



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

Delegation to the United Nations

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Agenda item 28: Advancement of Women
Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly
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Mr Chairman,

On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), allow me to first congratulate you and the members of the Bureau on your election to guide the important work of the Committee during this session. I would also like to thank you and the speakers for the informative briefings received at the outset of this debate.

Mr Chairman,

I will focus my remarks today on two points: first, the vital role of rural women in development, particularly in hunger and malnutrition prevention; and second, the need to address persistent and widespread gender based violence.

As I speak, the drought in the Horn of Africa threatens millions of lives and livelihoods. In Southern and South East Asia floods, typhoons and other disasters have once again affected the region in recent weeks. In the face of such crises women can be powerful drivers of resilience, recovery and development. One concrete way to empower women, particularly rural women, is to scale up investments for women in agriculture. Two reports this year have acknowledged the central role that women have played and are playing in hunger and malnutrition prevention – the 2011 IFRC World Disasters Report with a focus on hunger and malnutrition and the FAO State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 report with a focus on women in agriculture. The research showing that targeted investment in women farmers can improve yields by as much as 30 per cent is too significant to ignore. Let us now take forward the recommendations in these reports. We also welcome the theme of the empowerment of rural women at the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 as an opportunity to engage further on this issue.

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to turn to one of the greatest humanitarian challenges facing us today: violence. The eradication of violence, including gender based violence, is no utopian ideal. Violence is predictable, hence preventable – it requires addressing the underlying root causes and social determinants, such as gender inequality, misuse of power, poverty, discrimination



and stigma. In recognition of the humanitarian, societal, and economic impacts of violence, including gender based violence, the IFRC is making violence prevention, mitigation and response a priority through its global strategy for 2011-2020. Based on the experience of our member National Societies in addressing violence, let me raise the following:

First, a shift of allocation of resources is necessary. The majority of violence is interpersonal, yet the bulk of resources focus on collective violence. Additionally, prevention is key and must become a greater policy and budget priority.

Second, education (both formal and non-formal) is one of the best tools we have for changing mindsets, attitudes and behaviours by challenging gender stereotypes, xenophobia and discrimination, as well as by building up self-esteem and skills. Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies evaluate the needs in their own communities and have responded in a variety of ways, such as building negotiation and leadership skills among girls in Sierra Leone and Saint Lucia, fostering acceptance of men as caregivers in Honduras and several Southern African countries, and addressing domestic violence in the Americas.

Third, an inclusive approach that involves men and relevant stakeholders within the community is essential to fostering an enabling environment for legislation to be implemented. This approach facilitates community buy-in and support, which is particularly useful in addressing traditional harmful practices and tacit social acceptance of violence. The ability to bring together diverse stakeholders and foster positive change has been a true value added of our National Societies. For example, the Red Cross of Chad used a bottom-up approach involving young volunteers all the way up to community chiefs, religious authorities, administrative representatives and opinion leaders which led to tremendous gains in addressing female genital mutilation.

Fourth, we must draw on the strengths of communities. No one size program fits all. An example lies in maintaining indigenous knowledge. An innovative program by the Canadian Red Cross, called "Walking the Prevention Circle" relates to First Nations communities and uses indigenous ways of dealing with violence through a participatory, equality-based and circle approach, which is different from hierarchical sentencing and sanctions.

Moving forward we must continue to build on the successes which many communities have made in addressing violence within their midst. A holistic, evidence-based and coordinated approach is essential. For this reason, the IFRC has joined the WHO's Violence Prevention Alliance, and our member National Societies are working in their auxiliary role with Governments to address violence.

Mr Chairman,

Empowering women, at the individual level and in the communities and societies they live in, will help us reach our common goals for development. So long as women continue to face discrimination, violence and exclusion the Millennium Development Goals will always be out of reach.

Thank you.