International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace

UNGA High-Level Plenary Meeting

24 April 2019

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is pleased to join in today’s commemoration of the first official International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace.

As the guardian of international humanitarian law (IHL), a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian actor, and a multiple recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize honoured for our humanitarian activities during war, the ICRC deems it important to provide our perspective on this critical topic. In particular we wish to highlight the interrelated nature of humanity and multilateralism.

Madame President,

In the aftermath of the Second World War, States recognized that if wars cannot be prevented they must be waged within certain limits. Humanity brought States together to draft, negotiate and adopt the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which today are core to IHL and represent a shared commitment to humanity. Universally ratified, these rules of war are the quintessential product of multilateral consensus. They demonstrate what is possible through effective multilateralism: together States can create norms, uphold them and take action.

These Geneva Conventions were designed to protect the safety, dignity and well-being of people affected by conflict. The original drafters knew that when we invest in our shared humanity, we see positive results. Torture and ill treatment or rape and other forms of sexual violence are prevented. Hospitals can function and medical personnel are able to help the wounded and the sick. People who are detained are treated humanely. We are able to view our enemies as humans. When upheld and respected the collective result of international humanitarian law is less human suffering.

Madam President,
Humanity and multilateralism are at the heart of the United Nations and bring us together today. In this multilateral fora we create the norms that uphold our humanity. This year we mark the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Let us remember the spirit of these Conventions and uphold human dignity even in the midst of war. It is our collective responsibility to ensure these laws are respected. Through multilateralism we can achieve this.

Thank you.