



(d) **Interactive Roundtable: Strengthening evidence-based policymaking, public debate and cooperation for safe, orderly and regular migration (addressing objectives 1, 3, 7, 17 and 23)**

15:30 – 17:00 pm, 11 March 2021 (*Bangkok time*)

Delivered by Fathimath Himya, Secretary General, Maldivian Red Crescent

Good morning, good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to participate in this important Roundtable discussion and contribute perspectives from Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies across the Asia Pacific Region.

I am the Secretary General of the Maldivian Red Crescent, one of the world's 192 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies.

The world's largest humanitarian network, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is founded on our 14 million community-based volunteers working in their own local contexts. Present at the community level, we witness the enormous suffering that many migrants face during their migration experiences - before departure, while in transit, while abroad and upon return.

As an exclusively neutral humanitarian organisation, our aim is to respond to humanitarian needs and reduce suffering, without seeking to encourage, discourage or prevent migration.

During our engagement with the GCM negotiations, we came together as a Movement, at the national, regional and global levels. We insisted that the Compact could not succeed in fostering "safe, orderly and regular migration" without also outlining basic minimum standards of human dignity that must be afforded to all migrants - irrespective of their status.

We have called upon States to respect their obligations under international as well as domestic law.

Our advocacy is focused on 4 humanitarian priorities:

1. First, that all migrants be protected from **going missing, death, family separation and violations** of their rights throughout their migration experience
2. Second, that all migrants - irrespective of legal status - have **effective access to essential services and humanitarian assistance**
3. Third, that **the rights and needs of the most vulnerable, especially children, be prioritised**
4. And finally, that **detention of migrants be used only as a measure of last resort.**

In the face of the climate crisis, we also urge states to **act immediately to address the adverse effects of climate change, as a driver of migration and displacement.**

We welcome that these priorities are well captured in the text of the GCM, and we are now urging States to turn their commitments into reality and into actions.

We stand ready to support all States in that regard – and appreciate the recognition of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a key stakeholder in paragraph 44 of the Global Compact.

We encourage States to partner with their National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, as their auxiliaries in the humanitarian field, to assess and address the protection and humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable - including migrants and displaced people.

Many National Societies already cooperate with local authorities to help identify and understand the vulnerabilities and risks faced by migrants through their networks at the community level and their branches located along borders and in other significant locations. This provides a strong evidence-base for our humanitarian diplomacy with governments, and can inform policy-making decisions.

A robust understanding of vulnerability and risk is particularly important both before and during disasters and crises.

For example, the **Fiji Red Cross** is involved in various initiatives to strengthen resilience at the local level and support communities adapt and prepare for a changing climate, and reduce risks of displacement.

In the context of **COVID-19**, we are seeing responses very much focused on citizens first, and negative narratives towards non-citizens including migrants, refugees and stateless people.

Ensuring that all people, including migrants, have effective access to essential services, is critical to addressing vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated and exacerbated the disproportionate risks that migrants face. Since the start of the crisis and in the IFRC's global Emergency Appeal, migrants and displaced people are a strong focus of the Movement's response at the local, national and regional levels.

In our humanitarian diplomacy, we advocate for the necessity of 'Humanitarian Service Points' as protection spaces or 'firewalls' between authorities and service providers - to enable migrants' safe and effective access to humanitarian services - including healthcare and psycho-social support, legal support, food, shelter and information - at all stages of migration.

One positive practice example is from my own country - the Maldives – a country where 1 in every 4 people is a migrant.

When the government planned to undertake COVID-19 health screening of migrant workers' - many of whom who had no identification documents, the **Maldivian Red Crescent** emphasized the humanitarian imperative of to "*first, do not harm.*" Following discussions with the relevant authorities, we ensured that any information collected from migrants would only be shared with the Ministry of Health for contact-tracing and health screening purposes, and that migrants' legal status would not be recorded.

In partnership with local authorities, the **Maldivian Red Crescent** also established a Migrant Support Centre where volunteers, including migrants, coordinated food distribution, operated a COVID-19 Call Centre to listen to migrants' needs and concerns, and promoted social cohesion between migrants and host communities.

And now, the **Maldivian Red Crescent** - in coordination with our government - are registering undocumented migrants for the purpose of COVID-19 vaccination roll-out. So far, we have registered over 2,500 undocumented migrants in the Maldives.

In the **Philippines**, the **Philippine Red Cross** in cooperation with their government, has provided assistance in health monitoring at ports of entry and quarantine facilities, and has also established

welfare service desks to provide food, non-food items, psycho-social support and Restoring Family Links (RFL) services to Filipino returning migrants.

We regard access to information as an essential basic service. Many National Societies are responding to the need for accurate, accessible and timely information in an appropriate format, especially for children, and other groups most at risk.

For example, the **Cambodia Red Cross** provides prospective migrants with information about how to reduce risks when migrating, including how to maintain family links and reduce family separation while abroad.

The **Philippine Red Cross** updated its web-based application (called the ‘Virtual Volunteer’) which puts vital information directly into the hands of those who need it, namely prospective migrants, those away from home, and the family members of migrants.

The application has been updated with the most current information about COVID-19, including the location of quarantine facilities, government advisories and contact details of relevant organisations and agencies, to support migrant workers while they are abroad and upon their return to the Philippines.

Collectively, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has compiled an open access [Global Online Library](#) of COVID-19 risk communication audio and visual materials and covering topics including:

- Symptoms and Treatment
- Psycho-social support
- Rumours and Stigma
- Hygiene and Masks

Available in a wide variety of different languages, and easily accessible to anyone who needs them, these resources seek to reduce risks for migrants who might otherwise be hard to reach.

We recognise the GCM as an opportunity for Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies to engage with their governments and coordinate efforts with other key stakeholders to ensure that National Societies - and all humanitarian actors - have the necessary space and access to assist all people in need, particularly in times of crises such, as these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, international cooperation and partnerships are essential. We remind governments that they need not act alone in working towards meeting the Objectives of the Compact.

Thank you!