

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
INDIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY AND ST. JOHN AMBULANCE
(INDIA)**

Rashtrapati Bhavan Auditorium, New Delhi: 03-05-2013

1. I am indeed happy to participate in the ceremonial session of the Annual General Meeting of the Indian Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance (India). I extend a warm welcome to all the volunteers of these organizations, many of whom have come from far to attend this important event. I congratulate all the award winners, who have been recognized for their exemplary services towards humanitarian causes.
2. The Red Cross and St. John Ambulance have been active in their service to the humanity. The Red Cross, in its history of 150 years, has upheld the fundamental values of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.
3. In India, the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance have been at the forefront of humanitarian service in the country since 1920. The Indian Red Cross Society is truly a pan-Indian organization. It operates through 700 branches and draws millions of volunteers and members to carry out its programmes. St. John Ambulance (India) also commands a wide reach in the country with its 21 state and 3 union territory centres, 9 railway centres, and many regional and local centres.
4. The Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance (India) have increased the reach of their programmes in no small measure. They have marked their presence increasingly through schools of nursing, homes for the elderly, tuberculosis programmes, disaster response and preparedness, and education on positive attitude for children and youth. Millions of people have benefitted from the expansion in their efforts.
5. Resources are a key ingredient to sustain philanthropic activities. I am told that the financial health of the Indian Red Cross Society has

improved considerably in recent years. Both the organizations are now financially sustainable, and are in a comfortable position to further enhance the scale of their efforts.

6. There is a need to maintain a uniform standard in the delivery of service and provision of assistance. I, therefore, applaud the initiative to frame uniform rules for the Indian Red Cross Society. I am told that these rules have been implemented by a majority of the Society's branches. I urge the remaining branches to also implement these standards.
7. Ladies and Gentlemen, despite the progress made by mankind, it can exercise no control over occurrence of natural disasters. While we may not be able to prevent such unfortunate events from occurring, we can definitely lessen their adverse impact on human lives. For that, the quick response mechanisms for relief must be reinforced. We have strengthened our nation's capability to respond to emergencies that has resulted in saving countless lives. The National Disaster Management Authority, the National Institute of Disaster Management, and the National Disaster Response Force are the front line of India's disaster preparedness providing policy, guidance and effective response to natural calamities. But immediate disaster relief also calls for efficient local response. It is in these situations that volunteer-based organizations like the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance (India) can play a very crucial role.
8. Local volunteers, who understand local conditions better, can deal with disasters in the locality more effectively. It is gratifying to note that the Indian Red Cross Society is developing local community members to respond to such challenges. I urge upon the Society to encourage widening the network of young people as "first medical responders".
9. I am told that newly renovated warehouses have enabled the Indian Red Cross Society to deal with disaster responses with greater efficacy. It is well placed to partner with government authorities to quickly provide aid and relief. The collaborative efforts of the Society with other similar

organizations also have the potential for more efficient and effective handling of disaster situations.

10. Ladies and Gentlemen, economic prosperity of our country is manifested in the increasing purchasing power of the people. The number of cars on Indian roads has multiplied during the last four to five decades. This has unfortunately resulted in a substantial increase in the number of road accidents. In 1970, the number of road accidents per one lakh population was 21.2. This has risen by almost 2 times, to 41.1, in 2011. The number of deaths due to accidents in India in 2009 at 10.8 per one lakh population is far higher than in countries like Japan and UK, where it is less than 5 per one lakh population. This calls for proactive programmes to ensure immediate medical assistance during road accidents so as to minimize the loss of life.
11. The success of any organization lies in the development of its skilled manpower. I am told that the Indian Red Cross Society has taken steps for capacity building and skill development. The Society's Post Graduate Diploma Course in Disaster Preparedness and Rehabilitation, run in collaboration with Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, is a step in the correct direction. It will ensure the availability of highly trained manpower at the time of disasters. I compliment those who are behind this initiative and urge them to further expand the capacity of such trained workforce.
12. The Indian Red Cross Society is known for its promotion of health related causes like blood donation. The Society should pride itself in the fact that it's 166 blood banks contribute almost 10 per cent of our country's blood supply. 85 per cent of the blood donated through the Society is on voluntary basis. Despite the notable efforts of our country's blood banks, our country remains short of 2 million units of blood. I take this opportunity to call upon our young men and women to come forward in a big way and take part in voluntary blood donation. Greater sensitization of our youth towards this important social service is absolutely necessary. Our efforts must be to ensure that not a single person in need of blood is left unanswered.

13. Our demography is today characterized by a growing number of elderly people. We must ensure that those who have invested a lifetime in the growth of their families and the nation are not left alone without care. The Home healthcare attendant programme of these organizations aimed at training young people to take care of the elderly is a laudable initiative. I look forward to seeing many young people trained for this noble vocation. The energy of youth and the wisdom from experience of the elderly will surely lead to mutual benefit for the care-provider and the care-recipient.
14. The contribution of Indian Red Cross Society to the development of weaker communities overseas has grown over the years. I am told that India has become one of the most significant donors to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The Indian Red Cross Society is playing an important role at the international level in matters of health and development, blood donation policy and disaster response and recovery. I applaud the Society for delivering on its humanitarian agenda regardless of geographical frontiers. I am confident of the Society continuing to play a meaningful role in international humanitarian assistance.
15. It is a challenge to work for society in a voluntary capacity, even though it is satisfying. It holds true for the members and volunteers of these two organizations as well. Once Kaviguru, Rabindranath Tagore, had observed and I quote: "If I cannot make it through one door, I will go through another door - or I will make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present (unquote)." The doors that the Red Cross can open will bring a brighter future for all of us.
16. I take this opportunity to compliment Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad, Dr. S.P. Agarwal and all the office bearers of the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance (India) for working with unflinching dedication, absolute commitment and thorough expertise. I wish the organizations all success in their future endeavours. I also wish you all a successful conduct of the Annual General Meeting.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
