



# 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

DRAFT ZERO RESOLUTION

April 2024

**EN**

CD/24/DRX.X  
Original: English  
Draft

Document prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross,  
in consultation with the Movement Reference Group on War in Cities

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The Council of Delegates,

*deeply concerned* by the devastating humanitarian impacts of war in cities, experienced 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, livelihoods 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 that also impacts the communities hosting them, and *acknowledging* that these impacts affect women, men, girls and boys differently,

*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 continue to be the main battlegrounds of conflicts now and in the future,

*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 to prevent, reduce and respond to the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare, starting with strengthened compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL),

*recalling* Resolution 6 on “War in cities” adopted at the 2022 Council of Delegates and all previous Council of Delegates resolutions and other Movement guiding documents of relevance for the work of the Movement’s components on war in cities and recalled in that resolution,

1. *adopts* the 2024 resolution “War in cities: A Solemn Appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement” (Solemn Appeal), which is annexed below and to be presented at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent;
2. *calls upon* States and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to make pledges related to war in cities in order to demonstrate their commitment and to take concrete actions to prevent and respond to the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare, and *calls upon* States to support the Movement’s work in this respect;
3. *calls upon* States that have not yet done so to endorse the 2022 Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, and *urges* all States, as well as non-State armed group parties to armed conflict, to adhere to and faithfully implement its commitments;

4. *welcomes* the ongoing work under the 2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities, *encourages* Movement components to promote widely the annexed Solemn Appeal and *welcomes* the ongoing work under Resolution 11 of the 2022 Council of Delegates, “Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward”.

## **Annex**

### **War in cities: A Solemn Appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

**When wars are fought in cities**, we see appallingly high numbers of civilians wounded and killed. Over and over again, we see hospitals destroyed, medical systems in crisis, medical personnel threatened and injured, and sick patients succumbing to preventable deaths. Even those fortunate enough to survive carry physical and mental scars long after the fighting abates.

**When front lines move into cities**, we see streets, homes, cultural property and buildings turned into battlegrounds and civilians trapped in besieged areas. Despite their resilience and ingenuity, we see the lives of civilians in urban areas become ever more precarious. Every trip to the market, to work or to school can mean a loved one is hit by a stray bullet, shrapnel or an explosive blast. We see those forced to flee lose contact with their families, sometimes never to meet again.

**When explosive weapons are used in cities**, we often see entire neighbourhoods turned into rubble, their residents buried underneath. Infrastructure critical for the survival of the civilian population is destroyed and damaged without means for repair. We see residents run out of drinking water and food supplies, electricity provision disrupted and communication networks break down. Civilian life grinds to a halt and takes years, sometimes decades, to rebuild.

The volunteers and staff of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement try to alleviate human suffering and protect lives whenever armed conflict breaks out, often in dangerous situations. We experience the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare every day and are all too often prevented from providing assistance. **We have seen enough.**

Our Movement was born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield. Decades of efforts to limit the suffering of war victims culminated 75 years ago in the adoption of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and, subsequently, of their Additional Protocols.

However, these historic achievements stand in stark contrast to the scale of devastation and suffering of recent conflicts fought in cities, where an estimated 70% of the global population will live by 2050. The implications of current urban conflict trends for the protection of civilians, for humanitarian assistance, for the fabric of international humanitarian law and for future generations are profound.

**We, therefore, solemnly appeal to all States party to the Geneva Conventions to uphold their obligation to respect and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.**

**We further solemnly appeal to all States, as well as to non-State armed group parties to armed conflict, to:**

- ensure, where fighting in urban areas cannot be avoided, that the protection of civilians and civilian objects is given the highest priority in military operations, including through full and rigorous compliance with IHL principles and rules,

- adopt and implement policies to avoid using explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas owing to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects, and to minimize civilian harm from the use of all explosive weapons,
- improve the capacity of armed forces to understand the location and interconnected nature of critical infrastructure that provides essential services for civilian populations and to avoid damage to such infrastructure,
- take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks and uphold the prohibition on the use of human shields,
- respect and protect medical personnel and facilities, as well as Red Cross and Red Crescent personnel, volunteers and assets, and uphold the protective value of the emblems,
- facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access to areas of urban conflict for impartial humanitarian assistance, civil defence, essential service providers and necessary commodities,
- ensure that all armed forces and fighters are provided with adequate training and operational guidance that supports them to comply with IHL and protect civilian populations when fighting in urban areas,
- monitor compliance with IHL and ensure accountability for violations of IHL, including through effective investigations and prosecutions as appropriate,
- review and improve the capacities of armed forces to understand the humanitarian impacts of their military operations, including through data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and to respond to the needs of the civilian population.

Every one of us can, and has a responsibility to, work to reverse current trends. Imagine it was your family hiding in the basement, your neighbour caught in the crossfire, or your friend unable to receive medical treatment for their life-threatening injuries. Let us be guided by our common humanity and, together, take urgent and effective action to alleviate the plight of civilians affected by war in cities.