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Special  
issue

# Europe Zone

A newsletter of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



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Temirtau/Kazakhstan - Tuberculosis/HIV coinfection programme - advisory team - Galina, psychologist (white cardigan) Elena, social worker (blonde hair), Galina, lawyer (blue top)

## International Women's Day 2013

Creating change from within communities

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Saving lives, changing minds.



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Editorial

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**T**oday, on the International Women's Day, we want to celebrate diversity.

The 8 of March represents first of all an opportunity to remind ourselves – women and men, boy and girls alike - of how far we have come to advance the gender cause as a whole, and of the steps that still lie ahead to have gender equality fully recognised at all levels.

In the Red Cross Red Crescent, it was 1999 when the General Assembly adopted the IFRC Gender Policy, reflecting the commitment of National Societies to integrate a gender perspective in all their activities, according to the Red Cross Red Crescent mandate. In November 2011, a **gender pledge** was presented at the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which has so far been signed by 45 Red Cross Red Crescent Societies around the world, out of which 14 in the Europe Zone.



Anitta Underlin, Director of IFRC Europe Zone

*“What does it mean for a National Society to sign the Gender Pledge?”*, was my question to Dr Werner Kerschbaum, Secretary General of the Austrian Red Cross – the latest Red Cross signatory to the pledge in the Europe Zone - during my last visit to Vienna last January, when the Austrian Red Cross hosted the Red Viwo network<sup>1</sup>.

A National Society that signs a Gender Pledge is a National Society that is aware of the advantages of having not simply gender balance, but a mentality and culture of gender equality in its day-to-day work. It is, most of all, a National Society that is ready to tackle its own shortcomings and undertake an internal process of change at organisational level, which will have a positive impact on the work with vulnerable people and communities.

I am happy to present you this special issue of the Europe Zone newsletter dedicated to the International Women's Day. This issue features a message by the IFRC Secretary General, Bekele Geleta, and interviews with three male leaders of National Societies in the Europe Zone that have signed the gender pledge, who share their views on gender issues and on how gender equality can contribute to the well-functioning of their organisation. This year, we have focused on presenting why top male leaders support and advance diversity and gender in an acknowledgment that change is driven by men and women alike, for mutual benefit.

On the occasion of the launch of the IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues for 2013-2020 today, I would like to join the call of our Secretary General on National Societies that have not yet signed the Gender Pledge to do so, and to walk the talk in changing mind-sets and embracing equality.

**Anitta Underlin**  
Director of Europe Zone

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Red Viwo, click [here](#).

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## Message from the IFRC Secretary General

**D**ear colleagues,  
Today,  
International  
Women's Day, I  
share with you an Amharic  
proverb from Ethiopia cele-  
brating the power of diver-  
sity: "When spider webs unite,  
they can tie up a lion."

The benefits of diversity are evi-  
dence-based today. Diversity  
makes an organization blossom.  
It increases its performance and  
financial returns, as well as orga-  
nizational health. Workforce  
diversity makes employees feel  
appreciated, improves their satis-  
faction and delivers higher levels  
of engagement.

In my capacity as IFRC Secretary General, I am deeply appreciative of  
the immense benefits diversity brings. I have tried to pave the path  
through my commitment at the highest level within the secretariat to  
work with a gender-diverse senior management team, composed of two  
male and two female Under-Secretary Generals.

Aware that more needs to be done, I am happy to announce that for the  
secretariat we have recently approved a strategic framework on gender  
and diversity Issues. I look forward to seeing the strategic framework  
presented to the next session of the Governing Board for its endorse-  
ment or appreciation as to how to further strengthen gender and diver-  
sity issues for/within the membership.

So, let us walk that path towards celebrating diversity hand in hand...  
and one concrete step you can take on International Women's Day is to  
sign (if you have not done so) the IFRC pledge on gender P2093, submit-  
ted to our last International Conference in 2011. 45 National Societies  
– nine from Africa, ten from the Americas, nine from Asia Pacific, fif-  
teen from Europe and two from MENA - have already signed, and  
this is wonderful.

### Gender Pledge - What?

Armed conflicts, natural disasters, and other  
vulnerable situations have profoundly different  
impact on women, girls, men and boys. The  
risks and vulnerabilities each of the groups  
face differ and as such have a varied impact on  
them. Women, girls, men and boys have distinct  
and diverse strengths, needs and capacities  
which should be equally valued and inform  
effective and sustainable relief, recovery and  
development initiatives. It is essential for any  
effective humanitarian work to pursue equality  
of power, influence, opportunities and access  
to resources and services, between women,  
girls, men and boys.



Bekele Geleta, IFRC Secretary General

### Gender Pledge - Who?

As of today, the pledge has been  
signed by the IFRC Secretariat  
and 45 Red Cross Red Crescent  
Societies of Argentina, Austria,  
Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cameroon,  
Canada, Chile, Cook Islands, Côte  
d'Ivoire, Denmark, Fiji, Finland,  
Georgia, Guatemala, Guyana,  
Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica,  
Jordan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho,  
Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali,  
Norway, Panama, Papua New  
Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines,  
Romania, Russian Federation,  
Samoa, Sierra Leone, South Africa,  
Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Tonga,  
Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu, Viet  
Nam, Zambia.

– nine from Africa, ten from the Americas, nine from Asia Pacific, fif-  
teen from Europe and two from MENA - have already signed, and  
this is wonderful.  
The most recent sig-  
natories were Libya  
and Mali (during  
the 8th Pan-African  
Conference, October  
2012 in Ethiopia),  
Malawi (December)  
and Austria this  
January.

The IFRC and all 45  
National Societies  
who have signed  
this pledge to date  
have committed to

## Message from the IFRC Secretary General

### Gender Pledge - Which goals?

- To implement the IFRC Gender Strategy;
- To systematically integrate a gender perspective into all policy work;
- To advocate for policies and legislation that tackle stigma and discrimination on the basis of gender;
- To create conditions favourable for gender balance at all levels in governance, management and staff and for gender balanced representation in statutory bodies and meetings, where possible;
- To integrate a gender dimension when revising statutes;
- To promote and encourage work to understand a gender perspective in international humanitarian law.

systematically integrate a gender perspective into policy work, advocate for policies and legislation that address stigma and discrimination on the basis of gender and create conditions favourable for gender balance at all levels in governance, management and staff within our respective organizations.

The gender pledge is accompanied by evaluation criteria, amongst which a target

of at least 60 per cent of the membership (or 112 National Societies) signing up to the pledge by 2015.

So I call upon you as the highest level of leadership of National Societies. By signing onto the pledge your National Society would join our collective effort as we strive for a world transformed by respect for gender and other forms of diversity. Please return the attached pledge, signed, to [principles.values@ifrc.org](mailto:principles.values@ifrc.org).

Further, I invite the 45 National Societies who have signed to share the ways in which you have been implementing it by posting your experience on FedNet, where we created a simple platform to share your thoughts and actions and engage with more than 18,000 Movement volunteers and staff worldwide<sup>1</sup>.

### IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues

The IFRC Global Senior Management team recently approved the IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues, and a cross-divisional taskforce, chaired by the Secretary General, will be set up to oversee its implementation at the Secretariat level. The IFRC Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues was presented to the Humanitarian Principles and Diplomacy Advisory Body at its next session on 28 February, which in its turn will submit it to the Governing Board in May 2013.

*Finally, let me express my appreciation for the work of RED WIVO, an informal network of female senior and middle managers in European National Societies. Their recent empowerment initiative in which managers coach less experienced female colleagues is a good and innovative example of implementing the Gender pledge.*

I truly believe that change must come from within and must involve a high level of leadership as well as grassroots support and acceptance to be meaningful and long lasting. On this special day, let us all become champions of gender empowerment.

Yours sincerely,

**Bekele Geleta**  
IFRC Secretary General

<sup>1</sup> As part of your membership in FedNet, you automatically have your own blog in the Communities section. We have attached a one page description of how to post a blog, and the [FedNet Communities Guide](#) is a resource for your staff to update your profile with a picture and other information.

## Voices from National Societies

### Austrian Red Cross: starting from language to change mind-sets

“We now live in a world where 52 per cent of the total population are women and 48 per cent men. Even if we limit ourselves to the Red Cross Red Crescent context, what is sure is that if we exclude women from fully participating in decision making processes we fail to utilize the full potential of all the volunteers, members and employees that we have in the Red Cross” says Dr Werner Kerschbaum, Secretary General of the Austrian Red Cross.

Austria is one of the 45 Red Cross Red Crescent Societies in the world that as of today have signed the IFRC Gender Pledge.

“For a National Society, signing such pledge means that they believe in the inclusive approach that the pledge tries to promote” continues Dr Kerschbaum. “It also means that there is enough dissatisfaction with the status quo to provoke a change; that there is a vision of the direction that the organisation should take and that vision is substantiated by a concrete plan of how to turn that idea into action”.

Dr Kerschbaum explains how, in the Austrian Red Cross, the signing of the pledge was only the starting point for the establishment of clear objectives at top management level, as well as at department and unit level, aimed at advancing gender equality. This has already translated into concrete actions, such as the establishment of a monitoring system to assess the performance of the National Society in terms of gender issues and the creation of management training programmes for both men and women. From 1 July 2013, the Austrian Red Cross will also introduce a flexible working time arrangement, which is meant to support in particular part-time female employees and single mothers.

According to Dr Kerschbaum, in order to nurture a true culture of gender equality within an organisation, one has to start from the roots, that is from changing the communications patterns, and influencing what people talk about and how they talk about it. “Language creates reality - he adds by quoting the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein - and what is discussed about within your organisation on a daily basis will eventually happen. That is why we think it is very important to have gender issues on the agenda of meetings, ranging from top management meetings to meetings with other National Societies”.

“Gender equality starts at home” he concludes. “So I firmly believe that if we succeed in changing our organisation first, this will eventually influence programmes and also our surrounding communities to do the same.”



Werner Kerschbaum, Secretary General of the Austrian Red Cross

#### Red Viwo

Founded in May 2011 by a group of likeminded women from senior and middle management positions within the IFRC and Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, the European Red Cross Red Crescent Women's Network - Red Viwo is an informal network committed to gender equality in the Red Cross Red Crescent and in its work.

Under the motto “to walk the talk”, members of the network act as agents of behavioural change both in the individual context and as part of the network, to raise awareness in the Red Cross Red Crescent family about of the issue of gender equality, with the ultimate goal of reaching equal representation of men and women at all levels, including governance and management of the IFRC and National Societies.

For more information about the RedViwo, click [here](#). You can contact the Red Viwo at [redviwo@gmail.com](mailto:redviwo@gmail.com).

## Voices from National Societies



Hristo Grigorov, President of the Bulgarian Red Cross

### Awareness, mainstreaming and empowerment. The path of the Bulgarian Red Cross towards equality

When asked about what it means to have a gender sensitive approach within the Red Cross Red Crescent, Mr Hristo Grigorov, President of the Bulgarian Red Cross, lists a few key elements: awareness, gender equity in internal structures and gender mainstreaming in programming, with the last two being complementary strategies.

“Understanding the needs of both men and women and providing them with efficient support are the necessary steps to the creation of an enabling and nurturing environment” he explains. “Respectively, this leads to an increase in creativity levels, thus directly influencing better programming and work effectiveness”.

The Bulgarian Red Cross was one of the first National Societies to sign the Gender Pledge in November 2011. “Our management and I are highly committed to fulfilling the targets outlined and I believe we are well on our way towards those achievements” continues Mr Grigorov. “Our National Society has already reached equal representation on the executive management level, and over the next three years we will be working on equal representation at governance level. I would also like to further support a culture of work-life balance across all levels of our organization by adding more measures for career development”.

Mr Grigorov adds that two female staff members of the Bulgarian Red Cross are also members of the European Red Cross Red Crescent Women’s Network (Red ViWo), which is working on raising awareness and providing a platform to promote gender equality and translate policy into action.

Talking about the Bulgarian context in terms of the advancement of gender equality, Mr Grigorov says that although significant progress has been made, inequalities still exist. “Companies need to ensure that their recruitment, appraisal and career management systems are gender-neutral and performance-focused, and that they do not hold women back in their professional development.”

“My personal view is that there is a shift in trends which beneficial to all” he concludes. “We, men, are not ‘dinosaurs’ and the only breadwinners anymore. Nowadays, men and women want to share power, responsibilities and obligations. We want new prospects for men and women in the 21st century!”



## Voices from National Societies

### Azerbaijan: more awareness among women is crucial to boost change

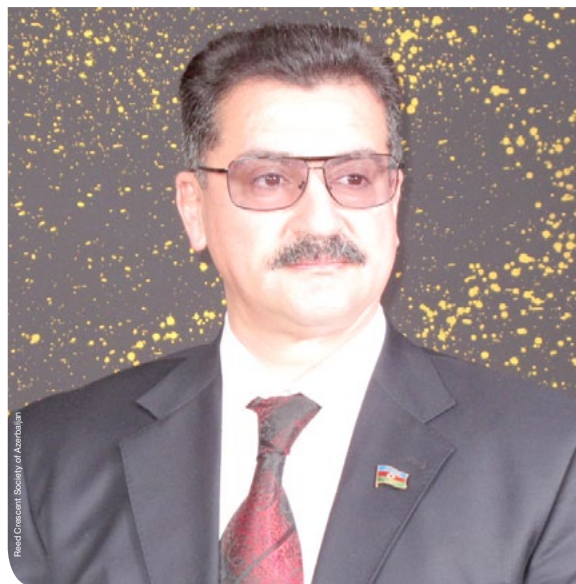
Since the times of Mrs Nigar Shiklinskaya, one of the founders of the Nurses' Movement of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan back in 1920, the National Society has had three women leaders and ten women nurses awarded the Florence Nightingale medal.

"Currently, there are 37 men and 38 women working in the headquarters of the AzRCS" says Mr Novruzali Aslanov, President of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan. "We have 52 men and 21 women among the directors of local branches and three women currently represented at governance and management level in our National Society. I think this is already a good starting point".

Looking at the future, Mr Aslanov explains how gender equality will be part of the agenda of the AzRCS – one of the 45 signatory National Societies to the IFRC Gender Pledge - over the next three years. "This process will not only be object of discussion inside our own structure, but will have a positive impact also in our work with the communities that we serve, according to our mission".

In reply to the question about the bigger picture on gender in Azerbaijan, Mr Aslanov notes that, a number of issues still exist nowadays in the country, where one can observe, though occasionally, gender-based violations, rooted in the widespread perception in society of clear differences between men and women when it comes to decisions, behaviours and responsibilities. "These differences hamper gender equity and have a direct effect on life within families, on men and women's ways of life, as well as on their social-economic and health status" adds Mr Aslanov. "What is crucially needed is a more active involvement of women in decision-making processes – in our organisation as well as in others -, a change of attitudes and behaviour towards gender issues in communities, and more awareness among women themselves.

On the other hand, Mr Aslanov also points out how women are playing an increasingly active role in the political life of Azerbaijan, with a growing number of women making their way to management levels, and also in the non-governmental sector.



Novruzali Aslanov, President of the Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan



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