



Power of humanity

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

27–28 October 2024, Geneva

War in Cities: A Solemn Appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

April 2024

EN

CD/24/XX
Original: English
For information

Document prepared by the Norwegian Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross,
in consultation with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

War in Cities: A Solemn Appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2022 Council of Delegates resolution “War in cities” and the annexed “2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities” (Movement Action Plan) contained a set of commitments to be carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies).

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) is convinced that the scale of the human suffering and destruction caused by urban warfare requires all States, as well as non-State armed group parties to armed conflict, to take urgent and wide-ranging action, and the draft resolution and the annexed appeal carry this work forward. The appeal will present the Movement’s humanitarian concerns directly to States and help strengthen joint work over the coming years to build capacities to prevent and respond to the brutal realities of urban warfare.

1) INTRODUCTION

War in cities has devastating humanitarian impacts, leaving appallingly high numbers of civilians wounded and killed, hospitals destroyed, medical systems in crisis, medical personnel threatened and injured, and with sick patients succumbing to preventable deaths. Even those fortunate enough to survive carry physical and mental scars long after the fighting abates.

The volunteers and staff of the Movement try to alleviate human suffering and protect lives whenever armed conflict breaks out, often in dangerous situations. They witness the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare every day and are all too often prevented from providing assistance.

The proposed resolution will present our concerns about war in cities directly to States in a united and strong manner. It will contribute to moving forward some of the objectives of the Movement Action Plan and will be a vehicle for the Movement to pledge to work with States over the coming years to build capacities to prevent and respond to the brutal realities of urban warfare.

A spotlight session on urban warfare, as part of the commission on international humanitarian law (IHL), and various pledges will complement and strengthen the Solemn Appeal.

2) BACKGROUND

The Movement’s profound humanitarian and IHL concerns about the unacceptably high costs of war in cities were extensively documented in Resolution 6 of the 2022 Council of Delegates (CD/22/R6) “War in Cities”, which adopted the Movement Action Plan. The action plan commits the Movement as a whole to a wide range of activities, including better documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities, strengthening prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities and strengthening the Movement’s collective capacity to provide

protection and assistance in contexts of urban warfare through a multi-year effort. That same year, the Council of Delegates adopted a resolution on “Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward”.

The Movement alone can never adequately prevent or remedy the profound and lasting humanitarian impacts of urban warfare. It must also mobilize and cooperate with States, other international humanitarian actors and the public to achieve lasting results.

Further to consultations within the Movement, it was proposed that this 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is an historic opportunity, and indeed has a responsibility, to address the unacceptable realities of war in cities and the profound implications of such wars for the protection of civilians, for humanitarian assistance, for the fabric of IHL and for future generations, who will increasingly live in cities. Consultations within the Movement Reference Group on War in Cities, and more specifically within the subgroups established under the Movement Action Plan, have provided useful inputs to develop the proposed draft resolution and Solemn Appeal.

3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

Resolution

The resolution is intended to put the human costs of urban warfare squarely in front of States and other participants of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference) on behalf of the entire Movement. It adopts the Solemn Appeal, to be presented at the 34th International Conference, and invites States to make specific joint or individual pledges to actions they will take in this field. In the lead-up to the conference, the ICRC and National Societies will present and promote the use of pledges on war in cities with State officials. Finally, the draft resolution also promotes endorsement of and adherence to the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

Solemn Appeal on war in cities

The proposed Solemn Appeal is addressed to all States, as well as to non-State armed group parties to armed conflicts. This is to include all those responsible for the humanitarian impacts of war in cities and to allow the Movement to use the Solemn Appeal as a mobilization and advocacy tool beyond and after the 34th International Conference. It is consistent with the 2022 Council of Delegations resolution on war in cities, and many calls addressed to all States, as well as to non-State armed group parties to armed conflict. The draft Solemn Appeal calls on them to explicitly make the protection of civilians a strategic objective and to take concrete actions to prevent and mitigate civilian suffering and facilitate access for humanitarian actors.

The draft Solemn Appeal is an important step towards achieving two key objectives of the Movement’s Action Plan:

- “raising awareness through public communication of the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare”
- “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”.

The Movement’s Solemn Appeal will be presented at the International Conference, such as through the spotlight session on war in cities, which could feature audiovisual media, panellists and a presentation of the Solemn Appeal.

4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The background document related to the 2022 Council of Delegates resolution on “War in cities” ~~resolution~~ highlights that executing certain activities outlined in the Movement Action Plan is likely to entail resource implications.

The draft 2024 Council of Delegates resolution is designed to support the achievement of key objectives from the Movement Action Plan. It sets out important initiatives by the Movement, such as National Societies engaging in discussions with their respective governments about pledges and their implementation, and various components of the Movement leveraging the Solemn Appeal as a powerful tool for advocacy and communication. Whether these commitments will have resource implications for Movement components or not depends on the extent of the resources already allocated to the Movement Action Plan and its programmes and activities.

5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Building on Resolution 6 of the 2022 Council of Delegates, a Movement Reference Group on War in Cities was established to oversee and assist with the execution of the Movement Action Plan. Additionally, a framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation was developed. The draft resolution for the 2024 Council of Delegates serves as a continuation of the 2022 Council of Delegates resolution, and implementation and monitoring will be carried out under the existing framework.

6) CONCLUSIONS

Through the proposed resolution and Solemn Appeal, the Movement will present directly to States its concerns about war in cities. This will help strengthen joint work over the coming years, including through related pledges, to build the capacities to prevent and respond to the brutal realities of urban warfare. International mobilization is needed to recognize the unique horrors of urban warfare, to prevent them from occurring by changing how wars in cities are fought, including through compliance with IHL and the promotion of new norms. The proposed Solemn Appeal as an annex to the short resolution is a critical part of this work.