



United for humanity

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

3–4 December 2026, Geneva

War in Cities

(Resolution 6 of the 2022 Council of Delegates)

PROGRESS REPORT

October 2026

EN

CD/26/16
Original: English
For information

Document prepared by
the International Committee of the Red Cross in consultation with
the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and
the Movement Reference Group on War in Cities

PROGRESS REPORT

War in Cities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resolution 6 of the 2022 Council of Delegates “[War in cities](#)” (CD/22/R6) and its Movement Action Plan (MAP) for 2022–2027 seek to strengthen the capacity of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) to prevent and respond to the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare. The MAP focuses on four complementary pillars of action: documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities; strengthening the Movement’s operational response; raising awareness through public communication; and influencing policy and practice through humanitarian diplomacy.

This report reviews progress achieved between September 2024 and July 2026. During this period, the Movement Reference Group (MRG), 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 more than 40 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), continued to coordinate implementation of the MAP and facilitate the sharing of experiences and priorities across the Movement. This report is based on consultations with and inputs from the MRG.

Under the “Documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities” pillar, National Society capacities related to data collection and management were strengthened through the compilation and dissemination of existing tools and resources.

Progress was made under the “Strengthening the Movement’s operational response” pillar with the sharing of operational experiences and lessons learned from urban warfare contexts, including the support provided by the Movement to essential service providers to support people’s continued access to essential services.

Under the public communication pillar, a communications campaign brought the voices of people affected by armed conflict, including in cities, to the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, with videos promoted during the period to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of urban warfare.

National Societies strongly engaged in humanitarian diplomacy, including through work related to the Political Declaration on the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA political declaration), the adoption of the Movement’s solemn appeal on war in cities, and engagement with governments and other stakeholders through pledges in the framework of the 34th International Conference, conferences and other activities.

In the period leading up to the 2028 Council of Delegates, and based on the interests expressed by National Societies, the MRG will continue to focus on humanitarian diplomacy efforts. At the same time, consultations with the MRG and the wider Movement will be organized in 2027 in order to assess the future direction, scope and format of the war in cities initiative, taking into account achievements, lessons learned and challenges, as well as the resources realistically available across the Movement for implementation.

1) INTRODUCTION

Wars in cities have 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 alone, and it must therefore 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 National Societies, the Council of Delegates adopted the resolution "[War in cities](#)" (CD/22/R6). That same year, the Council of Delegates 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 (MAP) 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, in accordance with each component's specific mandate and capacity. A previous [progress report](#) reviewed implementation of the MAP between 2022 and 2024. The present report covers the period from September 2024 to July 2026.

2) BACKGROUND

The MAP identified four pillars of action: documenting the humanitarian impacts of war in cities; strengthening the Movement's operational response; raising awareness through public communication; and influencing policy and practice through humanitarian diplomacy. The Movement Reference Group (MRG) was established in January 2023. Chaired by the ICRC and composed of representatives from the IFRC and more than 40 National Societies, the MRG facilitates coordination, the sharing of experiences and collaboration within the Movement in implementing the MAP. The ICRC supports and coordinates implementation of the MAP and monitors its progress.

3) ANALYSIS AND PROGRESS

Maintaining a community of interested National Societies and orienting work towards their priorities

In 2025, the ICRC's bilateral consultations with several National Societies helped identify priorities and orient the work of the MRG. These discussions confirmed that, in general, National Societies' engagement remained strongest on humanitarian diplomacy, while National Societies operating in urban warfare contexts showed greater interest in operational response discussions. Through the MRG, National Societies continued to engage in the initiative with regular meetings and updates. In addition, and to keep the wider Movement engaged, the ICRC organized presentations to other forums, such as the National Society Rapid Deployment group in April 2025 and the annual meeting of National Society legal advisers in November 2025. During this period and based on the interests expressed by National Societies, a greater emphasis was placed on general meetings linked to the different pillars rather than dedicated pillar subgroup meetings.

A) DOCUMENTING THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACTS OF WAR IN CITIES

Existing Movement tools and resources related to data collection and management in urban warfare contexts were compiled and disseminated. These included tools on open-source information collection, remote data collection methodologies and examples of data management systems used by National Societies. The objective of this work was to support National Societies interested in strengthening their internal capacities related to data collection, protection and use. In addition, an overview of relevant data and information sources on the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare was developed and shared to support operational response and communication activities across the Movement.

B) STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT'S OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

The MRG working group dedicated to strengthening operational response, co-chaired by the Lebanese Red Cross and the ICRC, continued to focus on learning from and analysing the Movement's operational experiences in urban warfare contexts. The working group concentrated on issues related to preparedness, safe access and response in populated environments. A key moment during the reporting period was the spotlight session organized during the 34th International Conference (see details below). The MRG also facilitated several operational exchanges and webinars with National Societies working in urban warfare contexts presenting their work. In addition, the issue of protecting and facilitating safer access for essential service providers generated sustained interest and practical engagement.

Some progress, activities and exchanges on the operational pillar take place through other Movement operational and technical forums. They are not tracked and reported under the war in cities initiative and are therefore not captured in this report, even when relevant to the implementation of the plan. In addition, in a period marked by shrinking funding and increasing humanitarian needs, Movement components operating in contexts affected by urban warfare focused on their operational response, which limited their availability and the opportunities for peer-to-peer operational learning within the MRG.

Activities included:

Spotlight session during the 34th International Conference

The MRG supported the development of the concept for the spotlight session on war in cities during the 34th International Conference. During that session, the National Societies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Palestine and Sudan shared their perspectives on the humanitarian consequences of urban fighting in their contexts and on their operational response to these challenges, while the Norwegian Red Cross reflected on the role of a participating National Society.

Responding to the humanitarian consequences of war in cities

Several National Societies working in contexts affected by urban warfare expanded their operations and range of activities in response to humanitarian needs. This included the Lebanese Red Cross conducting a large-scale emergency medical response with strengthened coordination with the authorities and emergency services, reinforcing their volunteer preparedness and safety, and addressing infrastructure disruption. The Myanmar Red Cross Society provided assistance to displaced and conflict-affected communities, including through health and rehabilitation services, emergency relief and cash assistance, risk-awareness activities, and support to communities affected by damage to essential infrastructure. The Palestine Red Crescent Society drew on lessons learned from its ongoing response in Gaza to strengthen its emergency preparedness in the West Bank by enhancing the readiness of its facilities, staff and resources, coordinating with national and international actors to support civilians affected by military operations and displacement, and conducting preparedness exercises for emergency medical response teams, as well as holding other

preparedness training. The Sudanese Red Crescent expanded its response to the ten most affected cities, providing psychosocial support, water, food and health assistance, as well as infrastructure support and activities to restore family links. All faced humanitarian access constraints and security challenges, and several staff and volunteers were tragically killed while carrying out life-saving work.

Sharing operational experience

Webinars were organized for the MRG during which the Lebanese Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) shared lessons learned from their operations, with a focus on essential services by the SARC.

Supporting access for essential service providers

In November 2024, the Norwegian Red Cross and the ICRC published a [report](#) entitled *Keeping the lights on and the taps running: Protecting and facilitating safer access for essential service providers in armed conflict*, detailing the Movement's experience and providing recommendations to authorities and humanitarian organizations, including the wider Movement. The ICRC, the Norwegian Red Cross and the SARC presented the report to the MRG and, in April 2026, co-organized a workshop in Damascus, Syria, with authorities to discuss the challenges faced by Syrian essential service providers during the conflict and a practical follow-up.

C) DEVELOPING A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

Several initiatives were undertaken to continue raising awareness of the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare. Implementation of the public communication pillar was more selective than initially envisaged, reflecting reduced ICRC communications capacity and competing demands on Movement communications teams arising from multiple conflicts and crises. As a result, public communication relating to war in cities was often advanced through broader work relating to international humanitarian law (IHL), protection of civilians, EWIPA and crisis communications, rather than through stand-alone communication campaign activities.

Activities included:

Raising the voices of people affected by armed conflict

An ICRC communications campaign ahead of the 34th International Conference sought to bring the voices of people affected by armed conflict to decision makers. Digital assets shared with the MRG encouraged the public to call on leaders to uphold IHL. Over 40,000 people from more than 75 countries engaged with the campaign over two weeks. While it was broadly focused on IHL, the campaign highlighted several issues and contexts directly relevant to war in cities. A war in cities immersive exhibition was also presented at the IHL Innovation Village. The [solemn appeal](#) was also amplified by the [ICRC's communication channels](#) and several National Societies.

Promotion of *If War Comes to You*

The interactive film on IHL, [If War Comes to You](#), which was developed by the Danish Red Cross with the European Legal Support Group as an initiating partner, continued to be promoted and used by several National Societies, including the Belgian Red Cross; it was played during the second international conference on EWIPA.

Development of a video on EWIPA

The ICRC, with support from the Norwegian Red Cross, developed a [video](#) explaining the wide area effects of explosive weapons to support the Movement's awareness-raising efforts on this issue. It was launched during the second conference on the EWIPA political declaration and

at subsequent diplomatic events. The Belgian and Italian Red Cross also expanded the educational game Raid Cross with additional urban-warfare-related content.

D) INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE THROUGH HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY

Consultations and activity reports from National Societies demonstrate that this pillar has generated the strongest engagement within the Movement. The working group, co-chaired by the Norwegian Red Cross and the ICRC, has facilitated regular exchanges and humanitarian diplomacy efforts, contributing to a range of initiatives undertaken by National Societies with their national authorities.

Activities included:

Developing and promoting a solemn appeal

The MRG developed a [solemn appeal on war in cities](#) to States and non-State armed group parties to armed conflict, which was adopted by consensus by the 2024 Council of Delegates (CD/24/R8). Twenty-six National Societies, including those from contexts affected by urban warfare, and the IFRC made statements supporting the resolution and/or expressing concern about the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare. The solemn appeal focused on the policy priorities of the MRG, and offered National Societies a strong basis for future engagement with their national authorities. Representatives from the National Societies of Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Ireland, Pakistan and Yemen read the solemn appeal during the opening plenary of the IHL Commission of the 34th International Conference.

Developing and promoting pledges at the 34th International Conference

The MRG developed model pledges on war in cities. Many National Societies then worked with their governments to tailor and adopt pledges, leading to the adoption of pledges by the governments of Austria, Belgium (with its National Society), Costa Rica, Nigeria, Norway (with its National Society), Sudan and Switzerland, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) and its member states (with EU National Societies) and the Commonwealth. In April 2025, the European Legal Support Group discussed their follow-up to the EU pledge on urban warfare.

Promoting the implementation of the EWIPA political declaration and contributing to the second EWIPA conference in Costa Rica (November 2025)

The MRG supported the development of an ICRC and IFRC [joint statement](#), which was delivered by the president of the Costa Rica Red Cross in the opening segment of the EWIPA conference. The two key advocacy calls were included in the United Nations' 2026 [Report of the Secretary-General on the Protection of civilians in armed conflict](#). The ICRC's president gave a [video address](#) to the conference.

Prior to the conference, several National Societies, including the Belgian, British, Canadian, Irish, Italian and Norwegian National Societies, promoted the EWIPA political declaration and discussed recommendations for its effective implementation with their governments, mostly based on the [ICRC's policy messages](#).

Engaging political, military and public audiences on war in cities

National Societies promoted key messages on the humanitarian impacts of war in cities through engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, armed forces, academics, legal communities, volunteers and the general public. Several National Societies – including the American, Australian, Belgian, Canadian, French, Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross Societies – reported integrating urban-warfare-related messages into their IHL dissemination and awareness-raising activities, reaching tens of thousands of people, such as through annual IHL courses and online training modules, and often making use of materials developed through the war in cities initiative. Some National Societies, and particularly the

Belgian and Italian Red Cross Societies, also engaged directly with military authorities on the review of military doctrine, manuals and practices related to urban warfare. In addition, the Australian, Belgian and Irish Red Cross Societies shared the solemn appeal with their national IHL committees, while the British Red Cross organized a dedicated session on urban warfare through the United Kingdom's NGO-Military Contact Group.

The ICRC contributed to military workshops on the implementation of the EWIPA political declaration, participated in universalization regional meetings, mobilizing National Societies when relevant, and raised concerns about the use of EWIPA in multiple policy forums. Discussions were held with the MRG for each meeting in order to keep abreast of relevant political and policy developments and to create synergies. The ICRC also included the issue of war in cities as part of its bilateral and confidential dialogue with parties to conflict, when relevant.

Humanitarian diplomacy working groups for affected contexts

National Societies created humanitarian diplomacy working groups to coordinate their advocacy and communications efforts on urban warfare-affected contexts. For instance, a working group for Sudan was created in 2026 to enable members of the working group to highlight the impact of the war on civilians and the work of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society, to organize advocacy with their own interlocutors, to develop context-specific messages, and to develop and promote communication materials – in line with the messages of the solemn appeal.

Consultation on EWIPA and arms transfers

The Norwegian Red Cross and the ICRC organized a workshop with several National Societies – including the Belgian, Irish and Palestinian National Societies – and civil society organizations to identify ways to refocus international attention on the particular harm caused by explosive weapons with wide area effects and to explore how the continued transfer of such weapons to countries engaged in urban warfare can be addressed as part of EWIPA efforts. The Norwegian Red Cross shared the key messages from the meeting with the MRG.

Global Initiative on IHL

The [Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law](#) highlighted several war in cities messages and recommendations, which will also be reflected in the final outcome documents, particularly for the civilian infrastructure workstream.

4) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Implementation of the MAP continued, with stronger National Society engagement on the humanitarian diplomacy pillar. Consultations with National Societies should take place in 2027 to assess priorities, expectations and available resources ahead of the 2028 Council of Delegates.

5) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As already noted in the 2024 progress report, the ambitions of the MAP require sustained and significant financial and human resources from all Movement components in order to achieve full implementation. The period since the adoption of the MAP has been marked by geopolitical instability and tensions, growing humanitarian needs and shrinking resources, affecting the rate of implementation.

However, MRG members noted that the war in cities initiative has, since 2022, enabled the Movement to develop tools and resources, facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons learned, and strengthen collaboration on humanitarian diplomacy related to urban warfare. They expressed how relevant the initiative remains, given that urban warfare continues to

cause devastating humanitarian consequences globally and States must strengthen their efforts to ensure effective implementation of their commitments at national level, including those enshrined in the EWIPA political declaration.

To align with the revised dates of the statutory meetings, the MRG will continue the implementation of the 2022–2027 MAP until the 2028 Council of Delegates. The MRG will continue to focus on the follow-up of the solemn appeal and the 34th International Conference pledges, on the universalization and effective implementation of the EWIPA political declaration, and on advocacy and further consultations related to the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and essential service providers.

Consultations with Movement components should take place in 2027 to review the achievements made, challenges faced and lessons learned since 2022, and to inform discussions at the 2028 Council of Delegates on the future direction of the war in cities initiative. This should include consideration of which aspects of the current MAP remain relevant, whether there are additional war-in-cities-related issues on which the Movement should focus, and how to better align ambitions with available resources. The consultations should also consider whether and how the war in cities topic should feature at the 2028 Council of Delegates.