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**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
FEDERATION PLEDGE TO THE 27TH INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON VOLUNTEERS**

**Report prepared by the
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

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Introduction

Recognising the importance of volunteers for Red Cross Red Crescent, the International Federation made the following pledge to the 27th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent in November 1999.

Volunteers are the most important strength of any National Society; they are "the power of humanity" and the champions of Red Cross Red Crescent humanitarian values. The International Federation therefore pledges the following:

- *to review the current situation of volunteers and identify areas where change is needed to improve services to beneficiaries, the status of volunteers and their role in the organization,*
- *to develop clear policies, guidelines and best management practices for volunteers which focus on human resources development,*
- *to ensure equal opportunities for men and women of all ages as volunteers in service delivery and National Society leadership, to bring about greater involvement of marginalized groups, and to provide the required support by paid staff,*
- *to cooperate with governments to broaden the existing legal, fiscal and political bases for volunteering, and to mobilize increased public support,*
- *to expand cooperation with other volunteer organizations at all levels, and play a significant role in the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.*

This report provides information on the implementation of the Pledge.

Background

One of the most important conclusions of the evaluation *Learning from the Nineties* conducted by the International Federation prior to developing its Strategy 2010 was that the global network of volunteer-based National Societies is the *main comparative advantage* of the organisation. However, the evaluation also showed that during the 1990s the National Societies had "*difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers*" resulting in "*a significant decrease in their numbers*". As this trend was jeopardising the work of National Societies and the Federation, the General Assembly of the International Federation in 1999 adopted a *Policy on volunteering* and authorized the making of the Pledge to the 27th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent on volunteering.

Against this background, the following list of the most common reasons to strengthen Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteering was developed by the International Federation Secretariat after consultation with National Societies.

External reasons

- **Bigger and changing needs:** To deal with the *growing* needs in society National Societies have to mobilize more volunteers. To deal with *changing* needs they have to adjust work programmes. This often requires some new programming, and the closure of some which are no longer relevant. These processes cannot be accomplished at the National Society level without strong leadership and volunteer management.

- **Higher stakeholder expectations:** Governments, companies and the general public giving money and other resources to our Movement now require higher quality and accountability standards from volunteer services, including those provided by National Societies. This is also true for beneficiaries, including the most vulnerable, and even the volunteers themselves.
- **Increased competition:** The number of non-profit organisations seeking to attract qualified volunteers is growing fast all over the world. The vast majority of them are small, highly focused, community based organisations often using systematic volunteer management successfully to attract and involve volunteers. This intensifies the need for the Red Cross Red Crescent to provide a strong volunteer environment to ensure that services to the vulnerable are not affected by competition.
- **Volunteering is changing:** Most National Society volunteer structures are operated on traditional lines which have not changed for many years. Outside the Movement however, volunteering has changed a lot. The single most important reason for that is the development of systematic volunteer management. Because of this and demographic changes, increased education, changes in the labour market and so on, today's volunteers have very different backgrounds, expectations and needs from those twenty years ago. This translates into higher demands on the tasks, the leadership, the support and the recognition they get.

Internal reasons

- **Federation's Strategy 2010:** The success of *Strategy 2010* is heavily dependant on National Societies' ability to develop volunteering and strengthen local volunteer and programme management.
- **New mission statement:** "To improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity" means mobilizing donors, members and others, but most of all it means mobilizing and organising volunteers.
- **Difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers:** The International Federation's evaluation *Learning from the Nineties* concluded that the Movement had "difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers" and noted "a significant decrease in their numbers."
- **Lack of knowledge:** The breadth and diversity of the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteer network has made it difficult for many of the components to benefit fully from the rapid development of volunteer management knowledge outside the Movement. As a result many leaders, volunteers, managers and staff in National Societies and the Federation lack updated knowledge on volunteering and how to combine staff and volunteers.
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Implementation of the Pledge

To deal with the challenges described earlier and to facilitate the implementation of the Pledge, the International Federation Secretariat has, since the beginning of 2000, taken important steps. The following points highlight some of the main issues addressed:

To review the current situation of volunteers and identify areas where change is needed to improve services to beneficiaries, the status of volunteers and their role in the organization;

In 2000 the *Volunteering Trend Report* was published in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. From the report it was clear that volunteering and volunteering trends differ between regions. The Secretariat therefore embarked on a process of region specific consultative meetings and other activities to raise awareness about country specific approaches to volunteering and to learn more about Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteering in different cultural contexts.

In 2001, over 30 National Societies took part and exchanged ideas at the World Conference of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in Amsterdam. During the event, two workshops were organized focusing on cultural differences in Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteering.

To celebrate the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day in May 2001, special workshops were organized at the Federation Secretariat. Several events related to volunteering were organised during the Federation's General Assembly in 2001 to celebrate the International Year of Volunteers.

A chapter on volunteering was included in the World Disasters report in 2001 and a special section on volunteering was launched at the Federation's web site in 2002.

Various initiatives were undertaken in all regions to review the situation of volunteers and identify areas to focus in order to improve services to beneficiaries. Below are some examples.

Africa

In the Africa region two consultative meetings were convened, one for East and Southern Africa (Addis Ababa, April 2000) and another for Central and West Africa (Dakar, June 2000). The outcomes of these meetings were provided to the 5th Pan African Conference held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in September of the same year.

At the Conference, African National Societies committed themselves to:

- actively support the Secretariat's *Volunteering 2005 plan* as a follow up to the 27th International Conference;
- developing clear recruitment strategies, adopting coaching systems better adapted to the needs of volunteers as well as developing appropriate pedagogic tools;
- making use of cultural and traditional values which facilitate recruitment and management of volunteers.

These commitments were brought to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly in the same year with the support of the Government of Burkina Faso.

In support of the African National Societies, the Secretariat established an office for the coordination of the development of volunteering for the region in Nairobi in July 2001. With the African office fully established, consultative meetings to review the status of volunteering around the sub-regions were convened for Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. A similar consultation in West Africa has had to be postponed because of the situation in that sub-region. The outcome of the three sub-regional meetings convened has been the establishment of sub-regional volunteering networks, knowledge development through case studies, the widely sharing of lessons learnt through the case studies as well as the piloting of new ideas generated from the case studies in selected National Societies. Documentation of the experiences in the pilot National Societies is being prepared for distribution to all interested parties.

Western Europe

In 2000 a group of West European National Societies established the "*West European Network for the Development of Volunteering*" (WENDO). It has since had two meetings a year to discuss how to develop volunteering and problems related to that and to report on progress.

To gather and share knowledge and experiences, several study visits to National Societies within the region were organised and a report on volunteering at the Spanish Red Cross was published by the International Federation Secretariat. The report highlighted that the Spanish Red Cross has built its strength considerably over the last ten to fifteen years through a systematic change process focused on volunteer based local service delivery and as a result the National Society's image, profile and ability to generate resources have been greatly strengthened.

Asia/Pacific

The experiences of the National Societies of China, Japan and the Philippines were studied in 2001 and three reports were prepared by the International Federation Secretariat. The Philippines report, which is available from the International Federation Website, highlighted the strength of the National Society on volunteer management. With an estimated 5 million volunteers, the Philippines National Red Cross is, as far as known to the Secretariat, the National Society with the largest number of volunteers in the Movement.

Middle East and North Africa

In 2001 the 3rd Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference in Tehran included volunteering in its agenda. Volunteer management experiences of the Iranian Red Crescent Society was studied in 2003 and main findings were published in the International Federation's web site.

Americas

Regional work has been based around the concept of modern volunteer management as a knowledge based skill. Knowledge-sharing and networking has been a primary objective, in recognition of the need for National Societies to gain access to modern thinking and techniques. A major learning opportunity was the *International Conference on Volunteer Administration*, in 2002 in Denver, USA. The International Federation and the American Red Cross used the occasion and piloted successfully a *Volunteering Development Week*. Representatives from a number of National Societies took part, and also had a constructive meeting with the Volunteer Administration Institute of the American Red Cross.

The International Federation Regional Delegation in Southern Cone of the Americas successfully facilitated the exchange of experiences among National Societies with regard to volunteering. The situation on volunteer management in the sub region was reviewed and statistics on National Society volunteers were compiled. The National Societies meet annually to focus on volunteer management issues.

To develop clear policies, guidelines and best practices for volunteers which focus on human resources development.

In 2000 the Secretariat distributed to National Societies and Federation delegates more than 500 copies of the pamphlet *From the Top Down* introducing the concept of professional volunteer management.

The Secretariat *Volunteering 2005* plan was approved in February 2001 and was distributed to all National Societies together with the video *Voices of volunteers*. In the *Volunteering 2005* plan amongst other things, the Secretariat committed itself:

- to promote and support a structure that ensures the introduction, development and exchange of knowledge to facilitate this work.
- to work to promote and ensure a favourable external environment for the development of volunteering.
- to work with the entire Movement to ensure necessary investment for the development of volunteering.

In 2002 the Secretariat developed and tested training modules on volunteering and volunteer management for National Society leaders as part of its leadership development programme. Training modules are also made available for Secretariat's field delegates involved with organisational development.

The *Volunteering Policy Implementation Guide* was developed, tested and published in the four official languages of the International Federation and distributed to all National Societies.

The International Federation's Governing Board decided to discuss reports on volunteering at each of its meetings, and devoted a special session to volunteering in June 2002 with an external expert. This work was supported by policy-related discussions in the International Federation's Commissions for Development, Youth and Disaster Relief.

The International Federation supported the adaptation of policy and learning tools to the different cultures, legal systems and local environments found around the world. A number of National Societies in Africa (e.g. Central African Republic, Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland, South Africa and Senegal) now have or are in the process of developing their own volunteering policies.

In South Asia the 6 National Societies have collectively drafted and adopted a regional Human Resource Development Manual for Volunteers, based on the Federation's *Volunteering Policy* and *Volunteer 2005 Plan*. The Manual, which has been formally adopted by the forum of the regional Secretaries General for implementation in each Society. It establishes minimum standards to be followed in volunteer recruitment, retention, development, appraisal and reward systems, and includes integrated components of the Federation's Gender and Youth Policies to ensure increased diversity in the volunteer base of the region. As a direct result, the Nepal Red Cross Society has adopted the first *Volunteering Policy* in this region. Several other National Societies have strengthened their volunteer management systems at headquarters and branch levels.

Similar experiences have been reported from other regions, including from the National Societies of Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Yemen and St. Vincent and the Grenadines which had either volunteering policies firmly in place or were in the process of testing the *Volunteer Policy Implementation Guide*.

To ensure equal opportunities for men and women of all ages as volunteers in service delivery and National Society leadership, to bring about greater involvement of marginalized groups and to provide the required support by paid staff.

One important goal of the International Federation is to ensure that all Red Cross and Red Crescent programmes are carried out with the input and equal participation of men and women at all levels within the National Societies and the Secretariat. National Society responses to the International Federation's Self-Assessment questionnaire indicate that 57 percent of the volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are female.

For volunteers, in contrast to paid staff, it is not possible to use simple administrative measures to ensure gender, age or diversity balance. Experience has shown that it is important to ensure that the circumstances and requirements of volunteers are well understood when gender issues are addressed. The Secretariat has, accordingly, included a special case study on volunteering and a number of reference materials in its gender training CDROM produced in 2002 as well as in its gender training pack published in 2003.

Sessions on diversity, gender and youth were included in the National Society leadership training courses organised by the Secretariat in 2001 and 2002. To encourage the National Societies to send women and young people to the leadership training, the Secretariat adopted special criteria for the selection of participants.

About 25 percent of National Societies have been using disaggregated data concerning the involvement of volunteers, length of stay, their gender, age and cultural structure, amount of time given in their annual reports shared with the Secretariat. The Secretariat has prioritised encouragement for the provision of such differentiated data in future.

In South Asia, four National Societies made specific mentioning of diversified volunteer and membership bases as the core objective of the organization in their new draft Constitutions. Minimum representational standards have been adopted at these National Societies to increase the participation of women and young people in governance bodies.

To cooperate with governments to broaden the existing legal, fiscal and political bases for volunteering, and to mobilize increased public support;

Legal and fiscal regulations for volunteers and organisations affect volunteering. Examples of typical legal issues affecting volunteering might include:

- whether unemployed people are allowed to volunteer without negatively affecting their entitlement to unemployment benefits
- whether tax allowances to voluntary organizations constitute "unfair competition"
- questions concerning liability for damage caused to third parties

To address the legislative framework which affects volunteering, the International Federation launched a project in 2003 with the aim to:

- a) as part of a wider effort, build an enabling volunteer environment in all countries, conduct an overview of the legislative needs and obstacles related to volunteer activity
- b) transfer of knowledge between countries on best practices in the area of legislative issues related to volunteering
- c) identify basic principles for creating an enabling volunteer environment through the establishment of a legislative framework.

As a first step in implementing the project, in May 2001 the Federation Secretariat established a special Volunteering Legal Committee composed of experts from National Societies and Federation Secretariat. Furthermore, the Federation formed a partnership with the United

Nations Volunteers and the Inter-Parliamentary Union with the aim of inspiring governments to promote and support the development of volunteering in their countries. As a part of the project, the International Federation, with its partners, developed a survey with the aim of gathering information on relevant existing legislation (including decrees and other legal instruments) and identifying its impact on volunteer activity. The survey was distributed to National Societies by the International Federation in August 2003 and the project was described made to the National Societies' Legal Advisors Meeting held in September 2003. It has also been distributed to parliaments and governments, and the final results, including recommendations on creating an enabling volunteer environment through appropriate legislative framework will be circulated to all National Societies and other partners in early 2004.

The International Federation also used many opportunities at international conferences to highlight the contributions made by volunteers to the management of problems of core international concern. These interventions, wherever possible, used specific country examples from different parts of the world to demonstrate the global reach of the Red Cross Red Crescent network, and the ability of the network to operate effectively at international, national and local levels simultaneously.

Bilaterally, many National Societies from all parts of the world worked with governments at all levels in the context of the International Year of Volunteers.

To expand cooperation with other volunteer organizations at all levels, and play a significant role in the International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

The International Federation President spoke at the inauguration of the International Year of Volunteers at the United Nations on 28 November 2000. The Year was seen as an important opportunity for all National Societies to improve their work of recruiting, selecting, training, organising and recognising volunteers and to promote the volunteering environment in their countries. Each National Society was encouraged not only to celebrate the year in many creative ways, but also to take an active part together with other organisations and the government in organising and promoting the International Year of Volunteers (IYV 2001) at national and local levels. Many National Societies worked with other voluntary organizations on "National Committees" to promote all aspects of volunteering in their countries.

The International Federation has been cooperating around volunteering development with the main international specialized organizations in the field such as the IAVE and the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA). For instance, National Societies provided easily the largest contingent of delegates to the World Volunteer Conference, Amsterdam in January 2001.

The International Federation addressed the United Nations General Assembly in December 2001 to support its volunteering resolution and to celebrate the end of IYV2001. Also in 2002 the International Federation contributed to the report of the United Nations Secretary General on activities conducted during the International Year of Volunteers.

In addition, an agreement was signed by the Presidents of the International Federation and the International Olympic Committee in May 2003 which presents significant opportunities to link the work of National Societies and the National Olympic Committees on a wide range of priorities. Both organisations and their members depend heavily on volunteer support and volunteer involvement in their activities. Both Presidents agreed to mainstream volunteering into the cooperative activities which will be undertaken in the context of the agreement.

The Secretariat took part in a joint review of IYV with United Nations Volunteers, one of the outcomes of which was a decision to work together to form a coalition with other interested organisations with the aim of inspiring governments to promote and support the development of volunteering in their countries. As part of this initiative, the partnership held several side events at major international conferences such as the World Assembly on Ageing held in April 2002, Madrid; the 14th World AIDS Conference in July 2002, Barcelona and the World Summit on

Sustainable Development in September 2002, Johannesburg to promote the role of volunteers. The International Federation, working with its partners, has emphasised the need for raising government and public awareness of the importance of volunteerism and volunteers at all suitable opportunities, in particular International Volunteers Day (5 December) each year.

Conclusion

The International Federation has made a significant progress in strengthening the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteer management over the last 4 years. The Secretariat's *Volunteering 2005 Plan* is now in its third year and being actively implemented by the National Societies, International Federation Delegations and the Secretariat. Structured approaches were undertaken in Europe, Africa and South Americas regions to implement the Pledge and as a result a number of National Societies adopted their own Volunteering Policies and implementation guides. Several knowledge sharing opportunities and tools were created for National Societies. The International Federation is successfully developing partnerships with other organizations and governments. Various guidelines and reports developed by the Federation Secretariat are appreciated by National Societies as useful tools for strengthening their volunteer management.

However, a lot more remains to be done. Dealing with problems of volunteering is a change process and it requires a consistent strategy and time. The Secretariat's *Volunteering 2005 Plan* is and can only be part of the work needed to encourage and support the change. The change will continue requiring:

- Federation's political will at the international level;
- active leadership by the Federation's senior management;
- knowledge that is based on local conditions;
- commitment of National Society leaders;
- proper practical and economical support from the Federation Secretariat and donor National Societies.

The ability to run relevant volunteer based services and program is the most critical core competence of any National Society. Consequently, the ability to encourage and support such capacity building will continue to be the critical core competence of the International Federation.