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Statement by

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Check against delivery

Mr President,

Thank you for giving me the floor to bring the perspectives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies into this important ministerial level debate.

The debate has gathered many contributions from governments on partnerships aimed at poverty eradication. The reference to the global partnership for development is important to us, for it ensures a concentration on the eighth Millennium Development Goal and from that to the way the MDGs themselves contribute to the alleviation of poverty and hunger.

The IFRC is a strong supporter of the objectives contained in the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. Our own Global Agenda, which was adopted in 2005 at our own General Assembly in Seoul, creates a framework for action which is designed to support the achievement of the MDGs. Our work internationally with other organisations introduces the eradication of poverty and hunger, and a number of important health standards, as part of this effort.

We pursue our Global Agenda at the international level using our status as an international organisation with the UN and other members of the international community, and at the national level where our worldwide membership of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies use their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field to engage their governments and other partners on what must be done to meet humanitarian needs.

An important reason for mentioning this today is that the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which will convene in late November here in Geneva, will tackle very similar issues.

The overall theme for the Conference and our work for the following four years has been set as "Together for Humanity".

This is itself a signal of our wish to engage actively with others on the major humanitarian challenges facing the world, on a basis of equality and within partnerships which respect the contributions that all players can offer within their own mandates. We stress the binding character of our Fundamental Principles in this regard, noting that independence, neutrality and impartiality are themselves of profound assistance to the service of humanity.

The themes for the International Conference all have a bearing on efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, for they focus on the biggest challenges now confronting humanity as a whole. As is so frequently the case, these challenges confront all humanity, but their impact on the poor and the most vulnerable is the most acute of all.

There are four such themes:

Environmental hazards, including climate change. As has been clear from several statements in this debate, the changes in world weather patterns and the increase in disasters originating in weather conditions is causing growing concern around the world, and accelerating trends in some countries which leave people starving and in dire conditions.

Migration is the second theme. This does not concern what is legal and what is not, nor does it go to definitions. It is about the vulnerability which a rapidly increasing proportion of the world's population faces as trends accelerate population movement, for a host of reasons. Migration is closely linked to poverty, both at the departure and arrival stages of a migrant's journey, and needs to be accepted within this vulnerability context.

Violence in communities is a deeply troubling aspect of the modern world. We are witnessing decaying social conditions in many cities, and increasing violence brought on by a range of issues. The range is wide, but a common denominator in many situations is poverty and deprivation. It is in these circumstances that those who would foster violence for their own ends are able to succeed, and we believe this is an issue which deserves the attention of the Red Cross Red Crescent world.

The world is also threatened by a number of emergent and recurrent diseases. HIV has brought economic and social devastation to large parts of Africa, and is likely to do the same to some other countries unless governments make the right links with community-based organisations like their Red Cross and Red Crescent Society counterparts to challenge the disease where they strike.

This is the central approach in the IFRC Global Health and Care Strategy for 2006-2010. The document has a central place in all our planning in this area, and has been welcomed by our colleagues in WHO as well as many governments for its clarity and its emphasis on partnerships which build effective community participation in responding to the most urgent health and disease challenges.

This Strategy was discussed extensively in May this year at one of our most important partnership actions, the IFRC Health Forum. This is a gathering of National Societies, WHO, some government personalities and others which brings together the expertise in the fields of the major challenges and charts a course for the future. One significant event this year was the signature of a new agreement between IFRC and WHO-AFRO, supplementing at this vital regional level the excellent agreement in place between our Secretary General and the Director General of WHO.

This cooperation, from global to local levels, is the essential value of our cooperation. There are many good examples of how we work in partnership with others, and there is not time to do more today than point to one: the Measles initiative launched by the IFRC in 2001 and now including a wide range of international organisations, governments, foundations and other players. It is a long-term commitment aimed at vaccinating more

than 350 million children and cutting childhood deaths from this disease by more than 80% by 2015.

A common thread in the debates we hold within the International Federation is the importance of tackling these and similar issues with national resources. Our experience is that although in many cases external assistance is vital, cash alone does not provide any easy answers to challenges of this magnitude.

The essential element in any program to deal with poverty and other humanitarian challenges is the empowerment of the affected people and their communities, the empowerment of all groups in those communities, and the readiness of governments and other decision-makers to listen to the messages these communities send. A particular point of importance for us is the inequality which is always present alongside poverty, and the special vulnerability which results.

Programs must also address factors which retard or prevent development from taking place. This is why public health programs aimed at preventable diseases are essential, and why whole communities need to be involved in their design and implementation.

It is also why it is high time to listen to communities affected by climate change, which is bound to have a strong impact on the emergence of humanitarian crises in the coming decade. The scientific evidence clearly proves that the increasing number of such crises can often be attributed to the effects of climate change. Television today uses impacted communities as evidence of a recently-discovered problem. But climate change is not a new thing – it has been happening for many years, and the efforts that have been made to address some consequences have received little support.

Desertification is an example. The Desertification Convention was adopted in 1994 and is now one of the most universally ratified treaties in the UN list. 2006 was declared as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. Despite this energy and the willingness of governments to go so far as to ratify a treaty, the issue of desertification is still treated with complacency, programs are seriously underfunded, and the work of governments and others is poorly coordinated.

Much of the work to combat desertification is similar to the work the Red Cross and Red Crescent engage as disaster preparedness. It remains exceptionally difficult to get governments and donors in general to pay serious attention to preparedness, while all are ready and willing to support response. Even though it is clear that for every dollar spent on preparedness, ten are saved at the response stage.

The Movement is not striving to look deeply into the causes of that phenomenon, but at the upcoming International Conference we shall try to promote the need to adapt our activities to address its humanitarian consequences. Together with other humanitarian partners, we shall make a call to the global community to protect the people most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as well as other environmental challenges, in

the wider context of disaster risk reduction, conflict prevention and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

So, for us in the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the key to the eradication of poverty and hunger is through the building of partnerships which include the affected communities themselves as groups empowered to make an effective contribution to the design, implementation and monitoring of programs which meet their needs.

With ownership on this scale, the communities will help governments scale up national development, and this in turn will support actions which will make a significant contribution towards the achievement of the MDGs.

We have built several partnerships and alliances with this in mind. A recent example is our Global Alliance on HIV, which is currently seeking approximately \$250 million but which will link with national resources in southern Africa to sustain a program there which will make a real difference in favour of the communities impacted by the disease.

We are also carefully assessing the way the Red Cross Red Crescent should address the humanitarian consequences of climate change. The Netherlands Red Cross, through an agreement with the IFRC, manages the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre in The Hague. The Centre held a major conference in The Hague a week ago, with over 40 National Societies to examine case studies and reports and work towards the International Conference to be held in November in Geneva.

It quickly became apparent at the meeting that the investment gap between the richer and poorer nations is widening rapidly. Many developed countries have responded to recent news about climate change and global warming by taking measures and investing in their own national environmental security. Few have recognised that environmental security cannot be purchased for a nation state – it may be an issue with local impact, but it requires global transboundary solutions.

Mr President, this leads me back to a point to which I've referred several times, but I conclude with an explicit sentence.

UN meetings and other similar gatherings are being held more and more frequently, and are producing predictable lofty promises. Delivery on the promises is much harder to find. It is our hope in the IFRC that the new format you have chosen for ECOSOC will make it possible to link promises to delivery, but we know that this will require concerted action.

We will make this point in statements in other segments of this session, and return to it later in the year.

Thank you.