

Power of humanity

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COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

**OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
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War in Cities

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the International Committee of the Red Cross
in cooperation with
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and the Norwegian Red Cross**

Geneva, September 2021

DRAFT ZERO RESOLUTION

War in Cities

The Council of Delegates,

deeply concerned at the devastating humanitarian impacts of war in cities witnessed first-hand by the staff and volunteers of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), including the unacceptably high number of civilian deaths, the extensive and long-lasting physical and mental suffering, the consequences of weapon contamination, the destruction of homes and critical civilian infrastructure, the disruption to essential services, including health care, water supply, food supply, sanitation, solid waste disposal, electricity and education, and widespread displacement, and *acknowledging* that these impacts affect women, men, girls and boys of different ages, disabilities and backgrounds differently,

recognizing that many of these consequences are not unique to war in cities, but that they occur on a significantly larger scale because of the density of the civilian population and civilian objects, the tactics and weapons used by the belligerents, the population's reliance on interconnected infrastructure systems that enable the delivery of public services, and the often protracted nature of urban fighting,

concerned that, although urban warfare is not a new phenomenon, current trends in global demographics towards rapid urbanization increase the risk that towns and cities will become the main battlegrounds of future conflicts,

stressing that the scale of devastation and suffering caused by urban warfare is determined by the actions, tactics and strategies of the parties fighting in these environments, and *expressing deep concern*, in this respect, at the frequent violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), notably attacks directed against civilians and other protected persons and civilian objects, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the unlawful denial of access to impartial humanitarian organizations, and the use of human shields, as well as the grave humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, and of siege and encirclement practices,

recalling that the Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacities, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found through neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action, and *underscoring* that the components of the Movement have unique capacities to access, protect and assist people and communities affected by urban warfare,

expressing deep concern that the Movement's staff and volunteers, working in stressful and dangerous conditions, often pay too high a price when they seek to access and support vulnerable populations affected by urban warfare,

underscoring that the humanitarian response to the consequences of urban warfare is currently too fragmented and that the Movement, when it plans to strengthen its capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to these consequences, must consider the different needs of women, men, girls and boys of different ages, disabilities and backgrounds and favour a multidisciplinary, integrated and scalable approach that combines prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities specifically adapted to the urban context,

acknowledging that documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities is essential to understand the scale and nature of people's needs and to develop relevant, effective and timely preventive actions and operational responses, and *stressing* the importance for the Movement to strengthen its collective capacity to collect accurate, reliable and relevant data, including sex, age and disability disaggregated data, and to share information, including human impact stories, on the humanitarian consequences of war in cities, in line with the Fundamental Principles, data protection principles, accountability requirements, the "do no harm" principle, existing priorities and other operational constraints,

welcoming the analysis by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of the challenges arising from the urbanization of armed conflict in its report entitled *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts: Recommitting to Protection in Armed Conflict on the 70th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions*, submitted to the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2019, and the report entitled *Urban Services during Protracted Armed Conflict: A Call for a Better Approach to Assisting Affected People*, and *noting*, as a source of inspiration, the outcome documents of the 2019 Movement consultation in Oslo entitled "War in Cities: Towards a Comprehensive Response by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement",

recognizing the need to fully implement existing Movement initiatives with a bearing on urban warfare, and *recalling*, in this respect, the resolutions on "Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation" adopted at each session of the Council of Delegates since 2013, Resolution 6 of the 2009 Council of Delegates on the "Movement Strategy on Landmines, Cluster Munitions and other Explosive Remnants of War: Reducing the Effects of Weapons on Civilians", Resolution 7 of the 2013 Council of Delegates on "Weapons and international humanitarian law", Resolution 7 of the 2019 Council of Delegates on "Strengthening implementation of the Movement policy on internal displacement: Ten years on", Resolution 4 of the 32nd International Conference on "Health Care in Danger: Continuing to protect the delivery of health care together", Resolution 2 of the 33rd International Conference on "Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies", as well as other relevant guidelines, policies, frameworks and approaches, notably the Minimum Protection Approach, the Safer Access Framework, the Preparedness for Effective Response approach and the ICRC guidelines on mine and explosive remnants of war risk awareness and safer behaviour,

1. *adopts* the 2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities (action plan) annexed below and *commits* to its effective implementation;
2. *invites* the ICRC to support and coordinate the implementation of the action plan, and to monitor and report on its implementation as necessary;
3. *also invites* all components of the Movement to take all possible steps to implement the action plan, as necessary and feasible, including by:
 - a) documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to improve the Movement's prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities;
 - b) strengthening the Movement's collective capacity to provide humanitarian protection and assistance in contexts of urban warfare through a multifaceted, multi-year and scalable effort;
 - c) raising awareness through public communication of the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of urban warfare;

- d) influencing parties to conflict through humanitarian diplomacy to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and change how conflicts are fought in urban areas; and
 - e) ensuring implementation of the commitments undertaken, including through the mobilization of resources to support National Societies operating in contexts of urban warfare;
4. *urges* States to take action to prevent and reduce the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare, including by strengthening their legal and policy frameworks that protect the civilian population and civilian objects against the effects of urban warfare, sharing examples of good military policy and practice, and considering making individual or collective commitments to this end at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent;
 5. *calls upon* parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for IHL, notably the prohibitions against indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the obligations to take all feasible precautions in attack and against the effects of attacks to protect civilians and civilian objects, the prohibition against the use of human shields, the prohibitions against using starvation as a method of warfare and against attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, the obligations safeguarding the provision of health care and the obligations protecting the natural environment;
 6. *also calls upon* parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for the norms of IHL related to specific weapons, in particular landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war, as applicable;
 7. *further calls upon* parties to armed conflict, in accordance with IHL, to meet the basic needs of the civilian population under their control, and to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control;
 8. *further calls upon* parties to armed conflict to take greater steps towards strengthening the protection of civilians from the dangers of urban warfare, in particular to avoid using explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas because of the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects, [and to endorse the international political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas and faithfully implement it in an open, inclusive and transparent manner, with the involvement of relevant humanitarian organizations, including the ICRC and National Societies].

Annex: 2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities

Resolution [CD/22/DRX.X] of the 2022 Council of Delegates calls attention to the devastating humanitarian impacts of war in cities, witnessed first-hand by the Movement's staff and volunteers. This action plan builds on a series of consultations with the ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and a wide range of National Societies held between February and June 2021. It outlines a comprehensive set of activities that all components of the Movement will strive to implement to better prevent and respond to the humanitarian consequences of war in cities. The plan is built around five interconnected action areas:

- a) documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to improve the Movement's prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities;
- b) strengthening the Movement's collective capacity to provide humanitarian protection and assistance in contexts of urban warfare through a multifaceted, multi-year and scalable effort;
- c) raising awareness through public communication of the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of urban warfare;
- d) influencing parties to conflict through humanitarian diplomacy to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and change how conflicts are fought in urban areas; and
- e) ensuring implementation of the commitments undertaken, including through the mobilization of resources to support National Societies operating in contexts of urban warfare.

A. DOCUMENTING THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS OF WAR IN CITIES

Documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities is an essential first step in strengthening the Movement's prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities to alleviate the suffering caused by urban warfare. There is a need to strengthen the Movement's ability to collect accurate, reliable and relevant data and to share information, including human impact stories, on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, in line with existing mandates, the Fundamental Principles, data protection principles, accountability requirements, the "do no harm" principle and other operational constraints.

There is also a need to better understand the urban environment and its residents, urban systems and governance structures, and the complexity and interconnectedness of urban service systems that urban dwellers rely on..

To this end, the components of the Movement will, *inter alia*:

- a. work together to develop methodologies and, if required, model templates that establish the minimum data sets required to implement this action plan, based on an analysis of current information gaps and an assessment of existing data collection efforts, to be carried out in the early implementation phases of this action plan;
- b. strengthen National Societies' capacities, where relevant, to collect, analyse and transfer data on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, including through training, the development of tools, systems and methodologies and the application of

appropriate safeguards to ensure compliance with data protection principles, and by reinforcing internal procedures;

- c. work together to identify context-specific best practice to help ensure the safety and security of National Society staff and volunteers who collect and analyse data and that of the persons interviewed, notably through lessons learned from the Safer Access Framework and the development of safe and secure means of communication.

The ICRC, in consultation with the IFRC and National Societies, will:

- d. establish a resource centre for the regular sharing of publicly available data and human impact stories, communication resources and updates on the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare and the international efforts to address these impacts.

B. STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT'S OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

A core mission of the Movement is to protect and assist vulnerable people, including in situations of armed conflict. The components of the Movement have unique capacities to provide humanitarian assistance during urban warfare.

In our collective effort to develop a fit-for-purpose operational response to war in cities, the components of the Movement will, *inter alia*:

- a. work to increase our acceptance among all parties and improve security and our access to people and communities affected by war in cities, in line with the Safer Access Framework, notably by:
 - i. investing further in sharing knowledge and raising awareness of the Movement, its mission and Fundamental Principles, as well as the mandates, tasks and core competencies of the Movement's respective components;
 - ii. improving capacities to engage with parties to conflict that control or influence access to the communities affected by urban warfare and with those in a position to influence such actors; and
 - iii. considering actions for strengthening key elements of staff and volunteers' security.
- b. work to strengthen the Movement's protection and assistance response to war in cities, in line with existing guidelines, approaches and frameworks, notably by:
 - i. identifying which assistance and protection capacities are lacking or inadequate and, where possible, develop such capacities as required, including through partnerships within the Movement and with local structures and actors, while respecting the Fundamental Principles and the "do no harm" principle;
 - ii. seeking to collectively strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure that enables the delivery of essential services against the most probable threats and hazards as a function of emergency preparedness;
 - iii. taking steps to identify how the Movement's Fundamental Principles could be invoked more widely to facilitate safe access for essential service providers to carry out their duties, including to operate, maintain, assess and repair critical infrastructure; and

- iv. considering the potential for developing and deploying, where appropriate, a rapid reaction capacity available to all components of the Movement, with the ability to mobilize multidisciplinary resources to ensure access to essential services in the short and long term, in partnership with other agencies and actors at municipal, national and international levels.

To further assist National Societies in implementing these commitments, the ICRC, in collaboration with the IFRC, will, *inter alia*:

- c. expand existing resources, develop an easily accessible repository of all relevant operational tools, guidelines and frameworks that can be used by National Societies to prepare for and operate in contexts affected by urban warfare, and further develop this resource over time based on their requirements;
- d. develop training modules and simulation exercises for National Societies on humanitarian assistance responses specifically tailored to urban armed conflicts, as required.

C. RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Communication with a wide range of actors is essential: to raise awareness of the Movement's concerns about the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, to gain access for protection and assistance activities, to promote meaningful change in military policies and practices and to build trust with local communities.

The Movement must create an environment conducive to fostering greater support from policymakers, those in military circles, parties to conflict and other key actors, and raise awareness with the public about the scale and nature of the humanitarian impacts of war in cities and of the grave implications of current trends. To this end, the ICRC, in collaboration with the IFRC and National Societies, will launch a Movement-wide communication campaign on war in cities and will:

- a. lead efforts to develop a global communication strategy on war in cities, based on a global consultation, that will specify the following: communications objectives, key audiences and contexts, channels and formats, topics and angles, key messages and calls to action, timelines, milestones and key moments for public communication pushes, and the mapping of potential influencers and core media outlets (global and regional); and
- b. lead efforts to develop communication packs on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, enabling National Societies to customize and roll out the communication campaign in their own context, including, as appropriate: data and human impact stories from affected communities, audiovisual materials and creative assets, templates, public and expert engagement and media relations toolkits, and a contact list of Movement experts in a variety of fields and contexts who can act as spokespersons on the topic.

National Societies will:

- c. customize and roll out the communication campaign in their own contexts, as appropriate, in coordination with the ICRC;
- d. communicate about and raise awareness of the role and relevant requirements of IHL; and

- e. as feasible and in line with existing priorities, provide a dedicated communication contact point to work with the contact point on war in cities (see section E of the action plan) by [dd month yyyy].

D. INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE THROUGH HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

If the Movement is to prevent human suffering, the extensive destruction of critical infrastructure and the prolonged disruption to essential services that result from urban warfare, it must continue to identify and promote recommendations and practical measures for long-term legal and policy discussions with those responsible for the conduct of military operations, including political leaders, military commanders, the leaders of non-state armed groups and those in a position to influence their decisions. This includes a concerted and systematic engagement with national political and military authorities to encourage States to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and, insofar as possible, influence how conflicts are fought in urban areas.

Based on the documentation, communication and operational efforts outlined in this action plan, the components of the Movement will, *inter alia*:

- a. work together to raise awareness with key audiences of the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare, the role and requirements of IHL and the need for an effective operational response, taking inspiration from existing communities of concern;
- b. work together to encourage political and military authorities to clarify and/or strengthen the national and international legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities in urban areas and to share examples of good military policy and practice; advocate for protective interpretations of IHL in the diplomatic, academic and public domains; and, in the context of these discussions, highlight:
 - i. specific aspects of law, policy and military doctrine particularly relevant to urban warfare, notably the prohibitions against indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the obligations to take all feasible precautions in attack and against the effects of attacks to protect civilians and civilian objects, the prohibition against the use of human shields, the prohibitions against using starvation as a method of warfare and against attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, the obligations safeguarding the provision of health care and the obligations protecting the natural environment;
 - ii. the obligation of parties to armed conflict to meet the basic needs of the civilian population under their control and to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control;
 - iii. the treaties and rules on weapons that keep on killing when the conflict is over, in accordance with the 2009 Movement Strategy on Landmines, Cluster Munitions and Explosive Remnants of War;
 - iv. as a step towards strengthening the protection of civilians, the need for all parties to armed conflict to avoid using explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas because of the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects, [and, to endorse the international political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas and faithfully implement it in an open, inclusive

and transparent manner, with the involvement of relevant humanitarian organizations, including the ICRC and National Societies].

- c. discuss with political and military authorities, including those of all parties to armed conflict, further policy and other measures concerning the conduct of hostilities and humanitarian responses that can be taken to strengthen the protection of civilians in situations of urban warfare.

The ICRC, in consultation with the IFRC and National Societies, will:

- d. provide updates on international and regional developments to reduce the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to the contact points in National Societies who work on this issue; and develop and inform National Societies of new diplomatic, legal and policy resources for engaging with parties to armed conflict; and
- e. provide, as feasible and required by National Societies, tailored support to engage with specific national audiences through humanitarian diplomacy.

E. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

There is a need to ensure that all components of the Movement, particularly National Societies operating in contexts of urban warfare, are empowered to effectively implement the commitments in this action plan. The ICRC, in consultation with the IFRC and National Societies, will therefore:

- a. develop an implementation monitoring and evaluation plan and convene a Movement Reference Group on War in Cities to guide and support the implementation of this action plan.

All components of the Movement, if feasible and in line with existing priorities, will:

- b. commit to efforts to mobilize additional resources to support the implementation of this action plan, particularly to support National Societies operating in contexts of urban warfare, from [dd month yyyy]; and
- c. inform the ICRC of their contact points for the implementation of this action plan by [dd month yyyy].