



ICRC | Syria: Vienna talks must focus on respect for International Humanitarian Law

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Geneva - As major powers gather in Vienna for fresh talks to try to end the conflict in Syria, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has called on states to intensify efforts to ease the Syrian people's suffering by increasing respect for International Humanitarian Law.

"We welcome these talks as a positive step in the right direction. We urge those taking part to redouble their efforts and make real progress towards ending the horror that has gripped Syria for nearly five years," said the president of the ICRC, Peter Maurer. "So many have been forced to flee their homes, embarking on desperate journeys in search of a safe haven. The suffering of the Syrian people must be at the heart of these talks."

Access for humanitarian organisations such as the ICRC to populations in desperate need of help continues to be extremely complex. Meanwhile, health care facilities and personnel continue to be targeted in violation of their protected status, in Syria as in many other conflicts worldwide.

"The end to this conflict will not come overnight. But as they work towards this goal, the parties must take measures to respect the basic principles of humanity and the law of war. Ensuring access for medical and humanitarian missions and stopping the use of heavy, explosive weapons in populated areas would help reduce the suffering of those caught up in this conflict. Practical and concrete measures such as these can help pave the way for a political solution," added Mr Maurer.

In an [unprecedented joint statement](#) at the end of October, the President of the ICRC and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, called on States, both individually and collectively, to do more to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

This body of law, of which the ICRC is a key custodian, seeks to reduce the suffering of civilians caught up in conflict. It emphasises such principles as the prohibition on indiscriminate targeting of populations, the need for proportionality of military action and for combatants to take precautions to protect civilian lives.