



Request by Non-State Actors to Submit a Written Statement at the Virtual Session of the Seventieth Regional Committee for Africa

Name and acronym of the accredited NSA

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Date and title of the meeting: 25th August 2020 Seventieth Regional Committee for Africa

Agenda item (number, title): AFR/RC 70/7, Special event on the COVID-19 response in the African Region.

Statement (in English)

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its member Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies (RC/RC NS) in Africa and around the world aim to reduce mortality and morbidity resulting directly and indirectly from the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting the health, safety, wellbeing, dignity, and livelihoods of the most vulnerable.

The RC/RC Movement-wide approach reflects the local and global nature of this operation, but our response efforts are primarily local, community-driven activities. RC/RC NS respond to in-country needs, based on their tailored COVID-19 Response Plans, developed in coordination with governments in each of the 48 countries we are supporting.

Throughout Africa, we support efforts to contain, slow and suppress transmission of the virus by helping communities to understand and adopt infection prevention practices, supporting public health control measures, and helping communities adapt to mitigation measures.

We also play a key role in increasing demand for critical immunization services and addressing vaccine hesitancy by working at the community level. Through these efforts, IFRC and RC/RC NS are uniquely positioned to support the maintenance and restoration of immunization activities in the context of the pandemic and the roll out of candidate COVID vaccines.

We therefore use the opportunity of the 70th WHO Regional Committee for Africa meeting to call on member states to focus on:

1. **Facilitating equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine through support for the COVAX Facility**

- We recommend that governments unite towards “a people’s vaccine” and commit to a fair and equitable distribution of any eventual COVID-19 vaccines.
- Donors are strongly encouraged to provide financial support for low income states to receive vaccine doses through the Facility.

2. **Ensuring maintenance and restoration of immunization services and vaccination campaigns in the context of the pandemic**

- It is critically important that Member States sustain gains in raising EPI coverage and continue to focus on reaching zero-dose and under-immunized children.
- Community trust is key to ensure the success of any immunization initiative.
- States should work with civil society and other local actors to ensure that their populations understand why vaccine allocation choices are made.

3. **Prioritizing investment in immunization-related activities**

- Investments in such life-saving interventions are critical for maintaining healthy, resilient communities. Increasing donor support to immunization is a smart investment. It saves lives, strengthens health systems, ensures health security, and advances universal health coverage.

4. **Ensuring health and social systems can meet the secondary needs of vulnerable people, particularly those of non-COVID patients**
 - We recommend governments strengthen community-level health services to maintain access to essential health services and other life-saving commodities to prevent indirect illnesses and deaths.
 - Partners should prioritize delivery of vaccines as a tool to avert mortality, particularly in low income countries and humanitarian settings.
 - Pre-existing vulnerabilities, including access to health care, food insecurity, and routine immunization must be addressed.

5. **Addressing humanitarian access and movement restrictions:**
 - We recommend that RC/RC NS and other relevant humanitarian actors be given freedom from movement restrictions to carry out key humanitarian services, including immunization.
 - We recommend that governments include provisions in emergency proclamations to enable RC/RC and other local humanitarian actors to respond to needs according to their humanitarian mandate.

6. **Protecting volunteers and staff of local and national organizations**
 - We encourage governments to make every effort to ensure protection for those involved in immunization services, and other life-saving interventions, including civil society groups and volunteers. This includes medical care and where personnel are injured or die, appropriate and sensitively provided compensation for their families.



Name: Mohammed Omer Murkier
Position: Regional Director for Africa (IFRC)
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