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Protecting people from the humanitarian impacts of extreme climate and weather events: Working together to strengthen anticipatory action

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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Protecting people from the humanitarian impacts of extreme climate and weather events: Working together to strengthen anticipatory action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides the background and rationale for the resolution “Protecting people from the humanitarian impacts of extreme climate and weather events: Working together to strengthen anticipatory action”, proposed by the German Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The resolution aims to develop a joint vision of how State Parties and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) can work together to ensure anticipatory action is strengthened and expanded so that more people at risk are protected from the humanitarian impacts of extreme climate and weather events, which are increasing due to drivers such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation and population growth and exacerbated by socio-economic challenges, food insecurity, conflict and other factors.

The 34th International Conference is a key forum not only for tackling current humanitarian challenges through unified and concerted action, but also for anticipating future risks by adopting innovative approaches. The proposed resolution therefore seeks to enable States Parties and the Movement to act jointly, decisively, sustainably and at scale in anticipation of extreme climate and weather events, by strengthening relevant capacities, resources, frameworks and mechanisms, in accordance with their respective roles and mandates and with specific consideration to multi-hazard and comprehensive approaches, given the complexities and realities of compounding and cascading risks in certain settings. The resolution builds on existing commitments to strengthen disaster laws, policies and plans addressing climate change, set out in International Conference Resolution [33IC/19/R7](#), [the Paris Agreement](#), [the Sendai Framework](#), [the Movement Ambitions to Address the Climate Crisis](#), [the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace](#) and other instruments.

1) INTRODUCTION

Countries are now facing new and different impacts of extreme climate and weather events that are more intense than ever before due to drivers such as climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and population growth. These factors are adding a layer of stress to a humanitarian system that is already stretched by the compounding consequences of armed conflicts, food insecurity, displacement and epidemics. To reverse this trend, both States Parties and the components of the Movement have committed to stepping up their efforts to prevent, anticipate, prepare for and respond to the growing humanitarian consequences of climate change, declaring it to be a major priority, as reflected, for example, in the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and the Movement Ambitions to Address the Climate Crisis.

The technological progress of recent decades makes it possible to predict with increasing accuracy when and where extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, drought or flooding, will occur. This provides time to act before they turn into a disaster, saving lives and livelihoods. Anticipatory action seeks to reduce human suffering by enabling relevant actors, especially affected communities, to act ahead of a potentially harmful event to protect families, lives and livelihoods. It is increasingly recognized as a key solution to minimize the impacts of extreme weather and climate events. Building on decades of experience in disaster risk reduction (DRR), the Movement has been at the forefront of using these technological improvements to pioneer anticipatory action.

These efforts aim to contribute to closing current gaps between long-term prevention and response and within early warning systems. The [IPCC report](#) highlights that effective early warning systems and disaster risk management (DRM) are key cross-cutting adaptation options. However, one in three people globally are still not covered by early warning services, mainly in the Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.¹ There are also major gaps in the capacities of global and national authorities to translate early warnings into life-saving anticipatory action. In fact, a study that analyses the deadliest and costliest disasters of the last two decades found that the shortcomings in the effectiveness of the protection provided by early warning systems are not attributable to deficiencies in forecasts or warnings but rather to inadequate communication and dissemination of warnings and the lack of capacity to act appropriately based on the warnings received.²

There has also been a shift in the policy commitment to scaling up anticipatory action at the global and regional level. Examples include the [Political declaration of the high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction \(A/77/L.70\)](#), the [African Union's Institutional and Operational Framework for Multi-Hazard Early Warning and Early Action System](#), the [ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action](#), the [G7 statement on strengthening anticipatory action](#) and the [EU Council Conclusions on addressing the humanitarian funding gap \(9598/23\)](#).

As humanitarian needs continue to rise, it is crucial to transition from reactive emergency response approaches to proactive, people-centred models focused on early warning and anticipatory action. This shift should be led, guided and encouraged by national governments to ensure sustained implementation. As endorsed by Resolution [33IC/19/R7](#) of the 33rd International Conference, governments are encouraged to allocate financing for anticipatory action, where possible, to enable actions that will mitigate the impacts of extreme weather and climate events. In line with two UN resolutions ([A/RES/74/218](#) and [A/RES/72/132](#)) and the [Early Warnings for All initiative](#), the proposed resolution calls on States Parties and the Movement to strengthen anticipatory mechanisms to reduce the impact of disasters and humanitarian needs.

By adopting a joint resolution on anticipatory action, States Parties and the Movement will be better positioned to anticipate and minimize the risks of extreme events and able to contribute greatly to reducing the suffering and losses of vulnerable people.

2) BACKGROUND

Building on decades of experience in DRR, specifically around early warning and early action, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) and the IFRC have been at the forefront of making use of technological progress and lessons learnt to develop anticipatory action approaches.

For the purpose of the proposed resolution, anticipatory action refers to “actions taken to reduce the humanitarian impacts of a forecast hazard before it occurs or before its most acute impacts are felt; the decision to take action is based on a forecast or collective risk analysis of when, where and how an event will unfold”.

When an event occurs, lives and livelihoods are lost due to the unfolding crisis and the often significant time lag between the onset of the shock or the early warning and the delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance. Anticipatory action approaches seek to reduce human suffering, losses and damage by enabling relevant actors, especially affected communities, to act ahead of a potentially harmful event, based on forecasts and collaborative analysis, to protect families, lives and livelihoods. They make use of the time window between the moment of prediction of an extreme event and the actual impact of that event by systematically linking forecasts or early warnings to funding and action plans. They are considered to work best when it is agreed well in advance of an event, in consultation with communities, what priority actions will be taken, when and by whom and how these will be funded.

The Movement has long-standing experience in communicating warnings to last-mile communities and in preparing them to respond to hazard warnings. National Societies, as auxiliaries to their

¹ [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\), “Early warning systems must protect everyone within five years”, 21 March 2022](#)

² E. Coughlan de Perez et al. (2022), “Learning from the past in moving to the future: Invest in communication and response to weather early warnings to reduce death and damage”, *Climate Risk Management*, Vol. 38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2022.100461>

governments, help the authorities to design early warning and anticipatory action plans with communities and for communities and develop strong links between national authorities and hydrometeorological services. In addition to its work to develop anticipatory action frameworks in more than 50 countries, the IFRC is also allocating reliable financing for anticipatory action through the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF). As a pioneer in this field, the [IFRC is committed](#) to allocating 25% of DREF funding to anticipatory action and to supporting 80 National Societies through anticipatory action initiatives by 2025 to save more people and livelihood assets from predictable hazards. The Movement has committed to strengthening anticipatory action in the Council of Delegates resolution “Strengthening anticipatory action in the Movement” ([CD/22/R2](#)).

Anticipatory action is part of the DRM continuum and is aimed at improving capacity for action in the face of an impending hazard to prevent or mitigate potential negative impacts on vulnerable people and their livelihoods. As part of the DRM cycle, anticipatory action contributes to the DRR objectives of “preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk”, set out in the Sendai Framework. Anticipatory action complements longer-term DRR by enabling short-term measures to be implemented, based on concrete warnings. Anticipatory action should not be seen as a substitute for longer-term investment or action to reduce vulnerability. As a matter of fact, structural problems that require long-term action are better addressed through DRR, climate resilience and adaptation frameworks.

Efforts to develop anticipatory action frameworks and establish mechanisms for their implementation complement, and are part of, preparedness, focusing particularly on the operational capacity to act ahead of a specific extreme event to minimize impacts on at-risk populations. As anticipatory action is taken before a shock’s impacts are acutely felt, it strengthens the capacities of communities, authorities and organizations to manage a crisis and safeguard livelihoods, thereby contributing to their preparedness levels. By pre-positioning funding for pre-agreed plans that is released when an agreed trigger point is reached, as in the case of the Movement approach, anticipatory action ensures the availability of funds to respond to warnings rather than to disasters. It also contributes to reducing response times and the financial impact of disasters, which cuts the cost of humanitarian response and recovery, and to protecting development and climate adaptation gains. Anticipatory action should be integrated into national and local preparedness strategies and contingency planning, and any contingency planning efforts should also include measures in anticipation of hazards.

There is [growing evidence](#) that anticipatory action saves lives and livelihoods and can make humanitarian assistance more dignified, rapid and cost-effective. Moreover, the growing recognition of the importance of anticipatory action has stimulated collaboration beyond the humanitarian sector with a range of stakeholders across the development and climate communities, academia and non-governmental organizations, as evidenced by the launch of the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) and the Anticipation Hub.

The current global scale and impact of anticipatory action practice are outlined in the Anticipation Hub report (2022), which highlights the increase in the number of pre-agreed plans in place for predictable hazards, anticipatory action initiatives implemented and people covered by anticipatory action frameworks. According to the report, in 2022, there were 70 frameworks in place globally, covering 7.6 million people who are better prepared to act ahead of the impacts of hazards, and USD 138 million was committed to anticipatory action.

While there have been positive trends in the development of anticipatory action approaches, implementation has not kept pace with growing humanitarian needs. According to [EM-DAT](#) 2023, there were 387 natural hazards in 2022, which resulted in the loss of 30,704 lives and affected 185 million individuals, with economic losses amounting to USD 223.8 billion ([CRED, 2023](#)). These hazards will continue to become more frequent, extreme and complex, affecting people’s health, lives and livelihoods. An unprecedented collective shift is therefore required to scale up anticipatory action.

3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

A. Fully integrating anticipatory action into DRM frameworks and systems (OP1)

In order to truly reach scale and ensure more people are protected, it is indispensable for governments to integrate anticipatory action into their own DRM systems. Pre-agreed funds, responsibilities and processes, supported by adequate capacities, are essential for the effective implementation of anticipatory action. This requires governments to clarify the place of anticipatory action in the wider government-led DRM system and to assess relevant laws, acts, policies, tools and capabilities. It also means building on and leveraging existing frameworks and actors to deliver anticipatory action. This should happen in parallel with the strengthening of DRM systems and laws in general, as outlined in the resolution adopted at the 32nd International Conference “Strengthening legal frameworks for disaster response, risk reduction and first aid” and the proposed resolution for the 34th International Conference “Strengthening disaster risk governance through comprehensive disaster laws, policies and plans”.

National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat can support states in this process. National Societies, as auxiliaries to their governments, are well positioned to work in close partnership with the authorities to ensure laws and policies consider local needs and provide an enabling environment for anticipatory action. The IFRC and National Societies have been at the forefront of developing anticipatory action and have worked closely with multiple stakeholders, including at-risk people, in a participatory way to ensure that anticipatory actions are grounded in local needs and feasibility. In the course of that work, they have developed significant expertise and capacities in anticipatory action that enable them to offer practical and technical support in this area to governments. The IFRC Secretariat has worked with National Societies and governments under its Disaster Law Programme to improve disaster risk governance, including through capacity strengthening, advocacy, research and the promotion of opportunities for peer learning on disaster law. Jointly with National Societies, it has also developed many valuable guidance documents and training packages on anticipatory action and related fields, such as the Preparedness for Effective Response framework, that can guide work in this area.

B. Strengthening anticipatory action to address extreme climate and weather events in fragile and armed conflict-affected settings (OP2)

According to the [IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report](#), the vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions, and approximately half of the world’s population live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Research also shows that extreme events often affect people in armed conflict and fragile contexts the most. The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index shows that eight out of the ten countries most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change are affected by armed conflict. Furthermore, as recognized in the [COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace](#), “many of the people, communities, and countries threatened or affected by fragility or conflict ... are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and are among the least resourced to cope with and adapt to associated shocks and stressors”. Too often, people living in such places are not reached by early warnings, much less anticipatory action. Anticipatory action for climate impacts in such contexts is crucial to support the most vulnerable people but needs to be adapted to the complexities of the interplay between fragility/conflict and climate hazards. The proposed resolution highlights this issue and will contribute to strengthening and scaling up effective early warning and anticipatory action systems.

C. Strengthening multi-hazard early warning systems to ensure information needed for anticipatory action is available (OP3)

Anticipatory action requires adequate disaster risk knowledge and forecasting, monitoring and preparedness capacities to ensure action can be taken in the critical time window between the forecast of an event and its actual impact. For example, forecasts need to be robust, timely, understandable and actionable, and they need to reach everyone. In order to ensure this, local actors and communities at risk must be involved in all relevant processes.

[The UN Secretary-General’s Early Warnings for All initiative](#) presents an opportunity to strengthen all elements of early warning systems, making use of mechanisms such as the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) initiative. While investment in technical forecasting capacity is vital for an effective early warning system, it is just one part of the process. In addition, these systems require data and information to quantify hazards and exposure to risk, institutional capacities and the

skills of local responders, including those from National Societies, which can be used to strengthen and complement local government capacity for “last-mile” warnings that enable anticipatory action. The IFRC Secretariat and National Societies have significant experience, expertise and tools that they can make available to support the improvement of early warning systems.

D. Strengthening the capacities of local actors, including National Societies and communities (OP4)

The capacities of local actors, both local government agencies and non-state partners, are at the centre of successful anticipatory action. They are the ones who ensure that anticipatory action reaches those that are hardest to reach when critical forecast thresholds are reached. Local actors, along with people at risk, should be partners in the design and planning of anticipatory action frameworks. Local actors often need resources and technical support for their work in these areas to deliver assistance effectively in the short space of time between the forecast and the hazard impact. Given that the majority of global financing is not available or accessible to local actors, it is imperative for anticipatory action to “leave no one behind”, ensuring inclusivity, accessibility and non-discrimination. This involves giving special consideration to individuals disproportionately affected by disasters, as highlighted in the adopted Resolution [31IC/11/R6](#) “Health inequities: reducing burden on women and children”. Furthermore, in line with Resolution [CD/19/R1](#) “Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability”, it is crucial to foster greater awareness and understanding of the issues and barriers faced by vulnerable and marginalized people. Anticipatory action initiatives, programmes and projects can and should actively and meaningfully involve these groups so as to tailor action plans to their specific requirements and needs and enhance their capacity to protect themselves ahead of disasters.

E. Creating, increasing and facilitating access to financial mechanisms for anticipatory action (OP5)

In some countries, government authorities face challenges in accessing funding based on a forecast ahead of an extreme event. Governments should take steps to ensure the accessibility and availability of pre-agreed financing, which can take different forms, depending on the context. Many governments have well-established financing mechanisms for disaster response that could be adapted in a way that enables their use in anticipation of an extreme event, including through shock-responsive social protection. Use can also be made of existing regional financing mechanisms, such as the Southeast Asia Disaster Risk Insurance Facility (SEADRIF). National governments can benefit from the increasing recognition of and support for anticipatory action by international organizations, funds and initiatives, including in the climate and development sectors, to adapt their current disaster risk financing mechanisms and build in anticipatory action.

F. Collaborating, coordinating and working jointly with National Societies, leveraging their experience in anticipatory action (OP6)

National Societies have demonstrated their worth as partners to their governments when it comes to implementing and planning for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response and have garnered significant experience and expertise in anticipatory action. As at February 2024, there are 24 pre-agreed anticipatory action frameworks in place with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for action when a hazard warning is issued. They cover almost 500,000 people who are now safer from predictable weather and climate hazards. National Societies in more than 50 countries are working on developing such frameworks.

In many states, National Societies are already the partner of choice when it comes to developing anticipatory action frameworks. And vice versa, in many contexts government stakeholders have also been closely involved in the development and implementation of National Society anticipatory action plans. These experiences should form the basis of a strong partnership for the development of government-led anticipatory action frameworks.

G. Supporting the components of the Movement in their work on anticipatory action (OP7)

While the Movement has made great progress in advancing anticipatory action, further support in terms of expertise, technical inputs and investment in capacities is needed. The availability of and access to financing is also a major bottleneck to scaling up anticipatory action, despite the existence of financial instruments such as the Anticipatory Pillar of the IFRC's DREF. The scaling up of anticipatory action needs to be backed by sufficient resources and requires joint efforts to reach a larger number of people at risk. In addition to the funds required for activations, technical support and investment in system building at the local level will be needed so that actions and support can reach the areas where they are most needed in the critical time window between the forecast and the impact, with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.

H. Using the Anticipation Hub as a central platform (OP8)

To scale up anticipatory action, it is helpful to have a space for cross-sectoral engagement to reflect on the effectiveness of different types of anticipatory action, exchange lessons learnt and explore tools, innovations and good practices. The Anticipation Hub is a knowledge and exchange platform that brings together science, policy and practice, with partners from across the Movement, research institutions, NGOs, UN agencies, governments, donors and networks.

I. Progress report at the 35th International Conference (OP9)

4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The resolution may make it necessary to review existing capacities, reallocate funds and increase budgets to support the implementation of activities aimed at scaling up anticipatory action. Components of the Movement and States Parties should invest in increasing organizational capacities and expertise and training staff and volunteers to implement and expand anticipatory action approaches.

5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The success of this resolution depends on how well States Parties and the Movement components reflect and apply the commitments in their own policies and procedures. With a view to reporting collectively on progress in implementing the resolution, assessing existing gaps and consolidating further recommendations, operative paragraph 9 of the resolution requests the IFRC to submit a progress report to the 35th International Conference, based on applicable frameworks for monitoring and guiding the implementation of anticipatory action, such as the IFRC's Operational Framework for Anticipatory Action 2021–2025.

6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of increasing disasters fuelled by the changing climate, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and population growth and exacerbated by the interrelated effects of economic challenges, food insecurity, armed conflict and other factors, anticipatory action is a part of the solution to navigating the complex humanitarian landscape. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that anticipatory action not only saves lives and livelihoods but also enhances the speed, cost-effectiveness and dignity of humanitarian assistance compared to reactive responses. Despite the gradual policy developments, much more remains to be accomplished to ensure that anticipatory action reaches more people before predictable events occur.

Therefore, the proposed resolution on anticipatory action outlines how States Parties and the Movement can work together more closely to ensure that more people, country contexts and hazards are covered by anticipatory action approaches. It focuses specifically on where and how collaboration is needed to successfully establish and strengthen anticipatory action.

The 34th International Conference is a timely opportunity to establish a basis for a stronger and more systematic partnership on anticipatory action, both operationally and strategically. This partnership will capitalize on the synergies between governments and Movement components, ensuring that anticipatory action can be strengthened and expanded with a view to protecting more people from the increasing humanitarian impacts of extreme climate and weather events.