

This section contains a detailed presentation of the major features of IHL. The salient aspects of each of the 14 topics highlighted are outlined in short introductory texts, followed by references to articles from the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and to the rules set out in the ICRC's study, Customary International Humanitarian Law. These are supplemented by bibliographical references for those who wish to delve deeper into the subject matter. Each topic offers direct links to pertinent cases.

General bibliography on IHL

Fundamentals of IHL

What is IHL? What is its place within the international legal order? What is the difference between *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello*? When does IHL apply? What are its origins and how has it evolved? What are its sources?

Principle of distinction

What is the principle of distinction (between civilians and combatants, between military objectives and civilian objects) and what does it encompass? Why is it one of the cornerstones of IHL? How and why is the principle of distinction challenged at times in contemporary armed conflicts?

Combatants and POWs

Who is a combatant? What is combatant status? What are the rights and obligations of combatants? Can one lose combatant status? Who is entitled to the status of prisoner of war (POW)? How must POWs be treated? What are the rights of POWs? When must POWs be repatriated?

Wounded, sick, shipwrecked, dead and missing

What protection is afforded to the wounded, sick and shipwrecked? What is the scope of this protection? How are medical personnel and objects protected? What provisions govern the use of the protective emblems? What are the rules of IHL pertaining to the dead and the missing?

Civilian population

Who is a protected civilian? What are the rules governing the protection of civilians? Are there specific provisions of IHL for the protection of women and children? Are there specific rules protecting refugees and IDPs? What is occupation? Why are there separate rules governing situations of occupation? When does occupation start? When does it end? May civilians be detained?

Conduct of hostilities

How are civilians protected against the effects of hostilities? Can they lose their protection? What is a military objective? What does the principle of precaution encompass? What are the "means and methods" of warfare? How are they regulated? Is there a right under IHL to receive humanitarian assistance? Are those providing humanitarian assistance protected by IHL?

Naval warfare

Naval warfare

What are the specific rules governing the conduct of naval warfare?

Air warfare

What are the specific rules governing the conduct of air warfare?

Non-international armed conflict

What situations qualify as non-international armed conflict? What are the rules governing this type of conflict? What are the differences and similarities between the legal regimes applicable to international and to non-international armed conflicts? Who is bound by the law of non-international armed conflict? What are the legal consequences of this type of conflict on the status of the parties?

Implementation mechanisms

How is IHL implemented? What measures can or must be taken in peacetime? In the midst of an international armed conflict? In times of non-international armed conflict? May or must third States ensure compliance with IHL by belligerents? What is the role of Protecting Powers? Of the ICRC? Of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies? Of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)? Of the United Nations? What factors contribute to violations of IHL? What factors improve respect for IHL?

State responsibility

When are violations of IHL considered as having been committed by a State? How can State responsibility be ascertained? Can States take measures to restore respect? What kind of sanctions must be taken against a State responsible for violating IHL? Are reprisals admitted under IHL? Is there an obligation to make reparations ?

Criminal repression

Can an individual be held responsible for violating IHL? Does IHL provide mechanisms to punish violations? What is a grave breach of IHL? What is a war crime? What is a crime against humanity? What is the crime of genocide? How can they be prosecuted? What is the role of domestic courts? What is the role of international courts?

IHL and human rights

What are the differences and similarities between IHL and international human rights law (IHRL)? What are their respective fields of application? Can their rules be suspended or limited? Who is protected by their rules? Who is bound by their rules? How do these two bodies of law interact? What is the lex specialis principle?

ICRC

What is the ICRC's mission? What role does the ICRC play within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement? What are the principles underlying its action? What are the legal bases for its action? How does IHL support the ICRC's humanitarian work? What does confidentiality mean for the ICRC?