



Intervention by Belgium

Global IHL Initiative Workstream 5 - First State consultation on Hospitals: Achieving meaningful protection in armed conflict – statement from Belgium 28/05/2025

Belgium, as a **staunch supporter of International Humanitarian Law**, is honored to participate in today's workstream of the Global Initiative, which stresses the importance reaffirming IHL's specific protection of hospitals.

Our colleague online, from the Ministry of Defense, will be giving answers to the specific questions, allow me to share the **following general remarks**:

The **legal standards established by IHL** were reinforced in the aftermath of the world wars, to **avoid harm being done to civilians**. These standards are not only binding to warring parties but to all states and international actors **tasked with upholding, promoting, and facilitating compliance** with IHL.

While IHL does not eliminate the horrors of war, it **injects a crucial measure of humanity** into its conduct, seeking to prevent a descent into barbarity. The **failure to uphold these rules** leads to unconstrained violence, indiscriminate suffering and the erosion of legal and ethical boundaries meant to protect civilians.

In international armed conflicts, **units of the medical service of a party to the conflict** may in no circumstances be attacked and must be **respected and protected at all times**.

Such units **may lose their protection** if they are used to commit "acts harmful to the enemy" and only after a warning has been given and such warning has gone unheeded.

The protection of units of the medical service of a party to the conflict has been **extended to civilian medical units**. Such civilian medical units may lose their protection under the same conditions as applicable for units of the medical service of a party to the conflict.

In **non-international armed conflicts, medical units and transports** (belonging to the parties to the conflict) are equally to be protected at all times and may lose their protection when they are used to commit “hostile acts” after a warning has remained unheeded.

The **protection of medical units is equally assured under customary law**. According to the commentary to the customary rule, the protection offered during non-international armed conflicts to medical units belonging to the parties to the conflict must be **extended to civilian medical units**.

In all circumstances, the **IHL principles of proportionality and distinction** must be upheld. By consistently applying these, parties to conflicts can reduce civilian suffering and uphold **the integrity of IHL**.

Belgium would like to see this Global Initiative as **renewed impetus in support for IHL**, and its outcome to serve all committed to **upholding their international obligations**.

It is more than necessary to focus on the relevance of IHL in safeguarding human dignity in armed conflicts.

We hope to **contribute to a renewed determination** to uphold the fundamental principles that preserve life and dignity in war.