

Masterson, Harold

by Turlough O'Riordan

Masterson, Harold (1946–2005), humanitarian aid worker, was born in Lisbellaw, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, and educated at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen and at QUB, taking an honours degree in social and economic geography. He graduated M.Sc. from the London School of Economics with a dissertation on 'population distribution and interaction in South Africa'.

After teaching at Luwingu secondary school, Northern Province, Zambia, he then studied linguistics at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Becoming fluent in Danish, he took a career sabbatical to help his wife, Kirsten Bendixen, raise their triplet daughters, before joining the League of Red Cross Societies in 1981. Masterson served as a development and project advisor for the league in Malawi (1981–3), and as chief delegate to the Erzurum earthquake relief effort in eastern Turkey (1983–4). After becoming a desk officer (1984–5) in the European section in the Geneva headquarters of the league (by then, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), he moved to the East and Southern African section (1985–6). As head of the field personnel department (1987–93) of what became in November 1991 the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Masterson led the training of best practice and building of capacity within affiliated national societies. Remaining with human resources, he led the training and support services section (1993–2002) and the organisation and staffing section (2002–03). He then managed the national society leadership development programme within the organisational development department (2003–05).

Renowned as a widely respected mentor of early-career aid workers, Masterson was an expert in disaster relief assessment, and a critic of some of the managerial changes taking place within the IFRC and in the sector generally. He championed the support and training of humanitarian and disaster relief staff. He delivered workshops and professional training programmes for the IFRC, advised the Relief and Rehabilitation Network of the Overseas Development Institute in London, was on the faculties of the Center for International Humanitarian Cooperation and the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University (both in New York), and taught on the international diploma course in humanitarian assistance (jointly delivered by RCSI, Fordham University, and the United Nations System Staff College). He contributed, with IFRC colleagues, to *Public health guide for emergencies*.

Masterson, drawing on his personal expertise, spearheaded the agreement in 2002 between the UNHCR and the IFRC under which national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies would provide first-aid training to UNHCR staff. He fronted a worldwide campaign to combat the stigmatisation of and discrimination against

people with HIV/AIDs by associating the IFRC and its protective emblems with people living with HIV/AIDS.

Active in the Geneva Irish Association, he was a founder member of the Geneva Literary Aid Society and a prominent fundraiser for HIV/AIDs research, living with HIV/AIDs himself. Warm and humorous, he was fondly regarded by colleagues and acquaintances in the humanitarian community in Geneva and the IFRC. Lapsing into a coma after suffering a heart attack, he died 11 August 2005 at Geneva University Hospital, Switzerland, and was buried after a funeral service at the church of St Gervais in Geneva.

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*Ir. Times*, 12, 27 Aug. 2005; Geneva Literary Aid Society: website, [www.theglas.org](http://www.theglas.org); newsletter (June 2005); *The international diploma in humanitarian assistance – IDHA 30* (2010); IFRC website, [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org); information from Grant Mitchell, Human Resources, IFRC, Geneva, Switzerland; internet material downloaded Nov. 2012