



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL, 2009
COORDINATION SEGMENT – IFRC STATEMENT

President,

Thank you for giving the floor to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies during the discussions in this Segment. I will be outlining some aspects of the work the IFRC and its worldwide network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies undertake in partnership and cooperation with elements of the United Nations family, with a view to offering some suggestions as to how we can together strengthen sustainable development.

A pertinent example of well-coordinated action towards shared objectives is the work now under way to address the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

Article 4 of the Framework Convention contains a commitment by States party to cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change. A variety of headings for future action are set in the article, but experience over the 15 years since the negotiation of the Convention has shown that the commitment taken through the Convention has not alleviated the concerns of communities facing the threat posed to them by climate change.

Communities are now at a stage which cannot be reversed quickly enough by mitigation to prevent millions of livelihoods, and lives, from being seriously jeopardised.

That threat has become a daily reality for many people, especially in the developing world. Food insecurity, a challenge in Africa for many years, is now an acute concern for communities. This insecurity is accompanied reduced nutritional intake amounting in many cases to malnutrition, which in turn renders people much more vulnerable to disease threats and much less able to stand as productive members of local and hence national economies.

Their voice is brought to the international level, and bodies like this Economic and Social Council, by the IFRC through its status with the United Nations and associated organisations.

Similarly, it is brought into the inter-Agency system including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, through which coordinated action is made possible by the interaction of organisations sharing common crisis management objectives.

One of our concerns in this inter-agency setting is to ensure that crisis management is undertaken with sustainable development integrated into the decision-making process.

We see this as particularly important in the context provided by climate change. The crisis which confronts so many people and communities in the developing world must be managed with a view to enabling those communities to adapt in ways which retains their productive force within their countries, and which sustains the dignity of the people themselves.

Returning to the example of food insecurity within the climate change challenge – the IFRC launched a five year strategic framework on food security aimed particularly at those communities in Africa most vulnerable to the threat of HIV and AIDS and disasters.

Results so far are encouraging, but there is much more to be done. Our directions support community based programs which enhance community resilience through food security actions for at least 20 percent of the most seriously affected people in the communities concerned.

This approach provides integrated assistance to communities beyond aid; through the strengthening of their volunteer base, supporting their agricultural and livestock production, their income and at the same time supporting their health protection systems and their environments.

It assists their resource mobilisation efforts. This is vitally important, as it enables the communities to build their own viability, and through this support for their dignity it is a strong contribution to sustainable development.

The IFRC program also supports improved interaction between the communities, their local authorities and the national institutions in their country. This is the real benefit in such cases of the active utilisation by National Societies of their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities, at all levels.

IFRC brings this local and national action to the top international table through its participation in the IASC and through its representation at relevant international conferences and other meetings. IFRC is currently the facilitator of the IASC Informal Task Force on Climate Change set-up by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Task force raises awareness of the humanitarian impacts of climate change, taking into account the long-term consequences, for example on health, food security, livelihoods, migration and displacement. It also highlights the importance of local level action made possible through community based climate change adaptation.

Our Secretary General outlined the coordinated position of the IASC agencies at a Risk Management Workshop at the 14th Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, on 3 December 2008, in Poznan. He spoke then of disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management as key elements of climate change adaptation. He highlighted the need to take account of and manage the humanitarian impacts of climate change through systematic reduction of disaster risks, but also through strengthening emergency preparedness, response and recovery mechanisms at all levels.

Climate change adaptation must be driven by countries and local communities. This also implies an increased focus on national integration of climate change adaptation measures into national development plans. Additional financing for national and local level adaptation is crucial.

The objectives must also be set in recognition of the overwhelming impact of crises on the communities, and accompanied by programs to strengthen the resilience of the communities. After all, technology transfer is not an abstract term. It is only useful if it benefits those communities, and this is where the special strength of the Red Cross Red Crescent and its trained volunteer base is indispensable.

Our chief message today, therefore, is that inter-agency coordination, and the coordination of governmental action, must be accompanied by recognition of the communities who are the key to sustained economic and social development. . As the IASC Task Force has said, "responding to the humanitarian challenges of climate change and addressing the root causes of vulnerability will require greater coordination between the humanitarian, development and climate change communities.

This coordination message is one we have been delivering throughout our 90 year history. It is one which was born when communities went forward armed only with neutrality and determination at the start of the Red Cross Red Crescent ideal on the battlefield of Solferino 150 years ago.

It is, however, a message which has been received well but much less well turned into action. It is our intention to work actively to invigorate that action in the time ahead, and so it is our hope today that this Council will share our hopes, and that this will contribute to the building of a new reality base at the end of this year at the 15th Conference of Parties to the FCCC, in Copenhagen.