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Preserving humanity: Our collective efforts to uphold international humanitarian law

DRAFT RESOLUTION

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DRAFT RESOLUTION

Preserving humanity: Our collective efforts to uphold international humanitarian law

The Council of Delegates,

recalling previous resolutions of the Council of Delegates and International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference) that express the commitment of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) to advocate for respect of international humanitarian law (IHL) and better meet the challenges of our times,[1]

noting that, as a long-term historical trend, the development and universalization of IHL have contributed to greater restraint in armed conflicts, which in turn has contributed to mitigating human suffering, and that this positive trend must be strengthened and sustained,

recognizing that, in many cases, States and parties to armed conflicts are taking measures to ensure compliance with IHL, and that this contributes to mitigating human suffering,

alarmed nevertheless that since the last Council of Delegates the humanitarian situation has further deteriorated: armed conflicts – now more complex, longer-lasting and harder to end – have become a defining feature of our time, with profound and devastating consequences for populations around the world, only a fraction of which can be addressed through humanitarian responses,

outraged that the suffering that always accompanies armed conflict continues to be felt most, and increasingly, by civilians, and is being compounded by repeated violations of IHL and by the erosion of respect for human dignity and human life,

deeply concerned that the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence that underpin humanitarian action are increasingly misrepresented in public discourse by the use of dehumanizing and misleading language, which puts humanitarians at higher risk and in turn obstructs impartial humanitarian action,

condemning in particular the intolerable attacks against humanitarian personnel, including those performing medical functions, many of whom have been killed with impunity while carrying out their work, and *dismayed* that in 2025 alone, this included 35 Movement staff and volunteers,

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[1] including Resolutions 5, 7 and 8 of the 2024 Council of Delegates ("Call for respect and support for principled humanitarian action", "Reaffirming the role of the Movement as a factor of peace" and "War in cities: A solemn appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement"); Resolution 1 of the 33rd International Conference in 2019 ("Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law"; Resolution 1 of the 34th International Conference in 2024 ("Building a universal culture of compliance with international humanitarian law"); the 28th International Conference's declaration "Protecting human dignity" in 2003; Resolution 3 of the 2024 Council of Delegates ("Weapons and international humanitarian law"), which expresses the Movement's concern about the potential human cost of new technologies, including autonomous weapon systems and other military capabilities that incorporate artificial intelligence; Resolution 2 of the 34th International Conference in 2024 ("Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict"), which "expresses deep concern about the impact that malicious ICT activities may have on humanitarian organizations, including data breaches and disinformation that target them, disrupting their relief operations, undermining trust in humanitarian organizations, including Movement components, and threatening the safety and security of their personnel, premises and assets, and ultimately their access and ability to carry out humanitarian activities"; Resolution 8 of the 2009 Council of Delegates ("Respecting and protecting health care in armed conflict and other situations of violence"); and Resolution 4 of the 32nd International Conference in 2015 ("Health Care in Danger: Continuing to protect the delivery of health care together"), which takes note with appreciation of the practical recommendations elaborated by the Movement to make the delivery of health care safer.

recalling that humanitarian personnel save lives and carry out their work with the sole aim of preventing and alleviating the suffering of people affected by armed conflicts,

concerned by the frequent unacceptable delays and obstruction of the movement of emergency medical services, which can lead to preventable deaths, further endanger medical personnel and transports and humanitarian personnel and impede the functioning of medical facilities, in contravention of the requirement that all those who are wounded and sick receive medical care with the least possible delay,

dismayed by these trends, and convinced of the need for renewed political will to confront and reverse them, including the impunity that prevails even for the most serious violations of IHL,

emphasizing that ending impunity is essential to preventing the recurrence of IHL violations, and *recalling* the mandates of impartial bodies, including international courts and tribunals, and other mechanisms, to support accountability efforts at the national and international levels,

alarmed by the regularity with which States fail to conduct thorough, prompt, impartial, independent, transparent and effective investigations into IHL violations – including, notably, incidents affecting humanitarian personnel − with a view to holding perpetrators to account, and fail to use their influence over parties to armed conflicts to prevent violations of IHL and stop patterns of clear and repeated violations,

insisting that States refrain from encouraging, aiding or assisting IHL violations by other States and act to promote compliance with IHL by other States in conformity with international law and the United Nations Charter, including by convincing parties to armed conflicts to put an end to IHL violations,

believing that, in the context of the major contemporary challenges, it is urgent for States and the components of the Movement to do their utmost to counter narratives that question the relevance of IHL or that undermine its very spirit and purpose,

recalling the primary responsibility of each State to comply with its obligations under IHL, including those that apply in peacetime,

believing it necessary to reaffirm our commitments and collective efforts to uphold IHL and to remind all parties to armed conflict and States of their obligations,

1. *adopts* the annexed appeal, “Preserving humanity – A solemn appeal”, and *commits* to promoting it widely as a matter of urgency;

2. *calls on* the components of the Movement, in line with their respective mandates, to strengthen respect for IHL worldwide by leveraging further the credibility, expertise and humanitarian voice of the Movement to urge States and all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligation to respect and ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances, thereby enhancing a universal culture of compliance with IHL;

3. *also calls on* the components of the Movement to remind States, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and their respective mandates, of their obligation to investigate all serious violations of IHL, and if appropriate, prosecute the suspects;

4. *welcomes* the consultations held in 2025 and 2026 under the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law and *reaffirms* the role of the components of the Movement, within their respective mandates, in following up on the outcomes of the seven workstreams, notably for National Red Cross and Red

Crescent Societies (National Societies) to follow up on Workstream 1 on prevention good practices;

5. *welcomes* the ongoing work of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and National Societies in developing an IHL Roadmap for the Movement to strengthen the Movement's efforts to help build a culture of compliance with IHL, to be adopted at the Council of Delegates in 2028;

6. *recognizes* the role of National Societies as auxiliary to their respective public authorities in the humanitarian field, notably: their mandate to disseminate and assist their governments in disseminating IHL; to cooperate with their governments to ensure respect for IHL, including through national committees or similar entities on IHL; and their strong commitment to collectively fight against dehumanization, and to foster dialogue, non-violence, and a spirit of peace in a whole-of-society approach;

7. *commits* to do its utmost, using all tools at its disposal, to urge respect for and protection of humanitarian personnel and medical personnel, facilities and transports, and respect for the distinctive emblems which facilitate identification of medical personnel, facilities and transports and which are essential to enabling the components of the Movement to carry out their humanitarian mission effectively;

8. *encourages* the components of the Movement to carry out advocacy and influencing efforts, in accordance with their mandates and in a collaborative and complementary manner, including at statutory meetings such as the International Conference, and to take stock at the 2028 Council of Delegates, in particular of the efforts to disseminate the appeal;

9. *urges* Movement components to spare no effort in this regard.

Annex
Preserving humanity – A solemn appeal

1. We, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), make this appeal to avoid future irreversible harm.

2. More than 75 years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, we are shocked by the magnitude of human suffering we see across the world, marked by a record number of armed conflicts and by a lack of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). The law of armed conflict and its underlying principles and norms are indispensable to alleviating suffering, to preserving humanitarian space and to contributing to the prospects of sustainable peace. This body of law gives expression to the protection of our shared humanity in the darkest times and must never be abandoned.

3. As a Movement, we have a deep, first-hand understanding of the human cost, primarily for civilians, of the lack of respect for IHL. We are appalled that civilians continue to pay the highest price in armed conflict, with civilian deaths and injuries reaching some of the highest levels in decades.

4. Impunity for serious IHL violations, such as attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including civilian infrastructure, and on humanitarian personnel, sends the dangerous message that such conduct is acceptable, contributing to further erosion of respect for IHL.

5. In 2025 alone, 387 humanitarian staff and volunteers were killed, including 35 staff and volunteers of the Movement. It was one of the deadliest years on record. Not only is this an unacceptable and tragic loss of life, it has also led to populations being left without access to the life-saving assistance provided or supported by humanitarian actors.

6. These unacceptable attacks are symptoms of a world in which the fundamental recognition of our shared humanity is being denied, to dangerous effect.

7. We are dismayed by these trends and are convinced of the need for renewed political will to confront and reverse them, including the impunity that prevails even for the most serious violations of IHL. Accountability not only provides justice for victims of violations but also makes an important contribution to the prevention of future violations and to the prospects for peace. Repeated violations with impunity have encouraged the spread of a narrative questioning the relevance and effectiveness of IHL; yet it remains the universally agreed framework to alleviate human suffering in armed conflict.

8. Respect for IHL − including respect for the distinctive emblems − is an obligation of parties to armed conflict and is essential to provide the Movement the necessary humanitarian space to fulfil its life-saving humanitarian mission.

9. Many important resolutions, statements and pledges have been made in recent years by States, reasserting their commitment to IHL: They must take meaningful action to demonstrate that these are not empty words, and to fulfil their legal obligations.

10. Without tangible, meaningful efforts to uphold IHL, we fear the erosion of the human values which it is the mission of the Movement to defend, putting at risk respect for the human dignity of future generations.

11. As the world's largest humanitarian network, it is our firm belief that the current dangerous trajectory is neither inevitable nor irreversible. We call in the strongest terms to safeguard those affected by armed conflict and to limit the suffering caused by war each day. In particular:

    a. We commend work done to implement IHL and the positive impact that compliance has in protecting populations during armed conflicts.

    b. We insist that all States comply with their obligation to respect and ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances, including by using their influence with all relevant actors, to ensure a global culture of compliance with IHL.

    c. We insist that all parties to conflict comply with their IHL obligations, including to respect and protect humanitarian personnel, including those serving in medical functions, and the distinctive emblems.

    d. We urge States, where appropriate, to promote compliance with IHL by non-State armed groups.

    e. We urge all States to uphold their obligations regarding accountability and responsibility for serious violations of IHL.

    f. We urgently appeal to States and parties to conflict to promote and take up avenues for dialogue and confidence-building to ensure the preservation of human dignity and prospects of reconciliation, laying a stronger foundation for a sustainable peace.

    g. We urge States to renew their political commitment to IHL at the highest level, including through the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to IHL.

    h. We stand ready as a Movement to do our part for the sake of our shared humanity. In accordance with our mission, we will continue to support States and all parties to armed conflict to uphold IHL and to protect and assist all those affected by armed conflict around the world.

We remain convinced that this dangerous trajectory can be reversed, and that States and all peoples can choose even in the darkest times to renew their shared commitment to humanity.