My name is Libby Bowell. I’m a nurse and a public health delegate with the Australian Red Cross, and I am speaking today as a member of a global network of 14 million volunteers and half a million staff from across 192 National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies.

COVID-19 poses the greatest threat to our collective health and wellbeing. The work that the Red Cross Red Crescent does everyday to support programs in maternal and child health, vaccinations, HIV, malaria, access to clean water and sanitation are threatened by this global pandemic. We know people living in poverty don’t have a stockpile of food or money saved to help them through any form of lockdown. We know that it will highlight and exacerbate inequalities, in all contexts. Those that were vulnerable, marginalised, excluded and stigmatised before this pandemic, will disproportionately feel the force of its effects now and into the future. Collectively, we must do all we can to protect those most vulnerable and we must ensure that we deliver on our promises of health for all.

We must also look to the indirect consequences of this outbreak on our already overwhelmed health systems; for many, it is their only point of contact with life-saving health and routine care services. People will still require their antiretrovirals; food supplies must continue to flow; expectant mothers must have a safe place to give birth; malnourished children still need access to feeding centres and support and communities will still need access to safe water and sanitation.

We therefore call on States to do the following:

- Continue to invest in essential humanitarian work and fragile health systems.
- A collective global commitment to designate and ensure access to everyone irrespective of where they are in the world in any future development of a vaccine, testing and treatments for COVID-19.
- Ensure a duty of care for all public health professionals, first responders, community health workers and volunteers responding to this outbreak.

Thank you