

Bulletin

Letter from the Chair



Dear readers,

By the time this Bulletin sees the light of day, it will have been four years since the 18th Session of the Standing Commission started, following the elections held in Geneva at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2019. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, we still have a further ten months of work ahead of us in the lead-up to the 34th International Conference.

This has been a time of great challenges and uncertainties, which we know will continue over the coming months, but also a time for consolidating the work of a team that has pulled together to deliver on our responsibilities, preparing the statutory meetings, promoting implementation of the resolutions adopted and fostering harmony among the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This is crucial because, as we said in the previous issue, in such times the Movement must act in a united way and show itself to be an organization capable of fulfilling its mission and meeting growing humanitarian needs effectively and efficiently.

Our last meeting held in Hanoi just a few days ago during the 11th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference provided an opportunity for us to engage with leaders of the National Societies of this vast geographic region, so often affected by serious and devastating conflicts and disasters.

This Bulletin provides me with an opportunity to extend my sincerest gratitude to the Viet Nam Red Cross leadership and the IFRC for their invitation to take part as observers in the 11th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in Hanoi and for facilitating the organization of the 13th Meeting of the 18th Session of the Standing Commission.

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Standing Commission

of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

19 Avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

E-mail: standing.commission@standcom.ch

Website: www.standcom.ch

On the occasion of its meeting in Hanoi, the Standing Commission *“expressed its deep concern for the devastating consequences for all civilians affected by the dramatic escalation of the armed conflict in Israel and Gaza since 7 October 2023 and voiced its solidarity with all the volunteers and staff of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement involved.*

Volunteers and staff have spared no effort in providing assistance and protection to the affected populations and the most vulnerable, while upholding the Fundamental Principles and values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Standing Commission shared its grief for those who had been killed or injured in the line of duty while rescuing and assisting victims of the violence.

The Standing Commission reaffirmed the importance of all parties acting with restraint and complying with their obligations under international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. Civilian populations must be protected and the parties to the hostilities must allow and facilitate access to humanitarian aid and the vital resources civilians need. Humanitarian aid workers and medical personnel and facilities must be protected at all times and be permitted to deliver unimpeded life-saving services.

In these darkest moments, the Standing Commission calls for HUMANITY”.

In addition to advancing the discussion of matters relating to the content, management and organization of the upcoming statutory meetings – the 34th International Conference and the 2024 Council of Delegates, we also addressed other issues affecting the International Movement, such as progress in implementing the [Seville Agreement 2.0](#).

The Standing Commission welcomed Mr Olivier Ray, ICRC Director for Mobilization, Movement and Partnerships, as the second member representing the ICRC. It also

expressed its appreciation and gratitude to Mr Francesco Rocca and Ms Katrin Wiegmann for their dedication and commitment to the work of the Standing Commission over the last six and four years respectively, wishing them every success in their future endeavours.

Before I draw to a close, I would like to congratulate the new President of the IFRC, Kate Forbes, recently elected at the extraordinary session of the IFRC General Assembly, and formally welcome her as a new member of the Standing Commission.

Likewise, I would like to thank all those who have been kind enough to contribute to this Bulletin with their articles and especially Ms Yolanda Kakabadse, Chair of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre’s Board, for her opinion piece “We are in the era – more than ever – of needing to deliver on our ambitions on climate”.

Once again, I invite you all, as members of the International Conference, to actively engage in the different rounds of consultation and share your suggestions and concerns with the Standing Commission.

And I encourage both National Societies and States party to the Geneva Conventions to maintain an active dialogue in your respective countries to help prepare this unique forum which has the responsibility of guaranteeing the continued existence of a neutral humanitarian space.

I am confident that the collaboration and dedication of all the members of the International Conference will ensure the success of the statutory meetings.

I wish you all the very best for 2024.

Yours sincerely,
Mercedes Babé



34th International Conference and Council of Delegates in 2024: One step closer

Agendas and resolutions take shape

The Standing Commission is grateful to the members of the International Conference and the Council of Delegates for the comments they have provided since March 2023 on the concepts and outline of proposed topics for the agendas of these two important statutory meetings of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, scheduled for October 2024 in Geneva. With support from the co-organizers – the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – the Standing Commission is now counting down to the statutory meetings, with two important dates to share: April 2024 for the circulation of the convocations, draft provisional agendas and programmes, and draft zero resolutions, and September 2024 for the circulation of all official working documents.

Both the Council of Delegates (with its 193 members from the Movement) and the 34th International Conference (with its 196 additional members from states party to

the Geneva Conventions and numerous observers) are primarily forums for humanitarian dialogue and decision-making. Participants commit to respect the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, particularly to preserve the political neutrality of the meetings, while striving to build consensus to find common responses to humanitarian concerns of the utmost importance.

This is the purpose of the current consultations on the draft elements of the resolutions that are expected to be submitted to the 34th International Conference and to the Council of Delegates in 2024. Consultations will continue with representatives of National Societies and states until October 2024. Everyone is invited to use these consultation opportunities to provide feedback and to actively contribute to building support for the resolutions in preparation.

Important dates

2023

22 December Deadlines for consultation on the elements of the Conference and Council resolutions

2024

April Invitations, provisional draft agenda and draft zero resolutions published for consultation

6-7 May Preparatory meeting for members of the 34th International Conference

September Dispatch of official working documents

27-28 October Council of Delegates

28-31 October 34th International Conference

Movement Awards 2024 - Call for nominations

The Standing Commission reminds all components of the Movement of [the call of October 26, 2023](#) to submit nominations for the **Henry Dunant Medal** and the **Red Cross Red Crescent Prize for Peace and Humanity** by January 31, 2024. The Standing Commission encourages the nomination of candidates whose achievements are of an exceptional nature, while showcasing diversity, inclusion and integrity.

Nominations should be prepared after a careful reading of the relevant documents [available on the website of the Standing Commission](#).

34th International Conference: From elements of resolutions to a provisional agenda

The focus of the International Conference is ***Navigate Uncertainty – Strengthen Humanity***, and its three thematic pillars provide a framework for the resolutions and for the discussions that will take place in the plenary sessions, the Commissions and at the side events. These pillars, which will be included in the draft provisional agenda and programme, are as follows:

1. **Building a global culture of respect for international humanitarian law**
2. **Standing by our Fundamental Principles in responding to humanitarian needs and risks**
3. **Enabling sustainable, locally led action.**

The draft elements of five resolutions are currently open for consultation until 22 December 2023 (see the box on the right) and will serve as the basis for the draft zero resolutions to be issued in April 2024.

Further guidance will be provided in early 2024 for participants interested in organizing side events or making voluntary pledges related to the themes of the 34th International Conference.

You can access [documents and information for the 34th International Conference](#) on the statutory meetings website.

The draft elements of five resolutions currently submitted for consultation for the 34th International Conference:

- [Toward a universal culture of compliance with international humanitarian law](#)
- [Preventing and minimizing digital threats to people affected by armed conflict](#)
- [Strengthening disaster risk governance through comprehensive disaster laws](#)
[Annex: Guidelines on Disaster Risk Governance](#)
- [Empowering local leadership, capacity and delivery in principled humanitarian action and strengthening resilience](#)
- [Protecting people from the humanitarian impacts of extreme events: Working together to strengthen anticipatory action](#)

Conference members are invited to send comments on these draft elements of resolutions to: conferences@rcrcconference.org

2024 Council of Delegates: From elements of resolutions to a provisional agenda

The draft elements of eight resolutions are open for consultation until 22 December 2023. These will form the basis for the draft zero resolutions to be issued in April 2024:

- [Migration Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2024–2030](#)
- [Extension of the Restoring Family Links Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement \(2020–2030\)](#)
- [Weapons and international humanitarian law](#)
- [War in cities: A solemn appeal from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement](#)
- [Reaffirming the role of the Movement as a factor of peace and resilience](#)

- [Protection in the Movement: Improving our collective impact in protecting people](#)
- [Clarification of Resolution 2 of the 2017 Council of Delegates “Movement-wide principles for resource mobilization” \(CD/17/R2\)](#)
- [Call for respect and support for principled humanitarian action](#)

National Societies are invited to send their comments on these draft elements of resolutions to conferences@rcrcconference.org. Other proposals may follow.

You can [access documents and information for the 2024 Council of Delegates](#) on the statutory meetings website.

Walk the talk: From resolutions to action

In 2019, the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent adopted [eight resolutions](#). These were supplemented by voluntary commitments from participants in the form of [151 pledges](#). The Council of Delegates adopted [12 resolutions](#) in 2019 and [13 resolutions](#) in 2022. All resolutions and pledges amount to calls to action for members to make a difference in the service of humanity. This section highlights some of the progress being made in this regard.

The human toll on war in cities

While urban warfare is neither a new phenomenon nor one with entirely unique humanitarian consequences, the suffering and devastation it causes appear on a much larger scale than when hostilities break out in less populated areas. Armed conflict in urban areas causes large numbers of civilian deaths, extensive and long-lasting physical and mental suffering, and widespread destruction of civilian homes and critical civilian infrastructure. The disruption of essential services – health care, water, food, sanitation, solid-waste disposal, electricity and education – exacts a severe human toll.

At the 2022 Council of Delegates, the Movement adopted [Resolution 6](#) on “War in cities” to express its grave concern about the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare witnessed by its staff and volunteers. [An 2022-27 action plan was agreed on](#) to guide the Movement in working towards documenting more accurately the humanitarian impact of war in cities; strengthening its operational response; raising awareness of the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare; and influencing states and conflict parties, through humanitarian diplomacy, to strengthen their legal and policy frameworks and alter the conduct of conflict in urban areas. A Movement Reference Group (MRG) was established in early 2023 – now comprising 41 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – to coordinate implementation of the action plan, share updates, and exchange operational experiences.

The MRG is producing factsheets on humanitarian subjects of relevance to urban warfare, contributes to the Movement’s public messaging on War in Cities, and is finalizing an online War in Cities course for the IFRC Learning Platform. National Societies have organized War in Cities study days, conferences, picture exhibitions and seminars. Discussions on the Movement’s humanitarian diplomacy efforts have centered around the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the promotion of the “Dublin Declaration”.

The Movement looks forward to working with states over the next year to ensure that at the 34th International Conference in October 2024, the challenges created by urban warfare are fully understood and acknowledged; and, just as important, that practical measures are proposed, adopted and implemented in the coming years, so that we can put an end to the large-scale destruction and suffering so often caused by urban warfare.

By **Eve Massingham**

*Policy Adviser, War in Cities
Arms and Conduct of
Hostilities Unit, ICRC*

emassingham@icrc.org

and **Tobias Ehret**

*Senior Adviser,
Norwegian Red Cross*

tobias.ehret@redcross.no

Learn more:

- [The human toll of war in cities - full article on the blog of rccrconference.org website](#)
- [War in Cities: Preventing and Addressing the Humanitarian Consequences for Civilians | ICRC Report](#)

Standing Commission members' corner

A talk with Niamh Lawless and Katrin Wiegmann

Niamh Lawless is the under-secretary-general of management policy, strategy and corporate services at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Ms Lawless has over 35 years' experience in the international not-for-profit, public and private sectors. Prior to joining the IFRC, she served as the secretary-general of the New Zealand Red Cross.



Katrin Wiegmann is the head of institutional strategy and organizational development at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Ms Wiegmann is a genuine humanitarian, who has worked within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for more than 16 years.



What do you think are the two biggest challenges facing the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement?

Niamh: Thank you for such an interesting question. Without a doubt, in my view, the most significant challenges facing our Movement are climate change and the lack of sufficient funds to meet growing humanitarian–development needs across the world.

I recently read an article by Hugo Slim, a Movement veteran, where he said that, for humanitarian work in the future, “the climate emergency will not intersect with other areas: instead, everything will intersect with climate change”. I couldn’t agree more. We are already seeing how climate-related disasters and health emergencies are multiplying at an unprecedented rate. The accelerating effects of climate change have increased not only the number of extreme disasters affecting communities all over the world,

but also the scale of destruction. The IFRC's World Disasters Report 2020 showed that, in the past decade alone, 83 per cent of all disasters were caused by climate-related events – floods, storms and heatwaves. These disasters killed more than 410,000 and affected 1.7 billion people!

Climate change is also a key driver of population displacement, disease outbreaks and ultimately conflict, as competition for resources intensifies. Here is exactly where, in my opinion, the lack of funds is intimately intertwined with the climate crisis; as in every crisis, lack of resources has the potential to turn an already dire situation into a catastrophe. The funds needed to meet these complex, prolonged crises are not growing to match the escalating humanitarian needs, and the resources needed to intervene before, during and in the aftermath of a natural disaster are immense.

We need a significant increase in financing for climate change adaptation to support communities to reduce their risks and be better protected and prepared for emergencies. As we all know, it is the countries that contributed least to the problem who are experiencing first-hand the devastating effects of climate change. Take the Pacific Islands, for example. They are responsible for only 0.03 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, and yet they are one of the first regions experiencing the impacts of climate change: flooding, coastal erosion, storm surges and severe degradation of their coral reefs.

I think, overall, we need a significant increase in funding for all our humanitarian work, and not just for climate change and other emergency appeals. Imbalance of funding globally is getting worse. We have emergency appeals with funding as low as ten per cent, while some others are fully funded. Moreover, and if I may throw a third element into the mix, the threat that humanity is facing now and will face in the future is not something that our Movement can tackle alone.

Katrin: Niamh, I couldn't agree more. And while a clear causality between climate change and conflict has yet to be established, a lot of conflict-affected areas already are, and increasingly will be, impacted by climate change. Beyond this, I think a huge challenge is the polarization, fragmentation and rifts in the global political landscape – causing a lot of insecurity and instability. We have to be a force and spark of hope for humanity, and also make sure we are not getting politicized. Lastly, I think we have yet to grasp the acceleration of change as a result of artificial intelligence. Be that in terms of creating new vulnerabilities and new methods of warfare or the changes to service delivery and how we work. It's amazing how in such a short space of time it has already impacted so many aspects of our life, and I believe it will pose huge challenges and opportunities to our Movement in the years to come.

How can we further enhance the culture of humanitarian principles and values on which our Movement is based?

Katrin: This is a very critical question, especially in a world where our principles are – yet again – under so much pressure. As I have mentioned before, there is a growing sense that we are operating in an age of major polarization, fragmentation, misinformation and disinformation, with hardened protracted conflicts and the opening of new front lines. Now, generally I think our principles have stood the test of time, in both driving and enabling our humanitarian work. But they have also often been misunderstood and challenged, and they have to be continuously explained in light of the environment and trends.

So, this question of how to further enhance the culture of humanitarian principles and values is an important one. I think there are at least three important measures. Firstly, we need to make sure that in all levels of the Movement we understand their purpose well and we are able to identify with it. Secondly, principles in action means taking decisions on ethical, operational and strategic dilemmas that are often very complex in nature. Many times, there are no simple answers, and often it means choosing between a bad and a worse option, between a short-term and a long-term impact, being under a lot of

pressure. I think it is helpful to offer and engage in peer dialogue platforms to foster support and exchange; platforms where decision makers can share and draw from experience on how to best navigate dilemmas. I believe peer exchange and constructive criticism can be very helpful to identify creative solutions in situations where there are no clear-cut answers.

Also, demonstrating principled behaviour at the highest levels of our respective organizations is crucial. This sends a clear signal internally and externally in view of our commitment to the Fundamental Principles. Leadership must set an example by consistently “living” the principles in their decision-making processes, words and actions. Lastly, it is important that we continue our work on increasing accountability and integrity. We have mechanisms already in the Movement and we have to make sure that these are effective and transparent.

In conclusion, enhancing the culture of humanitarian principles and values requires a multifaceted approach that involves leadership commitment, dialogue, accountability and adaptability in a world filled with evolving challenges. It’s a great opportunity to invest in this now, not only because of their importance to drive and enable the Movement’s work, but also because we are celebrating their 60th anniversary soon.



Opinion

We are in the era – more than ever – of needing to deliver on our ambitions on climate

The desperate reality of our post-pandemic world is that even as new and unforeseen wars threaten to consume our attention, concern and resources, the climate and environmental crisis grows relentlessly.

New research by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) shows that climate or extreme weather were contributing factors in the vast majority – our analysis generates a figure of 94 per cent – of all “natural disasters” between 2018 and 2022.

The IFRC’s [World Disasters Report](#) last year reminded us that the total number of global deaths from disasters has declined since the 1960s, with improvements in weather forecasting, early warning and evacuation procedure. But the largest fall was from the 1960s to the 1970s, it adds, and since then there has been “no clear trend”.

Recent climate attribution studies also reveal the fingerprints of the Planet’s climate crisis. The continued drought in the Euphrates and Tigris river basins, for example, was [25 times more likely](#) in today’s world than it would be without climate change.

This May and June, climate change [more than doubled](#) the chance of the extreme fire weather that affected eastern Canada. Similarly, in September, extreme heat in South America was at least [100 times more likely](#), and the extreme rainfall that contributed to the tragic flash flood in Libya was found to be [50 per cent more intense](#) than without climate change.

In short, **the forecast world of more frequent, volatile and intense climate extremes has arrived.** How should we respond?

The disaster timeline

We must integrate weather and climate information right along the disaster timeline, from preparedness through early warning early action to recovery, risk reduction and long-term planning. When we “build back better” after a disaster strikes, we must blunt the intense shocks of the future with the best available climate science helping integrate adaptation into recovery.

Anticipatory or early action is the low-hanging fruit of adaptation and should be scaled up – the IFRC’s efforts to do just that are described in the most recent [ALNAP report](#) as “one of the most significant shifts observed in the [humanitarian] system”.

The IFRC is also [leading](#) the billion-dollar fourth cornerstone, on preparedness and response, of the UN initiative on early warning for all, for which the executive action plan was rolled out at COP 27 last year.

Local action

The Red Cross Red Crescent must also champion locally led adaptation and leverage our unrivalled network of volunteers, many if not most of them young people, to concretize local action and inform global policy. And engaging the young through strategies like the [climate youth summit](#) and the [action survey](#) – both coordinated by the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre – is one way to meet the unparalleled challenge of the climate crisis.

With the Climate Centre – one of the IFRC’s six global reference centres – the Movement can call on the very latest climate science to frame policy and practice; our door is always open.

In general, making available the latest knowledge on mitigation and adaptation will support local actors to better prepare for changing climate and environmental risks.

One encouraging sign, at least, is that now more than half of all National Societies [have signed](#) the Climate and Environment Charter; in line with the principle of “do no

harm”, they will also “avoid, minimize and manage” damage to the environment and the climate in continuing to provide effective humanitarian assistance.

We are in the era – more than ever – of needing to deliver on the [ambitions on climate](#) we spelt out first in 2020, and I believe our direction of travel is the right one.

By **Yolanda Kakabadse**

Yolanda Kakabadse is the chair of the Climate Centre's board. Ms Kakabadse was Ecuador environment minister from 1998 to 2000 and president of the WWF International from 2010 to 2017.



STANDING
COMMISSION
OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

Happy new year and best wishes
Bonne année et meilleurs voeux
Feliz año nuevo y mejores deseos
سنة جديدة سعيدة وأطيب التمنيات