

Researchers deliver science for humanitarian action



The “Engineering Humanitarian Action” initiative aims to put the expertise of the two federal institutes of technology at the service of humanitarian action.

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Using innovative technologies and scientific expertise to help people in need is the goal of the Engineering for Humanitarian Action initiative launched by the ICRC, ETH Zurich and EPFL in 2020. Generous donations by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), along with the Foundation for the ICRC, Rolex and the Fondation Lombard Odier will enable this initiative to continue with future calls for projects.

Around the world, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports people affected by wars and conflicts. To help make planning and implementation of this humanitarian action more effective, ETH Zurich, EPFL and the ICRC launched the Engineering for Humanitarian Action initiative in December 2020. Its goal is to make knowledge and technologies from both universities available where they are critically needed: in humanitarian crises.

The programme provides financial support to specific projects run by EPFL and ETH Zurich labs. Two series of projects – 12 in all – have already been funded, with the first round now providing results to the ICRC. These will resolve logistical issues in healthcare provision, protect refugees through biometrics, make ICRC construction projects more sustainable, create new digital infrastructure to protect against cyberattacks and more.

“The collaboration shows how digital technologies and scientific expertise support the ICRC in carrying out its important work and thus help people in need,” says ETH President Joël Mesot. “We are very much looking forward to seeing the real-world impact of the projects already completed or in progress, as well as new proposals,” adds

EPFL President Martin Vetterli.

“Our researchers are hugely motivated to contribute to a better world in these turbulent times.” ICRC Vice-President Gilles Carbonnier explains: “Fast advances in science and technology offer huge potential to unlock innovation for greater humanitarian impact. As we turn research findings into action, there is much more to come!”

Generous donations by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), along with the Foundation for the ICRC, Rolex and the Fondation Lombard Odier will enable this initiative to continue with future calls for projects. Their commitments will total more than CHF 12 million by the end of this year. “The most important scientific advances start from real human needs, from a process of discovery imbued with humanity, openness, and optimism. Bringing humanitarian action and science closer together, as this collaborative initiative will do, is how we ensure that technological development helps improve life for those that need it the most,” says Stavros Niarchos Foundation Co-President Andreas Dracopoulos. SNF will support forthcoming projects as part of the Foundation’s global Health Initiative.

Press release of ETH Zurich

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