



ICRC

Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts

Contribution by the ICRC

June 2024

Status of adherence to the three Protocols additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and to other IHL instruments

1. At the time of writing, the **total number of states party to Additional Protocols I, II and III** is 174, 169 and 79 respectively. 76 states have current **declarations under Article 90 of Additional Protocol I** accepting the competence of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission. Over the reporting period, the ICRC notes with regret that there has been no new ratification or accession to the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and reiterates its support to the call by the United Nations General Assembly to “all States parties to the Geneva Conventions that have not yet done so to consider becoming parties to the Additional Protocols at the earliest possible date”, as expressed in UNGA Resolution A/RES/77/107 of 19 December 2022. The ICRC further notes that no additional state has recognized the competence of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission. The ICRC also supports the call by the General Assembly to “all States that are already parties to Protocol I, or those States not parties, upon becoming parties to Protocol I, to make the declaration provided for under article 90 of that Protocol and to consider making use, where appropriate, of the services of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission in accordance with the provisions of article 90 of Protocol I”.
2. The ICRC stresses the importance of increasing the acceptance of existing treaties, in particular the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. States who stay outside the quasi-universally agreed framework create doubt as to what the common rules are, and uncertainty about the rules in armed conflicts cost lives. Each new ratification of an IHL treaty increases the protections afforded during times of conflict and contributes to securing the universality of IHL. In this respect, the ICRC has continued to promote adherence to and implementation of **key IHL instruments**. In the period under review (June 2022 to April 2024), the ICRC welcomes the following **accessions and ratifications**:
 - 1 state (Solomon Islands) became party to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict,
 - 1 state (South Sudan) became party to the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological Weapons,
 - 2 states (Malawi, Singapore) became party to the Convention prohibiting Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW),
 - 2 states (Malawi, Singapore) became party to the Convention prohibiting Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), amended Article 1,
 - 2 states (Malawi, Singapore) became party to CCW Protocol (I) on Non-Detectable Fragments,
 - 1 state (Malawi) became party to CCW Protocol (II) prohibiting Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices,
 - 1 state (Singapore) became party to CCW Protocol (III) prohibiting Incendiary Weapons,

- 1 state (Singapore) became party to CCW Protocol (IV) on Blinding Laser Weapons,
 - 4 states (Cabo Verde, Finland, Maldives, Republic of Korea) became party to Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance,
 - 2 states (Nigeria, South Sudan) became party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions,
 - 2 states (Andorra, Gabon) became party to the Arms Trade Treaty,
 - 9 states (Cabo Verde, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste) became party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
 - 2 states (Iceland, Mauritania) became party to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property,
 - 2 states (Iceland, Mauritania) became party to the Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property,
 - 2 states (Mauritania, Yemen) became party to the Second Hague Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property,
 - 1 state (Armenia) became party to the Statute of the International Criminal Court,
 - 2 states (Mexico, Peru) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 8,
 - 2 states (Niger, Peru) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, articles 8bis, 15bis and 15ter,
 - 3 states (Estonia, Germany, Uruguay) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 124,
 - 6 states (Chile, Estonia, Germany, Mexico, Slovenia, Uruguay) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 8 (Weapons which use microbial or other biological agents, or toxins),
 - 6 states (Chile, Estonia, Germany, Mexico, Slovenia, Uruguay) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 8 (Weapons the primary effect of which is to injure by fragments undetectable by x-rays in the human body),
 - 6 states (Chile, Estonia, Germany, Mexico, Slovenia, Uruguay) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 8 (Blinding laser weapons),
 - 6 states (Estonia, Germany, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Switzerland, Uruguay) became party to the Amendment to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, amended article 8 (Intentionally using starvation of civilians in non-international armed conflict).
3. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. This anniversary provides an important opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the Geneva Conventions and IHL in preventing suffering in armed conflict and ensuring that a level of dignity is maintained. It also provides an opportunity to reaffirm the shared commitment to preserving humanity in war that has led to the universal ratification of the Geneva Conventions, and to make compliance with IHL and respect for the humanitarian values that underpin it a political priority. The ICRC has continuously encouraged states to seize the opportunity of this anniversary to mark a public renewal of their commitment to preserving humanity in all situations of armed conflict as well as to implement and comply with IHL. Such a commitment could take several forms, some examples of which are public statements, ratifications or accessions to IHL-related treaties to which the state is not yet party, publication of a voluntary report on the domestic implementation of IHL or establishment of a national committee or similar entity on IHL. In particular, in furtherance of paragraph 1, the ICRC has been working to encourage states that

are not party to the Protocols to take this opportunity to consider acceding to the two Additional Protocols¹ and, where necessary, to enact implementing legislation to give effect to them. In addition, the ICRC highlights that states may also consider making a Declaration under Article 90 of Additional Protocol I to recognize the competence of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC), in case they have not done so yet, and to use and encourage the use of IHFFC's good offices and fact-finding services.

4. The 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, titled "Navigate Uncertainty – Strengthen Humanity", will also take place this year in Geneva, from 28 to 31 October 2024. The International Conference is the supreme deliberative body of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and is normally held every 4 years in Geneva. All states party to the Geneva Conventions and representatives of recognized Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies participate in the conference, as well as the ICRC and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Objectives of the International Conference include to contribute to respect for and development of IHL, as well as improve the safety, security and dignity of individuals by strengthening legal frameworks and policies. As part of the preparations to the International Conference, the ICRC has submitted two draft resolutions for adoption. The first one is titled [Toward a universal culture of compliance with international humanitarian law](#), and aims to reaffirm states' commitment to IHL as well as the core principles and assumptions on which it depends, and to draw urgent attention to the problem of noncompliance, calling upon states to act in various ways. The second resolution, titled [Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against cyber and information operations during armed conflict](#), aims to build a common understanding of some of threats posed by cyber and information operations to civilians, medical facilities, and humanitarian operations. It also seeks to identify ways to prevent or mitigate harm to people affected by armed conflict, including by highlighting the work on a proposed "digital emblem", as well as the need to respect the limits that IHL imposes on cyber and information operations. The ICRC has hosted several meetings with states and National Societies since the beginning of 2024 in order to support the Members of the Conference in their preparation. One of such meetings was the 6th Commonwealth Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on IHL, co-hosted by the ICRC, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the South African government, and the South Africa Red Cross Society, with support from the British Red Cross and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The conference was an opportunity for government officials and representatives of national societies to share their perspectives on the implementation of the [Bringing IHL Home resolution](#) adopted at the previous International Conference in 2019 and to prepare for the 34th International Conference.

Recent developments

5. The adoption of the Ljubljana-Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, War Crimes and other international crimes ("Ljubljana-Hague Convention") on 26 May 2023, is a major step forward in ending impunity for the victims of the most serious crimes. The Convention aims to significantly enhance cooperation among all states Parties in the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. As the guardian of IHL, the ICRC is committed to supporting states to fully implement their IHL obligations, including those contained in the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. Ensuring accountability for war crimes is one such crucial obligation, as was recognised in article 88 of Additional Protocol I, which requires states to

¹ States may refer to the [ICRC's ratification kit for the Additional Protocols of 1977](#).

cooperate in connection with criminal proceedings brought in respect of grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. The ICRC has therefore been involved throughout the Ljubljana-Hague process with a specific focus on the need to align the definition of war crimes with the definition under customary international law and ensuring that the convention included provisions to enable cooperation in connection with universal jurisdiction proceedings. The ICRC would like to reiterate its appreciation and congratulations to the Core Group, who ensured an open, consultative and constructive approach to the negotiations throughout the process. The ICRC is happy to see that 34 States have joined the Ljubljana-Hague Convention and calls upon all states to consider signing and/or ratifying this important instrument.

6. In recent years, the international community has paid particular attention to the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas. In November 2022, 83 states endorsed the [Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas \(the Political Declaration\)](#). The first international follow-up conference to review implementation of the Political Declaration took place in Oslo in April 2024, and led to more states endorsing the Declaration, reaching 87 states at the time of drafting this report. The ICRC has worked, and continues to work, to encourage all states to endorse the Declaration and fully implement it. It also encourages those states who have endorsed the Political Declaration to work for universalization. Paragraph 20 of this report further highlights the work of the ICRC to alert, and respond to, the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare.

Legal advice and technical assistance for the national implementation of IHL

7. The ICRC continued to support states to implement their criminal repression obligations through domestic legislation. During the reporting period, the ICRC engaged in confidential bilateral dialogue with states on the inclusion of penal repression provisions within IHL implementing legislation. Additionally, the ICRC continued to support judicial training entities to integrate IHL into their judicial training curricula and was available to provide advice on questions of IHL.
8. The ICRC also worked with states on adopting counter-terrorism (CT) legislation that complies with IHL, notably through the inclusion of “humanitarian exemptions” and “IHL saving clauses” in several international instruments and domestic laws. Humanitarian exemptions aim at excluding exclusively humanitarian activities, undertaken by impartial humanitarian organizations - such as the ICRC - in accordance with IHL, from the scope of application of counter-terrorism measures. These exemptions allow humanitarian organizations to carry out a number of humanitarian activities foreseeing, authorized and protected under IHL such as reaching people in need living in areas controlled by non-state armed groups designated as terrorists and providing them with assistance, engaging with non-state armed groups on respect for IHL, visiting people detained by the non-state armed group, providing training on first aid, and conduct other humanitarian activities. As for the “IHL saving clauses”, such provisions ensure that attacks against military objectives or other actions that are considered not prohibited under IHL are not labelled as “terrorism” and criminalized as such in domestic law. Attacks against lawful targets constitute the very essence of an armed conflict and should not be legally defined as “terrorist” activity under another legal regime. To do so would be contrary to the reality of armed conflicts and the rationale of IHL, which does not prohibit attacks against lawful targets and may ultimately disincentivize parties to an armed conflict, especially non-state armed groups, to comply with IHL. They can also ensure that counter-terrorism laws do not contravene basic IHL principles, such as protection of

children affected by armed conflicts, prohibition of ill-treatment and respect for judicial guarantees.

9. International and autonomous sanctions have triggered concerns over the years due to their adverse effects on principled humanitarian action and their contradiction with some key rules of IHL, notably those governing humanitarian activities. This underlying tension between sanctions, IHL and humanitarian action has been significantly mitigated at the UN level with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2664 in December 2022. This resolution explicitly excludes humanitarian action conducted by specific humanitarian actors from the scope of current and future UN financial sanctions. While UNSCR 2664 does not mandate transposition beyond the confines of UN financial sanctions (i.e., does not require states or regional organizations to adopt exemptions in non-UN sanctions), its inspirational value set in motion significant changes in the approach of many states and international organizations, which followed and replicated this UN-established exemption in their autonomous sanctions regimes. During the period under review humanitarian exemptions were introduced in numerous autonomous sanction regimes in order to preserve impartial humanitarian activities from adverse impact and to reconcile sanctions regimes with IHL.
10. The ICRC has continued to work on preventing and reducing the human costs of weapons' use, remnants, and availability. In the reporting period, the ICRC has endeavoured to promote universal adherence and faithful implementation of humanitarian disarmament treaties, with a focus on the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), the Cluster Munitions Convention (CCM), the Arms Trade Treaty, and the various Protocols to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). For example, the ICRC has promoted universalisation and implementation at meetings of states parties to these treaties and engaged in bilateral and regional dialogue to support states to become a party to or implement these treaties. The ICRC's work in this field is grounded in evidence of the humanitarian consequences of weapons use based on ICRC's own field observations, ICRC research and consultations, and public sources. Disarmament and arms limitations are not solely tools to maintain international peace and security, and to prevent or end armed conflict. They are also critical means to mitigate the impact of armed conflict when it occurs. The humanitarian aims of arms prohibitions and limitations (humanitarian disarmament) can have positive knock-on effects on peace and security and development goals. The humanitarian narrative on weapons has in several cases allowed states to rise above political and security divisions and to break disarmament deadlocks.
11. Since the 1977 Additional Protocols established specific limits on wartime environmental damage, the natural environment has still too often remained a silent casualty of war. The consequences of environmental damage for conflict-affected populations are severe and complex, affecting their well-being, health and survival. As environmental degradation increasingly collides with climate risks, its impacts are compounded for people trying to survive in contemporary armed conflicts. As part of the ICRC's efforts to address the environment and the climate crisis, the ICRC has updated its 1994 Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict to reflect developments in treaty and customary IHL. The updated 2020 Guidelines are a collection of existing IHL rules and recommendations relevant to reducing the environmental impacts of armed conflicts. The 2020 Guidelines are intended to serve as a reference tool for all states, to support the incorporation of relevant IHL rules into military manuals, national policy and legal frameworks. The Guidelines are currently available in English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian,

Spanish and Ukrainian. To further this work, from 24 January to 2 February 2023, Switzerland and the ICRC hosted an online meeting of governmental experts, with the aim of improving environmental protection in wartime through better implementation of IHL. The state expert meeting brought together 380 specialists – in particular from Ministries of Defence and Ministries of the Environment – from over 120 countries, to share national experiences, challenges and good practices related to the protection of the environment in armed conflict. The [Chair's Summary Report](#) of the expert meeting was published in August 2023 in 6 languages and promoted worldwide. It presents the results of the exchanges between the state participants, including good practices identified. Since its publication, the ICRC has encouraged states to draw on the examples contained in the Chair's Summary Report to advance the implementation of IHL at the national level, and ultimately strengthen the protection of the natural environment as they fight. The ICRC invites states to submit pledges regarding IHL and the protection of the environment at the forthcoming 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and has prepared a model pledge to facilitate these efforts.

12. As it works with states on their domestic implementation of IHL, the ICRC has supported the establishment of new national committees and other similar entities on IHL, and the strengthening of existing ones. During the period under review, 2 national IHL committees or similar entities were created or re-established (Estonia and Brazil). Many other committees have made admirable efforts to increase their activity and reinforce their work through the renewal of regular meetings, development of action plans, adoption of internal regulations or by strengthening their legal basis. ICRC was often able to support these processes by providing legal advice and practical assistance. National IHL committees have been a key instrument in supporting their states in ensuring the adequate implementation of IHL at the domestic level and ICRC continues to promote their creation and work. In addition, and in line with the recommendations from the [Bringing IHL Home resolution](#), the ICRC co-organized several regional meetings of national IHL committees, as a means to foster exchanges on good practices and solutions found to answer challenges faced by states in implementing IHL domestically.² ICRC has also promoted and facilitated contacts and cooperation between NIHLCs on a bilateral and sub-regional level. Finally, the ICRC continues to support the work of national IHL committees through the online community, by enabling direct and regular exchanges and cooperation among them, and by encouraging the sharing of information about their activities, as well as discussions on various IHL topics.³
13. As much progress has been made on the domestic implementation of IHL, several states have published voluntary reports outlining the degree of IHL domestication. While there is no definition of what voluntary reports are, there is a common understanding that a voluntary report refers to any document drafted under the lead or with the strong involvement of a state entity (for instance, a National IHL Committee or similar entity, and sometimes with the support of the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society), with the purpose of describing the state of IHL implementation within the domestic legal system, including law, policy and practice. The trend of publishing voluntary reports on the domestic implementation of IHL saw a sharp increase during the period

² During the period under review, such meetings included: the First Regional Conference of European National IHL Committees (organized with the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs and the Austrian Red Cross), the Regional Meeting of National Committees on IHL and Similar Entities of the Americas (organized with the Argentinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence) and the Twelfth Meeting of Arab National Committees on IHL (organized with the Qatari NIHLC and the League of Arab States).

³ More information on the online community and the possibilities it offers to its members can be found at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/online-community-national-committees-and-similar-entities-ihl>.

under review, to reach 14 voluntary reports published by states, often with the support of their national IHL committees.⁴ The ICRC has created a [dedicated webpage](#) that contains information on the process of establishing voluntary reports and offers guidelines for states interested in drafting one. Such voluntary reporting complements the submissions that several states make to the United Nations Secretary-General's report on the Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts. Throughout the period under review, the ICRC supported several states, on a bilateral basis and at their request, to draft a voluntary report and/or a submission to the Secretary-General's report. The ICRC also continues to strongly encourage other states to consider reporting on IHL domestication via those tools. Finally, the ICRC also welcomed and continued to support regional initiatives in which states voluntarily report, in a verbal manner, to each other on their respective advancement concerning IHL implementation.

Efforts by the ICRC to reaffirm, clarify and disseminate IHL

Updated Commentaries on the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977)

14. Throughout the period under review, the ICRC continued to work with a team of experts to update the Commentaries on the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Additional Protocols. The updated Commentaries seek to reflect current interpretations of the law, taking into account developments in law and practice over the past eight decades, gleaned from state practice, case law, legal writings and the ICRC archives. They provide an important guidance tool for those who need to interpret and apply the treaties, including diplomats, members of the armed forces and policymakers. The updated Commentaries on the First, Second and Third Geneva Conventions have already been published. The updated Commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention will be published in 2025. The updated Commentaries are published first in English and then systematically translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish, and other languages on an *ad hoc* basis. They are made freely available via the ICRC website in each language as they are published, and are also accessible via the ICRC's IHL app. Hard copies of the updated Commentaries are available from Cambridge University Press.⁵

Customary IHL Study and Database

15. In close co-operation with the British Red Cross, its long-standing partner in the update of the practice part of the [Customary IHL Database](#) during the period under review the ICRC was able to make available new practice from 8 states in the online Customary IHL Database: Colombia and Sweden (added in 2022), Nigeria, Peru, South Africa and Tajikistan (added in 2023) and Brazil and the Philippines (added in 2024). The database contains the 161 rules of customary IHL identified in the 2005 ICRC customary IHL study, the practice underlying that study, and regular updates of the study's practice part. Since December 2019, in addition to English, the rules section of the Database is also accessible in Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

⁴ The following states have published voluntary reports: Belgium, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, Nicaragua, Niger, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/ch/academic/subjects/law/humanitarian-law/series/commentaries-1949-geneva-conventions>

Children in armed conflict

16. In recent years, the ICRC has drawn attention to the particularly devastating consequences of urban warfare for children. In cities from Gaza to those in Syria and Ukraine, childhoods are irrevocably changed by urban warfare. Sadly, this is far from a rare occurrence: an estimated one out of six children worldwide must navigate war as part of their lives. To further efforts to prevent child-specific harm arising from hostilities in urban environments, in 2023, the ICRC released its dedicated report on [Childhood in Rubble: The Humanitarian Consequences of Urban Warfare for Children](#). The report sets out the international law and standards on the protection of children in armed conflict applicable to warring parties and makes recommendations for weapons bearers to change their behaviour in favour of reducing harm to children. In tandem to this work, but beyond urban contexts, the ICRC continued to raise concerns about the discriminatory approach taken to the treatment of children associated with, allegedly associated with, or born to members of groups designated as terrorist. The ICRC continued to recall the rules of international law defining the rights and protections of children affected by armed conflict – including the 1977 Additional Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Drawing from these laws and standards, the ICRC has provided legal and technical advice to a number of states as they put in place measures to support the safety, recovery and reintegration of conflict-affected children. In parallel, the ICRC continued its work to support access to education, ensuring that children and school communities at frontlines, in remote areas and in highly violent zones can continue to go to school.

17. In June 2023, the ICRC co-organized an international conference on “Protecting Children in Armed Conflict – Our Common Future” together with Norway, Save the Children International, UNICEF and in partnership with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict, the African Union and a cross-regional group of states. The conference brought together more than 450 participants from 80 countries, many at ministerial level. It aimed to increase awareness and understanding of decision-makers on the greatest protection challenges that children face, and mobilize action and commitments by states, donors, and the humanitarian community to address these challenges. Throughout the conference, the ICRC called on states to accede to treaties and higher policy commitments addressing the recruitment of children in armed conflict, protect – without discrimination – all children who have been recruited by armed forces or armed groups, and significantly step-up efforts for child release and reintegration. Eighteen states and a wide range of organisations made concrete commitments at the Conference.

Detention by NSAG

18. Detention – by states and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) – is a reality in armed conflict. At present, the ICRC estimates that around 100 armed groups are holding detainees. The [ICRC’s new report](#) – available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic – presents research conducted by the ICRC on the law and practice relating to detention by NSAGs. It restates the legal framework for the protection of detainees in non-international armed conflict based on international humanitarian law treaties and customary law. At the heart of this publication is a set of examples of measures that over 80 different NSAGs have taken – or aim to take – to implement the relevant rule, based on NSAG practices, reported practices, and doctrine. It is hoped that this study may provide evidence-based examples of how NSAGs can respect and protect detainees. It may also be of interest for states that consider supporting non-state parties to armed conflicts in order to help

the latter protect detainees, humanitarian organizations working for the protection of detainees, and researchers working on related issues.

Persons with disabilities and IHL

19. Persons with disabilities are estimated to make up around 16% of the world's population. In conflict-affected areas, their number is estimated even higher, between 18-30%. Behind the numbers, persons with disabilities experience specific barriers and risks in armed conflict. These include the inaccessibility of advance warnings, shelter or evacuations, and an increased risk of incidental harm, wrongful targeting, heightened risks of violence and abuse, or inaccessibility of humanitarian relief. Promoting disability-inclusive interpretations and implementation of IHL, in complementarity with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), is part of [the ICRC's Vision 2030 on Disability](#) and in line with implementing inclusive protection activities as per the [ICRC's Institutional Strategy for 2024-2027](#). The ICRC co-hosted in 2022 regional consultations which brought together state armed forces and organizations of persons with disabilities together with the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the International Disability Alliance and other partners. A number of recommendations resulted from these consultations whose implementation [the ICRC would like to further promote](#), namely that states should include persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in IHL trainings and dissemination activities for armed forces. National IHL committees or similar bodies should also be seized of this issue, and the specific risks to persons with disabilities should be integrated in military manuals/LOAC manuals as well as the planning and conduct of military operations. A spotlight session at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent will provide an excellent opportunity to reflect on this issue, and to encourage International Conference participants to submit related pledges.

Urban warfare

20. [War in cities results in immense suffering](#). The human consequences are devastating and include: an appallingly high number of civilian deaths; extensive and long-lasting physical and mental suffering; lack of safe access to vast tracks of weapon contaminated land; destruction of homes and critical civilian infrastructure often due to the use of [heavy explosive weapons](#); [disruption to essential services](#); environmental damage; and widespread displacement. IHL imposes limits on the choice of means and methods of warfare, protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure against unacceptable harm and destruction. Even so, the devastating humanitarian consequences of urban warfare [raise serious questions](#) regarding how parties to such conflicts interpret and apply relevant IHL rules. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) is working to better prevent and respond to these humanitarian impacts, in accordance with the [2022–2027 Movement Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Humanitarian Impacts of War in Cities, adopted in Resolution 6 of the 2022 Council of Delegates](#). In this vein, the Movement will be seeking to highlight the issue of War in Cities at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and in the coming year will *inter alia* be calling on states to make commitments to action in this regard. As such, throughout 2024, the Movement will also present states with a number of open and/or model pledges articulating the Movement's concerns and suggesting concrete, practical steps that states, specifically, and others can take to help prevent and respond to the humanitarian impacts of war in cities. The ICRC encourages states to use these models to make their own individual or joint pledges, based on their interests, influence and capacities.

Digital emblem

21. The ICRC is seeking the support of states to create a digital red cross/crescent emblem that could make it clear to cyber operators that they have entered the computer systems or digital infrastructure of medical or humanitarian entities that enjoy specific protections under IHL. In November 2022, [the ICRC published a detailed report](#) presenting its analysis on the benefits and risks of a digital emblem, measures to mitigate any risks identified, and possible technical solutions for the digital emblem's implementation. This year, the ICRC has conducted a series of consultations with states, National Societies, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders to determine whether and how a digital emblem could be incorporated into IHL; a multilateral technical consultation, where the proposed technical solution will be presented in detail, will take place with states on June 26th, 2024. The ICRC also hopes for a dynamic discussion on the digital emblem at the 34th International Conference in October. The ICRC encourages states to mobilize their technological, legal and military expertise to engage with the ICRC on the establishment of a digital emblem, including during bilateral and multilateral consultations that will take place over the course of the year.

Autonomous weapons systems

22. Addressing the dangers posed by autonomous weapon systems (AWS) – being weapons that select and apply force to targets without human intervention – remains an urgent humanitarian priority. Such weapon systems pose serious humanitarian, legal, ethical and security concerns today, with militaries deploying weapons with increasingly autonomous functions. The ICRC has, since 2021, [called for new, binding international law](#) to establish clear prohibitions and restrictions on AWS. In 2023, the ICRC President and the Secretary-General of the United Nations issued a [joint appeal to all states](#) to negotiate such rules by 2026. In particular, the ICRC has recommended that these rules include specific prohibitions on unpredictable AWS and those that target humans directly. For all other AWS, there must be strict restrictions on design and use. These rules will be a preventive measure, an opportunity to protect those that may be affected by such weapons and avoid terrible consequences for humanity. In November 2023, 164 states voted in favour of the first ever UNGA First Committee Resolution on AWS ([A/C.1/78/L.56](#)), stressing the urgent need to address the challenges and concerns raised by AWS and mandating the UN Secretary-General to seek a broad range of views and report back in 2024. ICRC [submitted its views](#) to the Secretary-General in March 2024. In April, Austria hosted the largest ever international conference on AWS, with over 1,000 delegates including representatives from 144 states. A Spotlight Session on AWS is planned as part of the 34th International Conference, to further highlight humanitarian perspectives on this issue and to identify actions to be taken towards establishing new, effective international law.

Teaching IHL

23. The ICRC further developed and updated reference tools to support IHL teaching and research in universities worldwide. In particular, it updated its “Teaching, debating, researching international humanitarian law, action and policy in academia” brochure to support relations with such academia.⁶ The ICRC also created a pilot syllabus to test teaching of the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict with select lecturers worldwide, which is expected to be finalized in 2025 with lecturers' and student's feedback. The work on the ICRC's IHL app has continued, with

⁶ The new brochure can be downloaded here: <https://shop.icrc.org/teaching-debating-researching-international-humanitarian-law-action-and-policy-in-universities-pdf-en.html>

new documents added and efforts to optimize its functioning (downloading time).⁷ “International Humanitarian Law: A Comprehensive Introduction”, the reference IHL handbook by Nils Melzer, was translated further into Indonesian, Farsi and Armenian.⁸ The ICRC also developed and updated its reference “How does law protect in war?” platform (visited by over 600’000 users worldwide in 2023) with new introductory texts, bibliographic references, case studies and thematic highlights on contemporary IHL issues, such as “Targeting under international humanitarian law”, “The Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict” or “The same IHL applies to all warring parties: differentiating between jus contra bellum (law prohibiting use of interstate force) and jus in bello (law limiting effects of warfare)”.⁹ The ICRC also organized and supported various IHL students competitions, roundtables and training courses for academics all around the world. In particular, it organized the 15th edition of the Advanced IHL Seminar for Academics and Policymakers fully on-site for the first time again since 2019, aiming for concrete IHL implementation-related commitments and outcomes by 50 senior participants worldwide.

Considering gendered impacts of armed conflict when applying IHL

24. Finally, the ICRC’s work to mainstream a gender perspective in interpretations of IHL, in service of IHL’s obligations concerning non-discrimination and the reduction of civilian harm, is relevant for all themes and activities mentioned above. The ICRC is committed to strengthening the application of a gender perspective in its work for the understanding, dissemination of knowledge, and faithful application of IHL. This involves considering how the application of rules of IHL may impact diverse women, men, girls and boys differently, in order to better take account of the gendered harm caused by armed conflict and ensure that protections are applied without discrimination. As announced in the previous report submitted by the ICRC, in 2021 and 2022, the ICRC co-convened two expert meetings to deepen understandings of gendered impacts of armed conflict and to consider corresponding practical implications for the application of IHL. Based on these findings, the first report on [Gendered Impacts of Armed Conflict and Implications for IHL](#) calls on states to commit to apply and interpret IHL using a gender perspective, with the aim of better protecting all civilians and improving compliance with non-discrimination obligations. The second report, on [IHL and a Gender Perspective in the Planning and Conduct of Military Operations](#), sets out good practices that armed forces are encouraged to adopt to avoid and reduce gendered harm arising from military operations. The reports draw in particular from IHL and the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda, drawing connections between these legal and policy frameworks and recommending areas where they can be better jointly implemented. Recommendations for the consideration of states include appointing well-trained gender advisers to positions of influence in armed forces, integrating a gender perspective in military training exercises including through civilian-military cooperation, and ensuring clear provisions addressing non-discrimination and gender in military manuals. States are encouraged to make pledges at the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent on the basis of recommendations made in these two reports.

⁷ The 2.0 IHL app can be downloaded for iOS and Android devices here: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ihl-digital-app>

⁸ Those new versions are and will be available here for free, along with the already existing ones in 9 languages: <https://shop.icrc.org/international-humanitarian-law-a-comprehensive-introduction-pdf-ru.html>

⁹ The platform can be accessed for free here: <https://casebook.icrc.org/>