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SOCIETIES DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
63<sup>rd</sup> session**

**Economic and Social Council Chamber**

***High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals  
Round Table No. 3  
“Environmental Sustainability”***

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

**Statement by  
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Secretary-General  
as Official Lead Discussant**

**Check against delivery**

**New York, 25 September 2008**

*Chairs, Excellencies, friends and colleagues,*

I am honoured, amidst such distinguished company, to introduce this afternoon's discussion. Naturally, I do so from the perspective of the myriad communities served by the tens of millions of members and volunteers of the 189 National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies that constitute the world's largest humanitarian and development network.

It is now almost a cliché to label climate change as the defining human development issue of our age. If development is ultimately about expanding human potential and enlarging human freedom through empowering people to make choices in leading the lives that they value, then the impact of climate change could constitute a major reversal, cancelling the progress of recent decades.

The organisers have asked us to highlight key issues. I have three such issues.

**First, we must recognise that the human development consequences of dangerous climate change are not equally distributed.** What is "dangerous" and for whom is determined by differences in factors such as localised climate effects, social and economic coping capacities, and public policy choices. Overall, it is the poor that suffer most because they live in the most environmentally stressed circumstances and have the least resilience to handle climatic shocks.

**Second, climate change has to be tackled, ultimately, through mitigation** i.e. by decreasing the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases. But this is not enough as significant climate impacts are already with us and the inherent inertia in climate systems means that current and future mitigation efforts will take a long time to stabilise and reverse the consequences of climate change.

**Third, adaptation** i.e. actions that reduce the negative effects of climate change or enhance the benefits, is essential and urgent. Climate change is a global phenomenon but the human development effects are largely locally felt in the communities so well known to the Red Cross Red Crescent. As these effects are experienced most by the poorer communities and countries that have made the least contribution to the problem, investment in climate change adaptation is necessary, not just for reasons of social justice, but also to address inequality-based grievances. This will help to generate a more positive political climate for the application of sound, evidence-based policies and fostering of the global co-operation that is vital for effective mitigation.

The organisers have also asked us to focus on needed actions. I have just four actions for your consideration:

- *First*, we must expand our understanding of the climate change impact scenarios that are predicted in relation to each of the specific key dimensions (agriculture, water, health, etc) that are relevant to the MDGs. What are the specific consequences and differential impacts for human development, and how are they mediated?
- *Second*, we must develop greater precision in the policies and strategies that will integrate climate adaptation measures with poverty and vulnerability reduction. This includes the specific actions needed to address inequalities based on location, economic status, gender, and other disadvantage markers. How should traditional development co-operation assistance be modified to incorporate adaptation objectives? What are the critical drivers of the adaptation behaviour of governments, and public and private social and market institutions?

- *Third*, we must influence personal and social attitudes and mindsets, in relation to climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. This means social mobilisation on a very large scale by incentivising the approaches that are most effective in building resilient communities. This is an area of priority action for the Red Cross / Red Crescent.
- *Fourth*, we must find innovative financing options, going beyond traditional ODA. We know that investing in prevention is highly cost effective with available studies indicating that \$1 investment in hazard risk management can reduce from \$3 to \$10 in disaster losses. We are comforted to know that governments can immediately find hundreds of billions of dollars to save financial markets from meltdown. Can we find similar – perhaps even smaller sums that are needed over a much longer time period - to save the world itself from melting?

In concluding, I can do no better than to quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

*"In a world that is so divided by inequalities in wealth and opportunity, it is easy to forget that we are part of one human community. As we see the early impacts of climate change registering across the world, each of us has to reflect on what it means to be part of that family... Of course, rich countries can use their vast financial and technological resources to protect themselves against climate change, at least in the short term... But as climate change destroys livelihoods, displaces people and undermines entire social and economic systems, no country – however rich or powerful – will be immune to the consequences. In the long-run, the problems of the poor will arrive at the doorstep of the wealthy, as the climate crisis gives way to despair, anger and collective security threats".*

But Archbishop Tutu is also the ever-inspiring optimist. He went on to say"....*none of this has to happen.....*". Can we prove him right? That, dear friends, is the central challenge that the organisers of this Round Table are asking us to address.

*Thank you.*