International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is concerned that the issue of information and communication technology in disaster preparedness and response is not addressed in the draft plan of action, circulated to this subcommittee this morning.

If we are serious about our trying to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we must realize the intimate relationship that exists between development and so-called natural disasters. This means ceasing to view disasters as unique "events", and understand their roots in social and economic processes. In other words, such issues as risk reduction, preparedness planning and the building of response capacities have to be built into development planning. Disasters seek out the poor, and ensure they stay poor. Development gains achieved over decades are sometimes wiped out in hours.

ICTs play a key role in disaster preparedness. I would like to illustrate this point with an example:

The Mauritius Red Cross, with the support of the French Red Cross, has set up an early warning system, based on extensive use of modern information and communications technology, which can predict hazardous weather patterns up to 72 hours in advance. These 72 hours are crucial. They are the difference between minimal damage and total loss for a family or community. Within 72 hours, families can remove there loved ones from harms way or move livestock or other valuable assets to safer ground.

In all stages of Disaster Management, access to accurate, timely information is a crucial determinant of the ability of local communities, national organizations and international support agencies to minimize the impact of natural disasters and ensure speedy recovery.

In that context, the emergence of modern Information and Communication Technologies represents an opportunity to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of Disaster Management. With this in mind, the International Federation set up a Disaster Management Information System, an extranet accessible to all the RCRC members, on tools, systems and processes in disaster preparedness and response.

The time to focus on ICT is not when disasters strike. This needs to be attended to as part of the overall, developmental approach to addressing vulnerabilities and reducing risk, combined with disaster preparedness planning.

All experience of responding to disasters - in particular sudden-onset ones - shows that at the initial stages, the bulk of life saving activities are carried out by family members, friends, neighbors and local organizations, many of whom rely on volunteers. This means that the issue of ICT in relation to disaster preparedness and response is not a matter only of ensuring the availability of the relevant equipment, connections and training to institutions, but that it is necessary to ensure access to these tools at the community level, and to the organizations that recruit, train, motivate and deploy volunteers in the communities.

This is why we feel, strongly, that the Plan of Action that will be adopted in December needs to contain a recognition of the importance of ICT in relation to natural disasters, risk reduction and the building of local capacities to respond.

Mr., Chairman, I would just like to conclude by referring to the draft submitted to subcommittee 2, by the president of this subcommittee, which included an action line on ICTs for recovery. The International Federation supports the inclusion of such an action line but recommends that plan of action include other aspects of risk reduction, namely disaster preparedness and response. Such an inclusion would ensure that we are on the right road to reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

World Summit on Information Society
Geneva 2003 – Tunis 2005

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
contribution to:
  1.   Draft Action Plan (document WSIS/PC-2/DT/3-E)
  2.   Draft Declaration (document WSIS/PC.2/DT/2-E)

Based on the above stated argument, the International Federation recommends that the content of the following paragraphs be considered for inclusion in the Draft Action Plan and Draft Declaration that are based on the discussions in the working group of sub-committee 2.

In the Declaration:

Paragraph 15 – The Information Society should be people centered, with citizens and communities at its core. **ICTs are recognized as a means of building the capacity of volunteer organizations, which provide valuable services to their communities.** It should be at the service of humankind, including disadvantaged and marginalized groups and those with special needs. To reach its full potential, the Information Society requires the genuine participation, contribution and commitment of all, especially Governments, private sector and civil society.

Paragraph 16 – The Information Society we envision is one that reduces poverty and creates wealth to satisfy the basic needs and rights of peoples. The Information Society offers great potential in promoting international peace, sustainable development, **reduction of vulnerability**, democracy, transparency, accountability, and good governance.

The Action Plan:

ICTs in risk reduction:
ICTs play an important part of the overall, developmental approach to addressing vulnerabilities and reducing risks associated with natural and technological disasters. Risk reduction is a critical component of sustainable development. Without the inclusion of such measures, natural and man-made hazards escalate into disastrous proportions and set back development. Governments should recognize the importance of ICTs in relation to natural disasters, risk reduction and the building of local capacities to respond. It is also important to recognize that in emergency situations, the first 24 hours are the most critical to saving lives and the first to people to respond are from the local community. This means not only ensuring the availability of the relevant equipment, connections and training to institutions, but also ensuring access to these tools at the community level, and to the organizations that recruit, train, motivate and deploy volunteers in the communities.

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