



# Power of humanity

34th International Conference  
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

28–31 October 2024, Geneva

## 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

OUTLINE OF PROPOSED AGENDA TOPICS

July 2023

**EN**

Original: English

---

# Outline of proposed agenda topics for the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

---

## *Navigate Uncertainty – Strengthen Humanity*

Today's global challenges are both the cause and consequence of compound, interconnected crises, such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, climate change and health emergencies. As these crises grow in scale and severity, they take an increasing toll, resulting in unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs and greater protection challenges. Concerted and enhanced humanitarian action is therefore needed, based on respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and the Fundamental Principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

As the world's oldest and largest humanitarian network, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement ("the Movement") serves to prevent and alleviate suffering wherever it may be found. While states have the primary responsibility for addressing 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: the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is a key forum for considering how to spur collective, unified action to tackle current humanitarian challenges, anticipate risks and future crises, and design tomorrow's responses. It brings together the Movement and the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions and other key humanitarian partners. They discuss how to strengthen the impact of humanitarian responses to new, ongoing and future crises; set priorities; and undertake joint commitments that translate into tangible outcomes for affected people.

This outline follows on from the initial proposal of topics for decision and debate at the 34th International Conference and provides some preliminary information on topics to be discussed outside the formal agenda (side events).

## **PILLAR 1: BUILDING A GLOBAL CULTURE OF RESPECT FOR IHL**

The International Conference will likely be held in a challenging international environment, in which the relevance of IHL to protecting people affected by armed conflict will be plainly apparent. Thoughtful leadership in the debates and decision-making will help build a global culture of respect for IHL and encourage states to reaffirm their commitment to effectively implementing and respecting the law.

Respect for IHL depends on states holding themselves, and each other, to account. Building a global culture of respect for IHL starts with a shared understanding of the rules, and entails leading by example. Having a clear understanding of the legal framework and effectively incorporating international obligations into national legal systems encourage better respect for IHL by all parties to armed conflict and strengthen parties' ability to influence others.

Two resolutions will be introduced for decision: a general resolution reaffirming essential principles of IHL, together with a call for states to continue working towards better national implementation (following up on the previous conference's "Bringing IHL home" resolution);

and a resolution calling for the protection of civilians against risks resulting from the increasing digitalization of armed conflicts. The resolution on digital threats will aim to advance multilateral, humanitarian and tech debates on the subject. The emblems of the red cross and red crescent in particular are also under pressure from growing digital threats. The resolution may mention a “digital emblem” and provide direction on next steps, notably whether further work towards a digital emblem is desirable and, if so, which avenues could be pursued to implement it under IHL. Both resolutions could briefly encourage states and their National Societies to work together on relevant objectives.

The International Conference will celebrate the Geneva Conventions as a common good and will reaffirm their relevance on their 75th anniversary.

A plenary session is envisaged on the issue of building a global culture of respect for IHL. In addition, sessions would be held throughout the day on the priority topics for engaging with states and the Movement, for example on:

- urban warfare: a high-level panel seeking states’ recognition of the humanitarian concerns regarding urban warfare observed by the Movement, and their commitment to joint efforts to address those concerns, in particular to better protect essential infrastructure
- autonomous weapon systems: to analyse the humanitarian, legal and ethical challenges these weapons present and identify avenues to address them
- protecting the natural environment in armed conflict: to encourage states, working with National Societies, to better implement IHL rules related to protecting the environment, particularly given that today’s armed conflicts largely overlap with the epicentres of our global environmental and climate crises
- IHL and disability inclusion (i.e. protecting people with disabilities in armed conflict): to increase awareness that people with disabilities have more difficulty getting protection and assistance in armed conflict, and to seek pledge-level commitments from states to improve their implementation of IHL in areas that complement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

A common thread in these discussions will be devising ways to build a culture of respect through humanitarian education and IHL, including by expanding cooperation between public authorities and National Societies in providing humanitarian education, through both formal and informal learning, and especially in public schools. In light of the need for respect of IHL today and in the future, ways to highlight the engagement with the young people attending the International Conference will be explored.

Based on the proposals received so far, possible topics for side events include: the human cost of the disruption of satellite services; gender and IHL; the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons; voluntary reports on implementation of IHL; and evidence, innovation, and best practice in building a culture of respect for IHL, including through formal and informal education.

## **PILLAR 2: STANDING BY OUR FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IN RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND RISKS**

In a world beset by so many complex, multi-dimensional crises made more acute by the effects of climate change, unplanned urban development, digital risks, and the effects of growing inequality and political, social and economic instability, humanitarian action needs to be as effective as possible if it is to respond adequately and anticipate future risks. The increasingly frequent shocks are leaving millions of people behind and without access to humanitarian services, because so many people need so much help.

The Movement has a distinctive role in humanitarian action due to the centrality of its Fundamental Principles. These principles, shaped by the Movement and globally recognized, serve as crucial enablers and drivers for creating an effective humanitarian response. They bestow legitimacy and credibility upon the Movement, guiding all humanitarian actors and shaping their approach to various crises, including those that are often overlooked. Applying them enables effective and appropriate protection and assistance, priority for the most vulnerable individuals and communities, access and safety in high-risk environments, a common framework for partnerships, and facilitated humanitarian diplomacy.

The International Conference will be an opportunity to further recognize, reaffirm and showcase how the Movement's Fundamental Principles – particularly humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – are foundational across all three pillars as enablers of effective humanitarian action. In the past, states solidly supported these principles, but in recent times components of the Movement have faced increasing challenges to putting them into practice.

The International Conference will be also an opportunity to appeal to states to respect neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action. A session could be dedicated to demonstrating how the Fundamental Principles underpin affected people's access to humanitarian protection and services and thus alleviate suffering, protect lives, and uphold human dignity. It could also unpack some of the challenges to principled action.

An updated resolution on disaster law will be introduced for decision, building on momentum gathered since 2003 at each regular session of the International Conference. It will increase support for comprehensive and multi-sectoral disaster laws, including by recognizing a new consolidated (but non-binding) checklist covering all phases of disaster risk management. The checklist will, among other things, highlight ways in which national laws can incorporate early and anticipatory action and critical elements of recovery, and ensure a comprehensive approach is taken to preparing for and responding to health emergencies.

The Conference will also be looking at funding for humanitarian operations. Funding conditions need to make it possible to find sustainable solutions that help maintain affected people and their livelihoods or to take preventive or early action when the risks for affected people are high. This is especially true in contexts where there is little ability to be flexible and adapt to changing needs. A dedicated session could reflect on the need for investment in preparedness, the need for innovative partnerships to respond to silent and chronic crises, and how, if financial resources were predictable, humanitarian services could be more sustained, allowing them to address the proliferation of risks.

The International Conference will also invite states and National Societies to consider what actions will be their priorities in addressing the extensive and fast evolving humanitarian needs and risks. In particular, the members could be invited to "think big" about specific areas where the Movement, states and other partners could work together on a much larger scale in order to anticipate, prepare for and respond to crises.

Specific areas for consideration could include: the humanitarian (and health) impacts of climate change; mental health and psychosocial needs in humanitarian settings and contexts of distress, and equitable access to health services, including vaccinations.

Focusing on humanitarian needs and risks also provides an opportunity to consider how to prepare for future humanitarian protection challenges.

Based on the proposals received so far, possible topics for side events could include: the important work done by the Movement in partnership with states on topics brought forward during previous conferences, such as the work on mental health and psychosocial support in armed conflict and other emergencies; the use of distinctive emblems (and signs) to protect

health care during armed conflict; and plans to give proper consideration to the management of the dead in emergencies, emphasizing the role of states and humanitarian organizations.

### **PILLAR 3: ENABLE SUSTAINABLE, LOCALLY LED ACTION**

The International Conference will highlight the benefits of increased international and domestic investment in local leadership, ownership and action related to humanitarian activities, resilience and peace-building. The global COVID-19 response was only the most recent example of the global impact that local first responders can have in preventing disease transmission, responding to its effects, and recovering from the long-term consequences.

The International Conference will build a common understanding of the role of local actors in pushing forward global ambitions (such as in sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, adapting to climate change, universal health coverage). It will also explore the benefits of empowering local resources, in coordination with public social protection systems and local rural or urban authorities, and promoting local coalitions to catalyse and energize local action. These coalitions could bring together a range of entities, including National Societies and their networks of local branches spread throughout their countries, the private sector, NGOs, and local governments. The International Conference will also promote international partnerships that empower local actors' decision-making in project design and delivery.

Likewise, the International Conference will encourage states to recognize the value of investing in local and national capacities and strengthening the natural partnership with their respective Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, as their auxiliary in the humanitarian field.

A resolution will be proposed for adoption on enabling sustainable, locally led action by National Societies. The resolution will highlight the importance of investing in local leadership, local capacity, and local solutions to solving national and global challenges. The resolution will develop a clear vision about the role of local capacity and local action in achieving success in humanitarian activities and other, related global agendas. It will also clarify what local action means with regard to National Societies, as principled humanitarian organizations that also contribute to public health and development goals. It will encourage states and National Societies to work together to ensure that National Societies remain (or become) the "partner of choice" both for communities and for the authorities at all levels while acting in line with the Fundamental Principles. This will include strengthening the auxiliary role (including at the local level), making their resource base sustainable, facilitating the development of branches and skilled volunteers, and working together to support social safety nets at the local level.

A plenary session is envisaged to illustrate the benefits of increasing international and domestic investment in local ownership in key areas of humanitarian action and areas that promote peace and resilience, including locally led community health action and front-line preparedness for, response to and recovery from man-made and natural hazard events. Other sessions could focus on how to empower National Society volunteers to lead social safety nets at the community level, in coordination with public social protection systems and local rural or urban authorities; how National Societies and authorities can work together to support community-led action and community participation in resilience-building, public health, peace-building, support to vulnerable migrants and humanitarian response; good examples of National Societies' efforts with local authorities to convene and build coalitions across the private and voluntary sectors at the branch level; and taking a people-centric approach to risk-sharing in order to support localization objectives, enable principled, effective humanitarian action and meet everyone's accountability requirements.

Based on the proposals received so far, possible topics for side events could include: showcasing and promoting the positive outcomes in terms of National Societies' structural and operational capacities and sustainability that have been achieved through National Society

funding mechanisms within the IFRC (the Capacity-Building Fund and the Disaster Response Emergency Fund) and the Movement (the National Society Investment Alliance and the Empress Shôken Fund); promoting the Rapid Disbursing Debt Conversion Mechanism, which enables governments to redirect foreign currency bilateral debt into local-currency-funded humanitarian action in its country; promoting the IFRC's certification scheme as an example of progress in securing trust from communities and partners; and showcasing localization in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, with a focus on practical guidance on transitioning from humanitarian assistance provider to enabler.

### **List of pledges (to be developed)**

Pillar 1: Building a global culture of respect for IHL

- Urban warfare
- Protection of the natural environment in armed conflict
- IHL and disability inclusion
- Voluntary reports on implementation of IHL

Joint pledges between states and National Societies will be encouraged to increase joint offerings on humanitarian education.

Pillar 2: Standing by our Fundamental Principles in responding to humanitarian needs and risks

- Open pledge related to the Movement approach to education

Joint pledges between states and National Societies will be encouraged on scaling up.

Pillar 3: Enable sustainable, locally led action

- Pledges with National Societies' UN partners to strengthen respectful and supportive partnerships (including public–private partnerships) and commitments on local collaboration
- Open pledge on migration

### **Progress reports**

This is an outline of the topics that require progress reports to follow up on the previous conference, held in 2019. Progress reports will be submitted in writing and noted during the plenary session of the International Conference.

- Progress report on Resolution 3 of the 33rd International Conference: “Time to act: Tackling epidemics and pandemics together”
- Progress report on Resolution 4 of the 33rd International Conference: “Restoring Family Links while respecting privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection”
- Progress report on Resolution 5 of the 33rd International Conference: “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”
- Progress report on Resolution 7 of the 33rd International Conference: “Disaster laws and policies that leave no one behind”
- Progress report on Resolution 2 of the 2019 Council of Delegates and the 2022 Council of Delegates progress report, both on the Movement's statement on integrity of the Movement
- Progress report on Resolution 8 of the 32nd and 33rd International Conference: “Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on Operational

Arrangements, dated 28 November 2005, between Magen David Adom in Israel and the Palestine Red Crescent Society”

- Overview of the implementation of the resolutions and pledges of the 33rd International Conference

**Procedural matters**

- Adoption of the agenda for the International Conference by the Movement Council of Delegates
- Election of the International Conference officers and establishment of the subsidiary bodies (commissions, drafting committee)
- Election of five members of the Standing Commission