



# Power of humanity

Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross  
and Red Crescent Movement

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## War in cities

RESOLUTION

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## RESOLUTION 6

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# War in cities

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The Council of Delegates,

*deeply concerned* by 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 appallingly 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, the environmental damage and the widespread displacement of people, with consequences both for those displaced and sometimes for the communities hosting them, and *acknowledging* that these impacts affect women, men, girls and boys differently,

*recognizing* that many of these consequences are not unique to war in cities, but *underscoring* that they occur on a significantly larger scale because of the density of the civilian population and civilian objects, the belligerents' choice of certain weapons, means and methods of warfare, the population's reliance on interconnected infrastructure systems that enable the delivery of public services and the often protracted nature of urban fighting, and *concerned* that, although urban warfare is not a new phenomenon, current trends in global demographics towards rapid urbanization increase the risk that cities and other urban areas will become the main battlegrounds of future conflicts,

*stressing* that the scale of devastation and suffering caused by urban warfare is determined by the behaviour of the parties fighting in these environments, and *expressing deep concern*, in this respect, at the frequent violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly attacks directed against civilians, civilian objects and other protected persons and objects, including objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the unlawful denial of access to impartial humanitarian organizations and the use of human shields,

*noting* that while improved compliance with IHL will significantly alleviate the suffering caused by urban warfare, it may not always be sufficient to ensure the full protection of civilians,

*expressing deep concern*, in this respect, at the grave humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area and of siege and encirclement practices, and *recognizing* the further harm that may be caused by the use of new technologies of warfare in urban areas,

*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 capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found through neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action, and *underscoring* that Movement components have unique capacities to access, protect and assist people and communities affected by urban warfare, and that these Movement capacities can best be leveraged when all the parties to the conflict comply with IHL, particularly the obligations to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of all impartial humanitarian relief consignments, equipment and personnel,

*expressing deep concern* that the Movement's staff and volunteers working in urban areas to provide humanitarian assistance, often in stressful and dangerous conditions, frequently face life-threatening challenges when they seek to access and support populations, and *stressing* that due respect should be given to those who die while carrying out their humanitarian work,

*underscoring* that the humanitarian response to the consequences of urban warfare is currently 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 impacts on women, men, girls and boys, taking into account ages, disabilities and backgrounds, and favour a multidisciplinary, integrated and scalable approach, based on the equal participation and full involvement of women, that combines prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities adapted to a specific 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 of strengthening its collective capacity to collect accurate, reliable and relevant data, including sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data, and of sharing information, including human impact stories, on the humanitarian consequences of war in cities, particularly in line with the Movement's Fundamental Principles, data protection principles, accountability requirements, the "do no harm" principle and existing priorities,

*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 (International Conference) in 2019, the reports entitled *Urban Services during Protracted Armed Conflict: A Call for a Better Approach to Assisting Affected People*, *Reducing Civilian Harm in Urban Warfare: A Commander's Handbook* and *Explosive Weapons with Wide Area Effects: A Deadly Choice in Populated Areas*, 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",

*welcoming* the adoption of the resolution on "Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward" at the 2022 Council of Delegates,

*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 Movement guidelines, policies, frameworks and approaches, particularly 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;
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. *invites* all Movement components to take all possible steps to implement the action plan, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, including by:
  - a. documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to strengthen and enhance 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 devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare;
  - d. influencing States and parties to conflict through humanitarian diplomacy to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and to influence how conflicts are fought in urban areas, to the maximum extent possible;
  - e. ensuring implementation of the commitments undertaken, including through the mobilization of resources to support National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) operating in contexts of urban warfare;
4. *calls on* States and parties to armed conflict 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 and by sharing examples of good policy and practice, and *urges* States to make collective or individual commitments to this end at the 34th International Conference;
5. *also calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances, particularly the prohibition against attacks directed against civilians, civilian objects and other protected persons and objects, 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 prohibition against acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population, the obligations safeguarding the provision of health care, the obligations protecting access to education, the obligations protecting the natural environment and the rules protecting civil defence organizations;
6. *further calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to give due attention to the diverse needs of and risks faced by women, men, girls and boys, taking into account ages, disabilities and backgrounds when implementing and applying IHL, to ensure the collection and protection of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data and to encourage the inclusion of persons of different genders and backgrounds in planning, analysing and decision-making;

7. *further calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for the rules of IHL that protect civilians in situations of siege or encirclement, in particular the illegality of besieging civilian populations and the obligation to allow civilians to evacuate a besieged area, the prohibitions against attacking civilians trapped in or fleeing from such areas and against using their starvation as a method of warfare, and the obligations to take constant care to spare them and to protect them from the danger of hostilities;
8. *further calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for the rules of IHL related to specific weapons, in particular landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war;
9. *calls on* States and other actors that support parties to armed conflict, including by providing them with weapons, to do everything reasonably in their power to not only minimize the risk of any adverse impact of their support on civilians but to seize all opportunities to enhance the protection afforded to civilians and to those no longer fighting;
10. *calls on* parties to armed conflict, in accordance with IHL, to meet the basic needs of the civilian population under their control and to ensure the freedom of movement of authorized humanitarian relief personnel, and *calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief consignments, equipment and personnel for civilians in need, subject to their right of control;
11. *calls on* States and parties to armed conflict to take greater steps towards strengthening the protection of civilians from the dangers of urban warfare, particularly to avoid using explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas because of the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects, and *urges* States to promote, in all relevant forums, the strongest possible protection for civilians from the effects of explosive weapons in populated areas, including commitments to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in such areas, and to collaborate in this regard with 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 6 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 among 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 Movement components will strive to implement to better prevent and respond to the humanitarian consequences of war in cities, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity. The plan is built around five interconnected action areas:

- a. documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to strengthen and enhance 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 devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare;
- d. influencing States and parties to conflict through humanitarian diplomacy to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and to influence how conflicts are fought in urban areas, to the maximum extent possible;
- 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, including human impact stories, on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities. The processing of these data, including the collection, storage, transfer and any public use thereof, must be in line with existing mandates, the Fundamental Principles, data protection principles, accountability requirements and the "do no harm" principle.

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 on which urban dwellers rely.

To this end, the Movement components, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, commit to:

- a. endeavour to develop framework agreements for the processing of data;
- b. 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;

- c. strengthen National Societies' capacities, where relevant and based on best practice, to collect, analyse and transfer data, including sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, including through training and by developing tools, systems and methodologies, by applying appropriate safeguards to ensure compliance with data protection principles and the professional standards for protection work and by strengthening internal procedures, to the extent feasible;
- d. 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, particularly through lessons learned from the Safer Access Framework and the development of safe and secure means of communication.

## **B. STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT'S OPERATIONAL RESPONSE**

A core mission of the Movement is to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being, particularly in times of armed conflict. Movement components have unique capacities to provide humanitarian assistance in contexts of urban warfare.

In our collective effort to develop a fit-for-purpose operational response to war in cities, Movement components, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, commit to:

- a. work to increase our acceptance among all parties to armed conflict and to improve security and our access to people and communities affected by war in cities, in line with the Safer Access Framework, particularly by:
  - i. investing further in sharing knowledge about and raising awareness of the Movement, its mission and Fundamental Principles, as well as the mandates, roles and capacities of the Movement's respective components;
  - ii. working together to ensure safe access to communities affected by urban warfare; 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, policies, frameworks and approaches, particularly by:
  - i. promoting preparedness among Movement components for assistance and protection activities in urban warfare, including through partnerships within the Movement and with local communities, civil defence organizations and other 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. endeavouring to identify how the 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. developing and implementing, where appropriate, a common response capacity within 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 and with the support of other Movement components – commits to:

- c. make easily accessible, and further develop over time, 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
- d. develop training modules for National Societies on humanitarian assistance responses specifically tailored to urban warfare, as required and subject to available resources.

### **C. RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH PUBLIC COMMUNICATION**

Communication with a wide range of actors is an essential part of the Movement's efforts to prevent and respond to the humanitarian impacts of war in cities. It is therefore essential for the Movement to create an environment conducive to fostering greater support from policymakers, those in military circles, parties to armed conflict and other key actors, and/or to 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 commits to:

- a. lead efforts to develop a global communication strategy on war in cities, based on a global consultation within the Movement and fully in accordance with sections A, B and D of this action plan, that will specify the following: communication 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.

Given that political sensitivities associated with war in cities can vary greatly from country to country, the global communication strategy will provide a broad direction and will allow for customization when implemented at national level, as deemed appropriate and in close coordination with National Societies.

In coordination with the ICRC, National Societies, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, commit to:

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



- e. as feasible and in line with existing priorities, provide a dedicated communication contact point to work with their National Society contact point for war in cities (see section E of the action plan) by 1 October 2022.

#### **D. INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE THROUGH HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY**

If the Movement is to prevent human suffering, the extensive destruction of critical civilian 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.

This includes engaging concertedly and systematically with national political and military authorities, including national committees and similar entities on IHL that advise and assist national authorities in implementing, developing and spreading knowledge about IHL, in order to encourage them to strengthen legal and policy frameworks related to the conduct of hostilities and to influence how conflicts are fought in urban areas, to the maximum extent possible.

Based on the documentation, communication and operational efforts outlined in this action plan, Movement components, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, commit to:

- a. work together to raise awareness with key audiences of the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare, the relevance 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, to reaffirm their IHL obligations, to commit to develop good faith interpretations of IHL that uphold or strengthen the protection of persons affected by war in cities, to implement practical measures to mitigate the risks to civilians and to identify and share examples of good policy and practice that reduce the human cost of urban warfare, and, in the context of these discussions with the authorities, highlight:
  - i. specific aspects of law, policy and military doctrine particularly relevant to urban warfare, particularly the prohibition against attacks directed against civilians, civilian objects and other protected persons and objects, 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 prohibition against acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population, the obligations safeguarding the provision of health care, the obligations protecting access to education, the obligations protecting the natural environment and the rules protecting civil defence organizations;
  - ii. the diverse needs of and risks faced by women, men, girls and boys, and the need to take into account ages, disabilities and backgrounds when implementing and applying IHL, and the need for the collection and protection of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data and for the inclusion of persons of different genders and backgrounds in planning, analysing and decision-making;

- iii. the rules of IHL that protect civilians in situations of siege or encirclement, in particular the illegality of besieging civilian populations and the obligation to allow civilians to evacuate a besieged area, the prohibitions against attacking civilians trapped in or fleeing from such areas and against using their starvation as a method of warfare, and the obligations to take constant care to spare them and to protect them from the danger of hostilities;
  - iv. the obligation of parties to armed conflict to meet the basic needs of the civilian population under their control, to ensure the freedom of movement of authorized humanitarian relief personnel and to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief consignments, equipment and personnel for civilians in need, subject to their right of control;
  - v. the treaties and rules on weapons that continue to cause suffering, including death and injury, long after conflict has ended, in accordance with the 2009 Movement Strategy on Landmines, Cluster Munitions and Explosive Remnants of War;
  - vi. the need for States and other actors that support parties to armed conflict, including by providing them with weapons, to do everything reasonably in their power to not only minimize the risk of any adverse impact of their support on civilians but to seize all opportunities to enhance the protection afforded to civilians and to those no longer fighting;
  - vii. as a step towards strengthening the protection of civilians from the dangers of urban warfare, 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 the need for States to promote, in all relevant forums, the strongest possible protection for civilians from the effects of explosive weapons in populated areas, including commitments to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in such areas, and to collaborate in this regard with relevant humanitarian organizations, including the ICRC and National Societies.
- c. discuss with political and military authorities further policy and other measures concerning the conduct of hostilities and humanitarian responses that can be taken to strengthen the protection of civilians in urban warfare.

The ICRC – in consultation with the IFRC and National Societies – commits to:

- 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 (see section E), 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 Movement components, 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 – therefore commits to:

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

- b. carry out a mid-term evaluation of and propose amendments to this action plan, as necessary.

All Movement components, to the extent feasible and according to each component's specific mandate and capacity, commit to:

- c. take steps to mobilize additional resources to support the implementation of this action plan, particularly to support National Societies operating in contexts of urban warfare; and
- d. inform the ICRC by 1 October 2022 of their contact points and the people from their organization assigned to the Movement Reference Group on War in Cities in order for this action plan to be implemented.