



**MAURITIUS INTERNATIONAL MEETING
on the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF
SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

PLENARY DEBATE

Statement by

Dr. Raymond Forde
Leader of the Delegation
Member of the IFRC Governing Board
President of the Barbados Red Cross Society

**INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES**

Port Louis
14 January 2005

Check against delivery

SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES
MAURITIUS INTERNATIONAL MEETING
IFRC PLENARY STATEMENT

President,

Thank you for giving me the floor at this very important Meeting. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies takes this opportunity to reiterate the special vulnerabilities of the people of small island developing states.

We wish to record three points of particular relevance to our member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies at this Meeting. Before doing so, however, I wish to make a brief reference to the situation in the Indian Ocean around us — the region so devastated by the tsunami.

The International Federation, through its National Societies in 11 of the 12 countries directly affected, has been in the forefront in responding to the disaster. Our first assessments of damage led to our first preliminary appeal being launched less than twelve hours after the disaster struck. Our volunteers and trained staff were at work within minutes of the tsunami striking.

At a briefing for Geneva diplomatic missions on 5 January we were able to report that we had deployed 14 emergency response units, delivering basic health, water and sanitation and relief to communities in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, with more available for deployment as needed. We were also providing support and other assistance to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the other affected countries, and had deployed a Federation Assessment and Coordination Team to the Maldives, the only affected country where there is not yet a National Society.

Our Secretary-General, Mr Markku Niskala, elaborated on these points when he spoke on 6 January at the Jakarta Meeting of ASEAN and other Government leaders. The full text of his statement is in the IFRC website.

Mr Niskala also spoke at the Ministerial Meeting on Assistance to Tsunami-Affected Countries held in Geneva on 11 January, and detailed the importance we attach to community-based disaster preparedness. This Geneva Meeting heard many delegates speak of the importance of early warning, preparedness and disaster prevention, and Mr Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, took special note.

As delegates will know from our presentation in the Parallel Event at this Conference, we attribute great importance to this issue, and in many countries our Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies play a significant role in transmitting warnings to the most vulnerable. So my delegation hopes that the same message be highlighted in the conclusions of this International Meeting, and strengthened at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe next week.

Disaster Preparedness

Our people, and I speak from the experience of the Caribbean region which is devastated almost every year during its hurricane season, have had to learn the hard way about the need for communities to look after their own needs. We know how to build for ourselves, how to prepare for the worst, how to look after each other, and how to work together to rebuild.

This is perhaps one of the main reasons why the Red Cross Red Crescent network is so valuable to us. It has as one of its basic programs the support we need for building community self-reliance and for the maintenance of the partnerships that are so essential to disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

Health

Our experience is that public health needs in SIDS are of a quite different character from those in continental states. Remoteness imposes its own challenges for the communities, and the International Federation is constantly looking for ways of meeting the needs of populations. An example, which we wish delegates to take note of, at this Meeting is the opportunity available to link people to medical care through the Internet. This work, telemedicine, using technology modified by the Icelandic Red Cross, is as relevant for SIDS as it is for the remote communities of the Arctic region, and we hope to bring it to the attention of governments and others later in the year.

Millennium Development Goals

The International Federation sees this conference as having the opportunity to address with some precision the particular tasks which must be taken in SIDS if they are to achieve the targets set within the MDGs. For our part, we have worked to underline the applicability of the MDGs to our programs in island states and their communities. The International Federation's regional program in the Pacific has been a leader in this effort, and its appeal for donor support for 2005 has based each of its programs around the MDGs.

Finally, President, it will be clear from what we have said that we regard this Meeting as having the capacity to contribute towards programs which make a real difference to the prospects of people in SIDS. They are people living with special vulnerability, but vulnerabilities which cannot and should not be addressed without the closest consultation with them. This is why the Red Cross Red Crescent, with its world-wide and indeed island-wide network is so well-placed to support the work of governments and their international organisation partners.

We intend to stay close to these issues in the years ahead, and look forward to much more intense consultation as the outcomes of this Meeting move into their implementation stages.

Thank you.