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Subject:	34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Geneva, 28-31 October 2024) - Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States

Delegations will find in Annex the statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States, approved by written procedure on 25 October 2024, which had been delivered at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

34TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

GENEVA, 28-31 OCTOBER 2024

GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

This is a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs and a critical moment in our history. As conflicts proliferate, international humanitarian law is increasingly disregarded. At the same time, damaging natural hazards are causing ever more suffering to persons already in extremely vulnerable situations.

We have the power to change this situation. But we must take immediate action. Those in need are counting on us.

We praise the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for its essential work on prevention, protection and humanitarian assistance. We recognise the extremely difficult conditions in which you act, every day. We pay tribute to your staff and the vast network of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers. The European Union and its Member States highly value the IFRC and the National Societies' commitment to locally led action, as well as the ICRC's unique role in humanitarian protection, as the guardian of IHL and as a neutral, impartial and independent intermediary. We welcome the solid and forward-looking strategic partnerships between the EU and, both, the IFRC and the ICRC.

This 34th International Conference is a much-needed moment to bring together the Movement, States and other stakeholders to reaffirm our global commitment to IHL and to strengthen our commitment to principled humanitarian action. These are key political and policy priorities for the EU and its Member States.

We are deeply concerned at the brutality of warfare in current conflicts in which IHL rules, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, are not respected. This has appalling consequences for civilian populations and infrastructure, and a disproportionate impact on women and girls.

There must be no impunity for serious violations of IHL and other most serious crimes. The decisions and judgements of international courts and tribunals must be respected and implemented. We underline that States are primarily responsible for prosecuting individuals responsible for grave breaches of IHL under their jurisdiction. Should a State be unwilling or unable to prosecute the individuals responsible for these violations, we trust the ICC to act. The ICC is instrumental in the fight against impunity through its investigation and prosecution. We fully support the ICC and other relevant courts and tribunals' efforts in that regard.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to using all available mechanisms at national, regional, and international levels to ensure respect for IHL. This includes efforts to build close cooperation with regional organisations, to enhance and uphold the respect for IHL and International Human Rights Law. The EU Member States will continue to adopt the necessary legislative, administrative, and practical measures to ensure and further strengthen domestic implementation of IHL. We therefore fully support the draft resolution "Building a universal culture of compliance with international humanitarian law" and undertake to continue efforts to foster a culture of respect for IHL as a long-term commitment.

We welcome, as well, the draft resolution on “Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict”. While we recognise the important role of information and communication technologies in delivering essential services to the affected populations, including humanitarian assistance, we also acknowledge the growing impact of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech on humanitarian operations. The EU and its Member States recognise the increasing role of cyber and information operations in armed conflict, acknowledge that their use can be harmful in armed conflicts and that IHL applies to these operations. Together, we will strive to ensure better protection of civilians against cyber threats.

More than 300 million people need humanitarian assistance. The EU together with its Member States is among the leading humanitarian donors in the world. We remain committed to ensure that, in all humanitarian settings, the needs of the most vulnerable are appropriately addressed in accordance with the humanitarian principles. For this, we are committed to continuing facilitating humanitarian access and supporting humanitarian organisations in their work. This entails continued support to increased data collection, better analysis and support of practical measures to enhance the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel.

As strong advocates of the localisation agenda, the EU and its Member States are committed to work with their humanitarian partners to support locally led responses, through participatory processes contributing to more resilient communities and a stronger humanitarian system. We recognise the critical role played by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in advancing the localisation agenda, emphasising the importance of strengthening the National Societies’ capacity and responsibility as first responders to a crisis and welcoming the efforts to strengthen risk-sharing throughout the humanitarian response. We, therefore, welcome the draft resolution on “Enabling local leadership, capacity and delivery in principled humanitarian action and strengthening resilience”.

Climate change and environmental degradation are raising the frequency and intensity of natural disasters. By 2050, 216 million persons could be constrained to leave their home because of climate change. This is an increasing risk to peace and security that needs to be better managed. It is urgent to strengthen anticipatory action in order to limit negative effects of natural disasters and reduce corresponding humanitarian needs and better preserve human dignity. We welcome the two draft resolutions that are being put forward in this respect.

On their 75th anniversary, the EU and its Member States call on all States parties to the Geneva Convention to put their differences aside and to reaffirm their commitment to IHL and the humanitarian principles.
