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**NOTE**

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Geneva 9-12 December 2019) - Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States

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Delegations will find in Annex, for information, the statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States, approved by the Council on 25 November 2019, for delivery at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement.

**33rd International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement**

**Geneva, 9-12 December 2019**

**General Debate**

**Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States**

Chair

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. We welcome the 33rd International Conference as a unique platform for substantial discussions on international humanitarian law (IHL) and the challenges faced by humanitarian action. The EU and its Member States remain committed to continued discussions on respect for and the implementation and further strengthening of IHL and the humanitarian principles in close cooperation with the National Societies. We particularly acknowledge the important role of the ICRC as a guardian and promoter of international humanitarian law. We express our appreciation for the Movement's strong commitment and dedication in providing assistance to those most in need, often in very challenging operational contexts. Seventy years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, the European Union reaffirms its strong support for the respect for and the promotion of international humanitarian law, which remain crucial to achieve the best protection of those affected by armed conflict.

We are seriously concerned about the widespread lack of compliance with International Humanitarian Law during many contemporary armed conflicts, particularly by deliberate breaches of IHL. This disregard for the rules of armed conflict poses a critical challenge to the protection of civilians and vital civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, that have been targeted, in particular when explosive weapons are used indiscriminately in populated areas. The EU remains strongly committed to the fight against impunity for atrocity crimes and underlines the important complementary role of the International Criminal Court in case a State is unable or unwilling to carry out genuine investigation or prosecution of alleged perpetrators of the most serious international crimes. Those crimes are quite often committed in connection with an armed conflict. The EU also appreciates the crucial contribution of other accountability mechanisms, such as the IIIM, in documenting serious breaches of IHL and in ensuring accountability.

The EU and its Member States urge for universal respect for International Humanitarian Law and remain committed to strengthening the implementation and dissemination of IHL. The EU and its Member States will continue to implement a broad range of actions to ensure better compliance with International Humanitarian Law, including measures aimed at enhancing the safety of humanitarian workers and volunteers, as well as medical personnel. We strongly support initiatives to collect and analyse data on attacks against medical personnel and hospitals in order to better address and prevent such attacks.

In compliance with international humanitarian law and in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of health care in armed conflict, the EU and its Member States will seek ways of enhancing their support in the implementation of and respect for the legal framework regulating humanitarian work, especially to enhance the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel, both staff and volunteers.

Domestic implementation of relevant international instruments plays a central role in fulfilling obligations under IHL. The EU and its Member States have pledged to work towards further participation in principal IHL and other relevant international legal instruments, and to explore ways of better using existing mechanisms and procedures at the domestic level, such as national IHL committees, to promote ratification and implementation of IHL instruments. We therefore fully support the draft Resolution on “Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law”.

Equally, we wish to draw attention to the increasingly complex legal landscape that humanitarian actors operate in. Important tools of foreign and security policy, sanctions and counter-terrorism measures, should be designed and implemented fully taking into account obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law as well as the humanitarian principles. These tools should include, when appropriate, safeguards for principled humanitarian action to avoid unintended consequences.

Technological innovation is leading to new means and methods of warfare (such as cyber-attacks, armed drones and autonomous weapons systems) and further consideration should be paid to their potential impact in terms of emergence of new challenges with regard to the implementation of IHL and the protection of civilians.

The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable persons are appropriately addressed in all humanitarian settings. The protection of women, girls, boys and men and those most at risk due to, for example, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age or religion, is therefore our priority. We are enhancing efforts to address and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict, particularly against women and children. The EU and its Member States are also committed to better address the needs of persons with disabilities and to promote their empowerment and meaningful participation in the decision making process in all phases of humanitarian action. We acknowledge the key role that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement plays in supporting persons in vulnerable situations. We also welcome the draft Resolution on “Women and leadership in the humanitarian action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement”.

Mental health is an essential dimension of health and well-being. Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs is also critical as it helps empower individuals and build resilient communities. We therefore welcome the draft Resolution on “Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies”.

Bearing in mind the profound negative impact of the separation of families due to armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies, we welcome the draft Resolution on “Restoring family links while respecting privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection”.

The negative effects of climate change lead to increasing humanitarian needs. We call for better management of the increasing risks deriving from climate change by looking further into the investment possibilities for preparedness, early action and disaster risk reduction, in order to lessen the humanitarian impact of climate change and limit material damage.

Overall, we note that there are immense humanitarian needs, further exacerbated by increasing vulnerabilities, against a background of limited resources. It is therefore important to address the challenges through a joint, multi-stakeholder approach, with all actors contributing in line with their respective mandates and core strengths. In this context, we would like to underline that a good coordination between humanitarian and development actors is essential for addressing needs and vulnerabilities in an integrated and sustainable manner.

Thank you.