

The time is now for Governance in our community.

Joining the Red Cross in 1974 was to eventually open a gateway into the all too often uncomfortable topic of Human Rights. For me, at the time it was all about bandages, stretchers and being a part of an organisation based on preparedness for conflict (although no one went so far as to say that most of the victims of conflict are not treatable with what I might possess in my first aid bag).

It was not until the 1980's when I discovered that the Red Cross actually has Principles, as do many organisations and people, we hope. The Principles of the Red Cross are the foundation stone of what most organisations call their Mission Statement. For convenience they are divided into what are known as the seven fundamental principles, almost like the ten commandments of the christian churches. These ideals, in an ideal world, are there to inspire and direct, but are all too often forgotten in the every day truth of life.

Human insecurity is described by Dr David Roberts in his book "Human Insecurity" as global structures of violence. A global society which forces humans into spiralling debt and abstract poverty.

The observer reported on the 25th of September 2005 that Sonia Khatun, a 12 year old Indian girl, took her own life due to the shame of not being able to afford the one penny for her school lunch. She was a victim of social oppression constructed by her fellow humans. Only two years later 25,000 Indian farmers would commit suicide as a consequence of even more oppression as a consequence of the financial pressures of globalisation and falling profits and higher costs.

I was to spend over 25 years challenging the Red Cross and others for their role in conspiring perhaps unintentionally in this human oppression and failures in corporate governance. This culminated in May 2012 when the Public Accounts Committee of the National parliament of Ireland issuing a damning report following its detailed examination of the Irish Red Cross.

This report however was never made widely available to Red Cross members, such was their shame at its content.

We must however share the blame and share the shame of our role in global oppression and structures that cause human insecurity. Change must begin somewhere and we can begin by addressing governance within each and every community group at all levels with special focus on the community sector and within community organisations especially those who have been given public monies to carry out their duties.

The new governance code, albeit voluntary in Ireland, is a new beginning and the consequences can and will have far reaching effects on the global suffering of our fellow travellers on this spinning globe called earth.

Setting aside our prejudices and seeking only to do good may be an aspiration, but in doing so we might just save another Sonia Khutan from the shame of poverty and oppression.

Governance within community organisations can and does have far reaching consequences. So as to make change in a wider global context we must and should start somewhere. I am a believer and ardent advocate of accountability and this begins with our community.

“Gentlemen, someday you in America will be told the truth. In the meantime, we who have been on the housetops telling the truth have to suffer. We have to go down the dark days and the dark nights but we go there with the truth in our eyes and our hearts, and no lie upon our lips.” (Jim Larkin at his trial in the US being accused by Hoover of criminal anarchy.)

We must be the cause of change and governance and transparency is a start.