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Resolution 5 of the 33rd International Conference: “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”

PROGRESS REPORT

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Resolution 5 of the 33rd International Conference: “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference), the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) and States Parties to the Geneva Conventions unanimously agreed to adopt Resolution 5 “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”.

The resolution urges Movement components to increase the representation of women from different backgrounds in decision-making at all levels and to identify and invest in women leaders through mentorship and leadership development programmes. It calls on Movement components to achieve gender parity by 2030 and collect sex-disaggregated data to monitor progress and also encourages Movement components to invest in research and build an evidence base on women’s leadership.

This report summarizes some of the actions taken by Movement components to fulfil the commitments set out in the resolution. It is largely based on the data collected by the GLOW Red network and the Resolution Reporting Group (set up by the network) in 2022 and 2024. It highlights the progress made and successful initiatives and also points out some of the remaining barriers that women leaders still experience within the Movement.

The Movement currently has three women in its highest leadership positions – president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and chair of the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent – and in 2022 the IFRC elected a Governing Board that achieved gender parity for the first time in its history. In addition, all IFRC regional conferences since 2018 have made commitments to work on gender equality in leadership and decision-making. This can be considered a huge shift in mindset and culture in the Movement, and it shows that the will to change is there. However, specific investments and targeted efforts are still needed at all levels to sustain the progress made and to ensure gender equality is always a priority in all aspects of our work.

In addition to the progress and challenges described in this report, further information is available in the official reports published by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) and other Movement components on the International Conference webpage. To read the full GLOW Red report, go to www.glowred.org.

1) INTRODUCTION

In 2017, two years prior to the adoption of Resolution 5, the Movement components adopted a resolution at the Council of Delegates that included a commitment by all parts of the Movement “to address the question of gender equality and equal opportunities at all levels of their own leadership”. This resolution was prompted by the lack of female representation in the newly elected IFRC Governing Board (where women held only 13% of the positions). However, it was clear to the group of women who initiated the resolution, based on long experience with previous resolutions and commitments on women’s leadership and gender balance, that without proper follow-up actions and mechanisms in place to hold the Movement’s leadership accountable, this resolution would go nowhere. The GLOW Red network was created in early 2018 in response to the need to ensure commitment to the resolution and action to implement it.

Resolution 5 on women and leadership, adopted in 2019 at the 33rd International Conference, was the result of the network’s first two years of action. It is a milestone resolution for gender equality in the Movement and a testament to the arduous advocacy work carried out by GLOW Red members and supporters across the globe.

As recognized in the resolution, women are agents in risk reduction and first responders in humanitarian crises, including armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies, and their perspectives should always be heard and included from the outset in humanitarian responses. The empowerment and inclusion of women and girls should also extend to development assistance, peacebuilding, mediation, reconciliation and reconstruction, and conflict prevention, and it is important for women’s groups and women from different backgrounds to be involved in decision-making, so as to ensure that humanitarian needs and priorities in the community are met and the diversity of everyone in the society that they belong to is represented.

2) BACKGROUND

The GLOW Red network took on a leading role in raising awareness and encouraging Movement components and States to take action and fulfil their commitments on gender parity. Among other things, it established the Women and Leadership Resolution Working Group at the start of 2021, which published a progress report on the resolution in March 2022. The report aimed to inspire Movement components to break down silos, exchange best practices to advance women’s leadership and share and celebrate the progress made towards the implementation of the resolution.

From November 2023 to May 2024, the reporting mechanism was opened again to gather more information and lessons learned on what is being done across the Movement and by States to fulfil their commitments. This document summarizes the findings from both occasions as well as other research findings, observations and lessons learned from GLOW Red network members and partners over the five years that the resolution commitments have been in place.

3) ANALYSIS AND PROGRESS

In general, across the Movement and the humanitarian sector at large, women are still **under-represented in governing bodies and senior management positions and in processes and bodies related to humanitarian work, including in senior positions in national, regional and international institutions. However, since the adoption of the resolution, the Movement components have taken action to change this. Described below are some**

examples of successful initiatives and remaining challenges, which indicate that there is still work to be done.

Achievements

GLOW Red's progress report (2022) and the updated version (2024) outline achievements and challenges in promoting women's leadership. Innovative examples and good practices from National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC include:

- implementation of leadership development programmes for staff and volunteers
- measures to review and update organizational statutes and policies
- introduction of targeted recruitment policies
- appointment of women to executive teams
- creation of mentorship opportunities
- cross-cutting working groups focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion.

The GLOW Red reports highlight case studies from across the Movement, with in-depth information on the excellent work carried out by its components. For example, the American Red Cross and the Canadian Red Cross have invested in the use of diversity and inclusion data to analyse and address the discrepancies and disparities faced by women; the Australian Red Cross has implemented a range of leadership development programmes since 2019, focusing on building an inclusive and diverse workforce; the French Red Cross carried out a statutory review, including amendments to ensure that its Governing Board always has at least 40% men and 40% women members; the Kenya Red Cross Society and the French Red Cross launched the Women Social Entrepreneurship Institute (WSEI) supporting 25 women who own informal businesses in Mombasa in the coastal area of Kenya; the Maldivian Red Crescent established organizational policies to ensure the equal participation of women and men in every operational deployment and volunteer mission; the Spanish Red Cross has been successful in achieving a better gender balance through male allyship and women's networks; the Swedish Red Cross and the ICRC have invested in research on international humanitarian law and a gender perspective in the planning and conduct of military operations; and the IFRC Americas region invested in the Equity and Leadership initiative which improved the gender balance in the leadership of disaster response operations: while 99% were led by men in 2019, 48% were led by women in 2020 and 50% in 2021, although the figure dropped to 30% in 2023.

Barriers

The report also analyses barriers to implementation of the resolution, which include:

- patriarchal attitudes within society and Movement components, which in some cases have led to a backlash against the initiatives mentioned above
- assumptions that gender parity has already been achieved within the Movement
- failure to allocate adequate financial resources to implement the resolution and prioritize the resolution commitments
- lack of awareness about the resolution and lack of an action plan and specific binding provisions to ensure implementation of the resolution
- lack of an intersectional approach to the implementation of the resolution.

The resolution specifically calls for the representation of women from diverse backgrounds. In this instance, the use of the term "diverse" highlights the importance of having women from a variety of different backgrounds in leadership positions, including – but not limited to – women of different ethnicities, ages, abilities, educational backgrounds, classes, castes, sexual orientations and/or migrant statuses. Through the reporting mechanism, respondents indicated that the absence of an intersectional lens limited the advancement of women from diverse backgrounds into leadership positions, as it prevented an adequate analysis of all the barriers

from being carried out. Women across the Movement come from a variety of backgrounds and have specific individual needs and strengths. They are not a homogeneous group and should not be treated as such.

Research

The resolution encourages States and Movement components to invest in research involving women to identify good practices and how to remove barriers to women's participation, particularly in leadership and decision-making in humanitarian responses. The GLOW Red network carried out research on [How diverse leadership shaped responses to COVID-19 within the International Red Cross Red Crescent](#), together with the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), the IFRC and the ICRC, and on [Strategies that support women leaders in aid organisations \(2023\)](#), in cooperation with the French Red Cross Foundation and the Swedish Red Cross.

The latter research report identified building blocks to advance women's leadership, which are in line with the successful actions taken by Movement partners, further stressing the need to implement these strategies on a larger scale. One important action is to collect and analyse sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data to document gender gaps within the organization and set a baseline to monitor progress. Additionally, the report highlights pitfalls for humanitarian and aid organizations, such as backlash against the gender equality discourse, the limitations of awareness-raising on its own, the "queen bee" syndrome and carrying out gender diversity training through isolated sessions and without targeting those in power.

Progress over time and work ahead

Since the 1970's, the Movement has adopted several resolutions with commitments to increase women's participation in decision-making and leadership across humanitarian action, the most recent (before this resolution) in 2017 at the IFRC General Assembly and Council of Delegates. An external evaluation,¹ conducted in 2022, showed that the formation of the GLOW Red network has been pivotal in increasing women's leadership and furthering implementation of the commitments set out in the resolution. The members of the network have managed to keep the issue on the agenda and challenge the Movement to achieve gender parity in decision-making bodies and leadership positions and also in working groups, panels and other forums.

The review also found that there is room for GLOW Red and the Movement as a whole to make further progress on gender equality, particularly on developing and supporting a pipeline of women leaders at different levels of seniority, creating and leveraging male allyship, reaching a more diverse cohort, supporting and advocating for a more radical culture change within the Movement, strengthening the Movement's accountability for women's leadership and considering how to move towards a more sustainable governance and operational model.

4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Feedback provided through the GLOW Red resolution reporting mechanism highlighted, in several instances, that the main challenges to implementing the resolution include the lack of both financial and human resources.

The women and leadership resolution urges and requests all Movement components to increase the representation of women from different backgrounds at all decision-making levels. It is up to each Movement component to dedicate sufficient human and financial resources to action to create change. Members of the GLOW Red network have worked to spread awareness of the resolution and encourage the Movement components to act on the

¹ Humanitarian Advisory Group, *Lighting the path to women's leadership: A review of GLOW Red's four years of action*, 2022.

commitments. Members do this on a voluntary basis, and the network is supported by a small Secretariat of part-time paid staff from National Societies.² The network has a small operational budget, and its activities are carried out either through pro bono work or donations from National Societies.

Long-term investments are still needed to ensure systematic and sustainable change at all levels of the Movement.

6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As shown by reports from Movement components to GLOW Red, independent research and observations by the GLOW Red network, the equal representation of women from different backgrounds at all decision-making levels, including in governing bodies and management positions in the Movement, is not yet a reality.

While the Movement at large has taken steps in the right direction over recent years, it is clear that much work remains to be done and that the progress made is still fragile. The commitments set out in the resolution remain in place and have been reiterated through regional commitments at IFRC regional conferences over the past years.

The GLOW Red network will continue to advocate for the implementation of the resolution, hold Movement components accountable for their commitments and work with members and like-minded partners to build on and scale up the successful initiatives already in place.

² Between 2019 and 2024, the following National Societies have seconded staff on a part-time basis to the GLOW Red Secretariat: American Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, French Red Cross, Georgia Red Cross Society, Turkish Red Crescent Society and Swedish Red Cross.