

**Remarks by Ms Kathryn Clarkson - Head of IFRC Country Cluster Delegation for  
Cambodia, Lao PRD, Thailand and Vietnam and  
Permanent Observer of IFRC to UNESCAP**

**at the 78<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCAP  
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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Participants,

I join the many honourable speakers before me to wish the Commission a 'happy birthday' as it marks 75 years since its establishment and take this opportunity to congratulate you for the many achievements during this time.

As our region starts to recover from the widespread health and socio-economic effects of the COVID19 pandemic, people's coping capacities for dealing with new disasters and crises will be stretched. We need to learn the lessons from COVID19 and be better able to support the most vulnerable people to deal with the impact of complex disasters.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – or IFRC - with our National Societies in each country and alongside our partners, are taking clear action. We are investing more in anticipatory action – whether it be anticipation of flooding, storms, heatwaves – or in early detection at the community level of disease outbreaks. We have a new early action protocol in Viet Nam to respond faster to the effects of heat waves, the first we have developed globally. We are also increasing funding opportunities designed for this purpose – the Disaster Response Emergency Fund or DREF – to support our members in these efforts. Thanks goes to all governments who are contributing to this Fund.

It is also high time to put the legal conditions in place to prepare for the next public health emergency – possibly the next pandemic. Our extensive research, including recently in collaboration with ASEAN secretariat, has shown that in many cases, states were not legally prepared to manage public health emergencies. Laws, policies and contingency plans were often outdated or inadequate. Furthermore, public health emergencies were – and still are – often regulated separately from other emergencies, even though the response to them is rather similar. But law and policy play a crucial role – enabling states of emergency to be declared, lockdowns to be imposed, determine who can lead, act and fulfill specific roles, and the expedition of vaccine approvals and their administration.

We have all the research, knowledge and tools in place to act - and now is indeed the time to act. It is time to develop and review disaster laws and policies relevant to public health emergency preparedness and response and to put in place the coordination mechanisms between disaster risk management and public health actors.

I would like to warmly invite you for more discussion on this topic. Please join the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and IFRC during a virtual side event on Friday.

Let me conclude by thanking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand and ESCAP, as well as the governments and partners present here today for their partnership in our joint efforts to build resilience against the multiple risks we face and leave no one behind in our efforts.

Thank you.