



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY  
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 14 November 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,

We welcome the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, to the Permanent Council and thank him for his address to the Council.

The ICRC is the most significant guardian of the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law. The ICRC's work is based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. These are values also important to the OSCE, which finds a useful and important partner in the ICRC.

There is a number of recent and on-going armed conflicts and humanitarian crises in the OSCE region. We are concerned when parties to armed conflicts disregard the obligation to protect civilians. All participating States must show respect for International Humanitarian Law and human rights in our entire region. In the context of armed conflict, this obligation is critically important. The ICRC's competence, presence and proximity in the field makes it a key partner to ensure respect for these obligations.

We are concerned about the situation in Ukraine. Vulnerable people, in particular the elderly, children and people with disability, live under very difficult conditions. The ICRC has increased their efforts for safe access to education in many different contexts. We would appreciate if the President could elaborate on how the ICRC might be working on safe access to education in the conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.

The President stated that the efforts to ensure that people do not go missing, is one of the most important humanitarian legacies. Under the topic of humanitarian protection,

preventing that people go missing is a priority for Norway, as well as restoring family links when prevention has failed. For us, contributing to solving the issue of the missing is closely linked also to restoring family links and to the protection of children. In this context, we appreciate our partnership with the ICRC, which supports the ICRC's work to standardise the international procedures for working on the missing.

Norway will actively participate at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva in December. We appreciate that protection will be a central topic at the conference. We also particularly welcome the draft resolution on addressing the mental health of people affected by armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies. The adoption of such a resolution will serve as a necessary reminder that there are more than physical consequences to conflict.

Some Norwegian priorities are particularly important at the upcoming international conference. Upholding international humanitarian law is essential. Probably more than ever in our time. As part of that, we emphasise the practical implementation, and strengthening, of the protection of civilians. Preventing and combating sexual and gender-based violence remains a priority. So too, does the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as addressing urban warfare and its impact on the civilian population.

The OSCE has recently conducted a survey on the well-being and safety of women in conflict in parts of the OSCE region. The report shows that sexual and gender-based violence is disturbingly prevalent, in particular in armed conflict, where 70 % of women have reported to experience some form of violence. This has to be dealt with. We commend the ICRC's efforts to identify clear measures to reduce and eliminate such violence. The participating States must draw on this expertise and take concrete action to prevent and counter violence against women.

Thank you