



Power of humanity

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War in Cities

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PROGRESS REPORT

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PROGRESS REPORT

War in Cities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council of Delegates (CoD) resolution “War in Cities” (CD/22/R6), along with the Movement Action Plan (MAP) for 2022–2027, seeks to improve the efforts of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to prevent and respond to the devastating impacts of urban warfare through collaborative work across four pillars of engagement. This progress report, requested by the CoD resolution, demonstrates the solid progress achieved in implementing the MAP in the past two years.

A Movement Reference Group (MRG) was established in January 2023 to oversee implementation of the MAP, thus enhancing coordination and experience exchange within the Movement. Chaired by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and composed of representatives from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and over 40 National Societies (NSs), the MRG has developed detailed work plans and a monitoring framework to maximize the strategic impact and transparency of the Movement’s efforts. It created four working groups (WGs), three of them chaired or co-chaired by NSs, to work on the four pillars of the MAP.

“Documenting the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare” (Pillar A) has increased NS knowledge of data management (data collection, protection, use, etc.), establishing a strong foundation for future work. Training modules on data collection and the mapping of tools have been instrumental in these efforts. “Strengthening operational response” (Pillar B) has involved analysing the Movement’s experiences in urban contexts, identifying gaps and developing new tools and guidelines. These initiatives, which are still ongoing, are paving the way for improved Movement ability to provide humanitarian protection and assistance in urban warfare situations. Public communication campaigns (Pillar C) and humanitarian diplomacy efforts (Pillar D) have raised awareness of the humanitarian consequences of war in cities and promoted legal and policy frameworks, such as the Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA PD), with strong engagement from a number of NSs and coordinated advocacy with governments.

The impact of these efforts will be to enhance the Movement’s capacity to respond to urban warfare, with a view to providing crucial support and protection to affected populations. The collaboration and knowledge-sharing facilitated by the MRG have strengthened the Movement’s position as a leader in humanitarian diplomacy on urban warfare.

Moving forward, the MRG will focus on further improving collaboration, rolling out new tools and training materials, exploring the development of a common operational response capacity and increasing public communication on urban warfare, including through the Solemn Appeal on war in cities proposed for adoption at the 2024 CoD. Efforts towards the universalization and effective implementation of the EWIPA PD will continue to be a priority.

In conclusion, solid progress has been achieved since the adoption of the MAP, driven by the active engagement of NSs and effective coordination through the MRG. Full implementation of the MAP’s objectives will require Movement components to allocate sustained and increased resources, including human resources, to addressing the issue of war in cities. It is recommended to include the resolution and a progress report on the agenda of the 2026 CoD

to provide an opportunity to review the work to date and determine the future direction of the War in Cities initiative.

1) INTRODUCTION

War in cities has devastating humanitarian consequences, causing significant numbers of civilian deaths and injuries, the large-scale destruction of civilian homes, livelihoods and critical infrastructure and extensive and long-lasting physical and mental suffering, compounded by cascading indirect effects, including the disruption of essential services, such as health care and water, the displacement of people and environmental damage.

The Movement's volunteers and staff strive to alleviate human suffering and protect lives whenever armed conflict breaks out, often in dangerous situations. However, the Movement cannot do this all on its own and must also mobilize and cooperate with States, other international humanitarian actors and the public to achieve lasting results.

In 2022, building on a series of consultations with the ICRC, the IFRC and a wide range of NSs, the CoD adopted the resolution "War in Cities" (CD/22/R6). That same year, the CoD adopted the resolution "Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward", led by the IFRC. The ICRC and the IFRC coordinate on these two strands of work. The "War in Cities" resolution included a Movement Action Plan for 2022–2027 outlining a comprehensive set of activities for Movement components to implement in order to better prevent and respond to the humanitarian consequences of war in cities, according to each component's specific mandate and capacity. This progress report focuses on the implementation of the MAP over the past two years.

2) BACKGROUND

The MAP identified four pillars of action:

- documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to strengthen and enhance the Movement's prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities
- strengthening the Movement's collective capacity to provide humanitarian protection and assistance in contexts of urban warfare
- 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 influence, to the maximum extent possible, how conflicts are fought in urban areas.

The ICRC is responsible for supporting and coordinating the implementation of the MAP and for monitoring and reporting on progress.

3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

Establishing a community of interested NSs and a framework for action

The MRG was established following the adoption of the 2022 CoD resolution to implement the MAP, serve as a community of practice to foster the exchange of experience and lessons learned and ensure constant coordination and consultation on this matter within the Movement. The MRG, chaired by the ICRC, is composed of representatives from the IFRC and more than 40 NSs from around the world who chose to join the group. All member NSs are invited to take part in the general discussions of the MRG. In addition, many NSs have joined WGs (see below) to hold more detailed and technical discussions on each pillar of action. These WGs

are chaired by a NS or the ICRC or are co-chaired. Online MRG meetings generally take place quarterly and are documented in detail to ensure full transparency and the inclusion of all Movement components.

The creation of a [Jive community](#) on war in cities, open to all Movement components, enables anyone interested in this issue to post information or ask questions, facilitating the exchange of information and ideas across the Movement.

The development of work plans for 2023 and 2024, based on several consultations to prioritize activities and identify concrete actions to be undertaken by specific Movement components, has provided clarity and direction for the MRG. The design of a monitoring and evaluation framework has also provided a solid foundation for the implementation of the MAP and will help to maximize the impact of the Movement's work.

The establishment of the MRG and the creation of detailed work plans and a monitoring framework have significantly enhanced coordination and transparency and should ultimately increase the strategic impact of the Movement's efforts in addressing the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare.

A) DOCUMENTING THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS OF WAR IN CITIES

The MRG created a WG to focus on “documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities to strengthen and enhance the Movement's prevention, preparedness, protection and assistance activities”. It is convened by the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society and the ICRC. Since 2022, it has successfully increased NS knowledge of data collection, use and management and information verification, in line with best practices, data protection principles and professional standards, and mapped out the tools currently used by NSs. These activities provide a strong foundation on which to further develop this work in the coming years.

Activities included:

- Delivering a webinar on open-source data collection designed by the ICRC,
- Delivering a webinar on remote data collection methodologies by the IFRC and ICRC,
- Mapping tools and systems of data collection and management used by NS.

B) STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT'S OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

The MRG created a WG to focus on “strengthening the Movement's collective capacity to provide humanitarian protection and assistance in contexts of urban warfare through a multi faceted, multi year and scalable effort”. This WG is co-chaired by the Lebanese Red Cross and the ICRC. Since 2022, it has concentrated on learning from and analysing the Movement's operational experience in urban contexts, emphasizing safe access, response and preparedness. Based on these exchanges, gaps and areas for further MRG work have been identified. Some of these experiences and lessons learned have been captured in reports, which will enable the MRG to promote this research in coming years. Over time, these efforts to capitalize on what has been learned will enable the MRG to develop additional operational tools, guidelines and frameworks that can be used by NSs to prepare for and operate in contexts affected by urban warfare. As co-chair, the Lebanese Red Cross has started developing an action plan which will be further refined by/with the WG.

Activities included:

- The NSs of the Philippines, Mexico and the United Kingdom (UK) sharing lessons learned from the Safer Access Framework relevant to war in cities.
- The Norwegian Red Cross and the ICRC carrying out operational research on the Movement's experience in protecting and facilitating safe access to enable essential service providers to carry out their duties, with a report scheduled for publication in late 2024.

- Conducting an analysis of national legislative frameworks in four countries on the protection of water and electrical infrastructure. A questionnaire was developed to enable the Movement to increase its understanding of how these systems are set up and managed, with a view to increasing preparedness.
- The ICRC, with support from the NSs of Portugal, Qatar, Canada and Norway, designing a training module on war in cities for Movement staff and volunteers, coordinating its launch with the IFRC training course on urban resilience. They are both hosted on the [IFRC learning platform](#).

C) DEVELOPING A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

The MRG formed a co-design group to develop and “launch a Movement-wide communication campaign on war in cities”. The group is currently composed of communications and social media managers from nine NSs (Australia, United States, UK, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Portugal), the IFRC and the ICRC. It focused on two aspects:

- gathering and leveraging communication campaign products from Movement components to maximize their use and impact
- developing a Movement communication campaign on war in cities.

Activities included:

- *Leveraging existing ICRC products for use by the Movement* and/or at key events prioritized by the Movement: This has included, for instance, showcasing the Broken Cities communications project at the Oslo EWIPA Protection Forum. In addition, the Norwegian Red Cross funded the production of a video and PowerPoint presentation summarizing the key findings of the ICRC protection report on war in cities for use by NSs at events, including dissemination and training for armed forces.
- *Developing the Voice of Humanity campaign*: The co-design group took steps to create a Movement-wide communication campaign called the Voice of Humanity, which included developing a global campaign brief – supported by market research – a creative concept, a communications strategy and a roll-out plan. Plans were reviewed by the MRG, the ICRC and the IFRC and welcomed with a wave of enthusiastic messages from NSs worldwide willing to amplify the innovative campaign. The plan was to use artificial intelligence (AI) and audio technology to harness the power of thousands of voices calling on States and armed groups to respect international humanitarian law (IHL) in urban warfare. However, due to perceived data protection risks related to the use of AI and to changes in the operational, organizational and societal environment, the ICRC Directorate decided in April not to move forward with the campaign.
- *Developing alternative campaigns*: At the time of writing, new ideas and options were being developed for a Movement campaign, which is likely to have a broader scope, including IHL and the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, with urban warfare continuing to feature strongly. The aim is still to engage public support for compliance with the rules of war. New concept ideas have been shared with the MRG co-design group for feedback and validation. The campaign should include, at a minimum, individual stories on video from a range of stakeholders, including affected communities and armed forces. At the time of writing, this was one of two options being considered. The other option is for the ICRC to develop a fully immersive version of its Broken Cities project which will offer co-branding opportunities to NSs.

D) INFLUENCING THROUGH HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

The MRG created a WG to focus on “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, to the maximum extent possible.” This WG is convened by the Norwegian Red Cross. It has focused on following up on the significant milestones established in the EWIPA PD, adopted in November 2022. It has

also produced several factsheets on topics of interest to the Movement and relevant to war in cities. These activities have provided NSs with support to engage with their national audience on these issues. The WG has also prepared for the 34th International Conference, including the CoD resolution “War in Cities”, its Solemn Appeal to States and parties to armed conflict and related pledges. There has been strong engagement from NSs with the WG, which has kept them informed and carried out humanitarian diplomacy, leading to multiple individual initiatives undertaken by NSs with their governments.

Activities included:

Promoting the Movement policy on the avoidance of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in relevant political, military and policy forums

- The ICRC developed a [briefing note](#) to facilitate the Movement’s advocacy and gave a [presentation on EWIPA](#) during the NS European Legal Support Group meeting in May 2023.
- The Italian Red Cross included the issue of EWIPA in the new manual of international law applicable to military operations currently being drafted by the Italian armed forces.
- The Norwegian Red Cross organized a workshop with the Norwegian armed forces research institute, where police, armed forces, civil defence, health authorities and regional authorities discussed preparedness and the implications of IHL for different urban warfare scenarios on Norwegian soil.

Promoting the implementation of the EWIPA PD and contributing to the first international follow-up conference in Oslo (April 2024)

- In October 2023, the ICRC organized an expert meeting on preventing and mitigating the indirect effects of EWIPA on essential services. The [report](#) and [ICRC recommendations](#) were published ahead of the Oslo conference to promote the implementation of relevant EWIPA PD provisions.
- The ICRC published [policy recommendations](#) to influence the outcomes of the Oslo conference, and NSs were able to tailor and promote them with their governments. The ICRC issued a [public statement from the President](#) and a [joint blog post](#) with the Norwegian Red Cross, United Nations agencies and the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW).
- The Norwegian Red Cross and INEW co-organized a well-attended Protection Forum on 22 April 2024, ahead of the EWIPA conference in Oslo, to give a voice to affected people and highlight the direct and indirect impact of the use of explosive weapons on civilians and civilian infrastructure in urban warfare.
- The Palestine Red Crescent Society and the Ukrainian Red Cross Society addressed the plenary of the Oslo conference, ensuring State delegations heard from NSs working in contexts affected by war in cities. The Italian Red Cross also attended the event.
- Several NSs, including those of Finland, Ireland and Italy, promoted the EWIPA PD and shared recommendations for its effective implementation with their governments prior to the Oslo conference.
- The Portuguese Red Cross hosted a day of the European Legal Support Group meeting in May 2023 dedicated to European NS EWIPA strategies.

Developing new policy material on relevant topics

- Advisers at the Finnish Red Cross and the ICRC published an article in the *International Review of the Red Cross* on [War in cities and the natural environment](#).
- The ICRC and NSs developed factsheets on [war in cities and the natural environment](#), [war in cities and disabilities](#) and war in cities and Health Care in Danger.
- The ICRC partnered with a university to develop new case studies on military good practices for reducing civilian harm during urban warfare and to publish them on its [IHL in action](#) website.

Statutory meeting preparations – Solemn Appeal and pledges

In 2024, the CoD will consider for adoption a new resolution on war in cities. It will include a Solemn Appeal and be a vehicle for States and the Movement to pledge to work together or individually to build capacities to prevent and respond to the brutal realities of urban warfare. This will contribute to moving forward on some of the objectives set out in the MAP. The ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross developed the proposed CoD draft resolution and Solemn Appeal, pledges and this progress report, with useful inputs from MRG members via a series of consultations. The annual meeting of NS legal advisers provided an additional opportunity to extend this consultation beyond the MRG.

4) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Implementation of the MAP is moving forward, with activities planned for 2023 and 2024 already implemented or in progress. Yearly work plans will continue to be developed and updated. The monitoring and evaluation framework is being used to monitor progress and will support a fuller evaluation in 2027. This is a mid-term report. An updated report will be made available to the 2026 CoD.

5) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report demonstrates that solid progress has been achieved since the adoption of the MAP on war in cities just two years ago. As urban warfare unfortunately continues to be a global concern, this work strand benefits from the active interest and engagement of NSs across regions. The WGs have developed and compiled a range of tools and resources to support the Movement's operational response and have facilitated the exchange of lessons learned and experiences among Movement components. They have also enhanced collaboration within the Movement on humanitarian diplomacy related to urban warfare.

With the groundwork now done and the foundations laid, the Movement will need to step up its efforts in the next three years in order to effectively implement the MAP's ambitious objectives in time for the 2027 target. The availability of resources enabling the ICRC to deliver on its assigned role to support and coordinate the implementation of the MAP and the support of key NSs and the MRG more generally have been key factors in ensuring progress. However, human resources for addressing the issue of war in cities across the Movement remain fragile, with very few NSs having the dedicated staff required to fully implement the MAP. The initiative would also benefit from Movement components allocating sufficient financial resources to carry out the activities established in the MAP and increased engagement from NSs in affected contexts.

In the coming years, the MRG will continue to enhance collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the Movement, while rolling out and disseminating new tools, training materials and resources. It will also explore further the ambition to develop and implement, where appropriate, a common response capacity within the Movement. The need for increased efforts towards the universalization and effective implementation of the EWIPA PD will remain a priority for the MRG's humanitarian diplomacy efforts, with advocacy on the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and essential service providers emerging as a potential new focus area for engagement. Leveraging the Solemn Appeal and pledges will also be prioritized. Linkages with the IFRC-led work on urban resilience will continue to be explored. It will be necessary to organize regional workshops and other meetings in person to allow for more focused discussions on MAP priorities and activities. Initiatives to ensure the sustainability of these efforts beyond 2027 will also need to be developed.

It is recommended to include the resolution and a progress report as an item on the agenda of the 2026 CoD. This will be an important opportunity to review the work to date and decide on the future of the War in Cities work strand.