

# International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



14<sup>th</sup>. September 2005

A testimonial to

The United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

By

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

On

“Recovering from Hurricane Katrina: The next phase”

The International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) would like to thank the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security for their invitation to testify at this hearing. I would first like to convey, on behalf of the President and the Secretary General of the International Federation, and on behalf of the 181 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, our most heart-felt thoughts to the people of the United States, and more especially to those individuals directly affected by Hurricane Katrina. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, representing the collective humanitarian force of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation and all of its 181 member national societies, is dedicated to assisting in the recovery of those impacted by the consequences of natural and man-made disasters by “mobilizing the power of humanity”, as reflected in our mission statement. As a Movement, we are only too familiar with the images of these past weeks, from other disasters around the world - the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the earthquakes in Bam and Gujarat, Hurricanes Mitch, Ivan and so many others.

Although members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement share a common mission, the nature of each disaster response can vary given the economic situation, the role of the government and other agencies, the overarching needs of the public and the capacity of the national society. In the United States, American Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's immediate emergency disaster-caused needs. Today, the American Red Cross faces the largest relief operation in its history and it is with both an honour and duty that 154 staff from 80 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, the International Federation and the ICRC have been asked by the American Red Cross, a founding member of our Federation, to assist them in this enormous and critical task

Equally, as the waters of disaster recede, the need to rebuild lives, property and above all hope must take priority. It is with that challenge in mind that we would like to share with you some of our experiences, lessons and observations, for your consideration as you move forward in your response efforts. The humanitarian actors may be greater in number and the economies in which they work, stronger but the principles of sustainable recovery remain the same.

## *What next?*

Recovery link the emergency phase with the long-term development process. During the recovery process, special attention must be given not just to reconstruction of infrastructure, hospitals, schools and homes, but it has to also foster economic revitalisation and belief in a better future. This can be achieved in many ways and will likely require the participation and coordination of many different humanitarian and government actors. Such support may come in the form of support to small businesses and assistance to the local economy, credit schemes, loans and financial incentives. The first priority for victims – be they a farmer in Ethiopia, a fisherman in Sri Lanka, a waiter in New Orleans or a doctor in Iran - is to re-establish their livelihoods and to regain control over their lives. As such, they should be fully supported in the recovery of

productive assets. Attention must also be given to restoring social services and rebuilding local infrastructure. The recovery process should identify areas for initial impact and seek to support a return to normalcy, while long-term reconstruction is being organized. Nevertheless, post-disaster recovery should not be a simple restoration of pre-existing livelihoods and infrastructure. Instead, it should be treated as an opportunity to implement better development policies which strengthen the resilience of disaster prone populations against future hazards, to “Build back better,” and to strengthen individual faith and confidence.

## ***How?***

- **Supporting spontaneous recovery.** Within days of even the most devastating disasters, such as those in Bam and Banda Aceh, there is a part - and often a large part - of the population whose natural resilience and positive determination motivates it to return to normal and move on. The spontaneous recovery carried out by individual communities should be recognised and supported by the recovery process and regulatory frameworks and financial resources should enable and further this spontaneous activity. Equally important to recognise, however, is that parts of a population can be rendered helpless by a traumatic event -- and recovery must therefore address both these realities. The critical role of volunteers in both response and early recovery activities is aptly demonstrated by the actions of some 80,000 American Red Cross volunteers in the Katrina response.
- **Recovery must be inclusive.** Populations both directly and indirectly affected by a disaster must be identified and taken into consideration in recovery plans. It is important to not isolate an affected population, as doing so can cause resentment and tension between those assisted and those not eligible for assistance. Recovery initiatives must be participatory. Headway in the recovery phase can be severely handicapped without the buy-in of communities affected, whether they be contemplating the reconstruction of the World Trade Centre in New York City, recovering from a Tsunami in a remote fishing village in Papua New Guinea, or rebuilding shelter following an earthquake, even in Bam, Iran where a highly centralised form of management might have been anticipated. Affected communities need to feel a genuine sense of ownership and a role in determining what will become their new community. After Hurricane Mitch, the Gujarat earthquake, and in almost all post-disaster communities, some form of national consultation, involving community groups and leaders, was included in the recovery process.
- **Recovery must be sustainable.** Recovery efforts must help build capacity at the local, regional and national level. They should seek to support and strengthen local governance mechanisms and to build the resilience of those affected through activities such as income generation, vocational training, employment and credit. Post-disaster recovery interventions need to be timely in order to be effective. Yet, at the same time, recovery efforts – and authorities implementing them – should not be driven purely by the need to “do something fast”. The opportunity to review existing policies, improve risk reduction, disaster preparedness, response plans, and hazard and risk mapping and emergency training is critical. In fact, the need to do so will never reach a more aware public than at this stage. Communities should be rebuilt to be more resilient to natural hazards, and previous environmental, industrial or social risk factors can be mitigated or even eliminated thanks to heightened political support. Rebuilding communities and lives without addressing the underlying causes of the devastation – whether weak construction in Turkey, unplanned urbanisation in Venezuela, or unprepared populations in the Indian Ocean – would be tantamount to humanitarian malpractice.
- **Recovery must be needs-based.** Recovery must take into account the specific vulnerabilities of certain populations and the specific challenges faced by particular groups. Natural disasters primarily and most critically affect the poor and vulnerable, and can further entrench poverty. Recovery must avoid creating the same inequities that existed before. In most situations where Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies work, it is clear that a gender dimension must be mainstreamed into recovery plans. Sensitive issues around cultural, tribal, racial or ethnic divides further complicate the process - but cannot be ignored without reinstating or even aggravating previous inequities.

### ***Critical Factors:***

- **Ensuring a Coordinated Response:** To establish a coordinated effort in the midst of a disaster is difficult, and often seemingly impossible. However, when achieved, coordination lays the foundation for effective response by authorities at local, regional and national levels. Coordination involves building long-term relationships and sharing information platforms between humanitarian operators, public authorities, funding institutions and donors, and above all the very public and communities affected. When roles and responsibilities of response agencies and actors are clearly defined and publicly understood, coordination is a more likely outcome rather than a ‘hoped-for’ result.
- **Building Back Better:** Regardless of how devastating, every disaster offers a unique opportunity to build back better homes and schools, and to establish new livelihoods, opportunities, and hope. Ironically in some cases, the disaster itself helps break the cycle of poverty through improved infrastructure. In Afghanistan and Angola, better schools have meant not just new buildings, but also green space, play areas, and less crowded classrooms. In countries impacted by Hurricane Mitch, Red Cross efforts helped improve living conditions, and in Bangladesh and Vietnam, our coastal mangrove planting projects improved the environment and strengthened resistance to cyclones. “Building Back Better” also means more trade opportunities - such as the possibility proposed by former President Clinton in his current role as the UN Special Envoy for the Indian Ocean Tsunami - to invigorate the housing construction business and trade conditions through the rebuilding of Tsunami-affected communities.
- **Relocating Displaced Populations:** Relocating affected populations - from and back to devastated areas - is fraught with sensitivity. Some of the displaced will never return, while some will never leave, and both extremes must be managed during the recovery process. Special attention must be paid to the needs of the 10-15% of the displaced population who are particularly vulnerable and often fall through the gaps. The loss, fragmentation and dislocation of families can have long-term psychological and social risks. The man in Bam who refused to leave the pile of rubble that was once his home and under which his family lay is no different from the resident of New Orleans, who still today, seeks to remain in his flooded house. The process of relocation is often knotted in security issues, evacuation dilemmas, land rights and titles, and often feelings of threat and jealousy from host populations. Public authorities can be challenged by the simultaneous need to find new land, assess environmental and other disaster risks, and assuring a source of work, education and transportation for the displaced population. Transitions from sudden homelessness, to temporary, semi-permanent, and finally permanent accommodation are sensitive.
- **Involving the business and private sectors in disaster management:** The Indian Ocean Tsunami has demonstrated, more than ever, that the business and private sectors have a significant role to play in post-disaster recovery. While this may seem natural in developed countries, in those less developed it is a new and promising source of aid. Opportunities exist for logistical, material, technological and technical support from the private sector. The provision of financial and human resources can be an important input in the context of broader and longer-term cooperation and partnership.

**Finally**, a word from Johan Schaar, Special Representative of the International Federation’s Secretary General for the tsunami operations, “Whether Katrina was America’s tsunami is debatable, what is true of both, and is so in most disasters, is the endless grief of those who lost loved ones, the courage of the rescue, relief workers and tens of thousands of volunteers and the selfless generosity of strangers who opened their doors and gave of themselves to help those in need.” All those devastated by disaster or conflict - be they Iraqi, Iranian, Caribbean, Indonesian, or American - have the same need for dignity, community, privacy, and above all for the belief that a better life awaits them.

