



## Address to the 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission of Narcotic Drugs

### Joint position of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the placing of ketamine under international control

In the light of ongoing discussions relating to the possible placement of ketamine under the framework of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), would like to inform the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the following:

Ketamine has an undisputable role in humanitarian assistance and in prehospital and disaster medicine. There are no available alternatives to ketamine to provide safe anaesthesia in some of the most challenging clinical situations and emergency settings.

Ketamine has a very specific but not insignificant – thus not “limited” – value for humanitarian assistance. Ketamine’s clinical benefits and safety profile, coupled with its usability and importance in some of the most vulnerable and fragile countries far outweigh the risks associated with its misuse.

Ketamine is the anaesthetic of choice when reliable manual and mechanical ventilation equipment is not available or when advanced airway management (tracheal intubation) is not possible (e.g. in mobile clinics, road-traffic accidents with crushed vehicle and trapped persons). Ketamine has a very favourable safety profile in clinical use and is particularly useful in healthcare settings where task-shifting is required due to a lack of anaesthetic staff. In resource poor hospital settings without anaesthetic machines, often without oxygen and sometimes even without electricity, ketamine is the only anaesthetic drug that allows even major surgery being performed. Its usability in traumatology makes it the preferred drug in mass casualty situations, such as earthquake.

In situations of armed conflict, there is frequently a huge increase in the number of trauma cases, combined with severely reduced access to health services at hospital or at specialised level due to insecurity, damaged infrastructure, and flight of professional staff. Health structures may be damaged or destroyed, supply lines disrupted, including with respect to medical oxygen and other consumables necessary for securing safe anesthesia and pain management. In such contexts the regulatory environment for humanitarian supplies often remains as during peacetime, but the authorities may no longer have the capacity to process applications for import licenses in a timely manner or to adequately monitor compliance with existing regulations. These constraints too often limit, delay or totally preclude the availability of life-saving drugs to be used in professional medical practice.

In the light of the above, the IFRC and the ICRC call upon the Commission on Narcotic Drugs to ensure that reinforced control of ketamine does not hamper or delay its availability for medical use, including as part of the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the National Societies, form the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies promotes the humanitarian activities of National Societies among vulnerable people. By coordinating international disaster relief and encouraging development support it seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering.



ICRC

The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest, it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.