



ICRC STRATEGY 2024–2027



For centuries, wars have profoundly shaped and devastated the lives of people across continents. The ever-evolving nature, means and methods of warfare continue to have enduring impacts on individuals and societies. While armed conflicts are often considered an intrinsic part of human existence, conveying the reality and horror of war from the perspective of those who suffer its consequences remains an elusive and challenging, yet necessary, task.

War is the harrowing moment when armed men emerge on the hills overlooking your village, leaving you with mere minutes to escape. In that split second, you face the impossible decision of which possessions to take before you flee. Do you prioritize essential documents, food and clothing, cherished family photographs, or items of sentimental value?

As you hear the men approaching and gather your children together, apprehension overwhelms you. How long will you be displaced? Will it be a matter of days, weeks – or months? You push the thought away as you suddenly realize that your youngest child is still at school, in a building that will be caught in the crossfire of tanks, drones and artillery, as rival forces storm the area.

During war, front lines tear through your once peaceful village or town, cutting you off from friends and relatives, leaving them beyond your reach. In the streets, horrific massacres play out, night after night, with lifeless bodies an inescapable reminder of the atrocities committed. Each day in the hospital, you encounter the anguished look of parents who watch over their injured children, haunted by their inability to shield them from the relentless shelling and shooting. And in the depths of your soul, you carry the pain of a missing spouse or sibling, last seen being taken away at gunpoint in an unmarked vehicle.

War is the anxiety that arises when you approach a local checkpoint. War is the humiliation of being at the mercy of a person armed with a gun, often so young that it could be your own son or daughter. In war, there is no escaping the terror that grips you as you are led blindfolded down unknown corridors by a prison guard, a terror intensified by the screams of fellow detainees being tortured in neighbouring cells.

Pre-existing structural inequalities and power dynamics are exacerbated during conflict. The challenges of what you face depend on who you are, and gender shapes how you experience armed conflict in major ways. You may also face stigma or discrimination because of this or other factors, such as age, class, disability, race, religion and sexual orientation.

Modern conflicts expose you to risks from confrontations fought on both physical battlefields and in cyberspace. They often occur in urban settings, where explosive weapons tear through your densely populated neighbourhood – taking lives, causing massive damage and destroying vital infrastructure. Cyber tools are increasingly being used to shut down civilian infrastructure like hospitals, water systems or electricity grids, causing mayhem without an actual bullet being fired.

War has undergone profound changes throughout history, but the human suffering it causes remains the constant. War forces you to witness unspeakable atrocities, to experience things that should never be endured – and from which there is no full recovery, even if you ultimately survive the conflict itself. When the guns finally fall silent, your surroundings are unrecognizable; the social fabric you once knew is gone, shred to pieces; you coexist with the injured, disabled, traumatized, displaced and humiliated, all of whom have mustered unimaginable strength, courage and resilience to survive, but for whom nothing will ever be the same.

The legacy of war lingers for decades, keeping societies trapped in cycles of pain and uncertainty. You anxiously await the return of a detained loved one or struggle to cope with the unending trauma that comes from not knowing the fate of a missing brother or sister. Each time the doorbell rings or a text message arrives, you desperately cling on to hope, in anticipation of some long-awaited news. Mostly in vain.

Armed conflicts serve as fertile ground where the seeds of hatred are sown. They mark a time when dialogue ceases and the worst impulses are justified under the guise of an “honourable cause”. Suddenly, neighbours once known and respected are ostracized or hunted down; whole communities are wiped out. Today, artificial intelligence and traditional and social media are amplifying the problem by spreading misinformation and distorting the news, making it even more difficult to find a peaceful resolution.

Nevertheless, time and again, it has been demonstrated that only through dialogue, the preservation of some fundamental notion of humanity, a genuine recognition of the suffering and injustice endured and an insistence on accountability for perpetrators can opposing communities or countries find lasting paths toward reconciliation and healing. Unrestrained violence and vengefulness in war – as well as any unaddressed physical and mental wounds left in its wake – serve only to perpetuate brutality and dehumanization.

There is no anonymity in death and suffering. Wars are first and foremost defined by their devastating human consequences.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was born on a battlefield, driven by an outcry and a sentiment that is present in every society and culture: the fundamental refusal to be indifferent to suffering and an unwavering dedication to preserving the dignity of people whose lives are shattered by war. This purpose alone lies at the centre of who we are. It drives our commitment from the day we join this organization. This is what we proudly stand for – nothing else.

Through compassion and a deep commitment to humanity, the ICRC strives – under a mandate enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL), the Geneva Conventions and the statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – to protect and assist people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.

We passionately adhere to the Movement's Fundamental Principles, primarily that of humanity and the overriding respect for human dignity, as well as to neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Our organization does not take sides in armed conflicts and refrains from engaging in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. At times, this posture is misunderstood. Yet, to the ICRC, neutrality is an action-enabling principle: it serves to build a humanitarian space in which we can

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address delicate challenges in dangerous places that would otherwise be beyond our reach. Neutrality does not imply silence in the face of violations of IHL during conflicts. We prioritize bilateral, confidential communication with the parties to conflicts so as to foster dialogue and change behaviour. We may, under certain circumstances and criteria, express our concerns publicly.

ICRC staff endeavour to access populations at risk, as our core mission is centred on being present and in proximity to affected people.

We work in contested spaces, often where other actors are not present. We believe in the importance of showing empathy, actively listening and analysing, as well as designing and directly implementing responses for – and with – individuals and communities. The ICRC distinguishes itself through a unique operational approach, which combines protection and essential services while promoting adherence to IHL, embodying the rules that apply in times of armed conflict.

Nothing in these rules is abstract or theoretical. Every article in IHL emerged from the daunting realities of war. Though at times contested or violated, the Geneva Conventions remain the world's most ratified treaties and reflect a shared international consensus on the need to regulate and limit certain kinds of behaviours during times of armed hostilities. Respecting IHL is the responsibility of both states and non-state armed groups.

As the guardian of and reference organization for IHL, the ICRC works tirelessly to raise awareness of, develop and implement this body of law, for its integration into national legislation and the training of armed forces.

In times of conflict, we stand up for people – whether civilians or combatants – to ensure that their rights and protections under the rules of IHL are upheld. In our daily experience as a front-line humanitarian actor, we see how IHL plays a vital role in limiting the brutality of armed conflict. Respecting these rules is imperative in order to save lives, limit suffering and preserve the prospect of future dialogue and a space for peace, one small step at a time. This is something that the ICRC contributes to, modestly yet importantly, in our role as a neutral intermediary.

A central point of our identity is that we operate from within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and engage in genuine, mutually enabling and supportive partnerships. The ICRC is proud to be at the origin of the Movement and we are conscious of our important responsibility to actively work with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to preserve the Movement as a credible and impactful global humanitarian network.

As an organization, we know what wars are and witness their destructive impact first-hand. Our staff in conflict zones support those who have lost loved ones and homes, provide medical care to treat appalling injuries, and fight against torture and rape. We witness the harm inflicted upon vulnerable people worldwide and the violence resulting from the use of every type of weaponry – from the technologically most advanced to the home-made – by states and non-state armed groups. It is our duty to highlight these realities for decision makers and advocate for change through protection dialogue, humanitarian diplomacy and thought leadership.

While the ICRC's existence is intrinsically connected to the harsh realities of armed conflict, we firmly believe that none of the over 100 ongoing conflicts around the world are inevitable. It is the collective responsibility of the international community to create conditions that are conducive to peace. As a humanitarian organization, the ICRC also carries the responsibility to speak up for peace, especially in these times when the possibility of war is raised in public discourse with such unsettling casualness and frequency.

At a time when the world stands on the brink of yet more tragedies, courage for the ICRC lies in giving modest yet firm reminders to all actors of the urgency to rediscover the humanity in one another.


Mirjana Spoljaric, ICRC President



Sviatohirsk, Ukraine.
The town has seen heavy
fighting, and a number of
residential buildings have been
destroyed or heavily damaged.



WHAT WE FACE

The global socio-political landscape is undergoing significant transformations, departing from the post-World War II era and Cold War struggles. The world is becoming more multipolar, fragmented and divided, leading to growing and multi-dimensional confrontations.

Conflicts are escalating on many fronts and often have devastating consequences. Major international and non-international armed conflicts involve a variety of state actors and non-state armed groups, while other situations of violence impact populations in numerous countries around the globe. The proliferation of armed actors, combined with the high intensity of conflicts, presents significant security and safety challenges to humanitarian organizations. This is compounded by hateful speech and attitudes, misinformation and disinformation. Arms treaties have also been allowed to lapse, and there is a heightened risk of the use of nuclear weapons.

In addition, new technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, autonomous weapons and the digitalization of conflict all create complex physical and digital battlefields, with blurred lines between the civilian and military domains. The pace of change further complicates humanitarian preparedness and response. Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms are hindered by political divisions; this results in prolonged suffering, setbacks in terms of a country's development and displacement. There are also rising concerns regarding the ability to foster consensus around new international legal frameworks.

Furthermore, the accelerating and critical effects of climate change compound the already dramatic conditions faced by conflict-affected communities. Droughts, floods, desertification, unpredictable weather patterns and environmental degradation all make the survival of these communities more difficult, severely threatening their coping mechanisms. Growing demographic pressures, combined with economic exploitation and poverty, also lead to instability and large-scale population movements.

At present, the attitudes towards international development and humanitarian action are undergoing significant change. For instance, the discussions surrounding the localization and decolonization of aid serve as examples of a profound re-evaluation of conventional practices, which have been criticized as patronizing and reflective of outdated mindsets and unequal power dynamics. Approaches deemed to be externally imposed and lacking in appreciation for local expertise and mechanisms, as well as dishonest partnership models, are increasingly being met with resistance.

Finally, funding for humanitarian work is experiencing significant shortfalls and a paradigm shift. These changes are expected to have a lasting impact moving forward, prompting a fresh evaluation of funding models that will better encompass the diverse global landscape – this includes not only state and international financial institutions, but also private philanthropic donors.

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WHAT WE FOCUS ON

STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

In these polarized and transformative times, the ICRC's role remains as relevant as ever. Our goal is to effectively protect and assist conflict- and violence-affected people, firmly stand up for the Fundamental Principle of humanity, and uphold IHL in dialogue with states and non-state armed groups.

Our aims are unambiguously forward-looking. The ICRC embraces the profound changes taking place in terms of the challenges, perspectives and working methods that mark the world of humanitarian action. We are setting priority orientations that reflect a determination to centre upon what lies at the heart of our mandate, with the belief that clarity of focus is the best way to prepare for a meaningful impact in uncertain times.

Five orientations aim to enhance the relevance and impact of our work through activities such as upholding the centrality of protection, promoting IHL, enhancing response quality, affirming an identity within the Movement and engaging with a diversity of perspectives on humanitarian action. A further three enabling orientations focus on bolstering institutional readiness through risk management optimization, digital transformation and staff cohesion. The ICRC will address these orientations through modernization, creativity, adaptation and strategic investments. These orientations are integrated into the organization's annual planning and budgeting processes and are complemented by an implementation plan.

The progress of the strategy will be measured against the following indicators:

- the extent to which people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence access relevant and impactful protection and assistance
- the level of recognition of the ICRC's positions on key subject matters, such as the protection of civilians and individuals *hors de combat*, and the rights of detainees, missing persons and other affected people
- the extent to which the ICRC can access people in places affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence
- the effectiveness of the ICRC's coordination with Movement partners
- the level of motivation, internal cohesion and trust among staff
- the level of financial stability within the organization.

In addition, six cross-cutting approaches are necessary to ensure effective and responsible humanitarian action in the areas of: security management and duty of care; accountability to affected populations; communication; climate and conflict; gender, diversity and inclusion; and impact, evaluation, learning and innovation.

STRENGTHENING THE ICRC'S RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

Upholding the centrality of protection and the role of a neutral intermediary

Promoting international humanitarian law as a global political priority

Enhancing the response impact in acute and protracted phases of conflicts, as well as other situations of violence

Affirming our identity within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

A new humanitarianism for a changing world



BOLSTERING ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND EFFICIENCY

Optimizing risk management and financial stability

Accelerating the digital transformation

Enhancing skills, trust, cohesion and responsibility



CROSS-CUTTING APPROACHES

Security management and duty of care

Climate and conflict

Accountability to affected populations

Gender, diversity and inclusion

Communication

Impact, evaluation, learning and innovation



Gaza Strip.
An ICRC nurse holds
a patient receiving
anaesthesia before
an operation.

A. STRENGTHENING THE ICRC'S RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

Mopti, Mali.
A child held in detention.

1. UPHOLDING THE CENTRALITY OF PROTECTION AND THE ROLE OF A NEUTRAL INTERMEDIARY

Goal

States and non-state actors fulfil their obligations under IHL and uphold the rights of individuals, thus preserving the lives, security, dignity, and physical and mental well-being of people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.

In affirming its pivotal role in humanitarian protection, the ICRC consistently embraces and acts upon its mandated protection-related responsibilities at all levels of its leadership at headquarters and in the field. The organization will strive to enhance its capabilities and foster innovation in the following areas.

1.1 Strengthening engagement and protection dialogues

The ICRC prioritizes direct and confidential interactions with state and non-state actors, as well as other relevant stakeholders. It draws their attention to the consequences in humanitarian terms of armed conflict and reminds them of their obligations under IHL and other applicable bodies of law. By building diverse networks, the ICRC aims to promote behavioural change, prevent, and mitigate the impact of, violations of IHL, and shape policies.

1.2 Implementing protection activities

The ICRC carries out protection activities for the direct benefit of individuals and communities who are impacted by armed conflict and other situations of violence. These activities aim to reduce risks and vulnerabilities, and to uphold the rights of civilians, prisoners of war, detainees, people who have been separated from their loved ones, the missing or deceased and their families, the wounded and sick, victims of sexual violence, children, persons with disabilities, and other affected people. These efforts are complemented by essential services and prevention activities to achieve effective protection outcomes and by collaboration with National Societies and other local actors.

1.3 Acting as a neutral intermediary

The ICRC proactively asserts its role as a neutral intermediary to address challenging humanitarian problems. It leverages its experience to facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties, with the aim of injecting humanitarian considerations into negotiations or attempts at resolving disputes. The role of neutral intermediary also seeks to preserve a space for dialogue and action towards confidence-building and, ultimately, conflict resolution.

1.4 Upholding cross-cutting approaches

The ICRC aligns its multidisciplinary responses with realities in the field, leveraging its proximity to and interactions with affected communities in order to design and implement its humanitarian work in close collaboration with them; adopts perspectives and approaches that factor gender, age and disabilities into its response, to ensure that its activities recognize and address the distinct vulnerabilities and capacities of affected people; and applies improved evidence-based approaches, utilizing data in an effective and timely manner in order to inform its decision-making and protection strategies.

1.5 Enhancing understanding of the risks posed by artificial intelligence and new technologies in warfare

To effectively address these challenges, the ICRC improves its protection methodologies by modernizing its knowledge and capabilities. In addition, it establishes external partnerships in order to gain insights and expertise from relevant stakeholders.

1.6 Establishing protection dialogue and action as foundational competencies

The ICRC prioritizes the development of staff expertise and capabilities in the field of protection, both for generalists and specialists, ensures a sufficient professional workforce that is focused on protection, and fosters a culture of protection across the organization through integration, training and mentoring.

An ICRC staff member talks to a member of a non-state armed group in Colombia.



2. PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AS A GLOBAL POLITICAL PRIORITY

Goal

The human cost of war is reduced by upholding IHL, elevating it to a global political priority, and reinforcing the consensus surrounding the rules applicable to armed conflicts, as well as the limits imposed on the means and methods of warfare.

As the nature of warfare has evolved over time, IHL has also been continually enriched. In order to assume its role as the guardian, promoter and thought leader of this body of law to the fullest extent, the ICRC undertakes the following.

2.1 Making IHL a global foreign policy priority

The ICRC mobilizes all states party to the Geneva Conventions; interacts with non-state armed groups; and strategically engages in regional and global multilateral forums, as well as with National Societies and academia, with a steadfast commitment to reinforcing the universality and enduring significance of IHL. This requires safeguarding its principles and provisions from the temptations of what may be politically expedient at any given time.

2.2 Building bridges for IHL

In an ever-changing world, the ICRC fosters principled and inclusive dialogue with stakeholders across continents – addressing evolving challenges; listening to diverse perspectives; building bridges between cultures, religions and IHL; and integrating local preventive and protective traditions into this dialogue, so as to promote adherence to IHL in armed conflicts. This approach enriches the ICRC's narratives on IHL, anchoring them more effectively in diverse settings and customs.

2.3 Enhancing prevention and bringing IHL home

As it places a strong emphasis on prevention during peacetime, the ICRC actively supports the integration of IHL treaties into national legislation and policies; stimulates awareness of this body of law among governments; encourages the endorsement of new treaties; provides training on the rules of war for the armed forces, diplomats, judges and parliamentarians, promoting an overall deeper understanding of IHL; and nurtures a culture of accountability.

2.4 Assuming IHL thought leadership

The ICRC conducts comprehensive analyses on the ever-evolving nature, means and methods of warfare. Through its extensive field presence and concrete understanding of the impact of armed conflicts, it collects substantial evidence to help shape new IHL initiatives, particularly in relation to weapons and restrictions on their use. It also takes a proactive role in engaging in dialogue and interacting with various actors – including states, non-state entities, National Societies, academia and other actors of influence – to help ensure the future relevance of and respect for IHL.

2.5 Understanding and responding to the impact of new technologies in warfare, including on IHL

One of the ICRC's primary focuses is understanding and responding to the impact of new technologies on warfare and IHL. It actively engages in dialogue with states, non-state armed groups and other relevant actors with the aim of emphasizing the applicability of IHL to domains such as cyber warfare, autonomous weapons, artificial intelligence and outer space, as well as advocating for new frameworks, wherever relevant. It assumes leadership by developing initiatives, such as the creation of a digital emblem, among others.

2.6 Affirming the link between IHL and peace

The ICRC firmly emphasizes the inherent connection between IHL, humanitarian principles and peace. It views IHL as an integral part of the broader international legal framework, which is centred on peace. Leveraging its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC offers its services and seizes opportunities to promote the humanitarian aspects of conflict prevention as well as conflict or dispute resolution.



West Hararge, Ethiopia.
People queue to receive food
and seed from the ICRC.

3. ENHANCING THE RESPONSE IMPACT IN ACUTE AND PROTRACTED PHASES OF CONFLICTS, AS WELL AS OTHER SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE

Goal

The specific needs of populations affected by armed conflict are addressed in a timely and relevant manner. The response takes into account the nature of the situation, the phases of conflict, the vulnerabilities and abilities of the affected people, and the capabilities of local and international actors.

To effectively address the specific needs of conflict-affected populations and achieve protection outcomes, the ICRC upholds its core responsibilities of delivering a targeted multidisciplinary response. It does so through protection, assistance and prevention activities in international armed conflicts, where it acts as it is mandated to do by the Geneva Conventions; in non-international armed conflicts, where it enjoys a right of humanitarian initiative based on IHL; and in other situations of violence, where it may offer its services based on the Statutes of the Movement.

3.1 Adapting to and effectively preparing for diverse and specific situations of armed conflict

The ICRC deliberately tailors the deployment of its activities to the different types and phases of conflict. It cultivates this by customizing operational and logistical capabilities, learning from experience, incorporating innovative services and approaches, and developing and maintaining relevant skills through training.

3.2 Responding to emergencies

The ICRC strengthens its response to the sudden onset or acute phases of conflict by streamlining decision-making processes, as well as improving and simplifying operational, administrative and procurement procedures. While it initially limits the range of its services and accelerates deployments to enhance the timeliness and relevance of its emergency response, it closely collaborates with National Societies and progressively adapts the scope of its services to assist affected people, in accordance with their needs.

3.3 Responding to the protracted phase of conflict

The ICRC adapts its response to long-standing conflicts, relying on its range of protection and essential services, with a focus on sustainable impact. It provides direct humanitarian aid while also supporting institutions in sectors such as health, food production, water, detention and the law. During this phase, the ICRC enhances its partnerships with local and international actors, as well as with National Societies, to sustain access to services and design collaborative approaches that support handovers and exit strategies.

3.4 Responding to post-conflict phases

The ICRC addresses the lasting consequences of war and mobilizes the parties involved to assume their continued responsibilities under IHL. This includes efforts to secure the release of prisoners of war and to visit detainees; search for missing persons and ensure the proper management of the dead, as well as support their families; strengthen the resilience of displaced people; and address the issue of weapon contamination.

3.5 Analysing and adapting to the future of warfare

The ICRC ensures the enduring relevance of its operational procedures and capabilities. It does so through an improved understanding of complex and overlapping factors such as the effects of climate change and pandemics on conflict-affected populations, as well as the growing impact of new technologies, cyber operations, artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons in conflicts. The ICRC recognizes the need to enhance its capacity to respond to these cumulative effects on the impacted communities, in particular through partnerships.

Staff from the ICRC, IFRC and Jordan National Red Crescent Society celebrate World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day.



4. AFFIRMING OUR IDENTITY WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Goal

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a leading force for humanity and stands for principled, effective and cooperative humanitarian action and collective impact across the full spectrum of crises, from armed conflicts to natural and other disasters.

The ICRC is proud of its identity, one which is firmly grounded within the Movement, and is committed to confidently and purposefully cooperating with all National Societies and the IFRC to strengthen the Movement as a credible and impactful global humanitarian network, with mutual recognition of each component's respective mandates, roles and responsibilities. This commitment is achieved in the following ways.

4.1 Improving collaborative mindsets and ways of working

In a changing humanitarian landscape, the ICRC partners with National Societies to develop robust operational responses for populations affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. It is committed to strengthening partnership mindsets and approaches in order to ensure reliability, predictability and consistency. The shift from intention to practice necessitates honest dialogue and learning lessons from and with National Societies and the IFRC, as well as transparent and genuine feedback on the respective expectations.

4.2 Safeguarding the space for principled humanitarian action

With the aim of enhancing access to conflict-affected populations, ensuring the sustainability of their respective operations and achieving their common goals at the local and global levels, the ICRC and National Societies intentionally leverage one another's specific relationships with states – with the former deriving its independent mandate from states, and the latter serving as auxiliaries to public authorities in the humanitarian field. The ICRC lives up to its primary responsibility in upholding and raising awareness of the Fundamental Principles within the Movement.

4.3 Advocating for coordinated Movement responses

The ICRC assumes its statutory responsibilities and advocates for coordinated Movement responses. As a co-convenor, and in line with the Seville Agreement 2.0 and the Movement's Fundamental Principles, it works hand-in-hand with host National Societies as convenors in order to ensure the effective and impactful coordination of the Movement's responses to armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

4.4 Collaboratively understanding a rapidly changing world

Together, the ICRC, National Societies and the IFRC analyse evolving global dynamics and raise our voice as a Movement to influence and address key issues that impact the lives, dignity, health and well-being of people and communities worldwide.

4.5 Enabling National Society responses and capabilities

In addition to its direct response to the needs of affected populations, and in consultation with the IFRC, which has a primary responsibility in National Society development, the ICRC invests in strengthening National Societies' capabilities and supports them in delivering principled and relevant responses. The goal is to achieve greater and sustainable humanitarian impact, stronger influence on the authorities and parties to conflicts, and improved management of reputational risks.

4.6 Building financial sustainability

The ICRC cooperates and coordinates with National Societies and the IFRC to increase the financial resources available for the Movement, based on agreed guidelines and principles.

4.7 Enhancing knowledge and capacities of the Movement within the ICRC

To live up to these commitments, the ICRC undertakes efforts to improve the internal vision of, commitment to and understanding of Movement relations across the organization. It commits to greater consistency of dialogue, interaction and partnering at all levels.

Somalia, Lafoole. The ICRC works with an agricultural cooperative to provide training, drought-resistant seed, farming tools and cash grants.



5. A NEW HUMANITARIANISM FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Goal

Profound political and societal changes at a global level, evolving paradigms around war and peace, and debates on the importance of supporting and enabling local humanitarian action necessitate a re-evaluation of mindsets, policies and practices.

Recognizing these profound shifts and critical debates, the ICRC commits to the following external and internal actions and interactions.

5.1 Taking a leading role in policy debates on the future of humanitarian action

The ICRC engages in local, regional and global discussions, critically evaluating the impact of traditional humanitarian concepts, addressing power imbalances in aid delivery and exploring new paradigms for humanitarian action. It actively listens, learns and innovates the design of its policies and methodologies. It contributes to debates by drawing on its field and legal expertise.

5.2 Strengthening local partnerships

The ICRC interacts at the most local level with affected people and communities, aiming to design responses together with them. The ICRC builds upon its existing practice of partnering with local institutions and National Societies. It actively engages with diverse local actors in order to integrate their perspectives, experience of local protective mechanisms and good practices into its operations.

5.3 Embracing diversity of perspectives

The ICRC enhances its collective ability to understand multiple social, cultural and other perspectives, thereby helping to improve operational decision-making. To this end, the ICRC recognizes the value of diversity within the organization and aims, at all levels of its hierarchy, to have a workforce that better reflects the multidimensional fabric of our world.

5.4 Underscoring the universality of the ICRC's mandate

The ICRC's governance body remains non-political, mono-national and anchored in Swiss law. In order to foster greater understanding of global affairs and humanitarian action as well as seek structured input for its institutional deliberations, it engages in consultations with international personalities, reflecting geographically diverse perspectives.

Mokha Airport, Yemen.
An operation involving the release and repatriation of detainees is carried out with the support of the ICRC.



B. BOLSTERING ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS AND EFFICIENCY

ICRC staff member in Mosul, Iraq.



6. OPTIMIZING RISK MANAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

Goal

The ICRC is professionally managed and governed. It strives for the highest standards of transparency, accountability and efficiency. A modernized, aligned, streamlined and effective risk and financial management system supports the ICRC's improved operational and institutional decision-making and its relevance, service delivery, credibility, accountability and impact. It ensures it has optimal financial resources that allow for the predictable delivery of its services and a timely response to unforeseen crises.

The ICRC's mission and operations entail inherent risks that require effective management. This involves determining risk appetite, anticipating and avoiding specific risks, limiting negative consequences and establishing proper acceptance levels. By optimizing financial management and fostering innovation, the ICRC reduces risk, avoids duplications, standardizes procedures, promotes transparency and accountability, and encourages knowledge sharing for improved financial governance and compliance.

6.1 Optimizing and modernizing financial management

The ICRC creates a senior role of Chief Financial Officer and establishes a robust financial function that is overall responsible for the conduct of all the organization's financial activities, including those implemented through Global Shared Services. This strengthens financial strategies and management; promotes a strong financial culture; enhances ownership of financial health; and drives financial risk management and compliance, including with internal controls and process improvements, thereby providing strategic analysis and guidance.

6.2 Improving efficiencies and financial controls

The ICRC integrates income and expenditure management. This consolidates financial processes and systems, providing a comprehensive view of performance and effective resource allocation. It supports decision-making, identifies cost-saving opportunities and optimizes financial resources.

6.3 Enhancing financial stability

The ICRC strategically diversifies its funding sources among states, multilateral institutions, development banks and private actors. It fosters coordination and resource mobilization with the other components of the Movement. It builds strategic partnerships with the corporate sector and philanthropic foundations that provide financial support and access to resources, expertise and innovative solutions.

6.4 Ensuring conformity with policies and legal frameworks

The ICRC strengthens compliance and oversight functions. This involves implementing robust mechanisms such as internal audits for corrective actions and external reviews to assess compliance with international standards, promoting transparency and accountability.

An orthopaedic technologist takes measurements and enters the information directly into the database. The University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital in Nigeria is supported by the ICRC.



7. ACCELERATING THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Goal

In an ever-evolving world, the ICRC recognizes the importance of seizing digital opportunities to enhance its operational capabilities; support a leaner, more agile and cost-efficient organizational model; and increase accountability and transparency.

In order to significantly advance its digital transformation, the following initiatives are essential for the ICRC to harness digital potential, seize new opportunities and navigate the evolving landscape of humanitarian work with efficiency and effectiveness.

7.1 Improving digital organization, processes and systems architecture

The ICRC is committed to refining its processes and systems, creating a cohesive digital ecosystem that reduces redundancies and inefficiencies. By building a unified digital backbone, the organization supplements its global physical presence with enabling digital means. This facilitates direct and digital interactions between the ICRC, conflict-affected individuals and external partners, donors and suppliers. The goal is to optimize the utilization of digital assets and human capital, ensuring that investments made in the coming years yield maximum impact.

7.2 Developing and implementing a comprehensive cyber security strategy

The ICRC mitigates cyber security threats, protects sensitive data and information and ensures the continuity or rapid restoration of operations following a cyber incident.

7.3 Investing in research and development

In order to remain future-ready in the digital sphere, the ICRC commits to engaging in research, testing and the coordinated scale-up of digital innovations. By continually anticipating needs, threats and disruptions, it stays at the forefront of digital advancements.

7.4 Safeguarding ICRC Archives

The modernized and unified ICRC digital ecosystem is crucial in preserving the organization's invaluable UNESCO-registered archives. This system not only ensures the protection of historical documents, but also facilitates the documentation of the development of IHL and the ICRC's history.

7.5 Leading by example

The ICRC places great emphasis on ensuring that the use of digital technologies aligns with the Movement's Fundamental Principles, as well as with the ICRC's own working methods. This commitment ensures accountability to conflict-affected individuals, secures the protection of data entrusted to the organization and provides transparency to donors. It further guides the choice of the ICRC's technologies, infrastructure and partnerships.

Kachin State, Myanmar.
An ICRC staff member
teaches children about
the dangers of landmines.



8. ENHANCING SKILLS, TRUST, COHESION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Goal

The ICRC's relevance and impact are safeguarded by a collective focus on its mission and principles, and through clarity about what the ICRC stands for.

Responding to complex situations, dealing with extensive human suffering and often facing intense professional stress, the ICRC emphasizes leadership responsibility and transparency about its capabilities and limitations, in order to forge cohesion and trust. Staff uphold values of respect, compassion, collaboration and impact, which leaders are expected to embody and promote. The ICRC values competency, diversity and inclusion within the organization and aims to cultivate a workforce where people from all backgrounds feel respected, supported and have a deep sense of belonging. To achieve this, the ICRC will enable managers to lead diverse teams inclusively and provide equitable career opportunities.

8.1 Investing in our people

The ICRC fortifies its recruitment processes, talent management strategies, diversity initiatives and an inclusive workplace culture. It values all its staff – generalist and specialist, resident (national) and mobile (international) – and relies on their unique roles, skills and contributions. Striving for fairness in terms of giving opportunities, the organization attracts qualified individuals and invests in their development, thereby strengthening the very fabric of its operational foundation and aligning with its primary goals.

8.2 Building unity of purpose

The ICRC places a priority on establishing a comprehensive and dedicated staff integration course within the programme. This reinforces cohesion and fosters a shared understanding of the organization's vital humanitarian mission. The integration programme focuses on humanitarian law and action; the Fundamental Principles; the essence of protection dialogue and action; the provision of essential services; security management and duty of care; nurturing Movement relations and partnership competencies; and cultivating a broader understanding of human resources and financial knowledge and responsibilities.

8.3 Enhancing performance and effectiveness

The ICRC promotes an environment that is conducive to knowledge sharing and continuous learning. This is accomplished through effective communication channels, effective feedback mechanisms and open dialogue with staff. The organization is continuously evaluating its people management strategies and actively seeks opportunities for improvement. Platforms for dialogue serve as a space to discuss operational challenges, ethical dilemmas and crucial challenges in people management.

8.4 Ensuring optimized internal functioning and resilience

The ICRC strengthens leadership responsibility and accountability within the organization, adapts its organizational model, gives top priority to – and empowers – field delegations and fosters a caring internal environment. It aims to establish coherence, integrity and alignment with its vision and objectives, and implements a leaner and more adaptable organizational design. The ICRC addresses the management of multiple crises while ensuring the seamless continuity of day-to-day activities.



Al-Hawl camp for internally displaced people, Syria. This ten-year-old boy was injured before arriving at the camp and needed surgery on his leg. When he went for his operation, his siblings cried, thinking they would not see him again.

CROSS-CUTTING APPROACHES

The ICRC is dedicated to improving the quality, impact and accountability of its operations by taking the following six cross-cutting approaches.



SECURITY MANAGEMENT AND DUTY OF CARE

The ICRC prioritizes the safety of its staff and the continuity of its operations, which allows the organization to maintain its ability to operate in some of the most dangerous environments. It continuously improves its ability to identify and mitigate security risks in order to enhance its overall resilience. By investing in robust preparedness measures, the ICRC minimizes the impact of potential crises and ensures a swift and efficient response when they do occur. The ICRC owes its staff a duty of care in relation to their health, safety and security at work, during and after their employment.



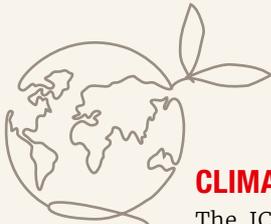
ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS

The ICRC puts people at the centre of its work, actively including them in designing humanitarian activities. It ensures transparency regarding its capabilities and limitations, and engages communities in meaningful discussions on needs, solutions and relevant activities. It enhances needs assessments and feedback mechanisms, and adjusts its operations to align with their priorities. Through continuous learning and adaptation, the ICRC addresses the humanitarian consequences of conflict, minimizes risks and tackles behaviours that undermine the safety and dignity of affected individuals.



COMMUNICATION

At the core of the ICRC's work is its focus on conflict-affected people. Their experiences and perspectives serve as the foundation for the organization's communication efforts. By humanizing the consequences of war, the organization aims to preserve the dignity of these individuals and shed light on the true impact that conflict has on them. The ICRC's communication emphasizes the importance of IHL in protecting people during armed conflict and supports the ICRC's operational efforts by highlighting its prevention, protection and assistance activities. It showcases the added value of these actions, and recognizes the contributions of Movement partners and positive outcomes for affected people. In conjunction with humanitarian diplomacy and policy dialogue, communication also plays a crucial role in advocating for the organization's mission. Managing security and perception challenges is another aspect of the ICRC's communication strategy. This includes combating misinformation, disinformation and hate speech that is directed at the organization and its staff. Emphasizing the ICRC's neutrality helps to underscore its access, action-enabling values and trust-building efforts.



CLIMATE AND CONFLICT

The ICRC supports conflict-affected communities in adapting to climate change and mitigating environmental degradation. It commits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reinforces IHL aimed at protecting the environment. The ICRC collaborates with states and other actors to reinforce their respective laws, policies and practices, so as to help ensure improved protection of the environment from the devastating impact of war. In order to achieve these objectives, it integrates climate and environmental risks into all of its programmes and maintains close cooperation with other Movement components.



GENDER, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The ICRC recognizes that gender and all diversity factors shape humanitarian needs and people's access to its services. It enhances its internal capacity to analyse, innovate and respond to diversity-related concerns by incorporating a gender perspective and promoting inclusive humanitarian action. The ICRC commits to fostering a safe, healthy and respectful environment with diverse representation and equitable treatment for its staff. Preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is a crucial part of this commitment.



IMPACT, EVALUATION, LEARNING AND INNOVATION

The ICRC actively integrates creativity and innovation into its operational and management approaches. The organization is committed to enhancing its evaluative practices and fostering evidence-based decision-making. By generating objective and relevant data, it ensures that findings influence organizational decision-making, strategy development and planning processes. These processes are closely tied together and contribute to the ICRC's Planning for Results system.

To review the present strategy, the ICRC has set specific targets. Each implementation year will see one targeted evaluation to assess the progress that has been made. In addition to these, a dedicated review will be conducted in the second half of 2026, to inform the next Institutional Strategy.

The Caquetá Department in Colombia has been hit hard by armed conflict. This man and his wife have been looking for their daughter for 18 years.



During a trip to Mamdi Department, Chad, the ICRC raises awareness of international humanitarian law with local civil defence groups.



A. Commins/ICRC

Cover photo: Aleppo, Syria. A mother who had to flee from her home tends to her child and bakes bread in the street, which is only a block away from the front line.

H. Vanesian/ICRC