

SECRETARY GENERAL'S MESSAGE ON WORLD RED CROSS DAY

2009 is a special year for the Red Cross movement. It is a year of joy, happiness and celebration for the Red Cross fraternity. On May 5th, 90 glorious years of International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are completed, on May 21st it is the 150th anniversary of the battle of Solferino and on August 12th, it is the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. The movement has launched a very inspiring and notable campaign 'Our World. Your Move'. Under the campaign with other National Societies, we have opted to address the global threat faced by our world today i.e. climate change. Therefore the theme for this year's World Red Cross Day is 'Climate Change and its humanitarian consequences serving as a Solferino of Today'.

I recall here one of the famous maxims quoted by our Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhiji "The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed". The current global financial recession and threat to our ecology have illustrated these very clearly. The latest scientific projections suggest that we are moving fast towards a climate catastrophe, if radical mitigation and adaptation actions are not taken. All countries are prone to natural hazards and more than half the world's population is highly exposed to at least one hazard. More than 250 million people are affected by weather-related disasters annually, out of which more than 98 per cent of them are in the developing world. In the context of climate change, over 344 million people are exposed to tropical cyclones (UNDP). Around 213 million people were affected by disasters in 2008 (2009 World Disaster Report). The number of affected people per 100,000 population doubled from 18 in the late 1970s to 36 in the late 1990s. Overall economic losses have increased, in constant dollar terms, from an annual average of less than US\$4 billion in the 1950s to some US\$12 billion in the 1970s and to over US\$83 billion since 2000.

Therefore time has come when we have to make our move and we need to change the way we live

If climate change is the consequence of human behaviour, then it is only when the billions of human "doings" that contribute to climate change are transformed into billions of positive human actions for mitigation – here, there, and everywhere - that we will really make a headway. In the Red Cross Red Crescent, we call this "mobilizing the power of humanity".

We can point towards many examples to show that risk reduction really does work, in practice, to save lives and protect livelihoods. Last year on World Red Cross day, we launched a nation wide plantation drive with the help of volunteers. Indeed it is a simple but effective measure to adapt to climate change. IRCS state branches have been conducting workshops, seminars and rallies to raise awareness on climate change and its humanitarian consequences. We need to consolidate our efforts and take them forward.

Globally the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are undertaking, without much fanfare, local actions such as protecting water wells before anticipated flooding, planting trees against landslides or desertification; constructing small scale drainage works to protect their homes and roads; cleaning stagnant pools against disease bearing insect plagues; and setting up local committees to spread life-saving knowledge or skills such as first aid.

This is climate change adaptation and mitigation in the most practical sense. It shows that while the climate change phenomenon is already affecting our world, we are not helpless or passive victims.

Friends, let us take an oath that now onwards we will take forward the campaign and implement the ways in combating the climate change.

I wish you all the best on the occasion of the World Red Cross Day.

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Secretary General
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