



Power of humanity

34th International Conference
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

28–31 October 2024, Geneva

Concept Note

34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY – STRENGTHEN HUMANITY
GENEVA · 28–31 OCTOBER 2024



INTRODUCTION

Today's global challenges are both the cause and consequence of compound, interconnected crises that are growing in scale and severity. As conflicts, natural disasters, climate change and health emergencies take an increasing toll, the world faces unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs and protection challenges.

What if, anything, can be done about it?

As the world's oldest, largest humanitarian network, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereafter the Movement) serves to prevent and alleviate suffering wherever it may be found. While States have the primary responsibility to address humanitarian needs, the Movement remains committed to engaging with them to tackle these pressing challenges, based on the shared mission and complementary mandates of its components (National Societies, ICRC and IFRC).

Against this backdrop, several thousand participants will convene to strategize and pursue the Movement's priorities at the 34th International Conference, in October 2024. The gathering will focus on three key pillars: *"Respect International Humanitarian Law"*; *"Respond to Humanitarian Needs and Risks"*; and *"Enable Sustainable Locally Led Action"*.

This Concept Note introduces participants to the significance of this quadrennial Conference; the current global context in which the gathering will be held; why each of the proposed three pillars is considered so important; the planned objectives and anticipated outcomes of the 34th International Conference; and a detailed timeline of the entire preparatory process for the event.

The world's oldest, largest humanitarian network

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

The 34th International Conference is scheduled to take place on 28-31 October 2024 at the International Conference Centre of Geneva. Held every four years, the International Conference is the forum in which all 196 State signatories to the Geneva Conventions, the 192 National Societies, the ICRC, and the IFRC come together to discuss, debate, and decide on pressing humanitarian issues of common interest and concern.

Established in 1867, the International Conference is the Movement's supreme, deliberative body and the world's oldest forum to decide on relevant humanitarian issues based on shared humanitarian principles. Decisions take the form of resolutions. Other major humanitarian players attend as observers and contribute significantly to the deliberations.

The Conference aims to address critical humanitarian issues that are not only at the heart of the Movement's mission¹ but carry global impact. At the same time, it strives to raise government awareness of – and support for – humanitarian action in general, and the Movement's efforts in particular. In addition, the Conference contributes to agreements on policies, legislation, and regulations.

The following four objectives were endorsed by the Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent² to serve as overarching guiding principles for the International Conference.

1. Contribute to respect for and development of International Humanitarian Law (IHL);
2. Improve the safety, security and dignity of individuals by strengthening legal frameworks and policies;
3. Shape the global humanitarian agenda;
4. Foster relationships, alliances, and synergies.

The [33rd International Conference in 2019](#) resulted in the adoption of eight resolutions that spanned the spectrum of timely, significant humanitarian issues. Among them: tackling epidemics and pandemics; national implementation of international humanitarian law; restoring family links while protecting personal data; women and leadership in the Movement; addressing mental health and psychosocial needs; and disaster laws and policies.

**The International
Conference is one of the
world's oldest, largest
international forums**

¹ Since 1863 the Movement mission has been "to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies".

² The Standing Commission is the trustee of the International Conference.

34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE – CONTEMPORARY HUMANITARIAN THREATS

The unpredictability of world events, coupled with ever-increasing humanitarian needs, calls for concerted and enhanced humanitarian action.

The 34th International Conference will provide a platform for dialogue between the Movement, States and other stakeholders to prioritize what must be done to strengthen the impact of humanitarian responses to new, ongoing and future crises. The proposed focus of the 34th International Conference is *“Navigate Uncertainty – Strengthen Humanity”*.

Just three months after the 33rd International Conference, the COVID-19 pandemic struck on a scale not seen since the 1918 influenza outbreak. Lessons learned from the global response to COVID-19 highlighted several needs: to strengthen the resilience of national, regional and global institutions, activate social protection, and enhance accountability and transparency at all levels.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2022 categorically confirmed that the climate crisis is also a humanitarian crisis. The exponentially accelerating effects of global warming across the planet – in the form of heatwaves, multi-year droughts, recurrent floods and water scarcity – are felt more acutely by poorer, more vulnerable people, particularly those in areas of high population density and growth, where resilience and recovery are difficult. For those already affected by armed conflict and other crises, the impacts of climate change have hindered their ability to cope and recover.

This complex and unpredictable humanitarian environment is further exacerbated by a backdrop of misinformation, hate speech and increasingly fierce power competition, fuelling tensions with potential to spark further conflict and violence.

In addition, the acceleration of digitalization, artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities is bringing risks and threats for civilian populations, as well as a whole new set of opportunities. Following on from the reflections and discussions on new technologies of warfare at the 33rd International Conference, the upcoming conference will address some of the humanitarian consequences of new technologies.

With the digital transformation of the humanitarian sector, the Movement and other impartial humanitarian organizations are facing a new layer of digital threats, which can affect their ability to protect the people they serve. Just two years after the 33rd International Conference approved a resolution to protect the personal data of the Movement Restoring Family Links programme, the ICRC suffered a massive cyber-attack on its Central Tracing Agency, targeting the data and personal information of some 500,000 vulnerable people receiving services from the Movement.

Against this backdrop, ensuring compliance with International Humanitarian Law – in the digital space as in the physical one – will be critical to address the most pressing challenges of our time.

PROPOSED FOCUS OF THE 34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY - STRENGTHEN HUMANITY

The International Conference is a forum that considers how to further mobilize collective, unified action to tackle current humanitarian challenges, anticipate risks and future crises, and design tomorrow's responses. Three broad pillars are proposed for the 34th International Conference:



01

**Respect International
Humanitarian Law**



02

**Respond to
Humanitarian Needs
and Risks**



03

**Enable Sustainable
Locally Led Action**

PROPOSED FOCUS OF THE 34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY - STRENGTHEN HUMANITY

01 → **Respect International Humanitarian Law**

Given today's highly polarized environment, with more than 100 armed conflicts going on around the world, the International Conference in 2024 will be a timely moment to reaffirm the relevance and importance of IHL to protect people affected by armed conflict, coinciding with the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

Following up on the 2019 "Bringing IHL home" resolution, the 34th International Conference will continue to address the primary responsibility of States to uphold IHL and lead by example – by implementing the resolution effectively at the national level. It will further consider how to strengthen the application of IHL with regards to new means and methods of warfare.

And finally, the International Conference will address the human cost of urban warfare, building on the spotlight session of the 33rd International Conference and the Council of Delegates resolution on 'war in cities'.

02 → **Respond to Humanitarian Needs and Risks**

A world beset by so many complex, multi-dimensional crises requires humanitarian action that is as relevant and effective as possible in responding to needs and anticipating future risks.

The Conference will reaffirm humanitarian action's crucial grounding in the Fundamental Principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. It will consider how, leveraging innovation, digitalization and partnerships can contribute to bringing humanitarian action to scale, while re-affirming the consensus to ensure respect and protection of humanitarian data online and offline.

It will also consider the investments and actions needed to anticipate and prepare for crisis, to mitigate their worst impacts on already-vulnerable people and build greater resilience, including through comprehensive disaster reduction and adaptation to climate change. States and the Movement play a key role in ensuring that institutional preparedness, readiness and response to high profile and silent or less visible crises have sustainable humanitarian impacts.

PROPOSED FOCUS OF THE 34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: NAVIGATE UNCERTAINTY - STRENGTHEN HUMANITY

03 → **Enable Sustainable Locally Led Action**

The history of humanitarian response has demonstrated the power of locally-led action. This action is based on the solidarity and resilience of communities. Enabling conditions for greater locally-led action is an important part of access to protection and assistance for those individuals most affected.

The Movement must continue to support and strengthen its member National Societies and their networks of local branches to promote community resilience and protect and assist local communities in the longer term.

National Societies must be able to deliver on their commitments to the people they serve, as well as to their governments in their capacity as auxiliary in the field of humanitarian assistance. Demonstrating respect, support and empowerment of National Societies through long-term investment in their institutional capacity is critical for the success of local principled action. This also requires finding effective funding models to ensure the sustainability of National Societies.

Effective local preparedness and response to disasters and emergencies also requires domestic disaster laws, policies, strategies and plans as promoted by International Disaster Response Law (IDRL).



WHAT THE 34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WANTS TO ACHIEVE & OUTCOMES

HUMANITARIAN DIALOGUE - WHAT THE 34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WANTS TO ACHIEVE

- An International Conference designed for interactive dialogue, with relevant topics and meaningful outcomes.
- An International Conference that is a safe space for humanitarian dialogue, free from controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- An International Conference that is highly inclusive and participatory, where voices from all parts of the globe can be heard.
- An International Conference that fosters constructive engagement among participants, who bring innovative thinking and fresh perspectives to the table.
- An International Conference that strives to use a mix of formal and creative sessions to cater to different needs and preferences, with a view to delivering on the commitments set out in the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#) endorsed by the Movement.

FOLLOWING UP ON THE 33RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Maintaining a continuum between International Conferences is an important factor in the event's historic success. Progress reports on resolutions approved, and pledges made at past Conferences are central to highlighting achievements and identifying challenges from one International Conference to the next. To demonstrate the outcomes of the upcoming Conference, as well as to highlight achievements and challenges that have affected the delivery of previous commitments, Conference members are encouraged to share their progress using the real-time online reporting mechanism at <https://rcrcconference.org/about/33rd-international-conference/>.

OUTCOMES

- Humanitarian needs and trends are identified and discussed in interactive thinking and stimulating debates while formulating effective, fit-for-purpose humanitarian action.
- Resolutions are adopted to map out ways forward.
- Forward-looking informal discussions provide an opportunity to think outside the box, consider "unthinkable" humanitarian crises, and visualize their implications for humanitarian response.
- Statements from Conference members and observers are formally recorded in the Conference report.
- Voluntary "pledges" are made with commitments to taking specific measurable action to address humanitarian needs in global, regional and national contexts.
- Participants are part of a network of committed humanitarian decision-makers and their contributions are reflected in both the Conference outcomes and in the related strategies and policies later developed by States and/or humanitarian actors.
- Five members of the [Standing Commission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent](#) are elected³.

THE PREPARATORY PROCESS

The agenda and programme for this International Conference will be developed through an iterative drafting and consultation process. In the lead-up to the Conference, engagement and consultation with States will take place through informative preparatory sessions organized with both Permanent Missions in Geneva and with their national capitals. Consultations with National Societies will be built into scheduled regional conferences, plus policy and legal meetings. Specific sessions will be arranged for this purpose.

Six months before the International Conference, a preparatory meeting will bring together all participants to share their questions and input to the draft Resolutions. Engagement with observers will take place at dedicated sessions.

³ Five members of the Standing Commission are elected in their Ad-Personam capacity from among National Society candidates by the members of the International Conference.

CONTACT US

This Concept Note sets out an initial overview of content for the 34th International Conference.

Feedback and comments are invited in response to the following questions:

1. Does the current framing of the 34th Conference reflect the critical issues and conversations that need to take place?
2. What are the specific topics that the International Conference should address?

Comments on this proposed concept will inform the agenda – a preliminary outline of which will be shared in July 2023. Please send your comments by 19 May 2023 to conferences@rcrcconference.org.

PROPOSED TIMEFRAME

MAY 2023	Deadline for feedback on Concept Note
JULY 2023	Preliminary outline of agenda for 34th International Conference sent out to members
NOVEMBER 2023	Elements of Resolutions ready for consultation
JANUARY 2024	Deadline for comments on elements of Resolutions
JANUARY — OCTOBER 2024	Pledges to be discussed and agreed – model pledges put forward on specific topics
28 APRIL 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Notice of convocation for 34th International Conference, along with draft provisional agenda and programme → Draft zero Resolutions ready for consultation → Call for candidates to the election of the Standing Commission
MAY 2024	34th International Conference preparatory meeting on draft zero Resolutions
JUNE 2024	Deadline for reporting on 33rd International Conference Resolutions and pledges
LATE/28 AUGUST 2024	Deadline for comments on provisional agenda and programme and draft zero Resolutions
11 SEPTEMBER 2024	Dispatch of 34th International Conference official working documents; draft Resolutions, progress reports, provisional agenda, etc.
LATE OCTOBER 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 24th session of the IFRC General Assembly → Council of Delegates of the Movement (adoption of the 34th International Conference agenda)
28–31 OCTOBER 2024	34th International Conference (opening ceremony and procedural matters on afternoon of 28 October)