Sunday 15 June 2014 – Launch of the RCRC Cooperation Platform

The opening day of the 2014 Doha Dialogue on Migration was dedicated to the launch of the Red Cross Red Crescent Cooperation Platform and mainly involved the participation of Movement representatives from 20 National Societies from the MENA, South and Southeast Asian regions, the IFRC and the ICRC. The first day of the dialogue aimed to establish the current Movement position and approach to migration, and to identify the areas in which the Red Cross Red Crescent can contribute more actively to assisting migrants workers who often find themselves in vulnerable and/or marginalized positions. From the outset, there was a common consensus from National Societies from both ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries that they are keen to engage and work together on the issue of migrant worker protection - both operationally on the ground and in terms of advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy.

“The time is now to act.. the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is in a unique and powerful position to bring about real change” Dr Baige Zhao, IFRC Vice President for Asia

The Cooperation Platform was opened by the IFRC Vice-President for Asia Dr. Baige Zhao who, in her opening address, said the time had come for the Movement to play a greater role in migration and stressed the need for participants to concentrate on the needs and vulnerabilities of labour migrants rather than focusing on the shortcomings in specific countries or apportioning blame. Dr. Zhao also added that migration was one of the biggest humanitarian issues of the modern age and that the trend of labour migration was likely to continue due to factors such as poverty, conflict and unemployment. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, she said is in a “unique and powerful position to bring about real change.”
Following on Dr. Zhao’s remarks, Dr. Mohammed bin Ghanem Al-Ali Al-Maadheed, President of the Qatar Red Crescent, reminded participants the role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in migration was to preserve human dignity and the fundamental principle of neutrality saying ‘our compassion cannot be segmented to an ethnic or political group, our strength is our humanity.’ Dr Al Maadheed also said that the 2014 Doha Dialogue was the result of over three years of efforts and commitment by many partners within the Movement.

Dr. Oussedik, Head of International Relations and International Humanitarian Law at the QRC, provided an update in latest developments regarding migrants rights, legal status and International Law. Dr Oussedik highlighted a number of examples in which Gulf countries, such as Qatar were changing laws and bringing them into compliance with international standards. He also explained that the GCC countries such as Qatar, expatriate workers were widely viewed as the ‘building blocks’ of the country but stressed the need to ensure all people who reside on a common land are equal before the law. Dr. Tahar Cheniti, Secretary General, Tunisian Red Crescent gave an overview of different types of migration in Tunisia both before and after the 2011 revolution and Libya crisis. His presentation highlighted the diverse and complex range and needs of migrant communities.

Guest speaker, Ms Zahra Babar, Associate Director for Research at the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS), said some sources, such as the media, often gave the impression that there are no laws or protection mechanisms in GCC countries. Laws in fact often exist but the implementation is hindered or affected by other factors such as irregular recruitment processes in both sending and receiving countries that, for example can leave migrant workers without valid papers. In her presentation Dr Babour also highlighted three key areas of concern facing migrant workers restricted mobility due to the sponsorship system, delayed or non-payment of wages and contract substitution.

Mr. Budi Atmadi Adiputro, Secretary General, Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) outlined the opportunities and challenges of labour migration from the perspective of a sending country. Mr Adiputro said that the majority of Indonesia migrant workers had low levels of education and were often involved in contract disputes, nonpayment of salary and physical violence in receiving countries.

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Mr. Budi reported that the Indonesian Red Cross Society had signed agreements with various government agencies including the Ministry of Manpower and that more needed to be done to ensure migrants workers were better prepared in terms of language and core skills before leaving to work overseas. Questions were also raised about whether sending countries should take more responsibility in ensuring migrant workers had enough knowledge and correct paperwork before leaving their countries.

Ms. Sue Lemesurier, Manager of the IFRC Migration Unit and Mr. Zlatko Kovac, IFRC Programme Management Coordinator for DEVCO Partnership outlined the importance of linking up with existing migration networks both regionally and at the global level. Zlatko Kovac gave an overview of the IFRC partnership with EuropeAid Development and Cooperation Directorate- General (DG DEVCO) of the European Commission.

**Vulnerability of women and irregular migrants**

It was widely agreed that female migrant workers and migrants without legal status are amongst the most vulnerable as they are often ‘invisible’ within society or, in the case of undocumented migrants, too afraid to come forward to ask for any help. Sue Lemesurier from the IFRC also noted the particular vulnerabilities of irregular migrants in times of natural disasters when a lack of valid permits or paperwork could hinder their access to assistance. She also said that a number of National Societies had made great efforts to include social inclusion and integration into their migration activities.

Mr. Matthew McMahon, IFRC Regional Gender and Diversity Focal Person from the Southeast Asia delegation gave an overview of the IFRC Gender and Diversity Policy and Strategy. He said that gender equality and equality for all would help to reduce vulnerability and that National Societies could contribute to reducing hatred and intolerance and creating safer working environments for migrant workers. He said the IFRC’s Gender perspective and strategy aimed to ensure humanitarian work benefited men and women equally and aimed to promote knowledge and promote a culture of peace and non-violence, notably in Movement activities on migration.

**The need to utilize and enhance existing Movement tools and policies - rather than creating new ones.**

The role of migration within Strategy 2020 was also recalled throughout the session and it was highlighted that a number of tools, strategies and policies have already been developed across the Movement and efforts should now focus putting those into practice rather than developing any new ones.

Mr. Vincent Raymond Ochilet, Deputy Head of Operations for Asia Pacific, provided an overview of ICRC activities in migration. He stressed that the organization had no ambition and no capacity to meet all needs of migrants and that the ICRC tries not to prevent or encourage migration, focusing solely on the humanitarian needs as they arise. Mr Ochilet said the ICRCs key activities in migration were visiting detained migrants, providing RFL services (with the NS as requested) and tracing missing people. He added that the protection of unaccompanied minors and children was a major priority and cited Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen as countries in which RFL services had been provided to migrants in detention. He said the ICRC works in close coordination with the IOM and UNHCR and is ready to support the Movement on migration issues.

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Two working groups provided an opportunity for National Societies to examine in more details the reasons why people move to work overseas and the vulnerabilities and risks they are facing. Greater exchange of information and training visits between partner National Societies were identified as a key way in which the Red Cross Red Crescent global network could be beneficial to labour migrant protection. More pre-departure outreach and assistance to migrants in sending countries was also suggested as an important avenue for National Societies to explore. It was noted that many labour migrants are not aware that the RCRC can provide assistance and more could be done to raise our public profile and visibility in migration.

Finally National Societies were asked to consider their auxiliary role to governments and the potential this provided in terms of the Red Cross Red Crescent role in influence policy and legislation on migration. A number of National Societies have already entered into agreements with their Ministries of Labour or other agencies but others have yet to develop a clear advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy strategy for migration. In many countries the RCRC is still considered as an organization for natural disasters and other emergencies and ensuring a National Society is also considered a key development actor in issues such as migration is an ongoing challenge. National Societies need to be more proactive in approaching governments and other external partners with assistance in labour migration and offering services, which governments may not realize, are available. The RCRC work on migration must be done in partnership and collaboration with others, including academic institutions and the private sector.

The launch of the Red Cross Red Crescent Platform on Migration concluded with six commitments
✓ A commitment from participants to move the Dialogue forward and attend a second RCRC Migration Platform in Manila in December 2014
✓ An agreement from participants to support/attend a regional workshop focusing on inter-cultural dialogue in Jakarta in September 2014. Further workshops to be potentially hosted by National Societies from sending and receiving countries to over the next 3 years.
✓ Enhance communication and exchange of ideas between sending and receiving National Societies through Red Cross Red Crescent ‘study visits’ to various countries and through workplace exchanges for staff and volunteers in sending and receiving countries
✓ Agreement from the National Societies to nominate one staff member/volunteer to act as a focal point for Movement-wide discussions and action on migration.
✓ RCRC Movement to be more proactive in establishing relationships and partnerships with external migration agencies and existing networks.
✓ National Societies to strengthen advocacy efforts and humanitarian diplomacy around migration and build on the RCRC auxiliary role with governments.

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