



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ICRC

As delivered by Counsellor Hilde Austad
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 27 October 2016

Mr Chair,

Closer cooperation between regional organisations, humanitarian organisations and civil society is necessary to improve our response to humanitarian challenges. With the number of recent and on-going armed conflicts and humanitarian crises in the OSCE area in mind, we are grateful for this opportunity to discuss these issues with the president of the ICRC.

Mr Chair,

First of all, Norway would like to take this opportunity to thank the ICRC for many years of important and fruitful partnership.

The work of the ICRC is of fundamental importance in developing and ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law. We are deeply concerned by the lack of respect shown by many parties to armed conflicts for the humanitarian law obligations on the protection of civilians. We commend the ICRC for their untiring efforts in addressing this crucial issue. .

In particular, we are concerned by the repeated pattern of indiscriminate and disproportionate use of explosive weapons with wide area effect in residential and urban areas. Such shelling causes high numbers of civilian casualties and destruction of critical infrastructure on which civilians depend for their survival and livelihoods, like power stations and water and gas plants.

The efforts made by the ICRC to deliver humanitarian aid to civilian populations affected by armed conflicts are of vital importance. In particular, we commend the ongoing efforts by the ICRC in Eastern Ukraine to deliver humanitarian aid and restore infrastructure, despite difficulties faced in gaining access to affected areas.

In this regard, we underline the obligation by all parties to the conflict to ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need. Considering the high number of persons detained or otherwise deprived of their liberty, we also call on the parties to respect their obligations to protect such persons, and to allow the ICRC full, safe and unimpeded access.

MrChair,

We are also alarmed by the increasing level of attacks and threats against health care personnel in conflicts and other emergencies. It is particularly disturbing that the blocking of access to health care is deliberately being used as a tool to inflict harm on civilians. We commend the ICRC's initiative "Health Care in Danger", to which Norway is a partner.

Sexual and gender-based violence is disturbingly prevalent, both in armed conflict and in the aftermath of disasters. This is totally unacceptable and has to be dealt with. We commend the ICRC for identifying clear measures to reduce and eliminate it.

As a result of the dire humanitarian situation caused by ongoing and protracted conflicts, an unprecedented number of people are on the move. We value the efforts of the ICRC to help and respond to the overwhelming needs along migratory routes.

Mr Chair,

Ensuring the protection of civilians is more important than ever. Two key priorities in Norway's humanitarian policy are safe schools and protection of health care. Last year in May, the Safe Schools Declaration was launched at an international conference in Oslo. The purpose of this Declaration is to prevent military use of schools and universities and hence reduce the number of attacks on schools, students and teachers during armed conflict. So far 56 countries have endorsed the Declaration, and the number will increase.

Mr Chair,

The role and importance of the International Committee of the Red Cross can hardly be overestimated. Let me conclude by expressing our deep appreciation for the valuable work carried out by the ICRC as well as National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies throughout the world.

Thank you, Mr Chair