

Statement of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

WHO Executive Board 152nd session

Agenda Item 12

Public Health Emergencies

Saturday 4 February

Honourable EB Members, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

On behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), thank you for giving us the floor, today.

We have reached a critical point in our efforts to reform the way we address public health emergencies. Nearly three years into the pandemic, COVID remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, Cholera is spreading across parts of the world at an alarming rate, and the drivers of disease spread and other disasters—from climate change to urbanization and inequity—are still growing. Along with them, the risk for further public health emergencies.

Our World Disasters Report, launched earlier this week, is clear: despite the enormous efforts of governments, international organisations, researchers and others--despite the sacrifices that hundreds of frontline responders have made to respond to this deadly virus, we still are not prepared for public health emergencies. More specifically, we have still not integrated the 3 key principles of effective preparedness to protect and make communities more resilient: these are trust, equity and local action, into laws, policies and programs.

It is only by working with communities that we will be able to prevent outbreaks in the first place, and to detect them and respond to them far earlier when they do occur, that we will be able to consider ourselves prepared. We can do this through stronger community surveillance and preparedness programs, more accessible and flexible community health systems, more inclusive and updated legal frameworks, and better use of local data.

We stand ready to support states and partners to reform global, regional, and domestic public health and health emergency frameworks and programs. But let us not stop at superficial reforms. Let us tackle these problems more meaningfully and more urgently.

Thank you