



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

**Delegation to the United Nations**

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**STATEMENT BY MR. AJAY MADIWALE,  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES  
DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS,**

**TO THE 57<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
NEW YORK, 11 MARCH 2013**

Madam Chair,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The IFRC welcomes this year's priority theme on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. The rich debate over the past week has highlighted both the progress made and the many gaps in this global effort. The Secretary General's reports before us make a clear call for further investment in prevention efforts, and in improving the research and evidence-base for such interventions.

Allow me to focus my remarks on one aspect, which while known and certainly critical, is not often included in our priority issues, and does not get the kind of attention it deserves.

**Violence in natural disasters**

While we have paid needed attention to violence in armed conflict, and must continue to do so, the same focus has been lacking in situations of natural disasters. Every year, natural disasters disrupt the lives of more than 200 million people, the majority of them women and girls. Among the often hidden impacts of disaster, is the devastation caused by the gender-based violence that often follows.

The evidence shows that in disaster after disaster, violence increases, including domestic and sexual violence. This violence occurs in camps, in shelters, in homes, and on the streets. The effect of such violence is not limited to the devastating physical and mental impact on its victims. Instead, this violence also has social and economic repercussions for individuals, families and the entire affected community. It is not an issue we can afford to overlook. As we face the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, we need to simultaneously scale up our efforts to prevent violence.

The IFRC is scaling up its own activities to bring greater attention to this issue. Last year, the IFRC and the Canadian Red Cross launched a report on violence, entitled *Predictable, Preventable*, which presents best practice on preventing violence in disasters for humanitarian actors. The report touches on the experiences of our National Societies in Haiti, Honduras and Canada in working with communities and in strengthening their own institutional capacity to respond to this issue.

We call on all stakeholders engaged in emergency response and early recovery to prioritize violence prevention, to respond rapidly when incidents occur, and to strengthen community-based social support structures. Collectively, we must endeavor to address violence prevention across all aspects of the disaster program cycle: in preparedness, response, recovery, and development. Any efforts at improving lives and livelihoods will fall short if we do not address basic personal safety or recognize that the threat of violence prevents people from accessing the assistance they deserve to rebuild their lives. Whether providing shelter or health care, delivering clean water and food, or helping to create livelihoods, violence prevention needs to be part of the responsibility, the vision, and the action of all who respond.

Decision-makers in government and in humanitarian organizations, as well as donors, need to commit the necessary financial and human resources to prevent and respond to violence in disasters. Working in partnerships, we can draw on community strengths and capacities, including the engagement of men and boys, to identify, mitigate, and reduce the risk of violence. All actors in a disaster response have a role to play in addressing the problem, and by adopting an evidence-based public health approach, we can monitor, prevent and respond to violence in natural disasters.

### **Silent disasters**

In addressing the prevention of violence in disasters, we must not forget that nine out of ten disasters the IFRC responds to are what we call 'silent disasters'. These types of disasters rarely – if ever – make international headlines. Whether floods, earthquakes, volcano eruptions or other types, they are anything but silent to those affected. The IFRC and ECHO have partnered on a campaign around 'silent disasters' that is currently running in Europe to engage the public on this issue.

### **Disaster risk reduction**

In concluding, let me turn to this year's emerging theme, and highlight the need for gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction measures and criteria in the post-2015 development agenda. Disaster risk reduction has long been a male dominated affair, despite the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and girls, and the critical role they play in increasing the resilience of their communities. Yet, in too many cases, women do not have a say and do not participate in disaster risk management processes and decision-making. Let us be mindful of this and resolve to ensure that gender equality and sensitivity in all sectors becomes a reality in any future development framework.

I thank you, Madam Chair.