



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

Statement by Mathew Varghese, Acting Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Diplomacy, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to the Executive Board of UNDP Annual Session 2010 on Wednesday, 30 June 2010

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is honoured to speak to the Executive Board of UNDP.

We at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies believe that the MDGs are vital to building more resilient communities for vulnerable people. We have come a long way. However, much more can be done by the international community to advance these goals. There are a lot of lessons to be learned about why our progress is slow and how it can be accelerated. We are very good at setting targets but at the same time must ensure that the resources and capacities to meet the targets are in place. Responding effectively to meeting the MDG targets is now, more than ever, dependent on the contributions made by volunteers across the world. Volunteer contributions should not be looked upon as an additional gap-filling resource or solely to increase technical capacity, but as the vital ingredients that make any development or humanitarian work successful – they bring access, trust and credibility with local communities.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies congratulates the work that United Nations Volunteers are doing to promote a stronger and more effective volunteer community. The IFRC and UNV share the aim of establishing an environment whereby volunteers can participate actively in the development and humanitarian fields. Our hope is that as we approach 2011, the International Year of the Volunteer + 10 is used as an opportunity to examine and advance the spirit of volunteerism for achieving the MDGs and fostering more partnerships.

The IFRC recognises the positive action now being taken by the UNV to prepare for and engage in IYV + 10. This presents UNV with an opportunity to promote its objectives with greater visibility. We recognise the organisational and logistical challenges involved in preparing for an event of such global importance, and therefore the need to collaborate if we are to achieve our collective objectives.

The strength of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is in so many respects connected to its tens of millions of volunteers. Collectively, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers constitute the largest volunteer base in the humanitarian world. As a network of 186 National Societies (one in almost every country in the world), Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers have the unique distinction of being able to respond to a humanitarian crisis with an understanding of local contexts and of the needs of beneficiaries on the ground.

Recognising the critical part that volunteers play at the local level in emergency situations, the IFRC has made its theme for the IYV + 10 – “Saving Lives. Changing Minds: Volunteering in Emergencies”. As auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, many National Societies are the first humanitarian actor to engage with governments in disaster relief contexts. This access to government allows our National Society members to promote global standards in relation to emergency relief. The IFRC believes that systematic disaster and crisis management starts with preparedness for early action by trained and organized volunteers.

There is still much work to be done to create the kind of enabling environment necessary for volunteers to operate effectively. We share with UNV the goal of promoting better recognition of the contributions that volunteers make to development work and the humanitarian space. In the context of our advocacy in relation to volunteers, we recognise that the IYV + 10 is simply the starting point. 2011 will also see the convening of the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. We see this as another opportunity to highlight the way volunteers have contributed to the MDGs, as well as ways in which they can contribute more effectively in the future.

Volunteering in the context of a changing world.

Communities and nations want to determine their future and want to be in-charge of their lives. Globalization has taken root but at the same time self determination is also taking root. Whether it is a village in New Zealand, Finland, Sudan, China or Haiti, communities want to be empowered to determine and have an impact on their quality of life. The Red Cross and Red Crescent takes self determination seriously, so our focus today is on building local volunteering capacity.

Gaining the trust and acceptance of communities remains paramount for any development and humanitarian work. Real change in individual and community health behaviours requires access to, trust and acceptance from the people whom we seek to serve. Our volunteers work in their own communities and understand the real and daily problems and needs of their families, friends and neighbours. They are able to effectively communicate in local dialects and languages and break down barriers that impact on improving their health or preparedness for crisis.

Technology is proving itself as the game changer that will make our dreams of realizing MDGs come true. Last year, Twitter was a channel where we could follow the spread of influenza pandemic from Mexico and around the world. The instantaneous sharing of geographic information by volunteers through Twitter enabled us to keep track and prepare activities.

In Haiti, SMS messages were used to spread information urging people to follow hygiene practices after the earthquake and to bring their children to the mass vaccination campaign done by the volunteers of Red Cross and Red Crescent. Messages in Creole were sent to more than 1.2 million people almost every other day. These mass messages would have been hollow if not for the on-ground support provided by the volunteers. Volunteers are making a difference every day.

In closing, the IFRC wishes UNV continued success in its important work and hopes that the UNV will rise to the emerging challenges of not only being an agency for United Nations Volunteers recruitment and management but an agency which sets standards in furthering volunteerism, supports and promotes national volunteering efforts, shares best practices and harnesses technological advancement in doing so. We look forward to the continued collaboration in organising IYV +10 as well as being a shared partner to achieve the goals of the MDGs through the efforts of volunteers.

Thank you.