

Thank you chair,
ladies and gentlemen.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – IFRC - is the umbrella organization for 190 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Together with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the ICRC, we form the largest humanitarian network in the world – present in almost every community on the globe through our 14 million volunteers.

IFRC has had observer status at the Arctic Council since the year 2000, but due to the global humanitarian landscape our active participation has been somewhat restricted in recent years. This spring it was agreed that the Finnish Red Cross will represent the IFRC in the Arctic Council and the working groups during the Finnish chairmanship and we'll ensure a good representation beyond that.

The Red Cross Movement has a special relationship to states. National Red Cross Societies are mandated both by international law and by their formative laws in their own countries to act as “auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field”. Every four years, representatives of the world’s states – the signatories of the Geneva conventions – come together at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to give support, endorsement and commentary to the Movements strategic direction. This is why at the Arctic council we are an observer in the intragovernmental category.

I'd like to take this opportunity to call on all states present to engage, support and explore deeper cooperation with your respective National Red Cross Societies in serving vulnerable people in the arctic region. The Red Cross and other civil society organizations have a great deal to contribute to joint efforts.

Our practical engagement with the Arctic Council will focus on two working groups – the Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response working group and the Sustainable Development Working Group. At the same time relevant practical projects are being implemented in the region, be it community resilience in Lapland district of Finland, participation to the Barents Rescue exercise with Emergency Evacuation Hospital or social project with indigenous communities in Nunavut, Canada.

Through our global network we strengthen the preparedness and the resilience of communities. This is in the core of our long term programming. This cannot be done by

one organization alone, in isolation – especially not in more remote areas where the challenges and distances are vast. On the contrary, cooperation is key, for all stakeholders. So let us cooperate, from the community level to the international. In this regard, I'd like to bring to your attention an initiative of great importance to the IFRC, the 1 Billion Coalition, which seeks to encourage cooperation, map out resilience projects and programmes – and ultimately show that together we can engage more than 1 billion people in activities to build resilience by the year 2030. The IFRC is one of the founding members of the 1BC along with UNICEF, WFP, Rockefeller Foundation and Zurich Insurance, with a growing number of public and private partners. This is an open invitation for all to join.

The “1BC” is premised on this realization that we must work at a truly global scale to reverse the inevitable and widening gap between humanitarian needs and available resources and that we must do it together. It works through global, national and local coalitions to support the ability of individuals, communities, organizations and countries to anticipate, prepare for and reduce the impact of disasters, crises and underlying vulnerabilities.

Through our engagement with the Arctic Council and its working groups, we want to bring our global expertise to bear on humanitarian and developmental issues in the Arctic areas. And we want to learn from the Arctic in order to adopt and adapt ideas and approaches in other parts of the world with similar characteristics.

Thank you chair for the opportunity to speak here today. Thanks to the Finnish chairmanship for continuing with the tradition of observer sessions. I'd be happy to provide more information on our work, presence and global strategy in a bilateral manner.

Thank you.