

Organization of American States
Permanent Council, Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs
Fourth Course on International Humanitarian Law
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Introductory Remarks

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. We are delighted to see so many of you here today.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is honored to collaborate with the Organization of American States in holding this fourth course on international humanitarian law. We are thankful for this honor to the sponsors and organizers of this course, including Ambassador Jorge Skinner-Kléé and the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs, and to Dr. Jean-Michel Arrighi, Dr. Dante Negro, Dr. John Wilson and Dr. Diego Moreno of the Secretariat for Legal Affairs and its Department of International Law.

Our collaboration with the OAS and its related entities is part of the overall multilateral efforts of the ICRC. Courses such as this one are offered to diplomats and staff of the United Nations and other multilateral bodies worldwide. They represent a joint effort by sponsors and organizers, to enhance a favorable global environment for the respect of international humanitarian law. Ultimately, this objective contributes to strengthen respect for and protection of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence.

To advance our common objective of contributing to enhance the protection of people in the Americas, we are also enormously grateful to the expert instructors for their willingness and dedication to be with us here.

By approving the content of the course, OAS member states have provided a forum for reflection and debate on a topic that is both relevant and timely: the interplay of international humanitarian law and other legal regimes.

The topic is relevant at the inter-American level because over the years, member states have consistently invoked international humanitarian law, alongside other legal regimes, when the subject of resolutions affects the protection of the lives, health and dignity of human beings. Such invocations signal that there is some level of interplay between humanitarian and other bodies of international norms. It seems appropriate then to consider how these bodies of law are different and how they fit together.

The topic is timely because individual states continue to devote efforts to implement various international norms, including humanitarian law. In this sense, to mind come questions about the scope of application of each respective body of law and their intersections. To be sure, the application of humanitarian law and related law is far from straightforward and uncomplicated in today's contexts worldwide.

Current ongoing conflicts experience acute and chronic phases and rarely come to a clear-cut end. Many of them have economic roots, and some, tribal, ethnic or religious dimensions. Conflicts may be characterized by the coexistence of non-state armed groups whose *raison d'être* and primary motives tend to switch from professed political grievances to acts of banditry. Weak institutions, collapsing infrastructure and environmental degradation, drought, floods or pandemics render entire populations extremely vulnerable. Most conflicts are non-international and their victims are for the most part civilians.

As a result, challenges exist, for example, in determining the thresholds of violence necessary for the application of humanitarian law, in characterizing new forms of violence, or in identifying participants in armed hostilities. I trust that we will address some of these challenges in the presentations that our instructors have in store for us and in subsequent discussions today.

We hope that this fourth course will meet your interests and your expectations.

Thank you.