

POWER OF HUMANITY

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT STATUTORY MEETINGS



33rd International Conference of
the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Act today, shape tomorrow

Geneva, 9–12 December 2019

What opportunities and vulnerabilities does the future hold?
How can a humanitarian system – already under strain – work more effectively
with communities, States and other actors to shape a better tomorrow?
And how can we help build a future where people are safe and thriving?

While States face heightened security concerns at the national and global levels, people require a different response to their needs, and the humanitarian system is still grappling with change. The world is evolving with unpredictable speed and complexity, yet there are still opportunities to strengthen humanitarian action in the 21st century. But what change will this require? What investments to strengthen humanitarian action in the 21st century. Who are the new actors that need to be engaged, and how can the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adapt to better meet people's current and emerging needs?

The 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent will provide a unique opportunity for States, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and key partners to come together to '**ACT TODAY, AND SHAPE TOMORROW**'. This historical platform, first convened in 1867, seeks to explore current and future challenges to the humanitarian world and the unique role that the Movement has, alongside States, in addressing these challenges.



We are currently witnessing a complex convergence of diverse issues which have a significant humanitarian impact. These include migration, the growth and expansion of cities, a youth surge in developing countries and an ageing population in developed and middle-income countries – as well as the rapid evolution of online connectivity and emerging technologies. These issues are fast changing the fabric of societies, including by building virtual communities and driving their transformation, to the extent that our traditional assumptions and ways of working might not be effective in addressing the challenges presented.

As humanitarians, we are already witnessing limitations, and we must adapt rapidly to this evolving landscape in order to remain relevant and agile in our response.

Armed conflicts are generally more complex and protracted than ever before, reinforcing the need to promote and respect international humanitarian law (IHL) and to uphold the fundamental humanitarian principles upon which this very Conference was established. The blurring of lines between civilian and military spheres, warfare and crime, and the use of conventional and non-conventional weapons has created humanitarian needs on an overwhelming scale and exacerbated existing fragilities in many societies, leading to the mass displacement of people.

The global natural environment is in a system-wide crisis, due largely to the impacts of climate change, and we are witnessing increasing food and water insecurity, climate-related displacement and rapid urbanization. In addition, the negative impacts of disasters, protracted conflicts and unplanned urbanization increase the potential for the spread of disease and pandemic outbreaks. The scarcity or inadequacy of water and sanitation infrastructure, coupled with limited access to medical care, exposes millions of people to preventable health risks. Disasters and conflict also interrupt safe and continuous access to education, undermining the capacity of communities to sustain their livelihoods, to foster economic development and, ultimately, to achieve social cohesion and peace.

At the same time – and despite technological, scientific, and economic progress – there is a deepening crisis of trust in the humanitarian system, with plummeting confidence in governments, the media and the non-government sector. While there is an ever-growing demand for humanitarian organizations to prove their added value in a very short time-frame and with fewer resources, this lack of trust is having a critical impact on the safety and security of humanitarian staff and volunteers. With the military and other actors assuming a larger role in humanitarian operations, independent and impartial aid can become politicized. In such a context, it is crucial to reaffirm the unique and impartial role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in humanitarian work.

Humanitarian assistance costs are predicted to rise to USD 50 billion per year by 2030 ([High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, January 2016](#)). In light of the growing gap between humanitarian and development needs and available funding, new partnerships and models should be explored to unlock new sources of capital and support.

While all of these changes bring new challenges and exacerbate existing ones – many of which cannot be predicted or foreseen – they also present opportunities to reconsider the way we address them and to make sure we include the view of at-risk and affected populations in our response. This is where the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement can add significant value, with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies working alongside public authorities in their unique auxiliary role to address these challenges in a principled, effective and accountable manner.

The 33rd International Conference: Developing the concept

Since early 2017, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have come together to discuss current and emerging trends affecting the world we live in (e.g. at the 'RC2' Forum, held between the IFRC General Assembly and Council of Delegates meetings in 2017). They have sought to better understand the unique role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in adapting to these trends and the priority issues to be addressed. Meanwhile, research, interviews and analyses have been carried out with a range of external stakeholders, experts, and opinion leaders to gather different perspectives and help shape the concept for the 33rd International Conference.

As a result, a forward-looking approach has been developed which will address a number of ongoing and emerging humanitarian concerns related to health, the effects of climate change, urbanization, new technologies and trust in humanitarian action. At the same time, the International Conference will also provide a platform for discussing topics that are central to the work of the Movement, such as international humanitarian law.

These areas can be summarized as follows:

The technological revolution – opportunities and threats

How can the humanitarian sector maximize its use of new technology to better reach the most vulnerable, assess needs and share information while ensuring that confidential data is protected? How can we overcome the digital divide and ensure that existing disparities do not create further inequalities for those left behind? And how can we better use local innovations and bring them to scale? New technologies offer better tools to anticipate trends in vulnerability, identify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and attract and inspire volunteers who, today more than ever, constitute an invaluable resource for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. However, the more data we gather or generate, the greater the responsibility to ensure privacy and protection. In addition, it will be essential to consider the challenges that new means and methods of warfare, such as cyber warfare, artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems, pose to IHL in ensuring adequate protection of civilians and civilian objects and explore possible solutions. The time is ripe to discuss how to step up the international community's response to these issues.

Tomorrow's humanitarian response

The sources of humanitarian crises rarely fall into clear-cut, well-identified categories. Many of today's crises are the result of overlapping hazards and drivers, both old and new, and this will also be true for tomorrow's crises. While continuously improving our efforts to meet today's complex needs, we must ensure that tomorrow's humanitarian response anticipates and reflects new developments and the connections between the drivers of change, as outlined below:

- **Working together to improve global health care**, with a focus on ensuring that all communities and individuals have access to quality health services; addressing mental health and psychosocial needs arising from armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies and; strengthening prevention, preparedness and response to epidemics and pandemics; as well as reducing violence against health-care workers and facilities. The Movement's programmes – especially those focused on the most vulnerable – complement the efforts of States and others who seek to achieve universal health care.
- **Reducing vulnerability and addressing the humanitarian consequences of climate change**, including how the humanitarian sector, and the Movement in particular, can get ahead in a changing climate. This includes supporting the resilience and adaptation of communities, ensuring that climate finance reaches the most vulnerable, shaping climate-smart and inclusive disaster risk management laws and policies and protecting the environment during armed conflicts. While effective preparedness and response will be critical, it will not be enough to keep up with rising risks. It will be important to consider how the international community will keep up with growing humanitarian needs as climate change fuels disasters and amplifies vulnerabilities, including in conflict situations.
- **Tackling urban vulnerabilities** and strengthening the resilience of residents and systems, particularly for the people living in slums and informal settlements. This thematic area will also consider the need to reinforce individual and collective capacity to respond to growing humanitarian needs in urban settings and how to tackle the humanitarian, operational and legal challenges brought about by urban warfare, such as the destruction of civilian infrastructure and displacement within cities.

The 33rd International Conference will also illustrate how the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement contributes to flagship agreements and global frameworks related to the future of humanitarian and development action.

Trust in humanitarian action

This is an increasingly significant issue of concern, and efforts are required to meet operational challenges, safeguard principled humanitarian action, ensure the highest ethical standards of individual behaviour and advance active partnerships that provide for the fair sharing of risks. Preventing the instrumentalization of aid is key to

enabling neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian actors to maintain the trust they so greatly need to access the most vulnerable. The growing tendency to use humanitarian actors to promote political and security objectives contributes significantly to the decline in trust in humanitarian work. This worrisome trend endangers the very essence of humanitarian aid and principled action.

At the same time, humanitarians must ensure that their own actions are irreproachable by addressing integrity breaches as a matter of urgency and by scaling up investment in their internal behavioural practices. Strengthening the capacity of local actors to maintain their integrity and accountability and ensuring complementarity with international humanitarian networks will be key. In this context, the Conference will look at the evolution of the auxiliary role of National Societies in the 21st century, how to reinforce their legal, statutory and policy-based frameworks and ensure principled funding for humanitarian action. It will also consider the role of States in addressing these concerns.

In addition to the three key themes that will feature at the 33rd International Conference, as outlined above, the event will also serve as **a platform for continued discussions on respecting and implementing IHL and follow up on previous commitments** made at the 32nd International Conference in 2015.

Respecting and implementing international humanitarian law (IHL)

As the main venue for the States Parties to the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to discuss and decide on matters related to IHL, the Conference will continue important work on strengthening respect for IHL. Building on the momentum of the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the Conference will be invited to consider a Four-Year Action Plan on National Implementation of existing IHL obligations. Other issues of current interest, such as the applicability of IHL to terrorism and counter-terrorism (e.g. with regard to foreign fighters and their families), as well as the challenges posed by particular means and methods of warfare to the protection of civilians and civilian objects (e.g. the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, cyber warfare and autonomous weapons systems) are likely to be addressed in a Report on Contemporary Challenges to IHL.

Follow-up to the 32nd International Conference

A number of topics mandated by previous resolutions of the International Conference will also be considered. These include the report on Resolution 5 ‘Safety and security of humanitarian volunteers’, the report on Resolution 3 ‘Sexual and gender-based violence: Joint action on prevention and response’ and the report on Resolution 8 ‘Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on Operational Arrangements dated 28 November 2005 between the Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom in Israel’, among others.



What are the expected outcomes of the 33rd International Conference?

The agenda for the 33rd International Conference will be designed to incorporate the areas outlined above in engaging and dynamic ways. Maximum participant engagement will be fostered through a streamlined and easy-to-navigate architecture, designed to encourage concrete and measurable outcomes as well as inspire conversations on current and emerging humanitarian concerns.

A number of **resolutions** will be negotiated among the Conference members in the drafting committee, which will work in parallel with the other elements of the Conference. The resolutions will be limited in number and should be focused and concise and provide for meaningful and measurable impact.

Genuine and lively debates on emerging needs and possible responses will take place in the **Conference commissions**, in which Conference members and observers are welcome to engage. The purpose of the commissions is to put forward proposals and ideas on the Conference themes to be translated into action and impact on the ground by the participants.

Conference participants will be encouraged to make voluntary commitments, known as **'pledges'**, covering specific, measurable actions that they will take to address humanitarian needs in their national or regional contexts. These may include actions to implement the Conference resolutions or other priorities not necessarily addressed in a resolution. National Societies and States are strongly encouraged to make joint pledges.

The Conference organizers will provide a platform for discussing and sharing experiences on a variety of humanitarian issues through events held outside the formal agenda of the Conference, such as **side events**.

The International Conference will also **elect five members of the Standing Commission**, in addition to the four representatives of the ICRC and the IFRC (two from each). To promote an inclusive, diverse and fair election, a call for nominations from members of National Societies will be launched when the convocation is sent out, six months before the Conference. For more information on the election, see: <https://standcom.ch/election-of-standing-commission-members/>.

How do we aim to achieve a successful Conference?

- ▶ By engaging in deep and lively debates about key issues of humanitarian concern
- ▶ By providing an opportunity for engagement with different actors – such as humanitarian practitioners, volunteers and subject matter experts – and those at the forefront of humanitarian action and for the sharing of experiences among them
- ▶ By ensuring that participants feel part of a network of committed and devoted humanitarian actors and that their contribution is reflected in the Conference outcomes and in long-term strategies and policies
- ▶ By reiterating the importance of translating Conference outcomes and commitments into action and impact on the ground.



Contact us

This concept note sets out an initial overview of the content for the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and topics for decision or debate. We invite feedback and consideration of the following questions:

- ▶ **Does the current framing of the 33rd International Conference reflect the critical issues and the conversations that need to be held?**
- ▶ **Do the topics proposed reflect the most pressing current and future humanitarian concerns?**
- ▶ **What are the specific discussions and angles on these topics that the Conference should address?**

We count on the active involvement of all participants to ensure that the Conference agenda is informed by humanitarian realities on the ground. This will allow the outcomes of the Conference to be translated into effective action.

Comments regarding the proposed concept of the 33rd International Conference will be considered when drafting a preliminary outline of the agenda, which will be shared towards the end of 2018.



**Please send your comments
by 12 October 2018
to conferences@rcrcconference.org**

Timeline of the preparatory process

The Conference agenda and programme will be developed through an iterative drafting and consultation process. Consultations with National Societies will be built into existing regional conferences, policy and legal meetings and additional dedicated sessions.



Engagement and consultation with States will unfold through informative and preparatory sessions organized with Permanent Missions in Geneva and an open-ended and inclusive Group of Ambassadors in the lead-up to the International Conference.

Engagement with observers will be broadened to ensure that the Conference is inclusive of new and emerging actors that have an impact on humanitarian work, in addition to traditional partners.

Joint consultations will be held among National Societies, States, the IFRC and the ICRC to facilitate consensus on proposed resolutions.



About the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

The Conference meets every four years. It is a leading forum for the development of legal frameworks and policies to improve the lives of individuals affected by armed conflict, disasters and other emergencies and to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable. The Conference aims to shape the global humanitarian agenda and foster relationships and alliances between National Societies, States and other humanitarian partners.

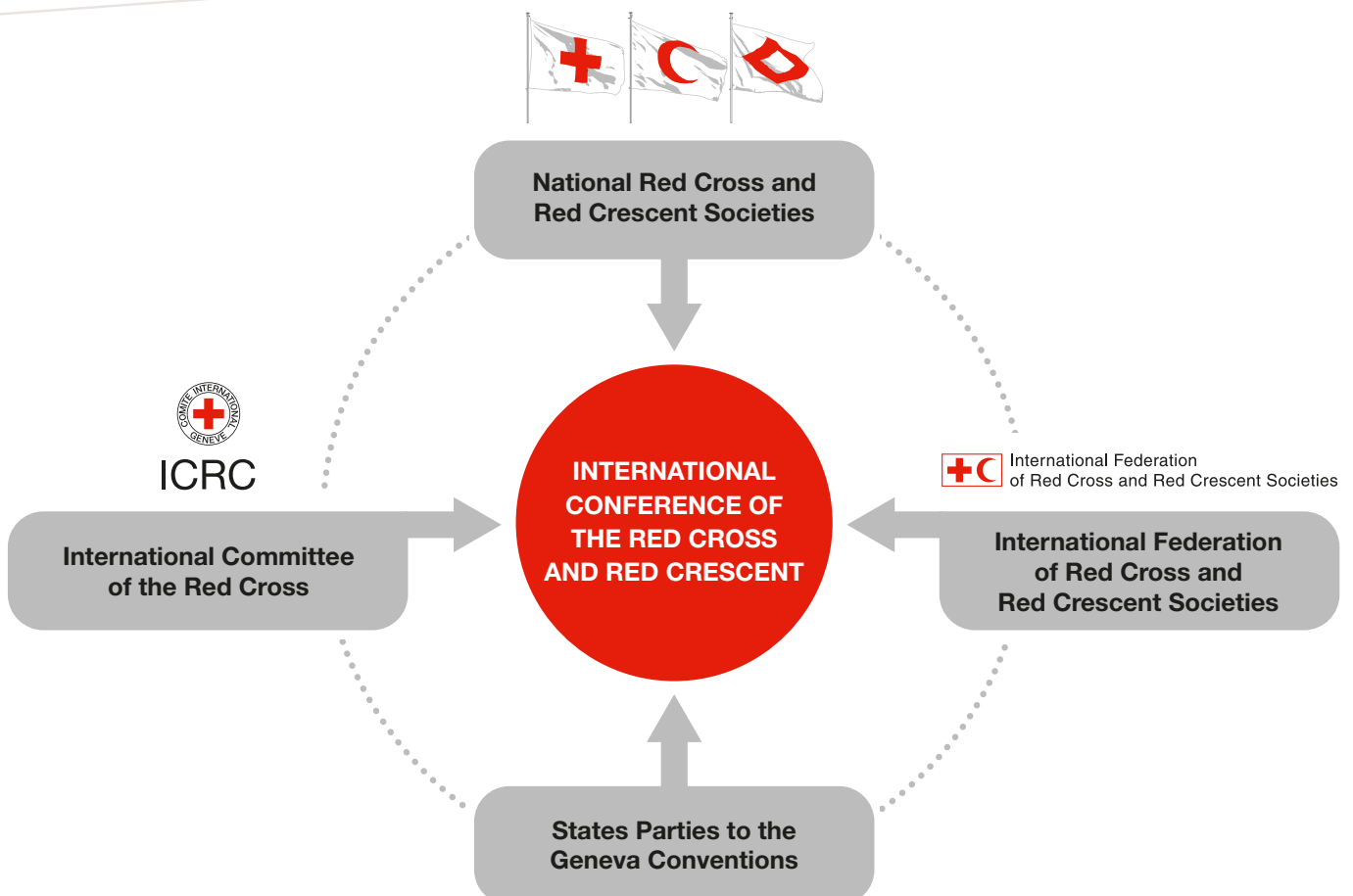
As the supreme deliberative body for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Conference

is an event at which States meet with all the components of the Movement to examine and decide on matters of common interest and any other related issues. The Conference contributes to the unity of the Movement and to the achievement of its mission – to strengthen respect for and further develop international humanitarian law and other relevant international legal frameworks.

The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent will guide and inspire debates and decisions made by the International Conference and provide a safe and creative space conducive to dialogue.

Throughout its history, the International Conference has had a remark-

able impact in the humanitarian field. At the Conference in Stockholm in 1948, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 were extensively discussed before their adoption the following year. The Movement's Fundamental Principles – which guide an immense array of humanitarian activities across the globe – were adopted at the Conference in 1965. In later years, the Conference promoted an international campaign to ban landmines (1995), unanimously adopted the 'Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance' (IDRL Guidelines, 2007) and provided a definition of the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to their public authorities (2007).



Proposed timeframe

DATES	MILESTONES
12 October 2018	Deadline for feedback on concept note
November/December 2018	Initial outline of agenda for the 33rd International Conference sent out to members
January 2019–December 2019	Pledges to be discussed and agreed Model pledges put forward on specific topics
Mid-March 2019	Elements of resolutions ready for consultation
Mid-April 2019	Deadline for receipt of comments on elements of resolutions
Mid-May 2019	Draft-zero resolutions ready for consultation
Early June 2019	Mailing of ‘Convocation’ and provisional agenda and programme
End June 2019	Deadline for submission of reports to be included in the final ‘Report to the 33rd International Conference on the Outcomes of the 32nd International Conference’
June/July 2019	Preparatory Committee on Draft Resolutions (TBC)
September 2019	Deadline for comments on the provisional agenda and programme and draft-zero resolutions
October 2019	Official document mailing (follow-up and progress reports on the adopted resolutions from the previous Conference, background papers on the draft resolutions, official draft resolutions, etc.)
9–12 December 2019	33rd International Conference (opening ceremony and procedural matters on the afternoon of 9 December)