Building the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to address the spread of harmful information in humanitarian settings

DRAFT ELEMENTS OF RESOLUTION

December 2025

EN

Original: English

Document prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with the Swiss Red Cross

DRAFT ELEMENTS OF RESOLUTION

Building the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to address the spread of harmful information in humanitarian settings

---

BACKGROUND

The draft elements of the proposed resolution "Building the Movement's strategic and operational preparedness to address the spread of harmful information in humanitarian settings" seek to provide an outline of the possible substance of individual paragraphs, without providing a definitive draft text. Each section is followed by a rationale explaining why the paragraphs would be useful to include in the resolution.

This document is being shared for consultation with the members of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in order to gather a first round of comments and feedback, and to gain an initial understanding of whether the proposed approach would be acceptable and garner consensus.

When providing comments and feedback on this document, please consider the following questions:

- Do you agree with the proposed elements for the preambular and operative paragraphs of the proposed resolution?

- Are there any elements that are missing or should be included in the resolution?

Detailed comments on the wording of the draft elements of this resolution are not expected at this stage. There will be an opportunity to comment on specific wording at a later stage, once the draft zero of the resolution is available.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the spread of harmful information has emerged as a critical challenge, threatening to undermine trust in and acceptance of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement). Harmful information is an umbrella term referring to any instance in which the spread of information, online or offline, has the potential to cause harm. It can include misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and hate speech. It also encompasses the spread of information that violates international humanitarian law (IHL) or international human rights law or undermines the space for principled humanitarian action.

People depend on access to reliable and timely information, whether they face armed conflict or other violence, disaster, epidemics, water scarcity or contamination, food insecurity or other crises or emergencies. In many settings, the impact of harmful information is felt first by individuals who are already suffering the effects of these crises or emergencies. The spread of harmful information can result in them having more difficulty gaining access to assistance,

being more exposed to discrimination or violence, or trusting less in those providing humanitarian services. In other words, harmful information has the potential to disrupt humanitarian operations and jeopardize the safety and well-being of Movement staff and volunteers and the people it serves. The Movement, through its components operating globally, is therefore increasingly confronted with the scale and the spread of harmful information in armed conflict, disaster and other crisis and emergency settings, online and offline.

That said, the spread of harmful information during crises is not new. History has shown how false or inflammatory narratives have been used to manipulate public opinion, escalate tensions, foster exclusion or discrimination and even incite violence. In armed conflicts, harmful information has fuelled divisions and contributed to suffering and decreased access to services. In crises and emergencies more broadly, harmful information has hindered the delivery of life-saving aid, delayed emergency responses and undermined trust in humanitarian actors.

The rapid expansion of digital connectivity; the widespread use of mobile phones, social media and messaging apps; and the rise of generative artificial intelligence have amplified the scale of harmful information and the speed of its spread.[1] Today harmful information can reach millions in seconds, sowing confusion, fear and mistrust. When the information environment is complex, as in crises and emergencies, the spread of harmful information diminishes people's situational awareness and impacts those in situations of vulnerability. It also exposes humanitarian organizations, including the Movement, to significant reputational risks by undermining the perception of their neutrality and hindering their ability to carry out their work effectively. There have been numerous instances worldwide where such narratives have resulted in intimidation and harassment of Movement staff and volunteers, doxing of staff members, withholding of funding, politicization of humanitarian aid, the spread of rumours encouraging potentially harmful acts against humanitarian operations, and restrictions on humanitarian access.

In an era where access to timely, accurate and reliable information can mean the difference between life and death, the Movement must act decisively, drawing on its exposure to and experience of the spread of harmful information, which give it a strong foundation for taking collective action. A coordinated, Movement-wide approach is essential to build strategic and operational preparedness to address this growing threat, protect and uphold principled humanitarian action and ensure that the Movement continues to serve as a trusted pillar in an increasingly contested information landscape.

Specifically, there have been iterative statutory resolutions and discussions, and reports have been shared by the ICRC and IFRC, such as the ICRC's framework *Addressing Harmful Information in Conflict Settings* and the IFRC's *World Disasters Report* on harmful information. Several National Societies have also contributed valuable resources, including the volunteer guide from the Slovak Red Cross, lessons-learned from the Spanish Red Cross, front-line messaging templates from the Canadian Red Cross, and social care guidelines from the American Red Cross. Momentum has therefore been building toward a more coherent and cohesive whole-of-Movement approach, which is reflected in this Council of Delegates resolution.

---

[1] 34IC/24/R2, preambular paragraph 19: "*recognizing* that the specificities of the ICT environment raise questions on how principles and rules of IHL apply to ICT activities in situations of armed conflict and that States have expressed a diversity of views on such questions, emphasizing the need for continued discussions".

On the margins of the statutory meetings of October 2024, 20 secretaries-general, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) confirmed the need for urgent, collective action, recognizing the Movement's unique role as a trusted provider of neutral and impartial humanitarian information.

Against this backdrop, the Movement Initiative on Harmful Information (MIHI) was launched. Through collaboration across National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC, this collective effort seeks to equip Movement partners to provide timely, life-saving information or services while safeguarding trust in their communication and minimizing humanitarian consequences. By enhancing the Movement's capacity to detect, assess and respond to harmful information through coordinated and contextually appropriate approaches, the MIHI aims to tap into the Movement's potential to lead the response to this sector-wide challenge.

Looking ahead, the IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2026* sets out evidence-based pathways for action, based on case studies from over 30 Movement partners, including National Societies, along with hundreds of community insights. National-Society-led pilots will test and adapt these approaches, which emphasize co-owned, localized and culturally appropriate responses supported by global coordination.

Resolutions relevant to this topic include:
- CD/24/R5: "Call for respect and support for principled humanitarian action"
- 34IC/24/R2: "Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict"
- CD/19/R1: "Movement-wide commitments for community engagement and accountability"
- CD/22/R12: "Safeguarding humanitarian data"

Statutory documents relevant to this topic include:
- 32nd International Conference background report, *The Fundamental Principles in Action: A Unique Ethical, Operational and Institutional Framework*
- Council of Delegates 2017 report on the workshop, "Upholding independence, neutrality and impartiality in the face of State responses to contemporary global challenges"

This resolution will:
- call on the Movement to recognize the spread of harmful information as a complex and escalating challenge that endangers affected communities, humanitarian action, and the Movement's integrity
- urge the Movement to take coordinated action to identify, address and mitigate the far-reaching impact of harmful information on affected communities and humanitarian action
- emphasize the need to enhance risk awareness and preparedness, build capacities, foster resource-sharing and strengthen coordination to safeguard the trust in the Movement and its ability to deliver principled humanitarian action.

Preambular paragraphs (PP)

PP 1: This PP could recognize that the spread of harmful information, online and offline, polarizes the information environment, leading to humanitarian consequences, creating divisions, amplifying tensions, propagating societal harm, and undermining trust within and between communities, further exacerbating their suffering.

PP 2: This PP could emphasize that the spread of harmful information significantly affects the Movement and its staff and volunteers by impacting their mental health, compromising their safety, and obstructing humanitarian access.

PP 3: This PP could emphasize that the spread of harmful information has the potential to distract the Movement from its core humanitarian work, overwhelming its capacities and diverting critical resources away from addressing urgent needs, especially if it lacks the necessary tools, capacities and preparedness.

PP 4: This PP could acknowledge that harmful information affecting any single component of the Movement puts the integrity and reputation of the entire Movement at risk, eroding public trust in its emblems and its credibility. It could further recognize that the spread of harmful information creates a risk of tensions and mistrust among and between the Movement's individual components, undermining our unity.

PP 5: This PP could recognize the community-led work that National Societies are currently undertaking to address the spread of harmful information. It could commend the tactics being used to mitigate and address harmful information and information vacuums, including grassroots initiatives to strengthen community resilience, such as volunteer-led risk analysis and rumour-tracking, community dialogue, trust-building efforts and localized responses.

PP 6: This PP could recognize the essential role of volunteers as trust brokers who represent the Movement while working in proximity to communities affected by armed conflict, disaster or other crises or emergencies, bridging the gaps between institutional messaging and community realities, and whose unique position in their communities makes them both particularly valuable and particularly vulnerable to the impacts of harmful information.

PP 7: This PP could acknowledge that the spread of harmful information can politicize the space in which humanitarian operations are conducted, undermining the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence that enable the Movement to operate effectively. It could therefore recognize that building trust and providing reliable information are essential for safeguarding principled humanitarian action.

PP 8: This PP could acknowledge that the rapid spread of harmful information, amplified by digital technologies and social media and facilitated by the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and its integration into other tools and technologies, has created a new reality for the Movement to address urgently.

PP 9: This PP could acknowledge that National Societies work within their own political environments and as auxiliaries to their public authorities, which can create sensitivities when upholding humanitarian principles in today's complex information landscape. National Societies therefore play a vital role in designing and delivering localized, culturally sensitive and community-based approaches to address harmful information, guided by global Movement coordination and aligned with both humanitarian principles and domestic legal frameworks.

PP 10: This PP could recognize the significant role of actors outside the Movement, such as technology companies and media platforms, in influencing the scale and reach of harmful information and the speed of its spread, and underscore the need to have a stronger external dialogue, in line with Resolution 2 of the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, "Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict".

PP 11: This PP could recall that IHL imposes limits, in particular on parties to armed conflict, on the spread of information.

Rationale:

Harmful information, both online and offline, has become a pervasive and urgent challenge in today's vastly interconnected world. It polarizes the information environment, deepens divisions and erodes trust within and between communities, which are at the heart of the Movement's work. Beyond its impact on trust, harmful information has important humanitarian consequences, including inciting violence, obstructing access to life-saving assistance and exacerbating the suffering of already vulnerable populations. The rapid spread of harmful information, driven by digital technologies, social media and emerging tools like artificial intelligence, has created a complex and fast-evolving reality that demands immediate and coordinated action from the Movement.

Harmful information also threatens the Movement's ability to deliver principled humanitarian assistance. It politicizes the space in which humanitarian operations are conducted, undermining the humanity, neutrality and impartiality that are essential to the Movement's operations. It diverts resources and attention from core humanitarian work, stretching the capacities of National Societies and hindering their ability to respond to urgent needs. Furthermore, harmful information creates dilemmas within communities, as conflicting narratives complicate trust-building and acceptance. The global nature of the Movement's components, operating in diverse political contexts, further complicates the delicate task of maintaining unity, impartiality and independence. External actors, such as technology companies and media platforms, operate services and platforms that can be used to amplify harmful information, making collaboration and advocacy essential. Recognizing the wide-ranging and lasting social, psychological and economic harms caused by harmful information, the Movement must act collectively to address this pressing issue and safeguard its ability to deliver principled humanitarian action.

In addition, all Movement components, as appropriate and in accordance with their respective mandates, are encouraged to disseminate IHL to private technology companies, make them aware that providing ICT services to clients that are or may become involved in armed conflict involves certain risks, and to engage, as appropriate, with these companies to encourage them to consider adopting measures to protect the needs of all people affected by armed conflict, disasters, and other crises and emergencies in accordance with applicable international and domestic law.[2]

Operative paragraphs (OP)

OP 1: This OP could call on the Movement components to keep communities at the centre of all efforts to address harmful information by embedding trust-building and community engagement into humanitarian communication and action.

OP 2: This OP could call for the establishment of early warning responses, processes, trust monitoring tools[3] and other tools and mechanisms that are coordinated or shared across the Movement to ensure that a collaborative approach is taken to address harmful information and to be able to provide timely, reliable and life-saving information to all.

OP 3: This OP could recommend enhancing risk awareness through the development and implementation of tailored training programmes for diverse audiences, including Movement leaders, staff and volunteers, to build their capacity to detect, assess and respond to harmful information.

---

[2] 34IC/24/R2, operative paragraph 11.

[3] e.g. the Community Trust Index.

OP 4: This OP could call for specific measures to support volunteers and maintain and build their capacity as trust brokers and front-line responders to harmful information, including the development of volunteer-specific guidance.

OP 5: This OP could call for active co-ownership and leadership of National Societies in the response to harmful information and emphasize the need to foster community-rooted approaches that respect cultural contexts, comply with domestic regulations, and uphold the Fundamental Principles.

OP 6: This OP could call for a comprehensive, Movement-wide approach to addressing harmful information, recognizing that it is not solely a communications challenge but requires the active engagement of all parts of the organization, including the leadership, operations, human resources, community engagement teams and others, as needed.

OP 7: This OP could call for the integration of a harmful information perspective – emphasizing building trust and providing reliable information – into existing frameworks and practices, such as the Safer Access Framework, community engagement and accountability, and mental health and psychosocial support, to ensure a holistic response is taken across all Movement operations.

OP 8: This OP could urge the Movement components to build internal consensus and foster stronger collaboration on addressing harmful information by establishing peer exchanges and communities of practice within the Movement.

OP 9: This OP could call on the Movement components to foster partnerships with academic institutions and research organizations to deepen understanding of harmful information, including its dynamics, dissemination and mitigation strategies, and to develop innovative tools and evidence-based approaches to address this growing challenge, building on existing Movement research, including the IFRC *World Disasters Report*, the ICRC framework *Addressing Harmful Information in Conflict Settings*, and National Society studies and initiatives. This OP could also call on the Movement hub to explore the development of a coordinated Movement-wide research agenda on harmful information, potentially leveraging mechanisms such as the Red Cross Red Crescent Research Consortium (RC3) to ensure there is coherent, evidence-based and collaborative research on this topic across the Movement.

OP 10: This OP could call on the Movement components to prioritize harmful information and its impact on humanitarian action as a key agenda item for the 35th International Conference, fostering engagement with States and other stakeholders through strengthened humanitarian diplomacy to ensure it is addressed as a critical humanitarian priority.

OP 11: This OP could welcome the creation of a dedicated National-Society-led hub within the Movement to spearhead this work of coordinating efforts, developing capacities and sharing resources to address the spread of harmful information, with dedicated workstreams structured around crisis management, capacity development, thematic alignment and external engagement.

OP 12: This OP could call on the Movement components to create a dedicated space for dialogue and collaboration, aimed at developing cohesive policies and establishing a common public position on harmful information. This includes the development of a Movement charter on harmful information, articulating shared principles and commitments. The Movement could also explore the expansion of this charter to external stakeholders in view of the 2028 International Conference.

Rationale:

Harmful information poses a significant threat to the safety, dignity and well-being of communities and to the Movement's ability to deliver effective humanitarian assistance. To address this challenge, the Movement must place communities at the centre of its efforts, building their resilience and agency while also ensuring that their needs and vulnerabilities guide all actions. A coordinated and collaborative approach is essential to mitigate the impact of harmful information, as fragmented responses risk undermining the Movement's collective capacity to respond effectively. By establishing coordination, facilitating the sharing and development of resources, processes, and mechanisms, and fostering peer exchanges and communities of practice, the Movement can strengthen its collective ability to address harmful information.

To achieve this, the Movement must adopt a comprehensive approach that engages all parts of the organization, from the leadership to operations and community engagement teams, recognizing that harmful information is not solely a communications issue. Tailored training programmes for leaders, staff, and volunteers are critical to building the capacity to detect, assess and respond to harmful information. Embedding harmful-information-related resources into existing frameworks, such as the Safer Access Framework, community engagement and accountability, and mental health and psychosocial support, will ensure the response to this issue is sustainable and holistic.

The IFRC *World Disasters Report 2026* recommendations, which are grounded in evidence from case studies and lessons from more than 30 National Societies plus hundreds of community insights, provide evidence-based pathways for action. Pilot projects led by National Societies will enable testing, learning and adaptation of these pathways in diverse contexts. National Societies' essential role in co-owning and leading localized, culturally appropriate responses must be recognized and supported through global coordination.

The creation of a dedicated National-Society-led hub will enable all components of the Movement to build on their capacities and to coordinate their efforts through the hub's four distinct workstreams: crisis management, training, thematic alignment and external engagement. The hub, led by National Societies and supported by the ICRC and the IFRC, will seek to position the Movement as a thought and operational leader on navigating this evolving challenge. The development of a Movement charter on harmful information will establish shared principles and commitments within the Movement, which will be further disseminated in view of the 2028 International Conference.

By prioritizing harmful information as a key agenda item for the 35th International Conference, the Movement components can strengthen their collective voice, engage in humanitarian diplomacy and foster collaboration with States and external stakeholders to mitigate the humanitarian impacts of harmful information.