

Call for Action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action

Gravely concerned by the violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), including the universally ratified Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the adverse consequences of contemporary armed conflicts on civilians and other protected persons as well as on humanitarian action, we reiterate with the present Call for Action our unreserved commitment to honor our obligation to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to promote universal adherence to IHL instruments, including the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions; and to support and facilitate humanitarian action based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, thereby contributing to our joint endeavor to safeguard the space for principled humanitarian action, for the benefit of all those in need of assistance and protection.

We further reaffirm the urgent need to minimize harm and suffering caused by armed conflict, and to protect civilians and all those who do not or who no longer take part in hostilities, including the wounded and sick, detainees, as well as humanitarian and medical personnel, with specific attention to women, children, persons forcibly displaced, persons with disabilities, and other particularly vulnerable groups.

We will continue to make the prevention of and response to the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict, the full respect of IHL, the preservation of the humanitarian space for humanitarian organizations to act in line with humanitarian principles, and accountability for violations of international humanitarian law, objectives of our domestic and foreign policies, in order notably to ensure access to people in need. We also agree to spread the strategic narrative that it is in everyone's interest for States and in particular parties to armed conflicts to respect and ensure respect for international norms for the protection of civilians, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international refugee law and relevant Security Council resolutions, and to allow and facilitate principled humanitarian action.

We pledge to take concrete and substantial steps in order to implement the following practical measures towards these objectives, without prejudice to our existing international obligations:

1. Reinforce national frameworks to ensure domestic implementation of international humanitarian law and facilitate principled humanitarian action

Ratify or accede to, and promote the universalization of international humanitarian law, including the Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

Take measures to implement those Security Council resolutions relating to IHL, such as Resolution 2175 (2014) and 2286 (2016).

Adopt or reinforce national protection frameworks to ensure domestic implementation of IHL obligations, including legislation, rules of engagement, military doctrine and policies, and ensuring the need to respect, protect and facilitate principled humanitarian action; review these frameworks regularly to guarantee protection matching the highest standards observed in international practice, and ensure implementation through education and training to the military, the creation and activation of national IHL Committees, and the allocation of ministerial responsibilities as well as appropriate resources.

Endorse, implement, and seek wider endorsement of, political commitments aiming at enhancing the protection of civilians, such as the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles and the 2017 Political Declaration on the Protection of Medical Care in Armed Conflict.

Consider to report on a regular basis on measures taken at the domestic level to ensure the implementation of international humanitarian law obligations engaging, if applicable, national IHL committees and using the ICRC's national implementation of IHL database.

Support the ability of humanitarian organizations to act in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Refrain from any acts, statements or practices which may undermine the principled, needs-based and non-political nature of humanitarian action.

Reinforce measures to protect the wounded and sick, medical personnel, infrastructures and assets in armed conflict.

While designing and implementing counter-terrorism and sanctions regimes, regulations, policies and practices, prevent and, in any event, minimize the potential negative effect on humanitarian action to make sure that impartial medical and humanitarian action is preserved (for example by the use of humanitarian exemptions) and that humanitarian and medical personnel are not prosecuted for activities conducted in accordance with IHL and the humanitarian principles.

Reinforce military training and engage in exchange of expertise and good practice on civilian harm mitigation in the conduct of hostilities, especially in urban environments.

Train military and security forces on how to uphold international humanitarian law and to respect principled humanitarian action, notably with the aim to support the acceptance of and respect for humanitarian and medical personnel.

Adopt national legislation encompassing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and assert jurisdiction over them.

2. Improve knowledge on international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action

Provide training to partner forces on respect for international humanitarian law, humanitarian principles and the functioning of the international humanitarian system.

Support the provision of training to non-state armed groups on how to respect international humanitarian law and facilitate principled humanitarian action, notably with the aim to protect the civilian population and persons hors de combat, as well as support the acceptance of and respect for humanitarian and medical personnel.

Support training to military, security forces and diplomatic personnel on how to facilitate and respect humanitarian negotiations when engaging in humanitarian diplomacy and political negotiation.

Seek and support dialogue between and with relevant stakeholders, including financial service providers, regulatory bodies and humanitarian actors to minimize unintended impacts on principled humanitarian action caused by de-risking and over-compliance.

3. Influence parties to an armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and facilitate principled humanitarian action

Influence parties to an armed conflict to ensure they take all feasible measures to protect civilians, as well as persons hors de combat, and provide or facilitate access to items essential to their survival, including allowing and facilitating safe, rapid and unimpeded access to people in need by neutral and independent humanitarian organizations, through inter alia the adoption of clear and simplified procedures and the establishment of civil-military coordination structures in close coordination with humanitarian stakeholders, and the application of humanitarian notification systems.

While considering the transfer of conventional arms, ammunitions, parts and components, assess the potential risks that they could be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law, consider mitigating measures, and refrain from any such transfer if the assessment concludes to a clear risk.

Support the adoption and implementation of, human rights and IHL compliance frameworks such as the compliance framework of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

In order to deter and stop violations of IHL, support and advocate for the adoption of sanctions by the Security Council against individuals or entities obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as sanctions against individuals or entities attacking civilians, as well as humanitarian and medical personnel and their infrastructures.

Support humanitarian organizations in building up capacities for humanitarian negotiations to ensure the protection of, and the provision of assistance to, civilians and persons hors de combat.

4. Support efforts to collect and analyze information, improve prevention and ensure accountability

Support bilateral and/or multilateral efforts at systematic collection, analysis and documentation of facts on instances where harm to civilians and to humanitarian or medical personnel occurred in direct relation with an armed conflict, to build robust, scientific evidence to prevent repetition and adopt mitigating measures.

Support relevant existing multilateral mechanisms, such as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict, the Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, and the Surveillance System of attacks of the World Health Organization.

Support bilateral and/or multilateral capacity building of national law enforcement and judicial authorities to conduct impartial and independent criminal investigations into alleged serious violations of international humanitarian law and, as appropriate, prosecute suspects and enforce legal sanctions, in line with fundamental judicial guarantees.

Cooperate fully with existing international investigation, accountability and fact-finding mechanisms.

Ratify the Rome statute, promote its universalization and support the International Criminal Court.

5. Follow-up on the implementation of the present Call for Action

Reinforce exchanges between States and the civil society on information, experiences, best practices and measures taken for the implementation of international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action.

Mindful of this objective, participate in meetings open to all interested states and the civil society, to be organized and hosted on a voluntary basis by a signatory./.