**Model Pledge**

# Protecting the Natural Environment in Armed Conflicts

**Proposed by**: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

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*Note:* *This model pledge offers an array of potential actions that States, National Societies and observers can choose to make their priority commitments. It gives a list of examples, which are not intended to be adopted in full. The proposed actions can be prioritized and adapted to the relevant national context.*

## A. Objective/introduction of the model text

The natural environment has too often remained a silent casualty of war. The consequences of environmental damage for conflict-affected populations are severe, complex and compounded by increasing climate risks. The ICRC’s 2020 [Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict](https://shop.icrc.org/guidelines-on-the-protection-of-the-natural-environment-in-armed-conflict-pdf-en.html) set out obligations of international humanitarian law (IHL) that fix legal limits on the damage that warring parties can inflict on the natural environment, with the aim of supporting the incorporation of these rules in national law, policy and practice. Broader in scope, the International Law Commission’s [Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3998322?v=pdf) clarify and develop international law on this topic, reiterating key IHL obligations and drawing on other branches of international law.

The objectives of this pledge are to advance national implementation of IHL and enhance wartime environmental protection. The pledge is linked to the 34th International Conference’s Commission I, entitled “Building a Global Culture of Respect for IHL”, and its spotlight session “Protection of the natural environment in armed conflicts”. It is also linked to the spotlight session on reducing climate change’s impacts on communities, and to the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations’ [Commitment 6](https://www.climate-charter.org/guidance/) regarding the implementation of international law, including IHL.

This document provides a set of potential pledge commitments that might be used in individual or joint pledges by conference members and observers. These are inspired by and based on previous conference pledges and on examples of good practices shared by government representatives at the 2023 State Expert Meeting on IHL Protecting the Natural Environment in Armed Conflicts, organized by Switzerland and the ICRC, which are presented together in the [chair’s summary report](https://www.icrc.org/en/document/chairs-summary-report-state-expert-meeting-ihl-protecting-natural-environment-armed).

## B. Actions to be considered

The National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society/State/observer or the State and National Society together is/are encouraged to choose actions from the list below that best correspond to their individual situation and priorities.

1. **Integrate IHL rules protecting the natural environment into national legal and administrative frameworks and disseminate them to national authorities and the general population. To do so:**
   * take steps towards acceding to international treaties that provide protection for the environment in armed conflicts (e.g. Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions; the Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques, and/or the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature)
   * analyse the domestic legal system to determine which areas of legislation need to be supplemented or amended to bring domestic law into line with international obligations
   * adopt legislative, administrative and practical measures, or modify existing ones, and ensure that the institutional framework is in place to implement international obligations. For instance, the following steps could be taken:
     + clarify how peacetime environmental legislation, policies or regulations apply to armed forces’ activities during armed conflicts, including extraterritorially
     + introduce regulations to eliminate or mitigate environmental damage in the testing, use or destruction of military equipment
     + institute appropriate penal legislation and sanctions for war crimes and other international crimes that concern the environment in armed conflict
     + establish monitoring capabilities to assess environmental damage resulting from military operations (e.g. use dedicated databases or data sheets to collect, share and analyse information on the environmental impacts of military activities, products or services)
   * task national IHL committees or similar entities with advising and assisting national authorities in their efforts to implement IHL rules that protect the natural environment and to spread knowledge about them
   * enhance coordination, information exchange and cooperation, as relevant, between the armed forces and national agencies with environmental responsibilities
   * apply to non-international armed conflicts the IHL rules protecting the natural environment in international armed conflicts
   * integrate IHL’s protection of the natural environment in academic courses and moot court competitions as well as in dissemination measures for the general population
   * use international and national forums, platforms or initiatives to increase awareness of international law that protects the environment in armed conflict and promote its implementation (e.g. conferences, workshops, pledges, public websites).
2. **Incorporate IHL rules protecting the natural environment into military doctrine, education, training and disciplinary systems:**
   * develop new or adapt existing resources of armed forces (e.g. military and field manuals, standard operating procedures, courses, guidebooks and toolboxes, maps and practical simulations) to expressly integrate IHL rules that protect the natural environment and to ensure effective instruction, taking into account the cultural identity and local norms and values of the audience
   * provide training to legal advisers to the armed forces or other relevant armed forces’ personnel on IHL rules protecting the natural environment to equip them to provide advice to military commanders
   * tailor military education and training to different levels (e.g. commanders, soldiers, personnel with environmental responsibilities), and provide relevant specialized training, including on specific topics (e.g. mine clearance, minimizing the environmental impacts of heavy weapons)
   * task personnel or units in the Ministry of Defence and armed forces with environmental responsibilities, including with providing expertise on reducing environmental damage during armed conflict and assessing those impacts
   * organize military field exercises to increase understanding of IHL rules, including regarding the natural environment, and to share knowledge on how to observe these rules in practice
   * take or support initiatives to disseminate and integrate IHL rules protecting the natural environment in non-State armed groups’ doctrine, training and compliance mechanisms, as well as to encourage the adoption of commitments to enhance wartime environmental protection.
3. **Adopt and implement measures to increase understanding and awareness of the effects of armed conflict on the natural environment prior to and regularly during operations, whenever feasible and operationally relevant, to minimize the direct and indirect impacts of military operations on the environment. For example:** 
   * prior to deployment and/or during operations, gather environmental data on the area of operations (e.g. determine the presence of protected environmental areas and locations prone to climate risks and shocks, or where the environment is otherwise particularly degraded or fragile) and include it in operational planning to mitigate expected damage
   * when planning attacks, map areas of particular environmental importance or fragility to inform the conduct of hostilities, for instance by including these areas on no-strike lists
   * take steps to improve armed forces’ understanding of the environmental impacts of military operations, for example by gathering information from:
     + agencies with environmental expertise and/or local communities as relevant and appropriate
     + remote and open-source data, and/or
     + new technologies and other tools such as geospatial analysis
   * establish in the armed forces specific environmental expertise and responsibilities (e.g. within existing functions for intelligence, planning, operations), for example to conduct a pre-deployment environmental study or to provide legal and environmental advice to commanders during the conduct of hostilities
   * enhance coordination between the armed forces and national agencies with environmental responsibilities, including to conduct pre-deployment environmental impact assessments or during military operational planning
   * conduct post-strike “battle damage assessments” or “after-action reviews” including an assessment of environmental damage to inform planning for future operations and attacks
   * carry out legal reviews of new weapons, means and methods of warfare that include information on the intended and likely direct and indirect environmental impacts
   * collate and share good practices of measures and processes that protect the environment with other armed forces, and encourage other armed forces or groups, when partnered with them, to adopt protective measures.
4. **Identify priority areas of particular environmental importance or fragility – such as national parks, other nature reserves or endangered species habitats – and designate these as demilitarized zones or with other enhanced protection in the event of an armed conflict. For example:**
   * use existing national, regional or international lists of protected areas, for instance World Heritage Convention natural heritage sites, to identify and prioritize such areas
   * conduct consultations with other States and/or the ICRC to consider mutually granting enhanced protection to certain prioritized environmental areas in armed conflicts
   * adopt or modify national laws, standard operating procedures or policies to facilitate the creation of demilitarized environmental zones or otherwise enhance protection of certain particularly important or fragile environmental areas in armed conflicts
   * integrate references to selected environmental areas in military doctrine, training or guidance, including in maps used by troops in military training or operations
   * consult local communities, including indigenous persons where they are present, notably when identifying environmentally important or fragile areas and when considering the establishment of protected environmental zones in armed conflicts
   * encourage, or endeavour to conclude, agreements between parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups, that will provide additional protection to certain areas of particular environmental importance or fragility, including for example through demilitarization of such areas
   * avoid placing troops and military objectives in areas of particular environmental importance or fragility where feasible (if full demilitarization not possible), and inform opposing parties of the existence and location of such areas
   * enhance coordination between national environmental authorities, conservation actors and the military around such areas
   * establish specialized units within armed forces operating in cross-border areas of particular environmental importance or fragility as well as cross-border environmental cooperation structures to manage, protect and preserve these areas.
5. **Exchange good practices and examples of measures that can be taken to comply with IHL obligations that protect the natural environment, through activities such as military training, conferences and regional forums.** **For example:** 
   * share relevant data on the environmental impacts of military operations with other actors, including States, humanitarian actors or allied forces, for example as part of memoranda of understanding or during exchanges between States
   * provide technical expertise to other States, for instance on conducting environmental impact assessments in armed conflict or on measures that can better protect areas of particular environmental importance or fragility
   * carry out or share scientific assessments of the damage caused to the natural environment by certain types of weapons
   * organize joint military exercises or other similar initiatives to increase understanding of IHL rules and their practical application, including with respect to the natural environment
   * support efforts by relevant actors to strengthen non-State armed groups’ awareness of the damage caused to the natural environment by certain types of weapons, and the limits imposed by IHL.

## C. Potential indicators for measuring progress

* Number of actions taken by States, National Societies and/or observers to incorporate IHL obligations and recommendations protecting the natural environment into national legislative, administrative and institutional frameworks, including military operational documents and policy guidance interpreting existing IHL-related national laws.
* Number of actions taken by armed forces to incorporate IHL rules that protect the natural environment into military operational planning and the conduct of operations.
* Number of military training sessions and exercises on the topic of IHL rules protecting the natural environment, including for armed forces’ legal advisers, and the number of people trained.
* Number of measures taken by States, National Societies and/or observers to promote and teach IHL rules that protect the natural environment in armed conflicts to national authorities, other actors and to the general population.

## D. Resource implications

The States and/or National Societies will determine the resources that may be required to carry out this pledge based on the objectives and actions they choose to take in their specific context.