

Australian Red Cross Submission to the Garnaut Climate Change Review: Climate Change Adaptation and the Pacific region

1. Overview

Red Cross appreciates the commitment of the Garnaut Climate Change Review to receive and integrate stakeholder input to the review process and is concerned about the humanitarian impacts expected due to climate change, particularly as the most vulnerable communities (the poorest of the poor in the poorest countries¹) will be disproportionately affected. It is recognised that while adaptation to climate change is not addressed in the interim report, it will feature in the final report. A number of international initiatives have been undertaken and commitments made to do more in this regard. This submission seeks to highlight the need to address climate change adaptation and to reiterate Australian Red Cross's commitment to reducing the risks faced by communities through preparedness for climate change and adaptation, most notably in the Pacific region.

2. The Impact of Greenhouse Emissions

Red Cross applauds the fact that the Review will provide an analysis of the impact of greenhouse emissions on Australia as well as the indirect impact of Australian emissions on other countries. Regrettably, while the island nations of the Pacific have contributed the least to overall emissions, they are among those countries most at-risk from the consequences of climate change.

Indications are that we are heading for emission levels that exceed the most pessimistic IPCC scenarios for growth; the interim report indicates that current measurements of temperature increase and sea level rise are heading towards the upper limits of predictions for this period (see page 18 of the report). It is our understanding that while work is being undertaken to mitigate further emissions, past emissions may have already locked us into substantial climate change for several years to come, leading to higher incidence of hydro-meteorological disasters. The humanitarian consequences and increased need for emergency preparedness and response are obvious (see Table 1, page 23 of the review).

The projected changes to the environment also pose a threat to the economic, traditional knowledge, and health wellbeing of the communities affected. They have the potential to fuel conflict as well create situations of forced migration². Increases in extreme events are likely to threaten capacity of communities to cope at many levels— adaptation will be necessary.

Red Cross sees its role both in increased response and facilitating climate change adaptation at the community level.

3. Risk Reduction and Complex Disaster Situations

The Review emphasises in the initial discussion, the uncertainties around climate change while in latter parts highlights the trajectories that we are on and just how urgent action is. In spite of the aforementioned uncertainties, IPCC states that impacts due to altered frequencies and intensities of extreme weather, climate and sea-level events are very likely to change. These changes, coupled with others influencing change, such as urbanisation, migration, conflict and

¹ The most vulnerable industries, settlements and societies are generally those in coastal and river flood plains, those whose economies are closely linked with climate-sensitive resources, and those in areas prone to extreme weather events, especially where rapid urbanisation is occurring. Poor communities can be especially vulnerable, in particular those concentrated in high-risk areas. They tend to have more limited adaptive capacities, and are more dependent on climate-sensitive resources such as local water and food supplies.

² See *Climate change and Forced Migration* by Etienne Piguet, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008.

environmental degradation, have implications for complex disasters that International Red Cross is called upon to respond to.

In recent years, Red Cross has recognised that preparing for and coping with disasters is essential but not sufficient given the sheer numbers of people affected annually. Building safer and more resilient communities is at the heart of our approach to risk reduction. Women and men are impacted by climate change in different ways according to the roles that they undertake. These gender roles should be considered in the final review.

4. The Role of Red Cross

In the last five years, more than 40 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies have started to address climate change in their work. The Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre based in the Netherlands, supports the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and other interested parties to reduce people's vulnerability to climate risks.

4.1 Preparedness for Climate Change Programme in the Pacific

There is a particular focus on assisting National Societies in small countries in the Pacific region such as Samoa, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands, which have undertaken a programme of Preparedness for Climate Change. As rightly pointed out in the interim report of the Review, our proximity to developing countries that are disproportionately exposed to damage caused by climate change introduces geo-political links. It is therefore appropriate that Red Cross is engaged with neighbours on strategies focussed on adaptation.

The Preparedness for Climate Change programme involves four integral steps. This includes:

- a workshop for staff and volunteers on climate change impacts and adaptation
- building a network with other actors working on climate such as government departments, meteorological offices, environment ministries, and other non-government organisations
- production and distribution of a document assessing the likely impact of climate change on a country and the work of the National Society
- a regional meeting conducted at which activities that address climate risks in the context of regular programmes and priorities of the National Society are developed.

The Australian Government is currently considering supporting activities under the Preparedness for Climate Change programme in the Pacific.

4.2 Red Cross internationally and its role in climate change adaptation

On a global level, in addition to the activities of the Climate Centre, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has initiated a Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction, aimed at scaling up our efforts in reducing disaster risks among the most vulnerable communities in countries where Red Cross operates.

The humanitarian consequences of climate change were one of the main subjects at the recent 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva in November 2007. The Conference Declaration, 'Together for Humanity', which was unanimously adopted by the participants including governments, explicitly identifies climate change as one of the four great challenges with profound humanitarian consequences facing the world.

At the Conference, the Australian Government pledged to continue to cooperate with Red Cross in Asia Pacific to reduce the vulnerability of communities in the Pacific region to disasters and degradation, including any which arise from environmental challenges such as climate change.

A wide array of adaptation options is available, but more extensive adaptation than is currently occurring is required to reduce vulnerability to future climate change.

5. Conclusion

Red Cross through its network of 186 National Societies and millions of volunteers is well placed to continue to be a part of adaptation strategies at global, regional, national, local and community level, and as demonstrated through the declaration at our International Conference, and through our current initiatives, is committed to doing so. In conclusion, Australian Red Cross looks forward to the final outcome of the review, particularly in terms of the position on climate change and adaptation, globally as well as within the Pacific region.