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IFRC SECRETARY GENERAL, ELHADJ AS SY

**Remarks at the Special Event, “Women Leadership
in Disaster Risk Reduction”,**

Thursday 25 May at 13:00-15:00, Arena E

5 mins

H.E. Ms Amina Mohamed UN Deputy Secretary General,

H.E. Ms Inonge M.Wina, Vice President of the Zambia,
Distinguished panellists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am very pleased to be here with you today, to share with you the experiences of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and our 190 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to address gender inequality during crises response and the role of women’s participation and leadership.
- For over 150 years, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers have been the first responders to disasters large and small, around the world. They were also early adopters of the risk reduction agenda, working hard over the last several decades to bring early warning, preparedness and resilience strategies to the community level.



- We have drawn two major lessons from this work.
- The first is that disasters are fundamentally unfair – and they are unfair in many of the same ways that our societies are still unfair. People at the margins, those who face discrimination and inequality are systematically struck the hardest. It is therefore no surprise that disasters have a gendered impact, sometimes impacting men, but more often it is girls and women who suffer the most.
- They often suffer the highest mortality, encounter the greatest challenges in obtaining support, and bear the heaviest burden to support families in recovery.
- In Bangladesh, for example, of the 140,000 people who died from the flood-related effects of Cyclone Gorky in 1991, women outnumbered men by 14 to 1.
- However, the second lesson is that disasters bring out heroes – and a great many of them are women.
- In Liberia, Neima Candy, a nurse and public health worker, witnessed how the 2014 Ebola crisis was not only ending lives but also destroying livelihoods, such as those of market women from Monrovia who could not cross closed county borders to buy food to sell in the city. She went on to become the Liberian Red Cross' Ebola Coordinator, overseeing thousands of volunteers helping their communities.



- When a deadly earthquake struck Pakistan in 2005, Saeeda Bibi, a 25-year old mother, put the disaster preparedness training she received from the Pakistan Red Crescent to work, saving the lives of 40 people buried in rubble.
- Turning back to Bangladesh, Shukoda (Shoo-ko-da), from Subarnachar (Soo-barn-ahh-char), experienced many catastrophic cyclones in her youth, and went on to become the vice chairwoman of her local community disaster preparedness committee. When Cyclone Aila threatened in 2009, she went from home to home in her community, telling the women to pack their belongings, bury valuables in the ground and seek shelter. She contributed directly to a massive drop in deaths compared to previous disasters.
- I'm happy to say that examples like these are becoming more common. The traditional roles of women when it comes to disaster are already changing. In the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene, for instance, women and girls play an ever-increasing role in both being prepared and responding to disasters but also developing long term WASH facilities. More women are involved in WASH management, technical operation and maintenance and engineering aspects.
- We see the value of this kind of leadership reflected in many parts of our Movement. Women are leading



some of our most active National Societies, from Egypt to Mongolia, South Korea to Botswana.

- We must apply these lessons across all our work in disaster risk management.
- In practice, it is quite challenging and there is still a long road ahead to achieve this.
- One very good example is the case of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). SGBV is all too-well documented in the context of armed conflicts but it is less well recognized that natural disasters also fuel greater exposure and incidents.
- Data are patchy, as the survivors of SGBV are often reluctant to report their abuse. In a series of country case studies the IFRC undertook in 2015, we found that this tendency is aggravated in disaster settings, when everyone feels pressure to “pull together as a community” and not to complain.
- We also found a frightening picture of vulnerable girls and women, removed from their homes and protective social settings. We found stretched and distracted law enforcement capacities. And we found disaster managers unaware and unequipped to handle the elevated risk of SGBV when disasters strike.
- In 2015, the Movement joined with the State Parties to the Geneva Conventions in adopting a resolution on SGBV in conflicts and disasters, with strong



commitments to scale up our efforts to prevent and respond to this danger.

- For our part, we have developed new training for National Societies and, through this new collaboration with our friends in UN Women and UNISDR, hope to roll out our efforts to community level volunteers around the world, making links to child protection, community engagement, and accountability measures, and ensuring that they are ready to handle disclosures SGBV and to provide psychosocial first aid.
- We have also begun new research on the main gaps and best practices in law and policy related to SGBV in disasters, with the aim of supporting authorities to draw on the best evidence in strengthening their legislative frameworks.
- Looking beyond SGBV, we are committed to contributing a much more systematic approach to gender in disaster risk planning and programming, including through stronger data collection, awareness and planning.
- To this end, the IFRC has developed *Minimum Standard Commitments on Gender and Diversity in Emergency Programming* which provides a minimum set of practical actions to integrate gender and diversity issues in our emergency response.



- In the past two years, four IFRC Protection, Gender and Inclusion personnel have been deployed in emergency responses (Nepal and migration response in Europe) to
 - ensure integration of gender and diversity into planning, reporting and operational systems,
 - support collection of gender and age disaggregated data, and
 - address multiple protection concerns.
- Our members are also taking up this broader challenge, particularly targeting how to empower and engage women in building their own resilience.
- For example, the Red Cross of Serbia uses a network of 500 trained community volunteers to conduct interactive anti-trafficking workshops at over 100 local branches.
- And the Myanmar Red Cross has been promoting women's participation by training women in firefighting and disaster knowledge.
- The **Philippine Red Cross**, with its seat within the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, contributed to the development of new law and policy that requires a gender analysis as part of early recovery and post-disaster needs assessments, for the provision of food and medical supplies and creation of safe spaces.



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FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

- I look forward to working with UN Women and UNISDR on our Global Programme, to provide the needed boost to these activities – to make them an everyday aspect of how our volunteers work around the world and to support governments to strengthen their own approach to gender.