

## Concept Note

SIDE EVENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018

# CIVILIANS UNDER FIRE: HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION AND RESPECT FOR IHL

*Co-chaired by the European Union, the Kingdom of Belgium, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Wednesday, 26th of September 2018

8.30 a.m. to 10 a.m.

*Conference Room 1 (CRI) - United Nations premises*



*Photo/Courtesy of ICRC*

The latest Report<sup>1</sup> of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict highlights the appalling humanitarian consequences of armed conflicts on persons who are protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

In particular, urban warfare disproportionately affects civilians who account for more than 90% of deaths and injuries<sup>2</sup> when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. Attacks damaging hospitals and schools are more widespread in urban areas, as is damage to other vital infrastructure, in turn causing long-term disruption of essential services and resulting in displacement, disease and hunger.

Some 80% of humanitarian assistance addresses the consequences of armed conflicts. Yet, more than 4 000 humanitarian workers have been victims of attacks over the past two decades. Endemic sexual violence continues with impunity.

246 million children face killing, maiming and forced recruitment, and many are deprived of education when their schools are destroyed, used for military purposes or mined.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2017/414) -14 May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> According to Action on Armed Violence.

In some armed conflicts, violations of IHL are widely reported as strategic methods of warfare. Such methods have long-term humanitarian consequences. For instance, attacks against medical mission cause long-term setbacks in public health and revivals of epidemics. Civilian death and suffering would be greatly reduced if existing rules of IHL were respected. All parties to the conflict are obliged to respect and ensure respect for IHL in all circumstances.

Despite this worrying trend, good practices also exist that demonstrate compliance with IHL and enhance the protection of civilians. The demobilisation of child soldiers in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, the agreements on accounting of missing persons in Colombia, or yet the government campaign to eliminate the threat of landmines in Thailand<sup>3</sup> have shown the commitment of a number of parties to conflict to respect IHL. While it is important to highlight the dire consequences of IHL violation, the side event will tend to display the results achieved by positive changes of attitude on IHL on the ground.

### **Objectives**

The event will aim to:

- Draw attention to the human cost of armed conflicts and the consequences of IHL violations on civilians, with a focus on humanitarian action, medical care, and education.
- Highlight the positive impact that reduction of violation would have on humanitarian economic and financial needs.
- Consider some good policy and practices in order to promote a constructive dialogue towards improved respect for IHL.
- Explore and share good policy, practice, and avenues for progress to reverse the alarming growing degree of tolerance for civilian death, injury, and destruction in conflict and highlight that "even wars have limits".

The event is particularly timely in light of the upcoming 33<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross Movement in 2019.

### **Format**

- Welcome and first Opening remarks by the EU Co-chair, followed by Opening remarks by the Belgium Co-chair.
- Moderation of the event by Mrs Pariat,
- Panel and keynote statements highlighting: (i) The protection of civilians (ii) Attacks on schools (iii) attacks on medical mission, including health care personnel, facilities and vehicles; (iv) integration of IHL in military operations (v) engagement with Armed Non-State Actors on IHL.
- Interventions from the floor.
- Closing remarks by OCHA co-chair.

The event will be translated and recorded.

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<sup>3</sup> ICRC database "IHL in action: Respect for the law on the battlefield", a collection of real case studies documenting compliance with IHL in modern warfare.

## **OPENING REMARKS BY THE CO-CHAIRS**

### **Christos Stylianides**

*European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management*

Suggested focus: IHL promotion in conflict as a pre-emptive game changer saving lives

### **Didier Reynders**

*Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, Belgium*

Suggested focus: building a dialogue on generating respect for IHL

## **KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

### **Jean-Yves Le Drian**

*Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France*

Suggested focus: protection of humanitarian personnel

### **Peter Maurer**

*ICRC, President*

Suggested focus: protection of civilians and medical facilities

### **Helle Thorning-Schmidt**

*Save the Children International, CEO*

Suggested focus: ending the war on children

### **Alain Délétréz**

*Geneva Call, Director General*

Suggested focus: engagement with Armed Non State Actors on IHL

## **Additional speakers to be confirmed**

## **INTERVENTION FROM THE FLOOR**

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

### **Mark Lowcock**

*Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Emergency Relief Coordinator*

Suggested focus: Strengthening compliance with IHL

The event will be **moderated by Ms Monique Pariat**, *Director General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission*