



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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STATEMENT BY MS. ANNE CHRISTENSEN, OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS,

TO THE 56TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
NEW YORK, 5 MARCH 2012

Mr. Chairman,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). IFRC welcomes this year's priority theme and its focus on empowering rural women. As we move towards Rio+20 and engage in discussions on the post-2015 development agenda we must ensure that gender equality is placed at the heart of sustainable development commitments.

Unlocking women's potential requires investment in breaking down barriers in the political, economic and social spheres and in reducing discrimination, stereotypes and social exclusion.

Health Inequity

One of the greatest challenges we face is that health inequities are rising despite overall progress on health. Particular attention must be placed on the most vulnerable groups, including women and children. Women, mothers and adolescent girls are too often subjected to stigma and discrimination and denied access to health care. In our experience, community-based volunteers can reach the unreached by tailoring a response to their specific contexts. And it works even in the most unexpected places around the world as described by case studies in the 2011 IFRC Health Inequity report.ⁱ

Many of our 187 member Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies are helping to bridge gaps in health inequity and at the same time are building women's knowledge, skills and leadership by engaging them in program design and delivery. One good practice is a community-based public health program run by the Solomon Islands Red Cross, which has to date provided 50 remote communities with the knowledge, skills and long-term support to help them improve health and hygiene practices. Female and male community-based volunteers with local knowledge are well-placed to address culturally sensitive issues and to help change mindsets and behaviours. The results are encouraging, with a direct impact for women as tensions have reduced in the communities, as causes of disease become better known.

Natural Disasters

We welcome the initiative by Japan to address “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters” in a new resolution at this year’s CSW and hope that it is adopted unanimously. As we are sitting here today, millions of lives and livelihoods are being threatened by disaster or crisis. For the IFRC, disaster risk reduction interacts closely with sustainable development. Therefore, the IFRC’s approach to disaster management not only involves meeting basic needs in the aftermath of a disaster but also building on and developing the affected population’s capacities, skills and resources so that they are less vulnerable to and more resilient to meet future crises.

Statistically, women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die from natural disasters. Gender shapes the way and extent to which women, girls, boys and men are vulnerable to and affected by disasters and it is imperative that in designing our responses that we take into account those different needs and priorities. When investing in disaster risk reduction we must ensure that women are engaged both as beneficiaries and as participants in the decision-making integral to disaster preparedness and response work. Addressing women’s unequal access to assets, education, knowledge and power is essential to boosting their resources and capacity to protect themselves, their families and their assets.

The IFRC encourages an increased and improved collaboration between humanitarian and development practitioners for the benefit of safer, healthier and more resilient communities. Effective collaboration is crucial in mainstreaming gender-sensitive risk reduction into sustainable development work in health, water and sanitation and food security, and must take place at local, national and global levels if minimum safety and resilience standards are to be achieved.

Relevant to our deliberations in CSW on women’s economic empowerment is the role of women’s livelihoods in disasters. Investing in livelihoods helps speed up recovery and increases resilience in the face of future disasters. In this regard, we must allow women to reach their potential to contribute to food security, poverty eradication and development, including by addressing women’s livelihoods in the immediate response phase. For example, in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, a key element of the IFRC’s response is support for livelihoods, agricultural inputs, and income generating and disaster risk reduction interventions in order to build local capacity and resilience for this and future years.

On a much larger scale, in both humanitarian and development contexts, we must also act on FAO’s estimate that targeted investments in women farmers can significantly improve yields by up to 30%.

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the rich experiences, successes and challenges shared by member states, UN entities and civil society in the course of the past week. Moving forward we need to work together to ensure that commitments made on gender equality and the empowerment of women are turned into reality.

Thank you.

ⁱ Available at www.ifrc.org