



IFRC | Central African Republic: Red Cross volunteers “show the power of humanity”

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Bangui: The Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has paid tribute to the “extraordinary courage” of the volunteers and staff of the Central African Red Cross Society, who have managed to expand life-saving malaria, HIV and tuberculosis prevention and treatment in the midst of the crisis that has gripped the country over the past two years.

Malaria is the leading cause of illness and death in Central African Republic, accounting for 40 per cent of hospital cases and deaths nationwide. HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis are also major public health concerns - an estimated 4.9 per cent of the population is living with HIV, and some 520 cases of tuberculosis are reported per 100,000 inhabitants.

In 2013, at the peak of the crisis, the Central African Red Cross, in partnership with the Global Fund to fight Aids Tuberculosis and Malaria and the IFRC, began a project to address these killer diseases and establish nation-wide mobile phone based reporting system which would allow the country to rebuild a health reporting system which had collapsed as a result of years of conflict.

“Our initial forecast of the number of health facilities we could support with malaria prevention programmes was 166,” said Mr Sy. “We reached 745. Over the past two years, Central African Red Cross volunteers have distributed most of the 2.1 million long-lasting insecticide-treated nets that are now offering protection to more than 60 per cent of the population of the country (several members of the same family sleeping under one net). Even when fighting was at its worst they were able to ensure uninterrupted distributions,” said Mr Sy.

“They also reached more than 25,000 people living with HIV with antiretroviral treatment – far exceeding the initial target of around 18,000 people.”

As a result of this programme, the Central African Republic has been able to expand its health provision to many of its most vulnerable citizens. This was achieved during a conflict that has displaced more than 1 million people and left 2.1 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, and which threatened to bring already weak health systems to a complete standstill.

Mr Sy said: “At a time when the country seemed to be on the brink of catastrophe, Red Cross volunteers were able to reach the most vulnerable and make a tremendous difference to their lives. This is evidence not only of their courage and commitment, but also of the ability of local organizations and volunteers to operate effectively in environments where no one else can.”

The Central African Red Cross has more than 12,000 volunteers providing a range of services across the country, including first aid, ambulance services, distributing relief items, providing water and sanitation services, peace education, managing burials, and giving psychosocial support. Many volunteers report being exposed to significant trauma and personal risk in the line of their humanitarian duties.

IFRC is working to build on the success of its collaboration with the Global Fund and partners to scale-up its life-saving activities across the country.