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to the United Nations
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The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and has the honour to refer to General Assembly Resolution 61/30 entitled "Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflict". In accordance with paragraph 11 of that resolution the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom has the honour to provide the attached information on measures to strengthen the existing body of international humanitarian law, inter alia, with respect to its full implementation and dissemination at the national level.

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations takes this opportunity to renew to the Secretary-General of the United Nations the assurances of its highest consideration.



United Kingdom Mission

to the United Nations

15 September 2008

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Measures taken to strengthen the existing body of international humanitarian law: international humanitarian law implementation, dissemination and education

1. The United Kingdom is committed to protecting human dignity by enhancing respect for international humanitarian law and is a strong supporter and advocate of its principles and rules. The United Kingdom by its statements and actions constantly reaffirms its commitment to uphold these principles, and to encourage others to do the same.
2. The United Kingdom established a National Committee on International Humanitarian Law in 1999, in line with a recommendation endorsed by the 1995 International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The National Committee on International Humanitarian Law has met annually to develop further and disseminate understanding of international humanitarian law policy and practice nationally, and to discuss ways to encourage international partners to do likewise, particularly within the Commonwealth. The UK has promoted the formation of National International Humanitarian Law committees, and has offered practical assistance to those wishing to do so.
3. The United Kingdom has legislation (namely the Geneva Conventions Acts and the International Criminal Court Act) which enables those who commit war crimes to be punished. The United Kingdom continues, in addition, to activities carried out by the European Union, with which the UK has been fully involved, to encourage States to become party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to put in place legislation to give the Statute effect.
4. The United Kingdom is a party to almost all of the treaties relating to International Humanitarian Law. Although not yet a party to the Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 on the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem 2005, the UK is a signatory and has been working towards the introduction of measures that will allow us to meet our obligations under this treaty. The United Kingdom Government fully intends to fulfil its commitment to ratify the Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions 1949 and is currently preparing a draft bill for publication as soon as possible this year.
5. The United Kingdom remains committed to promoting awareness and understanding of the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) in all parts of the United Kingdom. IHL has been included in the national curriculum for secondary schools in England and the UK government has committed to building on this by developing further relevant resources and by making them available within schools and other places of education, and to the teaching profession. It will also continue to encourage the curriculum authorities in the other parts of the United Kingdom to include IHL in their own schools' curriculum and will continue work closely with the British Red Cross Society, in recognition of its special status as an auxiliary to the government in the humanitarian field, to promote awareness of British Red Cross Humanitarian Education Programmes. In addition to developing IHL instruction in schools, the United Kingdom offers general international humanitarian law training to governmental policy and legal advisers plus ad hoc events and training as required. The United Kingdom also provides information on relevant international humanitarian law issues to the media in connection with events current at the time, including armed conflicts to encourage greater awareness of international humanitarian law and its relevance in their work.

6. The UK continues to assist the international organizations and non-governmental organisations in their work on international humanitarian law and supporting its implementation through the provision of financial and other support.

Military training

7. All United Kingdom servicemen and women are instructed in the relevant aspects of international humanitarian law during their basic training and at appropriate stages as they are promoted to higher ranks. Relevant aspects of international humanitarian law training are an integral part of the preparation for officers' ranks. The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) has published a Manual on Law of Armed Conflict containing comprehensive guidance for all three services and relevant training materials have been produced by all three services (Army, Navy and Air Force).
8. Relevant aspects of international humanitarian law are also covered as part of pre-deployment training for all service personnel. Aspects of the Geneva Conventions are covered in legal background briefs received by all deploying troops, and all military personnel receive an aide-mémoire card which clearly states that civilians, prisoners and detainees must be treated with dignity and respect and must not in any way be subject to abuse, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment. Each service will deploy lawyers to operational theatres where there is a requirement to do so; when deployed the lawyers will advise on all legal issues and provide refresher training where practicable.

Accountability

9. Under the Service Discipline Acts, service personnel are subject to English criminal law wherever they are serving. This means that any conduct which would constitute a criminal offence if committed in England can be prosecuted by court martial. This is in addition to the general extraterritorial scope of the domestic offences under the Geneva Conventions Act 1957, the International Criminal Court Act 2001 and section 134 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (implementing the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984).

Investigation and prosecution of abuses

10. All substantial allegations or suspicions involving activity of a criminal nature by military personnel are investigated by the service police special investigations branch. An investigation is required in every instance where the action of British service personnel may have led directly to the death or injury of civilians in a theatre of operation. When investigations lead to courts martial, these are public and conducted to the same standards of justice and independence that are present in the civilian judicial system.