The Movement
The Red Cross was born in 1863 when Henry Dunant set up the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, that later became the International Committee of the Red Cross. Its emblem was a red cross on a white background: the inverse of the Swiss flag. The following year, 12 governments adopted the first Geneva Convention; a milestone in the history of humanity, offering care for the wounded, and defining medical services as "neutral" on the battlefield.

The concept of Red Cross societies was soon adopted by other countries, and in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, five national societies: Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States, founded the International Federation. This number has grown over the years and there are now 181 recognized National Societies - one in almost every country in the world.

Volunteering has been at the very heart of the Red Cross Red Crescent since its inception in 1863. Today, as much as ever, volunteers are the backbone of all Red Cross Red Crescent activities, helping National Societies run successful programs and assisting millions of vulnerable people in need. There are now around 97 million members and volunteers in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement worldwide.

Strategy 2010
Strategy 2010 was adopted by the Federation's General Assembly in October 1999. It sets the strategic directions for the Federation and its member National Societies and defines the four core areas for our work:
- promotion of humanitarian values and principles
- disaster preparedness
- disaster response
- health and care in the community

Within these areas we all aim to achieve a common mission: to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. With this in mind, we work at increasing the capacity of local communities, through social mobilization and participation, in prevention, preparedness and response.

Indonesia Red Cross
Indonesia Red Cross has more than 350 branches nationwide with a large number of volunteers. In the Tsunami affected areas, many Red Cross members, staff and volunteers lost their lives. Still, a few hours after the disaster, when the waters started to recede and the extend of the disaster became visible, Red Cross volunteers started evacuating injured survivors, and during the first day managed to bring more than 100 people to the nearest operational hospital. Over the following days, more volunteers joined in, and by the end of day 3, more than 500 injured survivors had been evacuated, while 15,000 dead bodies had been retrieved and buried. Distribution of non-food items started on day 2.

Yesterday, several of the speakers referred to the fact that “life-saving” is done by the local communities during the first few days after a disaster. The situation in Aceh was no different. The first medical teams from Jakarta started arriving on day 4, including those sent by Indonesia Red Cross. Till then, first aid, evacuation of injured, distribution of whatever stocks were at hand, retrieval of dead bodies, etc., was entirely reliant upon the capacity of the local community to cope.
Capacity building
Yesterday we also heard several of the speakers mention the importance of building capacity of local government and institutions, and today several of my colleagues here around the table will talk about the importance of building capacity of local NGOs. I fully agree with both, but I want to stress the importance of moving down another level, and look at how we can further strengthen the capacity of the communities in terms of prevention, preparedness and response – after all it is in the communities that the battle for life or death takes place during the first few days following a disaster.

Training volunteers in community health, first aid, disaster response, psychological first aid, early warning systems, and so forth, is one way of doing this. Working with volunteers also becomes part of a preparedness plan for larger scale operations, and in Indonesia we have seen how attractive the Red Cross volunteers are to other organizations, including UN organizations, because they are so well equipped for community mobilization activities, information gathering, distribution of relief, etc.

Coordination
The initial response by the local community was followed by the massive national and international relief operation involving a large number of agencies and organizations. Alongside these, Indonesia Red Cross, ICRC, the International Federation, and many member national societies from across the world became engaged in a major relief operation involving distribution of food and non-food items, safe water supply, health care services, tracing, psychosocial support, and so forth.

By mid January we had teams from more than 35 national societies in Indonesia. Medical teams, Watsan teams, assessment teams, planning teams, volunteers, visitors, etc. Servicing these teams became a tremendous burden and threatened to overwhelm Indonesia Red Cross. Although all could see the need for a coordinated movement response, actually bringing this about was no easy task. The scale of the disaster, and the extraordinary public response, put a lot of pressure on national societies across the world – they wanted to act, and they wanted to act now. In spite of these initial obstacles and difficulties, by the end of February we had the first draft of a consolidated plan, and we are now in the process of finalizing a movement framework for recovery and rehabilitation.

Externally, the Federation collaborates with a large number of partners, including UN agencies, in particular WHO, OCHA, UNHCR, the World Food Program, and UNICEF. In 2003, WHO’s South East Asia Regional Office in Delhi and the Federation’s Regional Delegation in Bangkok, signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at strengthening the collaboration between the two organizations, and it is my hope that this may prove a useful tool for encouraging even closer collaboration in the tsunami affected countries – the challenge which lies ahead will require a well coordinated response if we are to be successful.

Let me end this presentation by expressing my profound gratitude and admiration for the more than 2000 Red Cross volunteers from all over Indonesia, who have worked around the clock for more than 4 months now to aid the affected people in Aceh.