I chaired an event organised by the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), entitled The Reality of Syria: The Importance and Limits of Humanitarian Relief. This was an excellent opportunity for practitioners, parliamentarians and other interested parties to get an update on the worsening humanitarian situation in Syria.

While the 150th anniversary of the ICRC may seem like a moment for celebration, the ICRC has decided to focus its resources upon a campaign to demand that all parties in Syria guarantee unimpeded access to all those who need assistance and ensure the safety of Red Cross and Red Crescent staff on the ground.

Robert Mardini, ICRC Head of Operations for the Near and Middle East and Sir Nicholas Young, Chief Executive of the British Red Cross, gave a briefing which demonstrated the overwhelming need for humanitarian assistance both within Syria and in neighbouring countries which are hosting up to 2 million refugees. Within Syria, over 100,000 people have been killed, many of them civilians. The plight of the 500,000 injured, often overlooked, is exacerbated by the collapse of medical services across much of the country, alongside the collapse of normal economic and social life.

In the midst of this crisis, the ICRC and Red Crescent volunteers are providing real help to millions of people, providing food, water and medical supplies to those they can reach. While the provision of water and sanitation has proved uncontroversial, with both sides allowing the installation of water pipes and other infrastructure, food and medical supplies are often used as a weapon of war, notably against the 1 million people who the United Nations estimates are living in besieged areas.

This is why the ICRC is launching the ‘Respect us – Protect us‘ campaign, which demands free and safe access to all those in need. The kidnapping of 7 aid workers last month shows the dangers faced by local and international staff. While humanitarian aid alone will not end the war, it will alleviate the suffering of civilians in this blighted country. For more information about the work of the Red Cross in Syria please go to their website or if you wish to donate click here.