



Interview with Lazare W. Zoungrana

Secretary-general of the Burkinabe Red Cross Society*

Lazare W. Zoungrana has been doing humanitarian work for the Burkinabe Red Cross Society for more than twenty years and has been its secretary-general since 2010.

Trained in sociology, with a research master's degree in information and communication science, Mr Zoungrana has brought his skills to a range of humanitarian activities, from development and emergency programmes to the organizational development and capacity-building of the Burkinabe Red Cross. He is specialized in project management, gender and education, international humanitarian law and training trainers in various aspects of humanitarian action.

Mr Zoungrana has coordinated several operations led by the Burkinabe Red Cross, including: providing assistance to victims of the Ouagadougou floods in 2009, victims of terrorist attacks in Ouagadougou, Malian refugees and people affected by armed violence in the country; and carrying out activities in response to meningitis epidemics and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the international level, Mr Zoungrana has sat as a committee chairman or a panellist on various round tables. He was a member of the multinational team charged with assessing and coordinating the humanitarian response to the earthquake in Haiti and has been a member of several multinational working groups, including one tasked with developing the restoring family links strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Keywords: Sahel, Burkinabe Red Cross Society, Burkina Faso, humanitarian assistance, refugees, COVID-19 pandemic.

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* This interview was conducted by Bruno Demeyere, Editor-in-Chief of the *International Review of the Red Cross*. In March 2022, after the conclusion and publication of this interview, Mr. Zoungrana was appointed as Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and National Solidarity of Burkina Faso.

What are the Burkinabe Red Cross's priorities and objectives?

On 31 July 2021, we celebrated our sixtieth anniversary. It was an emotional opportunity for our members, volunteers and staff to reaffirm their commitment to the Movement's humanitarian values and ideals. The vision, objectives and priorities of our National Society were given a special mention at a round table organized with our partners, where we presented our new strategic plan for 2021–2030.

In terms of priorities, our ambition is to set the standard for others to reach in terms of our capacity to deliver services to victims and the most vulnerable at all times and in all circumstances. It's this vision that led us to set protecting human beings and their environment as the main objective. The priorities that arise from that revolve around safeguarding human dignity despite the lack of security, ensuring access to education and raising awareness among the population of their duty to come to other people's aid by mobilizing the power of humanity to fight against social isolation and marginalization, to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable in society, to safeguard people's lives and health, to combat the effects of climate change, and to promote humanitarian values and the Fundamental Principles. In short, those are the objectives and priorities that we have set out in our strategic plan for the next ten years.

On 30 December 2020, the Burkinabe Red Cross was awarded the Medal of Honour for Health and Social Affairs for its "selfless service in the fulfilment of its mission". What does this medal mean for you and your organization?

It's a great honour and a recognition not only for our but also for our partner's humanitarian work—we don't act on our own, after all, but as members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It's the result of the efforts of *all* the actors mobilized around implementing the Burkinabe Red Cross's action plan to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This award reaffirms the inclusive approach that the various components of the Movement has been following for at least two years now in Burkina Faso. It also demonstrates the Movement's Fundamental Principle of unity and the geographical reach of one National Society across its country's territory. It is, after all, thanks to our volunteers in their various branches that we've been able to fulfil our auxiliary role to the public authorities during this health crisis. Finally, the award also symbolizes how well our National Society and the government work together.

The Burkinabe Red Cross has traditionally carried out its activities in times of peace. But Burkina Faso has been a theatre of conflict and violence for the past few years and has seen massive movements of people fleeing in search of safety. How has your National Society adapted to the new context? What have been the difficulties that you have encountered in adapting your work to the new security situation?

Before I answer those two questions in detail, it's important to say that Burkina Faso has gone through other difficult times since its creation, ranging from armed conflicts

via natural disasters to military regimes. Our National Society has toughened up as a result of having to deal with these crises. But in the last six years, the lack of security – with all that that brings in humanitarian terms – has become part of people’s lives. Managing to adapt to the new context is not a foregone conclusion, despite the Movement’s principles and values. At the start of the crisis, for instance, our staff were victims of security incidents – kidnappings and car-jackings.

Adapting to the context is always based on our operating procedures, which have to be grounded in safe access to victims in two ways. First, we strengthen our presence among the community, which gives us the advantage of ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches people in unsafe areas. With our solid presence among communities in the country’s forty-five administrative provinces and our network of volunteers, we can operate effectively in even the most difficult-to-reach places. This is one of the ways in which the Burkinabe Red Cross brings added value and it enables us to be closer to those people who are in need of humanitarian assistance. Second, there’s the use of digital tools for assessment and assistance, such as ODK (Open Data Kit), which means that we don’t have to expose ourselves to danger by going on risky journeys to the field.

We can say that the organization, structure and the network of volunteers of our National Society constitute this added value in the current context. It enables us to continue providing assistance, despite the difficulties with access because of the violence. But there are still supply issues with aid, when we can’t get certain items for places where we’re operating. There are armed escorts, but you know yourself that the Red Cross, in line with its principles, can’t have an escort. Given this problem, we have increased our communication efforts to provide more information on our humanitarian values and principles, so that we can gain the trust of all actors in the field.

There are other difficulties that I could mention that concern the incomprehension of some of the main actors about protecting beneficiaries’ individual data. This is something we take very seriously, in line with the Fundamental Principles. But we are often confronted with people asking, or demanding, transparency in this regard and the centralization of lists to ensure different actors can work together to provide a coordinated response. From the point of view of transparency that sounds good, but it is nevertheless true that we have to protect beneficiaries’ data from any use that could cast a shadow over the Movement’s Fundamental Principles of neutrality and impartiality.

In any case, adapting has not been too difficult for the Burkinabe Red Cross. Given that we were already present at the heart of communities – our volunteers come from these communities and know what their daily reality is really like – we simply needed to implement our contingency plan to provide assistance.

How do you see the humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso at the moment? What in your opinion are the main challenges facing people in the country? How could people build up their resilience in the face of these challenges?

Burkina Faso is in the grip of a complex crisis. On top of the usual crises – floods, drought, food shortages – the country is facing a security crisis and a health crisis

on account of the coronavirus pandemic. The latest figures provided by our National Committee for Emergency Relief and Reconstruction show that, as of November 2021, there were more than 1.5 million internally displaced people. Neighbouring countries have started to record the presence of Burkinabe refugees, which hadn't been the case till recently. The lack of security linked to the armed violence is causing other kinds of insecurities, such as economic, health and food insecurity, and making life even more precarious for the poorest sections of the population. We are seeing growing issues for protection and education. That's what people are going through at the moment in Burkina Faso. I have to say that the humanitarian situation does not look bright and we don't know when these things will come to an end. The challenges are about the sustainability – the long term – of humanitarian action. At all levels, there's a loss of impetus. Victims are totally immersed in their pain and stress and humanitarian actors must, despite all they've already done, do more. At this time of food and health challenges, the biggest challenge remains protecting people and ensuring their survival when no one knows what the next day will bring.

In terms of resilience, first what is needed is psychosocial support for people that is permanently available, given that the crisis is in fact permanent. There is no time to recover. The pressure and stress are constantly there. Second, we need to bolster our efforts on behalf of young people and women, who are the largest section of the population and the most vulnerable. Most armed groups see youth as fertile soil from which they can pluck fresh recruits. Our young people are unemployed and face a lot of hardships. The population pyramid for Africa has a very wide base because our population is very young overall. But young people and women, who are the most vulnerable members of society, are also the most effective because, if they manage to get assistance adapted to their needs, they are able to move mountains to overcome the challenges facing them and foster resilience among their groups and in the general population.

What concrete measures or action has the Burkinabe Red Cross carried out to help people to overcome some of the main challenges that you've mentioned? What difficulties and challenges has the Burkinabe Red Cross come up against in this respect, and how have you gone about overcoming them?

With regard to the national humanitarian context, we have become a “universal receiver”. The Burkinabe Red Cross and our partners have taken part in several areas of humanitarian action. For example, we are working in education and awareness-raising to change mentalities. It's a common problem that humanitarian work is not understood or taken onboard by the communities affected. This means that, over time, what we may take for granted can be called back into question by communities and the other actors who have not managed to take charge of the assistance we provide. That's why it's so important to work on behaviour change. Whether it's to do with development or emergency situations, we try to accompany every operation we carry out with awareness-raising, education for the communities with which we work to change behaviour,

so as to lock in our gains for the long term, to get them to truly get involved in implementing the activities.

In the area of development, the Burkinabe Red Cross is carrying out actions centred on model committees that are focused on bottom-up solutions. This is humanitarian assistance that is close to those it serves, accompanied often by small gestures that make a big difference in improving living conditions for the most vulnerable people. For example, we support small groups of women who gather and process shea nuts. Some of these groups now fund themselves, thanks to the processing and sale of their local produce.

In emergency situations, our work goes beyond handing out bread and water, providing medical care and shelter – we get the communities involved in finding solutions to their problems. We also take into account what affected people think about their situation by giving them ways to express their views. We need to change the way we work together; no longer can we be satisfied with carrying out surveys only for their immediate needs – we have to encourage people to express their views on how we should manage and overcome the crisis.

So, in sum, that's what we do for affected people and the difficulties we face and are working to overcome. Because it's when times are hard that the meaning of the Movement's mission is deepest. It's during the most dangerous assignments that we can show how important the Movement's vision and philosophy truly are. When no one is by the side of people who are suffering, the Red Cross must bring them comfort and assistance that will enable them to stand on their own two feet. Simply put, we give them the support they need to uphold their own dignity.

In the Sahel, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the health and socio-economic situation of people who were already struggling because of the lack of security. How has the health crisis exacerbated the vulnerability of people living there?

The impact was worse the further you went down the social scale. People who were already only just getting by were hit hard by the protective measures. Taxi drivers in Burkina, night workers, hosts for social events, to name just a few, couldn't do their jobs because of the curfews and lockdowns. As the situation disrupted their jobs, they fell further down the social scale. And behind those people were others who relied on their wages to get by. As you know, in Burkina a person's wages doesn't provide for only the nuclear family but for the wider family too, in the African sense, and for their loved ones.

In addition to the loss of earnings, the cost of living went up. People were already organizing demonstrations to try to get the government to bring down rises in staple goods, but the pandemic and, at one point closed borders, meant that a lot of goods could no longer be sent to the field. And this was in a country where we consume a lot more produce that comes from abroad than from within the country.

So, we can see that vulnerable people have been made even more so. And what's to become of displaced people, who have lost everything and find themselves in need of assistance?

As of 20 June 2021, Burkina Faso had recorded 13,469 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 167 deaths.¹ What role has the Burkinabe Red Cross played in the country's fight against the virus? What impact has the efforts to limit the spread of the disease had on the security and humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso?

First, before I go into more detail, I must underline that our National Society again took on the auxiliary role to the authorities to help manage this crisis. From the start, the health ministry called on us and brought us into all the meetings to set up a significant COVID-19 response plan. We were involved in monitoring, preventing the spread of and testing for the virus in the communities. The Burkinabe Red Cross is an organization that is based in the communities. It went without saying that this was the added value that we brought to our government in this crisis. More specifically, we helped strengthen capacity in the health ministry, in particular in their decentralized technical services. We worked on the response plan so that as an organization, we could be in a position to pass on information to these services.

As part of the COVID-19 response, we carried out a range of activities, with the support of our partners both inside and outside the Movement, such as the European Union. For example, we organized sessions on how to prevent the spread of the disease. In Burkina Faso, you have to work with those who are actually there with the people, since travelling to certain areas is difficult. But the Red Cross, given its roots in the communities, was able to call up its volunteers in the forty-five provinces, that is across the whole country, in coordination with the health ministry to ensure that the risks related to the disease were successfully communicated and to get people to take the protective measures seriously to reduce the spread.

We were also fairly involved in disinfecting the homes of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19, and in managing call centres. There, we played a very important role because, in the beginning, people didn't have enough information about the pandemic and how they could access treatment. So, our volunteers were mobilized very quickly to staff the centre for coordinating operations, which we call the CORUS. It was our volunteers who answered the calls of people who suspected they had caught the disease and told them where to go and how to get treated quickly. They were also involved in contact tracing.

We were also involved from the beginning in using our expertise in dead body management. There was a lot of fear around that issue. As the Red Cross already had people who had experience in training and people who had experience of dealing with people who had died of Ebola, it was obvious that the ministry would see what we could do in this situation. So, we managed the very first case of someone dying from COVID-19, in collaboration with the health ministry.

1 Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Latest Updates on the COVID-19 Crisis from Africa* CDC, available at: <https://africacdc.org/covid-19> (all internet references were accessed in February 2022).

On top of that, we gave psychosocial support to many people who were stressed out by the situation and didn't know who to turn to. We contributed towards the national communication set-up for managing misinformation. We already had the know-how and a department that was up and running, which we used to respond to misinformation, adapting our messages to raise awareness of the disease. There were even some people who were saying that the disease didn't exist. So, we needed a system of communication to respond to such rumours, which we ran with the health ministry. We aimed to make everyone aware of the disease and how everyone could help limit its spread.

Nevertheless, everything didn't go perfectly smoothly. The lack of security considerably reduced the ability of humanitarian actors to travel around the country. Also, from the start, some towns were put in quarantine, which prevented Red Cross monitoring teams from going there. You needed to have the authorization before you could go into certain towns. Our volunteers at the community level had difficulty in accessing certain areas to raise awareness. For instance, in a province affected by insecurity, volunteers could go to the capital but there would be certain areas that were completely inaccessible but with people living there. We also faced the problem of how to pass on information to our volunteers on the ground without being able to travel there. At times it all came down to telephone calls, where we explained to them what key messages we wanted them to pass on.

Elsewhere, in places where displaced people lived, they were too close together, which wasn't in line with the protective measures. They are people who are already living in stressful conditions on account of their status as displaced people and who can't easily meet their basic needs. So in such places, it's hard to just calmly carry on with your job.

Getting access to water in the Sahel is a colossal challenge at the moment, in particular in large parts of Burkina Faso. What are the most important effects in humanitarian terms on the limited access to water and sanitation and on how that is stoking tensions and conflict in the country? In your opinion, what could be done to reduce these effects and hence to help limit the impact of waterborne diseases?

As you know, water is a rare resource in the Sahel and hence in Burkina, which is why there has been a lot of work in this regard. But access to water remains a major concern. And this concern is one of the priorities set out in the Burkinabe Red Cross's strategic plans. In the part of the Sahel that is in Burkina, the lack of rainfall means that water tables are not being replenished. Every year, it's the same. There are water-supply points but they don't provide enough water and the maintenance teams can't get to certain areas because of the security situation. Maintenance is no longer being carried out. Some areas have been deserted by the local population, so much so that the few boreholes that were there no longer function.

Women and girls who go to fetch water – it’s usually women who do this in rural areas and in towns – now have to walk for long distances to get it, which eats into the time they would give to their families. Women are also caught up in the violence in these areas. On several occasions, the Burkinabe media have spoken about women who have been killed by landmines while looking for firewood or fetching water for their families.²

I was speaking about displacement, which is caused by the violence, but that has also made water even more scarce in the areas hosting displaced people. More people and animals mean that pressure has built up around the rare water-supply points that there are. Burkina is for the most part a country of arable farmers and livestock breeders. So when people move from A to B because of the violence, their livestock may be moved to places that are already suffering from a lack of water. It’s a major humanitarian concern. This has exacerbated the tensions that already existed between farmers and breeders. Nowadays people are squabbling over the few water-supply points there, while needing water for their animals too.

Furthermore, when surface water is available, in winter for instance, it’s not drinking water. When people come together in large groups, it’s not always hygienic. Waterborne and diarrhoeal diseases can spread. There are efforts that are often made by the users themselves. I mean the populations themselves, who make the effort to ration and reduce their water usage. But other solutions are needed in Burkina.

We aren’t water specialists, but as humanitarian actors, we try to see how the situation can be improved – by our experience, by our proximity to the local population. We often hear suggestions from local people about how to improve their living conditions; for example, by increasing access to water by drilling more boreholes in safe areas or setting up more places to host displaced people. But at the moment, because of the lack of security, the government’s policy is to avoid multiplying the number of host sites, above all on the outskirts of large urban areas. In reality though, people who have fled their homes settle in the first place they come to where they feel safe. But these places are often pretty vulnerable from the point of view of water scarcity.

The idea is to spread displaced people out across several host sites to reduce the pressure on the few water-supply points, and so to reduce as much as possible these people’s exposure to waterborne and other diseases linked to a build-up of humans living too closely together. Spreading displaced people out geographically to reduce the pressure on the rural areas that are accessible and that host displaced people who have fled their homes because of violence is one possible solution. In any case, the best solution remains a return to peace and with that people’s ability to live normal lives again where they come from. These people had their own way of life and had improved their living conditions. Unfortunately, by fleeing, they find themselves in difficult situations and with the status of internally displaced people. This is why the ultimate solution has to be a

2 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), “Burkina Faso: When Water Scarcity Meets Conflict”, 16 June 2021, available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/burkina-faso-water-scarcity-conflict>.

return to peace and to accompany these people back to where they came from so that they can continue to develop favourable and necessary living conditions for themselves.

How can raising awareness of humanitarian values and principles help prevent and reduce the suffering of people affected by the ongoing armed conflicts in the Sahel, including in Burkina Faso? In your opinion, how can we build up knowledge and respect for these values and principles, in particular in Burkina Faso?

Before becoming secretary-general, I was in charge of promoting humanitarian values and principles within the Burkinabe Red Cross. The Fundamental Principles were chosen to facilitate the Movement's humanitarian action at all times and in all circumstances. Each of the Fundamental Principles, irrespective of the wording, encapsulates a certain number of values that, if they are understood and applied, will boost the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and action. When we look at the Fundamental Principles, beyond the commitment we make, we need to see what sort of behaviour they encourage in actors within the Movement and in the actors outside the Movement with whom we work. Above all, it enables us to have beneficiaries' trust in what we do and also the other actors who have to be able to facilitate our activities in the field.

Take the example of humanity, which stands for friendship among different peoples. It's no more than prevention. If friendship becomes a habit for individuals and peoples, the world of peace that is so often called for in speeches will become a reality. Also, showing solidarity towards your neighbour, towards someone like you who is facing hardship—because someone else has created that situation of instability, insecurity or difficulty—leads you to stop thinking of another human being as your enemy. You are faced with a situation of vulnerability created by one human being and another human being brings you a solution. In some way, that puts your position into perspective, in the sense that you were in a position of wanting vengeance against human beings in general. Then you realize that there are people who can create terrible situations, but there are other people who can bring solutions to the situations that you find yourself in. It was in that respect that, with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), we produced a music album in 2002 called *L'Homme est un remède pour l'Homme*³ (Man is a remedy to man) rather than *l'Homme est un loup pour l'Homme* (Man is a wolf to man).

Humanitarian values and principles, while protecting people by inviting others to uphold humanitarian norms, enables us to have easier access to victims and to deliver aid. Assistance activities are based on a solid understanding and application of these Fundamental Principles. Imagine for a moment that these

3 ICRC, "Abidjan - projet musical: L'homme, un remède pour l'homme (in French)", 26 August 2002, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/fr/doc/resources/documents/misc/cote-d-ivoire-pm-2002-130404.htm>.

people received no assistance—what would such a world be like? What would become of it? Spreading awareness of these principles is in a way laying out a red carpet, no matter the location, that enables us to relieve human suffering and people to have confidence in themselves, to have confidence in life again and to continue to fight for a better world. In a word, the Fundamental Principles are there so that we have a more human and flourishing world.

What are relations like between the Burkinabe Red Cross and the ICRC? In light of the humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso, what are the main issues at stake in terms of communication and collaboration between the ICRC and your National Society?

The ICRC and the Burkinabe Red Cross have worked together as partners without a break since 1986. So it's a long-lasting relationship of friendship and collaboration that covers the areas of: communication; promoting humanitarian values and principles; restoring family links; access to water, hygiene and sanitation; community health; humanitarian diplomacy; and capacity-building in our National Society, i.e. institutional support. This partnership has been built up slowly, brick by brick, to enable us to say today that we have a high-quality partnership with the ICRC that is only growing stronger every year.

Nowadays, we plan joint activities and have an inclusive mindset, thinking in terms of how we can complement each other effectively. Given the context and the humanitarian duty that the ICRC and the Burkinabe Red Cross have towards people in need, the communication between our two organizations tends to concern internal coordination and coordination with other actors. Coming from the same family, everyone should do everything they can to make sure they are not just talking to themselves and hindering the work of other Movement components. This is why it's important to have the framework agreements on cooperation between Movement components in Burkina and for us to have weekly discussions on issues of common interest with the ICRC's delegation here.

We also communicate through how we act; that's a way of practising what we've been working on for a while. We mustn't speak publicly in a way that would contradict what we do in practice. We make what we say something practical and that helps us to organize joint sessions with the authorities and other actors to speak with one voice as a Movement. That's often had quite positive repercussions in our work with the ICRC. We have the same mission, we're in the same country, we're experiencing the same harsh realities, we have a common objective, which is to make sure that the mission of the Red Cross in Burkina Faso is achieved and for us to be benchmark organizations in the sectors in which we are experts. At this level, we manage to get our messages across to the public quite clearly in general, including in the interior of the country, which really helps our work in the field and our image in general. If one link in the Movement chain—which constitutes a system—isn't working well, the whole system takes a hit. So, we make sure that through our communications, all the

links in the chain fit together so that the system is in good health and our humanitarian action is effective nationwide.

We often talk about how the Burkinabe Red Cross is grounded in the community. What does that mean exactly and what effect does that have in operational terms?

Being part of the community means getting our mission, principles and values adopted by the communities and building a network of volunteers that come from and are supported by these communities. This network is made up of people who have experienced the same hardships, who share the same culture, the same reality, and who go through the same ups and downs.

We use that same mindset to get communities involved in carrying out our various activities – because it’s not enough to say that you are at the heart of the community while carrying out activities on the side that don’t involve them. We work so that it is the communities themselves who support the Red Cross’s activities. That means setting up National Society branches within these communities. You can’t be present at the level of the community without being linked to a system, and in this case, that system is the nationwide structure of the Burkinabe Red Cross, right down to the level of the community. So, there are sector committees, communal committees, which are operational, that enable all members of a community involved to express themselves through highly experienced institutional and organizational support.

We try to create humanitarian reflexes in people’s minds, and that also helps large-scale humanitarian operations during emergency situations. We say “Slow but steady wins the race” and “If you can do something complicated, you can do something simple”. So the more that we do the simple things, the more we’ll be able to do the complicated things too. That’s why, setting aside crisis situations, our volunteers live real lives. They need to develop community activities that help build up people’s resilience, so that when a crisis strikes, we can carry out operations in the most effective way possible.

The Red Cross has also set up a freephone number for complaints. The platform is open to the communities (beneficiaries and hosts) and any witnesses if they have a complaint about our work. The idea is that we can receive and treat complaints and suggestions so as to improve how communities are involved and the quality of the assistance they receive. The line is open 24 hours a day.

The humanitarian environment has changed a lot in Burkina Faso over the last two or three years as the situation has worsened. What are the main issues at stake in terms of coordination between the other humanitarian actors? Has their presence influenced, in one way or another, positively or negatively, relations between the authorities and your National Society (and your role as auxiliary to the authorities)?

We have a very good relationship with other humanitarian actors and above all with our government. There’s even a line ministry that is responsible for humanitarian

action in Burkina. I'm not telling you anything new when I say that a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society is created in a country to support the state in the area of humanitarian work. We have projects that we run in collaboration with other humanitarian actors and that shows that we work well together. And we're delighted that other actors are doing the same things as us, because the aim is to come to the aid of the most vulnerable people in the country. With the authorities and the line ministry, we're looking at how we could have contracts with set objectives that would not only make a few things easier for how our government supports us but would also enable us to be able to work closely with professional humanitarian agencies. It's one of the projects that we're really interested in pursuing and we aim to make it operational with our government.

With regard to influences, all human relationships have their influences, whether it's because we don't share the same operational strategies or we aren't at the same level of preparation to act. At times, that can create certain obstacles, but we always manage to overcome them. Because at the same time as we are trying to collaborate, each organization keeps its principles and plan of action. The crucial thing is to make sure that the principle of complementarity can be the order of the day.

We enjoy the support of our government, above all a yearly subsidy which enables us to show how much store the government sets by its commitments. The government is a party to the Geneva Conventions, helped to set up the National Society and gives us not only financial support but also a lot of exemptions. This allows us to buy more relief supplies at affordable prices and to increase the number of beneficiaries who receive assistance in the field.

How do you see the humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso in five years' time?

I'll be brief here because the facts speak for themselves. Our expectations of what the humanitarian situation will be like have already been set out in our ten-year strategic plan (2021–2030). The situation will not be better, given current events and their immediate effects, in the medium or long term. The future does not for the moment look bright. In addition, there are unforeseeable situations – such as the health crisis we're going through now – that can arise at any moment and rip up even the most talented planners' forecasts. In the next five years, I don't think we can exclude the chance of other unforeseen situations arising. At the moment we're talking of new variants, etc., and every time there's this type of situation, it only exacerbates humanitarian problems.

In Burkina, where there is so much violence, there will be internally displaced people; parts of the country will be deserted by farmers and breeders; there will be a lack of agricultural production, hence the destruction of people's means of survival. Even if the violence came to an end in the short term, the humanitarian consequences that it has already made will be with us for a long time. What the future holds in the next five years, from my point of view, is bleak.

In the past, we were used to crises like floods, drought, meningitis. But today, there are crises that come out of nowhere like COVID-19 and its many

variants. Our mindset, in the Burkinabe Red Cross, is to better prepare and equip ourselves to face any kind of crisis that may one day arise.

Do you have any final thoughts for our readers?

I would like to invite all your readers to keep feeling compassion for the most vulnerable people. No one's position in this world is guaranteed for life. From one day to the next, we can go from being comfortable to being vulnerable. The situations we see have proven that. So, it is by developing the practice of solidarity, developing humanitarian reflexes to come to the aid of those in difficulty, that everyone may benefit in their turn. We must come together, therefore, and remain committed to helping people in need.