



Power of humanity

Council of Delegates of the International
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War in cities: A solemn appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

RESOLUTION

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RESOLUTION

War in cities: A solemn appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

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 of different ages, disabilities and backgrounds 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,

1. *adopts* the annex below, War in Cities: A Solemn Appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Solemn Appeal), 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 to prevent and respond to the humanitarian impacts of urban warfare, and to take concrete actions to those ends, and *calls upon* States to support the Movement’s work in this respect;
3. *welcomes* the ongoing work under the 2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities and Resolution 11 of the 2022 Council of Delegates, “Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward”;
4. *encourages* Movement components to promote widely the annexed Solemn Appeal.

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 adequate means for repair. We see residents run out of drinking water and food, 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 founded 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 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. Current trends in urban conflicts present profound implications for the protection of civilians, for humanitarian assistance, for the fabric of international humanitarian law (IHL) and for future generations.

We, therefore, solemnly appeal to all States party to the Geneva Conventions to uphold their obligation to respect and to ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances.

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 identified as a strategic priority in military operations and implemented, including through full and rigorous compliance with IHL and effective civilian harm mitigation policies and practices;
- for all States, 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 (Political Declaration), and, for all States and non-State armed group parties to armed conflict, adhere to and faithfully implement its commitments;

- 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, including when implementing the Political Declaration's commitment to restrict or refrain as appropriate from the use of all explosive weapons in populated areas;
- improve the capacity of armed forces to understand the location and interconnected nature of critical infrastructure that provides essential services for civilian populations, and avoid damage to such infrastructure;
- take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects in attack and against the effects of attacks, uphold the requirement for combatants to distinguish themselves from the civilian population and comply with the prohibition on the use of human shields;
- respect and protect medical personnel, facilities and transport, 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 organizations, civil defence, essential services providers and essential supplies;
- ensure that all armed forces 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 prompt, independent and 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 disaggregated data collection and analysis and seeking the views of women, men, girls and boys affected by urban warfare, in order to inform decision-making, assess compliance with IHL and respond to the needs of the civilian population.

Every one of us may, one day, have family hiding in a basement, a neighbour caught in crossfire or a friend unable to receive critical medical treatment. It is already a reality for millions of people, and together we can make a difference. Let us be guided by our common humanity and take urgent and effective action to alleviate the plight of civilians affected by urban conflicts.