The right to self-determination was first enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and became recognized as a collective human right in the context of decolonization. The right to self-determination refers to the right of a people to choose their own government.

Under IHL, the notion of self-determination is relevant in the classification of conflicts. At least for States that have accepted Additional Protocol I, the rules of IHL of international armed conflicts apply to “armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist régimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination.” (PI, Art. 1 (4)). This provision is not universally viewed as reflecting customary international law.

See National Liberation Wars; International armed conflict;