

THE 151ST IPU ASSEMBLY & RELATED MEETINGS (GENEVA, SWITZERLAND)
05/04/2025 – 09/04/2025

Geneva Declaration (Outcome Document of General Debate)

Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis

Endorsed by the 151st IPU Assembly (Geneva, 23 October 2025)

We, Members of Parliament from around the world participating in the 151st IPU Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, reaffirm our commitment to uphold and promote respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and support humanitarian action.

We are meeting at a time of unprecedented levels of armed violence involving State and non-State actors, which has brought about major humanitarian challenges. Civilians bear the brunt of hostilities, especially women and girls, who have been disproportionately affected, along with the most vulnerable— children, the elderly, people with disabilities, displaced persons, and the wounded and sick. Civilian infrastructure, hospitals, and medical and relief personnel have also come under attack.

We recall that IHL was designed to ensure a balance between the principles of humanity and military necessity. Its norms and principles aim to alleviate suffering and protect human dignity during armed conflict by protecting individuals who are not, or are no longer, participating in hostilities and by restricting the means and methods of warfare. They represent the minimum standards of common humanity in the battlefield and must be respected by all parties to armed conflict at all times.

The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols are the core of IHL, adopted as a multilateral response to the horrors of the Second World War. The four Geneva Conventions have been universally ratified and largely incorporated into customary international law, binding on all our States and all parties to armed conflicts.

Over time, and in response to developments in warfare, other important IHL instruments, such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), were also adopted. These treaties aim to ban specific weapons due to the devastating humanitarian consequences resulting from their use, including consequences that last long after armed conflicts have ended.

These humanitarian instruments were created to minimize civilian suffering during armed conflict, and their *raison d'être* is therefore to be applied and respected in times of armed conflict. IHL treaties are tools of protection, which must not be applied selectively, interpreted permissively or used as political tools. Upholding these norms means preserving the moral values that unite us.

Since their adoption, IHL-related legal frameworks, when enforced and respected, have saved millions of lives and considerably limited the impact of armed conflicts on our citizens, their lives and their future. While new methods and means of warfare have emerged over time as a result of technological developments, existing IHL rules remain valid and must continue to apply, including to cyber military operations, autonomous weapons systems, and artificial intelligence used in military planning and decision-making.

Humanitarian action is also facing increased challenges.

The current global environment has led to increased politicization of humanitarian assistance and has heavily jeopardized humanitarian action. Questions of access to conflict zones and the capacity to deliver aid have become major concerns. Funding cuts to humanitarian aid worldwide have left the humanitarian system at a breaking point, with many of those in need of assistance at risk of losing their lives.

We recall the importance of supporting principled humanitarian action — meaning humanitarian activities carried out in accordance with the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Furthermore, IHL imposes an obligation on all parties to a conflict to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian assistance. This means that hospitals, healthcare centres, ambulances and humanitarian convoys must never be targeted or misused for military purposes; medical ethics must be upheld; and medical personnel must never be coerced to act against their humanitarian duties.

We recall the importance of providing adequate financial support for the activities of humanitarian organizations and express our support for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations humanitarian agencies and other humanitarian organizations. We commend the vital work done by humanitarian professionals, often at great personal risk. Their protection and independence must be ensured at all times. We welcome the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, launched at the 80th UN General Assembly, and call on IPU Member Parliaments to encourage their respective governments to endorse it.

In a time of proliferating armed conflicts, increased polarization and inequality, and widespread misinformation, a strong and sustained political commitment to respect and ensure respect for IHL and support humanitarian action is more necessary than ever. We parliamentarians recognize that we have a key role to play through our legislative, oversight and representation functions.

We therefore pledge to work to:

Strengthen the current IHL legal framework and its enforcement by:

- pursuing efforts towards accession to or ratification of IHL treaties;
- ensuring the full incorporation of IHL into domestic legislation by adopting new legislation and/or reviewing and amending legislation to enshrine IHL obligations in our national legal frameworks;
- integrating IHL into military training by ensuring that defence budgets include provisions for recurrent IHL training for armed and security forces;
- making sure that effective sanction mechanisms for domestic repression of IHL violations are put in place, including by adopting appropriate criminal legislation and ensuring that national judicial authorities have the legislative means to prosecute those who are responsible for serious IHL violations and war crimes;

- strengthening our oversight functions to ensure that all government decisions related to the use of armed force, arms transfer or peace operations are based on evidence and consistent with IHL obligations and that the humanitarian impact of decisions taken is clearly considered;
- supporting regional and global mechanisms established to end impunity for the perpetrators of IHL violations, including the International Criminal Court established by the Rome Statute.

Prevent violations of IHL by:

- supporting the establishment or strengthening of national IHL committees that assist the government in implementing, monitoring compliance with and spreading knowledge of IHL;
- allocating predictable and multi-year financial resources for IHL capacity-building and national implementation;
- integrating IHL expertise into our own parliamentary research and legislative services to ensure that new laws are compatible with our States' obligations under IHL, including by establishing a parliamentary body dealing with matters pertaining to IHL;
- shaping public understanding of humanitarian norms and action by using our influence as opinion leaders and representatives of the people to speak out to reaffirm the relevance of IHL, counter misinformation, and promote mutual respect and dialogue;
- combating the "dehumanization" that often accompanies conflict and polarization and leads to the erosion of empathy and the normalization of suffering, and recognizing that IHL protects all persons affected by armed conflict, irrespective of the party to the conflict to which they belong or with which are affiliated.

Support the provision of principled humanitarian action by:

- adopting laws and administrative frameworks ensuring rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, while safeguarding the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action, and ensuring that these provisions are known and implemented;
- reviewing national sanctions and counter-terrorism frameworks to ensure that their scope, if broadly regulated, does not adversely affect the activities carried out by impartial, neutral and independent humanitarian organizations;
- advocating for humanitarian assistance and providing political and financial support to national and international humanitarian aid agencies.

Strengthen the global humanitarian ecosystem by:

- building partnerships nationally, regionally and globally with relevant IHL stakeholders;
- strengthening cooperation with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including the ICRC, UN humanitarian agencies and humanitarian organizations;

- adopting a multisectoral and inclusive approach in our work, which is essential to advancing the humanitarian agenda. This includes addressing broader political, social and development challenges that amplify civilian suffering in situations of armed conflict, and taking into account the needs of those most vulnerable in times of armed conflict;
- ensuring the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making processes, both within parliament and beyond. Women and girls, in particular, contend with structural gender inequality, including in conflict contexts. Taking into account these differences when implementing IHL will result in better protection for all;
- investing in parliamentary diplomacy and dialogue as indispensable tools for the preservation and renewal of multilateral values such as inclusion, solidarity, cooperation, shared responsibility and a rules-based international order.

We welcome the ongoing Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, launched by the ICRC together with Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, and the UN Secretary-General's global campaign to uphold the norms of humanitarian disarmament and strengthen mine action. We commit to raising awareness in our parliaments about these initiatives and to encourage our governments to formally endorse and actively participate in them.

We emphasize that the IPU plays a unique role by making IHL a political priority in the global parliamentary agenda. We encourage the IPU to continue mainstreaming IHL in its activities and to enhance technical support to parliaments in this area. We encourage the IPU to continue building partnerships with the ICRC, the United Nations and other stakeholders to ensure that parliaments remain effective champions of humanitarian norms and action at the global level.

Let us be advocates for humanity, compassion and the rule of law.

We pledge to take this Declaration back to our respective parliaments, disseminate the outcome of our collective work to our national authorities and seek to implement its principles through legislative, budgetary, oversight and representative actions. We commit to sustaining this agenda within our parliaments, and through ongoing inter-parliamentary dialogue and cooperation, including under the auspices of the IPU.