

## Advocacy Paper

### Advocacy Efforts of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The work of DRC is based on humanitarian principles and fundamental human rights. The objective of the organisation is to contribute to providing refugees and displaced persons with the protection they need and to promote durable solutions to problems related to their displacement. We pursue these goals through advocacy and through direct assistance when advocacy is not enough. This paper focuses on our advocacy efforts.

DRC has learned from experience that displacement generally compromises the fundamental rights of displaced persons. This is true regardless of whether the displaced persons are refugees as defined by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or whether other types of displaced persons are involved, e.g. internally displaced persons or irregular migrants. This is also true regardless of whether these people are displaced persons or refugees residing in Denmark and Europe or are displaced persons residing in areas of conflict around the world.

In our efforts to ensure fundamental rights, we plead the cause of refugees and displaced persons at national and international levels alike. We are spokespersons for refugees and displaced persons.

Our advocacy efforts can be carried out in many ways and take place in a wide variety of contexts. Yet generally speaking, the “space for advocacy” has shrunk, and has become more difficult and complicated in recent years. This is due to the rising politicisation of humanitarian aid that has occurred, at the same time that operational organisations’ access to displaced groups – especially internally displaced persons – has become more difficult and entails bigger security problems. In addition, authorities and local rulers are placing more and more restrictions on humanitarian aid efforts.

For this reason, it is important for DRC to continue and strengthen its advocacy efforts both in Denmark and around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This advocacy paper was adopted by the Danish Refugee Council’s Executive Committee in its meeting 8 September, 2010.

One of DRC's fundamental values is "humanity". This means that people take precedence over principles and politics and, consequently, that a given advocacy effort, in principle, must not prevent us from providing continued assistance to displaced persons.

In our actual work – not least when this takes place in areas of conflict around the world – DRC is often confronted with a number of dilemmas which require us to make difficult choices about when advocacy should and can take place, who should carry out the efforts and the nature of these efforts. In other words: How can we conduct our advocacy efforts without endangering aid being provided to groups in distress?

- Can we advocate the rights of displaced persons by ourselves?
- Can we advocate the rights of displaced persons if we join forces with others?
- Can we advocate the rights of displaced persons in the public sphere or should we carry out our advocacy through non-public channels?
- Is it at all possible for us to advocate the rights of displaced persons – without having to give up the very aid they require?

## Strengthened Advocacy

The Danish Refugee Council wishes to strengthen its advocacy efforts as much as possible, i.e. to optimally exploit the opportunities at any time to speak up for refugees and displaced persons. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to doing so by establishing a common perception of the concept of "advocacy" and a common starting point for these efforts throughout our organisation – from our project office in the Central African Republic and our Integration Network in Roskilde, Denmark, to our secretariat in Copenhagen.

This paper provides the basic definition and expands on a number of implications. Next, we have specified some general guidelines for DRC's advocacy efforts. A number of tools for our specific efforts are presented in an **annex** (not enclosed). These tools will be further developed in the years ahead.

## Definition

*The advocacy of DRC comprises the mindset, processes and activities aimed at influencing decision-makers, opinion-makers and the general public at local, regional and international levels for the purpose of protecting refugees and displaced persons and safeguarding their rights.*

## Implications

This definition has the following implications:

- Advocacy is a method for achieving the goals of DRC, but it is not a goal in itself.

- This method can be used to strengthen and heighten the awareness of organisations and groups of people (civil society) for the purpose of empowering them to become actively involved in advocacy efforts aimed at refugees and displaced persons.
- Advocacy is a catalyst for lasting change in policy, practice or law for the benefit of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.
- Advocacy often involves the selection and organisation of information for the purpose of creating the most convincing line of reasoning.
- Depending on the goal, advocacy can take place at local, regional, national and international levels.
- The group of decision-makers includes governments, politicians, government officials, the UN and others with the power to change policies and practice.
- Other target groups, primarily various segments of the population, should therefore be perceived as instruments for influencing decision-makers.
- Advocacy can have both a short-term and a long-term perspective.

Advocating the rights of refugees and displaced persons, as expressed by the definition, means to assist in strengthening their protection and in safeguarding their fundamental rights. These general endeavours manifest themselves differently depending on the specific contexts in which DRC is working.

### **Guidelines for the Advocacy of DRC**

In order to be capable of handling the dilemmas frequently confronting DRC in its advocacy efforts, these efforts must be included in our general strategic planning, and the following principles and considerations must be observed:

- People take precedence over principles and politics. This *humanitarian imperative* means that, in some instances, advocacy must give way to the provision of specific, necessary assistance to affected groups of refugees and displaced persons who would otherwise risk being cut off from the assistance provided by DRC and other humanitarian organisations.
- A given advocacy effort must be preceded by a thorough analysis to identify and assess the risk entailed by the advocacy effort – in terms of the continued assistance to the targeted refugees and displaced persons, in terms of staff safety; in terms of the operations of DRC; and in terms of the organisation's fundamental interests.
- The analysis should also suggest various possible ways to implement the advocacy effort (formal, informal, confrontational, indirect, etc.), and should also indicate relevant channels for the effort. In situations that are politically sensitive and in terms of security, it could be expedient for DRC to join forces with other players (e.g. NGOs, the UN, networks in civil society, etc.) or to turn over responsibility for the effort to others.

- The advocacy efforts should have a carefully defined target group and be based on a meticulous analysis of the target group's motives, interests and possibilities of exerting influence in relation to DRC's goals.

## Advocacy Tools

Activities/tools that can be put to use in advocacy efforts can be divided into two overall categories: activities which take place in the public sphere and activities which take place in closed forums.

### Public activities:

- websites;
- PR initiatives (articles, comments, op-ed articles, letters to the editor, other debate contributions, TV presentations, etc.);
- consultation responses;
- drafting of reports, studies, documentation, etc.;
- conferences, seminars, lectures, courses (as organiser or participant);
- public meetings and hearings;
- newsletters;
- field trips (the effect of seeing things with one's own eyes);
- campaigns;
- social media;
- information services targeting pupils and students.

### Non-public activities:

- lobbying through letters and face-to-face meetings;
- formal contact with ministries, authorities, international organisations, etc.;
- internal workshops and informal briefings;
- offers to and negotiations with authorities;
- general relationship-building with decision-makers and opinion-makers;
- PR lobbying;
- brush-up courses for employees.

## Conclusion

The objective of DRC is to strengthen its advocacy efforts as much as possible, without this having a detrimental effect on our potential to provide concrete assistance to refugees and displaced persons. This means that we must utilise to the full what we call our "space for advocacy". Therefore, we must exploit every opportunity to speak up for refugees and displaced persons, and we must be aware of the various methods that can be used to make this effort. In this context, we should improve the utilisation of the many practical lessons we have learned through our programmes' advocacy efforts. Also, we should further develop our ongoing work to link up our programmes' local and national

advocacy efforts with international efforts by collaborating with national and international networks.

This advocacy paper is the first step towards strengthening our organisational focus on advocacy, and it is our intention to update the paper on an ongoing basis to incorporate the lessons learned through our practical efforts.

**It is important to emphasise that it is not a question of whether DRC should do advocacy or not. Rather, the overall question is how this can be done, by which means, through which channels, etc., and this must continue to be the focus of our organisation.**