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Contents

Editorial **2**

Georgia: the unique human touch **3**

Belarus: supporting young women **4**

Turkey: the role of our mothers **5**

Eliminating Violence Against Women **6**

International Women's Day 2011



Editorial



Dear friends,

On International Women's Day there is much to celebrate, for all of us of the Red Cross and Red Crescent family in Europe and especially for the women.

Women have influence as never before in the world and as Presidents, Secretaries General and directors in almost every Red Cross and Red Crescent society across the continent and into Central Asia.

This means that we can use our voices to bring to fore the issues which affect our gender, as leaders of the world's largest humanitarian organisation.

Study after study shows that it is women who suffer most during and after disasters, as a result of conflict and due to economic crisis. The men often have to leave – to fight and die, to work, to stay and guard property – meaning the women have to take charge of the family in the darkest of times.

When the daily business of finding shelter, food and water is finished, women still have to protect themselves and their children from rape, violence and exploitation.

Even in times of peace and without major disasters, women bear the brunt of ensuring the family is provided for. It is the woman who goes without – first neglecting her health and nutrition to ensure her children can eat and go to school, and in the most extreme cases, selling her last possession – her body – to guarantee her family's survival. This makes her more prone to disease and violence.

But it does not have to be like this. We Red Cross and Red Crescent leaders, we all want to push for changes. Thanks to the sacrifices our mothers and fathers made we had good educations, managed our families and our careers and we provide new role models for our own daughters and sons.

What a powerful force for change we can be! Of course we must push for our diversity goals, and ensure we create conditions where women and men can blossom in their careers. And if we invest in women leadership at grass roots level in the tens of thousands of Red Cross/Red Crescent branches across Europe then we can directly advocate at village level and beyond for better health facilities, access to education and child care.

We can protect girls and boys from being tricked into sexual slavery. We can ensure pregnancies are well spaced. That children are nurtured, with health checks, good food, clean water and vaccinations. Where all children, but especially girls, can get the education they need to find work. We can help create healthy families which will make communities more resilient.

Today is the time to celebrate the International Women's day, to congratulate each other on our achievements, and to start to walk together down the long road ahead.



Ms. Anitta Underlin
Director of Europe Zone

Anitta Underlin
Europe Zone, Director



International Women's Day 2011

Georgia: the unique human touch

Nana Keinishvili has been the President of the Red Cross Society of Georgia since 2000.

"Since my very childhood, I've always been of the opinion that the success you gain is in direct ratio with the effort you've put into your work. And I still believe that any problem can be solved with rigorous analysis and the correct strategy" she comments.

"During the 10 years that I have spent in my National Society I have gained a huge experience, which has helped me see the world in a totally new perspective and set new priorities in my life."

Nana was born and raised in Georgia, in whose language the word "woman" is associated with concepts like *earth*, *pillar*, *homeland* and *hometown*, and where the strong role of women, considered as an integral component of national traditions, has been attentively preserved for centuries.

"Whenever there was a fight between men, a simple kerchief dropped by a woman between them was enough to solve the conflict" says Nana.

"Just by seeing the importance of women's role throughout the history of our country, I have learned that women possess a unique human touch and innate skills of conflict resolution."

"In the Georgian Red Cross Society, 70% of all employees are women. I have often thought about it and the reason for this must be the fact that the activities of the Red Cross are more closely linked to women's mentality.

It is right that human touch that I believe can make a real difference in the life of all the people we bring our support to. The Red Cross is not capable of physically changing every person's life, but we can listen to them, support them morally and tell them that we will be there whenever our presence is needed."

To all the women of today, Nana has a simple message: "Keep in mind that, regardless of your role, be you mothers, sisters, daughters, wives or friends, by the strength of your humanity and love, you have the power to change the world around you into a better place for everyone."



Ms. Nana Keinishvili, President of the Red Cross Society of Georgia

Strategy 2020 Strategic Aim 3

"All communities have groups of people – often hidden – who are unable to enjoy the general benefits that are accessible to mainstream society. Such people may be neglected, marginalized or excluded for many reasons such as social or economic disadvantage, their employment status, a lack of access to information, knowledge or modern communication tools, or perhaps due to public attitudes that stigmatize or discriminate against them. Such disadvantaged groups include women and girls, who are at risk because of their gender"

International Women's Day 2011



Ms. Inna Ivanovna Lemeshevskaya,
Deputy Secretary General on Youth
of the Belarus Red Cross

Belarus: supporting young women

Inna Ivanovna Lemeshevskaya, Deputy Secretary General on Youth of the Belarus Red Cross, has a long standing experience with youth.

“Till some years ago, I used to work as an IT teacher at school, I organised out-of-school activities and helped children take initiative. Now my main task is supporting them to bring their projects into life” says Inna.

Having started in the Belarus Red Cross as an officer and gradually growing into her current position, Inna affirms that she’s been working to realise her potential by supporting the organisational development of her National Society and helping those who are in need of assistance.

“It is certainly a great honour for me to represent the Belarus Red Cross at such level, but at the same time I believe that it constitutes a great responsibility” she comments. “It is especially important for me to create and maintain a positive atmosphere in our organization, as I am convinced that, when someone is feeling confident and comfortable, he or she can work more and better.”

Inna has no doubt about the fact that working in the Belarus Red Cross requires full dedication, extensive knowledge, effort, and trust in success, but at the same time it provides an opportunity for everyone to realise themselves.

Statistics still show higher unemployment rates among women than men in Belarus: for young women it is more difficult to get a prestigious job, and they have to make bigger efforts to prove their professionalism.

Best practices

Spanish Red Cross' commitment to gender equality and women's rights

Policies for gender equality and women's rights are central aspects for the Spanish Red Cross. All their programmes implement such principles, with a clear focus: *being a woman implies no obstacles in any aspects of social life.*

In the middle of the economic crisis, one of the main objectives is to avoid situations of inequality in the job market.

Women in the Spanish job market

- Employment rates: -14%
- Man/woman salary difference: 30%
- Abandonment of work after maternity: 380,000 per year
- Workload: 6.5 hours more per week

Equality policies of the Spanish Red Cross are not limited to Spain: the **Women Training & Integration Project** was established in Liberia in cooperation with the Liberian Red Cross, with the aim of promoting social and professional insertion of women who were victims of the war that torn the African country apart.

For more info on the project, watch the [video](#).

“Willing to become self-sustaining as soon as possible, some girls end up searching for easier ways and possibilities to get financial independence, thus risking to become victims of trafficking and be involved in sex work. We try to prevent such situations by morally supporting those who got into trouble and helping them get professional education and find a job” comments Inna “It is with pleasure that we admit girls as interns: for many of them a job with the Red Cross becomes an excellent start, here they get invaluable experience which they can use in the future.”

“It is not hard to learn if you take an interest in your job and it becomes engaging and enjoyable to you. I’ve met many people in the Red Cross who like their job as I do. I would like to wish all women to find an occupation which is close to their soul and to enjoy what they do in the company of like-minded people” she concludes.

International Women's Day 2011

Turkey: the role of our mothers

"I don't think that my position is something extraordinary for today's Turkey: it is quite in line with the general trends of women's positioning in many countries across the region" notes Deniz Sölen, Coordinator for Governance Services and International Relations in the Turkish Red Crescent Society, when asked what it means to her being a woman in a position of power in her National Society and national context nowadays.

"There are more and more women in top management now. In Turkey, women gained their right to vote in 1936 and, in our Constitution, the principle of equal opportunity for women and men is recognized. But still there are many areas of business life or the larger society where we cannot talk about gender equality. In this regard, I think that my professional success is quite encouraging for the general perception of women in our country."

Deniz graduated in political science from Ankara University in 1979. Before taking her current position in the Turkish Red Crescent, she gained extensive experience in both the public and private sector, working to strengthen national and international relations in different areas of social and economic development.

"Nowadays, women and especially young women in Turkey can still be subjected to biased and prejudiced views and might receive insufficient education" she continues. "The Turkish Red Crescent works on raising public awareness of the role of women in the family and society, as well of the importance of education for women's empowerment and cultural change. And to do that, we start from ourselves: in our National Society, we take special care to have perfect gender balance among staff and volunteers, and make sure that men and women are equally treated. Besides that, such principle is always emphasised and pursued by our staff as well as Governing Board members and trainers in our activities."

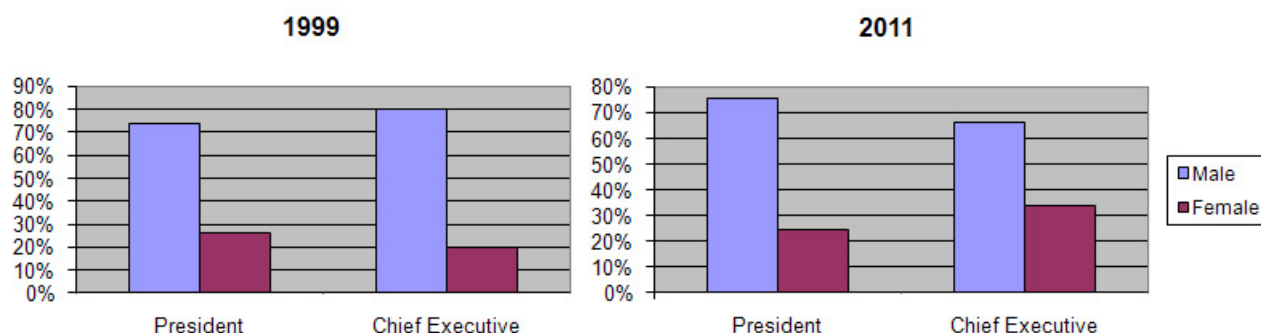
"Nonetheless, I firmly believe that the first move to change people's mind must come from within the family, where the most important role belongs to the mother. As the first educators, mothers shape the minds of their children and help them grow into adults."

"On a day like the International Women's day, I would like to remind all mothers of the importance of their role in society, and of their mission to lead us towards a better world through better future generations" she says.



Ms. Deniz Sölen, Coordinator for Governance Services and International Relations in the Turkish Red Crescent Society

Gender in Europe Zone National Societies



International Women's Day 2011

Eliminating Violence Against Women

The UN system continues to give particular attention to the issue of violence against women. The 1993 General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women contained "a clear and comprehensive definition of violence against women [and] a clear statement of the rights to be applied to ensure the elimination of violence against women in all its forms". It represented "a commitment by States in respect of their responsibilities, and a commitment by the international community at large to the elimination of violence against women".

In 2007, the theme of the International Women's Day was "Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls". And on 25 February 2008, Mr. Ban Ki-moon launched "The Secretary-General's Global Campaign, UNiTE to End Violence Against Women". In opening the multi-year global campaign, he called violence against women an issue that "cannot wait".

International Women's Day is observed on 8 March. The theme of the 2009 observance was "Women and men united to end violence against women and girls". The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is observed on 25 November.

UN Women becomes operational

On 1 January 2011, the new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – or UN Women became operational.

UN Women, merging four of the world body's agencies and offices - the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) - was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 2 July 2011, and tasked with accelerating progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

To visit UN Women's website, click [here](#).



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