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54th SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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

Statement by

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FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DES SOCIÉTÉS DE LA CROIX-ROUGE ET DU CROISSANT-ROUGE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES
FEDERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE SOCIEDADES DE LA CRUZ ROJA Y DE LA MEDIA LUNA ROJA
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Commission on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation).

This 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women marks an important milestone. Following the Security Council's recent adoption of resolutions 1888 and 1889 on violence against women and girls, and linked to the upcoming high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals this September, the fifteen-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represents a unique opportunity to renew commitments, build on achievements, address challenges, as well as to intensify efforts and resources for the realisation of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The International Federation and our member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies share this aspiration – and we are actively engaged to its achievement.

Today, as the International Federation mobilises and coordinates the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance to those affected by the tragic earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, we are taking steps to ensure that the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls are given special consideration in our needs assessments and in programme design and implementation. We are also investing in the prevention and response to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, including by deploying a dedicated gender focal point to Port-au-Prince as an integral member of the operation team.

Steps such as these exemplify the International Federation's commitment, as embodied in our global Gender Policy, which calls upon all National Societies to ensure that:

- *all Red Cross Red Crescent programmes benefit men and women equally,*
- *according to their different needs, and*
- *with the input and equal participation of men and women at all levels.*

The critical importance of ensuring equal participation by women and men is also reflected in the International Federation's global Volunteer Policy, which calls upon National Societies to ensure that there is appropriate participation of men and women in volunteer programmes for effective and gender-sensitive delivery of services.

Through various national and regional initiatives since the adoption of this policy now 10 years ago, the number of women among Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers has substantially increased. The latest available figures show that globally approximately 53 percent of active volunteers are women. What is more, this near balance is consistent across all regions – from a relative low of 46 percent in Africa, to a high of 58 percent in the Americas.

By empowering young women volunteers and ensuring their equal participation at this most fundamental level, we not only contribute to effecting attitudinal and behavioural changes within communities, but we also enhance the inclusiveness, outreach, and quality of our programme delivery.

In a recent example in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society recognised that success depended on behavioural and nutritional changes by female household members. By mobilising and training a team of 100 female volunteers to engage in their own communities, the society was able to directly reach malnourished and anaemic women in more than 19,000 households. In addition to raising awareness of the symptoms of anaemia and the immense risks for pregnant women and their unborn children, these volunteers provided de-worming and iron tablets and distributed seeds of iron-rich vegetables for the long-term sustainability of the project.

In closing, the International Federation underlines our vision of a world of empowered communities engaged to prevent and alleviate human suffering and to ensure respect for the dignity of all those in crises. This vision, rooted in our Fundamental Principles and their underpinning humanitarian values, is the vision of a world where all women and men, girls and boys enjoy equal rights and are treated with equal dignity and respect.

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the 10th anniversary of our global Gender and Volunteer Policies, the International Federation adds its voice to the call for intensified efforts for the achievement of full equality and empowerment of women.