

IHL THE BASICS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The ICRC is present in over 60 countries.

Its network of offices is adjusted regularly to keep step with developments in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The headquarters of the ICRC is located in Geneva, Switzerland.



International Committee of the Red Cross
19 Avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 6001 F +41 22 733 2057
E-mail: icrc.gva@icrc.org
www.icrc.org
© ICRC, October 2005

0850 / 002 10.2005 30.000



WHAT IS IHL?



Thomas Pizer/CRC

- › International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a set of rules which place restrictions on the use of weapons and methods of warfare.
- › It protects people who are not, or no longer, participating in hostilities.
- › IHL aims to protect human dignity and to limit suffering during times of war.
- › It is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict.

WHY IS IHL IMPORTANT?



William Smit/CRC

IHL is one of the most powerful tools the international community has at its disposal to ensure the safety and dignity of people in times of war. It seeks to preserve a measure of humanity, with the guiding principle that even in war there are limits.

"The Geneva Conventions... continue to remind us most forcefully of our common obligation to care for each other..."

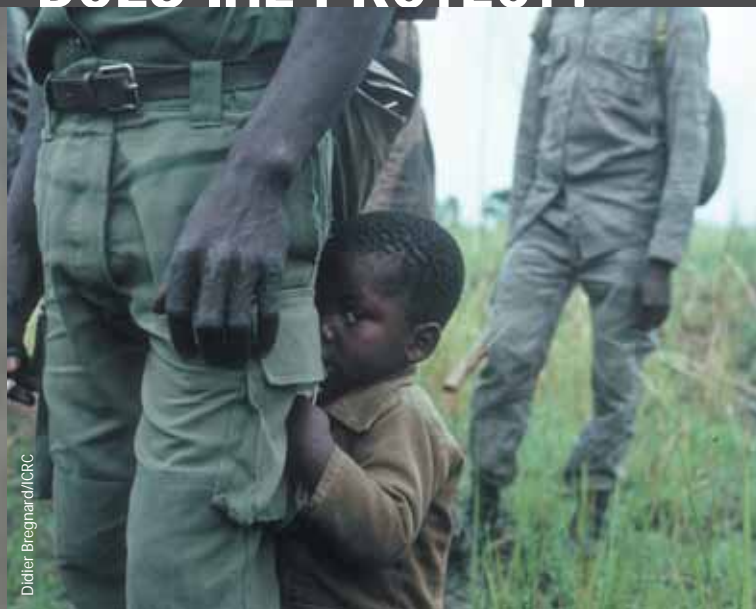
Nelson Mandela

WHEN DOES IHL APPLY?



Ursula Meissner/ICRC

WHO DOES IHL PROTECT?



Didier Bregnard/ICRC

IHL concerns two situations:

- › international armed conflicts, which involve at least two countries;
- › armed conflicts that take place in one country (such as those between a government and rebel forces).

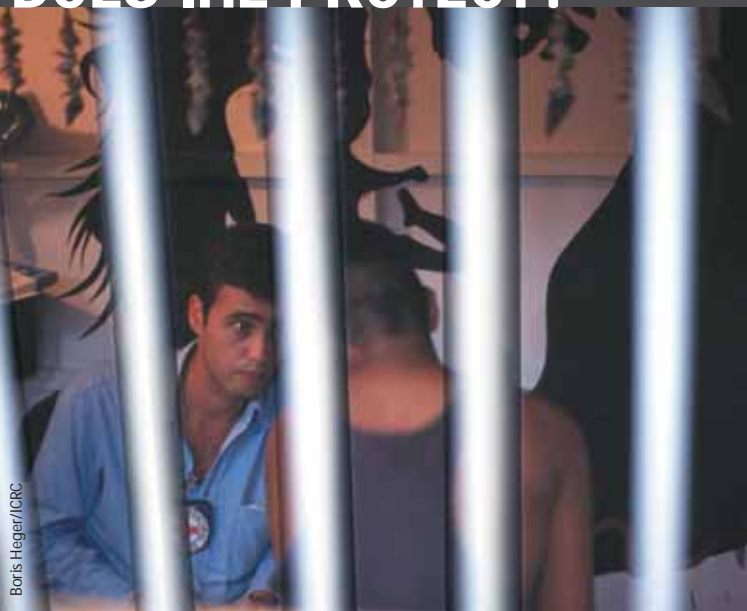
IHL applies to all parties to a conflict regardless of who started it.

IHL protects those who are not, or no longer, participating in hostilities, such as:

- › civilians;
- › medical and religious military personnel;
- › wounded, shipwrecked and sick combatants;
- › prisoners of war.

Recognizing their specific needs, IHL grants women and children additional protection.

HOW DOES IHL PROTECT?



Boris Heger/ICRC

IHL prohibits or limits weapons which are particularly cruel or which do not distinguish between combatants and civilians. It also requires the parties to a conflict to:

- › distinguish between combatants and civilians, and to refrain from attacking civilians;
- › care for the wounded and sick and protect medical personnel;
- › ensure that the dignity of prisoners of war and civilian internees is preserved by allowing visits by ICRC delegates.

WHAT IS THE ICRC'S ROLE?



Thierry Gassmann/ICRC

The ICRC serves as the “guardian” of IHL, basing its work on the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977. They give the ICRC the right to carry out activities such as bringing relief to wounded, sick or shipwrecked military personnel, visiting prisoners of war, re-establishing contact between members of families separated by conflict, aiding civilians and ensuring that those protected by humanitarian law are treated accordingly.