

**To:**

**Ms. Mirjana Spoljaric Egger**

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

18 November, 2022

Excellency!

The Belarusian Helsinki Committee and the Belarusian Medical Solidarity Foundation would like to express their high appreciation of the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the field of international humanitarian law and the assistance provided to those in need, victims of armed conflicts and violence around the world.

Hereby we would like to draw your attention to the situation unfolding in Belarus, where there has been an escalation in the scope of repressions over the past two years. Repressions come amid the incitement of social hatred, including by means of state propaganda.

In one of the episodes of "Postscriptum" TV show<sup>1</sup>, broadcasted on "STV" state-owned TV channel on 18 October, 2022, the show hosted Dmitry Shevtsov, a medical doctor and Secretary General of the Belarus Red Cross Society. Rhetoric, used by the Secretary General to discuss the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity, contained a number of stigmatizing and discriminatory statements. For example, he stated that "non-traditional relationships" between people of the same biological sex constitute a mental illness and are unnatural. In his speech, Dmitry Shevtsov stressed that such "non-traditional values" need to be handled within medical treatment, rather than communicated to the society.

According to the Preamble of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereinafter referred to as the Movement, the Statutes of the Movement), National Societies together with the ICRC and the IFRC are parts of the world humanitarian Movement.

According to Article 4.10 of the Movement's Statutes, the National Society is to respect the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, including humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

The principle of humanity encompasses the idea that respect for human dignity is paramount in everything the Movement does, while the principle of impartiality implies the prohibition of discrimination on any grounds. The ICRC stands at the origins of the Movement, heads its

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYW2uL4N7pU>

activities, and therefore bears a special responsibility for promoting the mentioned principles in pursuance of the ICRC's Mission, which is enshrined in the Program Document "ICRC: Mission and Work"<sup>2</sup>.

Dmitry Shevtsov, being the Secretary General of the Belarus Red Cross Society, officially represents the position of the organization. He publicly delivers statements that cannot be justified and are incompatible with the values and principles of the Movement in which the Belarusian Red Cross Society partakes. Such statements are disrespectful of human dignity, constitute hate speech and express homophobic ideas, as well as provoke discrimination, which contradicts the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and rules prescribed by other international human rights treaties.

We would also like to highlight the fact that Dmitry Shevtsov's statement labelling homosexuality as a mental illness essentially constitutes the dissemination of false information, since the World Health Organization in 1990 excluded homosexuality (as well as various types of sexualities other than heterosexuality) from the list of diseases in the International Classification of Diseases, which Dmitry Shevtsov must be aware of as a medical doctor.

Accordingly, the rhetoric publicly communicated by the Belarusian Red Cross Society stigmatizes the LGBT+ community in Belarus. In addition, the mentioned statements reflect and attest to the discriminatory practices of the Belarusian regime, promoted by state propaganda. Such actions do not comply with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Since, pursuant to Article 5.2 of the Movement's Statutes, the role of the ICRC is, *inter alia*, to maintain and disseminate the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, we call on the ICRC to:

- publicly condemn the statements of the Secretary General of the Belarusian Red Cross Society Dmitry Shevtsov;
- remind to the Belarus Red Cross Society that it is unacceptable that such rhetoric is communicated by persons affiliated with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Sincerely,

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Belarusian Medical Solidarity Foundation (bymedsol@gmail.com)

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc\\_002\\_0963.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0963.pdf)