



# Power of humanity

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

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## Reaffirming the role of the Movement as a factor of peace

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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## BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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# Reaffirming the role of the Movement as a factor of peace

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the complex challenges of an interconnected world, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement emphasizes the urgent need for a renewed commitment to building peace. The global landscape is marked by geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, crises and other emergencies, which are causing increased human suffering. This has prompted the Movement to turn once again to reflecting on its own role in contributing to peace and to advocate for collaborative, multilateral efforts to address the root causes and enhance community resilience. Recognizing that united, multilateral efforts are required to tackle global threats, such as pandemics and climate change, the Movement welcomes the United Nations Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, which emphasizes conflict resolution, community resilience and humanitarian values. It sees alignment between this Agenda and its own efforts to promote youth engagement, volunteering and education as transformative elements that contribute to bridging the humanitarian, development and peace-building nexus.

The proposed resolution for the 2024 Council of Delegates seeks to reaffirm the Movement's longstanding commitment to supporting peace (as evidenced in International Conference resolutions since 1921 and Council of Delegates resolutions adopted in 1961, 1963 and 1967), focusing on strengthening capacities and overcoming barriers to contribute to building peaceful and inclusive societies. Throughout its history, the Movement has sought to study, strengthen and promote its unique contribution to peace, fostering the spirit of humanity and conciliation even in the darkest of times. Over the past 100 years, the Movement has adopted nearly as many resolutions and other documents related to peace.<sup>1</sup>

### 1) INTRODUCTION

In an ever-changing and interconnected world, the pursuit of peace is imperative for the well-being of societies facing diverse challenges. Local communities often bear the brunt of disaster, crisis, armed conflict and other emergencies, and proactive efforts are required to build resilience and foster peace in such environments. Several intersecting trends underscore the compelling need to reaffirm the Movement's commitment to building peace.

Firstly, geopolitical, subregional, local and national tensions and conflicts persist as nations grapple with divergent interests, economic challenges, territorial disputes and ideological differences. These conflicts often escalate into local, national, regional or global tensions, highlighting the fragility of international stability. The Global Peace Index 2023 shows a disturbing increase in both civil and international conflicts, driven by political tensions, economic disparities and environmental challenges. Escalating levels of violence and insecurity have disrupted societies, increasing vulnerabilities and fragility, and the erosion of trust in international institutions and cooperation poses a threat to peaceful diplomacy. Additionally, the Index underscores the vulnerability of nations to external shocks, such as pandemics, economic shocks and climate crises, which can exacerbate existing conflicts. In view of these trends, the imperative to prioritize peace-building, conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1921 and 1985, 74 resolutions and documents were adopted and are compiled in the document "To Promote Peace: Resolutions on peace adopted by the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent since 1921", ICRC and IFRC, Geneva, July 1986. Additional resolutions from 1985 to present have been compiled by the ICRC in an internal document.

resolution and cooperation among nations is clearer than ever. In an interconnected world, restoring faith in diplomacy and cooperation is paramount.

Secondly, the world is increasingly susceptible to a wide array of global threats, including pandemics, climate change, misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and cyber security risks. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, demonstrated the swift and devastating impact that unforeseen and unprepared crises can have on communities, societies, economies and international relations.

Throughout its history, the Movement has sought to study, strengthen and promote its unique contribution to peace, fostering the spirit of humanity and conciliation even in the darkest of times. Over the past 100 years, the Movement has adopted nearly as many resolutions and other documents related to peace.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of these global trends and challenges, the Movement's ongoing interest in and desire to strengthen work on this issue, building on its long history of contributions to peace, also complement other global efforts, such as the United Nations Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

These challenges need to be addressed using a proactive approach, characterized by resilience-building, robust international partnerships and sustainable practices. There is a need for renewed dedication to humanitarian diplomacy, conflict resolution, education in values and humanitarian principles, action through youth engagement and multilateral cooperation, which is of paramount importance in mitigating the risk of violence and fostering peaceful coexistence among nations and between organizations.

## 2) BACKGROUND

To address these challenges, the Movement – driven by the principle of humanity – must renew its attention to conflict resolution and prevention, behaviour change through education in the Fundamental Principles and humanitarian values, the promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL), local youth engagement, the transformative power of volunteering and multilateral cooperation. Such efforts are crucial to mitigating the risk of violence, discrimination and exclusion and promoting peaceful coexistence. Founded on the principles articulated by Henry Dunant and inspired by the compassion and dedication of its volunteers, the Movement has played a pivotal role in responding to crises, conflicts and natural disasters worldwide. Since its inception, the Movement has been a beacon of hope, embodying the idea that, in times of adversity, humanity knows no boundaries. Therefore, the call for a reaffirmation of our commitment, as a Movement, to building peace is a vital imperative to ensure a secure and prosperous future for the generations to come and to rebuild trust in principled action, which is essential for our work.

The Movement has always held peace as one of its ultimate objectives.<sup>3</sup> The Movement's motto, "*per humanitatem ad pacem*" – through humanity to peace – underscores its commitment to the promotion of peace. The Statutes of the Movement state that "by its humanitarian work and the dissemination of its ideals, the Movement promotes a lasting peace", defining "lasting peace" as not simply an absence of war but a "dynamic process of cooperation among all States and peoples, cooperation founded on respect for freedom, independence, national sovereignty, equality, human rights, as well as on a fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet the needs of peoples". Peace, in this context, extends beyond the absence of violent conflict to include a dynamic process of cooperation founded on the Fundamental Principles and supported by "a universal sense of

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary*, 1979, pp. 18–20.

solidarity towards all those in need of its protection and assistance”. This commitment to dialogue, cooperation and humanitarian values has evolved over the long history of the components of the Movement.<sup>4</sup> For example, the IFRC emphasizes the importance of creating and sustaining inclusive societies – most recently as a focus on promoting humanitarian values and a culture of non-violence and peace in Strategy 2020 and on people mobilizing for inclusive and peaceful communities in the new Strategy 2030.

The Movement’s ethos revolves around connecting with others and promoting values such as equity, fairness, inclusion and respect for human dignity. The Movement seeks to preserve human dignity, which serves as the foundation of its work, by helping those in need, upholding their voice and demonstrating empathy and solidarity. This commitment to human dignity allows communities to prepare for, cope with and recover from shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects. There is also a commitment to positive and constructive solutions to problems, tensions and the source of violence.<sup>5</sup> Over the past decades, this has also been reflected in different resolutions and pledges at the Statutory Meetings.

### 3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

Involving local actors and communities in decision-making and response efforts is a key approach to promoting peace. Ensuring enabling conditions for the empowerment of local communities and organizations enhances ownership, sustainability and context-appropriate responses.

Local communities possess valuable knowledge, expertise and contextual understanding, making them essential partners in addressing complex challenges and promoting sustainable development, resilience and peace. Localized approaches to aid, development and peace have gained prominence, highlighting a significant shift towards empowering local actors and communities to shape their own responses to crises and conflicts and emphasizing the importance of involving local actors, communities and organizations in decision-making. This approach recognizes that local organizations, communities and local authorities possess intimate knowledge of their unique contexts and challenges, making them better equipped to design and implement effective peace- and resilience-building initiatives. By creating enabling conditions for participation in decision-making and making resources available at the local level, this approach enhances the ownership, sustainability and impact of peace and resilience efforts, promoting self-reliance and strengthening the capacity of communities to withstand and recover from adversity. Ultimately, localization serves as a key driver in building more resilient and more peaceful societies, by fostering partnerships and trust at the grassroots level and ensuring that responses are contextually appropriate and inclusive. Building peace at the local level involves a holistic approach aimed at preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, with a focus on the cultivation of positive relationships, social cohesion and inclusive governance structures. By addressing the root causes of tensions, fostering dialogue and promoting conflict resolution mechanisms, peace-building initiatives contribute to the creation of stable and harmonious community environments. The Movement, by collaborating with local communities, governments and international partners, ensures that its humanitarian efforts are guided by the imperative to save lives and alleviate suffering.

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<sup>4</sup> Vision of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), as defined in its Constitution (Article 4, 2007 version); Declaration “Together for Humanity”, adopted at the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2007); Vision of the IFRC regarding its role in addressing violence as set out in the report on the high-level meeting on violence held in Geneva (2008); IFRC Strategy 2020 (2009); IFRC Youth Declaration (2009); IFRC Strategy on Violence Prevention, Mitigation and Response 2011–2020; Resolution 3 of the 32nd International Conference “Sexual and gender-based violence” (2015).

<sup>5</sup> IFRC Strategy on Violence Prevention, Mitigation and Response, available at: <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/IFRC-SoV-REPORT-2011-EN.pdf>.

Youth engagement and volunteering play a transformative role in bridging the humanitarian, development and peace-building nexus. Volunteers are the lifeblood of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. They are front-line responders during crises and contribute significantly to delivering social services. Young people are viewed as proactive agents of positive change who bring fresh perspectives, innovation and energy to initiatives aimed at preventing conflicts, promoting reconciliation and building resilient communities. By mobilizing volunteers and working in collaboration with local organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent empowers communities, enabling people to regain a sense of control over their lives and contributing to sustainable recovery.

Education remains a cornerstone of youth engagement and community resilience. It is recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for empowering communities and individuals. Current trends in education reflect a dynamic landscape that extends beyond traditional classroom settings, encompassing both formal and non-formal education systems. One prominent trend is the increasing focus on inclusive and equitable education for all, as outlined in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4. This trend emphasizes the importance of ensuring that education reaches marginalized and vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict, displacement and other emergencies. The focus on education therefore extends beyond traditional learning to include both formal and non-formal processes, which encompass humanitarian education and education in emergencies, recognizing their vital role in promoting peace, resilience, inclusive development, psychological well-being and social cohesion among crisis-affected communities.

Education is also recognized as a critical tool for fostering personal and societal well-being. There is a growing emphasis on incorporating peace and global citizenship education into formal curricula at all levels. Such education promotes conflict resolution, empathy, inclusion and intercultural understanding from an early age, cultivating peaceful attitudes and skills and contributing to making communities and societies more harmonious. There is therefore the potential for education to be harnessed as a tool for building resilience by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of challenges arising from crises, such as natural disasters, conflicts and pandemics. Non-formal education is gaining traction, emphasizing the importance of teaching practical life skills, disaster preparedness and emotional resilience alongside traditional academic subjects. This is an area where the Movement can play a prominent role. It works diligently to provide educational opportunities that address not only academic needs but also psychosocial support, life skills and peace education, recognizing that education is a cornerstone of recovery and long-term development.

#### **4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There is a lot of work that is already being done in this area, and the Movement has to do more to communicate and share knowledge internally and externally. We plan to leverage the existing expertise within the Movement to connect, complement and coordinate, with a view to ensuring relevance and efficiency. It is about ensuring greater recognition of the work of National Societies in the areas of youth engagement and volunteering and existing education activities to promote the Fundamental Principles, etc.

#### **5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

With a focus on volunteering and youth engagement, National Societies carry out work, supported and coordinated by the IFRC, to mobilize people for inclusive and peaceful societies in fulfilment with Goal 3 of its Strategy 2030. This work will contribute to responding to the resolution's call to prioritize investment in volunteer- and youth-led programming. In addition, a renewed focus on providing quality humanitarian education and education in emergencies, including the teaching of humanitarian values, and on disseminating IHL will contribute to addressing the resolution's call for

greater volunteer and youth engagement. The IFRC will mainstream existing policies to be implemented with National Societies, map all formal and non-formal education initiatives carried out by National Societies and continue promoting the inclusion of relevant content in curricula in formal and non-formal education settings. The IFRC will also engage in collaboration with other Movement components on research, evidence gathering and advocacy.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will be undertaking policy and operational research in 2024 to determine ways in which its humanitarian activities and its work as a neutral intermediary may contribute to creating an environment conducive to peace. This work will help respond to the resolution's call to gather additional evidence with which to better evaluate the impact of the ICRC (as a Movement component) and assess where it can be strengthened and where its limitations lie as a principled humanitarian actor. The ICRC will collaborate and share knowledge with other Movement components and external partners engaged in similar research to complement and clarify perspectives and findings and to draw lessons learned.

## **6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The challenges highlighted above call for a more inclusive and participatory approach to addressing peace and resilience. The pursuit of peace and resilience is a dynamic and multifaceted endeavour, requiring a commitment to inclusivity, capacity-building and collaborative action to address the unique challenges faced by diverse communities. Through a combination of humanitarian assistance, community engagement and advocacy, the Movement exemplifies the power of principled action in promoting peace and resilience. This approach emphasizes the importance of local wisdom, the power of volunteerism, youth empowerment and accessible education in shaping a more equitable and sustainable world. The Movement's reaffirmation of its commitment to peace and resilience aligns with its historical mission and positions it as a vital force for positive change in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

The 2024 Council of Delegates presents a timely opportunity for the Movement as a whole to declare its continued commitment to supporting peace and resilience, to strengthening the Movement's capacities, advocacy and expertise in this field so that it can better assist vulnerable people in building peaceful and inclusive societies and to maintaining and building on its role as a champion in this area. The proposed resolution aims to increase commitment in terms of strengthening capacities, expanding the approach and widening its application in order to overcome current and potential barriers to scaling up at the required pace.

The proposed resolution will make an appropriate and valuable contribution to the Council of Delegates' previous resolutions and commissions related to the Programme of Action of the Red Cross as a Factor of Peace. By making this commitment and adapting its operations and procedures, the Movement can further contribute to peace and resilience in addition to its efforts to spread knowledge of IHL and its principles and ideals.