



ICRC

Israel and the Occupied Territories: armed conflict

30 November 2023 | ICRC COM guidelines for Movement partners

This document reflects the ICRC public communication approach to several topics of concern in ILOT (Israel and Occupied Territories). It is a reference document for use by National Society communication teams and should not be shared outside the Movement.

Table of contents ([click to go to section](#))

[Language guidance](#) | [Calls](#) | [Topline Messages](#) | [ICRC response](#)
[Color](#) | [Quotes](#) | [Q&A](#) | [COM Assets](#) | [Statements](#) | [Contacts](#)

Language guidance

Overarching redlines

Remain neutral and impartial at all times in all public communication.

Avoid making any statements that could be interpreted as comments on the political or military situation in the country or could be detrimental to the people we are supporting, the staff, volunteers and programmes of the Movement.

Specific terminology

Topic	DO NOT USE	Use
The location	Palestine (avoid as much as possible) ¹	Gaza, occupied Palestinian territory (when referring to Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem), etc. Israel
The conflict	International armed conflict, Palestine Israel war, Israel-Hamas conflict War ²	Israel-Gaza conflict, armed conflict
Humanitarian access	Closure (no longer relevant unless speaking about past 16 years) Blockade	Siege ⁵ or military siege Armed hostilities, conflict, escalation, current situation Safe and sustained (humanitarian) access Urge/call for de-escalation Protected zone

¹ The ICRC's working modality is to avoid using Palestine, but rather to instead specify the location of the topic under discussion. "Occupied Palestinian territory" refers mainly to Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Occupied Territories (plural form) is inclusive of Shebaa Farms and the Golan Heights. During this period of heightened polarization, the debates of statehood and territorial boundaries are also resurfacing strongly, including the debate of "from the river to the sea". This is also based on the standardization of the term, adopted by the United Nations.

² The term's prevalence in the English lexicon comes with a malleability that goes well beyond its interpretation within IHL. Therefore, we would like to seek your kind understanding to instead use the suggested term here – it will very much help strengthen grounds for IHL-related interventions with parties to the conflict, including access to those deprived of liberty by both sides, whenever these are possible. However, the usage of the word is permissible within phrases that have already 'caught on' for generic public communications, such as "[Rules of War](#)", "Even wars have limits", etc. (usually "Prisoners of war" is permissible, but the proximity to the ILOT context-specific landscape renders this too sensitive at the time of this writing).

⁵ Previously suggested use was "blockade" to categorically encompass all measures of control of movement in the previous years leading up to 7 Oct. Since then, however, the term is now applicable due to the cut-off of essential supplies.

	Humanitarian pause (or ceasefire, (military) truce, armistice, corridor, etc.) ³ Safe zone ⁴	
The parties	Militants, terrorists	Local authorities, Israel/Hamas authorities, decision-makers, concerned authorities/institutions, parties to the conflict
Hostages (from IL side currently held in GAZ)	Prisoners of war	Hostages ⁶
Palestinians currently detained in IL	Prisoners of war	Those currently detained
Dead bodies	Martyrs, those who died	The dead, those who have been killed
The people		Communities, population, civilians
The National Societies		Use the full correct names of the respective National Societies: Magen David Adom in Israel (MDA) Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS)
Release operations (hostages & detainees)	Exchange	Release
	Deal	Agreement
	Truce	Ceasefire (includes already "cessation of hostilities")

General lines (public use)

Calls (for pubCOM)

- [Protection of humanitarian workers](#)
- [Protection of medical facilities and personnel](#)
- [De-escalation](#) of violence.
- [Respect for and protection of](#) civilian livelihoods and the medical mission as well as access to those deprived of liberty.
- [Release of hostages](#).
- [Safe, sustained humanitarian access](#).

Topline Messages

- **On agreements related to the release of hostages/detainees.** Our partner, the **ICRC's role is to act as a neutral intermediary**, which means they implement what has already been agreed upon between the parties. The ICRC is not part of the negotiations, are not aware of the details of the negotiations, and do not have information on what exactly is the content of the agreement. As a neutral intermediary, which is at the core of ICRC's mandate, their role is to facilitate the release and the

³ Suggestion to avoid these because the term has become a source of contention after four failed attempts as a UN Security Council resolution – instead shifting the focus of the message to the purpose: safe and sustained access for aid to go in. The Jordan-led draft UN General Assembly resolution [adopted](#) on 27 October is a positive sign, but the instrument is not legally binding. The political discourse remains highly politicized vis-à-vis calls for ceasefire and pauses (or their alternatives). The new UNSC resolution adopted on [15 November](#) still was unable to include ceasefire, but merely “calls for extended humanitarian pauses” (as opposed to “demands for” etc).

⁴ Similar rationale as above (avoiding misunderstanding through varied interpretations), IHL prefers ‘protected zones’; which entail fulfilment of specific criteria and modalities that must be agreed upon by all parties to the conflict and that they must be demilitarized.

⁶ Take care to not use “Israeli hostages” because it excludes third-country hostages.

transfer of either the hostages or Palestinian detainees. The ICRC is in contact with the parties. And as usual, they are really here to implement this agreement on the ground.

- Renewed hostilities in Israel and Gaza – unprecedented in scale and intensity – reached the one-mark month this week and the human toll of the conflict is both staggering and heart breaking.
- Civilians continue to pay the heaviest price. Thousands of people have been killed and tens of thousands injured, many of them young children.
 - In Israel, families of over 240 hostages have no news from their loved ones, enduring 31 days of terrible suffering.
 - In Gaza, close to 1.5 million people are displaced and many of them have seen their homes and neighbourhoods turned into rubble.
- **Civilians** must not be attacked. They cannot be taken hostage. They have a right to receive humanitarian assistance and medical care. Health-care workers and humanitarian organizations must be able to safely carry out their life-saving work to reach those in need.
- Hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza are sheltering in hospitals, schools, or sleep in their cars or out in the open after their homes and neighbourhoods have been turned to rubble. Destroyed homes and essential infrastructure will take years to rebuild.
- There is no justification for indiscriminate violence or attacks against civilians. The International Committee of the Red Cross calls on the sides to respect their obligations under **international humanitarian law** and to take every step possible to prevent **civilians and civilian infrastructure**, such as electricity and water supplies from coming to further harm.
- Medical professionals and humanitarian workers must be able to respond without fear for their own lives. Any violence towards medical personnel is unacceptable.
 - Since 7 October, we've lost colleagues from both the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) as well as the Magen David Adom (MDA) in Israel. This is a tragic reminder of the dangers health-care personnel face and we offer our deepest condolences to their family, friends, and colleagues.
- As **essential supplies and energy** – crucial to operate hospitals, shelters, water facilities, bakeries – are running out fast, people are desperately trying to find food, water and shelter for their families. Aid entry remains both insufficient and unpredictable, further exacerbating a dire situation. As hostilities continue unabated and keep increasing in intensity, nowhere in Gaza is safe and every day is a struggle to stay alive.
- People in Gaza must receive desperately needed aid. We must be able to deliver it regularly and safely. Every hour that passes without the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure safe and sustained entry of humanitarian aid translates into more misery and suffering, and more loss of civilian lives.
- As Gaza loses power, hospitals lose power, putting newborns in incubators and elderly patients on oxygen at risk. Kidney dialysis stops. X-rays can't be taken. Without **electricity**, hospitals risk turning into morgues. Water can no longer be pumped or desalinated, leaving families with no access to clean drinking water. Wastewater will likely flood, creating a risk of disease outbreaks. Gazans will also lose

telecommunications to reach loved ones, further isolating them and deepening the challenges they face in these very difficult times.

- Most hospitals in Gaza are no longer functioning properly. They need power in order to maintain their services. With fuel supplies running low, impacting additional generators, the hospitals are in a very concerning situation.
- Four out of the five wastewater treatment plants are currently shutdown and the fifth is only operational at the minimum level. This means sewage is being pumped directly into the sea.
- All seawater desalination plants – vital for removing salt from seawater – have shut-down because of fuel unavailability and the electricity shortage. This directly impacts the availability of water that can be trucked within the Gaza Strip.
- We are horrified by the tragedies we continue to see at hospitals. Hospitals should be sanctuaries to preserve human life, not scenes of death and destruction. No patient should be killed in a hospital bed. No doctors should lose their lives while trying to save others. Hospitals must be protected under international humanitarian law.
- Nothing can justify the horrific acts that Israel suffered, but they should not lead to the limitless destruction on Gaza.
- The instructions of Israeli authorities to **evacuate** without providing basic necessities, such as shelter, food, water and medical care, further endangers the lives of over a million people in Gaza. Considering the current siege on Gaza, it is difficult to imagine such evacuations being held safely with the current conditions. With the ongoing siege, and an evacuation, large-scale humanitarian efforts, including those of the ICRC, become near-impossible.
 - Evacuations must be safe. The way they are carried out matters. People should not be put in more danger when they're trying to escape. They must move in ways that guarantee their safety.
 - Evacuation warnings have been given to civilians about possible attacks. While IHL requires that warnings are issued, they must also be timely and clear, and take into account that people have a safe way to leave.
 - Not everyone can leave, like the wounded, sick, elderly, or people with disabilities. Civilians are still protected under IHL; and all possible precautions must be taken to ensure they remain unharmed. Same applies to civilian infrastructure.
- Though our partner, the ICRC has been able to help facilitate the reuniting of some hostages with their loved ones in their role as a neutral intermediary, there are still families are worried sick about loved ones taken hostage. The **taking of hostages** is prohibited under international humanitarian law and anyone being held should be released. Our partner, the ICRC are in contact with Hamas and Israeli officials as part of efforts on this issue. We stand ready to continue to act as a neutral intermediary to conduct humanitarian visits; facilitate communication between hostages and family members; and facilitate any eventual release.

- With every round of fighting, the civilians of Gaza are left worse off. A whole generation of youth in Gaza has grown up knowing nothing but closed borders, the trauma of conflict and its painful legacies. About half of the population in Gaza is under 18 years old and has lived many major military operations and countless escalations for most of their lifetime. They need a glimpse of hope, a future to look forward to.
- The impact of this violence is affecting many communities. In Gaza, the latest violence comes on top of 16 years of restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which have hit the economy and life of residents of Gaza.
- Only political steps can solve the seemingly intractable cycles of violence and the humanitarian crises that accompany them. Political efforts must be intensified. The impact of this latest violence will have short and long-term repercussions. If international humanitarian law is completely disregarded, suffering will worsen and a political solution to end this bloodshed will be harder to find.

ICRC Response

• Release operations ([hostage-related Q&A](#))

- **As of 29 November** – a cumulative total of 97 hostages and 135 detainees have been released.
- **26 November** – Facilitated the release and transfer of 17 hostages held in Gaza; and of 19 Palestinian detainees from Israeli places of detention.
- **25 November** – Facilitated the release of 17 hostages and transported them to Rafah border, in addition to having facilitated the release and transfer to Ramallah of 33 Palestinian detainees.
- **24 November** – Facilitated the release of 24 hostages and transported them to the Rafah border. We also facilitated the release of 33 Palestinian detainees from Israeli places of detention.
- **24-25 November** – Our team delivered two medical shipments per day to hospitals – these were for Nasser Hospital (Khan Younis) and Al-Aqsa Hospital (middle area). We continue to support the European Gaza Hospital in absorbing the large influx of patients. These supplies included war-wounded kits, disposables, vital surgical equipment, foldable beds, and mobility devices like crutches.
- **22 November** – Completed installation of solar systems at 12 school shelters to provide the needed energy for water well pumps (serving 30,000 IDPs), and desalination plants (serving 70,000 IDPs). Medical assistance to war wounded is ongoing at the European Gaza Hospital, with the addition of a nutrition program aimed at supporting patients during their recovery. Provision of psychological support to 36 new patients and family members ongoing, while PRP continue to work on mobility rehabilitation.
- **19 November** – as it started getting colder in Gaza, blankets and tarpaulins were distributed to nearly 5,000 displaced persons.
- **15 November** – cash assistance given to 3,000 IDP households (15,000 individuals) in the Middle, Rafah and Khan Younis areas through mobile cash (PalPay), with each family receiving ILS 750 (around USD 200) to cover their basic needs.
- **14 November** – A further 61 received physical rehabilitation care, while over 150 patients in total have now received surgical and medical assistance, including 16 surgeries and 37 other medical interventions carried out since 9 October. The surgical team operating in the EGH received further supplies, and the ICRC also provided mobility devices for patients, including wheelchairs, crutches and walking frames.

- **11-12 November** – ICRC and the PRCS distributed essential household items, like blankets, tarpaulin and hygiene parcels to more than 13,000 in Gaza's Middle Area. More distributions are ongoing.
- The team continues to provide support (water trucking, purchase of solar panels for IDP camps and generators for ICRC premises) as best they can, securing critical materials from the remaining local suppliers and delivering it to needed sites through ICRC notified convoys whenever possible.
- One month Facts & Figures of ICRC response [here](#).
- An ICRC war surgery team is treating patients wounded in the conflict at the European Gaza Hospital (EGH). They treat patients with severe injuries, many of them burns that require complex labor-heavy medical interventions. They also provide follow-up nursing care as well as support to patients including changing burn dressings.
- **Between 31 October and 6 November**, 13 additional trucks have made their way into Gaza containing essential household items, medical and orthopedic supplies and body bags.
- **29 October** – Three additional trucks carrying medical supplies entered Gaza.
- **27 October** – A war surgery team and a weapons contamination specialist among 10 ICRC experts arrived in Gaza alongside six ICRC trucks carrying medical material and water purification supplies. The team will increase support to hospitals, trauma surgery, clean water provision, and family reunification of hostages. This small dose of relief is not enough, much more is needed. Three more trucks carrying medical supplies arrived on.
- As of **25 October** – We have mobilized 60 tons of humanitarian aid, including medical supplies, for Gaza. They are close to Rafah crossing waiting to enter. We also have staff on standby who could make an immediate, lifesaving difference, such as a war surgical team and weapons contamination specialists. These 8 trucks include 4,000 body bags 50,000 aquatabs (1 aquatab can treat/clear 1 liter of water) and we have 9 full Weapon-Wounded Kits ([general description](#)) and many more medical sets which can treat between 1,000 – 5,000 patients/people/war wounded injured at different degrees.
- **16 October** – the ICRC were able to supply the Civil Defense in Gaza, as well as the Military Medical Service, with gloves, bandages, sterile water, oxygen masks, blankets, scissors, adhesives and other essential medical equipment for their response.
- **15 October**
 - the ICRC is exploring all avenues to bring life-saving aid into Gaza. We are in the process of pre-positioning life-saving supplies in multiple areas, so that we're ready when access to Gaza is granted, which it must urgently be. This initial goods convoy includes medicine and thousands of household kits for families which include hygiene items and chlorine tablets for drinking water.
 - We are also urgently deploying staff to relieve colleagues in Gaza whenever we are able to move in. This includes a mobile surgical team and other health staff, a weapons contamination expert, and relief coordinators specialized in water and habitat and food security.

- In addition, prior to 15 October our teams were able to deliver fuel to the water sector; truck water within Gaza City; install batteries into water pumping stations to keep them working; and set up water storage tanks (enough to supply about 250,000 people with water). We also have supplies that could help make some repairs to the water network, but need to be able to do this safely.
- **7 October** – the ICRC dispatched a truck of medical supplies (stretchers, beds, body bags) to a hospital in Gaza. We are ready to provide further humanitarian assistance as required on both sides. Support with equipment has been ongoing since then and has included things like IT support for labs, as well as medical equipment. The ICRC donated 280 body bags and 12 stretchers to the Ministry of Health in Gaza.
- In Israel, ICRC teams have been supporting with forensic equipment and needs such as face masks and shields, to assist with these forensic efforts.
- Since armed hostilities began over the weekend (07.10.23), we have received many enquiries from people in Israel, Gaza and internationally desperate to know about the fate of their missing family members.
 - o We fully understand how devastating it is for the families not to know the fate of loved ones. Within the ICRC's mandate and capacities, we are ready to do everything we can to help.
 - o We are compiling these enquiries and are speaking with the authorities to try and clarify the fate of the individuals concerned. This can take some time given the volatile situation now. We will be in touch with families directly to keep them informed.

Colour (public use)

Ceasefire

- As the ceasefire continues, we hear from our colleagues in Gaza that the sky is clear for the first time in weeks. The silence, after constant explosions day in and day out, is almost eerie. The sound of war has been such a fixture in the lives of people, it's almost hard to believe there is a reprieve from it.

ICRC war surgery team

- The testimonies our teams are sharing with us every day are heartbreaking and terrifying at the same time. They are treating patients with severe injuries, many of them burns, that require complex and labor heavy medical interventions, and the essential supplies, like dressing material, are running dangerously low. They fear they may have to start operating on patients without anesthesia, causing them horrendous pain.
- Large numbers of the patients they are treating are children, some of them who have lost their entire families.
- When patients get discharged, they have nowhere to go after their homes have been flattened. Many of them remain in the hospital sleeping in the staircase and in the corridors, hoping that being inside the hospital can provide them with some safety. Tragically, nearly everyday our colleagues describe scenes of terrible violence around healthcare facilities.
- Surgeons operate with flashlights.

- Entire communities are cut off from vital services, including maternity care and childcare.

Hospitals in Gaza

- Hundreds of patients recently arrived at the Gaza European Hospital after weeks of being stuck at hospitals in Northern Gaza. Two schools were used as triage areas, as ICRC, alongside the Health Ministry's EMS, helped prioritize critically injured cases that needed to be moved into the hospital for urgent medical care and operations. The remaining less serious injuries were dealt with on the spot to stabilize them as they will remain at these two schools until they are discharged.
- Our teams saw seriously injured children, women and men rushed into the school. They were all shaking as it was cold, they looked stunned and in shock. We need to remember that any movement from the north to the south is not easy – people are doing this under horrifically stressful conditions. Fear is a constant companion.
- Some arrived in ambulances as their injuries were very severe that they couldn't walk. Others were stepping off the bus on crutches with metal bars in their legs. They were asking for water, food, and warmth.
 - A child asked if we could make the place warmer. She also asked if we could make it brighter as she has been through many horrific nights, and was now terrified of the dark.
 - A lady did not want to be moved into the hospitals, because after spending nights at a hospital in the north, she felt she would be safer at the school as they spent haunting nights at the Indonesian hospitals.
 - They were wondering if there's anything to eat or drink, and they were so disappointed when they learned there's nothing for them at the school.
- Our teams on the ground in Gaza have visited hospitals in the northern area. What they describe seeing are death, destruction, and displacement on a staggering level. People are sleeping in the stairwells of hospitals. Thousands of people have nowhere else to go and are seeking shelter in the hospitals. Our teams have felt building walls shake from explosions, and people are living through this day after day.

ICRC colleague in Gaza

- Some people don't have any way of relocating or evacuating from their homes.
- Some of them, I saw with my bare eyes, families, children, women, elderly, walking for tens of kilometers trying to reach safe areas as was instructed.
- Many families now are staying in the streets, without a roof over their heads, without access to any water.
- No bathrooms, no blankets, no mattresses, no hygiene kits.
- Without access to information about what's going to happen.
- The infrastructure has been heavily damaged in the vast areas of the Gaza Strip, especially in the north and the Gaza governorates.
- The internet and the communication system is paralyzed.
- The majority of people are disconnected from the outside world.
- People are searching for food.
- People are searching for water.

- Without the entry of humanitarian aid, without allowing this assistance to enter Gaza, we're going to witness more casualties, more deaths, more agony, more horrific scenes.
- And it just doesn't end. It just doesn't stop.

The situation

- Bakeries are beginning to run out of things like wheat and cannot make bread. Farmers cannot attend to their livestock or their crops. It is impossible to access the sea for the fishing trade. This will have long-term implications for people's livelihoods.
- People are waiting for humanitarian aid to enter. They are on the side of the roads, no roofs over their heads, water supplies dwindling, lacking power and food.
- Medical teams have been working non-stop for days, under horrific conditions. They haven't seen their families; some do not even know if their families have survived or been able to evacuate. Doctors are breaking down. The medical teams need reinforcement.
- The most pressing issues are currently the lack of food and water. The markets are even closed. Either closed, or do not get replenished with supplies. Demand is high for food and water; there is no access at all to fuel in some areas. Some people do not have any way of relocating or evacuating from their homes.
- Out teams have seen thousands of people, including children and elderly citizens, walking for tens of kilometers with only what they can carry, in an effort to evacuate the northern areas.
- Schools have been cancelled in many areas on both sides of the border. Roads have been shut, impacting ambulance routes.
- In Israeli communities, the sound of sirens has been heard constantly throughout the day. People are desperate to know if family members are safe, while parents hustle terrified children in shelters. People are locking themselves in their homes because they don't know where the threat will come from.
- In Gaza, there are reports people are packing up and moving away from the city as a populated area. They are scared to return to their homes for fear of what might happen.

Quotes (public use)

"Among the most shocking impact is the agony children have had to bear. Children have been ripped from their families and held hostage. In Gaza, ICRC surgeons treat toddlers whose skin is charred from widespread burns. What more must children endure? The images of suffering, dead and wounded children will haunt us all. This is a moral failing." **Mirjana Spolijaric, ICRC President.**

"The images and reports we have seen this morning are utterly horrific. The violence directed against civilians is appalling and cannot be justified. If the situation continues to escalate, then civilians on both sides will suffer immensely. We are aware of reports relating to people being captured or detained. I want to make it clear that carrying out, or threatening to carry out, an act of hostage-taking is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Anyone detained must be treated humanely and with dignity." **Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC regional director for the Near and Middle East**

“We’ve seen what’s happening in Gaza, the shelling. We’ve seen what’s happened and what’s still happening in Israel. And it’s always the same feeling of frustration and sadness, because at the end of the day who pays the price? Civilians. My thoughts are with the Israeli people who have lost their friends and family, who still don’t know what’s happening. And my thoughts are with the Gazan families stuck in Gaza hearing bombing, they can do absolutely nothing, just hope that they won’t be in the wrong place at the wrong time.” **Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC regional director for the Near and Middle East**

“We have our teams in Gaza trying to supply medical help. The power supply has been cut so we need to provide fuel to hospitals and essential services to avoid their collapse. And then we have some people who have been displaced and we need to provide them with aid. On the Israeli side we have been supporting MDA, who have had one of their ambulance employees killed and several wounded. We are trying to support them as much as we can mainly in the field of health. But the situation is very fluid and obviously we’re also preparing for an even worse scenario. A ground operation in Gaza would be devastating from a humanitarian point of view.” **Fabrizio Carboni, ICRC regional director for the Near and Middle East**

“We are closely monitoring the hostilities and the impact on so many communities in Israel and the Occupied Territories. We know the number of dead and injured will continue to rise. People are scared and unsure of what will happen next. We urge all parties to protect civilian lives and infrastructure at all costs. The ICRC is in regular contact with authorities and our Movement partners. The ICRC stands ready to provide whatever humanitarian assistance is required and to visit anyone deprived of their liberty in our role as a neutral intermediary.” - **Yuval Arie Nevo, Head of Office in Tel Aviv**

Q&A COM-related (reactive)

There are allegations circulating that an ICRC staff member placing a tracker on an apparent member of Hamas.

The ICRC firmly denies these allegations. We are committed to upholding humanitarian principles and ethics in all our operations. These false claims put at risk the safety of our staff and our access, hindering humanitarian aid from reaching those in need.

Israeli forces opened fire in the area around Gaza's Al-Rantisi Hospital as displaced citizens attempted to return to their homes in the north. Isn't this breaking the truce?

Regardless of any ceasefire in place, at all times during a conflict, civilians must be protected. We do not take part in the political negotiations of any agreement, so cannot speak to the conditions of this. Our role in this agreement is to act as the bridge between families. We will also continue to respond to the urgent and increasing needs on the ground in Gaza.

What is your response to the Director of al-Shifa Medical Complex being arrested? What about PRCS medics who were also arrested?

We have publicly reiterated that medical facilities like hospitals, as well as medical staff, are protected under international humanitarian law – the work they do is lifesaving.

We do not know the details of these specific instances. What we can say is that the PRCS is part of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and is bound by the core principles of neutrality and impartiality. They have a proven track record for their life-saving work and we work alongside their dedicated teams.

Humanitarian workers and medical staff work to help and save the lives of others. When their work is interrupted, the impact on the most vulnerable is too high. Medical staff and humanitarian workers in Gaza are risking their lives to help others. They must be protected and respected.

Regarding the takeover of the Al Shifa hospital by the Israeli side and/or possibility of investigating allegations that Hamas used Al Shifa to keep hostages or use as military base.

The role of the ICRC is strictly humanitarian, and it is the responsibility of the relevant bodies and authorities to conduct such investigations. This said, hospitals are protected under international humanitarian law and must be spared from the fighting and from any misuse of them by parties to the conflict. Anywhere in the world, where the ICRC would observe such a violation, we would immediately address it directly with the parties. We don't have staff present in Al Shifa, and last time we managed to visit the hospital on November 7 to deliver urgent medical supplies and escort six ambulances to the Rafah Crossing.

IDF says/a video is circulating that during an interrogation a Hamas fighter said the group was operating from the PRCS headquarters?

These are serious allegations, which could have grave consequences for humanitarian workers risking their lives to help others. They should not be made lightly.

The PRCS is part of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and is bound by the core principles of neutrality and impartiality. They have a proven track record for their life-saving work.

Humanitarian workers -and this include PRCS- are protected under international humanitarian law, and should be spared from the fighting.

On responding to the situation at Al Shifa hospital:

Overall approach and COM posture: focus on the human angle and try to stay away from legal/IHL explanations, if possible. Bring the narrative back to the people, civilians, etc. If needed, the following lines can be used:

- The ICRC is aware of ongoing military activities inside Al Shifa hospital and are extremely concerned over the impact on the sick and wounded, medical staff and civilians. All measure to avoid any consequences on them must be taken.
- Patients, medical staff and civilians must be protected at all times.
- Our partner, the ICRC is in contact with concerned authorities and continue to closely monitor the situation.

Are you participating in the evacuation of premature babies from Al Shifa?

The ICRC is constantly in touch with the Ministry of Health in Gaza and with the parties to the armed conflict. Evacuating a hospital in the middle of a war zone is an extremely complex and logistically challenging operation, and their teams on the ground are experiencing numerous constraints – lacking fuel, vehicles, incubators. Nevertheless, it is heartbreaking to see the most vulnerable bear the brunt of the conflict, and we stand ready to support if an agreement is reached.

On Al Quds Hospital stating it received threats of strikes/October 29th:

- The ICRC is deeply concerned about the warnings issued to Al Quds PRCS hospital, and civilians taking shelter.

- It is extremely difficult to relocate large numbers of wounded, sick and those with mobility issues, and those in Intensive Care Units (ICU)
- According to IHL, protection to which civilian hospitals are entitled shall not cease unless they are used to commit acts outside their humanitarian duties (*general explainer of nuances*).
- Before carrying out an attack on a medical facility that has lost its protected status, a warning must be given with a time limit, and the other party has to have ignored that warning.
- Armed operations must also take measures to limit the potential humanitarian consequences of the attack, respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

On ambulance strikes and allegations that PRCS ambulance was transporting terrorists:

- We are heartbroken to see medical services in Gaza put in harm's way. Our partner, ICRC's urgent call is for the sides to respect and protect them.
- Medical personnel, including paramedics of our partner, PRCS, save lives. They should not have to risk their lives to save others.
- PRCS has a strong track record providing lifesaving services. Like all the organizations forming part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, they are bound by the principles of neutrality and impartiality, which are at the core of our humanitarian work.

On the claims that hospitals in Gaza are being used as a military base for Hamas operations:

- We do not have information to confirm this. What we can tell you is, according to International humanitarian law, protection to which civilian hospitals are entitled shall not cease unless they are used to commit acts outside their humanitarian duties.
- Before carrying out an attack on a medical facility that has lost its protected status, a warning must be given with a time limit, and the other party has to have ignored that warning.
- Armed operations must also take measures to limit the potential humanitarian consequences of the attack, respecting the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.
- Parties must spare civilians from the effects of military operations and distinguish between civilians and military targets. They must never use critical infrastructure for military purposes. They must also ensure that the basic needs of the population are met.
- More background information on hospital protection can be found on our website here: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/protection-hospitals-during-armed-conflicts-what-law-says>

On refugee camp strikes:

The images that we are seeing from Jabalia camp are deeply distressing. It is beyond heartbreaking to see wounded children being taken out from under the rubble. Jabalia is the

largest refugee camp in Gaza and was home to some 60,000 people, an extremely densely populated area. These are the most vulnerable communities in Gaza who have been living in difficult conditions and suffering multiple deprivations even before the current escalation. Civilians and essential civilian infrastructure are protected by the international humanitarian law. The terrible human cost of this conflict is growing by the minute and we call on parties to spare civilians from further harm.

How did the ICRC manage to bring staff into Gaza?

The ICRC has over 130 staff in Gaza, who have been working relentlessly since the escalation of the armed conflict to provide much-needed relief. Additionally, a new team of 10 ICRC staff – comprising medical, surgical and weapon contamination experts – has crossed through Rafah into Gaza. The arrival of new humanitarian personnel will increase the ICRC's capacity to continue supporting hospitals and deliver life-saving trauma surgery, assist people desperate for clean drinking water, and to contribute to any future family reunification of released hostages.

Decisions on ICRC personnel and supplies brought into Gaza are purely based on humanitarian needs. Access is made possible through our regular and constant dialogue with the relevant authorities, which we carry out as a neutral, impartial and independent organization.

The arriving teams and the crucial humanitarian assistance they're bringing in is a small dose of relief, but it's not enough. We urge parties to the conflict to enable rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access in line with international humanitarian law. Sustained humanitarian access, and a sustained supply of humanitarian assistance, is desperately needed across Gaza.

What is your reaction that the agreement for Rafah does not include fuel?

- We welcome the agreement and hope that it can translate soon into action to get aid moving. However, it will not be enough to meet the scale of the needs. What is needed is a regular flow of aid into Gaza. Medical staff and other personnel must also be allowed to enter. There also needs to be a solution for fuel. Hospitals can't run without fuel. Water treatment plants can't run without fuel. We have been able to deliver fuel in small batches to keep health care facilities and water systems running.
- This is not only about the border opening: a pause in the fighting now is essential for humanitarians and first responders to help safely and effectively those in needs.

If pressed about whether IL authorities want to search the relief items that are being deployed to Rafah:

ICRC's response is purely of a humanitarian nature. We want to bring additional staff such as war surgeons and relief items. The humanitarian goods that are currently on the move include medicine and thousands of household kits for families which include hygiene items and chlorine tablets for drinking water. We have nothing to hide, and we welcome any measure that will speed up the process to deliver life-saving aid to the people in Gaza.

How will ICRC ensure, under the conditions set out by the Israeli and US statement, that aid won't be used by Hamas?

First and foremost, humanitarian aid should never be politicized, particularly given the fact that the level of need among civilians in Gaza right now is overwhelming. Our partner, the ICRC is accustomed to working in highly volatile situations. They carry out assessments beforehand to identify people in need of assistance and determine what aid is required. They have rigorous checks in place to make sure that aid we deliver reaches those who need it. As an impartial humanitarian organization, ICRC's normal practice is to deliver aid themselves or through trusted partners, so they know exactly who benefits from it. In addition, our standard way of

working is to monitor and evaluate aid distributions to ensure aid is reaching those who need it.

Was the attack on Al Ahli Arab Hospital a violation of IHL? Is it a war crime? Who is at fault?

For internal understanding ONLY: Confirming a violation of IHL is never a black or white issue. For example, there are situations where hospitals can lose their protected status under IHL. ICRC's approach is to only confirm facts and then raise these directly with the parties as our experience shows that this is the best way for us to achieve the change we're hoping to impact. We then do not comment on violations and bridge back to the human impact and speak generally to what international humanitarian law says. See below.

Reactive lines

Hospitals are specially protected facilities under international humanitarian law. That is clear. No patient should ever be killed while lying in a hospital bed. No doctors, nurses, or any medical professionals should ever die in a fiery explosion while working to save lives. Hospitals should be sanctuaries to preserve human life, not scenes of death and destruction. More broadly, attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure is absolutely unacceptable. Attacks against hospitals devastate the health-care service in Gaza, which is already on its knees. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be the last time in this war that civilians bear the brunt of the fighting.

If pressed on is it a violation/who is at fault :

The facts on the ground are not clear on what exactly happened. But what I can tell you is that hospitals are clearly protected under international humanitarian law. The devastation that we saw the night of 17 October is unacceptable, and it's the latest in a deadly trend we continue to see: health-care facilities in conflicts around the world face extreme danger in conflict. Too often hospitals are attacked, doctors are killed. It happens with shocking frequency.

There are reports that the Red Cross notified IDF of the coordinates of the hospital. Can you confirm?

Reactive lines

- Our partner, the ICRC works with all parties in all conflicts to reduce human suffering.
- International humanitarian law is very clear that hospitals are specially protected facilities. Put plainly: No patient should ever be killed while lying in a hospital bed. No doctors, nurses, or any medical professionals should ever die in a fiery explosion while working to save lives.
- The hard truth is that medical facilities and medical personnel suffer from vicious attacks in conflicts around the world. Our bottom line for all fighting parties everywhere: Medical facilities must be humanitarian sanctuaries.
- As much as we wish we could, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement cannot physically shield people or buildings from attack. We have no control of how the parties wage war. The parties bear that responsibility: They must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect civilians and civilian objects.
- Right now, the humanitarian toll of the ongoing hostilities is rising – civilians paying the highest price. And it's unacceptable.

If pressed on if we shared coordinates to IDF

- This is not something we as [insert your National Society] can speak to. What I can tell you is that our partner, ICRC is speaking to both parties as they do in conflicts around the world. We reiterate that hospitals must be humanitarian sanctuaries and are protected under the law. Bridge back further to above points as needed.

There are talks about opening humanitarian corridors. Is the ICRC involved in this and how could these help?

Humanitarian corridors – or what the ICRC refers to as safe passages – are an option that can help alleviate suffering. They can allow civilians to leave if they choose to do so or for humanitarian relief like food or medicine to get in. However, safe passages do not relinquish the parties' obligation under international humanitarian law. Civilians are protected wherever they are, whether there is a safe passage agreement in place or not. This also applies to anyone who chooses to stay or cannot leave. If the parties choose to establish them, it's important that the exact details are agreed upon clearly – the time, the route, the goods allowed in – and that any movement of civilians out of an area is voluntary. Because again: civilians are protected under international humanitarian law whether they are in a so-called humanitarian corridor, in their home, in a hospital bed, or on their way to school; this applies today and before, during and after any safe passage operation takes place so long as there is an armed conflict.

For Movement partners on hostages

We stand by our partner, the ICRC who has said publicly and clearly: the taking of hostages is prohibited under IHL. They must be released immediately. The ICRC has rightly received a lot of questions from families and the public about what they are doing to help the hostages. What we can tell you is: ICRC is speaking with Hamas at the highest levels face-to-face. The plight of peoples loved ones being held hostage is one of their top priorities. The ICRC are making demands to see them. They are asking that they be able to contact their loved ones. ICRC has also made it clear that we are ready to facilitate any eventual release.

The ICRC has stated publicly and clearly that the taking of [hostages is prohibited under international humanitarian law](#).

Why are you silent on the terrorist attacks against Israel?

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is a humanitarian organisation first and foremost. As a neutral organisation, we do not do politics. Our concern is purely humanitarian.

We are deeply distressed by the level of violence directed against civilians in Israel and the Occupied Territories in recent days. We reiterate our call for parties on both sides to protect civilians from harm at all costs.

When will the ICRC condemn war crimes by the Israelis / Palestinian militants?

We deplore the loss of civilian lives, particularly children. Direct and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects are prohibited under IHL. All necessary precautions must be taken to avoid civilian casualties.

Any concern resulting from the ICRC's own assessment on the ground will be addressed with the relevant authorities through our bilateral and confidential dialogue.

Are your staff safe and can they deliver aid?

ICRC staff are safe and accounted for. However, the intensity of the violence has made movement in southern Israel and Gaza difficult. We are speaking with authorities on both sides so we can deliver aid wherever it is needed.

Under IHL, humanitarians and health workers are protected and must be allowed to carry out their work without fear for their lives.

Aren't people in Gaza/the WB suffering the consequences of conflict far more than people in Israel?

Human suffering is happening on all sides. And it is always devastating. The death of a son or daughter, a sibling, a parent, is a human tragedy no matter where it happens or who it happens to. Civilian life must be protected on all sides (*pivot to cumulative consequences*).

Does the ICRC evacuate civilians?

The ICRC in Israel and the occupied territories does not currently evacuate civilians. Any involvement of the ICRC in evacuating civilians from an area would require first the agreement of the sides on the exact terms and conditions so that this can be done safely, and then with the full consent of those evacuated.

What is the status of the Gaza Strip under international law?

The ICRC considers the Gaza Strip as part of the occupied territory. The Oslo Accords also recognize the West Bank and Gaza as forming a single territorial entity (even if geographically separated). Israel is bound by certain obligations under the law of occupation including to ensure the basic needs of the population of Gaza are met.

Is Israel using white phosphorous on civilians in Gaza and isn't this a war crime?

We do not have information that would confirm its use in Gaza.

How do you ensure that the aid you're distributing is not being diverted?

The ICRC is accustomed to working in highly volatile, rapidly changing, and challenging environments. We have put a range of mitigating measures in place to prevent the diversion of goods or leakage of funds including (1) Compliance policies and practices; (2) Measures relating to inbound/import and reception of goods at ICRC warehouses (3) Careful needs assessments, beneficiary selection, and distribution; (4) Direct implementation and (5) Monitoring and Evaluation to ensure aid is reaching the targeted populations."

In the U.S., Hamas is sanctioned as a terrorist organization. How can the ICRC work in a place where there is a designated terrorist group?

- The ICRC works in line with its mandate from IHL to assist and protect people affected by armed conflict. We operate on the basis of the humanitarian principles, namely neutrality, independence, and impartiality, and carry out exclusively humanitarian activities targeting populations affected by armed conflict.
- The ICRC has in place robust oversight and risk mitigations measures to ensure our aid reaches targeted affected populations and to prevent aid diversion.

Do you fear that this will escalate into a regional conflict? What could you see unfolding in the coming weeks?

We do not want to speculate on what could come. Our focus today is on the humanitarian needs created by the fighting over the past week. *Move into the messaging above, bringing it back to today and the need for more aid into Gaza, humanitarian space to work, etc.*

IHL-related questions (for background only)

How are hospitals protected under IHL?

- Hospitals are especially protected under international humanitarian law because of their life-saving function that they have for the wounded and sick. This means that

parties to conflicts cannot attack hospitals and they cannot otherwise prevent them from performing their medical functions.

- That said, hospitals can lose their protection if used outside their humanitarian function humanitarian functions to commit “acts harmful to the enemy”. It would be the case for example if a hospital is used by a party to the conflict as a base from which to launch an attack; as a weapons depot; or to hide healthy fighters.
- The party has to do everything feasible to verify that it has lost its protected status. This means it has to do a factual assessment before the attack on the basis of the facts reasonably available to it.
- So the first thing when a hospital has lost its protected status is that a warning has to be given, and the purpose of the warning is to allow those who misuse the hospital to stop the acts harmful to the enemy or if they persist to allow for the safe evacuation of patients and medical staff. Now of course evacuation of patients in hospitals isn't always feasible, even less so in conflict situations.
- This does not mean there is a free license to attack. Under international humanitarian law every attack is always subject to the principles of proportionality and precaution. This means that the party to the conflict has to do everything feasible in order to avoid or at least minimize harm to patients and medical staff. And under the principle of proportionality, the party has to ask itself, will the death, the injury, the destruction caused by this operation not be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage pursued. And when you picture a hospital in a fighting zone, it's most probable that the harm to health care services and delivery will not only be in the short term but also in the medium and long term, and this in a situation of conflict where the delivery of services is all the more crucial because of the high number of wounded and sick.

What is the legal difference between PoW and hostages? Are there different legal provisions pertaining to each of the groups?

POW is a specific legal status under international humanitarian law (IHL), protected by the Third Geneva Convention (GC III). Hostage is not a legal status but a state you are in, i.e. you can be a hostage while being a POW.

Under Art.4 of the Third Geneva Convention, a POW status is granted to members of armed forces who have fallen into the hands of the enemy state forces. This status only applies in situations of an international armed conflict (IAC) opposing states. In non-international armed conflict (NIAC, opposing state vs a non-state actor), there is no such status.

Hostages are persons who, irrespective of their status, have been detained under circumstances in which death or injury to themselves or those close to them, or continued unlawful detention is threatened, in order to compel a third party to do or to abstain from doing any act in exchange for the release or safety of the hostage or others threatened. Carrying out, or threatening to carry out, an act of hostage-taking is prohibited under IHL and constitutes a war crime in grave breach in IAC and NIAC.

How are prisoner exchange transactions carried out in terms of international law? What is the involvement of international organizations?

Based on various IHL provisions:

- Transfers or exchanges of prisoners shall always be carried out humanely.
- The conditions of transfer shall not be prejudicial to the health of the prisoners, the detaining power shall supply the prisoners with sufficient food and drinking water and

with the necessary clothing, shelter and medical attention during the transfer and exchange.

- The detaining power shall ensure the safety of the prisoners during the transfer and exchange.
- Prisoners shall be allowed to take with them their personal belongings.
- A complete list of prisoners exchanged shall be drawn up before departure and should be shared with the receiving power and with the ICRC.

Regarding potential ICRC's involvement, here are the main conditions:

- Agreement of all parties concerned.
- Security guarantees: safe and unimpeded access for ICRC to carry out the operation.
- Respect at all times and by all parties of the requirements of IHL regarding such exchanges, in particular with regard to the humane treatment of the prisoners before, during and after the transfer.

Can Israel change its attitude towards security prisoners following last night's events?

Common Article 1 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions requires parties to respect the provisions of the Conventions "in all circumstances". That is, the obligations of the parties to the conflict under IHL continue to apply regardless of violations committed by the adversary.

What is the status of the Gaza Strip under international law?

The ICRC considers the Gaza Strip as part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Oslo Accords also recognize the West Bank and Gaza as forming a single territorial entity (even if geographically separated).

Is Hamas considered an "organization"? Is the conflict with Hamas an IAC or a NIAC?

There is state of armed conflict between Israel and the Hamas military wing, that can be considered a non-state armed group under IHL. The exact nature of such conflict remains unresolved. However, the main applicable rules governing such conflict are of customary nature applicable both in IAC and NIAC.

Are you concerned about the increasing levels of violence we are seeing in the West Bank, including deaths?

We have consistently reiterated our concern about the rising levels of violence seen in the West Bank throughout this year. 2022 is no longer the deadliest year seen in over a decade in the West Bank – 2023 has surpassed this number in terms of casualties and injuries. Unfortunately, we are seeing tension from the current armed conflict in Gaza now spreading in multiple areas of the West Bank.


A mosque was bombed in the West Bank on the 21.10.23 night – do you have any comment on this?

Any escalation of the violence is obviously concerning. The facts around this incident are not yet clear, but as a general rule, all those engaged in armed violence should respect and protect places of worship.

Communication materials

- **[LIVE WeTransfer Portal](#) of ICRC COM assets** (scroll down for most recent)
Please note: this will be updated on a regular basis to include our most recent assets. Please ensure you note anything that denotes “not for fundraising use”
- **[Q&A on hostages in Gaza](#) (20 Nov)**
- **One month on pieces:**
 - One month on: [operational update & key facts and figures](#)
 - On global ICRC X channel: [“In Gaza there is no time to grieve, only to survive”](#)
 - On IL/OT X channel: [“One month since the horrific attacks in Israel”](#)
- **ICRC Decries the shooting of its humanitarian convoy in Gaza:** [statement](#)
- **Horrific suffering of civilians must end:** [statement](#)
- **Ambulances arrive at Rafah crossing; ICRC calls for the protection of medical facilities and personnel:** [statement](#)
- **ICRC helps in the release of hostages:** President’s statement ([video](#) and [online statement](#)) (20 Oct)
- **Gaza: Surgical team, 60 tons of humanitarian aid** and medical items mobilised but access urgently needed (18 Oct)
 - [B-Roll](#) #1: Tom Potokar, Chief surgeon for the ICRC in Gaza, speaks about the critical importance to deploy, October 18.
 - [B-roll](#) #2: Video of ICRC staff at the warehouses in Amman, Jordan, including a short Interview with Ihab Shaban (min. 4:32 – 4:49), Communication manager for the ICRC in Amman, October 15.
- **ICRC Head of sub-delegation in Gaza:** “Civilians lack food, electricity, water” – William Schomburg, the head of sub-delegation for the ICRC in Gaza, speaks from a makeshift camp set up for displaced Palestinians in Rafah, near the Egyptian border, about the humanitarian conditions on the ground (15 Oct)
- **[Q&A for Israel & Gaza conflict](#)** (13 Oct)
- **ICRC [staff witness account](#) of the situation in Gaza (audio file)** (11 Oct)
- **[Additional Q&A on humanitarian corridors](#)** (Note: in *general* and not specific to this situation) (updated as possible)
- **[“Evergreen” explainers](#) on international humanitarian law** (1) Distinction, Proportionality, and Precautions and (2) shorter version on Proportionality.
- The following [pictures](#) can be used for public communications as well as fundraising, but **please ensure** that you always show one photo from Gaza AND Israel together.

Photos	Caption	Copyright	Date
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	<p>A new photo from AFP that can be used by your NS with respective credits</p> <p>Caption: A woman reacts while holding a pillow as she stands amidst debris outside the side of the Ahli Arab hospital in central Gaza on October 18, 2023.</p>	<p>Title: PALESTINIAN-ISRAEL-CONFLICT</p> <p>Location: GAZA CITY, PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES</p> <p>Credit: AFP</p>	<p>18/10/23</p>
	<p>Magen David Adom responding to needs and treatment of injured victims</p>	<p>Magen David Adom</p>	<p>8/10/23</p>
	<p>The International Committee of the Red Cross are supporting the immense needs in Gaza with essential medical supplies such as stretchers, surgical kits, war-wounded kits and body bags.</p>	<p>ICRC</p>	<p>8/10/23</p>
<p>Photo 1 :</p> <p>Photo 2 :</p>	<p>A man carries a crying child as he walks in front of a destroyed building in Gaza City on October 7, 2023.</p> <p>Apartments in a residential building catch fire during a rocket attack in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, on October 7, 2023.</p>	<p>AFP</p>	<p>7/10/23</p>

- ICRC [statement](#): ICRC calls for immediate protection of civilians after horrific violence (also in [Arabic](#))

ICRC Statements, News Releases, etc.

- [7 Oct](#) – Calls for immediate protection of civilians
- [10 Oct](#) – Targeting civilians leads to further spirals of violence and hatred
- [13 Oct](#) – Evacuation order of Gaza: catastrophic humanitarian consequences
- [20 Oct](#) – Neutral intermediary role in release of hostages in Gaza
- [27 Oct](#) – War surgery team arrives in Gaza
- [28 Oct](#) – De-escalate now
- [31 Oct](#) – Rising violence in the West Bank
- [6 Nov](#) – ambulances transporting patients from Al Shifa arrive at the Rafah crossing
- [7 Nov](#) – Children dying by the 1,000s. This needs to stop.
- [7 Nov](#) – ICRC convoy hit
- [9 Nov](#) – Humanitarian aid must not become a fig leaf for failing to protect civilian lives.
- [10 Nov](#) – Not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative to preserve human life
- [12 Nov](#) – Urges protection for Gaza civilians evacuating and staying behind
- [14 Nov](#) – ICRC President meets with families of hostages
- [20 Nov](#) – ICRC President in Qatar

- [24 Nov](#) – ICRC starts multi-day release of hostages/detainees & deliver aid

About the ICRC in ILOT

Through its permanent presence in Israel and the Occupied Territories (ILOT) since 1967, the ICRC has been working to alleviate the suffering of people impacted by conflict.

The ICRC has been supporting the capacity-building of emergency responders e.g. teams from the Ministry of Health, primary health care centres, Palestinian Authority MoH Coordination and Liaison Office in Gaza, EMS staff from MMS, MoH and Civil Defense. For details, please refer to the ICRC [facts & figures for first half of 2023](#). The ICRC currently has coordination agreements with national societies from the following countries: Japan, Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and IFRC. In total, there are over 300 fulltime ICRC staff working in this delegation; of which 130 are based in Gaza.

Reference

- FAQ on [Rules of War](#)
- Database on [customary IHL](#)

For more information

- Join our WhatsApp group for Movement partners [here](#). Or using the QR code below. Please use this for urgent questions/requests to ensure a timely response.
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