

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

2004 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION - HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

Resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Statement by Mr. Robert Barnes QC, Vice President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

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Madame President,

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) considers this item, and the theme for the 2004 High Level Segment, timely and appropriate.

Timely because the international community is preparing to review its work through the first five years of the Millennium Declaration. The Economic and Social Council should, in our view, position itself to make a strong contribution to that process, collating the expertise of Member States, UN family Agencies, other international organizations, and NGOs.

Appropriate because the theme recognizes a key point the IFRC is stressing - that meaningful work towards poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will not progress without an enabling environment. By this we mean an environment, which encourages the achievement of the Goals, within a framework, which enables realistic and valuable programs to be designed and implemented. The environment should embrace the work by organizations outside government and, very importantly, through the contribution of voluntary service.

The principal preoccupation of the Red Cross Red/Crescent Movement remains the alleviation of the suffering of the most vulnerable persons. Eradicating poverty eliminates the major cause of vulnerability. Nothing, therefore, fits better our mission than the topic chosen for the substantive session of ECOSOC 2004.

The IFRC does not pretend to have a solution for the challenges we face. We do, however, strongly endorse calls for the building of an enabling environment that must include the engagement of local communities and the use of local resources.

What do we Mr. Chairman, see as important elements for achieving success in the reduction of poverty, or where our Movement can add special value to that process?

1. An enabling environment is one that fosters tolerance, respect and non-discrimination. Indeed it is difficult to envisage a successful campaign to eliminate poverty within a culture of intolerance and discrimination. More attention needs to be paid to the affirmation of shared ethical values.
2. A community-focused approach to development should enhance the role of volunteerism and reduce institutional or legislative barriers to volunteer activities. The IFRC is a partner with UN Volunteers and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the development of a Guidance Note, which examines the ways in which legislation can have impact on volunteerism. We encourage you to carefully examine the document when it is presented later this year.
3. An enabling environment is one where the barriers to the immediate delivery of disaster relief are eliminated and where risk reduction programs are fostered. We

know that natural disasters hit the least developed countries harder than other countries. That is why our focus is on capacity building of our National Societies in those most vulnerable areas. That is also why we are promoting the International Disaster Response Law Project as part of the international norms and standards of operations. We call upon the international community to move that initiative forward.

4. An enabling environment is one which seriously addresses public health issues and in particular, the scourge of HIV/AIDS. The enhancements and utilization of local capacities to address the special problems of stigma and treatment are essential to success in this area.

We are encouraged by the Report of the Secretary-General where the building of partnerships with the humanitarian sector is recognized as important to the goal of poverty eradication.

Madame President,

As an organization with almost 100 million volunteers around the world, we believe that we enjoy a high level of public trust and acceptance in the communities where we work. With our links to local populations, to our governments, to the private sector, to financial donors, and to the media and with our commitment to voluntary service the role of the humanitarian sector must be seen as a key component in the building of an enabling environment for poverty eradication. We have been effective in mobilizing public support for disaster relief but we have fallen short in our desire to extend the road from simple relief to meaningful risk reduction and sustainable development.

We are prepared to work in partnership with you to contribute our humanitarian resources, expertise, networks and money to the task, which faces all of us.

But we need your support in fulfilling this essential humanitarian mission. Governments and the multilateral system will always be the engine, which drives this initiative.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we see this debate as an important forerunner to the work to be done in the wider UN family on progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In our view the Goals are achievable, but not without comprehensive and the active participation of communities. We and our National Red Cross and Crescent Societies stand ready to provide our support to your work to engage them, but if we are to do so effectively we need your commitment to engage. This, the building of the partnerships for development, is what is envisaged as a principal ingredient for success with the Millennium Development Goals, and it is what we are seeking today.

Thank you, Madame President.