and discuss your experiences, for example, in vaccination campaigns, field communication, the building of transitional shelters, etc. If IFRC staff is perceived to be knowledgeable and helpful, this will reflect positively on you and on the organization.

Refrain from mentioning internal and/or confidential information. If you are unsure, consult the owner of the information you want to share. Also, avoid commenting on the work of colleagues in this or other organizations that is outside your field of expertise.

## 7. Feel free to correct others but stick to the facts

The IFRC and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are complicated organizations, and we work in complicated legal and operational contexts. People frequently misunderstand or choose to misunderstand us. If you come across a misrepresentation of the Movement, feel free to identify yourself and organizational affiliation and correct their mistake but do so with respect and with facts.

If you don't feel comfortable doing it yourself, please contact the external communications unit in Geneva ([media.service@ifrc.org](mailto:media.service@ifrc.org)).



**Example:** In early 2009 a newspaper reported incorrectly that a National Society would abolish the cross completely and replace it with the crystal. A number of bloggers then spread this information through Twitter and other channels. The media unit replied with a short message along these lines: "That is not correct. The red crystal is an additional emblem and will not replace the cross or the crescent. States and National Societies that currently use and want to keep using the red cross or the red crescent will continue to do so. Please find more information on our web site: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/the-movement/emblems/>"

In most cases people won't mind being corrected and they will frequently even distribute the correction themselves. However, if you get the feeling that someone deliberately misinterprets everything you say, just ignore them.

## 8. Be the first to admit a mistake

If you have made a mistake, be upfront about it. Admit and correct the mistake. If you correct an earlier post in a blog do so visibly, e.g. by using the strikethrough function and adding a paragraph that explains the update at the end.



**Example:** "Update, 5 July 2009: My team delivered 500 tons of widgets to Alphaville - not 5,000 tons as I wrote previously."

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# BEST PRACTICE


## 9. Use your best judgment

If you are about to publish something that gives you pause, then do not publish it. Try to identify what concerns you before proceeding. If it is related to the Movement, ask your supervisor for a second opinion. Keep in mind that the content you publish is ultimately your responsibility.

## 10. Protect your own privacy

A lot of web sites allow you some form of control over who can see your material. Adjust these features to your comfort level.

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 **Example:** On Facebook you can control your privacy settings under “Privacy Settings”. We recommend that you set most of these settings to “Friends” or use the “Custom” option for even greater control.

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## 11. Keep security in mind

Be particularly careful with what you are discussing online if you are in an operational context. Please make sure that you have read and follow your delegation’s security requirements. Never talk about routes or times of planned convoys or distribution of goods. If in doubt, talk to the security unit or a security delegate. Never post personal details such as the home addresses of yourself or colleagues. Bear in mind that personal details – these include names and pictures – of local staff members can be very security sensitive in many operational areas. To guard against burglaries, do not post information on when you are travelling or away from your duty post.

## 12. Give credit

When using IFRC photographs and videos, make sure to include proper attribution along with a link to [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org). Media embedded in blogs, for example, must credit the appropriate copyright owner (IFRC, National Society, photographer, etc.). When you link to IFRC media on social web sites such as YouTube and Flickr, the attribution will already be present on the page.

If you plan on shooting photos and videos, especially with amateur equipment like FLIP cameras, take time to review the helpful tips and information provided in the IFRC Photo Guidelines and IFRC Video Guidelines.

## 13. Be polite

You will likely encounter various points-of-view in the social realm, especially when pertaining to sensitive topics. Be considerate and find ways to respectfully disagree, if needed. (Refer to the Code of Conduct.)

Many social networking sites also have their own rules of use and etiquette, so please familiarize yourself with them.

# EXISTING RULES AND OBLIGATIONS

## 14. Spread the word and connect with your colleagues

Connect with your colleagues through social networks, and share their success stories as well as your own. To help you get started, we have included links to the IFRC's most active social media profiles in the appendix.

## Existing rules and obligations

### 1. Observe neutrality

Don't get involved with political initiatives. The [Code of Conduct for IFRC staff](#) (Rule 14) requires you to:

*"not publicly express any opinions on events connected with political affairs or engage in political activities that could reflect adversely on the impartiality, neutrality or independence of the Federation, e.g., public support of a political party."*

In the context of social media, it is important to remember that the Code of Conduct applies not only when you represent the IFRC or during working hours but around the clock – even when you are on leave. Please keep in mind that the Code of Conduct also applies to “all accompanying family members covered under the Federation’s legal status” and that it is your responsibility to ensure that they are following it.

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**Example:** Following the elections in Alphaland, the opposition claims that the results were rigged and starts a campaign on Facebook and Twitter. They ask users to modify their profile photo and to post messages in support of re-elections. As an IFRC staff member, you cannot take part in these or other related activities since this would be a violation of the principle of neutrality and the Code of Conduct.



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In addition to the Code of Conduct for IFRC staff, the [Fundamental Principles](#), the rules laid out in the [Handbook for Delegates](#), and the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief](#) apply as well.

### 2. Don't use the emblems or the IFRC logotype

You cannot use the emblems or the IFRC logotype as any part of your blog or social media profile. If you have any questions on this matter, please refer to the [emblem guidelines on FedNet](#).

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# EXISTING RULES AND OBLIGATIONS

## 3. Stay focused on your job

While the IFRC leadership encourages the use of social media for business purposes and recognizes that these can be a valuable resource, make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job responsibilities.

## 4. Keep your manager in the loop

Inform your manager of your work-related social media activities to ensure they are aware of and comfortable with the information you are sharing. Refer to the IFRC [Code of Conduct](#) (Rule 25) for questions concerning content rights.

## 5. Observe IT security rules

Don't download or install software that you find through social networks on your work computer. Please re-read the [Acceptable Use Policy for Information and Communications Technology](#) if you are not familiar with it and pay special attention to the parts about unacceptable use and personal use.

## 6. Respect privacy

Respect people's right to privacy and don't take photos or videos without their permission. Keep in mind that many people who have just been through a traumatic event are under shock and might say "yes" to something they might later regret. Even if you take photos or videos for personal use only, make sure that you respect the dignity of the people portrayed (See also: [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief](#)). If in doubt, don't post a photo or video. It is your job to protect vulnerable people, not to exploit them. Focus on positive images.

Don't post anything about minors that could lead to anyone identifying them or where they live. (See also: [IFRC Code of Conduct](#), rule 22.)

## 7. Be careful when quoting numbers of casualties

The Red Cross Red Crescent does not count dead or wounded. This information always comes from the authorities. If you are writing about casualties, clearly reference the source, e.g., the police or the ministry of health. Numbers are very attractive for the media and if you don't reference the numbers correctly, a personal blog post could quickly turn into a headline that reads "Red Cross says 10,000 dead in Alphaland".

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# APPENDIX

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## Selection of IFRC profiles and sites

We welcome you to connect with the IFRC via any of our social communications channels listed below:

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/RedCrossRedCrescent>

<http://www.facebook.com/RedCrossRedCrescentYouth>

YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/ifrc>

Flickr

<http://www.flickr.com/ifrc/>

Twitter

<http://twitter.com/Federation>

<http://twitter.com/idrl>

Google+

<http://gplus.to/IFRC>

Scribd

<http://www.scribd.com/RedCrossRedCrescent>

Blog

<http://ourworld-yourmove.org/>

## Credit

These guidelines built on similar documents produced by a wide range of organizations. We benefitted particularly from the efforts of the American Red Cross, the British Red Cross, IBM, Intel and Kivi Leroux Miller.

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Saving lives, changing minds.

