

**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, New Delhi: 18-11-2014

1. I am indeed very happy to be present amidst you at the Annual General Meeting of the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance (India). At the very outset, I would like to extend my warm felicitations to the Indian Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance (India). I congratulate them for their selfless service and their humanitarian work in all parts of Indian society. The Indian Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance (India) are considered the pioneers and role models for voluntary workers and non-governmental organisations in India today.

I would also like to extend my felicitations to the individuals and institutions who are being recognised today for their outstanding efforts to serve the needy, the ill, the helpless, the aged and all others on whom they have bestowed their kindness and care.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. As we know, the Indian Red Cross Society is the largest statutory humanitarian organisation established in India by an Act of Parliament in 1920. Along with the St. John Ambulance, it has been carrying out a variety of charitable services with great dedication, through its 700 branches. It has the invaluable support of thousands of volunteers and members who implement their programmes and initiatives in the different parts of the country. I understand that the St. John Ambulance (India) centres are spread across 21 States and 3 Union Territories. The Indian Red Cross is linked to the 150 year old International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies along with 188 other member countries.

3. In recent months, the people of India have been collectively traumatised by four major natural calamities that have severely affected the populations in Uttarakhand, Odisha, Jammu and Kashmir, and Andhra Pradesh. These disasters have destroyed lives and livelihoods as swiftly as they have hit infrastructure and local economies in these places. The Indian army, as well as the civilian authorities, have, to their credit, risen to the occasion each time and set new standards through their heroic operations to save and rehabilitate the affected people. The Indian Red Cross Society, too, have helped by dispatching aid worth over 5 crore rupees to Jammu and Kashmir, and mobilising scores of trained volunteers to assist with evacuations, relief and shelter for the affected communities. I take this

opportunity to thank the Indian Red Cross Society, its staff and its volunteers, for their whole hearted and effective interventions.

4. In most advanced societies, Governments as well as non - governmental organisations have taken the necessary steps to prepare, to the extent possible, for the kind of unforeseeable eventualities that we call disasters. In recent years, India, too, has learned from its experiences and taken similar measures. Thus, while the 1999 super-cyclone caused 10,000 deaths in Odisha, thanks to the pre-emptive arrangements made by Government, the negative impact of the last two cyclones in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, resulted in very few casualties. We could manage to provide safety and security to maximum number of livestock, people and property located in the path of the approaching storms. Our success in doing this demonstrates the significant improvement in our technology, capacity and capability to pre-empt and thus mitigate the devastating effect of natural disasters on our territory. India's achievement has been recognized internationally as a triumph of early warning and timely action.

5. However, we are aware that more needs to be done: more vulnerable people need to be empowered; they need to have a greater ability to secure and protect themselves. More communities need to be free from the risks of disease and the dangerous forces of nature. To achieve that, joint efforts of state institutions and civil society will be required. With additional volunteers and skill development – as well as stock-piling of essential relief materials and disaster risk reduction work Government , voluntary service societies and local communities can assist vulnerable populations with ever greater swiftness and efficiency.

6. It is indeed a good initiative of the Red Cross that they are building up their human resources for disaster management and humanitarian assistance. The flagship project of the Indian Red Cross' for "First Medical Responders" aimed at training community volunteers is a good step in the correct direction.

7. I am glad to see that the Indian Red Cross is also involving young people, the future leaders, in their programmes and engaging with students and educational institutions in a sustained and systematic way.

8. In the field of health-care, the Indian Red Cross Society and the St John Ambulance have been spreading awareness about various aspects of health and sanitation among various target groups and sections of our population. Their programmes to facilitate inoculations, vaccinations and preventive treatment etc are well known. I was happy to hear that the Red Cross National Headquarters is even promoting Ayurveda and Yoga for the prevention of non-communicable diseases. Through its 166 blood-banks, the

Red Cross has, over the decades become synonymous with blood donation. I would like to take this opportunity to invite young men and women to come forward and take part in voluntary blood donation to the Red Cross, and thus help save many lives.

9. I note that the Indian Red Cross Society, in cooperation with the Belgian Red Cross, have launched Indian guidelines for evidence-based first aid. The reference document that they have brought out is adapted to Indian needs and acknowledges traditional healing methods. This is a landmark initiative as it will serve as a basis for developing community-based first aid programmes.

10. Ladies and Gentlemen, Gandhiji had believed, that “*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*” I call upon all those present here today to reflect on these words. Let each one of us seriously consider making a contribution – big or small, to support and supplement the noble efforts of the Government and organizations such as the Red Cross and St John Ambulance in the service of our people .

11. With these words, I once again compliment H’ble Health Minister, Shri J.P. Nadda, Dr. S.P. Agarwal and all the office bearers of the Indian Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance (India). I wish you a success in your Annual General Meeting and all your future endeavours.

Thank you.