



CONCEPT NOTE 23rd SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

General introduction

The last year and a half has witnessed an unprecedented situation globally, characterized by health, social and economic instability mostly linked to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Uncertainty at different levels has become a common state of mind, putting the daily lives of millions of people on hold. It has intensified inequalities and resulted in a widening wealth gap, rising unemployment, clear disparities in health-care access and increased challenges in receiving education for large parts of the world population. It made many people feel abandoned and isolated, and it increased the need for strong local actors able to respond and support affected people.

The focus on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has come at a high cost, exacerbating conditions of vulnerability and putting people to greater exposure to climate change, conditions triggering migration and compounded disasters. They have been pushed from the headlines, but we, as the Red Cross and Red Crescent family, are keeping them in the spotlight and continue to work together, in line with our respective mandates, to respond to and anticipate shocks.

The last year and a half has also highlighted the ability of our membership to deliver local impact and our ability as a humanitarian network to adapt to new challenges and at the same time remain relevant in our usual daily activities. While the full impact of this outbreak is still unfolding and the relevance of our network is receiving renewed recognition, it is becoming increasingly clear that National Societies and the Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) need to adjust their business models and adapt to new ways of working. A better shared leadership model is needed to harness the value and potential of the IFRC and all its members. In the years ahead, as we address these challenges, putting people at the centre of all we do, our member National Societies will, more than ever before, be at the heart of the way we work. Working with and for National Societies will be at the core of our strategies.

Key elements such as trust and integrity, humanitarian diplomacy, localization, volunteering and investing in National Societies have guided the preparations for the upcoming Statutory Meetings, which will provide an opportunity to discuss how we can remain relevant as an organization.

Looking back at the last General Assembly

The December 2019 Statutory Meetings took place in Geneva and included the 22nd session of the IFRC General Assembly, the Council of Delegates and the 33rd International Conference. The common topic was Trust in Principled Humanitarian Action, a focus reflected in decisions taken and resolutions adopted on the subjects of integrity, climate crises, Movement coordination and cooperation, gender and mental health. Under the slogan “Act Today, Shape Tomorrow”, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) also showed its ability to detect potential future crises with the adoption of the resolution “Time to act: Tackling epidemics and pandemics together”, along with the States party to the Geneva Conventions.

In relation to Futures and Foresight, the IFRC General Assembly adopted “Strategy 2030: Platform for change”, setting out key transformations and announcing the global ambition for the next decade, which is to remain relevant by actively adapting to a fast-changing environment and providing guidance and inspiration to drive the work of the organization and its member National Societies.

Strategy 2030 embodies and further enhances the long-standing vision of “Local Action, Global Reach”, with a view to ensuring that the Red Cross and Red Crescent remains a dynamic global network of organizations that are fit for purpose and always there to support people and communities. It also puts forward the vision of a global IFRC network that brings people together for the good of humanity. It is about changing not just what we do, but how we do it, so that we are better able to save lives, support people and strengthen their resilience. Strategy 2030 seeks to inspire and guide National Societies.

In 2019 we celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, revitalizing its *raison d'être* and our commitment to humanity and to each other. Now we want to celebrate the heroic contribution of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers in the response to COVID-19.

General Assembly overarching theme “Local Action, Global Reach - investing in National Societies in addressing Global Challenges: S2030”



**Strengthening the IFRC's
position in the
humanitarian world**



**Maximizing National
Societies' role as strong
local actors**



**Widening and refreshing
the concept of
volunteerism**

1 / Strengthening the IFRC's position in the humanitarian world

The 23rd session of the General Assembly will bring together 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to discuss and determine the IFRC's priorities for the next two years. They will approve policies and tools to support and guide National Societies in their daily humanitarian work, as recalled in Strategy 2030, under the theme “Local action, global reach”. At the 23rd session of the General Assembly will also be requested to elect the IFRC president, vice-presidents and Governing Board members for the next four-year term, while the Youth representatives will be called on to elect one member to fill a vacancy on the Youth Commission.

The changes of the 21st century are complex and inter-related. There are huge differences in access to education, technology, connectivity, health care, social security benefits and networks. The impacts of the climate and environmental crises, leading to more severe disasters, epidemics and increased vulnerability, will remain long-lasting issues of concern and become a reality for millions of people around the world. These threats, combined with an increase in the number of protracted crises and highly fragile contexts, contribute to driving migration and displacement and deepen distress and hardship in society at a time when compassion for people on the move is at an all-time low.

In this complex and multifaceted scenario, the Governing Board has held thematic discussions on strategic issues with the aim of looking in depth at today's main humanitarian challenges and priorities linked to the implementation of Strategy 2030 and setting the scene for the next General Assembly to adopt decisions that can support the positioning of the IFRC as the largest and most relevant humanitarian network in the world and a partner of choice for donors and other partners.



In the last two years, the current Governing Board, with the support of the Secretary General, has been working on preparations for the 23rd session of the General Assembly, approving the draft versions of the agenda and endorsing policies and strategies to be submitted to the General Assembly for final approval. The Board approved the IFRC Agenda for Renewal and the Plan and Budget for 2021–2025, as proposed by the Secretary General, and endorsed the revised IFRC Governing Board Priorities linked to the implementation of Strategy 2030. To increase our reach and be able to better assist National Societies, the Governing Board has approved the revised “Federation-wide Resource Mobilization Strategy 2030”, now re-named the “Global Resource Mobilization Strategy” for the next 10 years.

Aware that digitalization is now a reality and with the aim of better supporting National Societies in this unexplored field, the Governing Board in its 43rd session approved the Digital Transformation Strategy of the IFRC, as well as an Addendum to the Guidance for National Society Statutes 2018. The Addendum to the Guidance for National Society Statutes will be presented at the General Assembly and endorsed at the Council of Delegates.

The aim of this upcoming General Assembly is to improve the IFRC’s way of working, taking into account lessons learnt from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to meaningfully support the needs of National Societies, providing strategic and programmatic tools to increase impact locally and amplify their voices internationally with a view to influencing the humanitarian world.

2 Maximizing National Societies' role as strong local actors

National Societies have a crucial leading role in addressing global challenges and are uniquely placed to respond to these challenges. The strength of National Societies also derives from their role as auxiliaries to their governments and from the resources, expertise and solidarity that the Movement can provide. As a Federation, we need to be able to respond to global challenges by investing in, assisting and developing National Societies to improve their humanitarian diplomacy and ability to deliver services with high standards of quality and accountability.

3 Widening and refreshing the concept of volunteerism

Volunteers are the strongest asset of our Federation: their constant work links the Red Cross Red Crescent humanitarian efforts with the concrete needs of the communities, their work allow to read and understand social changes and to anticipate vulnerabilities before they arise.

In the past, had the tendency to give, often, for granted a lifelong engagement from its grassroot volunteers, considering them, sometime, mere implementers of services. If the Federation wants to keep its relevance it is time to widening and refresh the concept of volunteerism, creating space and innovative solution to include all forms of volunteers, who are reflecting the diversity of the communities in which they live and that are skilled and prepared to fit in various roles within the organization.



Volunteerism is shifting, and National Societies' approaches and models of working with volunteers and youth must adapt to those changes to avoid undermining the entire Movement in the long-run, in line with Strategy 2030, The Governing Board approved the Volunteering Vision that will be at the heart of the new volunteering policy. In this complex setting, it is important to redefine volunteerism, enhancing the feeling of belonging that our National Societies inspire and creating an enabling environment for our volunteers to fully express themselves.

Shaping the agenda and key items

The agenda of the General Assembly is shaped by constitutional requirements, previous General Assembly decisions and also by the needs of the moment and the vision for the future. It is therefore a question of maintaining a fine balance between the required housekeeping items, the discharge of accountability duties by governance and the Secretary General and space for discussing what to do and how to do it better.



Accountability Reports

Statements of the President
Report of the Governing Board
Report of the Secretary General
Financial matters



Elections

The GA will elect the president, vice-presidents and members of the Governing Board. Youth representatives will be called on to elect one member to fill a vacancy on the Youth Commission.



IFRC Policies

Approval of Policies



Addressing Global Challenges: Implementation of S2030

The GA will discuss how to invest in National Societies to strengthen their role in addressing S2030 challenges

Decision-making process to agree on the format of the 2021 Statutory Meetings

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFRC and National Societies have been rethinking their governance meetings and adapting them to the current situation by holding them virtually. According to the decision taken at the General Assembly in 2019, the Statutory Meetings were to be hosted by the Dominican Red Cross and were scheduled to take place in Punta Cana in December 2021.

Taking into consideration the global health situation, including vaccination campaigns, travel restrictions and limitations on movement, the Governing Board gave the President and Vice-Presidents a mandate to evaluate different options for the format of the 2021 Statutory Meetings. It was decided to postpone the 23rd Session of the General Assembly until 2022. It was also decided that preference would be given to an in-person meeting in Punta Cana (subject to the epidemiological situation), and the Secretary General was asked to monitor the situation and provide a further update in September 2021 when the President and the Vice-Presidents, as mandated by the Governing Board, will take a decision on the date and format of the General Assembly.

How to contribute: deadlines and contact email address

The General Assembly agenda will be developed through a consultation process with National Societies on the draft provisional agenda attached to this Concept Note. The Secretary General will incorporate the input of the National Societies into the agenda and submit it for approval to the Governing Board, which will meet from 4 to 7 October 2021.

Virtual platforms for discussion will also be created in the run-up to the 23rd session of the General Assembly in order to provide National Societies with the opportunity to share views and discuss National Society development, global challenges, strategic coordination and humanitarian diplomacy. Detailed information on these forums will be shared with all National Societies in due course.

The proposed timeframe and deadlines are shown below.



National Societies are now invited to provide feedback on the draft provisional agenda of the General Assembly by email to general.assembly@ifrc.org or the Secretary General by 14 September 2021.

Please click on this [link](#) to consult agenda and concept note