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Concept note for the General Debate

Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis

The world today is marked by increasing rates of violence involving State and non-State actors, across multiple regions. In 2025, more than 120 armed conflicts are in progress: some have only recently begun, while others have been ongoing for more than 50 years. In an era marked by protracted armed conflicts, a combination of factors, such as escalating armed violence, forced displacement, climate change, public health emergencies, food insecurity and gender-based violence, has exacerbated humanitarian needs. [More than 122 million people](#) are considered forcibly displaced today, while almost [310 million are in need of humanitarian assistance](#). Among these, women and girls are disproportionately affected: every day, 500 women and girls in crisis settings die from preventable causes related to pregnancy, and women and girls account for 60% of those facing food insecurity.

The Geneva Conventions were concluded in 1949 as a multilateral response to the horrors of the Second World War. This was a collective effort by States aiming to protect those most vulnerable to armed conflict and, thus, to limit its effects. The Geneva Conventions are at the heart of *international humanitarian law* (IHL). Recent developments have, however, shed light on the current multilateral system's difficulty in providing responses to major humanitarian challenges and to the suffering caused by contemporary armed conflicts. Growing nationalism, geopolitical fragmentation and mistrust in international institutions have severely impacted the global humanitarian landscape. *Humanitarian action*, understood as the sum of all activities aimed at protecting and bringing relief to people affected by crises, disasters or conflicts, has been heavily jeopardized. The recent funding cuts to humanitarian aid globally have left the humanitarian system at a breaking point, with many of those in need of assistance at risk of losing their lives. At the same time, even the most fundamental humanitarian norms are being challenged in today's warzones. Not even medical and relief personnel and facilities have been spared from attacks.

International cooperation to address these global challenges has never been more important. Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action are goals which can only be achieved through a collective effort aimed at bridging divides and reinforcing multilateral engagement. With this in mind, the International Committee of the Red Cross launched in 2024 a [Global Initiative to galvanise political commitment to international humanitarian law](#) with the goal of developing, over the next two years, a set of concrete and actionable recommendations to ensure that IHL is not only better respected but adapted for the future. In the same spirit, the UN Secretary-General launched, in June 2025, a [global campaign](#) to uphold the norms of humanitarian disarmament and strengthen mine action with the goal of re-energizing public support for disarmament and facilitating concrete actions by States in this area. At the launch of the [Global Humanitarian Overview 2025](#), he also [called](#) on States to recognize the need for a surge not only of funding for humanitarian aid, but also of political will to ensure adherence to IHL. This surge is multisectoral and requires investment across areas such as sustainable development, peacebuilding, human rights, health, climate action, science, technology, gender equality and youth empowerment. Looking at the interlinkages between the lack of adherence to humanitarian norms and the lack of support for humanitarian action on the one hand, and broader political, social and developmental challenges on the other is at the heart of efforts to strengthen today's humanitarian system and global action.

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Achieving sustained political commitment towards respect for international humanitarian law and support for principled humanitarian action can only happen with meaningful political will, inclusive decision-making, partnerships and understanding. This requires a whole-of-society approach in which all stakeholders play their roles and partner together, and in which decisions are made by a strong ethical leadership anchored in compassion and dialogue. As the institutions that represent the people, parliaments are uniquely positioned to mobilize political will, champion inclusive governance and dialogue, challenge narratives and be the voice of the most vulnerable. They are key actors in translating global humanitarian norms into domestic legislation and policy, scrutinizing government action over humanitarian commitments, and allocating resources to tackle pressing humanitarian challenges. In times of crisis, parliamentary diplomacy may also play a pivotal role in upholding multilateral values such as inclusion, solidarity, cooperation, shared responsibility and the rules-based international order. In all, parliaments can contribute to building a society and fostering a culture that uphold humanity in times of crisis.

The General Debate at the 151st IPU Assembly, entitled ***Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis***, will therefore consider the following issues:

1. How to reaffirm the parliamentary commitment to multilateral efforts aimed at promoting respect for international humanitarian law and its implementation
2. How to safeguard, through national commitments and engagement, humanitarian action in times of crisis, especially in view of the economic and political constraints brought about by the current crisis of multilateralism
3. How to adopt a multi-sectoral and inclusive approach to advance the humanitarian agenda

In addition to addressing some of these issues, parliamentarians participating in the General Debate may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- What actions can parliaments take to protect global multilateral values and advance multilateral efforts towards promoting respect for IHL and its implementation in times of crisis?
- What can parliaments do to ensure that the integrity of IHL is upheld, and that short-term national security considerations do not undermine long-standing commitments as enshrined in IHL treaties?
- What actions can be taken to support and protect principled humanitarian action in disaster and conflict-affected areas?
- How can parliaments contribute to ensuring that humanitarian funding is preserved and protected despite current economic and political pressures?
- What actions can be taken to ensure that humanitarian responses address the needs of the most vulnerable during crises, disasters or conflict, e.g. displaced populations, women, youth, religious minorities and political opponents?
- How can the interlinkages between IHL, humanitarian action, and other broader political, social and developmental challenges (e.g. technological advancements, politically motivated persecution, gender-based discrimination, climate change, disease outbreaks) be taken into account?