



79th session of the United Nations General Assembly Sixth Committee: Agenda item 81, Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts

4 November 2024

CANZ statement delivered by Laura McIlhenny, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations

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Thank you Chair,

I am pleased to deliver this statement today on behalf of Canada, New Zealand, and my own country, Australia.

This discussion occurs at a time when the devastating impact of armed conflict around the world is an all too constant reality.

At the outset, we reaffirm our strong commitment to the implementation of, and compliance with, international humanitarian law (IHL).

As we commemorate this year the 75th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions it is worth reflecting on the critical purpose the Geneva Conventions, and their Additional Protocols, serve in minimising the human cost of conflict. The Conventions seek to ensure that, even in the depths of



war, there are certain lines that must not be crossed – certain basic standards of humanity, and rules, that must be respected by all.

The Additional Protocols are an essential component of IHL, that protects civilians and other persons in both international and non-international armed conflict. The implementation of the Protocols helps to alleviate human suffering and ensure more lasting transition to peace and stability.

CANZ countries thank the Secretary-General for his report. We are concerned that during the reporting period no new State has become party to the three Additional Protocols. It is our view that States should strive to replicate the universal membership of the Geneva Conventions to ensure the protections of IHL are applied by all parties, in all armed conflicts, at all times.

Accordingly, we encourage States that have not yet become parties to the three Additional Protocols to do so, and encourage all State Parties to give full effect to their provisions.

Many of the key provisions contained in the Additional Protocols reflect customary international law and are therefore binding on all parties to an armed conflict. CANZ considers many articles of the First Additional Protocol on the protection of medical units, personnel and their transports reflect customary international law. Equally we consider that the prohibition on



making civilians the object of attack, set out in the Second Additional Protocol, is customary international law. Parties to armed conflicts are required to ensure that such protections are observed to their fullest extent.

CANZ firmly believes that the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers in accordance with international humanitarian law is paramount.

The protection of civilians and the protection of humanitarian workers go hand-in-hand. Humanitarian workers represent the best of us – going into conflict zones, in the toughest of circumstances, to protect civilians, alleviate suffering and deliver lifesaving support.

In this regard, CANZ welcomes the forthcoming Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, announced by Australia and partners during the United Nations General Assembly's High-Level Week, which will demonstrate the unity of the international community's commitment to the protection of humanitarian personnel and to channel that commitment into action in all current and future conflicts. All countries will be invited to join the Declaration.

We are acutely aware that protecting people affected by armed conflict rests heavily upon compliance with IHL. This relies on actors that violate IHL being held to account. In this regard, CANZ firmly believes that accountability for



violations of IHL is critical to achieving lasting peace and security and accordingly supports the work of competent judicial bodies, including the International Criminal Court.

We would like to acknowledge the crucial role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in promoting and disseminating IHL, and working to improve compliance among parties to armed conflicts. The role of the ICRC is indispensable. Together with States, the ICRC strives to ensure that civilians and victims of armed conflict are afforded protection. We are pleased to participate in the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent which brings together one of the world's largest humanitarian networks to advance humanitarian solutions to global challenges.

Increased implementation of IHL, including the Additional Protocols, will be achieved through taking practical measures to enhance their respect. This includes States incorporating IHL into their military doctrine, field training and rules of engagement, and ensuring national judicial structures can effectively address IHL violations.

Observing the challenging world in which we find ourselves today, it is clear that the principles enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, and their Additional



protocols, remain more relevant and important than ever. These principles, to save lives and to reduce the suffering of those caught up in conflict, underpin our collective peace and security.

Ensuring strengthened understanding of, and compliance with, IHL by all must be our priority. Australia, Canada and New Zealand will continue to work to that end, and we encourage all States to do the same.

Thank you.