



ICRC

Under the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (global IHL initiative), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the United Mexican States and the Swiss Confederation cordially invite you to the:

WORKSTREAM 6

FIRST STATE CONSULTATION ON UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2025, ICRC HUMANITARIUM IN GENEVA
9:30–18:00 SUMMER (UTC+2)

FORMAT: IN PERSON / ONLINE

BACKGROUND

The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) during armed conflicts raises significant humanitarian and legal questions. While it is widely accepted that international humanitarian law (IHL) imposes limits on the use of ICTs in armed conflict, the specificities of the ICT environment give rise to complex questions regarding its implementation. States have recognized the need for continued discussions on these questions.

Building on the global discussions so far, in particular Resolution 2 of the 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent “Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict”, the ICT workstream is part of an ongoing effort to foster shared understandings.

To advance this discussion, the first state consultation of the ICT workstream will be held on 15 May 2025 in Geneva and online. This meeting will launch a series of consultations spanning 2025 and 2026, fostering exchanges among states and gathering insights from relevant stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE

The ICT workstream aims to foster shared understandings on the limits that IHL imposes on ICT activities during armed conflict, with a view to safeguarding civilian populations from harm. The first consultation will focus on identifying legal and humanitarian issues and concerns arising from the unique characteristics of ICT activities in armed conflict, and exploring how they should be addressed.

with a view to upholding the protection that IHL affords to civilians and civilian objects in armed conflict, as well as specifically protected persons and objects.

The first state consultation will serve the following objectives:

1. **Provide a comprehensive briefing on the workstream**
 - Provide participants with an overview of the workstream, its objectives and process and the consultation timeline
2. **Identify legal and humanitarian issues and explore how to address them**
 - Facilitate an exchange of views on the key legal and humanitarian issues for further discussion within the workstream and explore how they should be addressed to uphold the protection IHL affords to civilians and civilian objects in armed conflict
 - Discussions will be guided by pre-circulated guiding questions and a background paper, with a focus on the limits that IHL imposes on ICT activities that:
 - disrupt, damage or destroy civilian infrastructure and civilian data
 - interfere with medical services and humanitarian activities
 - spread information in violation of IHL
 - use civilian ICT infrastructure for military purposes or involve civilians
3. **Frame future directions of the workstream.**

NEXT STEPS

- A summary of this first consultation will be included in the general progress report of the global IHL initiative, scheduled for publication in September 2025.
- Based on the initial guidance from this consultation, including priority issues identified for further deliberation and areas of emerging convergence, a second state consultation is planned for October/November 2025.

PARTICIPATION

- The consultation is open to all interested states, with a particular emphasis on capital-based governmental representatives specializing in international law and/or cybersecurity, alongside representatives from permanent missions in Geneva.
- The consultation will be held primarily in person in Geneva, with up to two representatives per state. To ensure broad and inclusive participation, participation online is also possible.
- Relevant stakeholders (e.g. international organizations, civil society and academia) may also be invited.
- Kindly register no later than **30 April 2025** at <https://forms.office.com/e/V49p66MfC7>.

PROCEDURE

- The **working languages** will be Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, with simultaneous interpretation.
- Participants are invited to deliver **brief statements** addressing the specific topics covered in each session of the consultation. When preparing interventions, we encourage participants to consider the **guiding questions** listed under each thematic session in the agenda below, as well as the accompanying **background paper** prepared by the ICRC, provided in the Annex.
- To ensure all participants have an opportunity to take the floor, we kindly request that statements be kept to **3–5 minutes**.

- Given the technical challenges of hybrid meetings, we encourage delegations who are in the room to make their statements in person and to show courtesy to those delegations online.
- To facilitate interpretation, we invite participants to share a copy of their statements by 13 May 2025, via email to ihlinitiative@icrc.org, with “ICT workstream first consultation” in the subject line.
- The substance of the consultations will be summarized in the progress report, to be published in September 2025, without attribution to participants. The consultation will be recorded to facilitate the preparation of the report, but the recording will not be made public.
- The inclusive, constructive, non-politicized and solution-oriented nature of the discussions will be maintained throughout the consultation.
- While participants are encouraged to refer to their state’s domestic practice during the consultations, we kindly ask participants to refrain from discussing specific contexts or the practice of other states.

AGENDA

Upholding International Humanitarian Law in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies During Armed Conflict

(ICT Workstream)

First State Consultation

9:30–18:00, 15 May 2025

ICRC Humanitarium, 17 avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva

Registration and coffee / Log-in and connection	9:00–9:30
Opening of the meeting and introduction to the ICT workstream	9:30–10:00
Session 1: The use of ICTs in today's armed conflict and the human cost	10:00–11:30
<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The risks of harm for civilian populations of ICT activities in armed conflict• The human cost of the harmful information spread in armed conflict <p>Expert presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mauro Vignati, Adviser on New Digital Technologies of Warfare, ICRC <p>Questions and discussions</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What ICT activities during armed conflict pose a threat or risk of harm either directly or indirectly to civilians and civilian objects?• How can information spread through ICT activities in armed conflict – in particular through social media platforms – cause, or contribute to, physical, lasting psychological, economic and societal harm?• From a practical standpoint, does your state consider that there are any relevant differences in how ICT activities manifest or pose risks to civilians in international and non-international armed conflicts? Has your state observed any specific challenges or trends in these types of armed conflict?• What measures has your state taken to assess or mitigate the human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict? Are there lessons learned that you could share with other delegations?	
Coffee break	11:30–12:00
Session 2: Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects from the dangers arising from ICT activities during armed conflict	12:00–13:00
<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The protection of civilians against injury and death, and civilian objects, including data, against disruption, damage and destruction under IHL• The protection of specifically protected persons, objects and activities	

<p>Expert presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Heather Harrison Dinniss, Swedish Defence University <p>Questions and discussions</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your state's view, what limits do IHL rules and principles impose on ICT activities in armed conflicts with a view to protecting the civil population from risks of harm? In particular, what limits do IHL rules and principles impose on ICT activities that disable civilian objects – whether as direct or reverberating effects – without causing physical damage? • How does your state apply IHL protections to medical services, impartial humanitarian organizations and objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population from ICT activities during armed conflict? • Has your state considered whether civilian data in general, or certain categories of civilian data, is protected from being tampered with, damaged or deleted under IHL? What protection does IHL provide against the unauthorized copying, seizing and potential publication of civilian or public data? 	
<p>Lunch (ICRC cafeteria)</p>	<p>13:00–14:00</p>
<p>Session 2: Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects from the dangers arising from ICT activities during armed conflict (<i>cont'd</i>)</p>	<p>14:00–15:00</p>
<p>Session 3: Protecting civilians and other protected persons from information spread in violation of IHL during armed conflict</p>	<p>15:00–16:00</p>
<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The obligation not to encourage or incite IHL violations • The protection of persons deprived of liberty against public curiosity • The protection of the civilian population from information operations whose primary purpose is to spread terror <p>Expert presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Martha M. Bradley, University of Johannesburg <p>Questions and discussions</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What ICT activities does your state consider fall under the prohibition of encouraging or inciting IHL violations? What measures have you taken to prevent such activities? • How are persons deprived of liberty protected against public curiosity caused by the dissemination of information through ICT activities/digital communication? What measures are in place to prevent and address such situations? • Has your state taken, or considered taking, measures to prevent the misuse of information operations in ways that could violate IHL? Are there good practices that could be shared? 	

Coffee break	16:00–16:30
Session 4: The risk of harm arising from the military use of civilian ICT infrastructure and the involvement of civilians in ICT activities during armed conflict	16:30–17:30
<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The military use of civilian ICT infrastructure and the resulting impact on its protection under IHL • The involvement of civilians in ICT activities • States' responsibility to disseminate IHL and to prevent and suppress IHL violations <p>Expert presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Lijiang Zhu, China University of Political Science and Law <p>Questions and discussions</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your state assess the risks to civilians and essential civilian services when ICT infrastructure serves both civilian and military functions? How are the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution applied when considering ICT activities against “dual-use” infrastructure? • What risks does your state see if civilians are asked or permitted to perform ICT activities in connection with an armed conflict, and what measures should be taken to mitigate such risks? • What measures should states implement to ensure that civilians involved in ICT activities during armed conflict are aware of and comply with their obligations under IHL? Has your state adopted national legal frameworks to address this issue and to prevent and suppress potential IHL violations? 	
Concluding remarks and next steps	17:30–18:00