

International Committee of the Red Cross

Statement to the First Committee

New York, 17 October 2025

Mr Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This First Committee takes place amid steadily increasing levels of armed conflict, and the shadow of growing fears of large-scale war.

Over 130 conflicts are raging today, twice as many as 15 years ago. Wars are lasting longer, growing more complex, and trapping entire generations. As ICRC staff see every day in our work around the world, the human cost is appalling.

In parallel, as detailed in the Secretary-General's recent report, military spending has grown to extraordinary levels.

Yet the conclusion of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held almost half a century ago in 1978, remains valid: more weapons mean less security.

In these grim circumstances, the work of this Committee is all the more important and urgent. Disarmament is a necessary and effective tool to prevent war and strengthen international peace and security. Humanitarian disarmament in particular is also a critical means to mitigate the impact of armed conflict when it occurs – in other words, it gives effect to the principles of international humanitarian law. In times of increased conflict and tension,

therefore, the treaties overseen by this Committee must be reinforced, developed and expanded – not ignored, neglected or abandoned. Now is the time for States to redouble their efforts to fully implement existing disarmament treaties, to bring them closer to universality, and to develop new treaties and other instruments and mechanisms to address the risks posed by new technologies of warfare.

What does this mean in specific terms?

Mr Chair,

First, States must take concrete steps to turn legal obligations and political commitments into real changes that save lives. For example, through the **Pact for the Future** and the political declaration on explosive weapons, States have committed to strengthen the protection of

civilians, and to restrict or refrain as appropriate from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. But the use of heavy explosive weapons in cities continues to cause unacceptable civilian harm on a shockingly large scale throughout the world. Action is needed to move these commitments from a record of good intentions to an effective means of protecting civilians from the indiscriminate effect of the use of EWIPA in reality.

Similarly, proliferation and diversion of conventional weapons exacerbate humanitarian suffering and pose a serious threat to security. The ICRC is deeply concerned about the gap that seems to exist between States' **obligation** to respect and ensure respect for IHL and to faithfully

implement instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty, and the arms transfer practices of too many of them. **The law is straightforward:** States must refrain from transferring arms where there is a clear risk that they would be used to commit or facilitate IHL violations.

Second, States must make progress on nuclear disarmament, through universalization and full implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the CTBT, and regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties. This must be done not *in spite* of the current international security situation, but *because* of it. Nuclear rhetoric and threats of use, accelerated modernization and strengthened roles for nuclear weapons in national security doctrines must be replaced

with renewed efforts to deliver on long-standing nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, and to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being used. This must include measures to condemn and suppress nuclear threats, and efforts to increase awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons.

Third, States must preserve and protect existing treaties and the norms they embody. The very last thing that States should do in times of insecurity and conflict is to abandon disarmament treaties. We are dismayed that, after a State withdrew from the Convention on Cluster Munitions, six states have announced their intention to withdraw from or suspend the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. Not only

is this a step backward that risks eroding life-saving protections and threatens decades of global efforts to eradicate these inhumane weapons, it undermines international Humanitarian Law and the entire multilateral disarmament enterprise. Preparing for war by abandoning treaties that provide for a minimum of humanity is the wrong choice. And where would it end? With the Geneva Conventions themselves? We must work together to reinforce our common understanding that true security comes from collective adherence to disarmament treaties, not from abandoning them.

Fourth, and finally, States must accelerate their efforts to limit the human cost of new technologies of warfare. We join States in

calling for the peaceful use of new technologies and for preventing arms races in areas such as outer space. Yet States must also ensure that if new technologies are used as a means or method of warfare, IHL is applied and fully respected. This requires a range of approaches, according to the technologies involved.

With respect to information and communication technologies, we call on States to build common understandings on how to apply IHL to adequately protect civilian populations against the danger of ICT activities during conflict. When it comes to autonomous weapon systems, we join the call of a large and growing number of States to build on the promising work in the CCW LAWS GGE and move quickly to negotiate a legally binding

instrument. On the development and use of AI in the military domain, we call on States to ensure that human control and judgement are preserved in decisions that pose risks to the life, liberty, and dignity of people affected by armed conflict.

Mr Chair,

It is well-documented that humanitarian disarmament treaties and commitments save lives, moderate the inhumanity of war, and foster peace. They are needed now more than ever. As the President of the ICRC states in the [progress report](#) on the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, [launched yesterday], “This is not an abstract legal debate; it has irreversible consequences on

millions of lives. When warfare abandons restraint and pursues total annihilation, the toll – both human and economic – is catastrophic, and the seeds of the next cycle of violence are sown”.

Finally, we are heartened by States who are joining disarmament treaties, strengthening their effectiveness and the norms they embody. We congratulate Kyrgyzstan and Ghana for their respective signature and ratification of the TPNW, the Marshall Islands and Tonga for joining the APMBC, and Vanuatu for joining the CCM. We urge other States to follow their example.