

## **Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction**

**Sendai, Japan**

### **Statement by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, for giving the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) the floor.

The ICRC has a long tradition in responding to the needs of people adversely affected by situations of humanitarian concern. Its mandate is to protect and assist civilian and military victims of armed conflict and to work for the application of international humanitarian law. But the ICRC is first and foremost a humanitarian organisation. As such it does not remain indifferent or passive when natural disasters strike populations and there are uncovered humanitarian needs. In addition natural disasters often occur in areas affected by armed conflict or other violence. Consequently we have on numerous occasions lent our capacities to contribute to a coordinated collective response and will continue to do so in the years to come should needs arise.

The ICRC therefore welcomes the holding of this third World Conference and expresses the hope that the new framework for action on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) will provide a strong impetus to better prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

Experience has shown that for a response to be timely and effective, there must be open communication channels, a spirit of complementarity, and clarity among all relevant stakeholders on the respective roles and capacities of each. This is why we take the floor today.

ICRC conceives its role primarily within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, the world's largest humanitarian network, and whose components all abide by the same Fundamental Principles. When a natural disaster exceeds the capacities of the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society directly concerned, other National Societies will engage as well, under the coordination of the International Federation. ICRC, for its part, will act when a natural disaster occurs in a context of armed conflict or on a basis of complementarity, drawing on its ability to provide a holistic emergency response, rapidly deploying logistical means as well as staff possessing the required expertise. We typically organize and deliver food, water, shelter, essential assistance items, even cash and primary health care (*Indonesia 2005, Sri Lanka 2005, Pakistan 2005 & 2010, Haiti 2010, Philippines 2013 and 14*). In contexts where many people have died, ICRC also provides support in the area of dead body management.

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, many families are separated and have no news of their loved ones: a typical feature of our contribution is to support the restoration of family links, using all possible tools, including the establishment of a specific website to facilitate the tracing of persons unaccounted for. This work is carried out hand-in-hand with the National Societies, building on their large number of volunteers and intimate knowledge of the context.

Because it is pivotal to maintain the continued functioning of essential infrastructures, ICRC also offers technical assistance and material assistance to repair water systems (*Haiti 2010*) and to support health services (*Indonesia 2005, Sri Lanka 2005, Pakistan 2005 and 2010, Philippines 2013 and 2014*).

Mr. Chairman,

ICRC's contribution to disaster risk reduction is manifold. First it is by improving national capacities. This refers first to strengthening capacities of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in areas of ICRC expertise such as restoring family links, water and sanitation, first aid or livelihood needs assessment. Second, such contribution concern supporting authorities and forensic practitioners to optimise the systems for searching, identifying and managing the remains of large numbers of victims.

Second, disaster risk reduction is an integral part of ICRC response to emergencies. For example, following typhoons Bopha and Haiyan in the Philippines, the ICRC rebuilt typhoon resistant houses and improved water drainage and irrigation systems. It also looked at introducing crops which could be a viable alternative to a sole source of livelihood in a place prone to typhoons.

Finally, the ICRC also considers disaster risk reduction in its longer-term programming, such as in the drought-prone Somali region where it constructs pools to collect water, or gravity drainage systems from main rivers. Supporting human and animal vaccination are other examples. Raising community awareness for example on basic hygiene, and regular communication with beneficiaries are also integral components of programs.

In conflict settings and environments prone to violence, disaster response and risk reduction often involve increased challenges. In such contexts, the resilience of affected populations is further weakened, as these situations generally entail significant disruption of livelihoods and a steep increase in the number of victims, combined with reduced Government capacities to provide for their needs. Impartial humanitarian actors are often best placed to respond, and it is thus important to support their action to the fullest extent possible, including by facilitating their access to affected communities.

Always taking into account the capacities of other actors, ICRC often prioritizes supporting disaster victims or potential victims located in areas considered "hard to reach" (Pakistan 2010, South Sudan 2014-15), whether due to their remoteness or because violence and lack of security prevent other humanitarian organizations from deploying. In such contexts, the ICRC often enjoys acceptance by virtue of being a neutral and independent humanitarian organization, and also takes a lead role for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement response. It ceases or adapts its disaster-related activities once the most urgent needs have been met and other humanitarian or development actors are able to be fully operational.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, the ICRC would like to seize this opportunity to express its readiness to pursue a dialogue with interested Governments on operational aspects of disaster risk reduction, in partnership with the National Societies concerned and their Federation. The purpose would on the one hand to clarify how it could best engage with relevant national or regional response mechanisms, such as line ministries, armed forces or civil defense, when disaster strikes. On the other hand, ICRC can contribute to capacity building within its areas of expertise and better integrate disaster risk reduction within its programming.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.