

Humanitarian Diplomacy in action: strengthening the Russian Red Cross

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Developing the capacities of the Russian Red Cross (RRC), examining new opportunities for international humanitarian assistance projects was high on the agenda of meetings between the secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Bekele Geleta, and Russian officials on his recent four-day visit to Moscow.

At the meeting with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Zhukov, who chairs the inter-ministerial commission which follows developments in the Russian Red Cross, the IFRC made several suggestions to establish a new level of cooperation with the Russian government and to strengthen cooperation with the IFRC, including potential donor relations.

"With this visit the International Federation stressed the importance of closer dialogue and cooperation between the IFRC, the Russian government and the Russian Red Cross," said Jaap Timmer, head of the IFRC regional representation in Moscow. "These high level talks are crucial in advocating for a strengthening of the Russian Red Cross, and exploring opportunities for the Federation to serve as a channel of international humanitarian and development aid financed by the Russian government," he added.

"We see the rapid economic growth in the country," said Bekele Geleta. "There are more resources available to support other people. The Russian Red Cross should be strengthened to allow it to receive some of these resources and play a greater role in helping those most in need of humanitarian assistance. A stronger Russian Red Cross would give it a greater voice in our international decision-making process and in defining IFRC policy," noted Bekele Geleta.

Subjects discussed included the Red Cross Law, RRC statutes, strategy, public image and programming.

In Moscow, the IFRC secretary general also met with Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Shoygu, Minister of Emergency Situations and Veronika Skvortsova, deputy Minister of Health and Social development. They exchanged views on the RRC as a key civil society organisation in the country – with a modernised legal base and a higher public profile. The Federation expressed its commitment to support the process and high-level Russian government officials also responded positively. "It is our common goal to make the Russian Red Cross stronger," concluded the deputy minister of Health and Social development at the meeting with Bekele Geleta.

The IFRC secretary general also delivered a lecture on humanitarian diplomacy - one of the key strategic priorities of the International Federation - at the Russian Diplomatic Academy. "From governments we expect greater humanitarian space in the decision-making process," said Bekele Geleta. "From business, we expect wealth creation and partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent in carrying out its corporate social responsibility. From the public, we want stronger commitment and human-to-human support."

Presenting the IFRC Report on the Humanitarian consequences of the economic crisis in Europe at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, the secretary general mentioned that through various forms of humanitarian diplomacy, the International Federation works "to transform its visibility, recognition and trust into concrete action at the highest level".

"I do not want governments to miss out on an opportunity to use this global network, with its huge capacity and unrivalled grassroots presence," he continued. "If they fail to partner with us to tackle today's humanitarian challenges, the world will suffer more than it should."