

The Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law

WORKSTREAM 2: NATIONAL IHL COMMITTEES

THE FIRST STATE CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL IHL COMMITTEES

7 May 2025

Statement by Finland

I wish to thank all the co-chairs (Germany, Philippines, Peru and the UK), and the ICRC for these first state consultations on National IHL committees under the Global IHL initiative. Finland supports and has already joined this timely initiative.

In Finland, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is in charge of the substance and coordination of participation in the development of international humanitarian law, as well as its implementation, and collaboration with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The MFA **established a working group on international humanitarian law**, i.e. the national IHL committee, **already in 1993. The committee, which has been active ever since**, was reconstituted and broadened in 2009. It brings together representatives of State administration, the national Red Cross society, academia and civil society.

The composition of the national IHL committee in Finland is in fact quite comprehensive. In addition to representatives of the relevant ministries (Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defence, Justice, Education and Culture, and Social Affairs and Health), it includes representatives from The Defence Command as well as the National Defence University, the Finnish Red Cross, University of Helsinki, the Finnish Section of Amnesty International, and the Finnish Society of Humanitarian law. The Finnish IHL committee is chaired by an ambassador/senior level official of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and as the current chair I am continuing this tradition. The committee meets approximately four times a year. All members are requested to contribute and suggest agenda points to be discussed in the meetings of the Committee.

The IHL committee is tasked with promoting and coordinating the dissemination and implementation of IHL, especially the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, exchanging information, and monitoring the development of international humanitarian law and assessing their domestic level implications.

The value of the national IHL committee has been shown, in particular, **in increased contacts and direct relations between Committee members also between meetings, which has been beneficial for the cooperation** between different IHL experts, including within State administration.

This exchange of information has also supported the shaping of government policy on IHL.

Examples of developments and initiatives that have been discussed in the IHL committee include the Political Declaration on the Protection of Civilians from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, the EWIPA Declaration, which Finland endorsed in 2022. Humanitarian exemptions to sanctions serve as **another example** that has been topical in many different fora in the past years and has been covered in IHL committee meetings. Finland has been active in supporting including humanitarian exemptions to sanctions to ensure that aid reaches the people

in need in a timely manner. A **third example** to highlight is the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts.

The IHL committee has a role in **preparing national and Nordic pledges for the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and**, in particular, in the **follow-up of their implementation**. In addition to these pledges, the IHL committee also follows up on the implementation at the national level of the pledges of the European Union. These pledges are an important tool in promoting IHL as they impact concrete actions.

The IHL committee also follows domestic legislation processes that relate to IHL and identifies issues of implementation that should be addressed at national level. The Committee also regularly shares information about IHL training and activities in Finland.

One of the challenges for the work of the committee is the limited time and resources available for its work. The Committee does not have a separate budget nor designated human resources that could focus on its work full-time.

The Finnish IHL committee participates in the **regional meetings** of national IHL committees and is often represented by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Finnish Red Cross. It is always valuable to learn about the experiences and best practices of others.

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