Agenda Item: 13.2 Political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases

Excellencies, Distinguished colleagues,

The IFRC welcomes the World Health Organization's Director General's report on the follow up of the political declaration of the 3rd high-level meeting and preparations for the 4th high level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, including its decision to develop a much-needed options paper on a global coordination mechanism, and the upcoming adoption of the Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030.

Non-communicable diseases are now recognized as a real and growing threat to population health and development--a threat that is magnified by and during emergencies such as COVID 19. Addressing these challenges is essential for progress towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In low and middle-income countries, a shortage of qualified health workers with the right the mix of skills, as well as uneven geographical distribution of the health workforce are some of the key obstacles to comprehensive NCD prevention and control. There are many steps needed to address this. Among these, a key step is to recognize and better articulate the role of Community based health workers including volunteers in global, regional, and national NCD Prevention and Control frameworks.

Indeed, prevention and care start at the community level, with people being better informed and better equipped to take care of their own health. The role that volunteers and community health workers play in supporting prevention, control as well as the provision of care and support for those living with chronic illnesses is critical. This is particularly true in complex settings and emergencies.

As I speak, the IFRC and hundreds of thousands of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are on the ground working with communities to tackle NCDs:

- They work with communities to increase awareness of chronic diseases, leading to earlier recognition, diagnosis, effective management and follow up.
- They bridge the gap between communities and health services, particularly in cases where there are health and social inequities.
- They empower people to take charge of their own health via community engagement, resulting in ownership and sustainability of interventions.
- And crucially, they promote locally appropriate solutions to health issues with tools that have been adapted to their respective local contexts.

With millions of people currently affected by Covid 19, conflicts and disaster worldwide, and with people living with NCDs now constituting one of the most vulnerable groups to COVID 19, and other humanitarian crises, we call on WHO and its Member States to emphasize their role and the specific challenges they face at the upcoming 4th high level meeting, and to make tangible commitments towards supporting them.
Thank you.