Remarks by Mr Christopher Rassi - Head of IFRC CCST, Bangkok and Representative to UNESCAP
at the 7th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)
20 May 2020, 0900-15.30hrs - Virtual Meeting

Madame Chair, Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, Distinguished Participants

As we have heard from the eminent speakers here today, the Asia Pacific Region has made enormous progress, but it still has a way to go to reach the SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind.

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and all our 192 National Societies – with their 14 million volunteers – are continuously contributing to this end, side by side with governments.

From the perspective of the IFRC, we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health disaster with immense secondary health impacts, but also a long-term socio-economic disaster, which risk forcing millions of people back into poverty and the push the attainment of the SDGs into the distance.

IFRC and all the National Societies of the Asia Pacific region stand ready to support governments to deal with these multiple impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as to deliver on the SDGs, including by not letting the current pandemic undermine the progress made on towards the SDGs thus far.

To effectively address the immediate needs, our frontline staff and volunteers will need governments’ permission to operate around any control measures, as well as access to the necessary personal protective equipment and medical care if they should themselves fall ill.

As such, IFRC urges all governments to make testing and treatment for COVID-19, including any future vaccine, available for all citizens and foreigners alike irrespective of their legal status.

Similarly, IFRC calls for equitable global access to eventual vaccines.

A further threat to achievement of the SDGs is the rising impact of climate and weather-related disasters and no region is more at risk than the Asia Pacific. The current pandemic must not hinder our efforts to deliver lifesaving assistance to people in urgent need and we must continue to progress our work on disaster risk reduction – an essential component of climate adaptation.

The challenges we are addressing are as interconnected and mutually reinforcing as the needed solutions.

Let me conclude by thanking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and ESCAP, as well as the governments and partners present here today for their partnership in our joint efforts to leave no one behind.

Thank you.