



ICRC

Speech given by Mr Peter Maurer
President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Acceptance speech: Four Freedoms Award Ceremony

24 May in Middelburg, The Netherlands

Your Majesties,
your Royal Highnesses,
Professor Van Vollenhoven,
Prime Minister,
esteemed laureates,
members of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and Roosevelt
Foundation,
distinguished guests,

It is a great honour and a pleasure to be here today with you all, and to accept this award on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. I am also very pleased to be able to share this special moment with my friend Dr Francesco Rocca, Vice-President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Our Movement in all its components is rooted and works through and with the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network: 189 National Societies that act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies, in times of peace and in war, are meeting the needs and improving the lives of vulnerable people. Together we tackle some of the most acute humanitarian challenges around the world and help communities strengthen their resilience. We are committed to saving lives and changing minds, even in the most hostile environments.

Our world is undergoing great transformations: economic and ecological, political and social, scientific and technological. Recurring humanitarian problems represent challenges: displacement of populations on a massive scale; wars that last decades with serious regional and global implications.

Increasingly complex humanitarian needs emerge, as conflict, natural disasters and underdevelopment coexist. All too often the basic consensus around minimum standards of humanity is elusive.

From new challenges emerge new dilemmas for all humanitarians:

- How do we guarantee the security of humanitarian workers while insisting on being close to those who need our help?
- How do we gain and maintain the acceptance of States and armed groups when they question the very basic notion of protecting civilians?
- How do we preserve a space for neutral, independent, and impartial humanitarian action when States seek to control the delivery of relief?
- How do we obtain political support for humanitarian action while avoiding that humanitarian action becomes a tool for achieving political aims?

In this challenging environment, it is critical to build a broad consensus on the meaning and significance of humanitarianism. This is precisely what we do, day in and day out, working as a strong and united Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to give principled humanitarianism a greater space. Together, we have unique access to decision makers and opinion leaders at local, regional and global level, and we must endeavour to preserve this precious asset. Looking ahead, this includes reaching out to our young people, the Red Cross Youth, who are agents of change, shaping the world they live in, and our hope for the future.

This prize is a great encouragement for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a whole. In thanking you for this honour, I would like to dedicate the Four Freedoms Award to the 80 million members and 17 million active volunteers based in 165,000 branches across the world, and to those who risk their lives every day in order to prevent and alleviate human suffering. These include the 34 staff and volunteers from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the five from The Palestine Red Crescent Society who have been killed in the line of duty in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, as well as the three ICRC staff who are still held captive in the country for 224 days now.

Thank you.