

IHL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Weakened by years of fighting, destruction, erosion of basic services and displacement, people living amid armed conflict now face a particularly potent threat in the form of COVID-19. With many populations relying on humanitarian aid for survival, let's not forget that international humanitarian law (IHL) provides crucial safeguards to people affected by armed conflict – even during pandemics.

HEALTH-CARE WORKERS NEED YOUR SOLIDARITY AND RESPECT, NOT STIGMA.



PROVISION OF HEALTH CARE

Adequately staffed and well-equipped medical facilities are necessary for the provision of care on a large scale, as the outbreak of COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated. Medical personnel, health-care units and transport facilities must be protected from attack during conflict.

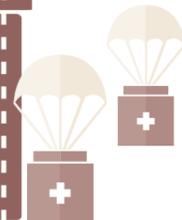
HAND HYGIENE IS IMPORTANT TO PREVENT SPREAD OF INFECTION, SO IT'S CRITICAL THAT WATER SUPPLY IS NOT HAMPERED DURING A CRISIS.



WATER SUPPLY

Water networks, including sanitation and distribution installations, are protected from attack during conflict as both civilian objects and objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population.

CIVILIAN POPULATIONS AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT ARE ENTITLED TO HAVE THEIR BASIC NEEDS MET.



HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

As States take measures to contain the spread of the virus, it will be critical to ensure that impartial humanitarian relief reaches vulnerable populations and that aid workers are able to continue to help those most in need.

PROTECTING THE WOUNDED AND SICK WAS THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF THE FIRST GENEVA CONVENTION, AND IS AS RELEVANT AS EVER.



PERSONS SPECIFICALLY AT RISK

It is essential to ensure that the elderly, people with disabilities, those with pre-existing health conditions and weakened immune systems are not neglected. Their age or physical condition might make it tough for them to adhere to preventive health measures, thus putting them at a higher risk of infection.

IHL REQUIRES THAT THE HEALTH AND HYGIENE OF DETAINEES BE SAFEGUARDED, AND THAT SICK DETAINEES RECEIVE THE MEDICAL CARE AND ATTENTION REQUIRED.



DETAINEES

Detention facilities that are overcrowded or which lack adequate sanitation or ventilation infrastructure pose a grave challenge when it comes to preventing the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. It is advisable for detention facilities to test new arrivals, install hand-washing stations and create isolation wards.

IHL MANDATES THAT ALL CIVILIANS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION.



IDPs, MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

All civilians are protected against the effects of armed hostilities and arbitrary deprivation of liberty. This applies equally to internally displaced people, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, who are particularly exposed to outbreaks of COVID-19, given their frequently harsh living conditions.

SUITABLE STEPS NEED TO BE TAKEN SO THAT CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION IS NOT DISRUPTED EVEN WHEN THEY ARE AT HOME.



CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

IHL contains rules that require parties to conflict to facilitate access to education. However, many schools have been temporarily closed due to the pandemic. While an important preventive measure, it puts additional strain on continuity of education, especially in areas of armed conflict.