

## **Measures to implement the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto**

The Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the implementation of international humanitarian law. Implementation efforts cover several areas:

- The improvement of national law and of law-enforcement practice;
- Accession to international treaties on international humanitarian law that develop the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto;
- Dissemination of knowledge about international humanitarian law, study of practice in the implementation of international humanitarian law obligations and cooperation with the authorities of foreign States that are responsible for implementing international humanitarian law.

The Republic of Belarus is a party to the vast majority of international treaties in the area of international humanitarian law.

During the period under review, a number of legislative and regulatory measures have been taken to implement international humanitarian law. Significant progress has been made in bringing Belarusian criminal law into line with the rules of international humanitarian law, including with regard to the incorporation into national law of rules providing for the suppression of war crimes and establishing criminal accountability for their commission.

Specifically, amendments have been made to the Criminal Code of Belarus to criminalize at the national level the acts referred to in article 15 of the Second Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 14 May 1954 and to implement the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 10 December 1984. Efforts have also been made to fulfil the obligations set out in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict of 25 May 2000. In addition, amendments have been made to Belarusian law in order to regulate the use of the Red Crystal emblem and to ensure its protection.

On 10 January 2015, significant amendments were made to the Martial Law Act. This instrument sets forth the legal situation of citizens and organizations during a period of martial law, which will be introduced, inter alia, in the event of an armed conflict in the territory of Belarus.

The Act governs the following:

- The designation of civilian objects and military objectives in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law;
- The internment of nationals of a foreign State that has carried out an attack;
- Temporary resettlement of civilian populations;
- Prosecution of persons who have committed crimes during a period of martial law.

In 1998 a commission for the implementation of international humanitarian law was established under the Council of Ministers of Belarus as a special standing interdepartmental advisory body to coordinate the work of ministries and other State bodies and organizations on incorporating the rules of international humanitarian law into Belarusian law.

The commission has participated in the drafting of resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Specifically, the Belarusian delegation to the thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (Geneva, 8-10 December 2015) communicated its position at the time of adoption of the resolutions at the Conference, including on the issues of strengthening international humanitarian law protecting persons deprived of their liberty, strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law, sexual and gender-based violence, health care, and the protection of humanitarian volunteers.

Belarus has on several occasions co-organized and hosted regional seminars on the implementation of international humanitarian law. For example, the fifth Regional Seminar on Implementation of International Humanitarian Law, held in Minsk from 18 to 20 May 2015, was attended by representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs, defence, justice and culture of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, representatives of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and experts from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

At the 2015 Seminar, discussions took place on current trends in the implementation of international humanitarian law, problems in preventing violations of international humanitarian law, and mechanisms for compliance with international humanitarian law. The event allowed States from the region to assess achievements and share practical experience with regard to the implementation of international humanitarian law at the national level. In addition, participants were given an opportunity to discuss current issues in the development of international humanitarian law with representatives of ICRC and regional and international experts.

Representatives of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Justice and of Belarusian higher education institutions took part in the sixth Martens Readings, an international conference on international humanitarian law, in 2015. The conference participants discussed mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law, war reporting, national and international criminal justice and current issues in the teaching of international humanitarian law.

Belarus attaches particular importance to the dissemination of knowledge about international humanitarian law. International humanitarian law is studied in general secondary schools and higher education institutions, either under particular subjects, as a separate discipline or as part of optional courses.

Events for the dissemination of knowledge about international humanitarian law among the armed forces of Belarus are held as part of yearly action plans on international military cooperation and cooperation between the Ministry of Defence of Belarus and the regional delegation of ICRC in the Russian Federation, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova. Military personnel and students of military subjects are regularly provided with information about the humanitarian problems associated with warfare and the humanitarian work of ICRC. A number of representatives of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus have received training at the International Institute of Humanitarian

Law in San Remo, Italy.

Knowledge about international humanitarian law is also disseminated through various kinds of competitions and olympiads.

The international youth olympiad, "Youth for Peace", has become an established tradition. These olympiads are usually held at MITSO International University in the form of a role-playing game that helps to improve students' knowledge of international humanitarian law, develops their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice and helps Belarus to fulfil its obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the dissemination of knowledge about international humanitarian law. Over the years, representatives of more than 35 States have taken part in the olympiads.

The Red Cross Society of Belarus, which organizes academic competitions every year on current topics in international humanitarian law, contributes significantly to the dissemination of knowledge about international humanitarian law.

In sum, the period under review demonstrates the importance Belarus attaches to the implementation of international humanitarian law and the dissemination of knowledge about it and to measures aimed at strengthening the existing rules of international humanitarian law.