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Media release

23 March 2011

World Tuberculosis Day TB target: to find 3 million people not getting proper treatment

**Embargoed until 10:00
GMT on 23 March
2011**

In partnership with

Stop TB Partnership

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The Red Cross Red Crescent and Stop TB Partnership say door-to-door outreach is the key to reducing the spread of TB and the number of TB deaths.

24 March 2011, Geneva – In Shanxi, China, Feng Wenli has been bedridden and weakened by tuberculosis for the past year, but she gains strength and comfort when she receives a visit from Red Cross volunteers, who monitor her treatment, bring her nutritious food and accompany her on medical visits. With this support, there is little risk that her illness will progress to multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB).

In Tumkur, India, Iqbal's relatives were shunning him because he had TB. When Red Cross volunteers came to his home, he was able to reconnect with his family. The volunteers explained that the family had nothing to fear as long as Iqbal took all his medicine and they followed a few simple prevention rules.

In Khakassia, Siberia, in the Russian Federation, Vladimir became depressed and stopped his TB treatment, believing his illness was a death sentence. His mental outlook was transformed through counselling by trained Red Cross nurses and by joining a support group for TB patients. He is now cured of the disease.

Stories like these unfold every day across the world as staff and volunteers with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies bring life-saving assistance to people who otherwise would be unlikely to complete their TB treatment. Many of them are members of marginalized or isolated groups, such as prisoners, slum dwellers, women, migrant workers and drug users.

Towards a tuberculosis-free world, a report released today by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Stop TB Partnership, offers a window on the human side of the global TB pandemic, which caused 9.4 million people to become ill and 1.7 million deaths in 2009. There were an estimated 440 000 cases of MDR-TB and 150 000 deaths in 2008, the latest year for which data are available.

About IFRC

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

is the world's largest humanitarian and development network with nearly 100 million members, volunteers and supporters around the world. Together, we act before, during and after disasters and health crises to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so without discrimination as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. By supporting humanitarian standards, working as partners in development, responding to disasters, and supporting healthier and safer communities, we help reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace. The IFRC, our 186 National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The Stop TB Partnership

The Stop TB Partnership, hosted by the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, consists of more than 1200 international organizations, countries, donors from the public and private sectors, and nongovernmental and governmental organizations, all working together to eliminate TB.

“Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies play a key role in meeting one of the Stop TB movement’s greatest challenges: to reach the approximately 3 million people who are not getting proper TB care each year,” says Dr Lucica Ditiu, Executive Secretary of the Stop TB Partnership. “TB is curable, and no one should die from this illness in the 21st century, but to stop all TB deaths, the world must begin to view access to TB care as a human right.”

The world’s most vulnerable people often have to travel long distances, miss work and lose valuable income just to have their TB symptoms investigated. The result is that many simply do not seek a diagnosis or miss out on treatment.

To tackle this problem, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers go to people in their own communities instead, providing access to treatment for those living in the most underprivileged areas of cities and rural areas, with little or no disruption to their daily lives.

Each Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society serves as an auxiliary for its government and an interface with civil society and local communities. National Societies, through their volunteers and staff, help increase access to TB diagnosis and treatment and promote increased community involvement in TB care. We call on governments and partners to embrace and work ever more closely with them,” says Dr Stefan Seebacher, head of the IFRC’s health department.

In 2010, the Red Cross Red Crescent provided daily care to 150 000 TB patients worldwide, of whom 10 000 were patients with MDR-TB and 40 000 were co-infected with HIV. The plan is to expand the programme worldwide to have 1.7 million of the most-difficult-to-reach patients enrolled in the IFRC’s TB programme by 2015.

The Red Cross Red Crescent adheres to the TB treatment guidelines and standards that are set by the World Health Organization (WHO), whilst striving to help meet the goals of the Stop TB Partnership’s Global Plan to Stop TB 2011–2015, which seeks to halve deaths from TB by 2015 worldwide and eliminate the disease by 2050.