

## **12<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Conference of the Red Cross and Red crescent**

### **Culture of non violence and peace**

#### **Key note speech**

#### **IFRC-MENA – Amelia Marzal**

Dear Chairman

Esteemed Red Cross and Red Crescent leaders and colleagues

For the last couple of days our discussions have covered the main humanitarian concerns in the Mediterranean region and we, as a Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, are asking ourselves if we are responding and how we should intensify our response. I propose that we reflect upon how we can collectively work on the underlying causes of the present challenges.

Many leaders of the RCRC Movement from the Mediterranean region, in the last couple of days, have been expressing the need to engage in a culture of non-violence and peace.

With dramatic conflicts in Middle East and North Africa, our region is, indeed, threatened by a lack of dialogue and confrontation. It is a paradox that in a time of globalisation when societies and nations are more and more mixed, polarization and fear to diversity is increasing every day. Xenophobia, discrimination and social exclusion are the symptoms that cause suffering to million of people, in particular the most vulnerable.

Most of the time discrimination and culture of violence is directly interrelated with instability, with economic crisis and disparities and with lack of future and opportunities, mostly among the young generations.

And we should not forget that this is as well a push factor in the decision of people to migrate from South to Northern countries in search of better perspectives.

In deed, migration is not a new phenomenon. Mediterraneans, we know very well, this is in our DNA and migration has shaped our civilizations, history and culture. What we are experiencing is a growing level of intolerance in many countries, especially between local and immigrant populations.

A lack of cultural awareness can turn this intolerance into violent clashes, dividing communities and people along lines of cultural or religious belonging and lead to exclusion.

This is also in the base of many prevailing perceptions and attitudes, which at the end are translated in policies towards migrants, sustained by a security approach.

Therefore the importance of promoting a culture of non-violence and peace through RCRC volunteer network at grassroots level is crucial to change to positive behaviours.

Violence can increase exponentially in emergencies. Again and again in disasters and crisis the risk of self-directed and interpersonal violence intensifies, as fragile community systems collapse, and people are exposed to harmful behaviour.

Political violence, economical stress and poor living conditions are directly associated with increased prevalence of interpersonal violence, thus prevailing towards the most vulnerable. This situation affects several countries in the region, facing national and international crises with thousands of refugees and internal displaced people.

Populations that already face the highest risks, such as children and women, become even more threatened especially in times of disasters and crisis.

In this sense violence prevention through community engagement programmes are crucial to enhance community resilience.

The Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies is strongly committed to fostering a global culture of respect for diversity, non-violence and peace, inter-cultural dialogue and social inclusion where human values and dignity are in the centre of our work. Within our

Strategy 2020, Promoting social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace is one of our three organizational priorities, as indicated in Strategic Action 3.

Two tools are essential to promote a culture of nonviolence and peace: voluntary service and education. Voluntary service is one of our 7 Fundamental Principles and is at the heart of community building. It brings the individual self-esteem, a sense of usefulness and is one of the most powerful ways to create or enhance a sense of community belonging and social cohesion.

With regard to education, skills and value-based education as a key tool to foster individual and social transformation towards building respect for diversity, nonviolence and social cohesion.

The IFRC's flagship initiative, Youth as agents of behavioural change (YABC) is one clear example of the power of this kind of education in a non-formal context.

You know very well YABC, and as a matter of fact the idea was initiated in the context of the Mediterranean Conference, particularly during the Atlantis Camp IV in Serbia.

Through the development of behavioural skills, youth are empowered to work towards change, both within themselves and as leaders in their communities. Now, 123 National Societies have peer educators trained and we count on over 1,300 educators worldwide. We have many great examples of YABC action in this room, such the Egyptian Red Crescent applied to first aid, the Italian Red Cross applied to migrants acceptance, French Red Cross applied to fight racism and discrimination, Tunisia Red Crescent applied to assistance to migrants and fight discrimination and stigma, Palestine Red Crescent applied to PSP and promotion of artistic platforms, the Lebanese Red Cross implementing in centres and youth clubs, or the Red Cross of Bosnia-Herzegovina applied to Psychological support for victims of emergencies and volunteers, the Libyan Red Crescent applied to emergencies.

The united voice of our youth colleagues yesterday could not be clearer, when expressing their commitment to be role models for living the Fundamental Principles and the resource to address the root causes of violence.

And now we need to move towards ABC, not just youth but all of us, volunteers and youth, being agents of change in our communities and context.

Our goal must be to promote a culture where violence is never an option. In other words we can contribute to build a person or community capacity to adapt to and remain strong in the face of adversity.

At the same time, we need to work in creating safe environments, particularly in times of emergencies. We must integrate the prevention of violence within Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments to better understand the risks and strengths of communities in preparing for a disaster, and to ensure the “do no harm” principle through addressing violence. Additionally, we must educate and support disaster responders of all levels and communities to be prepared to minimize the risk of violence and respond quickly and effectively if it does occur.

Communities that invest in programmes which prevent stigma, gender inequality and abuse, among many other activities, and which empower vulnerable groups of people, become stronger and less prone to violence. Therefore, targeting youth and communities most at risk is important.

We have many good examples of violence prevention programs, such as the one undertaken by the Lebanese Red Cross violence prevention integrated approach particularly in PSP programs, the Palestine Red Crescent with communities and disabled people through CBHFA, the Syrian Red Crescent with community based education in gender based violence, the Egyptian Red Crescent with the school based health program on preventing violence against children, the Croatian Red Cross raising awareness on human trafficking among children and youth, the Italian Red Cross school program for bullying prevention, the Hellenic Red Cross in PSP activities with victims of trafficking, the Spanish Red Cross

programs in centres for women victims of violence, the Serbia Red Cross raising awareness programs of trafficking among children and youth and promotion of human values. There are many examples.

In conclusion, violence is predictable and preventable. Violence prevention is our moral and humanitarian imperative. In the context of emergencies, concrete steps can be taken to prevent and minimize violence, especially towards our most vulnerable populations. Within our communities, and particularly with our youth and volunteers, the role of education in changing minds, fostering tolerance, social inclusion and respect for diversity are the key actions for a more resilient community.

We have heard and debated during the past few days about the main humanitarian concerns in the region and we have also seen how much they are interrelated. And now it is also time to think how we can scale up our efforts in tackling the underlying causes and mainly addressing violence, discrimination and exclusion.

**So, my question now is how we can join collective efforts and resources at regional and international level to have a real impact in making the Mediterranean Sea a space of peace of respect for human dignity?.....**

And before finishing, let me share with you this very short video on YABC. Although the video was prepared in 2012 in the context of the past crisis in Libya, it is still a very good example of the programme and the practical application of our Fundamental principles in the RCRC action with people on move. It shows the testimony of the great youth volunteers from Libyan Red Crescent and Tunisian Red Crescent.

*(video on YABC)*

Thank you very much

Amelia Marzal

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