**4th Asia Pacific Communications Forum**

**‘The Seoul Commitments’**

*The 4th Asia Pacific Communications Forum was convened by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Korean Red Cross, Seoul, 14-16 March 2016. The Forum was attended by representatives of 23 National Societies from the region who endorsed the ‘Seoul Commitments’ that serve as the outcome document.*

Over the past decade, digital technologies, including social media, have profoundly changed our world, transforming our economies, the way we communicate, access information and conduct our work.

These changes have re-shaped the contemporary humanitarian landscape. Mobile and web-based technologies have made one-way communication into a two-way dialogue. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can communicate more rapidly and directly with a wide range of audiences including at-risk communities, opinion leaders and decision makers and our public supporters.

In times of disaster, conflict or crises, social media networks have provided a lifeline for affected and at-risk communities: providing channels through which they can access information or communicate their needs, and also empowering them to take an active role in preparedness, response and recovery processes[[1]](#footnote-1). Social media has also created opportunities to share the wider development work of the Movement and disseminate important health, safety and preparedness messages.

Humanitarian and development organizations must be agile and continuously adapt as this landscape continues to evolve. With the growth of Internet connectivity together with the penetration of mobile technologies, the online population in Asia continues to grow rapidly[[2]](#footnote-2).

By recognizing the possibilities, strengthening cooperation, and mobilizing our network of millions of volunteers, youth, staff and members, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is uniquely placed to amplify its public communication outreach, its level of community engagement and its humanitarian impact across Asia Pacific and beyond.

Based on these considerations, and building on the 2014 *‘Beijing Call for Innovation’*[[3]](#footnote-3), the outcomes of the 2nd Asia Pacific Youth Summit[[4]](#footnote-4), and the 2015 Red Cross Red Crescent Social Media Summit[[5]](#footnote-5); We, participants of the 4th Asia Pacific Communications Forum, representing 23 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Asia Pacific, the IFRC and the ICRC, commit ourselves to:

1. Integrate and scale-up digital technologies and social media into our communications and community engagement efforts, operations and programmes. We recognise the value of such tools to increasing two-way engagement, reach and influence, and to give visibility to the needs and voices of the communities we serve. We also recognise their potential to inform and improve service delivery – and ultimately to save lives.
2. Enhance organisational understanding of the strategic value of social media, fostering a “digital culture” and a climate of innovation across our work. We strive to increase training, experience sharing, networking and peer-to-peer support among staff and volunteers in order to make social media engagement a shared responsibility.
3. Draw upon the capacities of Red Cross Youth in Asia Pacific, optimising their skills and interest in social media, engaging them in mainstream communications efforts and capitalizing on their expertise as ‘digital natives’ and potential to engage young online audiences across the region.
4. Continue our collective efforts to protect the Red Cross Red Crescent brand, minimizing the impact of online reputational crises. We remain committed to safeguard the Red Cross Red Crescent brand through strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination to ensure effective management of online reputational crises in the Asia Pacific.
5. Ensure that digital and social media engagement by Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff remains in accordance with our Fundamental Principles, and associated Policies and Codes of Conduct. Clear policies and guidelines are developed that that mitigate potential reputational risks and ensures individual responsibilities around the appropriate usage of social media platforms are clearly understood.
6. Adapt our approaches to contexts in which digital and social media may not be accessible. We remain mindful of the challenges faced by National Societies in areas where the ‘digital divide’ and limited internet connectivity present challenges in engaging with stakeholders via online and social media channels and will continue to strive to find solutions to these challenges.
7. Increase our humanitarian impact by working together to maximise the capacities within our network. Our voice is stronger and louder when we speak together. We commit to supporting each other’s digital communications / social media efforts , by sharing and promoting each other’s online content and messages, and engaging in global and regional communications priorities and campaigns[[6]](#footnote-6).

**CALL TO LEADERSHIP**

We, the Forum participants, also recognize that delivering on the Seoul Commitments requires the active engagement of our leadership. We call on leaders within the Movement to;

1. Accelerate the integration and mainstreaming of digital technology and social media into National Societies’ activities, by establishing a designated social media function within the communications unit of each National Society and empowering them to engage across different digital / social media platforms in support of all programme sectors.
2. Lead by example and champion social media adoption and engagement as a collective responsibility of staff and volunteers.
3. Establish partnerships with private-sector information and communications companies, governments and other humanitarian organisations to enhance digital / social media engagement in our humanitarian and development programmes. These partnerships may include skills development, online platform-sharing, information-sharing, resource mobilization or data analysis,
4. Elevate the expertise and positioning of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a leading humanitarian voice and thought leader via individual Twitter accounts. With Heads of State, policy-makers and opinion-leaders increasing their engagement on social media platforms, Movement leaders and technical experts may join the online space to share their knowledge and give voice to issues of concern.

Seoul, Korea

16 March 2016

**---**

**References**

IFRC World Disasters Report 2013, Focus on technology and the future of humanitarian action.

“Social Media in Humanitarian Response”, Wavelength, July 2013, issue no. 18, <http://bit.ly/1ITi314>

Comparative Review of Social Media Analysis Tools for Preparedness, Trilateral Research and Consulting / Global Disaster Preparedness Centre

*“Humanitarianism in the network age”,* OCHA Policy and Studies Series, 2013: <http://bit.ly/1PsN7Hg>

1. See “Social Media in Humanitarian Response”, Wavelength, July 2013, issue no. 18, <http://bit.ly/1ITi314>. In Asia Pacific, this has played out in a range of different emergencies, from the Great Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (March 2011), to typhoons Bopha and Haiyan (November 2013), Tropical Cyclone Pam (March 2015) and the Chennai floods (November 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to leading ‘We Are Social’ data, Internet users in the Asia Pacific, increased by an average of 14% in the year between January 2014 and 2015 <http://bit.ly/1ROUO9I>. In the same period, countries across the region showed very strong growth in social media users, ranging from an increase of 206% in Myanmar, 147% in Timor-Leste, 62% in Laos and 31% in Fiji <http://bit.ly/1RBchmE> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Beijing Call for Innovation”, the outcome document of the 9th Asia Pacific Conference held in 2014, in which National Society leaders from the region agreed to *“optimise the coverage of our services and to better manage and share knowledge by championing the innovative use of all forms of media and communications technology.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In 2014, delegates of the 2nd Asia Pacific Youth Summit committed to, *“championing the innovative use of social media and communications technologies to increase the effectiveness of our services and how we manage and share knowledge.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In February 2015, over 50 communicators from 15 National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC met in Washington D.C. for the first Red Cross Red Crescent Social Media Summit, hosted by the American Red Cross to discuss about how to strengthen global collaboration and mutual support on social media and digital technologies, particularly around the topics of reputation management on social media and online global engagement initiatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)