Under IHL, the category of civilians is opposable to that of “combatants”. In an international armed conflict, 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, however, lose that protection for the duration of their participation in hostilities. In non-international armed conflicts, there is no combatant status. Members of armed groups with a continuous fighting function may, according to doctrine, be targeted like combatants. All other persons must not be directly targeted. The civilian population 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;
CASES

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

Iraq, Forced displacement and deliberate destruction


Iraq: Situation of Internally Displaced Persons

ICC, Confirmation of Charges against LRA Leaders

ICRC, Statement - War in Cities; What is at Stake?

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

Iraq, The Battle for Mosul

Iraq, Crimes by Militia Groups