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A forbidden method of warfare consisting in deliberately depriving civilian persons of food. It is, for example, prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population ^[1], such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water ^[2] installations and supplies and irrigation works, etc., for the specific purpose of denying them their sustenance value to the civilian population ^[3] or to the adverse party, in order to starve civilians, cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

These prohibitions do not apply if the objects covered are used by an adverse party (a) as sustenance solely for the members of its armed forces ^[4]; (b) in direct support of military action, with certain provisions.

These objects must not be made the object of reprisals ^[5].

In recognition of the vital requirements of any party to the conflict in the defence of its national territory against invasion, derogation of the above prohibitions may be made by a party to the conflict within such territory under its own control where required by imperative military necessity ^[6].

See *Methods of warfare* ^[7]; *Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population* ^[1]

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OUTLINE

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Chapter 9, IV. 1. a) starvation of civilians: a prohibited method of warfare ^[9]

LEGAL SOURCE

prohibited method of warfare

PI, 54/1 ^[10]

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CASES

Angola, Famine as a Weapon ^[13]

The armed conflict in Syria ^[14]

Israel, Blockade of Gaza and the Flotilla Incident ^[15]

Yemen: Naval Blockade ^[16]

Yemen, Potential Existence and Effects of Naval Blockade ^[17]

Syria, Report by UN Commission of Inquiry (March 2017) ^[18]

Syria, the Battle for Aleppo ^[19]

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Suggested readings:

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MACALISTER-SMITH Peter, “Protection of the Civilian Population and the Prohibition of Starvation as a Method of Warfare – Draft Texts on International Humanitarian Assistance”, in *IRRC*, No. 283, September-October 1991, pp. 440-459.

MAYER Jean, “Starvation as a Weapon”, in ROSE Steven (ed.), *CBW: Chemical and Biological Warfare, Londonconference on CBW*, London, Harrap, 1968, pp. 76-84.

Further reading:

DINSTEIN Yoram, “Siege Warfare and the Starvation of Civilians”, in DELISSEN Astrid J.-M. & TANJA Gerard J. (eds), *Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts, Challenges Ahead, Essays in Honour of Frits Kalshoven*, Dordrecht, M. Nijhoff, 1991, pp. 145-152.

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[12] https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule54

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[18] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/syria-report-un-commission-inquiry-march-2017>

[19] <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/syria-battle-aleppo>