



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Presentation of the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 10, 2020

The United States warmly welcomes you, President Maurer, to the Permanent Council, and thanks you for your comprehensive report. Let me start by saying at the outset that the United States greatly admires the work of the *International Committee of the Red Cross* and the efforts of your courageous staff around the globe to preserve human dignity and relieve suffering in areas affected by conflict. Your work to mitigate the effects of conflict for non-combatants is difficult even in the best of times. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has only added to that challenge.

The *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) and OSCE have a long history of fruitful cooperation in preventing and responding to conflicts. Just last week, the OSCE's *Ministerial Council* considered the ravages of the bloody Russian-led conflict in eastern Ukraine, now in its seventh year. The overwhelming majority of Ministers and delegations urged Russia, and the armed groups and proxies that it supports, to facilitate the unhindered access of the SMM, including along the internationally-recognized border, and to allow the ICRC unhindered access to detainees in portions of Ukraine not controlled by the government, as well as Russia-occupied Crimea.

We applaud the work of the *International Committee of the Red Cross* in Ukraine to provide humanitarian relief through demining, addressing missing persons, supporting coronavirus relief efforts, and improving access to safe drinking water in conflict-affected areas, among other activities. The ICRC's efforts to alleviate human suffering, and the OSCE *Special Monitoring Mission*'s work to provide transparency regarding the situation on the ground, are crucial to creating space for negotiations to end the Russia-led conflict in eastern Ukraine – a progress and a development that we hope for in the immediate future. We call on Russia to facilitate the access of both organizations to all regions of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea.

The United States welcomes the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We urge the parties to the conflict to provide security guarantees and facilitate information-sharing for the ICRC and the *Personal Representative of the Chair-in-Office* to facilitate the exchange of detainees and remains. Until all detainees are safely home, we call on Azerbaijan and Armenia to provide for the humane treatment of every detainee and to hold accountable those responsible for any abuse.

I am sure you also share our concern regarding the deteriorating humanitarian situation, which is made worse by the coronavirus pandemic and the onset of winter.

We also commend the ICRC's work in Georgia and cooperation with the OSCE. Clarifying the fate of missing persons, facilitating family reunification, and helping communities on both sides of the *Administrative Boundary Lines* help build trust and knit conflict-affected communities back together again, even as Russia continues to occupy sovereign Georgian territory.

Mr. Chairman, the key to peacefully resolving these conflicts is respect for international law, including the *Geneva Conventions*, and OSCE commitments, including the *Helsinki Final Act*. The United States will continue to support the OSCE and stand by the ICRC as defenders of our rules-based international order and of human dignity. The ICRC and OSCE have a long, established history of cooperation. The ICRC's advocates in the OSCE area and around the globe serve in very dangerous environments. The ICRC's humanitarian assistance is crucial to saving lives and protecting human dignity in conflict ravaged areas, creating the space conducive to peace processes.

On behalf of the United States, I want to thank you, President Maurer and the devoted corps of the ICRC for your tireless work to alleviate human suffering and defend our rules-based order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.