

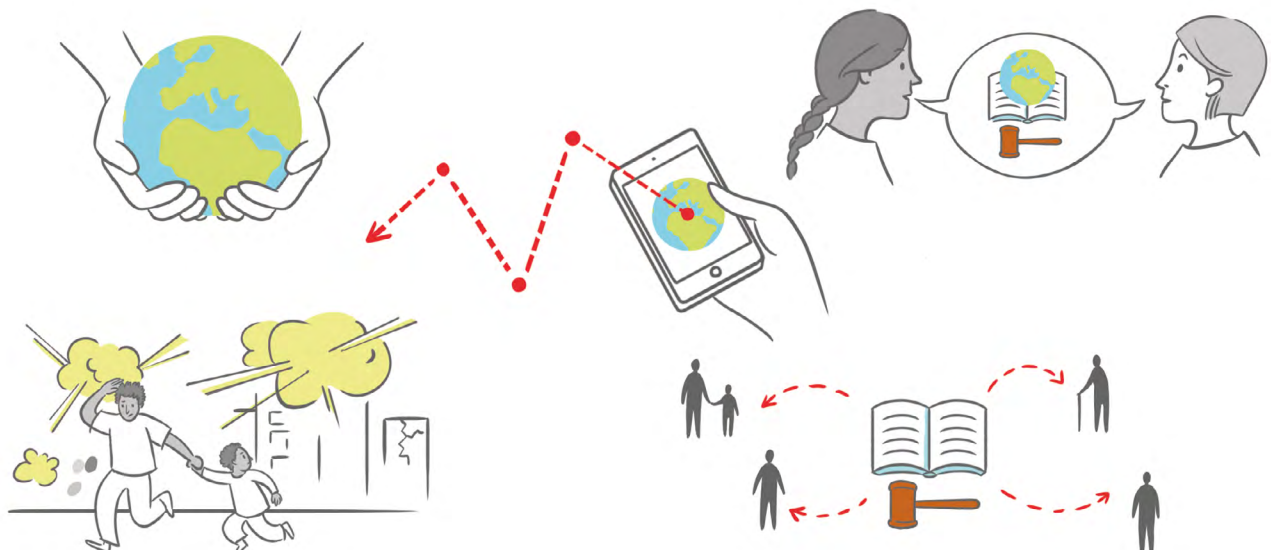
COMMISSION I — 10 December 2019

International humanitarian law: protecting people in armed conflict

Context

Recent years have seen many shocking and egregious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). The capacity of IHL to protect the victims of today's complex armed conflicts has been questioned by some and significant challenges lie ahead. Yet, in armed conflicts across the world, many belligerents are fighting by the rules. IHL continues to govern their behaviour, successfully protecting victims and restricting the way hostilities are conducted. Every day, the achievements of IHL – a wounded person allowed through a checkpoint, a child who receives the food they need, detainees able to send a message to their families, and many other examples – may not always be visible to the public. However, in every instance, they prove that IHL is respected. Created for the worst of times, IHL preserves the core of our common humanity. And respecting IHL prevents human suffering that would otherwise be felt not only years but possibly decades after conflicts have ended.

2019 marks the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which are universally ratified. The 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference) therefore presents an opportune moment for the members of the International Conference to reaffirm their commitment to IHL and to work towards its full application and implementation, especially at the national level. An entire day will be dedicated to IHL through a commission, which will include five spotlight sessions, as outlined below. The commission will give International Conference participants the opportunity to engage in positive and pragmatic discussions, and to share, learn, explore, and have a meaningful dialogue about key areas related to respecting and implementing IHL. Furthermore, it sets the scene for the subsequent days of discussion at the International Conference, as a number of the areas addressed during the commission are connected to the broader themes of "Shifting vulnerabilities" (e.g. in relation to digitalization and urbanization) and especially "Trust in humanitarian action".



Overall objective and expected outcomes

The aim of the commission and its spotlight sessions is to foster important and engaging conversations on key issues related to IHL and armed conflicts today, with a focus on the protection of people. There will be an opening plenary to set the scene for the day, followed by the five spotlight sessions. The commission will conclude with a plenary to consolidate the discussions of the day and highlight connections with themes to be discussed throughout the rest of the International Conference. Many of the commission's topics are rooted in the findings of the quadrennial report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on IHL and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts, which was shared with all International Conference participants as part of the official documents on 25 October.

Format

This commission will consist of two plenaries (opening and closing) and five spotlight sessions on the following topics:

- **Influencing behaviour to enhance respect for IHL**
- **IHL: Different people, different impacts**
- **Preventing and responding to the consequences of urban warfare**
- **IHL and new technologies**
- **Voluntary reporting and sharing of good practices**

Descriptions of the spotlight sessions are provided below.

SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS

INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR TO ENHANCE RESPECT FOR IHL

Date and time: Tuesday 10 December, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm



Objective

This session will showcase some of the ICRC's latest initiatives aimed at understanding the sources of influence on behaviour, how these sources can be utilized, and how we can measure their effectiveness in promoting respect for IHL.

Key Questions to be discussed

1. How can we have a greater influence on respect for IHL among State armed forces and non-State armed groups?
2. Can virtual reality improve the retention of IHL messages among fighters?
3. How can we determine which type of messages are more influential than others (e.g. in media campaigns)?

Supporting resources

- [ICRC, *Roots of Restraint in War*, 2018](#)



IHL: DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENT IMPACTS

Date and time: Tuesday 10 December, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm

Objective

This session seeks to demonstrate that while the text of IHL rules may be neutral, the application of these rules could still be experienced in different ways by different women, men, girls and boys. It also aims to consider what this means for States in terms of how they apply IHL.

Key Questions to be discussed

1. What are the different impacts that IHL rules have on different women, men, girls and boys?
2. What are potential implications of these different impacts for how States implement the rules of IHL?
3. What opportunities are there to learn more about how IHL can impact different women, men, boys and girls in different ways?

Supporting resources

- *ICRC pledge: Expert Meeting on Impacts of IHL on Different Women, Men, Boys and Girls*
- *Handout: Spotlighting IHL's Different Impacts on Different People*

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN WARFARE

Date and time: Tuesday 10 December, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm



Objective

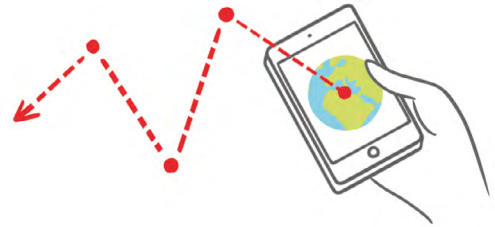
The overarching aim of this session is to highlight the need to address the causes and consequences of urban warfare. It seeks to raise awareness of the direct and indirect humanitarian consequences of urban warfare and provide an overview of the key causes of civilian harm.

Key Questions to be discussed

1. What are the direct and indirect humanitarian consequences of urban warfare, and what are the challenges faced by the Movement in responding to those consequences?
2. How can IHL be better respected in urban warfare?
3. What policies and good practices can States and parties to armed conflicts adopt to reduce the risks of civilian harm and facilitate better respect for IHL?

Supporting resources

- *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts (33IC/19/9.7)*



IHL AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Date and time: Tuesday 10 December, 2:30 – 4:00 pm

Objective

This session seeks to build awareness among the International Conference participants of the range of legal, ethical, societal and policy challenges posed by new technologies of warfare. It also aims to identify key concepts that can help States and other participants address these technologies in ways that reduce potential human suffering and ensure compliance with and respect for the rules and principles of IHL.

Key Questions to be discussed

1. What are the foreseeable humanitarian impacts of autonomous weapons, cyber operations and the use of artificial intelligence when it comes to decision-making in war?
2. Why are these technologies a cause for concern when it comes to the application and implementation of IHL?
3. How can we overcome these challenges to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and sufficient human control over new means and methods of warfare?

Supporting resources

- *International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts (33IC/19/9.7)*



VOLUNTARY REPORTING AND SHARING OF GOOD PRACTICES

Date and time: Tuesday 10 December, 2:30 – 4:00 pm

Objective

This session aims to share examples, inspiration, practical support and tools to help States start or improve their voluntary reporting on IHL obligations and encourage more voluntary reporting.

Key Questions to be discussed

1. What are the potential benefits of producing a voluntary report on national IHL implementation? What challenges do States face in this regard and how could they be addressed?
2. What information would a voluntary report ideally contain?
3. What roles could governments, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and national committees and similar entities on IHL play when it comes to voluntary reporting on IHL?

Supporting resources

- *ICRC, Implementing International Humanitarian Law: From Law to Action, factsheet, 2016*
- *ICRC, National Committees and Similar Entities on International Humanitarian Law: Guidelines for Success, 2019, in particular Annex 3 (p, 72) containing a template for a voluntary report [English and French only]*