



**FAO High Level Conference on World Food Security:
The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy
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**Statement by Dr. Massimo Barra,
Head of Delegation
International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
(also President of the Italian Red Cross)**

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which includes the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the 186 member Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, shares with the Rome based UN Agencies and with the broader humanitarian community the same concerns over the living conditions of more than 850 million people in the world suffering from food shortages.

Our Movement is guided at all times by our 7 Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

According to our Strategy 2010, we strive, through voluntary action, for a world of empowered communities, better able to address human suffering and crises with hope, respect for dignity and a concern for equity.

Our mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the Power of Humanity, which is not just a slogan, but is the power of our 100 million volunteers who - in their communities - live, work, suffer, and assist others in need.

Our International Federation, which I have today the honour to represent, was created in 1919 in order to assist the most vulnerable ones by spreading the light of science and the warmth of human sympathy. Ever since, it has been responding to all major crises, becoming the world's largest humanitarian and disaster response network.

Food security

Before the Millennium Declaration, food insecurity was already a deep concern for the IFRC. In September 2000, all our National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Africa at their 5th Pan African Conference in Ouagadougou adopted addressing food insecurity as a strategic priority.

This year, recently in April, the IFRC launched a Five-year strategic framework on food security for Africa targeting communities vulnerable to disasters and/or affected by HIV and AIDS.

This initiative targets 15 priority African National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and aims to reduce the vulnerability of African communities through longer-term support to livelihoods and food security. The purpose is to scale-up the International Federation's efforts in national food security programmes to provide at least 20 per cent of the most vulnerable populations with longer term food security support, to enhance their resilience.

The interventions are evidence-based and driven by good practice. For example, the localised, pragmatic approach of the strategy has successfully supported the Red Cross and other partners in Lesotho to help vulnerable communities to establish "key hole" gardens. Despite their small size, the gardens are productive, yielding substantial amounts of vegetables year round, regardless of rainfall patterns. Their ease of use and nutritional value make them perfect for particularly vulnerable families.

Mr Chairman, in line with our Global Agenda Goal number 3, which is to increase local community, civil society and Red Cross capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability, programmes are being developed with the full consultation and participation of vulnerable communities, in order to ensure that programmes build on the existing assets, capabilities and priorities of the communities and are owned by them.

Strengthening communities' resilience is also at the heart of our work in disaster risk reduction and we play a major role in the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction.

It is for this reason that I personally and the IFRC as a whole strongly welcome yesterday's initiative in which the FAO, the WFP and the IFAD signed an MoU with the Alliance for the Green Revolution in Africa, represented by Mr. Kofi Annan, aimed at strengthening the role of small farmers as a way to provide sustainable development to their communities.

This agreement is an important milestone in the way major global agencies work with and assist smallholder farmers in solving Africa's chronic hunger and food problems. In our view, this transformation of doing is in line with what the IFRC has devoted in their work. The IFRC strongly believes that the development of Africa needs to start with stocking-up of human capital, should the development be achieved in a sustainable way.

Capacity Building

In this way, an important component of the IFRC Five year strategy is to increase the capacities, skills and resources of the National Societies to have a demonstrated impact on chronic food insecurity using an integrated approach.

The current situation around high global food prices emphasises the need for both short- and long term actions. Our Movement will continue to address the immediate needs of those in food crisis through our humanitarian work, which is guided by our Fundamental Principles.

There will be a need to seek a balance between food distribution and other programmes addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity, recognizing that finding solutions to the emerging food gaps and to corresponding vulnerabilities may not be limited to food assistance only.

We therefore hope that this debate will impress on all concerned, including donors, the need to contribute resources and support to solutions beyond simple food assistance, and to prioritise local ownership of sustainable programs.

Climate change

The IFRC, alarmed by the increasing number of extreme weather events and their contribution to the global burden of disease, is deeply concerned about the observed and projected impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable people: the elderly, the sick and disabled and, in particular, the poorest of the poor.

Climate change not only threatens the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals but also strikes at the heart of our humanitarian work. The phenomenon requires a change in the way the whole humanitarian community addresses climate-related disasters.

Principally, the IFRC recognizes that climate change affects poor and vulnerable communities through increases in the scale and scope of the weather that they face on a year on year basis.

The 2007 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which gathers the Movement as well as 194 governments party to the Geneva Conventions, expressed strong concerns about the humanitarian consequences of climate change. By consensus, through a declaration entitled “Together for Humanity”, the conference made clear commitments to address the humanitarian consequences of climate change, which includes food insecurity, and in particular, the impacts on the most vulnerable people and to strive for sustainable solutions including a concentration on adaptation.

These efforts are strengthened by the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre, which was established in 2002 in The Hague to support national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to better understand and address the risks of climate change, including changes in extreme events, with a special focus on the impacts on the most vulnerable people in developing countries.

We will increasingly focus our efforts on ensuring, in those countries where weather-related disasters and poor health indicators are increasingly affecting vulnerable populations, that effective support reaches National Societies as they take action to promote climate change adaptation through the application of sound health promotion and disaster risk reduction at community level. We will also work closely with them through advocacy for strong national policies and strategies at national, regional and global levels.

We are also drawing experience from the many climate risk management programs which National Societies manage in their own environments. I will offer a few examples to illustrate the range: enhanced early warning and cyclone shelters in Nicaragua and Viet Nam, collaborations with the national Met Office in Mozambique, production of participatory audiovisual tools to communicate climate information at community level in Malawi, micro-finance to reduce risk in flood-prone urban slums in Indonesia, puppet shows to raise community awareness on changing climate risks in several Pacific Island Countries, and a program to address heat wave risks, particularly by reaching out to isolated elderly people, in the Netherlands.

The programs are aimed primarily at the community level, and their variety offers examples to people all over the world. In almost all cases, the programs have served to build bridges between practitioners and scientists, between different government agencies, and between government and NGOs. This bridging role of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, with its unique position as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and a trusted voice of communities, is an essential ingredient in the development of realistic and practical programs in this field.

In our experience, we found that although public awareness about the risks of climate change has increased dramatically over the last few years, this has not as yet been well focussed at national policy-making and community levels and there have not yet been substantial investments in climate risk management strategies and programs directed for the benefit of communities and the most vulnerable people.

We are particularly pleased, therefore, to have this opportunity to reinforce the call for priority for the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable countries.

Let me just conclude, Mr Chairman, with a special appreciation for the reference to the Red Cross and Red Crescent work made by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Mon, a former Youth of our Movement, like many other leaders I had the privilege to meet, whose commitment is an inspiring element for further cooperation between our Movement and the UN System, in favour of the most vulnerable ones.

Thank you.