



ICRC

Speech given by Mr Peter Maurer

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

**Plenary Statement to the United Nations Summit
Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants**

19 September, New York, USA

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ICRC welcomes this Summit and its Declaration.

The Declaration commits States to treat every individual migrant and refugee with humanity. It also recalls the high standards of international law governing their protection and assistance.

This dual commitment to humanity and law is fundamental.

Every day, in different parts of the world, the ICRC sees first-hand the suffering that pushes people to flee their homes in search of safety, to meet their basic needs.

The majority of people who are forcibly displaced stay in their own country. Today there are 41 million IDPs. They have not crossed a State border. Most refugees are hosted in countries neighbouring today's armed conflicts.

A family's decision to leave is always tragic. People have lost so much. They are desperate. They no longer see any future in the place which has been their family's home for generations.

Once they are forced to move, the journey is paved with insecurity. Migrants risk being detained. Families are separated. Relatives go missing. The initial tragedy meets more tragedy.

The truth is that unrestrained violence and violations of international humanitarian law are one of the main drivers of forced displacement.

Parties to armed conflicts, be they State or non-State actors, attack indiscriminately, detain arbitrarily, torture, rape, forcibly displace millions of people, and unlawfully destroy homes, hospitals and schools. The cumulative impact of this violence means people may no longer access basic services or maintain a sustainable livelihood.

In places not experiencing armed conflicts, chronic violence also triggers displacement. Homicide, sexual violence and intimidation force people to move and prevent investment in basic services and safe access to schools and clinics.

To address the root causes of large-scale movements of migrants, we must therefore work together towards better respect for international humanitarian law, refugee and human rights law and other legal frameworks that protect people from the effects of violence.

And in responding to their needs, States must make sure the policies they pursue do not generate additional suffering. “Do no harm” is a critical principle.

Policy-makers should listen to affected individuals and communities, and solutions ought to be found together. Otherwise, migrants will be pushed into situations of unnecessary dependency when what they need most - once their basic protection needs are met - is support in becoming or remaining self-reliant.

The ICRC and its partners in the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are comprehensively engaged in humanitarian work with migrants at every stage of their journey. We have valuable knowledge, expertise and resources to inform State policy and practice in easing their suffering. We look forward to contributing this experience to the Compacts that States will agree within the next two years.

Thank you.