



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1349 Vienna, 16 December 2021

EU Statement in response to the Address by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer

1. The European Union warmly welcomes Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We take this opportunity to pay tribute to the unique work carried out by the ICRC in challenging contexts worldwide and reassure you of the EU's continued support.
2. We reiterate our commitment to international humanitarian law and to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence as well as to preventing politicization of humanitarian aid.
3. We highly value the ICRC as an independent and neutral organization, which ensures humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. We commend the work of the ICRC in protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts. We especially appreciate your work on missing persons, visiting detention facilities, facilitating exchange of conflict-related detainees, and confidence building measures. This is a concrete and valuable contribution towards our shared goal of stability and peace.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to humanitarian work. It has further strained the health care systems of conflict-affected countries and puts persons in vulnerable situations, such as internally displaced persons, at additional risk.

5. The grave humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's acts of aggression in the conflict in eastern Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol has resulted in a situation where more than 3,5 million people on both sides of the line of contact remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The ICRC, as well as UN agencies, have documented a pattern of severe human rights violations and abuses in the illegally annexed Crimea, especially targeting the Crimean Tatar population and local Ukrainian-speaking communities. In eastern Ukraine, humanitarian issues include access to health services, food, livelihood, shelter, protection, receiving pensions, and restricted access to critical infrastructure and utilities, as well as to family members living on the other side of the contact line. As one of the few humanitarian actors operating in non-government controlled areas, ICRC's work to secure access to drinking water, to ensure health facilities on both sides of the contact line, to deliver humanitarian aid, as well as to train children and adults about mine awareness is crucial. This is why the EU is proud to be one of the largest humanitarian donors of the ICRC in Ukraine.
6. We regret that ICRC's access is severely restricted in the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, which are illegally annexed by Russia. The ICRC, and other humanitarian actors, need to have safe, secure and unimpeded access throughout the whole territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. We call for ICRC's full access to all detainees, including in the non-government controlled areas, in line with the Minsk agreements and the Paris Normandy Summit conclusions.
7. Humanitarian aid should be provided in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, through an international mechanism and with coordination at international level. The convoys entering Ukraine from the Russian side of the border without the permission of the Ukrainian authorities violate Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
8. The ICRC's work and the issue of its access has also been of great importance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We welcome the fact that the ICRC has provided emergency medical supplies, food and hygiene items as well other necessities to the affected populations in the region. The EU supports these operations with

humanitarian funding. In addition, we appreciate the ICRC's work in tracing missing persons as a result of conflict as well as their visits to detainees.

9. We are grateful for the ICRC's assistance regarding the migration situation at the EU's external border with Belarus. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the instrumentalization of migrants and refugees carried out by the Belarus regime for political purposes. International organisations, including the ICRC, need to be provided with immediate and unhindered access to deliver humanitarian assistance. Relevant international organizations must also be allowed to facilitate the return of these migrants to their home countries.

10. In concluding, we wish you, Mr. Maurer, and your staff, every success in carrying out your important humanitarian mission.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, as well as UKRAINE and the REPUBLIC of MOLDOVA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.