Statement of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
COVID-19 Response
Provisional Agenda Item 14.1

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies welcomes the Director-General's report on COVID-19 and acknowledges the leadership and efforts of WHO in the response to the pandemic.

The IFRC network with its 14 million volunteers and 192 National Societies has been involved in COVID-19 response from the very beginning of the pandemic, prioritizing efforts to stop transmission, maintain essential health services, reduce the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, and strengthening National Societies so they can continue to fulfil their essential humanitarian roles in their respective countries.

Collectively, in the first nine months working to stop transmission of COVID-19, we reached almost half a billion people with risk communication, community engagement, and health promotion; supported 1.6 million people with COVID-19 to isolate safely and with dignity; supported testing for 4.4 million people; and provided more than half a million suspect or confirmed COVID-19 patients with safe ambulance transport. The pandemic has had devastating system-wide impacts on health, social cohesion, and livelihoods. The IFRC's network has reached 72 million people with food and in-kind assistance, nearly 4 million with cash and voucher assistance, more than 7 million with mental health and psychosocial support, and nearly 6 million people with essential community health services.

With wide access to the communities they serve, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are uniquely placed to tackle the pandemic on multiple fronts, including public health measures at the community level, maintaining life-saving services, building trust and cohesion, and tackling the social and economic fallout of the pandemic. The unifying theme across these interventions, locally and globally, is ensuring the most vulnerable and excluded populations’ needs are met, and critical health and social services are adapted to meet diverse communities’ needs.

This also applies when it comes to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, and in advocating for fair and equitable vaccine access. That is why we have joined calls to support the COVAX Facility and ensure equitable global access to new COVID-19 essential health technologies, with prioritized access for frontline health workers, including community volunteers, and ensuring that the most vulnerable populations, including migrants, refugees and displaced people, Indigenous and racialised communities, are not left behind.

Community trust is key to the success of public health initiatives. Without trust, people may not accept or cooperate in immunization, testing, or other critical measures, and well-intentioned interventions may fail to achieve their life-saving goals. Governments have a central role in this but need support from independent civil society voices from organisations in which communities have long-standing confidence. Our measures must be grounded in evidence, risk-informed, and adaptive to communities’ own strengths and expressed needs.
We must embrace respectful dialogue with affected communities and commit to changing our approaches based on community feedback. That is how we can build confidence and public trust in vaccine efficacy and safety and improve the effectiveness of other pandemic response efforts. Working with affected people is the only way that we will succeed.

None of us will be safe until we are all safe. Viruses may not discriminate, but societies do, and it is clear that tackling the mistrust, disinformation, and lack of access to or acceptability of essential services that plagues our societies must be central to our response. Public health, social, and economic interventions to end and eventually recover from the pandemic must be tailored to communities’ needs, and build local organisations’ capacities. Communities and community-based organisations must be central to pandemic response and recovery. The power of our common humanity is and will be measured by how we collectively protect the most vulnerable people and communities during this global crisis.