

Power of humanity

33rd International Conference
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

9-12 December 2019, Geneva



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OUTLINE OF PROPOSED AGENDA TOPICS

BACKGROUND

Improving the lives of people affected by armed conflict, disasters and other emergencies is the core objective of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The Conference aims to influence the global humanitarian agenda and explore current and future challenges affecting people and communities and the vulnerabilities that they face on the ground. It is a key platform which brings together the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (National Societies, the ICRC and the IFRC – also referred to as “the Movement”) with the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions and key humanitarian partners to debate critical issues and undertake joint commitments which translate into tangible outcomes for affected people.

As proposed in the concept note for the 33rd International Conference, this event will have a forward-looking approach, addressing future challenges and vulnerabilities – but without losing sight of existing humanitarian needs. The proposed topics outlined below are cross-cutting and related to one or more of the initial themes of the Conference, as outlined in the concept note.

The outline of topics proposed in this document is based on the feedback received during the consultations on the concept note for the 33rd International Conference from September to December 2018. This feedback was received through online webinars, dedicated sessions during meetings of National Societies, discussions with the Permanent Missions in Geneva at both the working and ambassador levels, bilateral meetings with the Conference organizers and written submissions.

The messages that were consistent across the feedback emphasized that the 33rd International Conference must highlight and discuss current challenges to humanitarian action as well as emerging ones; that international humanitarian law, which is core to the International Conference and its members, must be given more prominence in the programme; that topics such as migration also deserve to be addressed in a more prominent manner; and that the Movement’s potential to strengthen resilience by improving community health and reducing the impact of climate and weather-related shocks and hazards should be developed. It was also clear that the 33rd International Conference should seek to ensure that the unique role and added value of the Movement, as well as a people-centred approach, are explicit throughout the discussions and proposed commitments, particularly when the issues being discussed are the subject of other specialized international gatherings.

The inputs received also suggested limiting the topics proposed for the agenda and not having too many parallel sessions scheduled as part of the programme, something which has proved challenging for smaller delegations in the past. At the same time, however, several Conference members proposed a specific emphasis on **gender and protection** as stand-alone issues. The Conference organizers wish to emphasize that gender and protection considerations are inherent and central to many of the proposed topics and will feature throughout the conference discussions rather than as stand-alone topics. In addition, the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the protection and assistance provided by the Movement in support of the most vulnerable remain the guiding principles of the Movement’s work and therefore this Conference.

This outline proposes topics for decision and debate at the 33rd International Conference. It refers only to formal parts of the agenda and does not include the details of topics to be covered in side events, exhibitions, installations, etc.

RESPECTING AND IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Protecting people in situations of armed conflict is at the heart of international humanitarian law (IHL). It is one of the key elements of the Movement's work and fundamental to saving lives. As the primary global venue for addressing matters related to IHL, the 33rd International Conference will be invited to consider a Four-Year Action Plan on National Implementation, which will be discussed and proposed for adoption through a resolution. Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the Four-Year Action Plan will aim to improve the protection of victims of armed conflicts through better implementation of existing IHL obligations. In this regard, the proposed Action Plan will recall key fundamental principles and rules of IHL and propose real and practical measures to be undertaken by States and National Societies to further the implementation of IHL (such as wider ratification and implementation of treaties, dynamic dissemination, effective training and strengthening the work of national IHL committees).

Separately, and independently from the Action Plan, a factual report on the work undertaken during the Inter-governmental Process on Strengthening Respect for IHL will be submitted as follow-up to Resolution 2 of the 32nd International Conference held in 2015. It is proposed that the factual report be taken note of in a general ("omnibus") resolution of the Conference.

In addition, members and participants at the Conference will be invited to discuss how IHL applies to current, cutting-edge and evolving issues in contemporary armed conflicts. This discussion will be based on the ICRC's quadrennial report on "International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts". The issues to be discussed may include how IHL addresses challenges posed by new technologies and new weapons, such as cyber-attacks, armed drones and robots, and the legal questions relating to IHL and terrorism. It may also explore connections with the proposed debates on vulnerabilities in urban settings and as a result of digital transformation.

SHIFTING VULNERABILITIES

Access to essential services

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement plays a critical role in enabling access to essential services for everyone, everywhere. Tapping into the full potential of community-based health workers and volunteers, for example, can specifically contribute to improving global health, to strengthening global pandemic surveillance and control systems and to facilitating access to other critical health services. A discussion at the 33rd International Conference could explore

ways to support and promote their role while ensuring adequate quality and accountability, including through national-level clarification of the auxiliary role of National Societies in the field of public health. Ensuring the safety and security of health care workers and facilities must also be discussed, as this remains a core concern for the Movement.

Specific commitments through a resolution would address **mental health and psychosocial needs** arising as a consequence of armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies. The proposed commitments would recognize mental health and psychosocial support as fundamental to saving lives and preserving dignity in humanitarian settings, including by ensuring that it is an integral component in domestic and international emergency response systems. Separate commitments regarding the role of Movement components in **global pandemic surveillance and control systems**, including at the domestic level, could also be proposed in connection with global frameworks such as the International Health Regulations.

The adverse impacts of disasters, climate change, protracted conflicts and pandemics are felt most acutely in **urban settings**, particularly in poorly planned urban areas. A discussion on concrete measures to decrease the vulnerability and exposure of the urban poor, particularly migrants and displaced people as well as individuals affected by urban conflict and violence and those living in slums and informal settlements, is proposed – particularly in light of the commitments expressed in the “New Urban Agenda”. This topic could explore how to improve individual and collective capacity to respond swiftly to humanitarian challenges in urban areas and how to jointly engage in urban planning and investment processes that reduce future risks, highlighting the value added of the components of the Movement in line with their respective mandates.

Meeting the **protection and assistance needs of migrants and displaced people**, regardless of their legal status, involves areas of work where Movement components are scaling up their own efforts. Recognizing that various legal frameworks and distinct Movement approaches to addressing the needs of migrants and displaced people exist, discussion on this topic could focus on exploring how the Movement could work more effectively with States to meet these needs, including through the establishment of humanitarian service points, for example. Under this topic, the Conference could address the need to preserve and protect the humanitarian space required to assist this category of people. It could also address how the Movement can work alongside States to deliver on the commitments contained in Resolution 3 of the 31st International Conference and the Global Compacts on Safe Orderly and Regular Migration and on Refugees as well as the 2018 Plan of Action on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Movement’s 2009 Policy on Internal Displacement – which will have its ten-year anniversary this year.

Humanitarian consequences of climate change

Today, there are around 400 extreme weather events every year, about four times as many as in the 1970s. The most at-risk and vulnerable individuals are those who are the poorest, most exposed and have the least resources to withstand the **impacts of climate change**, including those in situations of conflict, violence and insecurity. A discussion on this topic could explore how the various components of the Movement can best work, in accordance with their mandates

and capacities, with at-risk and affected populations, authorities and other partners to meet the needs of communities. These actions could include factoring climate considerations into their analysis and programming; ensuring adequate climate adaptation finance; and strengthening relevant laws and policies, all in line with the commitments of the UNFCCC COP and the UN Climate Summit dialogues.

Commitments expressed in a proposed resolution would draw on extensive comparative research and global consultations with disaster management officials, regional organizations, National Societies and other humanitarian organizations as to how **disaster laws and policies** can promote effective preparedness and response. The findings of this research will be shared in the form of a study and a new “Checklist on law and disaster preparedness and response”.

The proposed resolution would recommend steps States can take to ensure that their disaster laws are most effective, well equipped to address the humanitarian consequences of climate change as well as designed to ensure that vulnerable persons are not left behind, including a focus on child protection, sexual and gender-based violence, gender equality, targeted support for disabled and older persons and attention to other population groups that tend to be excluded, as highlighted in the “World Disasters Report 2018”.

In recent years, States have adopted a number of **major global frameworks**, some of which are referenced above, intended to chart a course for collective achievement in critical areas of humanitarian and development action. These include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (and its Sustainable Development Goals), the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the International Health Regulations and the Global Compacts on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and on Refugees. Without seeking to reopen the substantive content of these frameworks, a potential resolution could propose to identify the particular contributions of the components of the Movement, as consistent with their mandates and capacities, towards the implementation of these frameworks and promote cooperation between the Movement, States and other partners toward shared objectives.

Digital transformation

The rapid evolution of technology and the use of data and digitalization in recent years have transformed many aspects of society, with profound impacts on how the Red Cross and Red Crescent supports the most vulnerable. A debate at the International Conference could explore how the Movement can work together with States to foster the positive and minimize the negative impacts of data and digital transformations on society, with a particular focus on ensuring that vulnerable people are not further marginalized or left behind. This could include opportunities to promote social entrepreneurship, research and innovation in the realm of digital transformation. It could address how to make the most of new opportunities, including through efforts to bridge the digital divide by means of capacity strengthening, digital literacy, infrastructure and other resources. Finally, it could look at the specificities of digital and cyber risks in the humanitarian context, for instance, with regard to the sharing of information in some of the world’s most sensitive contexts.

One particular area where concrete commitments would be expressed is in a proposed resolution on **Restoring Family Links (RFL)**. This resolution would aim to foster the relationship of trust and cooperation between States and the Movement in the field of RFL and related aspects of data protection, with a particular focus on effective measures to prevent family separation and disappearances and to rapidly clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons who have gone missing. The proposed resolution would request States to recognize that the unrestricted processing of personal data, including the flow of personal data between the components of the Movement, is essential for the exclusively humanitarian purpose of providing RFL services and is in the vital interest of the individuals concerned.

TRUST IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

There is no greater asset to the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and its components than the trust of the people and communities that the Movement serves. Access, support and respect for the Movement's mission depends on this trust. Maintaining trust in humanitarian action requires efforts by humanitarian organizations themselves and by States, which have long recognized the importance of neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action.

A debate on this theme could explore how the components of the Movement, States and other stakeholders can best work together to retain trust in principled humanitarian action, focusing in particular on accountability and the preservation of humanitarian space, and the connections between these issues.

Accountability must be, first and foremost, to the people that the Movement serves. They must be fully engaged in our decision-making and confident that the Movement has the necessary safeguards in place to ensure the highest standards of integrity and quality. Discussions could address recent steps taken by the Movement and others in the sector and how best to share and address the risks to humanitarian action.

Ensuring space for the Movement and other humanitarian actors to work in a principled manner is the other critical ingredient for ensuring trust. This requires the Movement to be consistent and rigorous in its application of the Fundamental Principles and States to consider the impact of their policies on humanitarian action. It also requires joint investment in ensuring the capacity of the Movement components to retain and build trust in order to fulfil their mission, particularly at the local level.

PROGRESS REPORTS

The list below provides an outline of the topics identified which require mandatory progress reports as follow-up to the 32nd International Conference held in 2015. These are to be provided in writing and will be noted during the plenary session at the 33rd International Conference.

- Progress Report on Resolution 1 “Strengthening international humanitarian law protecting persons deprived of their liberty” (32IC/15/R1)

- Progress (Factual) Report on Resolution 2 “Strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law” (32IC/15/R2)
- Progress Report on Resolution 3 “Sexual and gender-based violence: Joint action on prevention and response” (32IC/15/R3)
- Progress Report on Resolution 5 “The safety and security of humanitarian volunteers” (32IC/15/R5)
- Progress Report on Resolution 8 “Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on Operational Arrangements, dated 28 November 2005, between the Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom in Israel” (32IC/15/R8)
- Overview report on the implementation of the resolutions and pledges of the 32nd International Conference.

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

- Election of the Conference officers and establishment of the Conference subsidiary bodies (commissions, drafting committee)
- Election of the members of the Standing Commission

HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO DEFINING THE AGENDA AND CONTENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Throughout 2019, the discussions with all members of the Conference and with observers will further articulate the topics outlined above and the content of the proposed decisions and debates in order to reflect the most relevant and pressing humanitarian concerns and potential solutions.

Please consider this document as an invitation to engage and jointly shape the content of the decisions and debates proposed for the 33rd International Conference. The Conference organizers count on the active involvement of all participants, including observers, to ensure that the agenda is informed by humanitarian realities on the ground and that the outcomes serve to enable effective action.

According to the Rules of Procedure of the International Conference, as outlined in the Statutes of the Movement, the official draft provisional agenda, due to be circulated in June 2019, will be developed based on the feedback received on this document.

The content of decisions/resolutions to be adopted by the 2019 International Conference will be developed through several rounds of consultation, including a preparatory meeting to be held on 27–28 June 2019 in Geneva, which will be open to all members of the International Conference. Please note that this meeting is scheduled to follow on from the National Societies’ Annual Legal Advisors Meeting, and all National Societies and Permanent Missions in Geneva will be invited to attend. At the discretion of the leadership of National Societies, provision could be made for

the legal advisors to attend the Preparatory Meeting. More details on the Preparatory Meeting will be communicated soon.

The Conference organizers encourage all members to express their interest in working together to shape the proposed debates, including in dedicated working groups. Partner organizations will be invited, as observers, to contribute to shaping these debates alongside the members of the Conference.

A number of side events will be organized as part of the informal agenda of the Conference and will be open to topics of interest to Conference members (in compliance with the Movement's Statutes and Rules of Procedure, including the rule that speakers may not engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature). Side events should connect with the overarching themes of the 33rd International Conference as outlined above. More information on side events will be provided in due course.

The Statutory Meetings website will continue to serve as a central resource for all information on the International Conference. Consult it regularly for more information and the latest documents and take part in the preparations for the meeting.

<http://rcrcconference.org/>

Please send your contributions and input on the proposed topics for the agenda to conferences@rcrcconference.org.