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The HELP-Courses - 20 Years of Successful Training and Networking

In 1986, the ICRC in conjunction with the WHO and the University in Geneva set up the HELP (Health Emergencies in Large Populations) course with the objective to improve the skills of health professionals in making decisions in complex emergencies.

Since the first HELP course, three main strategic orientations have been adopted:

- the first strategy was to decentralise the HELP course and to deliver it in countries close to operational assistance activities in Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa,

- the second strategy was to open the HELP course to persons who have experience in humanitarian actions and who occupy decision-making positions, but who do not have professional training in the field of health. This was done to broaden the dialogue about humanitarian assistance and provide non-health professionals with the necessary knowledge to better understand the consequences of health interventions and so to contribute to a better interdisciplinary approach in the field,

- the third strategy was to seek systematic collaboration with schools of public health in countries where the HELP course is being delivered. This was done with a view to having the schools take charge of organizing the course and progressively introducing the HELP course into their regular curricula.

While the main purpose of the course remains largely unchanged since its inception, a significant shift in emphasis was made in 1999 when ICRC formalized the legal and ethical components of the course, and created a distinct module called HELP II (Health, Ethics, Law and Policies) in order to sensitize participants to the legal framework in which they are working.

The course in Geneva is accredited within the tropEd network.

(<http://www.troped.org>)

Looking for new development. The next strategic orientation will be to look at ways to raise the HELP course to the Master Level. The rationale behind this strategic orientation is based on the link between Public Health and Human Security in Armed conflicts. In armed conflicts and internal disturbances, not only health issues are a

problem but also human rights violations. The link between this dimension and public health is obvious: prevention of forced displacements will prevent health problems, as will limiting the use of weapons..Therefore, public health becomes one of the major disciplines in managing "Human Rights Emergencies".

This is more or less translated in the concept of human security: access to health services, food security, access to water and hygienic environment, and also respect of individual physical and psychological integrity and community integrity. Therefore Public Health in Emergencies should be taught as a discipline dealing with all issues related to human security.

It will be approximately one year before this new development will be in place.