

REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

ICRC's Statement to the Third Preparatory Committee of Habitat III

Delivered by Dr Hugo Slim, Head of Policy at the International Committee of the Red Cross, at the Third Preparatory Committee of Habitat III, 25 July 2016, Surabaya

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In an urbanizing world, armed conflict and violence are urbanizing too.

Cities like Aleppo and Falujjah are being destroyed. Their civilian populations are facing displacement, siege and impoverishment. In South Sudan, people in Juba, Wau, Bentiu and Leer are living in similarly desperate conditions.

Armed conflict and violence are major causes of development reversals in many towns, cities and informal settlements. Prospects for sustainable development in these urban areas are being pushed back by decades.

Millions of urban people living in protracted conflict and chronic urban violence are being left behind.

The ICRC is concerned that the impact of conflict and chronic urban violence is not yet receiving the attention it deserves in the New Urban Agenda.

We have made recommendations to States for Habitat III, and are asking you to do three things as you negotiate in Surabaya.

First – please recommit to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

Conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas. We are tragically familiar with the severe humanitarian consequences of urban conflict in cities like Gaza, Homs, Mogadishu and Sana'a.

Habitat III's concern for safety must apply to civilian populations in urban conflicts too.

Parties to conflict must distinguish between military and civilian objects in urban areas. Precautions must be taken in attack and defense, and the use of military force must be proportionate to the threat.

Explosive weapons that have wide area impact should be avoided in densely populated areas. Blast and fragments from these weapons can damage pipes and substations - depriving people of water and electricity for months.

Healthcare facilities, their patients and their staff need to be protected and not indiscriminately or deliberately attacked.

Urban designers have a responsibility to site military installations away from civilian objects, and avoid placing factories using dangerous substances close to schools and housing.

Secondly, States must commit to support resilient urban services in protracted conflicts.

Millions of people in towns, cities and informal settlements rely on interconnected infrastructure to meet their needs for essential electricity, water, sewerage and waste management. Without such systems, people's living conditions deteriorate fast.

Over time, with repeated attacks and problems of staffing and supply, urban systems succumb to a cumulative impact that renders them increasingly inadequate, reducing people's life chances even further.

States and municipal authorities need to invest in the resilience of urban infrastructure and services during conflict. This means working closely with humanitarian partners and committing to multi-year financing.

Thirdly, local governments need support to serve people affected by chronic urban violence.

Much urban violence is not armed conflict but chronic violence that can result in similar humanitarian consequences.

Urban violence stops health workers and patients going to health facilities. It stops children and teachers going to school.

The New Urban Agenda should support local authorities and communities to increase people's safer access to essential services by monitoring the invisible costs of violence and changing behavior.

Thank you for letting the ICRC speak to you today.

Please give the millions of people suffering from conflict and violence their rightful place in the New Urban Agenda.