



IFRC Written Statement at the Virtual Session of the Seventy-First WHO 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: 24-26 August 2021 Seventy-First Regional Committee for Africa

Agenda item (number, title): AFR/RC 71/7, 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/RCNS) work to protect health, safety, wellbeing, dignity, and livelihoods of the most vulnerable in Africa and around the world. This includes continuing to work to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in the region. The RC/RC Movement-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies (PHE) is primarily driven and led by communities themselves. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, RC/RC NSs have responded to in-country needs by supporting 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, supporting COVID-19 vaccine roll out including other immunisation services and helping communities adapt to mitigation measures.

Laws and policies have played an integral role in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, underpinning all facets of the response from freedom of movement to access to equitable healthcare. The IFRC has recently examined the role of laws and policies in managing public health emergencies in the report, "[Law and Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)"

The report highlights critical issues relating to legal and institutional frameworks for the management of public health emergencies; the protection of vulnerable groups; and legal facilities for humanitarian actors, among others, that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The report also makes a series of recommendations to support states in strengthening their domestic legal and policy frameworks for public health emergency preparedness and response.

We, therefore, use the opportunity of the 71st WHO Regional Committee for Africa meeting to call on member states to focus on:

Reviewing and strengthening their legal frameworks for Public Health Emergencies (PHEs).

We recommend that:

1. States consider reviewing and updating their laws, policies, and plans relating to PHE risk management to ensure they are fit for modern purposes and adopt an 'all-public health risk' approach, as well as an all-of-society and all-of-state approach that facilitates the participation of all actors and stakeholders, especially communities.
2. Domestic laws and policies should address the needs of vulnerable people and communities who PHEs may disproportionately impact, and make provisions for



public authorities to give clear and actionable early warnings to the general population of health risks that may cause a public health emergency, as this is critical to curbing the spread of a novel infectious disease.

3. The role of humanitarian actors such as the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in response to PHEs be formalised in law and policy, with humanitarian actors being provided with appropriate exemptions from restrictions during PHEs, subject to health safeguards.
4. Laws and policies relating to PHEs and DRM (Disaster Risk Management) should be integrated to avoid a siloed approach and eliminate gaps, conflicts, and duplication between these frameworks.
5. States continue to take steps to ensure that their domestic legislation implements and facilitates the International Health Regulations core capacities through establishing a monitoring committee specifically to oversee implementation of the International Health Regulations.

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