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Remarks by Mr. Dragyel Dorjee on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

Director-General, Regional Director, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), made up of 192 National Societies and 14 million volunteers, was born in the aftermath of the 1918 flu pandemic. We have been fighting epidemics and pandemics alongside governments and communities ever since, through Ebola, Zika, SARS, dengue, measles, and COVID-19. Public health emergencies are our past, our present, and we will face them again. But next time, let's be better prepared.

The COVID-19 response has been hugely impaired by gaps in global cooperation and inequities affecting some of the most vulnerable people. Now is our collective opportunity to address these. We need bold new solutions – both in international and domestic laws – to avoid the same mistakes.

The new treaty must ensure that there is equity in life-saving interventions, testing, treatment and vaccines, solid commitments not to exclude those in need from recovery efforts, including economic recovery, and greater support for the often-forgotten work of community-level responders.

We must also ensure that health and emergency staff and volunteers are supported to operate safely. And we must guard against the economic ruin of the poorest and most vulnerable as a result of pandemic responses.

To do so successfully, we must ensure that the conversations around the new legal instrument take the following into account:

- **Equity** must be at the centre of the new pandemic instrument. This requires equitable access to all health countermeasures, finding more equitable ways to distribute pandemic response products as soon as they become available, prioritizing distribution according to needs, and legal and policy measures must protect vulnerable groups, both between and within countries.

- The new pandemic instrument needs to recognize the role of communities and local actors in all phases of epidemic and pandemic control. This includes ensuring adequate global and domestic financing for their activities and providing measures to ensure they are supported such as training and inclusion in coordination mechanisms.

- The new pandemic instrument should acknowledge the need for comprehensive, whole-of-society and whole-of-government domestic public health emergency legal and policy frameworks that address a wide variety of hazards and clearly outline coordination structures and roles/responsibilities of all relevant actors. The instrument should encourage states to provide legal facilities to authorized frontline responders to 1) prioritize their access to pandemic response products; and 2) facilitate the movement of their goods and personnel to allow them to reach and respond to the needs of communities.

Our member National Societies are mandated by State Parties to the Geneva Conventions to assist Governments with preparedness and response to disasters including public health emergencies. IFRC and its members stand ready to provide their expertise and advice to governments and to support an international agreement to not only be powerful on paper but transformative in reality.

Excellencies, distinguished representatives, dear colleagues, let's make sure our legacy is that we applied the lessons of the past and present to shape our future.

Thank you.