

## ICRC IHL Initiative – Workstream 2: National IHL Committees

### **Overview of CNCHL**

I want to start off by expressing gratitude to the ICRC and the chairs of this workstream for their invaluable work on this initiative. Canada is grateful for the opportunity to participate and to provide insight into the work of our National Committee.

At the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (held in December 1995), attendees committed to “move from law into action” through concrete steps. The 1995 recommendations encouraged States to create National Committees on IHL, with the support of respective National Societies. Canada supported this recommendation and the Canadian National Committee on Humanitarian Law (henceforth referred to as the CNCHL) was established on March 18, 1998, pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding.

The CNCHL includes representatives from Global Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of Justice, Public Safety Canada, as represented by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the Canadian Red Cross Society.

CNCHL's mandate is to facilitate the implementation of IHL in Canada. The major functions of the CNCHL in its terms of reference include reviewing and advising on legislation and other measures relating to Canada's IHL obligations, advising on training and awareness of IHL within Canada and maintaining an updated list of experts in IHL and sharing information on IHL with other national committees, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The CNCHL hosts meetings throughout the course of the calendar year. During these meetings members of the committee discuss relevant IHL topics as well as other administrative matters relating to the work of the committee.

### **Question 1: Role in shaping government policy on IHL**

The CNCHL serves as a collaborative platform to discuss policy initiatives and events relevant to both the CRC and the Government of Canada. For instance, there was active engagement of members of the national committee in the lead up to and during the 34<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Red Cross Movement. In the lead up, the CNCHL was able to convene to promote collaborative work on resolution negotiations, and reporting on joint pledges. The Committee was also engaged in Canada's participation in the 6<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference on International Humanitarian Law in preparation for IC34. Following the conference, members of our

national committee continue to engage closely concerning how to operationalize the resolution commitments as well as our intention to jointly sign pledges.

## **Q2: Actions that result in increased respect for IHL in Canada**

The CNCHL is mandated to promote the dissemination of IHL and work to increase the knowledge of and respect for IHL within Canada. One of these activities include the release of our inaugural Voluntary Report on the Implementation of IHL at the Domestic Level in the fall of 2024. The production of this report is as a result of the efforts of the CNCHL. A copy of this report can be found housed on the CNCHL website as well as on the ICRC page dedicated to voluntary reports.

The CNCHL is also involved in numerous military training and workshops relating to IHL. For instance, in coordination with the CRC and other members of the CNCHL, members of the Office of the Judge Advocate General share their experiences of putting IHL into practice and how the CAF implement IHL in their training, policy, doctrine and practice as part of these workshops.

Members of the CNCHL also participate in academic forums as panelists where IHL is discussed, such as the Canadian Conference on International Law (CCIL) and the American Society for International Law Conference (ASIL). These panels have included discussions on topics such as, “How International Law Protects Humanitarian Space in Armed Conflict”.

In line with our mandate, members of the CNCHL work closely together to promote awareness of the principles and rules of IHL to members of the public. This includes delivering Humanitarian Education training across Canada which includes resources such as “Canada and Conflict” and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)’s Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL) tool kit. These Humanitarian Education trainings are held for high school teachers from a range of subject specialities. The goal of these trainings is to introduce IHL materials and concepts in the classroom and increase teacher understanding of the main principles of IHL.

## **Closing**

Ultimately, the CNCHL is a forum for sharing information and discussing recent developments in IHL. All members participate actively in IHL dissemination activities on a proactive basis. Outside of committee meetings, regular exchanges take place between CNCHL members on their respective IHL related activities, while identifying different needs for decision-makers interdepartmentally.