



Published on *How does law protect in war? - Online casebook* (<https://casebook.icrc.org>)
Home > Civilians

Under IHL, the category of civilians is opposable to that of “combatants [1].” In an international armed conflict [2], all persons who are not combatants are civilians. Persons with civilian status may not be directly targeted in attacks. Civilians who directly participate in hostilities [3], however, lose that protection for the duration of their participation in hostilities. In non-international armed conflicts [4], there is no combatant status. Members of armed groups [5] with a continuous fighting function may, according to doctrine, be targeted like combatants. All other persons must not be directly targeted. The civilian population [6] is a term that refers to groupings of civilian persons. The presence of some combatants within the general civilian population does not render the civilian population as a whole targetable.

IHL contains certain rules applicable to civilians who accompany the armed forces.

See Civilian population [6];

LEGAL SOURCE

HR, 13 [7]

GCI, 13/4 [8] (see ICRC updated Commentary [9])

GCII, 13/4 ^[10] (see ICRC updated Commentary ^[11])

GCIII, 4(A)(4) ^[12]

PI, 23/6 ^[13]

CASES

ICRC, International Humanitarian Law and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts in 2015 [paras 242 ^[14], 252 ^[15]]

Iraq, Forced displacement and deliberate destruction ^[16]

Central African Republic, Report of the UN Independent Expert, July 2016 ^[17]

Iraq: Situation of Internally Displaced Persons ^[18]

ICC, Confirmation of Charges against LRA Leaders ^[19]

ICRC, Statement - War in Cities ; What is at Stake? ^[20]

International Criminal Court, Trial Judgment in the Case of the Prosecutor V. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo ^[21]

Iraq, The Battle for Mosul ^[22]

Iraq, Crimes by Militia Groups ^[23]

- [14] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icrc-international-humanitarian-law-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts-2015#challenges-2015-para242>
- [15] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icrc-international-humanitarian-law-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts-2015#challenges-2015-para252>
- [16] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/iraq-forced-displacement-and-deliberate-destruction>
- [17] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/central-african-republic-report-un-independent-expert-july-2016>
- [18] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/iraq-situation-internally-displaced-persons>
- [19] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icc-confirmation-charges-against-lra-leader>
- [20] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icrc-statement-war-cities-what-stake>
- [21] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/international-criminal-court-trial-judgment-case-prosecutor-v-jean-pierre-bemba-gombo>
- [22] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/iraq-battle-mosul>
- [23] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/iraq-crimes-militia-groups>
- [24] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/kenya-civilian-carnage>
- [25] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/georgia-attacks-against-peacekeepers>
- [26] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/great-march-return-demonstrations-and-israels-military-response>
- [27] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/yemen-humanitarian-impact-conflict>
- [28] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/eccc-detention-sites-cambodia>