



# ICRC

PUBLIC RELATIONS UNIT  
International Committee of the Red Cross  
19, avenue de la Paix  
1202 Geneva  
Switzerland  
Tel: +41 22 730 3443  
[press@icrc.org](mailto:press@icrc.org)  
[www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)

## ICRC News Release

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### **Ukraine: As humanitarian crisis deepens, parties urgently need to agree on concrete measures; misinformation risks lives**

Geneva (ICRC) – As the international armed conflict in Ukraine enters its fifth week, the level of death, destruction and suffering that continues to be inflicted on civilians is abhorrent and unacceptable.

Over the last five weeks, the ICRC has been speaking with Russian and Ukrainian authorities about their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and what practical steps must be taken to limit the suffering of civilians and those who no longer participate in hostilities, including the wounded, sick, and prisoners of war (POWs). To the ICRC's great concern, the parties are yet to meet many of their core obligations under IHL or reach consensus on key issues that only they can concretely deliver on, specifically:

- We have made detailed proposals regarding safe passage and evacuations for civilians to ease the massive suffering taking place in Mariupol, but we still lack the concrete agreements needed to move forward. Today, civilians are taking the life-and-death decision to flee when there is no ceasefire or other agreements in place that would allow them to leave safely.
- Time is running out for civilians in Mariupol and in other frontline areas who have now gone for weeks with no humanitarian assistance. The militaries on the ground need to give civilians and humanitarian organisations security guarantees and practical agreements to allow aid in and for those who wish to evacuate safely.
- In addition, the parties to the conflict must inform the ICRC of the POWs—and other people deprived of their liberty—whom they hold and allow the ICRC to visit them. We expect the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Geneva Conventions without further delay.
- The parties need to follow through on concrete proposals for the dignified treatment of the dead so they can be identified, families informed, and bodies returned.
- The belligerents are obligated under international humanitarian law to protect civilians, to limit military operations to exclusively military objectives and to take precautionary measures.

In an effort to advance conversations on these issues, reduce the suffering and increase assistance to civilians in need, the ICRC's president travelled first to Kyiv and then Moscow to meet with authorities. His meetings with authorities in Moscow triggered deep anger for some. We want to be clear that these diplomatic meetings with all sides are anchored in international humanitarian law and passionate advocacy for the best interest of civilians trapped in conflict.

At the same time, deliberate, targeted attacks using false narratives and disinformation to discredit the ICRC have the potential to cause real harm for ICRC teams, our Red Cross Red Crescent Movement

partners working on the ground and the people we serve. As needs increase by the hour, our ability to deliver much-needed humanitarian assistance is today being jeopardised by a surge of misinformation and disinformation about our work and the role that we play to alleviate suffering in armed conflict.

One claim that has no basis in truth is a false allegation about ICRC's role in forced evacuations. The ICRC has not been involved with any forced evacuation or forced transfer of civilians into Russia from Mariupol or any other Ukrainian city. To be absolutely clear, we would never support any operation that would go against people's will.

There is another false allegation that has no basis in truth about our work in Russia. To be clear: the ICRC does not want to open an office in southern Russia to "filter" Ukrainians, as many reports are alleging. We are not opening a refugee camp or any other type of camp.

These are the facts: the ICRC is discussing opening an office in Rostov in southern Russia, where we currently have no office. This is part of a huge regional scale-up to deal with a massive humanitarian crisis and meet the needs of people wherever they are. We already have teams in Belarus, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, and Romania.

Lastly, neutral and impartial humanitarian action must be respected, both ours and others'. This is bigger than the ICRC. Neutrality and impartiality are not abstract concepts or lofty principles that have no relation to people's real-life experiences. It is a means to an end, a way of working that allows us to reach, help and in many cases save the lives of civilians, no matter what side of the frontline they are on. Our presence is to assist and protect and should never be interpreted as legitimizing sovereignty or territorial claims, which are the exclusive right and obligation of the political actors.

This is the sort of lifesaving and life-changing humanitarian work that we and others must be allowed to do in Ukraine and surrounding countries in response to the massive and growing humanitarian needs caused by this international armed conflict.

The ICRC has been working in Ukraine since 2014, supporting people affected by conflict. Since the recent escalation of the crisis, we have brought over 500 tons of medical supplies, food and relief items into the country to respond to skyrocketing humanitarian needs. We will continue to scale up our work and now have teams in 10 locations across the country.

A world without neutral and impartial humanitarian action is a bleaker, more dangerous place for victims of conflict, and for us all.

We call on the parties to safeguard this action, to urgently meet their obligations under IHL to protect civilians caught in conflict, and to facilitate neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action.

**For more information, please contact:**

Crystal Wells (English), ICRC Geneva, [cwells@icrc.org](mailto:cwells@icrc.org), +41 79 642 80 56

Ewan Watson (French, English), ICRC Geneva, [ewatson@icrc.org](mailto:ewatson@icrc.org), +41 22 730 34 43

Jason Straziuso (French, English), ICRC Geneva, [jstraziuso@icrc.org](mailto:jstraziuso@icrc.org), +41 79 949 3512

Chris Hanger (French, English, German), ICRC Geneva, [changer@icrc.org](mailto:changer@icrc.org), +41 79 731 0403

Matthew Morris (English), ICRC London, [mmorris@icrc.org](mailto:mmorris@icrc.org), +44 7753 809471

Frédéric Joli (French), ICRC Paris, [fjoli@icrc.org](mailto:fjoli@icrc.org), +33 6 20 49 46 30

Elizabeth Shaw (English), ICRC Washington DC, [eshaw@icrc.org](mailto:eshaw@icrc.org), +1 202 361 1566

Diana Santana (English), ICRC New York, [dsantana@icrc.org](mailto:dsantana@icrc.org), +1 917 455 9035

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