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];

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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]


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]

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“Great March of Return” Demonstrations and Israel’s Military Response

Yemen, Humanitarian Impact of the Conflict

ECCC, Detention Sites in Cambodia

Source URL: https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/civilians

Links
[1] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/combatants