EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 15 February 2013
6542/1/13 REV 1
PRESSE 59

Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the European Union pays tribute to the ICRC's tireless and invaluable work in protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict worldwide.

Since its foundation on 17th February 1863, the ICRC has worked ceaselessly to prevent suffering through developing, promoting and strengthening international humanitarian law, set out in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols and other international agreements as well as in customary international law, and universal humanitarian principles, and through providing, in times of armed conflict and other emergencies, humanitarian assistance to wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of the armed forces, to prisoners of war and to other detainees, as well as to civilians. The work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, composed of the ICRC, the one hundred and eighty-eight National Societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, lies at the very heart of international humanitarian action. Co-operation between National Committees for the implementation of International Humanitarian Law and the ICRC is invaluable in promoting effective application of international humanitarian law.
The European Union fully supports the mission of the ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation worldwide. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid underlined the unique nature of the ICRC's mandate and pledged the EU's determination to work in close partnership with the ICRC. In 2005, the European Union adopted Guidelines on International Humanitarian Law which commit the EU to promote compliance with international humanitarian law, while the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights, adopted by the Council in June 2012, reiterates the EU's determination to continue to promote observance of international humanitarian law, not least through cooperation with the ICRC.

While celebrating one hundred and fifty years of humanitarian action by the ICRC, the EU is nevertheless concerned that grave humanitarian challenges persist; civilians frequently bear the brunt of armed conflict or violence, and violations of international humanitarian law are still all too common. The ICRC's work remains indispensable in addressing human suffering. The EU will continue to support the implementation of the ICRC's humanitarian mission worldwide and its fundamental principles of neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland* and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.