



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
SOCIETIES DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

800 Second Avenue
Suite 355, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10017
Tel: (212) 338-0161 Fax: (212) 338-9832
E-mail: ifreny@un.in

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Trusteeship Council Chamber

Round table 3

High-level plenary meeting on the theme "Africa's development needs: state of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward"

**THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES (IFRC)**

**Statement by
Bekele GELETA
Secretary-General**

Check against delivery

New York, 22 September 2008

Chair, Excellencies, colleagues and friends,

I am honoured to be here today. This is my first opportunity to attend a high-level meeting at the United Nations since becoming Secretary-General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on 1 July 2008.

There is no dearth of analyses on the many ills of Africa. Neither is there a paucity of declarations on Africa's development needs nor stated commitments to address them. Under the circumstances, it is somewhat puzzling that progress is slow and uneven, and sometimes we even go backwards.

I am privileged to represent the world's largest humanitarian and development network consisting of 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of which 54 are in Africa. With tens of millions of volunteers and members in communities everywhere, we bear daily witness to the trials and tribulations of ordinary people. We work alongside them as they toil for the better life that is surely their human right. Here is what they say: they would like to live a life of security in which they are treated with fairness and dignity, and where they can make a decent living to enable them to meet their basic needs. They welcome help in the spirit of our common humanity, but they do not want charity. They would like to see a balanced projection of the images of Africa. People work hard and governments are increasingly accountable. Economies are growing, some faster than others. Change is there for some and very much on its way for others. But a lot more needs to be done together.

In a world that is not lacking in knowhow and resources, how can we *do more and do better*? The prescription is familiar and does not need to be repeated here. But there are three special items, from the perspective of the communities in which the Red Cross / Red Crescent is engaged:

First, we have to change mindsets and attitudes in relation to development. This means that we have to focus development efforts on enabling the poor and vulnerable to better handle current and future risks. We all know well that recurrent disasters diminish precious development gains. We can, unfortunately, also be quite certain that, whatever future shocks our evolving world has waiting for us, from climate change or other factors, it is the poor that will bear the brunt. The implication is that we must move on from an approach that is preoccupied not just with managing disasters after they have happened but one that also tackles risks head on. This requires a comprehensive package of policies and investments that are oriented towards **creating a more resilient society**. This will not only help the poor to deal with the familiar problems of disease and disaster as we know them today but enable them to face the predicted or unknown uncertainties of tomorrow. On this way of thinking, **development is not just about raising income levels. It is also about liberating people from fear of the future that can paralyse them from acting boldly to lift themselves out of poverty.**

Second, we have to re-examine the concept of capacity building for sustainable development. Moving beyond traditional education and training, the capacities we need to develop are ones that will generate social entrepreneurship through new business partnerships that capitalise the ideas and capabilities of communities in finding solutions to their day-to-day needs and problems. This is not just about more partnership with the private sector which is, of course, necessary, but about finding ways to stimulate and reward creativity, and providing incentives that enable the fruits of innovation to be enjoyed by the poor and vulnerable faster and on a much wider scale than is currently the case.

Third, we must respectfully, but critically, ask if the international system for development assistance is, as yet, optimal in serving the best interests of the poor. This is not simply about the volume of aid but