



Power of humanity

34th International Conference
of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

28–31 October 2024, Geneva

OUTLINE OF COMMISSION I AND ITS SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS

Building a Global Culture of Respect for IHL

Tuesday 29 October 2024

Context

The 34th International Conference is being held at a critical time when the unacceptable cost of armed conflict demands a renewed commitment to our common humanity. It also marks the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Currently, there are over 100 ongoing armed conflicts, many of which are neglected by the international community and the media, and many of which are protracted, with consequences that last for generations. When international humanitarian law (IHL) is respected and its humanitarian spirit upheld, lives are saved and dignity is preserved. Yet, respect for IHL remains insufficient in many armed conflicts, causing devastating suffering. More must be done to improve implementation and compliance with it.

Overall objective and expected outcomes

Commission I aims to mobilize States, working with their National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society (National Society), to redouble their efforts to implement IHL obligations in good faith. The opening plenary of the commission will focus on prevention work and set the stage for thematic discussions that will take place in the spotlight sessions. With its prevention focus, the commission underpins the IHL resolution being tabled at the conference. Then, for four key topics in contemporary armed conflicts, each spotlight session aims to raise awareness, provide space for discussion and debate, and encourage members of the conference to adopt pledges to encourage concrete and meaningful action to improve respect for IHL.

Format

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

- war in cities
- promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL in complementarity with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- protection of the natural environment in armed conflicts
- autonomous weapon systems.

Descriptions of the spotlight sessions

Session 1: War in cities

Tuesday 29 October, morning

Objective

This session is designed to build awareness of the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare and to showcase efforts by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

(Movement) and States to reduce and respond to these humanitarian consequences. The spotlight session on the humanitarian consequences of urban warfare, at the 33rd International Conference in 2019, was followed in 2022 by a [Council of Delegates \(CoD\) resolution on war in cities](#) and a five-year action plan to strengthen the Movement's capacity to prevent and respond to these impacts. At the 34th International Conference, the CoD will adopt a Solemn Appeal to States through a resolution on war in cities, while pledges on this same topic will aim to gain States' support for strengthening the protection of civilians and for the Movement's work on war in cities.

The session will therefore be an opportunity for States to demonstrate their commitment to preventing and responding to humanitarian consequences by entering into pledges, some of them joint pledges with National Societies, which represents an important opportunity for mobilization.

Key questions to be discussed

1. What are the humanitarian consequences of war in cities – including the impact on children?
2. How is the Movement responding to these consequences? What challenges are they experiencing and how are they supporting affected communities?
3. What steps are States taking or should States take to reduce and respond to these consequences and to strengthen the auxiliary role of National Societies?

Supporting resources

Many resources in various forms are and will be available and promoted before and during the conference:

- 2024 CoD resolution and Solemn Appeal on War in Cities
- 2024 progress report on the Movement action plan on war in cities
- Model pledge on war in cities: [AR](#), [EN](#), [FR](#), [SP](#)
- Forthcoming chapter of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Challenges report, entitled "Urban warfare"
- 2022 CoD resolution on strengthening the resilience of urban communities: [AR](#), [EN](#), [FR](#), [SP](#).

Session 2: Promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL in complementarity with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

29 October, morning

Objective

This spotlight session aims to build on previous efforts to raise awareness of the specific barriers and risks faced by persons with disabilities in armed conflict, particularly resulting from military operations. It also aims to promote existing recommendations that came out of regional consultations bringing together persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and armed forces, co-organized by the ICRC with the UN special rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the International Disability Alliance, the European Disability Forum and the Diakonia IHL Centre. Conference participants should be encouraged to submit pledges with a view to promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL and humanitarian action. Promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL, in complementarity with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is part of [The ICRC's Vision 2030 on Disability](#). It is also in line with the previous 2015–2019 [Strategic Framework on Disability Inclusion by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement](#).

Key questions to be discussed

1. What are the specific barriers and risks faced by persons with disabilities in armed conflict, particularly resulting from military operations, bearing in mind how different persons with disabilities experience such barriers and risks differently?
2. What are the challenges and good practices in making the specific barriers and risks faced by persons with disabilities more visible in the interpretation and implementation of IHL?
3. How can organizations of persons with disabilities participate in processes related to the interpretation and implementation of IHL, in cooperation with States and Movement components?
4. What possible pledges can participants make in relation to disability-inclusive IHL and humanitarian action?

Supporting resources

- [Towards a disability-inclusive IHL: ICRC views](#)
- Forthcoming chapter of ICRC Challenges report, entitled “Promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL”
- [War in Cities: Persons with Disabilities and the Role of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement](#)
- Model pledge on IHL and persons with disabilities: [AR](#), [EN](#), [FR](#), [SP](#).

Session 3: Protection of the natural environment in armed conflicts

Tuesday 29 October, afternoon

Objective

Societies affected by armed conflicts are also coping with our global environmental and climate crises. Armed conflicts themselves deepen the crisis by harming the environment further and reducing people’s resilience to growing climate risks. Over the past 50 years, natural ecosystems have declined by almost 50% on average, and around 25% of species are close to extinction, with conflict an indirect driver of the loss. This is dangerous because biodiversity and ecosystems are crucial to sustaining human life and supporting adaptation to climate change.

The aim of this spotlight session is to highlight concrete measures that States, together with National Societies, and parties to armed conflict can take to improve wartime environmental protection through better dissemination and implementation of IHL rules that protect the natural environment in national law, policy and practice. States and National Societies are invited to share examples of such measures during the session. The session will also promote examples of good practices shared by government representatives at the 2023 State Expert Meeting on IHL: Protecting the Natural Environment in Armed Conflicts, co-organized by Switzerland and the ICRC, which are gathered together in this [summary report](#).

Drawing on good practices such as these, States and National Societies are encouraged to submit pledges to advance national IHL implementation to strengthen the protection of the natural environment in war.

Key questions to be discussed

1. What challenges and good practices do States and National Societies experience in relation to wartime environmental protection?
2. What measures have been taken by States, National Societies and other actors to advance national implementation of IHL rules that protect the natural environment in armed conflicts?
3. What pledges can States and National Societies make to strengthen wartime environmental protection?

Supporting resources

- Model pledge on the protection of the natural environment in armed conflicts: [AR](#), [EN](#), [FR](#), [SP](#)
- [State Expert Meeting on International Humanitarian Law: Protecting the Environment in Armed Conflicts](#), chair's summary, ICRC and Switzerland (2023) [available in Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish]
- [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#), especially the [guidance on Commitment 6](#) with IHL examples, ICRC and IFRC (2021) [available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish]
- [Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict: Rules and Recommendations Relating to the Protection of the Natural Environment under International Humanitarian Law, with Commentary](#), ICRC (2020) [available in French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian]
- Forthcoming chapter of ICRC Challenges report, entitled "The protection of the natural environment in the conduct of hostilities"

Session 4: Autonomous weapon systems

Tuesday 29 October, afternoon

Objective

Addressing the humanitarian aspects of, and the legal and ethical risks posed by, the unconstrained development and use of autonomous weapon systems (AWS) must be a priority for the global humanitarian agenda. The ICRC president, with the UN secretary-general, has called on political leaders to urgently negotiate new international law, setting clear prohibitions and restrictions on AWS by 2026. This session will provide a unique space for States and the Movement to exchange and share perspectives on this topic. It builds on previous Movement initiatives, including the spotlight session on IHL and new technologies at the 33rd International Conference and the 2022 Council of Delegates workshop, "Towards a Movement position on AWS". The session will:

- explore the potential human cost, ethical concerns and challenges for compliance with IHL arising from the use of AWS in conflict
- hear updates from regional, international and other processes including the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Group of Governmental Experts and the UN secretary-general's report
- solicit proposals for the way forward to establish new legally binding rules.

Key questions to be discussed

1. What are the foreseeable risks posed by the unconstrained development and use of AWS in conflict?
2. How can the international community capitalize on the significant multilateral discussions that have taken place since 2014, and translate these into action to address these risks?
3. What role can the Movement play to support the negotiation of new rules on AWS?

Supporting resources

- [ICRC position on autonomous weapon systems](#) (May 2021)
- [Joint call by the United Nations secretary-general and the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross](#) (October 2023)
- [United Nations secretary-general's report on autonomous weapon systems](#) (July 2024)